

# Better Teaching<sup>®</sup>

Classroom Ideas to Improve Student Achievement

Secondary  
EDITION

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Bringing Lessons to Life

## Imagine & research 'A Day in the Life'



When asked what they want to be when they grow up, young kids mostly say they want to grow up to be firefighters, cowboys or princesses. By middle school, when they should be selecting classes that will help them prepare for a future career, many have not refined their job aspirations that much.

Here's an activity that can help your students think about a potential career in a rigorous and systematic way. It will also give them practice in research and advanced-level writing skills.

Have students:

### 1. Research their family histories.

What kind of work have family members done in the last two or three generations? How did they prepare for those careers? Why did they choose those careers? Was there another career they might have chosen, but didn't pursue? Why not?

### 2. Think about careers that they might be interested in pursuing.

What do they know about these careers? Can they contact someone who currently holds that job?

3. **Continue their research.** Have them look for and read newspaper articles, novels or short stories that describe the life of a person in that profession.
4. **Research the requirements** for entering the field.
5. **Create a time line** for what it would take—and how long—to prepare for such a career.
6. **Include all the information** they have gathered in a written first-person narrative about the profession they have chosen. What do they think daily life will be like when they are in this career? Does this career reflect choices made—or not made—by members of their family?

Source: "Getting Students Ready for College-Preparatory Honors English," Southern Regional Education Board, ([www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)).

Teaching Character

## Keep bad language out of your classroom



Some students use language in the classroom that would make anyone blush. That kind of language coarsens everyone's experience. Here are some ways to get students to clean up their language while in your class:

- **Establish your expectations.** Ask students to make a list of places where they cannot use swear words. Then say, "Well, now you have one more—this class."
- **Talk about the impact** of language. Ask students what they might think of you if you used curse words in your class. What would a visitor think if he walked into a classroom where students were using bad language? Students may not be aware of how they present themselves when they swear. Help them realize that many people are offended by coarse language.
- **Create a class compact.** Students want to be treated with respect. Talk about how using inappropriate language does not show respect—for you or for other classmates. Ask students caught using curse words to restate what they just said using respectful replacement words.
- **Work with everyone on the staff.** The most powerful way to end bad language is to establish a school climate that says, "In this school, we use respectful language only."

Source: Tom Lickona and Matt Davidson, "Curbing Bad Language," *The Fourth and Fifth Rs*, Fall 2004, [www.cortland.edu/character/newsletters/2004-fall-green.pdf](http://www.cortland.edu/character/newsletters/2004-fall-green.pdf).

## Building Math Skills

### Use sports pictures to measure angles



Find a picture of a baseball hitter in mid-swing.

Your students can use that picture to learn about angles.

Have students look closely at the picture. What angles can they see? Here are some possibilities:

- **The angle between** the bat and the batter's arm.
- **The angle at which** the batter's arm is bent.
- **The angle between** the batter's legs.

Your students should be able to find several other angles in the picture. Have students trace and extend the two sides of each of the angles they identify.

Give students protractors and have them measure each of the angles. Then label the angles A, B, C and so on, in order of size from smallest to largest. Have them label the angles—right, acute, obtuse or straight.

Look for other pictures that illustrate angles. Let students estimate the angles in these pictures. Then use a protractor to check their accuracy.

**Source:** Pearl G. Solomon, *The Math We Need to Know and Do in Grades 6–9*, ISBN: 9781-4129-1725-4 (Corwin Press, a SAGE Publications Company, www.corwinpress.com).

Technology: Part One of a Three-Part Series

## Classroom blogs help develop learning skills



Using classroom blogs can be a great way for teachers to promote student learning.

Here are four different kinds of classroom blogs:

1. **Class News Blog.** What went on in sixth period today? When is the next group project due? Questions like that can be easily answered by a classroom blog. Students can write up the news reports and see their writing in “print.” A daily blog can also be a great way to post homework assignments—useful for parents as well as absent students.
2. **Mirror Blog.** Blogs allow students to reflect their thinking. While reading a chapter from a history textbook, a student could highlight two or three key ideas. Another student could link a current news story with a historical event. Teachers can also use this kind of blog to post their own thoughts and reflections.

