

Better Teaching[®]

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



Creates Images

Connecting With Students

Success—it's all in how you start



Ever watched champion runners at the start of a race? They take extra time and care with how they position themselves in the blocks. They know that a good start can mean the difference between a gold medal and an “also-ran.”

The same is true of your class. You can connect with students and get them motivated to learn and work hard in the first few minutes of class.

Start by greeting each student individually at the door. Even on the first day, when you don't know everyone's name, shake hands with students and look them in the eye. Establish a connection with each student.

Then introduce yourself to the whole class. One teacher did this with pictures. Try this technique:

- **Create an overhead transparency** with pictures that “describe” you.
- **Invite students** to make predictions about your interests based on the pictures.

Challenge students to introduce themselves the same way:

- **Have students create some visual clues** about themselves. Have old magazines, scissors, glue and colored markers available.
- **Ask them to challenge** other students within small groups to see if they can figure out their interests.

As the year moves on, continue greeting each student by name. These few seconds of one-on-one time will help you “take the temperature” of your class.

If a student seems upset or angry, you can take a few minutes to get the student settled before you move on with your lesson. You'll also be able to compliment a student on a good homework assignment or paper.

Source: Diane Walker, motivation MATTERS For Schools, “The Art and Craft of Motivating Students,” www.successoriesonline.com/mmatters/html/edu_fall02/i_o_m.htm.

Making the Transition

A smooth transition can set the stage for success in high school



It's time to say good-bye. The first days of high school are just around the corner for middle school students. And they—perhaps their parents, too—may be feeling anxious about what's ahead.

What can you do? Try these ideas:

- **Schedule a visit** to the high school. Arrange for your students to shadow older students for the day.
- **Invite a panel** of high school students to share tips for succeeding in class and getting involved with extracurricular activities.
- **Give students copies** of the high school handbook. Invite a counselor to talk about attendance rules and other expectations in high school.
- **Suggest high school students** create a page on the high school website with information just for incoming freshmen. They could even include a blog where students can post comments and concerns as well as suggestions and solutions.
- **Help students establish** some social connections now. Start a mentoring program where high school students serve as big brothers or sisters, or as tutors for rising freshmen.
- **Keep parents informed.** Studies show that when parents stay involved during the high school years, students have higher achievement rates.

Source: Nancy B. Mizelle, “Helping Middle School Students Make the Transition to High School,” ERIC Digest, www.ericdigests.org/2000-1/high.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.

Cheating: Part Two of a Three-Part Series

Are you certain the work is not plagiarized?

a. — Most teachers develop a sixth sense to identify work that has been plagiarized. But if asked what they look for, some will say, "I know it when I see it."

Researchers have pulled together specific signs to look for. A student's work may be plagiarized if:

- **The writing style and vocabulary** are markedly different from what the student usually turns in. Check further if a student whose writing usually sounds like an instant message turns in words like "notwithstanding" and "prima facie."
- **The introduction sounds** like the student wrote it. Then the paper shifts in tone and topic. The student might have "padded" the paper with material from another source.
- **The paper mentions individuals,** ideas or events with which the

student is not likely to be familiar. Not many tenth graders know much about the Council of Trent.

- **The paper suddenly shifts** in font, pitch or margin size. This is a tell-tale sign that the student didn't even bother to reformat the work.
- **The paper includes references** the student was unlikely to access. Most public libraries, for example, don't have a subscription to the *Journal of Clinical Microbiology*.

Probably the single best way to tell if a student has taken work belonging to another is by asking. If the student has difficulty responding to a simple question or two about the paper, odds are it's plagiarized.

Source: Gregory J. Cizek, *Detecting and Preventing Classroom Cheating: Promoting Integrity in Assessment*, ISBN: 0-761-94655-1 (Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

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Writing

Class blogs help students focus on lessons



Everyone knows that the answer to the question, "What did you learn in school today?" is "Not much." But when students become the reporters for their classroom blog, they are forced to focus on what they have learned.

