

Better Teaching[®]

Classroom Ideas to Improve Student Achievement

Secondary
EDITION

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Bringing Lessons to Life

Create an electronic scrapbook



Making scrapbooks is a popular hobby. Why not use technology to create an *electronic* scrapbook? Students will develop research skills and learn how to do oral presentations. Here's how:

1. **Talk about scrapbooks.** Have any of your students ever kept a scrapbook? Do you have a scrapbook that you can share? Talk about how you decided which "scraps" would be included.
2. **Tell students they will create** electronic scrapbooks based on works of literature. Assign students to use the Internet for research. As they locate websites on authors, time periods and their selected literary works, be sure students evaluate the information for accuracy.
3. **Have students capture "scraps"** of information for their scrapbooks. Have them include visual images, as well. They should also search for

multi-media such as oral recordings and video clips. As they capture the information, make sure they record the source for each item.

This is also a good time to teach students about the meaning of Fair Use under copyright laws.

4. **Have students use presentation** software (such as PowerPoint[®]) to create scrapbooks to present to the class. Emphasize that their oral presentations should provide more detail than shown on each slide. Also remind them not to read their slides to the audience.
5. **Ask students to share** their scrapbooks with the class. In addition to sharing what they have learned, students should be prepared to defend their choices. Why did they choose each "scrap" of information?

Source: "Literary Scrapbooks Online: An Electronic Reader-Response Project," ReadWriteThink, www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=787.

Building Writing Skills

Engage students in a summer writing project



Who says the hazy days of summer have to be lazy? Keep students active and learning with a summer writing project. "Nothing to write about?" Have students write about their own neighborhoods. For a successful project:

- **Discuss a summer writing project** in a departmental meeting. While one teacher may assign the work, another may receive and grade it in the fall. Have a unified plan.
- **Create guidelines.** Determine how you will evaluate the projects. Prepare written directions. Consider having a rubric. Post instructions on your class or school website.
- **Generate enthusiasm.** Share your own stories. Tell about a retired soldier, a local athlete or an interesting shopkeeper. Give students tips for interviewing and taking notes. Invite a local journalist to give a talk as you kick off the project.
- **Alert your local library.** Ask if they might create a special section on local history and personalities.
- **Encourage students** to accompany their articles with photos. Or have them draw their own illustrations.
- **Create an anthology** after students have submitted and revised their work in the fall. Invite your local paper to write an article featuring student stories.

Source: Jillian Mincer, "Education: Inner City's Summer Writing Project," The New York Times, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DE2DF1230F932A1575AC0A96E948260&n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/Subjects/B/Books%20and%20Literature>.

Research

'Self-talk' helps manage behavior



Research shows that students can modify inappropriate behavior and improve academic performance with "cognitive-behavioral intervention"—or "self-talk."

To model the concept, think aloud as you handle a situation. For example, "I should know the answer to Jennifer's question, but I don't. I could fake it, but I think I'll tell her I'll look up the answer and get back to her later."

Once students understand how self-talk works (and that it's normally not oral), incorporate it into a journaling assignment. Ask them to use self-talk to handle distractions for one week. Have them:

- **Articulate the problem.** "I'm not paying attention. I need to do something to keep focused."
- **Articulate a solution.** "I'll take notes. If I'm writing, I'll focus."
- **Recognize the consequences.** "Because I took notes, I remembered what the teacher said."

At the end of the week, have students share how they used self-talk to improve behavior, stay on task or cope with social situations.

Source: Stephen W. Smith, "Applying Cognitive-Behavioral Techniques to Social Skills Instruction," ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, www.ericdigests.org/2003-3/skills.htm.

Connecting With Parents: Part One of a Three-Part Series

Make sure all your students 'walk the walk'



The graduation invitations have been sent. Grandma and Grandpa have their airline reservations. Then some mean teacher spoils the fun by pointing out that unless Junior turns in several assignments, he won't pass the class—nor will he "walk" at graduation.

Teachers don't like being put in that position. So before you turn into the Grinch Who Stole the Cap and Gown, here's how you can work with parents to be sure every senior will, in fact, walk across the stage:

- **Review your school or district graduation policy** and follow it to the letter.
- **Put everything in writing.** Create an Incomplete Assignment Log that students must sign when they don't turn in an assignment. They must list the title of the assignment, its due date and a sentence or two

about why they did not turn it in. Also ask students to indicate when they will turn in the work.

