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ABSTRACT

This paper explains that women teachers working in public schools across Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia face many challenges related to poverty and rural locations. However, they also have several elements in common across their classrooms which they incorporate into their instructional practice. These elements are: maintaining high expectations for success; utilizing effective praise; providing direct instruction combined with challenging activities; incorporating technology; teaching metacognitive strategies; recognizing and accommodating learning styles; promoting self-assessment and self-monitoring; protecting and optimizing instructional time; valuing parental involvement; and celebrating diversity. An accompanying PowerPoint presentation is included. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

APPALACHIAN WOMEN TEACHING THE FUTURE

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Abstract

The hearts and minds of Appalachian children have been in the competent hands of women educators. Teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of preparing children to be well-integrated adults, competent to take an active productive role in society. Appalachian women have always faced obstacles but many have overcome them because of what is possible to achieve through education.

Continuing high poverty provides severe challenges for Appalachian schools. Schools like families are vulnerable to changes in regional and national economies and setbacks in both personal and community lives. Poverty reduces children's opportunity to learn. Additional resources must be provided to both the family and school for student success. Effective strategies can alleviate many of the difficulties and provide the support necessary for school achievement.

Introduction

I had teachers who taught me that knowledge was the greatest thing I could possess, that education would expand my heart, mind, and soul. Over forty years ago, in a rural remote section of Kentucky, I made my first trip to school. I learned a reverence for education and knowledge. When I remember those days, I am grateful for the strength and example provided by my teacher. She was the first on many special teachers I would come to know. To be a special teacher you must be the right kind of person, you can not give what you do not have. We teach the fiber of our souls. We teach what we are in addition to what we know.

As I have taught and worked in public schools across Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia since the early 1970's, I have observed several elements that are contextually common in all of their classrooms. These special teachers incorporate the following ten elements into their instructional practice: maintain high expectations for success; utilize effective praise; provide direct instruction combined with challenging activities; incorporate technology; teach metacognitive strategies; recognize and accommodate learning styles; promote self-assessment and self-monitoring; protect and optimize instructional time; and, celebrate diversity.

Children born into a literate world where important others value reading and writing often find learning to read and write in school a relatively easy process. For many of

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those we teach, this is not necessarily the case. For them this process requires more attention, effort, and time. From the beginning they find themselves challenged to learn a code and live by a set of rules they did not even know existed. Teachers help them break the code and learn the rules by reinventing their classrooms into structures that nurture and increase student achievement by incorporating the above listed elements.

Maintain High Expectations for Success

Teacher expectations effect teacher behavior which in turn influences student achievement. Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) suggested that teacher expectations act as self-fulfilling prophecies because student achievement mirrors these expectations. Smiles, eye contact, opportunity to learn new more difficult material, wait time, length and number of teacher pupil interactions and feedback are tangible ways a teacher conveys the expectations she has for her students. Low expectations have been identified as one obstacle to learning (Schunk, 1996).

Many teachers rise above their experience and personal prejudices and enter an instructional relationship with the belief that all can learn and that they have the confidence and ability to teach the students they have been given. They refuse to compromise academic standards or base expectations on factors unrelated to student performance. These teachers envision success and work to make their dreams come true.

Utilize Effective Praise

Praise is more than positive feedback. One of the greatest gifts we can give our students is an excitement and a zest for learning. We need to be excited about their achievement and help provide both context and value to their accomplishments. Praise needs to be positive, appropriate and delivered in a timely manner. Statements must be genuine. Students know the difference. We all need to feel valued, appreciated, and recognized. When used effectively, praise can help us establish the type of classroom climate that facilitates learning.

Incorporate Technology

Technology exploded on the scene in the last several years. Many of us, the pencil and paper generation, are insecure about the rising generation of technology stars. I have personally noticed this is one area where teachers can model learner behavior for their students. Students can often become our teachers. Major developments have increased access to the world. Computer networks and the internet have revolutionized the way we work and communicate. Can you remember life before email?

Classrooms are no longer bound by their geographic location. They can connect to any other classroom anywhere in the world. Many teachers are encouraging students to write and share experiences with students in other cities, states, or countries. Some schools, classrooms and students construct web pages, others conduct research and share through on line means. Students can visit libraries and museums through the wonders of virtual reality. Researchers have only begun to realize the potential of this technology.

Provide Direct Instruction Combined with Challenging Activities

Direct instructional approaches are characterized by teacher-controlled content steps, extensive student practice, frequent feedback, rapid pacing and whole group settings. Although there is evidence that direct instruction enhances the acquisition of some skills, critics argue that it can limit higher-order thinking and denies access to some students.

