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ABSTRACT

The use of the instructional module in college teaching is discussed. The module is an independent learning package that emphasizes students' learning activities rather than teacher activities. Along with independent modular activities such as reading, writing, discussing, and problem solving, students can use more class time to write, inquire, and share ideas. A sample module outline might include: statement of purpose, prerequisites, objectives, pre-test, materials, program or activities, and post-test. Advantages of modular instruction include: the potential of incorporating technology, a broader base for evaluating students, encouragement for independent learners, and the individualization of instruction. The module promotes students' active involvement and responsibility for the exchange of ideas. Students are informed in advance of unit objectives and are guided to complete various learning activities to achieve the objectives. This approach enables teachers to employ varied strategies and approaches with students. The use of occasional modules also permits teachers to enrich existing programs without radical changes. (SW)

USING MODULES IN COLLEGE TEACHING

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## ABSTRACT

The instructional module, a self-contained and independent unit of instruction, can be highly useful in college teaching.

The cry for improved teaching at the college level is growing louder. Rather than sit in classrooms with endless teacher talk and textbook exercises, students need to be more actively involved in learning experiences critics of higher education claim. The Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education of the National Institute of Education and the Association of American Colleges Committee on the Baccalaureate Degree both recommend that college faculty make greater use of active modes of teaching, present fewer lectures, require more reading, and design instruction so that students take greater responsibility for their learning. The current emphasis on improving college teaching creates a demand for alternative approaches to te-ching and learning.

Perhaps invitations to passivity and note-taking are frequently employed in college teaching because instructors are not aware of teaching alternatives which place priority on student learning and increased interaction of students with faculty. Yet, alternatives do exist which allow instructors to fulfill their academic responsibilities while fostering more active involvement in learning on the part of students. The use of the instructional module is one such alternative.

The module is an independent learning package offered to aid students in achieving certain instructional objectives. The emphasis in modular instruction is on students' learning activities rather than on the activities of the teacher. With the use of modules, the teacher does not serve as a disseminator of information but as one engaged in aspects of teaching such as motivating, advising, interacting, and serving as a resource person. Students, on the other hand, become independently involved in reading, writing, organizing, discussing, and problem solving related to modular objectives. Moreover, along with the independent modular activities, students can utilize more class time to write, inquire, share ideas, and make oral presentations. Learning is enhanced by exchanging ideas and hearing solutions fellow students have found to problems.

A module may be compared to a road map which points the learner towards his or her learning objectives. A useful definition of a module is "... a set of learning activities intended to facilitate the student's acquisition and demonstration of a particular competency " (Elam, 1971, p.4). More specifically, a module is a self-contained and independent unit of instruction which is developed around a few well-defined objectives.

Materials and instructional activities needed to achieve the objectives are

crucial to modular development, and this content is limited only by the

stated objectives. Although outlines for modules tend to vary, a sample

module outline might include: (1) statement of purpose, (2) prerequisites,

(3) objectives, (4) pre-test, (5) materials, (6) program or activities, and

(7) post-test. The following is a brief discussion of each of these

modular components.

## Statement of Purpose

The statement of purpose should relate the content of the module to

the specific educational needs and interests of the student. The statement

may also indicate how the module contributes to the overall course or

program of which it is a part. The task of the module developer is,

therefore, to describe the significance of the module.

## Prerequisites

The particular skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed before

beginning a module should be stated. The prerequisites should be of

assistance in helping the student decide whether or not he is prepared to

undertake the module.

## Objectives

The clear statement of instructional objectives is the focal point

in the development and use of a module. If the developer wishes,

objectives may be stated in behavioral terms. Behaviorally stated

objectives define what observable behaviors are required on the part of

the student as a result of completing the module and the conditions under

which the student must perform. Moreover, specific behavioral objectives

indicate acceptable standards of performance (Mager, 1962).

## Pre-test

A diagnostic pre-test may be developed as part of some instructional

modules. The pre-test can provide the instructor and the student with

information concerning the student's preparation for undertaking the module.

It is possible that some students may not need to take the module because

of outstanding performance on the pre-test.

## Materials and Resources

Materials and resources needed to complete the module should be listed.

Textbooks, journals, audio-visual materials, field sites, agencies and

resource persons, for example, may be indicated. The list of resources

should be supplemented by notes on acquisition or on how the resources can be obtained if necessary.

## Activities or Program

Teaching modules may be presented in a variety of forms. Some may consist of a set of instructions to students for completing independent learning activities. Others may involve audio tapes, film loops and other materials to help integrate the learning experiences of the module. Audio tapes may contain presentations and comments by resource persons, recordings of mini-lessons, conversations and dialogues. Still other programs may consist entirely of programmed instruction lessons to be completed by the student. The module may direct students to such experiences as reading assignments, small group discussions or projects, visits to cultural sites, school visits and observations, and written assignments or assignments to be developed in audio and/or visual form.

