

Iowa Core: Characteristics of Effective Instruction



One of the six Iowa Core Outcomes (#6) is: **Educators implement effective instructional practices to ensure high levels of learning for each and every student.** The thinking behind this outcome is that...

*“If content is challenging and relevant, and teachers routinely deliver instruction that demonstrates the characteristics of effective instruction, **then** student learning and performance will increase.”*

So... what are these **Characteristics of Effective Instruction**?

To remember them, use the acronym **START**.

S Student-Centered Classrooms:

In student-centered classrooms, students are directly involved and invested in the discovery of their own knowledge. Through collaboration and cooperation with others, students engage in experiential learning that is authentic, holistic, and challenging. Students are empowered to use prior knowledge to construct new learning. Through the development of the metacognitive process, students reflect on their thinking. Curriculum and assessment are centered on meaningful performances in real-world contexts. As a partner in learning, teachers intentionally create organized and cohesive experiences to assist students to make connections to key concepts.

T Teaching for Understanding:

Teaching for understanding is leading students to engage in a variety of thought-provoking activities such as explaining, finding evidence and examples, generalizing, applying, making analogies, and representing the topic in new ways. Grant Wiggins (1998) states, —Understanding is not just about coverage of knowledge... but about ‘uncoverage’—being introduced to new ideas and being asked to think more deeply and more carefully about facts, ideas, experiences, and theories previously encountered and learned. According to Wiske (1998), it shifts instruction from a paradigm of memorizing and practicing to one of understanding and applying. It is best accomplished through addressing classroom practices and supporting the teacher as the primary change agent.

A Assessment FOR Learning (Formative Assessment):

Formative assessment is a process, not an assessment tool or instrument, which includes collecting information on student progress toward a learning goal. The information is used to adjust instruction and increase student learning. The assessment for learning process is not an add-on to instruction, but an integral part of instruction necessary to identify and close the learning gap for each student. Assessment for learning is used by both teachers and students. Teachers use feedback to check for student understanding during the instructional process and to make adjustments to their instruction as necessary. Students use feedback from the process to monitor their own learning and to make adjustments to their learning tactics. 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.

R Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum:

A rigorous and relevant curriculum is one that is cognitively demanding and challenging to students as they apply the essential concepts and skills to real world, complex and open ended situations. 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 beyond the curriculum unit or classroom setting. Rigor and relevance is characterized by content that is linked to a core disciplinary concept or skill and ... 1) requires students to do authentic work, using methods that are specific to the discipline and applying what they know or what they are learning to solve complex problems 2) involves the use of prior knowledge, the development of in-depth understanding, and the ability to develop and express ideas and findings through elaborated communication.

T Teaching for Learner Differences:

Teaching for Learner Differences is about planning for and teaching to variances among learners in the classroom to create the best learning environment possible. It is designed to ensure **all** students acquire the essential concepts and skills of the Iowa Core. Using data to guide instructional decision-making students are provided core, supplemental and intensive levels of support. Teaching for Learner Differences is a framework which provides processes so that all students have access to the general education curriculum. It is best accomplished through a proactive approach where student and environmental data are used to plan for, implement, and adjust for the needs of all students.

Attributes of the Characteristics of Effective Instruction

Student Centered Classrooms:

- *Educators support all students in making connections to construct new learning in order to make decisions and solve problems.*
- *The educator facilitates opportunities for students to be metacognitive.*
- *Educators and students are partners in learning.*
- *Educators facilitate time for students to learn collaboratively.*
- *Educators use meaningful and authentic assessment in real world context.*

Teaching for Understanding:

- *Instruction facilitates the construction of deep conceptual and procedural knowledge.*
- *Instruction facilitates the development of representations and conceptual models.*
- *Instruction inducts students into the discipline.*
- *Instruction facilitates the application of new learnings and understandings in new and novel situations (transfer).*

Assessment for Learning:

- *Educators utilize K-12 learning progressions along which students are expected to progress in a domain.*
- *Student learning goals are clear, focused on the intended learning, and communicated so all students understand the criteria for success.*
- *Instructional modifications for students are planned from carefully elicited evidence of student learning.*
- *Descriptive feedback identifies for students the specific knowledge and skills needed to reach learning goal(s).*
- *Self and peer assessment is planned and structured by educator and students in order to develop life-long learning skills.*
- *A collaborative classroom climate is conducive to assessment for learning.*

Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum:

- *Higher order thinking (HOT) is performed by students during instruction.*
- *Deep understanding and mastery of critical disciplinary concepts and skills are demonstrated.*
- *Concepts and skills are applied to situations, issues, and problems in the world beyond school.*

Teaching for Learner Differences:

- *Instruction is focused on “big ideas”—the essential concepts and skills within the content.*
- *Instruction is designed and delivered to match students’ needs based on assessment data of students’ prior knowledge, readiness, individual interests and learning preference.*
- *Teacher provides flexibility within content, instruction and product to allow for variances in students’ acquisition and demonstration of learning.*
- *Teachers provide clear instruction about how to learn, making the various strategies and skills of the learning process conspicuous to all students.*
- *Instruction includes opportunities for students to practice and review their learning and receive feedback.*
- *The teacher regularly monitors each student’s progress related to the acquisition of the essential concepts and skills and adjusts instruction.*