In classrooms, direct instruction often manifests itself as teacher-directed drill on phonics, vocabulary, spelling and basic computational mathematics. Direct instruction is a part of a larger repertoire of strategies, it is only one tool, not the whole tool kit. Successful teachers combine pedagogical approaches to increase student achievement. Projects, student-centered approaches, problem-based simulations and experiential learning are balanced and integrated into a coherent set of challenging activities and assignments. These teachers are not obsessed with one single model or the mastery of discrete skills without any applicable context. Skills are mastered in the context of their application. Opportunities are provided for higher-order thinking to strengthen transference.

Teachers provide concrete experiences to facilitate and enhance skill and concept acquisition. Field trips, demonstrations, guests, and multimedia technologies augment student experiences. Learning is enhanced when it is personal and has relevance and meaning. School instruction is most effective when it builds on what students have learned outside of school and makes connections to real-life situations.

Cooperative learning methods share the idea that students work together and are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own (Slavin, 1991; Johnson & Johnson, 1987) Group rewards, individual accountability, and equal opportunity for success are essential. Student roles require clarification; the sequence of activity must be clear; and interactions must be monitored and evaluated.

Teach Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognition is taught. Students are guided to think about thinking and to share their thoughts with peers. How did you know that answer? What do I need to help me learn? Where do I go to get the resources that I need? The nature of questions asked by the teacher determines to some extent thinking and learning in classrooms. An important element of a student's experiential bases is understanding and communicating in a way that structures comprehension. Semantic maps, word webs, and clustering vocabulary help students attend to levels of meaning. Graphic displays provide an organizational schema for information and vocabulary (Caine & Caine, 1991).

Metacognitive strategies are techniques, principles, and rules that facilitate the acquisition, manipulation, integration, storage, and retrieval of information (Idol & Jones, 1991). A wide range of thinking, learning and study strategies exist. Mnemonics, note-taking, self-questioning, positive self-talk, advance organizers, chunking. SQ4R (survey, question, read, reflect, recite, review) and DISSECT (discover the context, isolate the

prefix, separate the suffix, say the stem, check with someone, try the dictionary) are just a few that are used to facilitate student mastery of curriculum.

Recognize and Accommodate Learning Styles

Research widely documents individual differences. Teachers need to accommodate a wide range of environmental, physical, emotional, social and psychological conditions. In the context of instructing students, learning styles refers to the set of instructional conditions that facilitate a specific student's academic progress. Group size (one-on-one with teacher, one-on-one with peer, small group, whole group), distraction management (headset, seating, carrel), lighting, and room temperature can effect student performance. Learning schedules including time of day (morning, noon, afternoon) and length of lesson (10 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour) must be considered.

Necessary adjustment of materials (highlighting essential content, varying sequence) and aids (organizers, checklists, peer tutors) are easily implemented in classrooms. Students who are actively engaged in lessons learn more and quicker. Some students learn skills and develop concepts by doing rather than merely watching or listening. Hands-on, interactive approaches heighten the senses and provide a reason and desire to learn. Active learning promotes attention and increases on-task behavior.

Many of these teachers involve students in planning and evaluating learning experiences. Students develop a sense of ownership, a pride in their contribution, and personal empowerment. For many students, this leads to a holistic, integrated approach. An integrated approach provides opportunities for learning. Speaking, reading, writing, and listening are common to all academic skill acquisition and demonstration. A more integrated approach offers opportunities for review, repetition, application, and generalization of content.

Promote Self-assessment and Self-monitoring

One of the ultimate goals of teachers is to develop independent learners. We want students to monitor and manage their behavior, to comprehend concepts and master concepts and skills empowering them to control themselves now and in the future. To help students acquire these skills, teachers encourage their students to verify the meaning of what is heard, said, read, or written. (Do I need to reread? Is that sensible?)

Graphic organizers assist students in monitoring school activities. Checklists assist in determining the need to reread, edit assignments, conduct experiements, and follow classroom rules. Teachers guide their students to manage attention, on-task behavior, peer and teacher interactions, and academic goals. Ask students to step back from the situation, assess the event, reflect on feelings and interactions, and keep records. Give students the opportunity to practice and monitor behavior and learning.

Protect and Optimize Instructional Time

Teacher interest and enthusiasm are essential to the development of student motivation to learn. Teacher enthusiasm is contagious. By efficiently managing the instructional process, teachers model self-management and self-assessment. Structuring a positive

classroom environment increases teacher enjoyment and the possibility that student will enjoy learning. Teaching and learning can and should be fun!

Effective instructional management includes planning, ordering a positive learning environment, efficient time management and scheduling, appropriate instructional groupings, use and design of materials, skill with technologies, and democratic procedures. Accentuate the positive, establish routines, and alternate activities requiring movement with quiet times.

