

STRATEGY TITLE: Synectics

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Curriculum Area(s):

Language Arts, Math,
Science, Arts, Social
Studies

Grade Level:

7th Grade

Time Required : 30
minutes

Instructional Grouping: Heterogeneous - GT
Pull Out, GT Honors,LD, ESL

Explanation of Strategy:

Synectics is a process strategy that uses metaphorical thinking to boost creativity and to deepen understanding. William Gordon has been credited with the use of synectics in education. The word, "synectics" is Greek and means "understanding together that which is apparently different." By following several steps, the teacher is able to take students on a metaphorical journey that helps them to link seemingly unrelated concepts, ideas, and topics with each other in a new way. Synectics can be used to make something familiar seem strange and something strange seem familiar. In this example, the teacher is making the familiar seem strange.

Overview:

Steps in making the familiar strange:

1. Describe the topic.
2. Create direct analogies.
3. Describe personal analogies.
4. Identify compressed conflicts.
5. Create a new direct analogy.
6. Reexamine the original topic.
7. Evaluate.

Materials:

Pen, paper (for students); chalk & chalkboard, marker & whiteboard, or overhead pen, plain overheads, and overhead projector to record student responses.

Examples of Use:

This strategy can be used to clarify concepts in social studies, such as prejudice or revolution. It can be used as a pre-writing activity for a poetry unit in language arts or to analyze themes in literature. While this can be used at all grade levels, the level of sophistication should increase with older grades. One example is described more fully.

1. Describe the topic - example: The teacher says, "Describe prejudice." You can either ask the students to write it down in paragraph form on paper or discuss it in small groups. Examples that the students come up with are then shared with the class. It is important not to evaluate these examples, this is the brainstorming phase.

Examples of descriptors:

power
stereotypes
bias
labeling
ignorance
hate
superiority

2. Create direct analogies - example: The teacher says, "Examine the list of words that we've used to describe prejudice and name a type of car that reminds you of these words." The category "type of car" is arbitrary, but it can be pre-planned depending on the purpose. Ask each contributor to explain why he/she chose the analogy. After everyone who wanted to has contributed, ask the students to vote on the analogy that they would like to continue with.

Examples of cars:

A red sports car because police pull them over and make assumptions about the people in the car.

A Pinto because it had problems one year with the exploding gas tanks and it was stigmatized as the "exploding car" for the rest of its existence.

3. Describe personal analogies - example: The teacher says, "How do you think it feels to be this type of car?" Give students time to think before asking for descriptions. Encourage students who respond to explain why he/she had that particular thought.

Examples of descriptions:

I'd feel judged. Just because cars like me blew up last year, doesn't mean that I'm going to.

I'd feel like I have to prove myself.

I'd feel discriminated against because I'd be known as the "exploding car."

I'd feel inferior to other cars on the road with better safety records.

I'd feel angry that I wasn't being looked at for who I was, but based on previous Pintos.

A good car because you have a lot to offer your passengers (smooth ride, nice features)

A loyal following because if people pick you after you blew up, they must really like you.

I feel relieved that things have improved and we are safe cars now.

I'd feel exclusive because I would be the choice of the truly informed.

I feel I deserve more respect than I'm getting.

I'd have low self-esteem because no one wanted me.

4. Identify compressed conflicts (words on the list that seem to conflict) - example: The teacher says, "Find two words on this last list that you feel like are opposites or are fighting each other." Ask each contributor to explain how the words are in conflict with each other. Ask the students to vote on the compressed conflict they would like to continue working with for the next step.

Examples of compressed conflicts:

feels inferior/ deserves more

discriminated against/loyal following

angry/relieved

good car/low self-esteem

5. The teacher creates a new direct analogy - example: The teacher says, "Describe an animal that might have both of those types of feelings."

Examples of animals:

snake

spider

bears

sharks

wolves

6. Reexamine the original topic. - example: The teacher and/or students pick from the list of the new direct analogy and describe the characteristics and answer the question: How are these characteristics like prejudice?

Examples of characteristics of snakes:

cold blooded

proficient - they go about their business in an efficient way

subject to stereotypes - every snake judged on the behaviors of a few

they are evil

they are misunderstood

they slip through cracks

move soundlessly

they surprise you

Examples of how these characteristics are like prejudice:

Prejudice and snakes are both viewed as evil.

Snakes enter your house through cracks and prejudice slips into your subconscious.

It is surprising to see a snake because you can't hear it coming, and prejudice is surprising because you don't expect it.

Fear of snakes stems from misunderstandings and fear of groups of people stem from misunderstandings.

Snakes sneak up on you soundlessly and so does prejudice.

7. Evaluate. Have the students evaluate the process. Ask them to identify why certain images were helpful or powerful to them. Have them describe their response to the process and provide suggestions that they think would help the process work even better for the class next time.

Practical Hints for Implementation:

Examples of categories that can be used: plants, animals, cars, foods, machines, flowers, and games.

Students become better at this process the more often they do it. The teacher needs to ensure that everyone's response will be respected so that students will feel safe sharing their thoughts with the class.

If they are not used to using analogies, this could be a very difficult process. Teachers may want to practice individual steps to help students become more familiar with each of the processes before trying to do it all at once.

If the teacher would like to add more difficulty, the teacher can make the topic and the types of analogies more abstract or a greater leap for the students.

Related Web Sites:

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~caveman/Creative/Techniques/synectics.htm>

<http://www.nexus.edu.au/teachstud/gat/forster2.htm>

http://home.hiwaay.net/~kenth/diane/column/p_010798.htm

<http://www.sjc.uq.edu.au/jea/papers/conley.doc>

Supplemental Resources:

Gordon, W. J. J. (1961). *Synectics, the development of creative capacity*. New York: Harper.

Gunter, M. A., Estes, T. H., & Schwab, J. (1995). *Instruction: A models approach*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, pp. 135-157.

