Instructional Strategies for Success

Introduction to Instructional Strategies

As any experienced teacher knows, "one size fits all" does not apply to instruction, especially within the adult education classroom. Effective learning is more than the result of developing creative strategies and positive learning environments. Effective learning also includes active interactions among instructors, students, and students' peers.

Course Design

Adult students tend to be problem-centered. When developing a GED® preparatory course of study, think about the following two questions often asked by students: "Why do I need to know this?" and "How will I use this information?" GED® curriculum must be relevant and inclusive of those ideas and concepts necessary for student success. As curriculum is designed for a GED® preparatory program, remember to:

- Select materials that have a variety of learning aids, such as study guides, online materials, and/or audio files, and encourage students to use them
- Craft a GED® syllabus that is standards-based, but that will also motivate students to learn
- Design a clear, meaningful assignments that enable students to accomplish course objectives and to reach individualized goals
- Expect students to attend each class and to be successful

"A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."

Henry B. Adams

- Space the workload, including homework, throughout the timeframe set for the course of study
- Provide constructive feedback on assignments and provide opportunities for "redoing" work as necessary for success

Some GED® preparatory programs are developed for a set timeframe, while others are open entry/open exit. Always ensure that the program is developed to best serve the student as well as obtaining a positive outcome. The knowledge to be learned requires multiple exposures with a variety of instructional strategies. Also, it is important that students understand that information, both academic and social, that is being learned in the classroom is applicable to both the workplace and postsecondary education.

Instructional Delivery Methods

A balanced mix of instructional methods is important in managing the adult education classroom. Each learner has preferences regarding how he or she learns best (working with a large group, small group, alone, with a tutor, etc.). Learning style inventories and questionnaires may help to determine these preferences that should be taken into consideration when organizing classroom activities.

The physical environment of the classroom may be better suited to some instructional methods than to others. For example, a small room with individual desks may lend itself better to large group or individualized instruction (although sometimes desks may be arranged to accommodate small group work). On the other hand, a large room with tables and chairs may offer the opportunity for large group, small group, or individual instruction all to happen at one time or another.

Regardless of which methods of delivery or classroom management are chosen, instruction should be standards-based. Integration of the Common Core State Standards is vital to success on the 2014 GED® test, as well as success in today's workplace and postsecondary education.

Some of the methods of instruction commonly used in adult education include the following:

- Large-group instruction
- Small-group instruction
- Cooperative learning
- Project-based instruction
- Computer-assisted instruction (technology based)
- One-on-one instruction
- Individualized instruction
- Field trips
- Guest speakers
- Exploratory/experiments

Large-Group Instruction

The instructor plans and directs activities to meet the needs of a large group or sometimes the whole class.

Appropriate when:	Key steps:
• They foster a sense of community in the classroom by starting everyone together. • They provide instruction or assistance in a particular subject area required by the majority of learners. • The physical environment is conducive to participation by the entire group. • Lesson content is at an appropriate level for all the learners included in the group. • The instructor varies the delivery of content and the assignments to include visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic input and output alternatives. • Small group and personalized instruction are available alternatives for some learners.	• Establish group rapport. • Provide a multi-sensory presentation of information. • Provide guided practice. • Provide independent practice. • Offer a variety of multi-sensory assignments. • Set evaluation criteria. • Assess learner progress and demonstrate learner gains that are a result of large group activities. • Provide follow-up activities as needed.
Content areas that are addressed well:	**How technology is used:**
• Anything appropriate to all levels • Major concepts or processes in all academic areas • Job readiness • Health topics • Topics in affective and cognitive domains • Life skills	• Technology can be worked into any lesson or can be the basis for any lesson. • Video or audiotapes can be used to deliver information. • In a computer lab situation, all learners in the group may be using the same software program and the instructor may use an LCD panel to demonstrate how to use the program. • Educational software programs on computers may be used to drill and practice new skills in the large group setting.

Small Group Instruction

Material is presented to a small number of learners (probably no more than 10) that are either on a similar learning level or are participating with a specific purpose in mind.

Appropriate when:	Key steps:
• The instructor needs to teach specific skills to part of the larger group. • Several learners require instruction, but the other learners do not. • Certain learners need more opportunities to participate in a group but are intimidated by a large group setting. • Certain learners prefer to work in a group versus individually. • The instructor wants to build peer relationships among the learners. • Successful learners are given opportunities to model strong skills or good study habits to learners who have weaker skills/habits. • The classroom has a limited number of instructional materials on a particular subject.	• Set purposes and expectations in establishing the group. • Limit the amount of time the group will work together (4, 6, 8 weeks). • Provide a multi-sensory presentation of information. • Provide guided practice. • Provide independent practice. • Offer a variety of multi-sensory assignments. • Set evaluation criteria. • Assess learner progress and demonstrate learner gains that are a result of small group learning activities.
Content areas that are addressed:	**How technology is used:**
• All academic areas • Reasoning skills • Team building • Study- and test-taking skills • Chart, graph, and map-reading skills • Writing • Problem-solving/reasoning activities	• The Internet can be used as a resource • Technology can be worked into any lesson or can be the basis for any lesson. • Video or audiotapes can be used to deliver information. • Educational software programs on computers may be used to drill and practice new skills in the small group setting.