Value Parental Involvement

Research has consistently indicated that parent and family involvement is critical to the academic success of many students. Parents can and often want to be a teachers greatest allies. They can and will work with teachers to enhance their child's personal , social, and academic well-being.

Parental involvement includes both home-based and school-based activities. Home-based activities involve school-related tasks that are conducted at home by parents, such as reading to their child, and must be designed to be meaningful and accomplishable. School-based activities require the parent to enter the school or classroom to assist with program delivery.

Teachers must be skillful in increasing both informal and formal communicating with parents. Communication must be two-way and requires openness and parity. Casual chats, personal notes, parent-teacher conferences, newsletters and report cards have direct cognitive and behavioral benefits.

Celebrate Diversity

Cultural differences can place students at risk. Language and experiential differences often divide students. Teachers can emphasize the rights of all students and teach respect for diversity. Teachers provide opportunities to experience a variety of cultures and to grow as human beings. Experiencing the music, art, literature, traditions, and food of different cultures enrich our lives. We must teach students to value their cultural roots and provide the foundation for their identity. All students must have full and equal opportunities to learn and be respected.

Appalachian teachers have a wealth of cultural material to use. School experiences must be congruent with home and community. Focus on the positive features of a culture and take every opportunity to celebrate and value our differences.

Reflections

Most teachers will recognize that many of these elements are present in their daily classroom practices. The observations I have shared are a summary of sound pedagogy in our complex contemporary society.

For many students, learning is so natural that mastery of curriculum, with a moderate amount of teaching is virtually guaranteed. For Appalachian students, school learning

does not always appear to be natural or spontaneous. For Appalachian students, concise pedagogy is critical. Teachers can not make assumptions. Appalachian teachers enter the instructional relationship well prepared and eager to apply the best pedagogy and processes. These teachers have an insiders understanding of their culture and communities. These teachers are armed with knowledge of cognitive development and the emotional strength to facilitate their students' progress toward educational achievement. Indeed, I can imagine these teachers linked to the past and bridging the future, a long line of strong, courageous, knowledgeable and committed women.

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Appalachian Women Teaching the Future



Dr. Nedra Wheeler Atwell
The Women of Appalachia
October 2001

Maintain High Expectations for Success



- Teacher must refuse to compromise standards or base expectations on factors unrelated to student performance.

Maintain High Expectations for Success

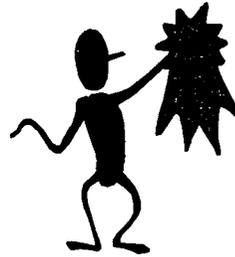
- Smiles
- Eye contact
- Opportunity to learn more difficult material
- Wait time
- Length and number of pupil interactions
- Feedback



Utilize Effective Praise

- One of the greatest gifts we can give our students is a zest for learning.
- Be excited about student achievement.
- Value their progress.
- Praise must be:
 - Positive
 - Appropriate
 - Timely

We All Need to Feel



- Valued
- Appreciated
- Recognized

Incorporate Technology



- Internet
- Community???
- Virtual world
- Expanding classroom possibilities

Direct Instruction and Challenging Activities



- Teacher controlled content while increasing student achievement by:
 - Projects
 - Problem-based simulations
 - Experiential Learning
 - Skills mastered in the context of learning.
 - Learning must be personal and relevant.

Metacognitive Strategies

- How did you know that answer?
- What do I need to help me learn?
- Where do I go to get the resources I need?
- Semantic maps, word clusters.



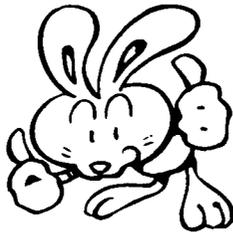
Metacognitive Strategies

- Mnemonics
- SQ4R
 - Survey
 - Question
 - Read
 - Reflect
 - Recite
 - Review



Metacognitive Strategies

- DISSECT
 - Discover the context
 - Isolate the prefix
 - Separate the suffix
 - Say the stem
 - Check with someone
 - Try the dictionary
- Advance organizers



Recognize and Accommodate Learning Styles

- Group size
- Distraction management
- Holistic
- Integrated
- Concrete
- Sequential



Self-Assessment and Monitoring

- We want independent learners.
- Do I need to reread?
- Is that sensible?
- Graphic organizers
- Checklists
- Reflections



Instructional Time

- Protect
- Optimize
- Structure a positive exciting learning environment.
- Democratic procedures



Parental Involvement

- Home-based activities
- School-based activities
- Formal and informal communication



Celebrate Diversity

- Language
- Experiential differences
- Religious
- Ethnic
- Sociocultural





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