

Review pertinent related material

Students often possess in their knowledge base pertinent information or skills needed to understand the new concepts or learning to perform new skills or strategies. However, although they may possess this knowledge, they may fail to draw upon it when attempting to understand the content or perform the new skill. As a result, learning new knowledge or skills can be greatly impaired.

A related problem is that at times, the subject matter you are teaching is iterative – that is, concepts build upon another. Therefore, students' erroneous understanding of a beginning requisite concept ensures faulty understanding of all subsequent concepts you teach. It is important to determine if students' knowledge of a requisite concept is sufficiently accurate to build upon, or whether additional instruction is needed to clarify understanding.

Likewise, all processes or strategies you teach require students to use, or build upon, requisite skills. If the students cannot perform the requisite skills both accurately and fluently, learning more advanced skills that require this background knowledge is always significantly impaired.

Effective Alternative

When teaching new concepts or strategies, carefully consider which pertinent previously learned ideas or skills you might need to review. When reviewing the material, avoid focusing questions on your brightest students, as their responses may cause you to develop the mistaken impression that the rest of the class knows the requisite material as well as they do.

If you find that students do not know the requisite material as well as they should, try to avoid the temptation to teach the new information anyway.

Specific Tips

Use review techniques that are student-action oriented. That is, the review should require students to think and make active responses. Reviews of requisite concepts should require students to generate descriptions of the concept (e.g., explain the gist of an idea, identify from a list of features those that are always, sometimes, and never

associated with the concept, provide an example or nonexample, metaphor, or simile of the concept).

Reviews of requisite skills should require students to perform the skills in question. Simply modeling the requisite skill for students as a review, in lieu of having students perform them, is not nearly as effective.