

Embedding Individual Teaching Strategies within the Standardized Lesson Plan

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Abstract

Standardized lesson plans that use scripted teaching lessons are increasingly being used for instruction. However, the standardized plan does not always meet the individualized learning needs of children thereby decreasing the intended goal of student success. This article includes several specific ways that a teacher may maintain the objectives included in the standardized curriculum and increase student learning and engagement.

Keywords: Curriculum, Scripted Text, Strategies

Effective teachers must know the interests, cultures, developmental level and learning needs of their students (Abacioglu et al., 2020). Knowing these qualities for just one student can increase teacher power for all students. “By knowing one learner, teachers can gain insight into commonalities among other learners that helps with effective teaching and learning.” (Gupta 2019). This knowledge of students is the foundation for instructional decision-making and lesson planning (Gupta, 2019; Hatch & Clark, 2021; Heineke& McTighe, 2018).

Current trends in lesson plan creation, however, focus on meeting local district level objectives and timelines rather than meeting the needs of individual children. The use of standardized lesson plans with scripted language has become prominent in the modern classroom. Teachers report that there is little time for planning student-centered lessons or reteaching a lesson when children do not meet the normal curve of learning. Planning for interests, culture or personality is abandoned in favor of the district mandated plan (Holt, 2022).

Bridges of implementation are needed to help teachers meet the district level requirement and the needs of students. The following strategies are noted as ways to plan for this bridge. The ideas listed below are suggested as ways to provide a more student-centered focus. Using these strategies will help the teacher plan learning activities for students who may differ from the classroom norm in their learning rates or background knowledge, while still teaching the focus of the standardized lesson plan.

1.0 Strategies for Adapting Lesson Plans

1.2 Simplify Language to Meet the Age and Cultural Background of the Student. Use age-appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure that children can understand easily. Children who hear vocabulary that is not part of their prior knowledge schema may develop misconceptions and misunderstandings about subject matter content. Instead, base instruction on familiar words to the child and allow them to participate with those words in learning activities that support active vocabulary usage (Bruner, 1985). Include connected physical gestures and images for key vocabulary words. Group projects, the Think, Pair, Share strategy or Peer Tutoring Activities are ways to encourage vocabulary usage and understanding of the subject content.

1.3 Use Visual Aids, Hands-On Activities, and Play. Incorporate visual elements such as pictures, diagrams, or props to make the lesson more engaging and accessible for young learners. Children are multisensory learners. This means that they learn using their sense of sight, touch, smell, taste and hearing (Shams & Seitz, 2008). Many children learn best when they can move and manipulate objects. Others prefer more imaginary play to internalize concepts. Still others learn by reading and assimilating the ideas of printed text. By providing varied learning aids that integrate all the child's senses and interests, children are more apt to become engaged in the learning objective and can express their learning in meaningful ways.

1.4 Shorten Instructions. Break down complex instructions into simple, step-by-step guidance to help children follow along more easily (Laird et al., 1984). Young children require concentrated focus on intricate tasks. At times, the complexity can prove too intimidating to the student causing frustration or lack of engagement. By analyzing instructions from the scripted curriculum and "chunking" them into manageable parts based on the student's level of development, children can experience greater success and higher levels of engagement with the lesson.

1.5 Consider Attention Span. Keep the lesson duration age-appropriate, considering the attention span of young learners. Shorter, focused lessons are generally more effective for young children. Young children have very short attention spans. Generally, a teacher can estimate that the child's attention span corresponds with a few minutes higher than their age. If a three-year-old begins to lose interest in a topic it may be because the lesson goes beyond his or her six-to-eight-minute attention developmental level. A shortened lesson that keeps most students focused on the learning objective is much better than a longer lesson that only reaches a few students in the class.

1.6 Incorporate Repetition. Children benefit from repetition; thus, it is necessary to include opportunities for review and reinforcement of key concepts throughout the lesson. The use of Bloom's taxonomy provides the teacher with guidance on ways to incorporate repetition within the lesson (Gershon, 2018). For instance, a child may demonstrate his or her knowledge of adding in various engaging contexts. Students may add the number of students present or the number of students absent. Similarly, students may add the number of student shoes in the classroom. Students may also compare the two data sets of absent and present children, and thereby, practice the skill of addition on a using a higher level of Bloom's Taxonomy. These are examples of ways to repeat a skill in several ways that interest the student.

