

School Improvement Model to Foster Student Learning

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Abstract

Many classroom teachers are still using the traditional teaching methods. The traditional teaching methods are one-way learning process, where teachers would introduce subject contents such as language arts, English, mathematics, science, and reading separately. However, the school improvement model takes into account that all students have different learning styles. The school improvement model consisted of four major components: multiple intelligences, curriculum integration, assessments, and reflections. These components would foster student learning in order to improve students' academic performance.

Introduction

Many classroom teachers are still using the traditional teaching methods. The traditional teaching methods are one-way learning process, where teachers would introduce subject contents such as language arts, English, mathematics, science, and reading separately. Also, Arends (2007) suggested that these methods are teacher-centered. The teachers expect the students to repeat what was taught in the classroom. And it is based on traditional perspectives, such as the task for students is to learn the subject materials through their cognitive process (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Apparently traditional methods may have contributed in the students' declining academic performance and where students of diversity are voided in their educational development and to explore and discover their personal capabilities and strengths for effective learning.

School Improvement Model

This model takes into account that all students have different learning styles. The school improvement model consisted of four major components: multiple intelligences, curriculum integration, assessments, and reflections. These components foster student learning in order to improve students' academic performance.

Multiple Intelligences

The implementation of the multiple intelligence theory is ideal for students of diverse background. Gray and Waggoner (2002) indicated Howard Gardner's concept suggested that knowledge could be displayed in multiple ways and where a teacher can reach more students in a particular timeframe. The authors further explained that multiple intelligence theory in the classroom would dramatically increase students' achievement. For example, in case studies at six diverse public schools (two elementary, two middle and two high schools), where multiple

intelligence was used for five years, it was found that basic skills improved at all grade levels regardless of whether a school is large or small, affluent or poor, and inner-city or suburban. It was also established that students consistently out performed peers in their districts, counties, and states, as well as nationally on recognized state assessment and standardized tests.

Curriculum Integration

Lazear (2003) suggested a metaintelligence, intelligence investigating itself, approach in teaching and where lessons teach students about their own multiple intelligences. The ideal time for implementing multiple intelligences is at the elementary school level, where the teacher would focus on the foundation in literacy skills. Brand (2006) suggested that integrating phonics and literature-based to develop children's emergent literacy skills. These skills include alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonics and nonsense word competence, and language usage. In addition, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence, where the program's literacy activities addressed children's interpersonal, intrapersonal, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, linguistic, musical, naturalistic, and visual-spatial abilities and interest, the teacher used children's trade books for a variety of storytelling methods, such as draw talk, character imagery, felt board, group role play, and chant. And the results from 13 inner-city children indicated that this integrated, seven-week program concluded in significant gains in phonemic awareness, nonsense word competence, and word usage fluency.

Another teaching strategy is by integrating mathematics with multiple intelligences, where the objective is for the students to estimate the number of bottle caps, a total of 23 bottle caps, for making their personal tambourine. This activity is in sequence and would take several days to complete. First, the students would gather bottle caps by asking their neighbors (bodily/kinesthetic intelligence and interpersonal intelligence) and for ivy plant vines (naturalist intelligence), where the teacher should have some samples for the students to show their

parents/responsible adults what the students need, which would be used to decorate their tambourines. Secondly, the classroom aide or parent would straighten and pierce a hole through the bottle caps, while the teacher ask students to form groups (interpersonal intelligence) and the students would brainstorm on how their tambourines, using a six-inch circular paper plate, by estimating the number of bottle caps require for making a tambourine. And the design for the tambourine, as to “How far apart would each peg be and how many bottle caps would require for each peg?” This is logical/mathematical intelligence. Third, the student would practice singing, with their completed tambourines (musical/rhythmic intelligence). Fourth, the practices would be video-taped. Finally, the students would write a journal describing their experience of the entire process in making their tambourines (intrapersonal intelligence).

Another teaching strategy is by integrating English with multiple intelligences, where the objective is for the students to retell their walk around the neighborhood. The activity is in sequence. First, the teacher takes the class for a walk around the neighborhood (naturalist intelligence and bodily/kinesthetic intelligence), and while the teacher points and read the names on signs and posters (visual/spatial intelligence) and the advanced students would take pictures of the signs and posters (bodily/kinesthetic intelligence). Midway of the walk, the teacher would ask the class this question, “How are the addresses of each home different from those on the other side of the street?” This is logical/mathematical intelligence. And at certain locations, the students would talk to the homeowners about having some small pine cones from the homeowners’ pine trees or talk to the homeowners about having some ivy vines around the homeowners’ front yard (naturalist intelligence and interpersonal intelligence). Secondly, the teacher’s “fun” activity is for the class to sing a farewell song (musical/rhythmic intelligence), and later teacher show the pictures before the class ends for the day and have the students retell their walk around the neighborhood (visual/spatial intelligence and verbal linguistic intelligence).

