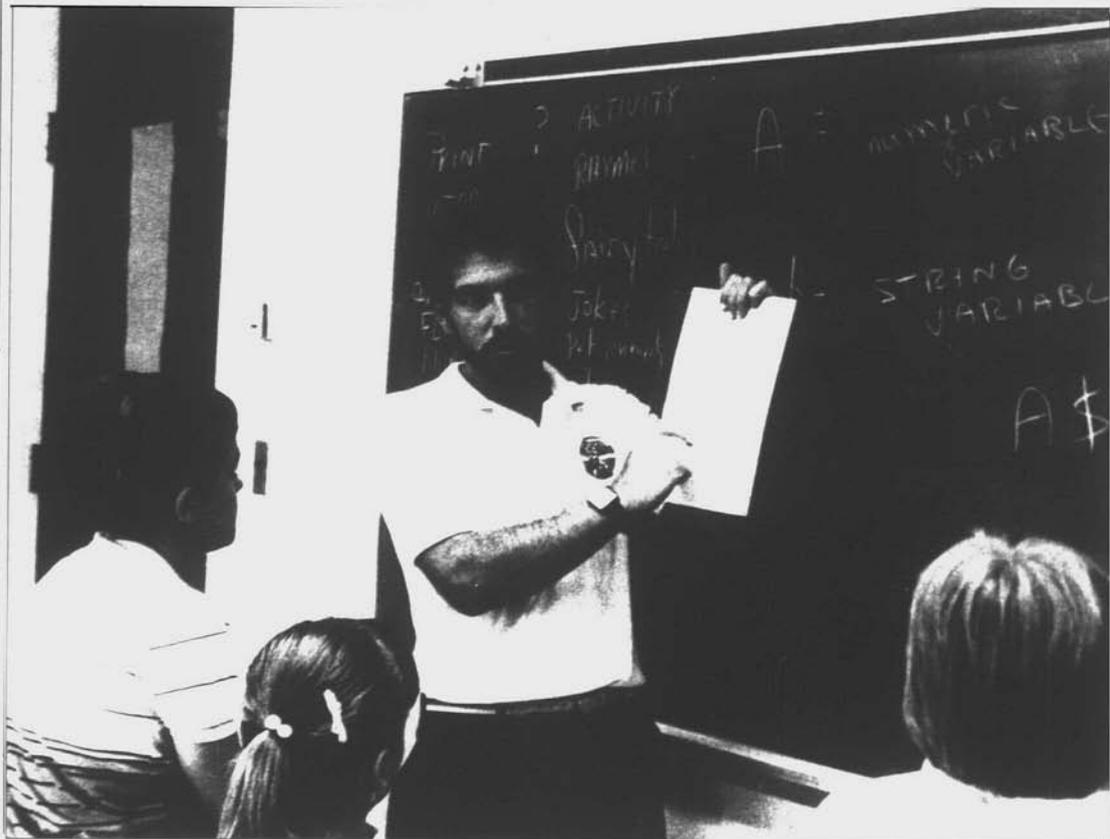


# New Strategies, New Visions

Skillful teachers use a variety of strategies to meet the demands of diverse students, content, and goals.



Teaching strategies define the roles of teacher and students to meet particular learning objectives. Carl Carrozza helps students learn problem solving techniques at Catskill Junior High School, Catskill, NY.

Teachers and teacher training programs sometimes seem to work at cross-purposes. This happens when teachers perceive the attempts of staff development programs to disseminate new teaching strategies as assaults on their personal teaching styles. One experienced teacher summed it up nicely to her trainer: "I can't be you, and what's more I don't want to be you." She might just as well have said, "I can't have your style, and what's more I don't want it."

The teacher is absolutely right. *Style* is a complex set of preferred behaviors. It includes a teacher's way of speaking, methods of classroom organization, techniques for handling conflict, and the pace and rhythm of his or her progress through particular content areas. Teaching style grows organically out of years of experience and reflects the teacher's personal history, memories of lessons won and lost, and individual value system. It is nothing less than a way of seeing and making judgments about the world of the classroom.