1.7 Provide Additional Support. Offer additional support through visual cues, prompts, real objects, manipulatives, or simplified examples, especially for challenging topics. Teachers can plan for different types of support within a lesson by thinking of ways to create a continuum of learning. Students who need greater support may benefit from simplified examples. A picture or practice with real objects is also helpful conveying difficult concepts. Students who need medium support may benefit from using manipulatives, or a verbal or written prompt to complete or task. Generally, the younger the child, the

fewer details in pictures and examples are needed to allow the child to focus on the most important aspect of the picture or example that relates to the lesson objective (Brownell, M. T. et al, 2019).

1.8 Include Enrichment. Children who display prior knowledge of the content or have previous experiences with the skills of the objective need enrichment for stimulating practice and deeper understanding of the content or skill. Choice is a powerful strategy that empowers young children to explore using their skills or knowledge. These choices could be contained in a center with materials that interest them. The choices could also be given in a simple prompt that challenges students to find examples in the room or in their imagination (Borah, 2021).

2.0 Planning for Differentiated Strategies

Within a heterogeneous classroom there will be a variety of learning abilities. Effective and experienced teachers may be able to adjust teaching strategies as they are teaching for the heterogeneously of their classroom. However, by thinking about differentiation before the lesson execution, the teacher can plan, reflect, and embed the strategies as part of the lesson flow. An example of differentiated and personal strategies that could be included in a lesson plan are described in Table 1. The ideas presented in this table may be embedded within any lesson plan format and provide varied strategies to help all learners meet the objective of the standardized curriculum.

3.0 Summary

The strategies provided above are designed as supports to help the teacher transform the scripted lesson to a lesson that meets the learning needs of the student. When lessons require a teacher to use a standardized conversation with the child, it is noted that the scripted conversation can still be used with these strategies. Lesson objectives will not change with this model but can be met more easily by the student when personalized strategies for learning are integrated in the overall teaching plan. We conclude that following these recommendations specific to learners will engage them and lead to deeper learning for all learners.

4.0 Concluding Recommendations

Many teachers may be unskilled in adapting scripted curriculum. We recommend a close examination of the curriculum to determine how best to meet student's learning needs within the teacher's classroom. Does it meet the needs of all the students in the classroom? Compare the vocabulary and activities with the knowledge and experiences of the students. What words will students have no reference for? What activities may not work well for your students? Now think of experiences you can do quickly to build background knowledge. For example, many students in a state within the southwestern United State may not have experienced snow. When a story, lesson, or vocabulary word has a focus on snow in a standardized lesson on the seasons, the teacher must design ways to help children explore the concept of snow before the lesson begins. A short video clip of children their age playing in the snow might be an appropriate strategy for providing background knowledge about snow. Encourage children to talk about what they saw and noticed. Emphasize any vocabulary that connects to the scripted lesson. Repeating this process of comparing student ability, prior background knowledge and experience with each part of the scripted lesson exposes areas of the lesson that need adaptations. Repeated success with adaptations creates affirmation of the process and confidence in using and adapting scripted curriculum. Employing strategies such as this will allow all students to be successful.

Table 1:

Embedding Strategies in a Lesson Plan for a Heterogeneous Classroom

Objective of the Lesson: The student will measure the perimeter of a square.

<i>Activity for a Student who is Approaching the Objective</i>	<i>Activity for a Student Who is On Level with the Objective</i>	<i>Activity for a Student Who Needs an Enrichment of the Objective</i>	<i>Activity for a Student who needs Individualized Help in Achieving the Objective</i>
<p>Example: Student mimics teachers' hand motions for perimeter and follow verbal cue to measure around the outside of the square.</p>	<p>Example: Students measure the perimeter of a one-dimensional square that is included in their textbook. Students will measure three different size squares at the teacher table.</p>	<p>Example: Student measures the perimeter of other items in the room that are of interest (a book, square tile on the floor, a carpet square from circle time).</p>	<p>Example: Student measures one side of the perimeter of a smaller square object. A picture is displayed showing a student measuring one side of the outside of a small square.</p>
<p>Strategy Used: prompt or verbal cues, or visual cues</p>	<p>Strategy Used: Repetition of the skill. The lesson is divided into small units of time.</p>	<p>Strategy Used: Exploration of applying the skill to real objects. Choice for interest, engagement, and curiosity.</p>	<p>Strategy Used: Additional support is provided. Concept is broken down into smaller steps with shortened instruction. Picture is used.</p>

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