



AFT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DISSEMINATION COURSE OVERVIEW

Course: Foundations of Effective Teaching I: Organizing the Classroom Environment for Teaching and Learning

Summary

This core ER&D course addresses the fundamental aspects of teaching and learning that are relevant for teachers and classroom paraprofessionals in all grade levels and subject areas. It examines proven practices for effective classroom and group management, maximal use of learning time, questioning and feedback skills, homework, interactive guided instruction strategies, and scaffolding techniques. Covering core topics critical to successful classroom practice, the course is particularly useful for the training of mentor teachers and beginning and at-risk practitioners. *Foundations I* is the entry course for start-up ER&D programs and is an essential part of Local Site Coordinator preparation.

Course Content

Beginning of the Year Classroom Management

The research is clear that what teachers do at the beginning of the school year to organize and establish an effective classroom management system influences what students accomplish throughout the rest of the year. Key practices include arranging the physical environment to support instruction, introducing rules and procedures, monitoring student behavior and applying consequences consistently, and planning a successful first day of school.

Effective Group Management

Managing student behavior throughout the year relies on establishing conditions that prevent or discourage behavior problems before they occur. By designing instruction that actively involves all students, hold students accountable for their work, and provides variety and a sense of progress, teachers maximize student work involvement. While delivering instruction, teachers who demonstrate awareness of student actions, manage smooth transitions between activities, and maintain a sense of momentum are able to minimize student misbehavior.

Interactive Direct Instruction

Sometimes called “guided instruction,” this pattern of teaching stresses teacher-directed learning and high levels of teacher-student interaction. It emphasizes the importance of leading initial student practice and providing immediate academic feedback, especially when teaching skills and structured learning tasks. With tasks that require higher-order thinking skills, effective teachers provide scaffolds, or temporary supports, which help students learn necessary cognitive strategies. Using effective questioning, pacing lessons appropriately, and ensuring a high success rate for students are important elements of all instruction.

Teacher Praise

Research findings on the effects of teacher praise are counterintuitive: While feedback and positive reinforcement are essential to student learning, teacher praise is not. Furthermore, when praise is used ineffectively, results can actually be detrimental. This unit distinguishes between praise and feedback and defines how praise can be used effectively.

Using Homework Effectively

Participants learn how educators can use homework to extend learning time, foster family involvement, and contribute to student achievement. They examine the relationship between homework and student learning, various purposes of homework and the outcomes for students, types of assignments, characteristics of effective homework, and the importance of providing timely feedback.

Time on Task

The use of time in schools is examined from three perspectives—allocated time, engaged time, and academic learning time. While increasing the amount of time students are on task is important, the more significant issue may be the quality of the time spent in the classroom. This unit provides strategies teachers use to maximize both the quantity of time for learning—through effective classroom management strategies, and the quality of learning time—by designing tasks at the appropriate level of difficulty and scaffolding students' learning as needed.

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