

# Heather Severson: Preferred Instructional Methods and Strategies

Arizona Commission on the Arts Teaching Artist Roster Application

*Describe how you adapt your teaching strategies to address various learning styles, intelligences and/or age groups.*

## Instructional Methods

I use **direct instruction** to provide information, develop step-by-step skills, introduce other teaching methods, and involve students in knowledge construction. *Examples:* lecture, structured lesson overview, explicit teaching, compare and contrast, didactic questions, demonstrations, guided reading/viewing/thinking.

I use **indirect instruction** to facilitate a high level of student involvement in solving problems. As facilitator, I offer support, resources, and feedback to students as they observe, investigate, draw inferences from data, and form hypotheses. *Examples:* case studies, concept mapping, problem solving, reading for meaning, reflective discussion, writing to learn.

My primary teaching modality involves **experiential learning**. The central focus of my workshop content involves personalized reflection and formulation of plans to apply learning to other contexts. My workshop activities emphasize a metacognitive process of learning, not necessarily a final product. Learners go through five necessary phases: experiencing the activity, sharing or publishing reactions, analyzing or processing information, making inferences or generalizations about principles, and applying new knowledge to a variety of new situations.

*Examples:* conducting experiments, field observations, field trips, games, building models, writing narratives, role-playing, simulations, storytelling, surveys.

The most important goal of my work in education is to foster the development of individual student initiative, self-reliance, and self-improvement. **Independent study**, while primarily self-directed with the support of the facilitator, often includes learning in partnership with another student or within a small group. *Examples:* answer questions, computer-assisted instruction, writing essays, writing journals, learning activity packages, learning centers, individualized learning contracts, learning logs, writing reports, research projects.

I use **interactive instruction** to facilitate discussion and sharing among workshop participants. Students learn a great deal from their peers and teachers. They are able to practice their developing social skills and abilities, including observation, listening, and effectively communicating with one another. “Publishing” their work by sharing written work or participating in facilitated discussions helps students organize their thoughts and develop rational arguments. *Examples:* brainstorming, conferencing, cooperative learning, debates, discussions, interviews, panel discussions, role playing, tutorial groups.

## Special Considerations for Different Learners

Students in **Grades K-6** may have unidentified special challenges with learning, such as partial deafness, limited vision, reading difficulties, restlessness, hyperactivity, and other issues. Children often participate enthusiastically in group learning opportunities, like discussions. They can be motivated by a wide variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as personal interest in a topic or wanting to please the adults in their lives.

Students in **Grades 7-12** are experiencing big physical and emotional changes. They often care a great deal about how they are regarded by others. They are often idealistic, excited to learn, curious, and easily motivated. Some students may prefer to explore their own thoughts and concerns rather than participate fully in academics if the learning context isn't very engaging. As they get older, students are increasingly independent, and increasingly concerned that their work should have real-life impact. Many students want to see their ideals in action, and want their learning contexts to reflect their concerns and priorities.

**In-School** workshops and residencies must take academic standards and educators' time constraints into consideration. Wherever it is possible to support the teacher's curriculum, I hope to do so.

**After-School/Out-of-School** learners don't necessarily require the same stringent academic standards as they do in school. These populations can expand further into realms of creativity and enjoyment, untethered by strict mandates, but guided by sound principles in learning.

**Adolescents** and **Young Adults** often appreciate novelty and entertainment, along with authentic creative contexts. They may be future oriented, and willing to engage in learning opportunities even if there isn't yet a direct application to their current circumstances. They may look to the teacher for direction, and be reluctant to take responsibility for their own learning.

**Adults** may require flexibility in their learning situations to allow for competing demands on their time and attention, including jobs, caregiving for children or older adults, and other obligations. The term "andragogy," coined in the early 1970s by Malcolm Knowles, describes differences between children and adult learners. Knowles identified six assumptions about the special aspects of adult learning: need to know, self-concept, prior experience, readiness to learn, learning orientation, and motivation to learn. Adults want to know why they need to learn something before undertaking learning. Facilitators often must make a case for the value of learning. Adults believe they are responsible for their lives. They need to be regarded as capable and responsible. Adults have individual differences in background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests, and goals, creating a greater need for individualization of teaching and learning strategies. Adults can successfully mine their background knowledge and experience to enhance new learning. Adults want to learn knowledge and skills that they can apply in their real-life, present circumstances, to deal with problems they confront in everyday situations. Adults are motivated by external factors, but internal motivation is key.

**Older Adults** thrive in learning situations that allow them to be physically comfortable, have some control over the learning context or situation, provide receptive rather than productive opportunities for learning, and offer frequent opportunities to assess their learning needs in terms of technology, assistive resources, physical and emotional comfort.

**Intergenerational** audiences combine the learning styles and needs of a variety of age groups in the collaborative accomplishment of a common creative goal.

**Persons with disabilities** may require accommodation, assistive resources, extra time, or assistance in realizing their creative endeavors.

**English Language Learners, At-Risk** students and **Underserved** learning populations may require particular sensitivity to their various and individual learning needs. Creative arts provide a particularly effective vehicle for success for people who may have been marginalized in other academic contexts.