


Better Teaching[®]

Classroom Ideas to Improve Student Achievement **Elementary** EDITION



Teaching Every Student

Adapt strategies to teach all learners

 One of the biggest challenges for many teachers is managing today's increasingly diverse classroom. Experts say that one of the most important things a teacher can do is to look at diversity as an opportunity for everyone to learn and grow.

Consider these important factors as you approach diversity in your class:

- **Analyze your attitudes.** Be aware of any biases you might have. You can't take steps to overcome them until you know what they are. Set high expectations for *all* students.
- **Evaluate your teaching style.** Is there anything you might change to help all students feel welcome and safe in your classroom? Incorporate culturally diverse examples in your lessons. Use pictures of people who look like your students in your handouts and materials you post on your classroom walls.

- **Look for chances** to celebrate cultural differences in your classroom. Build opportunities into your lesson plans for students to share information about their backgrounds and customs.
- **Familiarize yourself** with the cultural standards of your students and align your expectations accordingly. Simple behaviors you might accept as the norm may not be what a student has learned at home. For example, in some cultures it is considered disrespectful to make eye contact with figures of authority. Standards for personal space vary from culture to culture, too.
- **Be sure to keep cultural differences** in mind as you communicate and interact with the parents of your students.

Source: "Managing a Culturally Diverse Classroom," Teaching Today, Glencoe Online, www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/weeklytips.phtml/print/230.

Listening and Following Directions

Using praise can help motivate students to focus—and listen



Giving honest, well-timed praise is one of the most effective ways to motivate students—and that includes motivating the most active bundles of energy in your classroom to listen to what you are saying.

Consider some of the following ways to motivate your students to focus and to listen:

- **Place emphasis on encouragement.** For example, "Megan, I know you can listen as I explain the next step."
- **Provide positive feedback.** For example, "Marco, thank you for listening to me so quietly. Now, do you have a question?"
- **Stand next to the student** who is most easily distracted as you speak. Make eye contact and smile as the student listens to you.
- **Connect your praise** to what the student did and how it benefited everyone in the class. For example, "Nikolai, you haven't asked me to repeat myself very often lately—and that gives me more time to help other students, too."
- **Find time for private conversations.** Ask the student for input. For example, "Jamie, I know you are working hard to listen and pay attention. Does it help if I write the directions on the board as I speak?"

Source: Leah Davies, "Effective Praise," Kelly Bear, www.kellybear.com/TeacherArticles/TeacherTip37.html.

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Resources

The Teacher Institute's series *Professional Development Essentials: Proven Ways to Build Student Achievement* offers classroom-proven, practical ideas both new and veteran teachers can use immediately. These six, 16-page booklets give the latest research-based teaching information to help schools meet the requirements of state standards, AYP and assessments! Titles include: *Setting High Expectations, Managing Your Classroom, Motivating Students, Helping Children At Risk, Teaching Responsibility* and *Getting Ready for Tests*. Call 1-800-333-0776 to order.

Mathematics

Guide your class through a numbers maze



Students need to rely on reasoning to get through a maze. Here are two math maze ideas you can try.

- 1. Pattern or counting maze** (for younger children). Draw a maze. Within it, arrange a pattern (such as one flower, one star, one flower, one star), so that a child who follows the pattern will get from the beginning of the maze to the end. Fill the rest of the maze with other symbols so the path is not immediately obvious. Or arrange a pathway of sequential numbers. Start at 1 and end at 10, or choose other numbers.
- 2. Calculation maze** (for any age, depending on complexity). Choose a number to be your sum, difference, product or quotient. Place

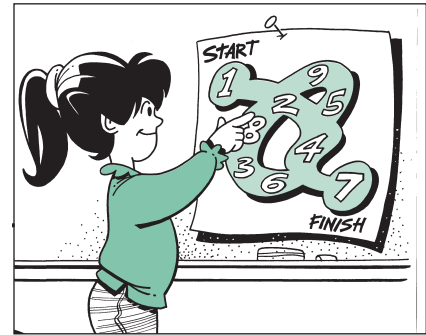


Illustration by Bob George

this at the end of the maze. Start your maze with the number 1. Students will need to add, subtract, multiply or divide their way through the maze to get to the answer. (Students may find more than one way through the maze.)

