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Learning challenges can arise mainly due to comprehension or communication factors. Teachers are unable to cover the syllabus in the short span of time given and thus concepts are being covered briefly, resulting in students being unable to comprehend the information fully.

LESSON PREPARATION

Teachers may find that there is too much preparation to be done to promote active learning in the classroom. Well-planned lectures as compared to transmission style of lectures would significantly reduce learning challenges faced by learners.

BIG CLASS SIZES

Big class sizes has an impact on students' learning. Students may face a much greater challenge in learning in a big classroom where it may not be as conducive as one which has a smaller class size and activities are done in small groups.

INFLEXIBLE TEACHING

Teachers may see themselves as the expert in the subject matter and may be resistant to change their teaching style. As such, students whose learning styles do not conform to the teacher's preferred teaching style may face learning challenges in comprehending the information taught.

LACK OF RESOURCES

The lack of resources may result in learning challenges as learners may not have the necessary scaffold in the form of an object to help them and make their task easier.

PASSIVE VS ACTIVE LEARNING STYLES

On the part of students, they may face learning challenges because they are unwilling to embrace other forms of active learning alternatives, which might be more effective for them to solve real-world problems. They must acknowledge that the passive style of learning may no longer work in the 21st century.

SCAFFOLDING

According to Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), scaffold is a process in which a child is able to do a task that he would be unable to without guidance. Scaffolds can be traced to the Vygotsky's (1978) idea of zone of proximal development where it is defined as the distance between the learner's current knowledge and what he does not know but can be bridged with adult's or peer's guidance. The learner is helped when the more capable teacher or peer provides the scaffolds, in the form of hard, soft, reciprocal or technical, to help the learner achieve the tasks.

The teaching strategy that I am using is scaffolding. According to Chang, Sung, & Chen (2002), this strategy caters to the needs of every learner based on his zone of proximal development. This is an effective strategy especially for dyslexic learners who require a lot of scaffold to be able to read, spell and write confidently. I am using the hard scaffold in the form of a worksheet to teach the new vowel team 'ui'.



There will be opportunities to practice sounding and writing out the vowel team on the worksheet so as to reinforce learning. An example is to draw a picture related to the keyword taught and subsequently sound and trace the vowel team three times in the blanks provided.

SOFT SCAFFOLDING

Soft scaffold in the form of questions will be asked whenever students are stuck at a response. For example, if the students are unable to derive at the keyword, I will ask a question like "What are apples, bananas and oranges categorised as?" Reciprocal scaffold is also used to encourage learning from peers. For example, one of the activities in the writing activity is to create a mind map for snakes. Students work in pairs of two to brainstorm for ideas.



USING TECHNOLOGY

Technical scaffold is used in the form of iPads whereby students have to check the meanings of the vocabulary words after they have drawn a picture related to the word and discussed in their own groups.



SCAFFOLDING TECHNIQUES

According to Hogan and Pressley (1997), the scaffolding techniques lead the student towards independence and mastery of their work. The scaffolding techniques are:

- ◆ Modelling
- ◆ Explaining
- ◆ Student Participation
- ◆ Confirmation of Student understanding
- ◆ Student Contributions

MODELLING

For the modelling phase (15 minutes), I will set out the objectives of the exercise so that learners know what to expect and frustration is minimal. Setting clear guidelines enables learner-centred teaching to take place due to the fact that learners are more focused. I will start by asking a question about snakes. The question is “What are the different types of snakes?” Learners are given the autonomy of throwing out answers by tapping on their prior knowledge, hence getting them actively involved. This helps to promote active learning in the classroom.

EXPLAINING

In the explaining phrase (15 minutes), I will give explicit statements about what and why is being learned, and how it is used. For example, I will ask questions like “Why do we need to know about

snakes in the food chain?” “What actions can we take to preserve snakes in the food chain?” This encourages learners to speak out in a psychologically safe classroom and it is learner-centred as they have opportunities to learn from their mistakes.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

In the students’ participation and contributions phrases (15 minutes), I will ask the students to identify the parts of a snake. Rather than direct participation, scaffolding can come about when I ask students to give ideas and I will chip in to guide the discussion. This is effective in promoting active learning as I am building on what learners have and getting learners to share own life experiences with snakes that will help them to relate to snakes better.

CONFIRMATION

In the confirming students’ understandings stage (15 minutes), I will assess their understanding and give feedback. Giving feedback is a continuous process which is learner centred as I would like to see how much the individual has improved, rather than being measured by a single exam.





TROUBLESHOOTING OBSTACLES

The first obstacle that I faced was when I was using the hard scaffold of printed worksheets to teach the vowel team 'ui'. One of my students did not understand the instructions stated on the worksheet and thus I had to scaffold even further by providing explicit instructions on the task needed.

Another student was having issues with his handwriting and as such, I provided him with a pencil grip to assist with the development of his fine motor skills. The second obstacle I faced was in the students' participation and contributions phrases. I was lacking the ability to probe and facilitate the discussion. I overcame the obstacle by using effective questioning techniques. To seek clarification, I asked a question like "Could you expand upon the point about snakes further?" after a student has gave his opinion on what a snake looks like.

To seek reason and evidence for the existence of snakes, I asked, "By what reasoning did you come to a conclusion that snakes are needed in the food chain?" Following which, I countered by asking, "What if someone were to suggest that snakes are not needed in the food chain?" to explore alternatives. To enable the students to think about

the effects that hunting does to snakes, I asked an implication and consequence question "What might be the consequence of hunting on snakes?" Lastly, to end the discussion with a summary, I asked "Can anyone summarise what we have discussed about snakes so far?"

In conclusion, the use of scaffolds lays the foundation for effective learning and teaching to take place.

References:

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