

Better Teaching[®]

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

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Library of Congress

Bringing Lessons to Life

Teach nutrition with primary sources



One important topic in physical education and health classes is helping students learn to make healthy food choices. In this activity, students can learn about nutrition information by examining posters that might have appeared in school lunch rooms in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Library of Congress makes available copies of posters that were used to provide nutrition information more than 60 years ago. You can find the posters, all of which are in the public domain, on the website listed in the source at the end of this article.

Enlarge the posters and laminate them if you wish. Display the posters around your classroom.

Ask students to list some of the things they know about making healthy food choices. Answers may include eating fruits and vegetables, eating a variety of foods and starting the day with a good breakfast.

Examine the posters together and point out that some of the advice about healthy eating 60 years ago is still true today. To complete the activity:

1. **Ask students to go stand** by one of the posters that attracts them.
2. **Have students discuss** what captured their interest about the poster they selected.
3. **Ask student groups**, "What is the most important nutrition message conveyed in the poster you selected?" Have the students share their thoughts with the rest of the class.
4. **Talk about** what makes a good poster.
5. **Have students work** alone or in groups to create their own nutrition education posters.
6. **Display these in your classroom** or in the cafeteria.

Source: Primary Source Learning, "Healthy Choices: Nutrition Then and Now," www.primarysourcelearning.org/teaching_materials/learning_experience/sources.php?experiences_key=235.

RTI in the Classroom

Monitor your students' classroom performance



A big advantage of Response to Intervention (RTI) is the speed with which the process allows a struggling student to get help. The key is frequent classroom assessments tied to grade-level standards. And a classroom teacher is in the best position to spot problems with a student's progress.

Here are some suggestions on ways to incorporate classroom assessments into the RTI process:

- **Don't wait.** Begin documenting concerns about an individual student's progress as soon as you spot a problem. If a student begins to struggle in November, classroom assessments will show trouble areas long before the state tests in May.
- **Use a variety of assessments**—checklists, observations, rubrics, running records and performance on classroom tests.
- **Look for scientifically-based** interventions to use—based on your observations. You may want to meet with a school or grade-level RTI team to discuss options.
- **Involve parents early.** Meet with parents to share your concerns. Together, come up with a plan for addressing the issue both at home and at school.

If the student does not make progress, it may be time for a higher level of intervention.

Source: Roger Pierangelo, *Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities: A Step-by-Step Guide for Educators*, ISBN: 9781-4129-1600-4 (Corwin Press, a SAGE Publications Company, www.corwinpress.com).

Writing

Teach students to incorporate mood into their writing



An important element a writer shares with the reader is the mood, or tone, of the piece. To give students practice incorporating it into their writing, ask them to write about:

- **A time they felt truly happy**—without saying, “I was (or felt) happy.” Instead, encourage them to write about what happened and how they reacted. Explain that the reader will *sense* the happiness without having to be told.
- **Something funny.** What makes them laugh? If it’s an (appropriate) episode of a TV cartoon show, that’s fine.
- **Someone they love**—without using phrases like, “I really love my mom.” Instead, have them describe what their mom does or a special time they spent together. “My mom works late, but she’s always up early to cook my favorite breakfast.” Explain that the reader will understand the writer’s expression of appreciation and love.

Source: Jane Bell Kiester, *Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test: Four Steps to Better Writing Scores for Students of All Levels*, ISBN: 0-929895-93-2 (Maupin House, www.maupinhouse.com).

Technology: Part One of a Three-Part Series

A PowerPoint® timer keeps students on track



It’s time for math, but your students are just not making the transition. How can you stop them from dawdling?

Try a PowerPoint® timer. Count-up and count-down timers can both help students make the best use of their time. Here are some ways you can use these timers:

- **Start a one-minute timer** at the beginning of a transition from subject to subject. See if students can “beat the clock.”
- **Keep students focused.** If students are working in small groups, start a count-down timer. They’ll know how much time is remaining to finish the task.
- **Increase speed and fluency.** For some subjects, such as math, you want students to work quickly and automatically to learn facts. So give students a short assignment and then start a count-up timer for five

or 10 minutes. When students finish, have them write the remaining time showing on the counter on their papers.

- **Make students responsible** for “time owed.” When behavior interferes with learning, start a 15-minute count-up timer. Stop it when students are ready to work. Later, deduct the time owed from a favored activity.