Source: Michael Naylor, "Math Mazes," *Teaching PreK-8*, August/September 2006 (Early Years, Inc., 1-800-678-8793, www.TeachingK-8.com).

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Homework

Create interesting, imaginative assignments



Students will be more motivated to complete assignments that can be classified as "fun with a purpose."

The assignments are not only fun and interesting, they clearly reinforce concepts and skills being taught.

To create such assignments, use more imagination. Also think of what would require students to use more of theirs.

Here are assignments other teachers have found successful. Have students:

- Interview people about their jobs or hobbies.
- Design an ideal vehicle, home, school or government.
- Write a new myth.
- Trace their family tree.
- Interview a senior citizen about a historical event they lived through.

- Write a how-to handbook for consumers.
- Invent a game they teach to the rest of the class.
- Plan a trip, including itinerary and expenses.
- Plan a balanced menu for a week.
- Use math skills to draw a floor plan of their house.
- Create a detailed map of their neighborhood.
- Volunteer.
- Update a fairy tale to modern times.
- Collect and identify rocks, leaves or wood.
- Conduct an experiment.
- Create a bulletin board display on a topic they research.

Source: Ronald L. Partin, *Classroom Teacher's Survival Guide*, ISBN: 0-7879-7253-3 (Jossey-Bass, 1-800-956-7739, www.jossey-bass.com).

Connecting With Parents

Ask students to write newsletters to parents



A weekly newsletter keeps parents informed and involved—and also helps avoid problems with miscommunication. Yet, there's so little time to publish a newsletter!

Student-produced newsletters are a great alternative. They ensure parents are “plugged in” without costing you valuable teaching time. Plus they boost students' content learning, writing skills and enthusiasm!

Each Friday, make time for a guided writing lesson. Give each student a sheet of lined paper with a cute border. The paper can then be inserted into a notebook. Or have students write in a spiral notebook.

Tell students they will all be writing the same newsletter together, as you create a model letter using a

chalkboard or overhead projector.

Follow these steps:

1. **Have students address** and date their letters to their parents or guardians.
2. **Ask students to** recall the “big things” they learned this week. Include academic and fun stuff.
3. **Write this down** in your model letter format. Add some exclamation points to show enthusiasm!
4. **Add a couple of sentences** on future events and learning topics.
5. **Help students copy** what you've written and sign the letters.

Ask parents to respond each weekend. You'll have a journal of parent communication for the whole year!

Source: Beth Lewis, “Taking the Work Out of Weekly Newsletters,” About, <http://k-6educators.about.com/od/classroommanagement/a/weeklynews.htm>.

Bringing Lessons to Life

Set the stage for active video lesson



Viewing an educational video doesn't have to be a passive activity where students sit and wait to be entertained.

To engage your students in active learning, follow these key points:

1. **Preview the video.** Select segments for specific learning objectives.
2. **Open the lesson** without the video. Find out what students already know about the topic and review related vocabulary.
3. **Provide a focus for viewing.** Tell students what to look or listen for and then analyze—beliefs, realism, relevance, unforgettable moments, organization of content, applicability to their lives, etc.
4. **Assign a physical task.** Have students raise their hands or make a tally mark when they hear or see the specific things you've asked for.
5. **Leave the lights on.** Let students know this is an active activity.

While you play the video, pause it to:

- **Check for understanding.** What did the students see or hear?
- **Elicit predictions.** Ask students, “What might happen next?”
- **Practice pronouncing a word** or idiom intoned by a character.
- **Make real-world connections** and comparisons.
- **Have students record** information in their notebooks.

For variety, try the following:

- **Show only the picture** without the sound. Ask students to narrate concepts they see displayed.
- **Play only the sound** without the picture. Let students hypothesize about what is happening.

Follow up with a hands-on activity to let students apply what they've learned.

Source: “Tips for Using Video in the Classroom,” Iowa Public Television, www.iptv.org/explore/PDFs/using%20video.pdf.

Classroom Management

Turn class clean-up time into learning time



Having to clean up after free time or a creative lesson can rob you of precious time every day. If your clean-up procedure with students isn't working or gets too chaotic, try turning it into a game or a learning activity. Work some of these ideas into your regular routine:

- **Use traffic signals.** Cut out green, yellow and red circles from construction paper. Attach double-sided tape to each circle. Post the green circle when free time begins. Post the yellow circle when there are five minutes left. Post the red circle when it's time to clean up.
- **Play “Simon Says”** with cleaning duties. “Simon Says clear off your desks.”

