

Characteristics of Effective Instruction: Definitions

Teaching for Understanding:

Teaching for Understanding is leading students (to engage in a variety of thought-provoking activities such as explaining, finding evidence in examples, generalizing, connecting, applying, making analogies, and representing the topic in new ways. Teachers assist students in making connections between prior and new knowledge to develop deep conceptual and procedural knowledge. Teachers who teach for understanding 1) make learning a long-term, thinking-centered process, 2) provide for rich ongoing assessment, 3) support learning with powerful representations, 4) pay heed to developmental factors, 5) induct students into the discipline, and 6) teach for transfer.

Assessment FOR Learning (Formative Assessment):

Formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students as part of instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of core content. As assessment FOR learning, formative assessment practices provide students with clear learning targets, examples and models of strong and weak work, regular descriptive feedback, and the ability to self-assess, track learning, and set goals. (Adapted from Council of Chief State School Officers, FAST SCASS).

Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum:

A rigorous curriculum is one that is complex, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging. A relevant curriculum requires students to use knowledge to solve complex, real-world problems, and to create works to use in real world situations. Rigor and relevance is represented by challenging content that is significant to a topic, includes authentic work, and the application of knowledge and skills to complex problems. It also entails the use of prior knowledge, the development of in-depth understanding, and the ability to develop and express ideas and findings through elaborated communication. The content is not just interesting to students, but involves particular intellectual challenges. When students successfully meet these challenges, their new learning will have meaning and value in contexts outside of the classroom.

Teaching for Learner Differences:

Teaching for Learner Differences requires teachers to understand essential concepts and skills, to identify the contributing factors affecting the desired outcome, and to utilize a variety of methods to teach and reinforce the desired concepts and skills. It includes providing access to the general education curriculum for all students. Teaching for Learner Differences can best be accomplished by engaging in a process which has teachers using student and instructional assessment data to make sound instructional decisions to meet the needs of individual students.

Student-centered Classrooms:

In Student-centered Classrooms, students construct their own knowledge based on experiential, holistic, authentic, and challenging experiences. Teachers take the skills, knowledge, and concepts that the curriculum requires and connect them to students' experiences, interests, and environment. They provide opportunities for students to communicate their understandings, reasoning, solutions, and connections. Teachers encourage students to reflect on their own thinking and learning. Curriculum and assessments are centered on meaningful performances in real-world contexts. Classroom learning experiences are intentionally designed for collaboration.