

Teacher for Learning – Misunderstood

Instructions

Identify a concept that is often misunderstood in your discipline.

Next, extend your thinking on this misunderstood concept. Can you think of an analogy that can help make the concept make sense to students? Does this analogy take into account where students are coming from in their previous experiences? Or how could you break that concept down into bite-size chunks so your students can more easily digest that harder-to-acquire information?

Now, re-state your misunderstood concept and then identify and expand on how you would explain your concept through an analogy.

Preface

As an EFL instructor for university students in Korea, I was often confronted with students entering class with the mindset of English being difficult and boring. “I hate English” was a common phrase to hear. These students had already been learning English for ~10 years with a major problem being the method of language instruction during this period. They had been presented with book after book of random vocabulary and grammar with little attempt to create and nurture the personal application of this knowledge. Rote memorization of data was the metric by which success was measured. They were never given the opportunity to actually make sense of this information and understand how it relates to them, let alone to apply this knowledge in a unique way.

Analogy

A good analogy could be learning to play a sport, let's use soccer as an example, strictly from reading a book.

Imagine being given a book outlining the history of the sport. The player roles and positions of are listed across multiple pages, field size and areas explained, required equipment explained in detail, specific example of plays and penalties outlined with historical examples given, teams and leagues worldwide described along relevant timelines. However, you are never taken outside, given a ball, and allowed to actually

play the game. How effective is this learning strategy? Could you be expected to effectively learn this sport without the opportunity to play it?

Activity

As an activity to explain this analogy, I would continue with the soccer analogy, highlighting the minimal vocabulary needed to discuss the sport as well as grammatical forms.

From this starting point, students could be asked to demonstrate these actions to prove their comprehension as well as help others understand. Once the basics are understood, play can begin. Upon identification of a disagreement or lack of understanding, additional vocabulary and grammar can be introduced as needed. By scaffolding off of existing knowledge, introducing new ideas as necessary, and allowing students to physically demonstrate their knowledge, the required language can be additively introduced in 'chunks', each building upon the last.