PowerPoint® timers run as videos. You can download them, for free, at www.interventioncentral.com/timers.php.

The fastest way to access these timers when you need them is by saving them to your computer. Just right-click and choose “Save Target As” Then when you want to give students a one-minute warning, you’re ready to go.

Source: “Using PowerPoint Timers to Improve Student Behavior and Learning,” Intervention Central, www.interventioncentral.com/timers.php.

Working With ELL Students

Help ELL students learn with STAR strategy



English Language Learners (ELLs) can’t take part in class activities if they don’t know the vocabulary. You can help by using this four-step process. It’s called the STAR strategy and it will help ELL students master needed vocabulary so they can be successful.

Here’s how:

- S Set the stage.** Preteach vocabulary words your ELL students will need to know. Focus on the words you think are critical for them to participate in the activity.
- T Teach as you go.** Once you have introduced your English Language Learners to key vocabulary, reinforce word meanings as you teach the content.

You won’t need to interrupt the flow of your teaching. Simply reinforce the vocabulary words students are learning as you teach.

- A Apply the concept.** After you have taught the lesson, have ELL students use the new words they learned in sentences. The goal is to have students practice using the words appropriately in written and in spoken language.
- R Review and repeat.** Don’t expect students to learn a new word in a single day. Always spend a little time reviewing words you have previously taught.

Source: Diane Haager, *Interventions for Reading Success*, ISBN: 9781-5576-6678-9 (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., www.brookespublishing.com).

Homework

Connect homework to specific learning goals



Homework should be a benefit, never a detriment, to your students. That means that all homework you assign should help students practice a key element of the curriculum. Homework should never be assigned as “busy-work.” Remember that students and parents can tell the difference.

As you plan your homework assignments:

- **Make sure students understand** the connection between their homework and the learning goal. Write the learning goal on the assignment if necessary. If students realize that you are assigning homework to help them move to mastery, rather than just to take up their time, they may be more likely to finish it and hand it in.

- **Ask yourself:** Can the majority of my students complete this homework on their own? There will always be exceptions, but if students cannot complete homework on their own, you are not asking them to practice. You are asking them to learn new material, which should be done in the classroom with you—not at home alone.
- **Communicate with parents.** Explain to parents how they can act as a resource during homework time—without doing the work *for* their children. Encourage parents to contact you if they have questions about how to help their children with homework.

Source: Robyn R. Jackson, *Never Work Harder Than Your Students & Other Principles of Great Teaching*, ISBN: 978-1-4166-0757-1 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, www.ascd.org/books).

Resources



There’s an old saying: “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you always got.” Sometimes, teachers and parents just keep doing the same things with children who struggle in math. Helene J. Sherman’s *Teaching Learners Who Struggle with Mathematics* offers new ways to focus on how children learn best. (ISBN: 9780-1361-3577-7, Merrill, www.pearsonhighered.com.)



In an era of budget cuts, school arts programs are often the first to go. The National Arts and Education Network, together with the Kennedy Center, has developed standards-based teaching materials to integrate the arts into many disciplines on their ArtsEdge website (<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org>). Teach adjectives by having students make monsters. Use a baseball diamond to teach patterns. Learn about animal habitats through song and dance.



One book cannot answer every professional question you have. But Robert J. Marzano’s *The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction* is a great place to start. Ask your librarian to get this resource on effective teaching. (ISBN: 978-1-4166-0571-3, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, www.ascd.org.)

Capturing Students’ Attention

Keep your students engaged with humor



“Laughter is the best medicine,” goes the old saying. Well, it’s not a bad teacher, either. Research shows that not only do students enjoy and appreciate good-natured humor from their teachers, but it also makes them more likely to tune in and participate—and less likely to start trouble.

No one expects you to become a comedian and keep your students rolling in the aisles. But try to inject a smile or two where you can. Here are some guidelines:

- **Look for ways to incorporate** humor into subject matter. For example, choose a humorous book for your next read-aloud.
- **Remember that humor** does not have to be verbal. Arching your eyebrow at students, fixing them

with a quizzical look as a smile plays about your mouth, or shaking your head and shrugging your shoulders with an exaggerated sigh can work, too.

