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**Teacher Toolkit**

**Special Education/ESL Instructional Strategies**

**Rotate Lessons**

This instructional strategy allows for the teacher to work directly with a small group of students and creates a more intimate level of learning. The teacher rotates lessons within different groups/centers so that on any given day new material can be introduced to one group, while only having to check in on others who are doing more independent activities. This strategy requires students to be grouped (up to the teacher) and allows for review time, independent practice and collaboration.

**How it works:**

1. **Decide and Prepare:** Decide on a lesson pertaining to the TEKS needing to be covered and prepare it.

2. **Select strategy:** Select the grouping strategy that makes the most sense given the objectives of the lesson. Try to match the grouping strategy to the lesson.

3. **Group:** Once a grouping strategy (ex: reading level, writing level, interests, randomly, etc.) is selected, group the students and write the groups down.

3. **Signal:** As students walk in the room, put a small colored post-it note on their desk. The post-it note signals that the students are doing a “rotate lessons” day.

4. **Begin work:** Students grab their post-it and go to the corresponding station to begin working.

5. **Time:** Provide a timer so students can self-pace and time stations accordingly to class time.

**When to use:**

This strategy can be used anytime the teacher pleases.

* The whole class time to allow students to review/give the teacher time to catch up students
* The whole class time to allow the teacher to teach a lesson to one group while the other students are rotating centers and practicing previous learned knowledge
* During the instructional delivery, having students rotate around the teacher giving them the chance to be up and close
* During the independent practice to allow the teacher to help students in need and give students a chance to show off what they’ve just learned, having to compete a task in each center
* Before a standardized test to review/re-teach information
* At the beginning of the school year to review prior knowledge from the grade before and see how much students remember

**Variations:**

1. Mix up the groups

2. Vary technology within lessons, have offline and online centers

3. Have stations be independent work or group work

4. Pick and choose which work you want to grade, not everything has to be a number grade

**Question Formulation Technique**

This technique turns the tables from a traditional classroom and gives students the chance to ask questions. This strategy requires students to learn how to produce and improve their own questions and then strategize how to use them. No matter what level a student is at, this technique is a great way to get students thinking and be creative while doing so.

**How it works:**

1. **Design:** The teacher designs a question focus

2. **Produce:** Students produce as many questions as they can

3. **Interchange:** Students work with open-ended (need more explanation) and close-ended (yes or no) questions and how to change an open-ended question to close-ended and vice versa

4. **Instruct:** The teacher gives instructions on how many questions are needed and students prioritize questions

5. **Discuss:** Teacher and students discuss next step using the questions

6. **Reflect:** Students reflect

**When to use:**

This strategy can be used whenever the teacher feels necessary.

* The day after a newly learned lesson to dig a little deeper into the information and refresh students’ brains
* Before the start of a project
* During the guided and independent practice to get students thinking about the material they just learned
* As a review before a test. Students can think of any questions and will be able to ask peers and the teacher.
* As the focus to see how much previous knowledge students know about the content they’re about to learn

**Variations:**

1. Change up the question focus each time this strategy is used

2. The questions can be used in many different ways such as a poster, partner question and answer, a picture, paper, for research, etc.

3. Vary the amount of time students get to formulate questions

4. Make it into a game and have one side of the classroom ask questions while the other side answers them. Then they switch turns. This get students thinking and allows them to use their peers for assistance.

**Instructions and Lessons into Songs**

Music is a powerful tool to engage students of any level. Rhythm and melody can help improve memory and understanding of key words and patterns. This strategy will make difficult or non-interesting information relevant, fun, and enjoyable for the learner. This takes creativity and time on the teacher’s part but it will make for a fun lesson and will increase the level of learning while doing so.

**How it works:**

1. **Create:** Create a lesson based off of the TEKS needing to be covered

2. **Choose:** Pick a section of the lesson that seems more complicated than other parts such as vocabulary, rules, cycles, etc.

3. **Song:** Turn the content in that section into a catchy song or jingle with some movement

4. **Teach:** Teach the song/jingle to the class and have them repeat and move after you

5. **On their own:** Have the students sing and move on their own with your assistance

6. **Proceed lesson:** Teach the rest of the lesson based off of the song you created (which should be the most important information)

7. **Include:** Incorporate the song into any other lessons that are built off of the content taught

**When to use:**

This strategy can be used whenever the teacher feels necessary.

* During the instructional delivery to teach new content
* Right before a test to review content
* As the focus to refresh students on what they have learned
* As a brain break. Singing a song is a nice break from working and will help the students stay on task
* As the closure to review the song/newly learned content

**Variations:**

1. This strategy can be used on any lesson and is not limited in content

2. Have the students help you come up with a song so that they are able to personalize it

3. Make the song and have the students create the movement that go along with it

**One Million Dollar Pyramid**

This game promotes communication, collaboration, listening and English expression as students race to get as many words as they can. The teacher will need to do a bit of prep work for this game, and will need either an overhead projector or a projector connected to his/her computer. Typically, the teacher will create 20 categories with five words relating to each category.

