

Bridges



Preamble

A bridge is a means of connecting Point A to Point B. As teachers, we must recognize that helping our students make connections is critical to their learning. The bridge is an innovative way to introduce a lesson. It states the purpose of the lesson so the students know why that particular lesson is important to their learning. In other words, it answers the question, “Why do we have to know this stuff?”

Laying the Foundation of the Bridge

We can build a bridge that connects the current lesson with *previous* knowledge, ie: “Yesterday, we learned about the qualities of different metals. Today, we are going to consider those qualities to select the appropriate metals for our specific welding projects.”

We can build a bridge that connects the current lesson to a *future* skill or activity, ie: “Once you have demonstrated an understanding and appreciation of the safety practices we will be discussing today, you will then get a chance to use the router to complete your woodworking project.”

Making the Connection

The most powerful connections are those that *evoke emotion and create a memorable visual image*. If you can help the student connect emotionally with the concept, then the chances are far greater that the concept will be stored in long term memory and thus, applied in their everyday work lives—and isn’t that why we’re teaching?????

The Art and Science of Teaching

Teaching is a science. If you apply the right formulas (establishing clear objectives, following a comprehensive lesson plan, using effective classroom management skills, evaluating with valid and reliable assessment tools, etc.), you will most likely achieve desired results. It is your instructional responsibility to deliver a technically sound lesson, complete with all the essential components.

But the art of teaching is the tricky part! This is the part of the lesson where you inject your personality, your humor, your beliefs and philosophies—and here, there is no formula—you’re on your own. So, you may as well have some fun and let your creativity flow!! Believe me—your students will thank you for it. It sure beats the alternative of walking into the classroom and asking your students to turn to page 146 to begin the lesson. The extra effort made to introduce each lesson in an innovative way will produce huge returns on your investment:

- students realize you actually care enough to make the class interesting for them
- you don’t bore yourself to tears after years of teaching the same thing in the same way
- enhanced student learning and retention.

Listed below are some sample bridges. Feel free to run with the ideas and personalize them to suit your particular teaching needs—and enjoy!!

Teaching Delegation and Accountability (one of the desired skills identified in the SCANS report). Walk into the classroom with a stuffed monkey on your shoulder and ask, “Ever felt like you had a monkey on your back at work—ever feel like they are attacking you from all angles?” Then explain that when they are delegated a task as an employee and they keep running to their supervisor for assistance in completing that task rather than attempting to problem-solve on their own, they are throwing a monkey (the problem) on the back of their supervisor. Accountability suggests that they are mindful of this process as an employee and to try to prevent this from happening. As a supervisor, they need to sharpen their delegation skills so they don’t take on their employees’ monkeys or they will have monkeys running wild all over their offices and they won’t be able to get any work done. Note the visual image that you have now created with their boss’ office overrun with monkeys.

Teaching Employee Turnover Reduction to Supervisors. Show a picture or bring in a hot air balloon to class. Ask the students to envision it close up and life size as it ascends before them. “Isn’t it a spectacular sight? Then in all its glory, it begins to drift away and you realize that soon it will be out of sight—gone.” Then relate how valuable employees are often like hot air balloons—they will drift off, never to be seen again, if supervisors aren’t mindful of employee satisfaction strategies.

Teaching The Role of Learning Objectives to Teachers. Ask the learners to think of the greatest marksman that ever lived—Robin Hood. When Robin shot his arrow, he hit his target. Bulls Eye! “As teachers, how do you know when you’ve hit your target or if you’re completely missing the mark?” Bring out a target with the arrow firmly planted in the center. “A clearly written objective is like this target. How can you measure whether you’ve hit your bulls eye if you haven’t set a target? In other words, how can you accurately measure whether your students have learned what you set out to teach if you haven’t clearly stated what that learning will look like? Imagine sitting in the classroom as a learner with arrows flying wildly about the room and whizzing past your ear. This is what it is like for students when the objective is unclear to them. They know that as a teacher, you’re firing arrows, but they’re not sure where those arrows are supposed to land. Without clear objectives, it is frustrating for both the teacher and the learners because there is no clear target by which to measure learner success.”

Teaching Quality Control in Welding. Suppose a fellow brings in his truck to have a hitch put on to tow a vacation trailer. When he picks up his vehicle, you wish him a happy holiday. Two days later, you read in the newspaper about a serious accident just outside of town that involved a family towing a holiday trailer in which the hitch had let go. You recognize the truck as that of your customer. What could have gone wrong? Could you have prevented this?