- **Don't wait.** Contact parents as early as you can. Share your Incomplete Assignment Log so parents can't say, "Junior simply didn't know he had to do that final research paper." You have the proof.
- **Keep the principal informed.** Make copies of all the letters you have sent home, notes you have from parent conferences and entries in your Incomplete Assignment Log.
- **Decide whether you'll accept extra credit work.** Whatever your policy, apply it in a scrupulously fair way.
- **Let parents know about progress.** "Junior handed in his lab notes. I still need a research paper."

Source: Paula Rutherford, *Instruction for All Students*, ISBN: 9780-9777-7968-0 (Just ASK Publications, 1-800-940-5434, www.justaskpublications.com).

Surviving the First Year

Take stock before you pack up for summer



The end is in sight—but before you head for the beach, take time to organize and store what you will need for next year. Consider:

- **Computer files.** Did you create several versions before you settled on a final copy? Save only what you'll actually use again. Move files to appropriate folders and label them so you know exactly what they are.
- **Hard copies.** Do you need to save extra copies of handouts? What about extra exams? Keep only what you will use again. Recycle or shred the rest.
- **Bulletin boards.** Ask your students to help you organize

items for storage. Try using tubes for larger sheets of paper.

- **Books.** Have you started a reference library? Use self-stick notes to mark the pages you will use again.
- **Substitute lesson plans.** Did the plans you left for your substitutes work this year? If you plan to use them again next year, do they need adjusting?
- **Notes, cards and letters of appreciation.** File them away in an "I am special" folder. Keep it handy for those days next year when you feel overwhelmed.

Source: Annette Breau, *101 "Answers" for New Teachers and Their Mentors*, ISBN: 1-930556-48-9 (Eye on Education, 1-888-299-5350, www.eyeoneducation.com).

Building Reading Skills

Workforce, college require same reading skills



According to a study by ACT, whether students plan to go on to higher education or directly to the workplace, they will need to have similar reading skills. Having lower expectations for graduates who plan to enter the workforce does a disservice to them and to their employers.

To determine the needs of students going directly into the workplace, the study looked at reading requirements for jobs that are expected to increase in coming years. These included electricians, construction workers and plumbers.

To learn job-specific skills, students entering these professions should be able to:

- **Find main ideas and supporting details.** Skills also include recognizing organizational structures of texts and using technical terms.

- **Identify relationships.** Skills include understanding cause and effect, applying instructions to new situations and following a sequence.
- **Understand new words.** Skills include using context clues, understanding acronyms and recognizing that words can have multiple meanings.
- **Draw conclusions.** Skills include forming conclusions based on details offered in a passage and applying information from a text to a specific situation.

Encourage students to bring in training manuals, instruction booklets, job applications and other documents. Talk about the reading skills these documents require.

Source: "Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different?" ACT Research and Policy Issues, www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ReadinessBrief.pdf.

Resources



Today's students have become a generation of *aliterates*—people who can read but choose not to read. That's the term author Kelly Gallagher uses to describe "the systematic killing of the love of reading." As a high school teacher, Gallagher understands the pressures faced by classroom teachers every day. In *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It*, he offers sensible suggestions that can help turn today's aliterates into tomorrow's readers. (ISBN: 9781-5711-0780-0, Stenhouse Publishers, 1-800-988-9812, www.stenhouse.com.)



Compared with high school graduates, students who drop out of school are four times more likely to be unemployed. They are more likely to be on public assistance and more likely to be in prison. An effective dropout program can make the difference in bringing down the number of dropouts. For information on successful dropout prevention programs, tips for parents and students, and links to funding sources, go to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network site at www.dropoutprevention.org.

Classroom Management

Effective teaching also involves multitasking



Research shows that effective teachers also know how to multitask. They can quickly and quietly prevent problems before they arise.

Here are some examples of how you can make multitasking work in your classroom:

- **Have students put work** on the board. While they are doing that, you can spend time working with individual students as needed.
- **Walk around the room regularly** while students are working independently. This gives you a chance to glance at students' papers to see if individuals are having trouble.
- **Use your presence** as an effective deterrent to disruptions. If two

students are talking, don't interrupt your lesson. Continue teaching, but move close to the students. Without saying a word, you can stop the conversation before it becomes a disruption to the class.

