

# Other Instructional Issues:

## Lesson Resources and Strategies

To deliver these lessons in the most effective way, it is important to consider a variety of instructional issues. In this section, the following topics will be discussed: materials and community resources, timelines, classroom management, instructional strategies, assessment and the service project.

### How Are Materials & Community Resources Used?

Resources from the community and Internet, such as news media, telephone directories, radio, television, commercial DVDs, brochures and technology, provide a wealth of material to supplement *The Transitions Curriculum*. In addition, community agencies, businesses, colleges and universities and public and private services can provide support to *The Transitions Curriculum* lessons through literature, speakers or site visits. Many communities also have a volunteer center that will assist students in finding a position for their required service project. Each lesson supplies needed handouts, as well as offering suggestions for finding additional materials and community resources to enhance student learning.

### What Are Recommended Timelines for Lessons and Units?

*The Transitions Curriculum* lessons are based on a 55-minute period, with 45 minutes for instructional activities and 10 minutes for the *Journal*, *Roundtable*, *Advance Organizer*, *Outcome Statement* and the *Connecting Activity*. Each lesson provides approximate timelines for the various activities. These timelines are suggested as guidelines and may be altered for a given activity. Be flexible, but keep an energetic pace. After the first few lessons, students will have settled into a routine and it will be easier to estimate the time required.

When there is a need to alter the presentation style or mode of student response (sign language or communication board) or when students need additional individual assistance, the activities will require more time than suggested. In the same way, when students are able to work independently and in groups with very little assistance, you will need less time for the lesson and may want to extend the lesson with a *Connecting Activity*.

Managing time effectively and efficiently is an important task and often the key to our success. Think in terms of the allocated 45 minutes being divided between instructional time and time that the student is actually engaged in a learning activity. We want to minimize the instructional time and maximize the engaged time each day. A good way to make improvements in the lessons is to reflect on how the time is spent. It is important to use the majority of class time with students interacting with each other and the environment.

### What Classroom Management Strategies Are Suggested?

Effective classroom management facilitates smooth delivery of curricular information. Although there are many classroom management techniques, here are some points to consider:

- **Positive learning environment:** Model genuine respect and care by greeting every student when they enter the room. Let them know you are glad they are there. Be prompt and well-prepared. To motivate students to be on time, plan interesting things for the first minutes of class, such as a joke or information the students would not want to miss.

Establish a well-organized environment in which the feeling tone is warm and safe. Help students learn to appreciate their personal best and to support growth for themselves and the growth of others. Model and help students learn respectful social behaviors and language. Arrange the room to maximize space and facilitate planned activities. Post a schedule so students will become familiar with the routine.

- **Classroom rules:** Have students help establish a few simple rules dealing with procedures and expected behaviors. Display the class rules in the room and make sure they are clearly understood. Plan for consequences and practice consistency. Some rules you may want to consider are: 1) be on time, 2) be prepared and bring materials, 3) respect other people and their belongings, 4) support each person's opportunity to learn, 5) do your personal best. Lesson 3 in the Preparation Unit of each teacher guide provides activities to involve students in making rules and consequences for the class.

## What Research-Based Instructional Strategies Are Used?

Instructional strategies used by teachers provide the energy and creativity to make curricular content challenging and successful. The overall purpose of this curriculum is to empower students to become independent, lifelong learners who take control and responsibility for their learning. The design of *The Transitions Curriculum* lessons involves students in the instructional process through interactive and experiential activities that are essential for success. Lessons create an atmosphere of curiosity and inquisitiveness using activities and materials that are interesting and related to students' future experiences as adults. All *Transitions Curriculum* lessons follow an established format, thus providing consistency for the teacher, the student and the instructional process.

Embedded throughout *The Transitions Curriculum* lessons are a variety of research and evidence-based instructional strategies, including:

- **Direct instruction** – consistent lesson format, cues, questioning and advance organizer, clarifying and feedback.
- **Strategies instruction** – mnemonics, graphic organizers, graphing and charting and note taking.
- **Vocabulary instruction** – personalized definitions, art, drawing and graphics, compare and contrast, cooperative games and review.
- **Research activities** – hypothesizing, collecting data and summarizing, accessing web-based resources and information and report writing.
- **Cooperative learning activities** – small/large group peer interactions, role-play, drama and debates.
- **Applied learning projects** – demonstrations and simulations, interactive experiences, community service projects and job-shadowing.
- **Homework and practice** – connecting activities and accessing campus, home and community resources.
- **Positive behavior support** – consistent classroom procedures and routines, student participation in setting up classroom rules, modeling, practice and feedback related to appropriate social behavior and individual and group accountability.

To meet the individual learning needs of each student, lessons have incorporated the principles of the *Universal Design for Learning* (UDL). The UDL utilizes the most effective evidence-based practices and instructional strategies to increase the effectiveness of lesson delivery, increase ways students can meaningfully respond and demonstrate their learning and increase overall student engagement. Many of these evidence-based strategies are described in the previous section, however, UDL provides an understanding for personalizing these practices to meet the individual needs and learning style of each student. UDL principles provide:

- 1) Multiple ways to deliver lesson content including auditory (verbal, music, recorded information, etc.).
- 2) Multiple ways for students to express their learning including speech (verbal or electronic through augmentative communication devices), written text (by hand or utilizing electronic devices), picture, video and multi-media.