Cooperative Learning

Learners of all abilities and backgrounds work together towards a common goal. Each group or team member is responsible for a part of the learning process and offers feedback, support, and reinforcement to others. Often group members are assigned specific roles (i.e. worrier, encourager, time keeper, recorder, reporter, facilitator, etc.). A variety of grouping strategies and techniques are employed (i.e. round table, corners, color-coded co-op cards, simulation, jigsaw, co-op/co-op, pairs check, cubing, numbered heads together, etc.). This method is important as students gain reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Appropriate when:	Key steps:
- Group work/teamwork skills are perceived as important job skills for the work place. - Cooperative behavior is promoted in the classroom. - Classroom activities and lesson content are structured so learners see each other as resources; students are willing to learn from peers as well as from the instructor. - Group members are active in sharing ideas and practicing skills. - Learners feel comfortable with one another. - Independent learners are allowed to work alone at times. - Learners are functioning at different academic levels/	- Teach skills for group/team learning. - Describe a clear and specific learning task. - Choose a grouping strategy and group size. - Select group members so that learner abilities are mixed, which will allow them to help each other. - Discuss and practice roles. - Engineer groups; assign team roles. - Set time limits and goals. - Facilitate the teams by providing materials and assistance as needed. - Monitor the teams. - Have teams report back and analyze their process. - Transfer these cooperative skills into life-skills/problem solving. - Establish evaluation criteria. - Assess learner progress and demonstrate learner gains that are a result of cooperative learning activities.

Content areas:

- Current events
- Writing
- Science experiments
- Mathematical problem solving
- Research skills
- Workplace/life skills

Project-based Instruction

Learners explore a chosen theme. Researching the theme and preparing to present the information involves a range of skills across the curriculum.

Appropriate when:	Key steps:
• The entire group focuses on a theme that is later developed at various levels with varying tasks depending on the learners' abilities. • Everyone is included in the completion of a finished product but each learner is allowed to select a task based on his or her ability and interest. • Learners are allowed to contribute to projects using their strengths and improving on their weaker areas. • Learners actively initiate, facilitate, evaluate, and produce a project that has meaning to them. • A context for new learning and cross-curricular integration is provided. • The instructor facilitates and coaches rather than creating and directing the activities. • The classroom environment is comfortable, risk-free, and promotes learner discussion without fear of criticism.	• Select a theme as a group. • Narrow the theme to a manageable length. • Design a project as a group. • Clarify objectives and desired outcomes of the project. • Research the theme as a group. • Decide within the group who will do what to gather information and present the results. • Create a product or program to share • Reflect on the process and evaluate the project. • Set evaluation criteria. • Assess learner progress and demonstrate learner gains that are a result of project-based instruction.
Content areas:	**How technology is used:**
• All academic areas • Science projects • Cross-curricular projects • Research projects • Workplace problems/career planning	• Educational videos, computerized encyclopedia, and Internet are constant resources. • Technology can offer a method of collecting information (video or audiotape live interviews and speakers or broadcast radio or television programs. • Technology can offer a method of presentation (PowerPoint, video production, etc.). • Technology can assist in creation of a final product (word processing).

Computer-assisted Instruction (Use of Technology)

The learner receives instruction and practice by means of technology that is used as a tool in teaching basic skills or knowledge. Education in today's classroom is about more than just computer literacy, it can also integrate other types of technology, such as smart phones, pads, video, audio, the Internet, white boards, lcds.

Appropriate when:	Key steps:
• The learner sees the use of technology as necessary to function in today's world. • The learner likes privacy and prefers to control the content and pace of learning. • The learner needs more drill and practice and feedback that demonstrates success and boosts self-esteem. • Flexibility in the length and scheduling of study time is necessary • The learner requires multi-media input and practice in order to learn. • Technology is not utilized as the sole means of instruction. • An instructor is readily available.	• Introduce basics about the computer (turning on/off, going to programs, putting in/taking out disks and CDs, etc.). • Introduce the specific software program(s) a learner will use (getting in/exiting the program, saving material/place, moving around within the program, etc.). • Introduce basic computer keyboarding. • Present new skills in a non-threatening manner: explain, show, have the learner do it, have the instructor keep hands off. • Establish the objectives of educational activities using the computer. • Assess learner progress and demonstrate learner gains that are a result of computer-assisted Instruction.
Content areas:	**How technology is used:**
• All academic areas – if you have the appropriate software, you can do anything. • The Internet as an information source, research tool, and teaching tool (many sites allow interactive learning). • Writing Skills – process writing. • Research.	• Educational videos and software programs can introduce basics of computers/Internet. • Computer/Internet basics or a software program can be demonstrated using an lcd panel to project onto a large screen. • Multi-media presentations can be created by learners to demonstrate their knowledge • Headphones should be utilized for software programs with sound (to avoid distractions). • Integration of other types of technology (smart phones, pads, readers, videos, etc.). • Spell checker, grammar checker, and encyclopedia as resource tools for other programs.