- **Develop silent signals.** If you have a student who is continually disruptive, develop a way to indicate, "You're going over the line."
- **Don't take multitasking too far.** Protect the time you have with your students for instruction. Turn off your own cell phone. Don't leave your classroom to talk with other teachers.

Source: Neal A. Glasgow and Cathy D. Hicks, *What Successful Teachers Do*, ISBN: 0-761-94574-1 (Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Tell us what you think!

We'd love to hear your ideas on how we might make your *Better Teaching* newsletter even better at helping you improve student achievement.

Which topics would you like to see covered more/less? Are there issues we are not addressing now that you would like to see included?

Other suggestions? We'd like to hear from you. Complete the brief survey online at www.teacher-institute.com/survey, or send your ideas to *The Teacher Institute, Editorial Dept., P.O. Box 397, Fairfax Station, VA 22039*, 1-800-216-3667 (fax), or email betterteaching@teacher-institute.com.

Focus on: At-Risk Students

Positive Thinking

Friends can help students achieve



Students' friends can have a huge impact on their attitudes toward learning. For some students, doing well in school is simply "not cool." They often reinforce one another's bad attitudes about learning.

As a teacher, you can help at-risk students develop friendships with the students who are higher achievers. As the school year winds down, it's not too late to encourage positive peer pressure.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Change the seating** arrangements in your classroom regularly. This will let your students interact with a wide variety of classmates.
- **Set aside time to talk** with your "anti-school" students one-on-one. Get them to understand that you are in their corner. Don't let their bad attitudes affect everyone in the class.
- **Assign students to groups** for group work. Separate the students who have negative attitudes so they are not all in the same group.
- **Find students' strengths.** A student who isn't excited about English may love art. This student could be the artist for a group project.

Source: Diane Heacox, *Up From Underachievement*, ISBN: 0-915-79335-0 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

Reading Skills

Reading for fun boosts achievement



Two groups took a standardized test that asked them to read and analyze a passage about baseball. The first group consisted of good readers who didn't know much about baseball. The second group consisted of baseball fans who weren't good readers.

Which group scored higher? The second! Strong reading skills alone were not enough to make up for a lack of prior knowledge.

Those test results may suggest a way to help at-risk students with important tests. Instead of insisting on skill drills, it might be better to let these students read interesting stories about a wide range of topics.

In fact, research shows that students who read for fun are more likely to score higher in reading and writing.

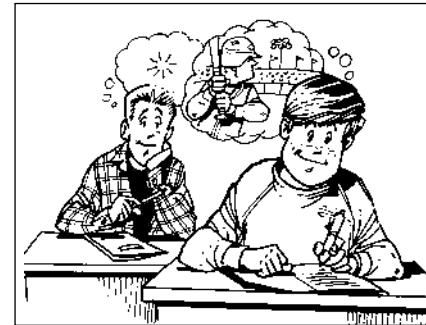


Illustration by Bob George

Look for interesting stories in newspapers, magazines and books. Give students time each day to read something just because it's interesting. They will start to love reading—and may do better on tests, as well.

Source: Kelly Gallagher, *Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It* (ISBN: 9781-5711-0780-0 (Stenhouse Publishers, 1-800-988-9812, www.stenhouse.com).

Overcoming Apathy

Look for summer learning opportunities



A Johns Hopkins study on the implications of summer learning loss indicates that low-income students are more likely to suffer a significant drop in skills during the summer break—which can lead to dropping out and failing to go on to higher education. The study found that the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more fortunate peers results from "how they spent their summer vacation."

To combat a summer setback:

- **Invite a local librarian** to come in to sign up students and give a presentation on summer services

at the library. Your students can learn about multimedia options, enrichment programs and volunteer opportunities.

- **Distribute brochures** from local historical sites and museums. See if students can get free or discounted entry.
- **Share information** about community programs. Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, a university and other agencies may offer programs that will appeal to students' interests and pocketbooks.

Source: Karl Alexander, "Summer Learning Can Set Kids on the Right—or Wrong—Course," National Center for Summer Learning, www.summerlearning.org/media/researchandpublications/AlexanderResearchBriefFINAL7.08.pdf.