

How to Teach a 5E Lesson:

The primary difference between a traditional, teacher-centered pedagogy and that of the 5E Model is in the delivery of content. In the traditional model, the teacher describes, presents, addresses, shows, demonstrates, and/or explains all content. The students sit attentively and listen, taking notes so that they remember it in preparation of the test. If time and materials permit, a project may be conducted after the instruction so that students can see “how it works.” The project is done last, if at all.

In the 5E model, students discover the content by experiencing it. The project or activity is used as the vehicle for instruction, not simply the application of it later. Teachers ask questions to guide student thinking, not answer their questions directly. There is no “front-loading” or “pre-teaching.” Students learn the content by doing it, clarify their understanding through questioning, and demonstrate their mastery through proper use of the concepts. The project is done first.

Consideration of the 5E model always prompts the same question: how can you expect students to know something if you do not teach them? From strictly an educational perspective, that is legitimate. But it is not reality. For example, one of the most complex things modern adults learn is how to operate the cell phone. It has its own set of operating instructions and language (lol). Yet there are no books published, no classes taught, or tests given at the store before the proud new owner carries it out. Modern society changes so quickly that we learn how to learn. We figure it out. Our understanding grows through use, not necessarily through lecture. As students encounter new vocabulary, they will learn to look for clues to its definition. As they run into problems, they will learn to find resources for solving them. As they discover new content, they will figure out how it connects to previous knowledge. None of this, however, diminishes the role or importance of the teacher. The teacher is critical to guide the learning process and adjust for the individual learners. The teacher is the expert in pedagogy but no longer the all-knowing master of the content. With proper instructional strategies, the knowledge level of the student can, and probably should, exceed that of the teacher.