Individualized Instruction

The instructor or a tutor works with one learner at a time, usually in a subject area in which a particular learner needs intensive individual instruction or is learning information not being accessed by the rest of class.

Appropriate when:	Key steps:
• Individual's skill levels require individualized instruction (either a skill mastered by the group or a skill that the student is specifically interested in attaining). • Individual's strong personal preference for this type of instruction is shown in the learning style inventory. • Only one individual needs to study a particular subject and requires substantial assistance. • It does not impede the progress of the rest of the class. • There is a least one instructor available to the rest of the group (a volunteer or speaker may work with the rest of the group or a tutor may do the one-on-one instruction). • An individual learner is not singled out in a negative way.	• Evaluate the learner's skill level and learning style. • Schedule appropriate times. • Limit the amount of one-on-one time so that it does not dominate total time available for instruction. • Plan for instruction. • Identify the specific subject matter/ objectives to be covered in that session. • Set evaluation criteria. • Assess learner progress and demonstrate learner gains that are a result of learning activities.
Content area:	How technology is used:
• All academic and workplace areas.	• Reinforce concepts when more drill and practice is necessary for mastery. • Provide opportunity for research into new skills.

Instructional Strategies

An instructional strategy is a method used in teaching (in the classroom, online, or in some other medium) to help activate students' curiosity about a topic, to engage the students in learning, to probe critical thinking skills, to keep them on task, to create sustained and useful classroom interaction, and to enable learning. There is no one best strategy. In fact, there are a multitude of instructional strategies that can be successfully implemented in the GED® classroom. It's important to remember that the learning process is not easily separated into a definite number of steps. Sometimes, learning occurs almost instantaneously, and other times it is acquired through diligent studying and lots of practice. Because students learn differently, it is important to have a toolkit of different strategies to use.

Let's look at some sample strategies in each of six different categories:

- Direct instruction
- Indirect instruction
- Experiential learning
- Independent study
- Interactive instruction
- Instructional skills

Direct instruction is an effective method for providing information, developing step-by-step skills, introducing other strategies, or actively involving students in knowledge construction. Strategies that are part of direct instruction are generally teacher centered. Some examples of direct instruction teaching strategies are: lecturing, explicit teaching or modeling, demonstrations, drill and practice, and structured overviews.

Indirect instruction strategies are primarily student centered and require a high level of student involvement. In indirect instruction, the role of the teacher shifts from lecturer/director to that of facilitator and resource. The teacher arranges the learning environment, provides students with what is needed, and then acts as a resource. Some examples of indirect teaching strategies are: case studies, discussions, problem solving, writing to inform, and reading for comprehension.

Like indirect instruction, **experiential learning** is learner centered and activity oriented. Experiential learning strategies provide students with the opportunity to:

- Experience an activity
- Share or publish their reactions or observations
- Analyze or process information to determine what has occurred
- Infer or generalize principles or concepts
- Apply what has been learned to new situations

A few strategies for experiential learning include: field trips, conducting experiments, role playing, model building, games, and surveys.

Independent study refers to the various strategies that help develop student initiative and self-reliance. Independent study strategies can be implemented with one student or within a team or small group. Independent study strategies include: crafting reports or research studies, completing homework, working in learning centers or computer-assisted instruction.

Interactive instruction relies on discussion and sharing among students. Interactive strategies assist students in developing skills and abilities, organizing thoughts, developing rational arguments, and learning from both their peers and their teachers. The success of interaction instruction strategies is highly dependent on success in structuring and developing group dynamics. A few interactive instructional strategies are: debates, brainstorming, think-pair-share, cooperative learning, and jigsaws.

Strategies for developing **instructional skills** have as their focus the teaching of behaviors necessary for procedural purposes and for structuring learning experiences for students. The instructional skills of explaining, demonstrating, questioning, and even the use of wait time are all teaching strategies that are used by the effective adult education instructor.

Remember, no one instructional strategy will work for all students, for all instructors, or in all subject areas. Think of strategies as places to start in determining what works best for the class.

Resources

The following are resources on instructional strategies and effective teaching.

- Glossary of Instructional Strategies
  http://www.beesburg.com/edtools/glossary.html

- Instructional Strategies Online
  http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/DE/PD/instr/alpha.html

- Leblanc, Richard. Good Teaching: The Top Ten Requirements (1998)
  http://www.appleseeds.org/good-teach.htm

- Fulk, Barbara. 20 Ways to Make Instruction More Memorable
  http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/teachers/make_instr_more_memorable.html