## Post-test

Some type of evaluative post-test which relates to the objectives for the unit should be provided. The post-test may emerge in a variety of forms. Pencil and paper tests, oral quizzes or presentations, and performance tests

where students are observed for competence in specific skills are examples

of forms which post tests may take.

An assessment statement related to an instructor's use of a

particular module can be helpful to colleagues and others interested in

the module. The statement which can be appended to a module on file

might include the time required to complete the module and the number of

students involved in completing the module during a given semester or

quarter. The assessment statement should also indicate the degree of

competency achieved by students on assignments and the post- test for the

module.

## Advantages of Modular Instruction

The use of modules can be advantageous to institutions and instructors

who employ them. One might consider the following advantages:

Allows for the Incorporation of Technology - A module has the potential for

incorporating technology into the college curriculum. Students may be

instructed to view a film or video-tape related to the topic. They may be

asked to complete a critique after listening to a taped lecture or discussion.

Computer assisted instruction may be utilized as part of a modular program.

Moreover, students may be guided to create their own audio-visual materials.

The possibilities for using audio-visual materials and technology with

modules are limitless.

Provides a Broader Base for Evaluating Students - Modular programs allow

college instructors to have a broader based system for evaluations.

Instructors can identify and report the skills and abilities which students

have demonstrated in completing modules. Grades are no longer dependent

solely on written examinations. Besides, in using modules, students know

what is expected of them and how they will be evaluated.

Encourages Independent Learners - The need for individuals to be self-

actualized, instrinsically motivated, and capable of independent learning

is a recurring theme in educational literature. The module promotes

independence in learning. Students may complete the same module within

different periods of time. One student may require six weeks to complete

a module while another student may need only four weeks. Moreover, choices

may be made among alternatives when deciding how best to achieve objectives.

The module places each student in a position where he or she must be

independent and responsible for his or her own learning in order to complete

the modular requirements.

Allows for Individualization of Instruction - The module allows for

individualization of instruction. Different modules may be offered to

different students at various points throughout a course. However, even

when the same module is given to an entire class, each student may pursue

modular activities in his or her own way. Then too, students may choose to

undertake specific modules based on interests and needs.

In addition to the above points, modules can be considered

advantageous in that they provide opportunities for courses to reflect

special areas of interest to the instructor or the students. These

independent instructional units also reduce the routine aspects of in-

struction leaving the teacher free to engage in more personal contact with

students. Moreover, independent self-instructional units make it easier

for instructors to update study materials without major revisions and modules

can be readily exchanged between institutions.

## Conclusions

If colleges and college instructors are committed to quality

teaching and to implementing varied approaches to instruction in order

to meet the needs, interests and abilities of students, the module has

a future in college teaching. For the many instructors who seek ways

of doing things a little differently in the college classroom, the module

may offer an alternative. Regarding module utilization, the points below

may be worthy of consideration.

The module allows instructors to plan for class sessions where

students are actively involved and take more responsibility for the

exchange of ideas than in the more traditional approach. With modular

programs, students are informed in advance of unit objectives and are

guided to complete various learning activities which lead to the

achievement of these objectives. Having students pursue these

activities and share the experience with others can certainly enhance

classroom interaction.

The modular approach can make the instructor's role a more

positive one. The traditional role of the college professor has been

that of a lecturer - a dispenser of knowledge. Certainly, there are

occasions when the lecture is most appropriate. However, one might

question how necessary or appropriate it is for a professor to spend

numerous class periods lecturing to students on material which is

stated in the textbook as is often the case. The modular approach

forces instructors to employ varied strategies and approaches in

working with students.

The modular approach places greater responsibility on the students

for actively seeking knowledge and developing new skills, habits and

attitudes. Students are presented with a program for study and action.

If the goals of the program are to be achieved, the student must put

forth the effort to realize these goals. Simply attending a lecture,

reading a chapter in a textbook, and taking a test is not sufficient to

acquire the in-depth knowledge needed to share, interpret, and evaluate

learnings with peers and instructors.

Even when more traditional methods are utilized in college teaching,

a module can be inserted occasionally in the course structure. At times

a module may be given to introduce a topic which is not a part of the

required textbook and which, perhaps, would not be studied except with

an independent learning unit. At other times, a module may be given to

enliven a class, give students learning options, or to allow students to

pursue special interests. Perhaps, the use of occasional modules,

more than any other use of modules in college teaching, may find the

greatest favor with instructors because this permits them to enrich

existing programs without radical changes.

Some may feel that the module is too structured, too geared to the

"systems-approach." It should be noted that the developer of a module

has freedom to design a module in any manner he or she sees fit. Some

modules may be highly structured and programmed; others may allow for much

independence, originality and creativity on the part of students in

reaching objectives. The module embraces the three phases of any good

instructional program, namely, objectives, methods and evaluation.