- 3) Multiple means of engaging students in learning (relevance and personal connection to the information, novelty of information and activities, grouping and cooperative work).

We encourage you to personalize lessons by utilizing up-to-date and available technology that will maximize student learning through the principles of the *Universal Design for Learning*. <http://www.udlcenter.org/>

Another powerful way to teach life skills is by teacher modeling. Some modeling techniques the teacher may want to consider are:

- Thinking aloud
- Reviewing the day's activities
- Referring to the classroom as a work environment
- Encouraging students to verbalize their plans to accomplish a task
- Commenting on efficient use of time and resources
- Calling attention to others who demonstrate appropriate skills

To encourage independence, teachers can use such techniques as:

- Allowing ample time for students to answer questions
- Encouraging students to search for and use resources to find answers to their questions
- Allowing students to solve their own problems
- Demonstrating belief in the student's ability to find answers and solve problems
- Holding high expectations for all students

## **What Adaptations Are Most Effective?**

The teacher knows best when adaptations are needed. Teachers are encouraged to differentiate instruction based on individual student readiness, interests and learning styles. Three typical adaptations are:

- Altering the format of the lesson – shorten or lengthen specific sections of the lesson, spread the lesson over more than one class period or omit or expand an activity.
- Changing the method of presenting the lesson content and instructions – read materials aloud to students, provide large print, record classroom lectures and classroom activities, provide peer tutors and a buddy system, use note takers; and use visuals when going over written material.
- Changing the way the students respond to and perform lesson activities – tape recorders; computer and spell checkers, voice-activated devices, graphics, drawings and other creative products.
- Provide additional visuals, such as a schedule of lesson steps and timeline, images, photos and video clips to enhance lesson concepts, timers and count-down charts to indicate the length of the lesson or sections of the lesson.

Our students frequently need extra help, especially in the beginning. Encouraging the student to come back to the classroom for additional practice or to spend extra time on their own, will build self-confidence and increase opportunities for success both in the classroom and in future environments.

## How is Student Learning Assessed?

There are three distinct assessment tools used in *The Transitions Curriculum*: 1) *Evaluation Outcome* statement at the end of each lesson; 2) *Assessment & Portfolio Guides*; and 3) *Transition Portfolio*. *The Transitions Curriculum* encourages frequent and ongoing feedback through each lesson. In addition, students evaluate themselves through an outcome-based process, which includes the development of the *Transition Portfolio*, maintaining a journal and participating in a large number of relevant small group activities.

The *Transition Portfolio* contains a variety of materials that demonstrate the quality and breadth of work completed by the student. The *Transition Portfolio* gradually will build over time as students add their evaluation sheets, resume, sample employment application, list of resources, interest and aptitude profiles, community service project reports, personal goals and progress charts and personal journal entries. The *Transition Portfolio* will serve as an evaluation tool to provide an opportunity for the student to reflect on ongoing progress. It also will serve as a valuable resource for the development of the *Summary of Performance* (SOP).

The *Assessment & Portfolio Guides* and the *Evaluation Outcome* statements throughout each unit also serve as effective assessment tools. The *Assessment & Portfolio Guides* is presented after a sequence of four to six lessons. At this point, students answer formal questions about previous lessons to evaluate their progress. In addition, students add important work samples to their portfolios. An *Evaluation Outcome* statement at the end of each lesson gives each student an opportunity to express concepts learned, allowing the teacher to assess student learning and identify further instructional needs. Finally, activities throughout *The Transitions Curriculum* emphasize the application of transition skills in real-life community settings.

## Why Are Community Service Projects Important?

A student service project has been suggested in each of *The Transitions Curriculum* volumes. The service project is outlined in detail in the Preparation Unit of each *Transitions* volume. The service projects require planning and assistance in order to help students secure positions and then to supervise their progress. Many schools have adopted community service projects as a graduation requirement. It would be advantageous to support these established programs where available.

For schools without this resource, it will be important to include other teachers, staff and parents in the planning, implementation and evaluation process. Although it may be a challenge for some students to complete a project, there are many options available to make this project a success for each student. For example, if finding a community placement is too difficult for some students because of transportation or availability, they may provide a service on campus before or after school or during lunch and breaks. With creative thought and flexibility, every student can accomplish this project.

Completing a service project is not only a way to provide a service to the community or someone in need but it is also important for students to gain valuable experience that will assist them in making future decisions about their career and lifestyle. In addition, it is an excellent opportunity for students to try out jobs, build work skills, find part-time work and create a resume.

The service project is a necessary component of the program that will provide an invaluable experience for students. Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, states that we "can make the most significant of contributions by imprinting the spirit of service on the souls of students so that students grow up committed to making a difference."