And while they may never know or care about AYP, this exercise in reflective writing will make them more aware of what they are learning. In addition, because most blog entries are short, blog writing will help your students learn to convey the essential details of a situation in as few words as possible.

Follow these steps:

1. **Create blogging assignment** sheets.
2. **Have student "reporters" sign up** for a topic they'd like to cover. It

could be something in their class, the school or community at large.

3. **Ask students to submit topics** for your review. (As the editor of the blog, you get final say.)
4. **Have each student submit a draft.**
5. **Post student blog entries** once they have polished their drafts.

In some classes, submitting a blog entry could replace journals of what students have learned. You will have a clear idea of what students have—and haven't—learned from your lessons. Parents will also have a window into the classroom that most parents of secondary students lack.

Source: Linda Lindroth, "How to ... Blog!" *Teaching Pre K-8*, August/September 2006 (Teaching Pre K-8, 1-800-249-9363, www.teachingk-8.com).

For a downloadable blogging assignment sheet, visit the Teacher Institute website at www.teacher-institute.com/bt/resources/blogging.pdf

Workplace Preparedness

Tell students about the rewards of hard work



Do your students raise the age-old query, “Why do we need to know this?”

When you answer with information and statistics about the workplace, you’ll not only motivate your students, you’ll boost achievement, too.

Learnandearn.org, a website created by the business community, poses this challenge, “Imagine how much we could do for students if we all worked together to create an inescapable message to every teenager in the country: Learn More Now. Do More Now. Earn More Later.”

Share the following statistics:

- **Future jobs** (about 70%–80%) haven’t even been invented yet. The best preparation is a solid foundation in academics.

- **Students who complete** high school may increase their annual wages by 25%.
- **College graduates** may earn up to \$23,000 more per year than high school graduates.
- **A good attendance record** often makes the difference in securing an entry-level job.
- **Students who develop** a strong work ethic, who show up for class on time every day and who work hard to do quality work are more likely to be effective employees—and more likely to be rewarded for their efforts.

Source: “Our Message to Your Students: Learn More Now. Do More Now. Earn More Later,” <http://learnandearn.org/for-educators.asp>.

Building Reading Skills

Increase students’ comprehension with power thinking



Power thinking may be a good way to help students who have trouble reading and comprehending large volumes of material make outlines. This method helps students break down the material and better understand its parts.

Power thinking is more than simply “chunking,” or providing the material in small doses. Power thinking helps students identify the main idea—a critical comprehension skill—as well as subtopics and supporting details.

To teach power thinking:

1. **Have students read a passage.** Adjust the difficulty according to their current levels of instruction.
2. **Ask students to pick out** the main idea or theme of the passage. What is the message the author hopes the reader will take away?
3. **Have them write down** this main idea. Label it as “Power 1.”
4. **Have students reread** the passage and search for subtopics or smaller themes that support the main theme. For example, if the main idea is “Big cats are fierce predators,” then the subtopics might be, “The hunting style of the female lion,” and “The speed of the tiger.” Label these subtopics as “Power 2.”
5. **Have students look for** smaller details. For example, within “The hunting style of the female lion,” a smaller detail could be, “The female lion typically hunts at night with other females.” These details are “Power 3.”

Source: John Beattie, LuAnn Jordan and Bob Algozzine, *Making Inclusion Work: Effective Practices for All Teachers*, ISBN: 1-4129-1469-8 (Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Maintaining High Expectations

Keep communication strong with each student



It’s human nature to want to interact with those who will respond to you. One of your challenges as a teacher—especially one who may have 150 students a day—is communicating to students that you *are* interested in them, when all they do is stare back at you in return.

Why is this important? Research shows that teachers, without necessarily meaning to do so, state their expectations of students by how much they attempt to interact with them.

Research shows that when teachers have high expectations of students, they:

- **Smile at those students.**
- **Move or lean toward them** while presenting material.
- **Make frequent eye contact.**

However, research also shows that teachers demonstrate these behaviors less frequently toward students they believe possess lower abilities.

