

Structuring Classroom Experiences for Success *Proactive Management Strategies*



Clearly communicating an anticipation for success

Understanding the problem

When teachers do not articulate the content or objectives of a lesson, instruction can become unfocused and disorganized. As a result, students may quickly lose interest and their behavior may deteriorate rapidly. They may also begin to make assumptions about what they need to learn. Generally, it is the quickest and the brightest students who make accurate assumptions and achieve success. In contrast, it is the poorly performing and

A key to the solution

In an effort to help all students succeed academically, teachers need to describe what is expected during the instructional activity. When teachers clearly communicate the content and objectives of the instructional activity, they establish a strong academic focus. The purpose of this process is to create a structured, academically oriented learning environment that encourages active student engagement and maximizes academic achievement. The result is a positive classroom climate with high expectations for success that facilitates student learning.

To clearly communicate the criteria for success, the teacher needs to state it at the beginning of the instructional activity. After the criteria have been explicitly described, teachers need to check for students' understanding in concrete ways. This orienting process establishes a context for learning that leads to improved levels of student engagement and achievement during the instructional activity.

difficult-to-teach students who are more likely to make inaccurate assumptions and perpetuate their cycle of academic failure.

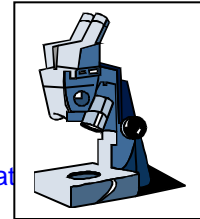
Management Tips

Step 1 Prior to beginning instruction, reflect on what you want students to learn as a result of the lesson or unit. Limit the focus of an instructional activity to one or two objectives that are specific, measurable, and observable.

In this example, the goal for biology is comprised of six objectives. Attempting to teach the six objectives in one instructional activity is neither reasonable nor realistic. Grouping the objectives into sets of two would help establish a clear instructional focus.

The Curriculum area: biology
Content: DNA replication and cell division

Goal: Orally describe the four phases of mitosis (cell division), including the unique characteristics of each, with no errors and identify the relevance of this process in relation of mankind.



Objective 1: Orally describe the unique characteristics of the prophase of cell division.

Objective 2: Orally describe the unique characteristics of the metaphase of cell division.

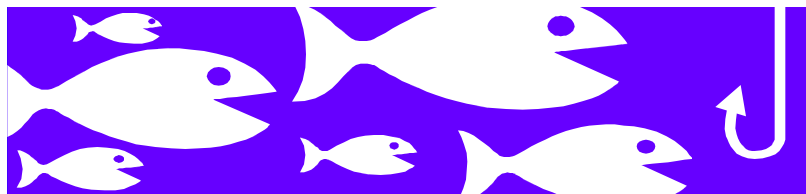
Objective 3: Orally describe the unique characteristics of the anaphase of cell division.

Objective 4: Orally describe the unique characteristics of the telophase of cell division.

Objective 5: Provide 3-5 examples of how DNA replication and cell division has impacted society in the past 10 years.

Objective 6: Predict how our knowledge of DNA replication and cell division will continue to influence our society in the new millennium by citing 3-5 significant implications.

Step 2 At the beginning of the instructional activity, grab the students' attention in unique and creative ways. This should be a powerful hook that prompts them to "tune in" rather than "tune out"! If the lesson were focused on objectives 5 and 6 of the previous example, newspaper headlines on the cloning of sheep could be presented. The purpose of this introductory activity is to gain students' attention while simultaneously stimulating their curiosity regarding the topic.



Step 3 At the beginning of the instruction, describe the sequence of the activities to students. When teachers present the order of activities, students know what to expect and when to expect it. This takes little time or effort, yet it has a profoundly positive impact on students' behavior. Many students' disruptive behaviors will be minimized or eliminated by this process.

For example ...

First, we will review what we already know about DNA replication and cell division.

Second, we will use a cooperative learning activity to construct a timeline of important DNA replication and cell division events that have occurred in the past 10 years.

Third, we will use a Think Pair Share activity to predict how our past, present, and future knowledge of DNA replication and cell division will impact our society in the new millennium.

Step 4 Clearly state the expectations for learning at the beginning of the instructional activity. These should be the goals and objectives that you have determined (in step 1) prior to initiating this instructional unit or lesson. The objectives for students' learning can be intertwined with the delineation of the instructional sequence (step 3).

For example ...

*First, we will review what we already know about DNA replication and cell division. **You will be expected to identify the unique characteristics of the four phases of cell division (mitosis) using your response cards.***

*Second, we will use a cooperative learning activity to construct a timeline of important DNA replication and cell division events that have occurred in the past century. **You will be expected to provide 3-5 examples of how DNA replication and cell division has impacted society in the past 10 years.***

*Third, we will use a Think Pair Share activity to predict how our past, present, and future experiences with DNA replication and cell division will create new ethical and moral dilemmas for society. **You will be expected to predict how our knowledge of DNA replication and cell division will continue to influence our society in the new millennium by citing 3-5 significant implications.***

Step 5 At the beginning of the instructional activity, identify the relevance to students or rationale of the instructional activity. When the teacher helps students to understand how and why the content is relevant and important to them, their interest and investment in the instructional activity can be increased. The relevance or rationale for the activity can be intertwined with the delineation of the instructional sequence (step 3) and the objectives for students' learning (step 4).

For example ...

This is important for you to understand because you are the voters who will shape future public policies regarding DNA replication and cell division. As our knowledge in this area becomes refined and sophisticated, it has the potential to have a profound impact on our health and well-being.

Jazzing It Up

1. Plan for differentiated instruction. Ask yourself whether it is appropriate for all students to be expected to learn the same thing at the same time. Some students will need enrichment activities, whereas others will require remediation. Using flexible instructional formats is one way to meet a variety of needs and ensure that all students will master the instructional objectives.
2. Create opportunities for students to be involved. After students have become familiar with the orienting routine, recruit them to become involved in presenting the instructional sequence, objectives, and relevance. Developing a

For example ...



Students who need additional focus on the basics of a topic could be divided into debate teams to argue the pros and cons of cloning. The teams would be instructed to formulate cogent arguments to support the definitions, facts, and values that are salient to their side of the issue. This activity would help students to review important content in creative and motivating ways.

On the other hand, students who require enrichment activities would be instructed to listen to the debate, weigh the evidence, interpret the meaning and spirit of existing laws, and make the best possible decision. This process requires students to resolve a complex and controversial issue, like the Supreme Court. To do so, students must engage in higher-order thinking skills, as well as apply their knowledge of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and contemporary political and legal policies. This framework for analyzing issues can be exciting to students.

shared sense of responsibility for learning at the beginning of the instructional activity can further aid in establishing positive learning climate.

3. Consult your state's Course of Study or Standards of Learning. Use these standards as a guide to generate instructional goals and objectives.
4. If there are students in your classroom who receive special education services, you also need to review their IEPs. The IEPs should describe the modifications that these students will require to access the general education curriculum. Be creative and utilize existing resources to ensure that students' needs are met. For example, if a student's IEP requires that the biology textbook be provided on audiotape and there is no such version available, then utilize high school and community clubs, senior citizen centers, and parent volunteers to dictate. When teachers ensure that students can access the curriculum in meaningful ways, they are maximizing the likelihood that students will meet the instructional objectives and achieve academic success.

What's Next?

Clearly communicating the expectations for academic success is one of several proactive approaches to employ at the beginning of the instructional activity to make positive or desired student behavior(s) happen. Additional strategies include

- Enhancing positive principles
- Describing expectations, rewards, and consequences
- Reviewing with students the procedure for handling "hot spots" and transitions

Management Tool Box

Tactics for BEGINNING a lesson