Foundations of Contextual Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

Children relentlessly seek answers to pressing questions. It is no wonder that young students should question the relevancy of their classroom learning. According to Thomas Sargent, educators are forced to look at teaching strategies to affirm that they are "relevant and useful to today's students" (Dec. 2000). The relevancy of education is a concern that is expressed by educators and students alike. Constructivist John Dewey, the father of modern education, envisioned an education system that encouraged student to interact with their learning. Schools should manipulate the academic environment enabling students to become "doers". Under the same philosophy, Marie Montessori discovered that children should be free to manipulate their learning in an environment that allows them to take risks. Contextual teaching and learning plays a key role in assuring that students learn in a setting that presents real-life experiences.

For many school systems, educators should teach to cover the material. The focus becomes "teaching to the test". When we do so we deprive students of the full academic experiences that produces a love for learning. According to the Center for Law and Education," Teaching methods traditionally used in vocational education -- active learning, students' demonstration of skills through a project, and coaching relationships, for example -- are at the heart of what we now know, from educational research, is good academic instruction for students." The goal of contextual teaching and learning is to provide students with real-world educational experiences that promote life-long learning. In Dale Parnell's book Contextual Teaching Works he states that "[Contextual teaching] is simply teaching the way individuals learn best…". He helps us to discover that by helping students make the connection between their classroom experiences and their lives, educators help promote life-long learning and help increase student achievement.

As the country's population becomes more diverse we are faced with the challenge of designing a curriculum that meets the needs of all people. Education systems risk imposing educational strategies that do not meet the individual needs of the students. Such strategies as cooperative and collaborative learning, integrated learning, problem-based learning, and work-based learning encourage inquiry and stimulate higher-order thinking. Research has proven that when students are allowed to manipulate their learning through the use of such strategies, they become problem solvers and incorporate problem-solving skills throughout their formal education experience (Parnell). Thus, incorporating the principals of contextual teaching helps to promote authentic learning and increases students' success.

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References

Parnell, Dale (1999). Why do I have to learn this?. Teaching the way people learn best.Texas:CORD Communications.

(1997). *Performance Standards*. Pittsburgh: Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement.

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Project Based Learning in a Fifth and Fourth Grade Elementary Gifted Education

Day 1

The students will practice the principles of Multiple Intelligence.
Class leads a discussion in students' interests. Teacher tells class that they are going to take an interest inventory and are expected to respond honestly. The inventories are collected and students are introduced to Howard Gardeners 8 Intelligences. After students work collaboratively in a game of Question Quest to define the terms students play a concentration game matching terms with definitions. Inventories are redistributed and students label their intelligence. Students showcase their intelligences by creating a poster.

Day 2

The students will identify their giftedness.
In whole group setting, students brainstorm words for gifted as teacher charts. Students choose five words that define them individually. Students are divided into cooperative learning groups and are grouped according to intelligence (heterogeneously). Each group receives a copy of the definition of the gifted learner (Congress, State of Georgia, Marietta City Schools, Theorist). The students research unknown words and re-write the definitions in their own words. Each group is given the MILE Individual Program Description. Using highlighters, student highlight eight important sentences that best define the MILE program. In collaborative group settings, students work to create a mission statement for MILE to be formed from the collective sentences. Work is saved on group disc.

Day 3

The student will work collaboratively to teach the class.
The teacher divides the class into groups that contain no more than five students. Each group is asked to teach the class how to play a sport using non-verbal instructions (a game of charades). Each group will designate one group member to draw a sport out of the teacher's basket. The groups are given 5 minutes to plan their instruction and 3 minutes to teach their sport to the class through charades. Each group member must participate. The class will guess the sport that is being taught. The students are asked to describe their group's planning process for instruction. Using short phrases, the teacher

charts the information. The students name ways that businesses work collaboratively. The students are directed to write their individual definition of working collaboratively.

Days 4 and 5

The student will research the gifted program in Marietta City School System.

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The students are told that in the spring we will receive visitors who will observe our gifted program. The visitors would like to know more about us; therefore, we need to design creative brochures that give an overview of MILE (Marietta Independent Learning Environment). Each cooperative learning group member is given a specific task (the experts). The experts will collect statistical data, conduct research and interviews, proofread, and create charts, graphs, or tables that depict the gifted population in the Marietta City School System.

