

Seventeen Instructional Intentions of an Effective Teacher

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Editor's Note: The authors have published *Standards-Based Constructivism: A Two-Step Guide Toward Motivating Students* (Eye on Education, 2004). Their next book will focus on the seventeen instructional intentions of an effective teacher. This article previews the book.

Abstract

The intentions of effective teachers are listed as seventeen questions in categories associated with the authors' Two-Step model. However, these intention-questions can be applied to any effective model of instruction in a standards-based classroom. The intentions are listed as questions so that teachers may self-assess their own teaching.

Introduction

The following list of seventeen intentions of an effective teacher is a summary of approaches to instruction discussed in an upcoming book on constructivist teaching.

Teachers have the responsibility to foster every student's cognitive achievement, a responsibility that includes nurturing every student's:

- social/emotional growth;
- ability and disposition to work collaboratively and;
- ability and disposition to utilize reflection as an essential part of the learning process

Cognitive achievement can be defined as having the ability to:

- ◆ analyze and synthesize information to create understandings
- ◆ transform current understandings into new knowledge

How do teachers know if their practices foster cognitive achievement? If a teacher can respond affirmatively to the following questions, the probability is high that s/he is nurturing cognitive achievement and is, therefore, an effective teacher:

The Foundation

(underlying classroom practices)

1. **Safe and nurturing environment** – do you create a classroom environment where students feel free to think critically and express their views without fear?
2. **Public speaking** – do you structure lessons that require and nurture public speaking, in pairs and small groups as well as in front of the entire class?
3. **Opportunities for success** – do you provide every student with frequent opportunities to experience “success”?
4. **Validation of student work and responses** – do you let each student know when his or her efforts are praiseworthy?

The Exploratory Phase

(the beginning of the lesson or unit)

5. **Grab attention** – do you begin class in a manner likely to encourage students to look forward to what comes next?
6. **Prepare students to engage** – do you create activities that focus student thinking, excite their imaginations, and prepare them to meet and exceed the learning standards.
7. **Assess and access prior knowledge** – do you design activities that will help students (and you) to access and assess their prior knowledge, interests, and needs?

The Discovery Phase

(The part of the lesson in which students learn and demonstrate how they are meeting the learning objectives of the lesson.)

8. **The learning objectives** – do you clearly state the one, two, or three specific things you want your students to learn? Have you cast these specific objectives in terms of what your students will understand, perform or create? Are the objectives aligned with appropriate learning standards?

9. **Authentic task** – do you frame learning tasks that are as authentic as possible and that will allow students to demonstrate their skill with or understanding of the learning objective(s)?
10. **Ownership** – do you create learning tasks that enable students to feel pride and assume responsibility for their own learning?
11. **Options** – do you offer students optional ways to accomplish the learning task, and therefore reach the learning objectives(s)?
12. **Multiple intelligences** – do you offer students frequent opportunities to utilize their stronger intelligences (recognizing that there are going to be times when they will also have to rely on their weaker ones)?
13. **Appropriate resources** – do you make sure that the resources necessary to accomplish the assigned student-centered activities are available, or can be made available, to students?
14. **Interventions** – do you look for opportunities (teachable moments) to intervene either in response to student questions or in reaction to student work, by “working the room” while students are engaged in an activity?
15. **Cognitively rich questions** – do you seize every opportunity: to intervene in student work with questions that require students to think critically; to phrase task questions to require critical thinking; and to require students to create their own cognitively rich questions?
16. **Reflection** – do you, during a learning experience, create opportunities for students to think about their thinking, to assess their progress and their decisions thus far? Do you, at the end of each day’s lesson, provide students with a brief closure activity that elicits evidence of something students have learned as a result of the lesson?
17. **Assessment measures** – do you utilize multiple forms of assessment to judge student performance? Is instructional improvement the primary reason you assess students? Is teacher observation structured to be the most meaningful form of assessment?