

Enhancing Students' Involvement

Hussen Eshetu*

Introduction

The old notion of teaching which primarily regarded the teacher as transmitter of knowledge has given way to a modern conception. Teaching is now conceived as the facilitation of pupils' own learning. In line with this, the emphasis on the role of the teacher has shifted from transmission of knowledge to organization of pupils' involvement in the process.

Pupils' active involvement in the teaching learning process, or indirect teaching is advocated because studies have found out that it has resulted in more pupils' learning and better attitude toward learning. Along with this, studies also have identified teaching behavior that have close relationship which desirable learning out comes. Accordingly, specifications of teaching behaviors considered as key or central to effective teaching are supplied by Perrott (1987), Borich (1988), Cole and Chan (1994), Moore (1995) and by others.

In this paper, an attempt is made to provide teachers with an eclectic framework for enhancing pupils' involvement in their lessons so as to ensure effective teaching and learning. The teaching behaviors treated in the framework are classified into components of a lesson.

Set Induction

There is a contention among psychologists that one of the essential condition in learning is that the learner should be actively engaged in the process in order maximize the possibility of new behavioral response. The teaching skill directed toward eliciting this involvement is termed by authorities as set induction. The concept of pre instructional set or set induction has a wide research support. Studies on

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classroom learning indicate that pre-instructional activity or set of a learning task has influence upon the out come of that task.'

Set induction has both psychological and cognitive functions. The main functions of a motivation are to get students' undivided attention and arouse their interest and curiosity so as to establish involvement in the forthcoming lesson. Relating the lesson to a topic of vital interest to the class, telling students why they should learn what they are being taught, and presenting challenging questions are some of the techniques that teachers can use to gain students' attention and arouse their interest and curiosity.

The cognitive function of set induction is served by an advance organizer. The concept of advance organizer is based on the submits theory which states that the learning of meaningful material can be facilitated by the provision of highly generalizable concepts under which new meanings may be subsumed. According to Lawton and Fowel (1978:78), advance organizers facilitate the incorporation and retention of new information in three ways:

- by activating relevant subsumes already present in the learner's cognitive structure;
- by providing subsumes where non-existent; and
- by reducing the necessity of rote memorization since anchoring ideas to which details can be meaningfully related are supplied.

Teachers can use the following techniques to facilitate the students' learning of a new material or presentation.

- Provision of an overview of the previous lesson
- Outlining the key points of the present lesson
- Making clear to students what is expected of them during the course of the lesson
- Using explanatory models

Lesson Development

As Cole and Chan (1994:99) contended, all lessons should include some direct and explicit activity, no matter how brief it is. Important teaching behaviors that must occur in the direct teaching phase are presented under three headings as follows.

Clarity of Presentation

Clarity of presentation (explanation) is an aspect of teacher behavior which has considerable influence on the effectiveness of classroom teaching. It is noted by educators that lack of clarity appears to be a major barrier for effective presentation of explanations.

Perrott (1987:33) noted that simplicity, explicitness and continuity are important factors for effective explanation. The inclusion of too much information in one sentence and the use of technical terms without definition of their meaning are common causes of failure. Furthermore, there should be logical connections between the various points dealt within a lesson and diversions must be kept minimal.

Fluency is important, not only in discourse, but also in questioning. Restating a question differently assuming that the first statement was not clear is likely to confuse pupils since this may divide their attention between the previous and the new information. Most effective teachers phrased questions so that they could be answered the first time without additional questions interspersed before the student responded (Rosenshine and Furst 1971:44). Clarity and coherence, pausing and pacing, directing and distributing, and prompting and probing are all important questioning skills. It is observed by educators that beginner teachers usually ask more questions than they receive answers due to lack of pause and pacing. This confuses the pupils and thus makes them silent and remain bewildered. On the other hand, skillful directing and distributing helps to maximize class participation. Directing questions in a non-threatening way toward pupils who are reluctant to participation will help to draw them into the discussion.

The use of examples is another useful skill in clarity of explanation. Effective teaching of new concepts, relationships or principles largely depends on the teacher's ability to use examples and seek examples from pupils. Relevant examples help pupils to concretize abstract ideas and comprehend new concepts.

Varying the Stimulus

Varying the stimulus as a teaching skill is based on the theory of learning which states that uniformity of perceived environment tends to lead pupils into mental inactivity, while changes in the perceived environment attract their attention and stimulate mental activity. The purpose of this skill is thus to arouse pupils' attention so as to focus upon the content of the lesson. The stimulus variation techniques suggested by Perrott (1987:29) include the following.