Days 6 and 7

The student will design an informational document that explains the Marietta Independent Learning Environment.

Each cooperative group will design a tri-fold brochure for the Marietta City Schools gifted program. The students are told that the brochure will be used as source of information for the community and visitors to our school system. The brochures will include the definitions of the gifted learner, the number of gifted students served in our school system, a brief description of the curriculum, photographs of the schools and the gifted teachers, and the mission statement. The students will present the brochures to the class. The brochures will be sent to central office for final approval.

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Evaluation

The students will be evaluated using a variety of formal and informal measures. Among them are questioning, rubrics, and observation checklists.

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National Elementary School Standards

Problem Solving:

- Develops ideas for the design of the product, service, or system
- Establishes criteria for judging the success of the design
- Uses an appropriate format to represent the design
- Plans and carries out the step needed to turn the design into a reality
- Evaluates the design in terms of the criteria established for success
- Organizes the presentation in a logical way appropriate for its purpose
- Speaks clearly and presents confidently
- Responds to questions from the audience
- Organizes the information into an appropriate form for use in the publication
- Checks the information for accuracy
- Formats the publication so that it achieves its purpose
- Examines models for the results of project work such as professionally produced publications and analyzes their questions
- Uses what he or she learns from models to assist in planning and conducting project activities
- Sets up a system for storing records of work activities
- Understands and establishes criteria for judging the quality of work processes and products
- Assesses his or her own work processes and product

Mathematics:

- Adds, i.e., joins things together, increases
- Uses knowledge about ones, tens, hundreds, and thousands to figure out answers to multiplication and division task
- Finds simple parts to wholes
- Recognizes fractions as instructions to divide
- Uses beginning proportional reasoning and simple ratios
- Recognizes relationships among simple fractions, decimals, and percents
- Connects ideas of quantities to the real world
- Finds, identifies, and sorts numbers by their properties
- Collects and organizes data to answer a question or test a hypothesis by comparing sets of data
- Displays data in line plots, graphs, tables and charts
- Compares data in order to make a true statement

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Makes connections among concepts in order to solve problems
Adds and subtract s numbers with several digits
Estimates numerically and spatially
Reads, creates, and represents data on line plots, charts tables diagrams, bar graphs, simple circle graphs, and coordinate graphs
Uses appropriate mathematical terms, vocabulary, and language, based on prior Conceptual work
Collects and records data, represents and displays data, and compares results with predictions
Writes a detailed plane and revises and improves the plan in response to feedback from peers and teachers
Carries out plan describes a question or concept to investigate

Science:
Uses evidence from reliable sources to construct explanations
Evaluates different points of view using relevant experiences, observations, and knowledge
Works individually and in teams to collect and share information and ideas
Uses technology tools (such as rulers computers, balances, thermometers, watches, Magnifiers, and microscopes) to gather data and extend the senses
Collects and analyzes data using concepts and techniques in Mathematics Standard 4, such as average, data displays, graphing, variability, and sampling
Represents data and results in multiple ways, such as numbers, tables, and graphs; drawings, diagrams, and artwork; and technical and creative writing instructions that others can follow

Reading:
Restates or summarizes information
Relates new in formation to prior knowledge and experience
Extends ideas
Makes connection to related topics or information
Makes and supports warranted responsible assertions about the texts
Supports assertions with elaborated and convincing evidence
Makes perceptive and well-developed connections

Writing:
Engages the reader by establishing a context, creating a persona, and otherwise developing reader interest
Creates and organizing structure appropriate to a specific purpose, audience, and context
Includes appropriate fact and details
Excludes extraneous and inappropriate information
Asks relevant questions
Confirms understanding by paraphrasing the adult's directions or suggestions

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Displays appropriate turn-taking behaviors
Actively solicits another person's comment or opinion
Offers own opinion forcefully with dominating
Responds appropriately to comments and questions
Clarifies illustrates, or expands on a response when asked to do so; asks classmates for similar expansions
Demonstrates control of grammar, paragraph structure, punctuation, sentence construction, spelling, and usage
Adds or deletes details
Clarifies difficult passages
Rearranges words, sentences, and paragraphs to improve or clarify meaning
Sharpens focus
Reconsiders the organizational structure