- **Play “Beat the Clock.”** Set a timer. When the time is up, tell students to “freeze.” If they've finished cleaning up, reward them with extra minutes of free time.
- **Count as you clean.** Ask students to put away: three items made of paper, two items that are red, etc. Or practice the alphabet—one item that begins with the letter of the student's first or last name.
- **Play “I Spy.”** Look around your classroom and locate the first item that needs to be put away. (Select categories—shapes, sizes, etc.) Then locate the next item to be put away and so on until everything is picked up.

Source: Linda Starr, “Keep It Clean!” National Education Association, www.nea.org/classmanagement/ifc041123.html.

Focus : Motivating Students

Encouraging Participation

Use sports as a classroom model



Many of the youngsters who are reluctant to participate in class are the first ones on the field when it comes to playing sports. You can draw on that reality to get these students off the sidelines in your class, too.

Think of your class in terms of the elements of baseball, soccer—any sport.

For example:

- **Teamwork.** Almost everyone likes to be on a team. Look for ways to design more team assignments—even when it comes to homework.
- **Fun.** Playing sports is fun and there's no reason that classroom activities can't be fun as well. Be creative. Look for ways to interject excitement, surprises and even silliness into each day.
- **Success.** Playing a game provides opportunities for successes, both big and small. Make sure your students—especially those who need a little extra encouragement—have frequent opportunities to experience success.
- **Creativity.** Players must rely on their own ingenuity and creativity to make the hard plays work. Encourage your students' natural creativity. Let them know you appreciate their individuality.

Source: Robert Harris, "Some Ideas for Motivating Students," VirtualSalt, www.virtualsalt.com/motivate.htm.

Motivating Students to Read

Time lines help struggling readers



Once your students pass into third or fourth grade, they should be actively reading assigned novels, or at least listening to you read them. For some students, of course, this is easy and joyful. But for others, it is new, complex and confusing. Some students may struggle just to keep up with what is happening in the story. And if they can't follow the plot, they will never find pleasure in the book.

If you see students struggling in this way, here's how using a time line can help:

- **Make the time line** as large and colorful as possible.
- **Ask for student input** on major events that should be included.
- **Have students illustrate** the time line, especially those students who

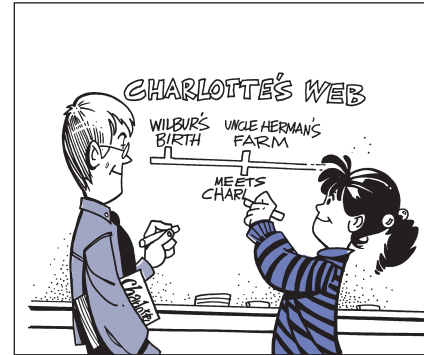


Illustration by Bob George

are struggling. Drawing characters and events is another way to learn.

- **Add to the time line** as you continue to read and remind students to refer to it often.

Source: Kelly Gallagher, *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts, Grades 4 to 12*, ISBN: 1-57110-384-8 (Stenhouse Publishers, 1-800-998-9812, www.stenhouse.com).

Setting High Expectations

Use rubrics to make your expectations clear



Most students—even those at risk—*want* to do a good job. But they don't always know what that means.

You can help by making your expectations as clear as possible. If students (and their parents) know what is required for a top grade, more of your at-risk students are likely to rise to the occasion.

For example, suppose you have assigned students to develop a poster on the life cycle of a butterfly. And you tell students that it is worth 20 points. Will all students earn the full 20 points? Probably not.

But what would a student have to do to earn full marks? What would the student need to do to earn 15 or 10 points? Under what circumstances might a student earn zero points?

Write down the answers to these questions in the form of a rubric. Be as specific as possible. For example, you may want students to use at least seven colors. You may want clear and neat lettering.

Hand out the rubric outlining your expectations together with the assignment—and expect the best.

Source: Dr. Kathie Nunley, "Rubrics," Layered Curriculum, www.help4teachers.com/rubrics.htm.