

Shepherds

RESOURCES

REAL Instruction

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Formal education and training are invaluable. Yet, teachers learn their job by doing it. Simply put, teachers learn how to teach by teaching. Sometimes, the first lessons are a little rough around the edges, but that's how teachers hone their skills. Most teachers value their education, but learn more about actual teaching by being in the classroom.

At [Shepherds College](#), we have some of the most dedicated and creative teachers in the field. They work hard, care about their students, and educate with the purpose of seeing their students grow in Appropriate Independence™. And growth happens.

Every teacher at Shepherds College teaches with R.E.A.L. instruction. R.E.A.L. is an acronym developed by Thom and Joani Schultz which stands for Relational, Experiential, Applicable, and Learner-Based. Since teachers learn by doing, continue reading to learn about R.E.A.L., along with some examples of how our instructors utilize this technique in the classroom.

R is for Relational. Remember, you are teaching a person, not a curriculum. Regardless of the content of the course, focus on the people you are instructing. Being a relational teacher has multiple components to it. First, there is the teacher/student relationship. Second, there is the student/student relationship. And, if your school is faith-based like Shepherds College, there is a third component - the teacher/student/God relationship.

The teacher/student relationship has two parts to it. First, have a relationship with the students outside the classroom. Get to know their lives, their families, and their interests. If you know about your student as a person, you'll gain a better understanding of how to incorporate aspects of real life into the classroom. For example, a lot of the students at Shepherds College love to play on the Special Olympics basketball team. When a physical activity is needed for class, basketball is always a good pick. Second, have relationships within the classroom. Being a teacher is not about lectures, or even content; it's about people. The teacher or paraprofessional should work to assist students at their level, both individually and in small groups. Walk around the classroom; call students by name; lean over and help them solve a problem; say good morning.

The student/student relationship benefits students in multiple ways. Having class discussions in partnerships or small groups allows for students to work together, relying on themselves and each other rather than the teacher. Peer interaction allows students to demonstrate ability, work as a team, and allows for self and instructor assessment. One way to use this is by assigning teams or partners. When teaching community safety, students are paired with a partner. They work together to think through, design, and print flyers that teach others about stranger danger or safety signs.

Because Shepherds College is faith-based, we also encourage a relationship with God. This is often shown through Bible memorization and prayer, as well as with specific Bible courses. A person's spiritual life is a very personal thing and if you can influence it, even in small ways, you have influenced a very important part of their life.

E is for experiential. People remember experiences. People learn from experiences. If you can turn your lesson into an experience, you will enhance your students' learning and retention. Following are a few ways Shepherds College classes incorporate experiences into the classroom. One of the skills taught in class is Money Skills. Students budget every week. Sure, they are being taught about budgeting, but then they also have to do it. Students look at the calendar for the upcoming week, plan financial need, go to the bank, withdraw money, and then organize it with envelopes. Teachers don't just teach *about* budgeting; they actually budget with the students. Another way to incorporate experience into the classroom is through Social Skills. When teaching an abstract concept like conflict resolution, students learn steps to handle conflict, and then they practice with scenarios. Each scenario is something that they may face in the dorms, at work, or in class. Not only do students talk about the conflict resolution steps, they practice them through role playing the scenarios so they know how to handle a situation if/when it arises.

A is for applicable. What's the point in learning something if it won't apply to our lives? Have you ever sat in class and thought "when will I ever use this?" When we don't see how we will use something in our lives, we are less likely to put forth effort to learn.

As instructors, everything we teach should add value to life, and it is important that our students understand how, when, where, and why. Once a student understands why they'll need to know what they are learning, they are much more likely to work hard at absorbing the content. At the beginning of every unit, and often throughout, explain the applicability to students. For example, when teaching laundry skills, explain to the students that, unless they want all of their clothes to turn out the same shade of light pink, they'd better sort their clothes by color.

L is for learner-based. People learn in different ways, but there are four basic learning styles through which people typically learn best. While experts have identified up to seven learning styles, Shepherds College focuses on the four primary ones - auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and read/write (tactile). Oftentimes, individuals learn in multiple ways, so the learning styles tend to overlap.

Auditory learners learn best by hearing or listening. They enjoy class discussion, lecture, audio book, or otherwise hearing the content. Listening to the material helps them learn and retain information.

Visual learners learn best by seeing something done. These learners benefit from visual aids to supplement material. Visual aids can include pictures, video (which could overlap with auditory), real-life scenarios, an experiment, or color coding.

Kinesthetic learners learn best by doing something with their hands. Many times, this means that they need to actually *do* the task they are learning. For example, instead of just hearing/seeing someone learn how to self-advocate, kinesthetic learners need to

actually practice this skill. Incorporate skits, tasks, and hands-on activities into your lesson to enhance the retention of kinesthetic learners. Sometimes, being able to simply move, pace, swing a leg, squeeze a ball, or chew gum can help kinesthetic learners focus in the classroom.

Read/write (tactile) learners learn best by reading or writing content. This is a pretty self-explanatory learning style. Learners benefit most from either reading content or writing something down. Provide class notes, fill-in-the-blank worksheets, or assign reading in order to best serve these students.

Most learners have one or two primary learning styles. For example, someone might be a kinesthetic and read/write learner. They would learn a task best by doing it, but learn information best by writing it down. When planning your lessons, intentionally use all of these learning styles in each lesson in order to maximize the learning for your students. Get creative!

R.E.A.L. instruction is a great teaching/learning strategy that will maximize student learning. Be intentional to include Relationship, Experiential, Applicable, and Learner-Based instruction in every lesson, and watch your students grow in ability and knowledge.

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