The module can be a powerful tool in the hands of an enlightened,

competent, and imaginative teacher. In the hands of a less able teacher,

however, the module can be nothing more than a new name for the same old

way of doing things.  Much time, thought and effort must be put into

the development and utilization of a module.  Modular instruction is a

challenge for the creative teacher.

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#### Note

Portions of this paper were presented at the 7th Annual Conference of
the Community College General Education Association at Schenectady
County Community College, Schenectady, New York on April 18, 1986.
The theme of the conference was "General Education Within the Disciplines -
How to Teach, Reach, and Retain Students."

## A Sample Module

The present module, which deals with th> teaching of writing and

and language arts, was prepared by the author for use with an elementary

education methods course entitled "The Teaching of Reading." The

author was asked by the divisional chairperson to incorporate a language

arts module into the reading course in order to give students exposure

to the teaching of language arts skills since at the time a course in the

teaching of language arts for elementary education was not being offered.

The module was used with sixty students in two sections of the reading

course. Students' reations to the module were generally very positive.

Additional sample modules may be found in The Use of Modules in College

Biology Teaching (Creager and Murray, 1971) and Preparing Learning Modules

to Train Teachers of Reading (O'Connell and McCormick, 1977).

WRITING IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Language Arts Module

by

Louise R. Giddings

## Purpose of the Module

This module introduces prospective teachers to various types of writing experiences for children in the elementary school. Both creative and functional writing are explored along with some of the conventions and mechanics essential to the writing process. The specific behavioral objectives for the unit are listed below.

## Prerequisites

Prospective teachers preparing to undertake this module should have completed a basic college freshman level course in English composition.

## Objectives

The behaviors which prospective teachers should be able to demonstrate upon completion of this module include:

1. Design a writing experience for primary grades.

2. Describe some values of creative writing for children.

3. Explain and give an example of patterned writing.

4. Explain and give an example of clustering.

5. Write two poems illustrative of types of poetry writing appropriate for the elementary school program.

6. Describe situations or experiences that lend themselves to practical or functional writing.

7. Describe steps children should follow in writing a report.

8. Identify items to be dealt with in revising and proofreading children's written work.

## Pre-Test

1. Discuss in writing, the meaning of each of the following terms.

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| a. writing center | g. proofreading |
| b. experience chart writing | h. limerick |
| c. patterned writing | i. revision |
| d. clustering | j. free-verse |
| e. haiku | k. Sustained Silent Writing |
| f. cinquain | l. functional writing |

2. Complete the following TRUE-FALSE exercise.

TRUE-FALSE

a.  Non print media are one way to encourage written expression. _____

b.  Children should avoid patterned writing, for it will inhibit
    their creativity. _____

c.  Independent composition activity cards are used only for
    story writing ideas. _____

d.  There are three major components of a composition lesson. _____

e.  Adequate motivation and stiumulation will guarantee
    quality writing. _____

f.  Writing of stories and poems is a complete composition
    program. _____

g.  Revision and proofreading are synonymous terms. _____

h.  Creative writing should be thought of as an extra
    attraction for the language arts program. _____

i.  Experience chart writing should begin after children have
    mastered handwriting and spelling skills. _____

j.  Experience chart writing involves interrelatedness of
    speaking, listening, reading, and writing. _____

_____

3.  Discuss how you would introduce one form of syllabic poetry
    writing to an intermediate grade elementary school class.

## Resources and Materials

1. Required Reading

    Burns, Paul C. and Betty L. Broman. The Language Arts in Childhood
        Education. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1983.

    Giddings, Louise. "Creative Writing in the Elementary School."
        Unpublished paper, 1986.

2. Instructional Materials to be Collected and Studied

    Trade books that may be used to motivate children to write.

    Pictures that may be used to motivate writing.

    Sample composition activity cards

    Samples of children's writings

    Specialized references on composition

## Activities for the Development of the Module

Part I.

    The student will:

1. Prepare to discuss in class the terms listed in the pre-test.

2. Discuss in class the values of creative writing for children in
    the elementary school.

3. Write one composition of patterned writing.

4. Write one composition using clustering.

5. Write one haiku poem and one    quain poem.

6. Record an experience story dic.. ed by a child or small group of
    children. Write or type the stor. and share it with the class.

Part II.

1.  Discuss specific situations in the elementary school which lend
    themselves to functional writing.

2.  Prepare five independent activity cards for children to use in
    some aspect of functional writing.

3.  Evaluate samples of children's writings with peers in a small group.
    The evaluation guide on page 231 of the Burns and Broman text or
    adaptations thereof may be used in evaluating children's work.

Post Test

1.  Use one instructional item listed in this module under
    "Instructional Materials to be Collected and Studied" with
    a child or small group of children.  Make an oral presentation
    to the class indicating how the material was used to assist the
    the child or children in writing development.

2.  Complete the written post test which can be obtained from the
    instructor.

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