

Strategies & Tools for Elevating Relevance in Instruction and Learning



What follows are strategies and tools, with brief descriptions, that are effective in incorporating higher levels of relevance into instruction and learning. Where on the GRC spectrum a teacher is will inform how I recommend to teachers to research and apply any of these strategies/tools.

As with the rigor strategies/tools, please continue to seek and research additional ones that you can guide teachers to use to increase relevance. This list is simply to get you started. It is not complete.

Career Connections: Teachers can increase relevance by helping students connect content and skills to careers. The Occupational Outlook Handbook found on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics website, CareerOneStop.org, and Salary.com can help students learn about various career paths. Students can watch videos of people in specific careers, research salary and education requirements associated with careers, research skills required for different jobs, and explore the demand for jobs connected to careers.

Community Service Projects: After studying a unit, students apply the information they just learned to a community service project. Some ideas include writing notes to residents in a nursing home, painting a mural in a hospital, designing advertisements for a local nonprofit business, etc. Students can also participate in longer-term community service projects. I have seen students build a marketing campaign to help raise awareness for a cause on behalf of a local nonprofit organization. Students manage the campaign's implementation for a predetermined number of weeks and, where possible, track results. At another school, students built a "community kitchen" on their campus to provide food donations to school families in need. Students launched and managed a campaign for ongoing food donations from community members and local businesses. They built a schedule for the kitchen's open hours (two days a week after school), and students signed up to volunteer throughout the school year. As a final idea, students could build a website for a nonprofit or cause-driven startup.

Strategies & Tools for Elevating Relevance in Instruction and Learning

Continued from previous page

Current Events: Teachers use current events to help students make learning connections. The teacher explains a current event and then asks her students how the content they are learning is connected to the current event. Though there are numerous places to obtain current events, some reliable places to pull quality current event articles are Newsela, TweenTribune, and Student News Daily.

Guest Speakers: Inviting guest speakers into the classroom is a great way for students to gain a different and real-world perspective on a topic they are studying. If speakers can't come to the class, teachers may consider using a video conference technology (Skype, Facebook Live, etc.) to broadcast an interview or discussion into the classroom.

Primary Sources: Instead of simply reading about a topic in a textbook or from a worksheet, students use direct sources, or primary sources, of information. This may include a magazine cover, photograph, diary entry, newspaper article, video recording, etc.

Project Based Learning: During this type of learning, students are immersed in authentic learning experiences. Students experiment, grapple with authentic issues, and work collaboratively with classmates and community members to pursue knowledge. Teachers begin with a real-world problem and design learning tasks that help guide students as they research solutions to the problem. For PBL to elicit highest possible levels of learning, it should follow a certain protocol. Visit the "Resources" tab on my website to access various resources connected to the implementation of successful PBL: www.reflecttolearn.com/resources. Career and technical education teachers may find the resources at CTEonline.org helpful.

Quick Career Reflection: Teachers designate time in all or some classes (less than five minutes) to pause instruction and ask students to conduct a quick online search for ways the content they are studying can be used in various careers. As a group, the class then discusses what they found during their research time.

Strategies & Tools for Elevating Relevance in Instruction and Learning

Continued from previous page

RAFT: This literacy strategy allows students the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to see a subject or idea from various real-world viewpoints. Along with a text related to the subject or idea, teachers give students a copy of the RAFT worksheet, which you can find at leadedred.com/coachingredefined. The teacher will explain each section of the worksheet:

Role of the Writer: Who are you? For example, a consumer, buyer, student, company president, etc.

Audience: To whom are you writing?

Format: What is the format of your writing? For example, a speech, letter, memo, etc.

Topic: What is the subject and purpose of your writing? Examples might include to educate the audience, to persuade the audience to change their minds, to present a new argument on a known subject or idea, etc.

For each of these sections, the teacher can assign roles, audiences, formats, and topics if she wants students to think about the topic through a specific lens. Or the teacher can let students choose all parts. Learning goals will likely dictate which approach a teacher takes.

Students will use the information in the text to write about the topic from different viewpoints and fill out answers in the worksheet.

Real-Life Submissions: Students submit their work (articles, essays, artwork, etc.) to outside publications or organizations to see how the content at hand and their work can connect to the real world. Teachers are advised to do an online search to determine where students could submit works and how she can assist them to that end. Depending on the grade level of the students, the teacher will calibrate her level of assistance as students complete submissions; i.e., more support for younger students and less for older students. Ideas for outlets to which students can submit work include a local magazine or newspaper, Cicada Magazine, Stone Soup (a magazine for creative children), Celebrating Art, and the Real World Design Challenge (a competition of students' STEM-based designs), to name some.

Real-Life Tools: Real-life tools used in careers are a form of authentic resources. They can include rulers, protractors, maps, scales, microscopes, hammers, etc. By incorporating these into instruction, students can broaden the kinds of learning connections they make between the content at hand and certain careers.

Strategies & Tools for Elevating Relevance in Instruction and Learning

Continued from previous page

Simulations: Students can use simulations that replicate real-life situations. Some examples include conducting virtual lab experiments, utilizing flight simulators, exploring various simulations on CK12.org, participating in the Stock Market Game, etc.

Technology Integration: Teachers can integrate technology into instruction to enhance relevant learning opportunities. As with any and all technology used in learning, the instructional tasks must be designed with high levels of relevance (or rigor and engagement) in mind. From there, technology can enhance and facilitate learning. But without strong pedagogy undergirding its use, technology does little to boost learning.

When students are asked to sift through and curate multiple sources of information to support their original ideas and conclusions, Popplet is a great tool to help keep information and ideas organized. When students are doing group research projects aimed at solving a real-world problem, Padlet facilitates collaboration and content organization from multiple resources. Also in such group work, Google Classroom enables virtual collaboration.

You're Important to Me: To build personal relevance, teachers benefit from knowing students. At the beginning of the school year, teachers can provide students with the You're Important to Me handout, which can be found at leadered.com/coachingredefined. The answers to these questions, followed by a supportive conversation, can help teachers build relationships and tailor their teaching to the learning preferences of their students.