*Strategies*, on the other hand, are specific techniques usually developed in research settings to enhance the fulfillment of specific educational objectives. We might best picture strategies as management systems that define the roles of teacher and student in a particular learning activity. Lecture, role playing, guided inquiry, and programmed instruction are examples of teaching strategies. While a teacher's style is reflected in the strategies he or she selects, style is never reducible to a set of strategies. Style is the whole that remains infinitely greater and richer than the sum of its parts.

A teacher may select a particular strategy as a reflex or extension of his or her style or out of the constraints of a particular classroom situation. In both instances the selection is limited by the number of strategies at the teacher's disposal. A primary purpose of staff development is to increase and update the repertoire of teaching strategies available to the teacher. Think of

strategies as keys on a ring. The more keys, the more doors the teacher can open.

Decisions about which strategies to use in classroom instruction depend on three factors: (1) the demands of the content area, (2) the needs of a particular group of students, and (3) the teacher's own quest for a rich and varied teaching style.

### Content Area Demands

Few content areas are simple and unitary. Most are amalgams of facts, skills, concepts, methods, and values. This diversity within content areas raises some strategic questions:

- Should the diverse elements of a content area be taught in the same strategy or format?
- Are some teaching strategies better for teaching facts and knowledge and others for teaching understanding?
- Should we use certain techniques when we want students to recall basic math facts and others when we want

them to develop an understanding of place value?

- Are there specific strategies that help students remember important factors and procedures, develop and attain critical concepts, evolve and critique a methodology or value system?

- Will certain strategies lead students to see the value of democratic institutions, and will other strategies aid them in the application of map skills?

The answer to all of these questions seems to be "yes." The research of Joyce (1972), Mosston (1972), and Hanson, (1980, 1982) suggests there are specific strategies that are well tailored to the development of concepts, principles, and values, while other strategies are better suited to facts, skills, and procedures. Examples of understanding-oriented strategies include Hilda Taba's Concept Development Strategy (1971), David Suchman's Guided Inquiry (1960), and Jerome Bruner's Concept Attainment (1967). Strategies that emphasize facts



Susan R. Henzel uses a strategy to help students group data and develop concepts at South Junior High School, Bloomfield, NY.

**"New strategies provide teachers with new visions of their content areas, their students, themselves. They afford opportunities for teacher creativity and autonomy [in] the classroom."**

and procedures include Command Strategy, Peer Practice, and Graduated Difficulty—all from the research of Muska Mosston (1972).

### Student Needs

Classrooms are at least as diverse as content areas. High school freshmen learn differently from 1st graders, and this year's 10th grade English class has an altogether different character from last year's. Within the class is a variety of learning styles. This diversity puts the strategic questions in a different light.

- Should all students and groups of students be taught in the same way?
- Do students have preferences and needs in terms of instructional strategy? Do their needs affect their ability to learn and, most important for the teacher, their resistance to learning?

Here again, the research suggests an overwhelming "yes" response. The works of Dunn and Dunn (1974), Gregorc (1979), Hunt (1971), McCarthy (1980), and Hanson and Silver (1982) suggest that some specific teaching strategies are more effective with some youngsters and groups than with others. Teachers have a right to have those strategies made available to them.

### The Teacher's Quest

There is a great deal of concern these days with teacher burnout. Trapped within the confines of a particular classroom situation and further confined by a relatively limited set of teaching strategies, it is easy for teachers to experience a sense of uselessness.

New strategies provide teachers with new visions of their content areas, their students, themselves. They also afford opportunities for teacher creativity and autonomy to reassert themselves in the area most important to their professional fulfillment: the classroom.

### Keys to Excellence

There is, clearly, a critical distinction between teaching styles and teaching strategies. Style is the development of a long, organic process between teachers and their experiences in and out of the classroom. It is the teacher's professional identity and deserves to be protected and defended by teachers, administrators, and others who seek to

provide staff development resources.

Strategies, on the other hand, are specific techniques for enhancing learning. Increasing a teacher's repertoire of known strategies is not intended to change his or her style but to provide a variety of classroom management systems for dealing with diverse content areas, the individual needs of students, and the teacher's own desire for a richer, more varied professional life. □

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