And another teaching strategy is by integrating reading with multiple intelligences, where the teaching lesson would address students' low academic performance. And this activity is where students follow instructions, which are posted on the classroom activity wall. First, the instructions are for each of the group table to select and state one of the musical scales, expect for "Fa," "La," and "Ti" and proceed on their own. Secondly, on the classroom wall, the title of the activity is Musical Scales, with do, re, mi, fa, so, la, and ti. The "do" would be for the students to go (bodily/kinesthetic intelligence) to the library and locate (visual/spatial intelligence) a story that has a female deer (naturalist intelligence) and write (verbal/linguistic intelligence) five sentences report on the story and give reasons why they enjoyed or did not enjoy the story (intrapersonal intelligence). "Re" is for an activity done outside the classroom; the students would place construction paper on the ground (bodily/kinesthetic intelligence) and place several treasured items on the construction paper and let the sun do the work. The students, however, would record (visual/spatial intelligence, verbal/linguistic intelligence, and logical/mathematical intelligence) the time the students check the paper and at the end of several days, the students would describe the sun painting to the class (verbal/spatial intelligence) along with a brief three sentences paragraph beneath the sun painting. "Mi" is for the entire class to write a creative story about "Me and my favorite reading book." The students would write a five sentences paragraph and later read their creative story to the class (verbal/linguistic intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence). "Fa" is done with the entire class on the playground and where the students would run a straight-line (bodily/kinesthetic intelligence) for three seconds and measured (visual/spatial intelligence, verbal/linguistic intelligence, and logical/mathematical intelligence). To enhance the lesson, table groups would come up with the average, medium, and mode (visual/spatial intelligence, verbal/linguistic intelligence, and logical/mathematical intelligence). "So" is to go to the library (bodily/kinesthetic intelligence) and locate (visual/spatial intelligence) a book about people sewing either in an industrial capacity or regular people in the story and later write

(verbal/linguistic intelligence) a five sentences report on the story and give reasons (intrapersonal intelligence) if they enjoyed or did not enjoy the story. “La” is done in the classroom with the students performing a choral reading of “Lavender’s Blue (Dilly Dilly). This is verbal/linguistic intelligence. “Te” is done by transforming the classroom into a tea garden and at each table with various teas and for the students to select a tea and jam for snack, while listening to the “Sound of Music.”

Assessments

Observation, dialogue, and documentation are key components in collecting information and examining the information to check if the students are reaching their objectives and if multiple intelligences are enhancing students’ learning abilities that mirror’s real life experiences. First, through observation, the teacher is able to observe the students’ ability such as running with friends at the playground or swinging on the monkey bars and traits such as helping another student getting up after the student fell. Thus, the students demonstrated their abilities that come naturally with little effort of teaching required.

Secondly, by observing the strengths of the students, the teacher would consider a student teaching model strategy (in one-to-one partnership), where the students (mentors) would assist students having difficulties, such as logical/mathematical intelligence and linguistic intelligence.

Third, another supporting role is having the students become a member of the classroom thinking club, which consisted of checkers and chess contests that would address their logical/mathematical intelligence. In this process, the teacher observes the students’ thinking process.

Finally, the teacher would have another “fun” game for the entire class is to have the students to bring into the class several comic strips. The teacher observes the students cutting away the balloons, where the characters are saying something, and crate and read their own fun

statements and this fun game would address the students' visual/spatial intelligence, bodily/kinesthetic intelligence, and verbal/linguistic intelligence. The appeal for using wordless pictures motivates students as the students work with new language skills. The complexity of the pictures increases as students' language skills develop, encouraging further development. This same strategy can be used effectively with beginning or reluctant writers as well as, and can be further personalized by having Students with Disabilities draw pictures to use as the basis of the story.

Dialogue is where the teacher is able to receive information in understanding the students' learning process. By asking questions, the students are reflecting their knowledge on the subject matter. Also, the dialogue is an avenue of learning about the students' academic strengths and weaknesses that would signal where the teacher might make possible changes to benefit the students. Another supportive tool in the assessment process is self-assessment, where there is dialogue between the teacher and the students. This process involves students in critical thinking and problem-solving task.

Documentation supports the teacher's decisions about the classroom environment and provides the means on where and how the students are performing in the classroom. One example is the daily journals, in which the students would write (verbal/linguistic intelligence) about the activities they experienced and reflect on their performances (intrapersonal intelligence).

Students' journals, homework, and classroom assignments are other forms of documentation. Homework and classroom assignments are students' progress and a learning process for the author to see if the instructions are being transferred to the students. All of these items are in the student's portfolios, where these are tools for reflection because it focuses on growth in learning as well as description and critique of author's teaching practice (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Modifying for Students with Disabilities

A portfolio reflects a student's individuality, encourages the student to evaluate his or her own work, and supports a student's chances for success. With computers in the classroom, technology provides wonderful tools for developing formative assessments, valuable feedback that provides opportunities for students to revise and improve the quality of their work.

