

The previous sections in this handbook dealt with *Self Concerns* and *Task Concerns*. The third type of concern for teachers facing change is *Impact Concerns*. For most teachers, this is concern about student achievement and the impact of their teaching on the students in the class.

Students come into the classroom with different backgrounds in experience, depth and breadth of knowledge and specific ways in which they learn most effectively. When teachers come into a new teaching environment they focus on whether their methods of teaching will work with these different students in new contexts.

How to be successful with these diverse students is a major concern for all teachers, but especially for teachers looking for success in a new classroom, school or district. To assist students in their learning, teachers can focus on how to:

- best accommodate different student abilities
- accommodate different learning styles in their teaching
- support students with identified learning needs
- guide the students' intellectual and emotional growth
- challenge unmotivated students
- teach so that every student gets what is needed to be successful.

When teachers design their classrooms with accommodations and support for all students, the students' learning experience and retention of knowledge is maximized.

Prior Knowledge

One of the most important tasks for teachers is to clearly identify what they want students to know and to be able to do. This is important information for students and parents as well as teachers. For students to reach these goals, teachers need to know the prior knowledge of each student and what new knowledge each student may need to develop along the way.

Teachers need to know if students already know about a topic or learning about a topic is too complex for them. If teachers do not have this information and take it into account in planning then some students will be:

- bored because they already know what is being taught
- lost because what is being taught lacks sufficient connection to what they already know.

One of the most important tasks for teachers is to clearly identify what they want students to know and to be able to do.

After the prior knowledge of the students has been gathered and assessed, teachers are ready to plan how they will structure the students' learning.

I was teaching accounting to my students and we came to the topic of depreciation. My students assured me they had never learned about percent before. When I asked a math teacher if they teach percent in math, he said of course they teach it. What I didn't ask was, what context was used for the student learning. Ari

Two important aspects of prior knowledge which teachers need for success in the classroom are based on the questions:

- what do students know?
- how did they come to know it?

Teachers use a variety of methods to assess pre-existing knowledge and skills in students. Some approaches include:

- tests where teachers gather information from students on topics which are considered important to the upcoming unit of study
- concept maps where students can show their knowledge of how ideas on the upcoming topic connect
- portfolios where students present information on what they already know about the topic and where they learned it
- interviews between the teachers and students, or students with other students, where questions are asked about the topic and what the students know is recorded
- self-reports where students record their own knowledge to open-ended questions
- inventories of prior experiences that students think may apply to the topic about to be studied.

The question of “how did they come to know it” helps to establish the:

- context of the students' learning
- way the students came to understand the topic
- students' level of familiarity with a topic.

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