Make it a point to communicate high expectations to *all* your students through your verbal and non-verbal class interactions.

Give as many students as possible the opportunity to:

- **Answer provocative questions.**
- **Respond in full.** Remember some students take longer to get their thoughts together.
- **Receive feedback** from you on their answers and other aspects of schoolwork.

Source: Linda Lumsden, “Expectations for Students,” ERIC Digest, No. 116, <http://eric.uoregon.edu/publications/digests/digest116.html>.

Focus : Motivating Students

Adapting to Learning Styles

Expand students' attention spans



Teachers have known for years that a student's average attention span is shorter than a typical class period. Incorporate some of the following strategies to help your students focus and to maintain their attention:

- **Post a "Daily Agenda"** for students to copy at the start of class. Break each class into smaller components.
- **Begin each activity** with a brief introduction, providing students with logical organizers for note-taking.
- **Use a variety of visual materials.** A picture really does say a thousand words!
- **Relate the material** to something meaningful in the students' lives.
- **Promote active participation.** For example, use "think-pair-share." Students write responses to a question and share their answers with a classmate; then pairs share their answers with the class.
- **Place easily distracted students** near you or near the visual display you're using.
- **Help a distracted student refocus:** "John, please find the diagram on page ..."
- **Include activities** that allow moving about, especially in longer, block classes.

Sources: "Behavior Tips for Teachers," College of Education, Northern Illinois University, www.cedu.niu.edu/pride/BehaviorTipsStretchYourStudentsAttentionSpan.htm.

Research

Self-discipline is indicator of success



Think about your top students. Are they the ones with the most innate abilities? Possibly—but one study says it's self-discipline that keeps these students at the top. In fact, these motivated students will probably be more successful than peers who have higher IQ scores, but lack self-discipline.

Researchers have found that self-disciplined students:

- **Are able to break bad habits**, such as procrastination.
 - **Are viewed as diligent** and responsible by parents and teachers.
 - **Are able to wait for rewards.** They work first and play later.
- You can encourage self-discipline by:
- **Communicating the importance** of a nightly homework routine to students and parents.

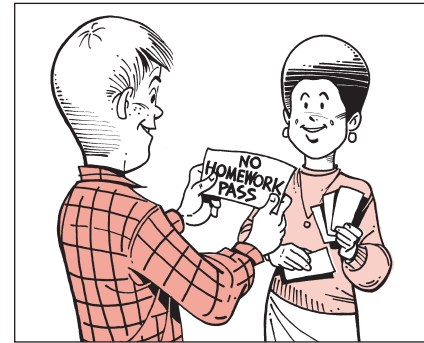


Illustration by Bob George

- **Assigning projects with due dates** at each stage of the project.
- **Giving rewards**, such as a night off from homework, to those students who have consistently turned in assignments on time.

Source: Jay Mathews, "Self-Discipline May Beat Smarts as Key to Success," *The Washington Post*, January 17, 2006 (The Washington Post Company, 1-800-627-1150, www.washpost.com).

Encouraging Participation

Rubrics help evaluate student participation



Active student participation enhances learning and makes class more enjoyable for everyone. Use the following activity to evaluate and increase student participation:

- **Decide what behaviors** you want in your classroom.
- **List them in numerical order.** Include points next to each one.
- **Create a half-page** self-evaluation rubric with space for name, date and period at the top.

For example, a class learning English may include the following:

- 1) **I was in my seat** and copied the Daily Agenda before the bell rang. 3-2-1-0.
- 2) **I brought my book** and all supplies to class today. 3-2-1-0.
- 3) **I tried to speak English** many times today! 3-2-1-0.
- 4) **I completed my homework** before class. 3-2-1-0.

Conclude classes with this self-evaluation until students grasp your standards. Collect the rubrics—you have "final say" on the score. Change criteria during the year, based on progress and activities.