**How it works:**

**1. Select**: Select key words or phrases from the lesson or unit. These can be concepts, themes, important dates or facts.

**2. Create**: Create a pyramid with three words or phrases you’ve chosen on the bottom, two in the middle, and one on the top. For each round of play, you’ll need to create a new pyramid.

**3. Divide**: Divide the class into pairs of students. Partners sit with Partner A facing the displayed pyramid and Partner B with his or her back to the pyramid. Explain that Partner B will guess each word or phrase based on descriptions given by Partner A. Partner B cannot use the displayed word or phrase in the description.

**4. Play Round One**: Partner A starts with the word or phrase on the bottom left of the pyramid. When Partner B correctly guesses, Partner A describes the next word or phrase on the bottom middle of the pyramid. Play continues as partners move up the pyramid, completing the bottom row, then middle, then top. The partner group that completes the pyramid first, by correctly guessing all six words or phrases, wins that round.

**5. Play Round Two**: Repeat this process with switched roles. Partners now change seats, a new pyramid is displayed, and Partner B gives the clues.

**When to use:**

This strategy can be used anytime the teacher pleases, but is great for a review.

* After introducing and working with new vocabulary terms, which is often
* After completing a story or novel to review the content just read
* As a review for an upcoming test or assessment
* As a vocabulary-building tool whenever the teacher pleases
* To increase oral language development. This activity is great for getting students to talk.

**Variations:**

**Group Play**: Instead of playing in pairs, play in groups of four students. One version of group play: one person sits with his or her back to the board and the other three give clues. Another version: Three people sit with their backs to the board and compete to be the first to guess the word or phrase based on one student's description.

**Rounds:** Vary the amount of rounds students get to play. Depending on the allotted class time, teachers can choose to play this game the whole class or for a portion of the class.

**Build:** Build the pyramid with more words to begin with instead of three. Depending on how many vocabulary words being covered, the pyramid can be larger than stated in the instructions.

**Visual Thinking Strategies Method**

This activity is designed to build students’ background knowledge and develop thinking skills that use detail to enhance understanding. It is targeted at developing creativity and thinking skills as well as requiring the student to use their background knowledge.

**How it works:**

**1.** The teacher selects an interesting picture that relates to the lesson to be taught.

**2.** A copy of the picture is placed on the overhead projector for students to see.

**3.** The students are asked to look at the picture silently for a minute and think about what they see.

**4.** After a minute the teacher opens up questioning to the classroom to hear their ideas.

**5.** When a student makes a statement of their findings, the teacher asks for more information to dig a little deeper.

**6.** The students justify their answers by providing evidence from the picture.

**7.** Next the teacher asks students to share differing opinions and provide justification. The discussion goes on until students have shared all they can about the picture.

**8.** The teacher summarizes what the students said, reveals the relevancy of the activity, and wraps up.

**When to use:**

This activity can be used at any time.

* As the focus activity to get brains stimulated
* As the closure activity to end on something fun
* During the instructional delivery after teaching new content
* As a random brain break
* Right before working on an assignment
* Before reading something relevant to the picture

**Variations:**

**1.** Instead of just sharing ideas, require students to write a few sentences about their discoveries.

**2.** Give the students an option of 2 pictures and let them decide which one they want to analyze. Mix up the pictures and sometimes incorporate pictures that aren’t related to the topic to make things fun.

**3.** Allow the students to start the questioning while the teacher just observes. This empowers the students and hopefully makes shy ones talk.

**Graphic Organizers**

This learning strategy is a useful educational tool to use in any subject area. They help students organize their thoughts and ideas for answering questions, function as a pre-writing tool for essays, and provide a visual display of information. They can be an easy way to differentiate instruction for a variety of learning styles as well.

**How it works:**

**1. Explain**: Teach students how to use the graphic organizer you’ve chosen for the activity.  Explicitly explain the situations in which certain Graphic Organizers are used and why they are effective for use at those times.

**2. Practice**: Give students time to practice using various Graphic Organizers. While one student may find T-charts especially helpful, another student might prefer Venn diagrams.

**3. Use**: After exposing your students to several different types of Graphic Organizers and showing them the proper ways to use these organizers, give them a chance to use the tool to better their learning and understanding

**When to Use**

The teacher can use Graphic Organizers at any point in the lesson to structure information to allow for an easier way of understanding.

* When taking notes about new information in a lesson to organize ideas
* When comparing and contrasting two concepts
* As a way to help students classify new information into meaningful  categories
* To help students find similarities and differences by creating analogies
* As a brainstorming tool to generate ideas before students begin an assignment, such as a writing task, a set of word problems, or a lab, to gather ideas or formalize procedures

**Variations**

**1.** Have the teacher make the graphic organizer categories and then make it a class activity, using a Venn diagram. Give students post it notes and allow them to come up one at a time to post ideas.

**2.** The teacher can use the KWL graphic organizer. This gets students thinking and is a great focus/closure activity. It asks questions such as “What I know”, “What I want to know” and “What I learned” and allows students to apply background knowledge and new material.

**3.** The students can incorporate a T-chart. This creates a chance to compare and contrast information and separate material into groups.