- **Teacher movements** can have important effects on pupils' attention, but should not be random and nervous.
- **Focusing behavior** is the teacher's way of intentionally directing pupils' attention by the use of either verbal statements, specific gestures or some combinations of the two. For example Emphasis of particular words or phrases, eye movements, facial expressions, movements of head, arms, and the like.
- **Changes in the speech pattern** helps to draw pupils' attention.
- **Changing interactions** that is, a shift from teacher's talk to either teacher-pupil dialogue or pupil-pupil conversations can attract pupils' attention and stimulate their mental activity.
- **Shifting sensory channels** that is, addressing to the pupils different senses through the use of audio-visual materials is much helpful for their active involvement.

Studies have indicated that student achievement is positively related to classrooms where a variety of instructional procedures and materials is provided and where the teacher varies the cognitive level of discourse and tasks. But there is some fear that increase in the frequency of stimulus variation can distract younger students from attending to the content of a lesson. Wyckoff (1973:85) observed that increase in the frequency of stimulus variation on the part of the elementary teachers resulted in lower student achievement, where as it resulted in a improved student performance on the part of secondary school teachers. This reminds us that stimulus variation need not be random, but carefully considered by the teacher.

Student Engagement and the Use of Student Ideas

The amount of instructional time students are actually engaged in learning the material presented is termed by Borich (1988:1) as the engagement rate or the on-task behavior of students. For him, the key to understanding engagement rate is the awareness that while a teacher can be task-oriented, providing maximum content coverage and communicating high expectations, students may not be engaged all of this time. They may be absent minded or emotionally detached. Correcting such types of disengagement is one of the most difficult tasks of the teacher.

Combining data from several process-product researchers, Brophy and Good (in Brophy 1992:6) concluded that both student engagement (time on-task rates) and student gains are enhanced when teachers

- give assignments and set work that students can complete successfully if they invest reasonable effort in them (rather than assignments that are confusing and frustrating);
- provide clear task directions and, if necessary, lead students through practice examples before releasing them to work independently;

- circulate the room to monitor progress and provide help once students begin to work independently; and
- keep these helping interactions brief so as to be able to continue circulating.

According to these researchers, the above activities are not frequently followed. Teachers do concentrate on procedural requirements rather than on the content aspects of the task or activities. They also seldom make clear the purpose of the assignments and structure them effectively so that students can work on them.

Another important teaching behavior strongly related to student engagement is the use of student ideas. The general principle supporting praise and the use of student ideas is that of affective reinforcement. Students generally tend to repeat behavior for which they have been praised or when credit is given for their ideas.

Flanders (in Rosenshine and Furst 1971:49) has attempted to divide this behavior into five sub-categories.

- acknowledging** the student's ideas by repeating the nouns and logical connectives he has express;
- modifying** the idea by rephrasing it or reconceptualizing it in the teacher's own words;
- applying** the idea by using it to reach an inference or take the next step in a logical analysis of a problem;
- comparing** the idea by drawing its relationship with ideas expressed earlier by the student or the teacher.
- summarizing** what was said by an individual student or group of students.

It is found out that these five ways of using student ideas are more strongly and consistently related with student engagement and ultimately with student achievement than a simple expression of approval, such as "Good".

Closure

Closure is a complement of set induction. It draws the attention of students to the end of a specific learning sequence or of an entire lesson by focusing on key points that have been learned. One of the key aspects of effective closure, in terms of Stones (1979:322), is that the learners leave in a highly motivated state, either to continue the learning independently or to be enthusiastically looking forward to the next lesson on the subject.

- Closure, like set induction, has psychological as well as cognitive functions. Recapitulation helps to consolidate the concepts that have been taught and orient the pupils to the continuation of the work to the next lesson by creating a sense of achievement in them. Some of the more important techniques require of the teacher for effective closure include the following:
- review the main ideas and facts covered in the lesson at the end
 - encourage and praise students to create a sense of achievement
 - set assignments and further reading tasks based on the lesson
 - briefly describe what will happen in the next lesson in the subject.

A. Framework for Enhancing Student Involvement

1. Set induction

- Motivator or attention getter
- Advance organizer

2. Lesson Development

a. Clarity of Presentation

- Simplicity, explicitness, fluency
- The use of examples, questioning skill

b. Varying the Stimulus

- Independent work
- Task directions and feedback
- The use of student ideas
- Questioning skill

3. Closure

- Review and Encouragement
- Assignments and readings tasks
- Remark on the next lesson

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