- **Allow students to participate.** Provide opportunities for students to share jokes or real-life funny stories with the class. (Have them share with you privately first to be sure they are appropriate.)
- **Consider your audience.** The maturity of your class is a huge factor in the kind of humor you can use, and how much. And of course, never allow sarcastic or hurtful humor in your classroom.

Source: Lonnie Moore, *The High-Trust Classroom: Raising Achievement from the Inside Out*, ISBN: 978-1-59667-104-1 (Franklin Covey, www.franklincovey.com).

Share an Idea

Do you have an idea to improve student learning that should be in this newsletter?

Send your ideas to **Better Teaching**, Editorial Dept., P.O. Box 397, Fairfax Station, VA 22039, fax to 1-800-216-3667 or go to www.teacher-institute.com/ideas/.

Full credit will be given with each article published. Materials sent cannot be returned.

Focus : Setting Expectations

Setting Goals

Set progressive expectations



Meeting expectations depends a lot on timing. From the beginning, set the bar high. But do not expect students to reach it right away. Many will need to pass through several interim steps before they meet your expectations. Just know that they *can* reach them.

Here are points to consider:

- **Start with success.** Give students a goal you know they're ready for right now. That doesn't mean easy, but it does mean reachable. Reaching this first goal gives students a sense of accomplishment and makes them hungry for more.
- **Continue to challenge.** Praise and encourage your students each time they meet a goal, but then raise the level of challenge. For example, if your students have learned that "how many more than" indicates they should subtract, offer some word problems that will require them both to apply this correctly and to use correct computation.
- **Differentiate.** A high expectation for one student may not be high for another. Set your expectations and goals accordingly.

Source: Elizabeth Breaux, *How the Best Teachers Avoid the 20 Most Common Teaching Mistakes*, ISBN: 978-1-596671096 (Eye on Education, www.eyoneducation.com).

Providing Encouragement

Encourage students to keep striving



Sometimes students who are struggling just give up. For them to meet high expectations, they need to know someone believes they can learn. Here are a few phrases that can help you communicate those messages:

- **"Of course you haven't learned that yet.** That's why you're here in second grade. This is something you aren't expected to learn until you're in second grade."
- **"It's my job to help you learn this.** So let's get started."
- **"I know this is not easy.** Let's work together. I'm sure if we put our heads together, we'll find a way to help you remember _____."
- **"Let's look back** at (something the student did earlier in the year). See how much you've learned! You can learn this, too."

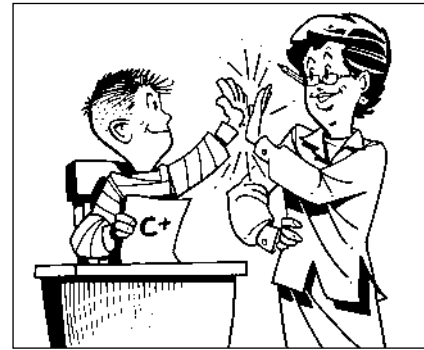


Illustration by Bob George

- **"We all have some things** we do better than others. You are very good at (list one or two strengths). But this is something that isn't quite as easy for you. That doesn't mean you won't learn it. But we'll both have to work a little harder."

Source: Deborah Diffily and Charlotte Sassman, *Positive Teacher Talk for Better Classroom Management: Grades K-2*, ISBN: 9780-4396-9496-4 (Scholastic, www.scholastic.com).

Effective Expectations

To get the best from students, give your BEST



If you want students to meet your expectations, you'll have to back your expectations with actions. One education expert calls this giving students your BEST:

B Belief. There is little point to setting expectations if you don't genuinely believe your students can hit the mark. And you must show students that you believe in them. For example: Do not avoid calling on, or rush in to answer for, a particular student. Instead, guide the student to an answer by drawing on prior knowledge.

E Encouragement. Give encouragement through constructive feedback. Notice effort, remark on improvements, give earned praise and suggestions for a better result the next time.

S Support. Many students cannot meet expectations on their own. Make sure they can access all resources available to them.

T Time. Students need your time to ask and answer questions, to receive help—and sometimes time outside school hours, too.

Source: Barbara R. Blackburn, *Rigor is NOT a Four-Letter Word*, ISBN: 978-1-59667-092-1 (Eye on Education, www.eyoneducation.com).