Portfolios include student's artifacts, pictures, narrative, and taped reading and speaking samples to document development and growth over time.

Students with Disabilities or who learn in nontraditional ways may not always clearly demonstrate their achievement using paper-and-pencil methods of assessment. Portfolios are practical, useful planning and reporting tools, and portfolio assessment offers many benefits. It increases the author's awareness of how students learn; links activities, learning, and assessment interactively; guides and supports curriculum planning, and assists in communication with parents.

Higher-Order Thinking

After a period of time, the students would reach a plateau where they have discovered and become competent and demonstrated their proficiency in the basic concept of multiple intelligences (Lazear, 2004). The teacher is satisfied with the classroom environment that foster and enhance the student's learning abilities. At this particular point, the teacher should be in the process of designing another level of multiple intelligences before the students' learning styles are stagnated and the students' become bored in the classroom.

A higher-order thinking process would be the next level for the students, and by designing a classroom environment conducive to refine the students' learning abilities, the teacher would take into consideration the continued implementation of multiple intelligences. An

example is where many of the ninth grade students performed poorly in mathematics. The teacher would concentrate on mathematics by having the class interact with nature by growing dried beans (natural intelligence). Next, the students would form into groups where they would create a joyful musical song about the neighborhood tour (musical/rhythmic intelligence), and the students would document their feelings and thoughts about the neighborhood tour by writing in their journals (intrapersonal intelligence and visual/spatial intelligence). In addition, since many of the students have their family origins outside of the United States, it would be an ideal time for the students to be part of the school assembly and dance their traditional dance that would convey work and celebration (bodily/kinesthetic intelligence), and with an ongoing problem of schoolyard bullies, this is not only a school problem but nationwide, the student would form into groups and discuss possible methods of avoiding schoolyard bullies (interpersonal intelligence), where the students have the opportunity to speak out freely about their experiences, as they encounter schoolyard bullies and what possible actions they would take to avoid these types of situations (verbal/linguistic intelligence). In addition, in the planting of dried bean, the thinking process changes from concrete to word problems, such as “By applying three seeds per cup and we have a total of 20 cups if half of the total are exposed to sunlight and the other half is in the shade, which group of seeds will come up first?” This is the logical/mathematical intelligence.

Reflections

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) indicated that reflective practice offers a better perspective on school reform and meaningful change in the school environment and in the individuals. Reflective practice provides productive engagement of conflict, a better way to understand differences and to support productive engagement of conflict. Understanding can also result in decreased judgment and recognition of different values, experiences, and priorities.

York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2006) also argued that there are several benefits for implementing reflective practices. First, students participating in reflective thinking practices contribute to the production of academic success. This process is done at the end of the day where the students would write in their journals and reflect on the activities they experienced and how they might improve on the experience. Secondly, reflection provides direction for educators in a different role. In this new role, educators become facilitators. A facilitator's role is to keep the discussion moving until solutions are established and a role where educators become change agents. In addition, reflective practice provides cultural awareness. This would give educators a better understanding and be able to relate to their minority students. And finally, reflective practice provides a sense of efficacy, where the teacher is able to project his belief that his/her teaching methods can make difference in the lives of his students.

Journals

Journaling is another area that is used as best practices for effective classroom management to minimize disruptive behavior and increase learning. Journaling can contribute important information through the process of reflection. Reflection is not subject to the area for teacher's use only; this is also a two-way learning process. It provides the students time to reveal their internal thinking process: how to improve their learning and offer the author their outlook in the class and help the teacher improve his/her teaching skills. In addition, this gives the teacher time to reflect by asking "How did I do today in my teaching?" and "Can I improve?"

Portfolios

Portfolios are ideal tools for reflection because it focuses on growth in learning, as well as description and critiques of practice (Osterman and Kottkamp, 2004). Graziano-King (2007) suggested that an effort to assess student writing reflects current views and demonstrate how

students can work independently. For example, during the first few days when school starts, the teacher should have the students write an essay that reflects a theme that runs through course texts and discussions. And every two weeks, the students' revisit, reflect on, and revise their essays. The result is a multi-drafted essay, written independently, but informed by course texts, class discussions, and author's feedback. As an assessment tool, it offers the best of the portfolios; it reflects current views of writing, and this would allow the teacher to have full confidence of his students because the students are the sole writers of their work.

Conclusion

As diverse learners increase their numbers in the regular classrooms and where most teachers are still using traditional teaching methods, diverse learners are constantly performing well below expectations on state assessments and standardized tests. The school improvement model takes into account that all students have different learning styles. And this model consisted of multiple intelligences, curriculum integration, assessments, and reflections. The school improvement model would foster student learning and would improve students' academic achievement.

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