3. **Showcase Blog.** Students do great work in your class, but they don't have many opportunities to show off. Technology allows teachers to now post everything from photographs of student art projects to videos of class discussions. (Be sure to have parents sign photo-release forms.) And also, protect students' privacy by using first names only.
4. **Literature Response Blog.** Just as students are invited to write responses to a piece of fiction in a journal, they can also use an electronic format. They can share thoughts on reading done outside the classroom. Or students can collaborate on an entry describing their reactions to a novel, poem or short story.

**Source:** Lisa Zawilinski, “HOT Blogging: A Framework for Blogging to Promote Higher Order Thinking,” *The Reading Teacher*, May 2009 (International Reading Association, www.reading.org).

## English Language Learners

### Who can help when no one speaks English?



It's an increasingly common problem in schools with rapidly growing populations of English Language Learners (ELLs): No one at home speaks English. So when a student encounters a problem, there is no one to ask for help.

If you notice an ELL who repeatedly has problems completing homework, consider the following ways to help:

- **Encourage the student to begin** homework before leaving school. That way, the student can ask you questions before heading home.
- **Consider allowing the student** to contact you at home. Give the

student your phone number or email address—and an appropriate time to contact you.

- **Divide your class into pairs** of homework buddies. These buddies can contact each other if either one needs clarification or runs into a problem.
- **Schedule a regular after-school** homework catch-up time. Or offer to meet with students during lunch period or before school so they can get the extra help they need.

**Source:** Eileen N. Whelan Ariza, *Not for ESOL Teachers*, ISBN: 9780-1371-5455-5 (Allyn & Bacon, an imprint of Pearson Education, www.pearsonhighered.com).

# Better Teaching<sup>®</sup>

## Classroom Ideas to Improve Student Achievement

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## Discipline

## Increase compliance with five discipline keys



Sometimes, you wonder if students can hear you.

You say the same thing over and over to correct behavior—but the behavior continues.

Here are five research-based keys that can help increase students' compliance with your requests:

1. **Stand close to the student** when you make a request. If you are across the room when you tell a student to do something, there is little likelihood that the student will comply.
2. **Keep your emotions in check.** Losing your temper may work once—but won't be effective over time. Create a classroom in which students comply because you have asked them to, not because you had a meltdown.
3. Use **"start" commands** rather than "stop" commands. A "stop" command tells students what *not* to do. "Stop talking to Miranda." (The student may, in fact, stop talking to Miranda—and start talking to Josh.) A "start" command tells a student to begin a desired behavior. "Please work the problem on the board."
4. **Give no more than two** directions at a time. If you give students a list of directions all at once, some of them are going to get lost.
5. Use **direct statements**, not questions. Replace "Could you get to work?" with "Please complete numbers 1 through 10."

**Source:** Nancy Mather, *Learning Disabilities and Challenging Behaviors: A Guide to Intervention and Classroom Management*, ISBN: 9781-5576-6935-3 (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., [www.brookespublishing.com](http://www.brookespublishing.com)).

## Resources



Today, "literacy" involves much more than just decoding words. Students also need to learn how to find meaning in a wide variety of graphic images. In *Reading Photographs to Write with Meaning and Purpose, Grades 4–12*, students learn how to think critically and analyze photographs. They use their discoveries to write everything from memoirs to narratives. Author Leigh Van Horn includes activities for students at all ability levels. (ISBN: 9780-8720-7612-9, International Reading Association, [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org).)



If you're planning student-led conferences, look at the guide developed in Jefferson County, Kentucky ([www.prichardcommittee.org/Portals/1059/Publications/student-led\\_conferences.pdf](http://www.prichardcommittee.org/Portals/1059/Publications/student-led_conferences.pdf)). This booklet provides suggested questions for parents and students, as well as a series of checklists to make it easy to have a productive conference.



Want to know what's on the front page of today's newspaper? In Istanbul? Each day, the Newseum's website ([www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/default.asp?page=1](http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/default.asp?page=1)) displays hundreds of front pages from newspapers around the world. Not all articles may be suitable for students, but for a quick way to see what leads the news around the world, this is an invaluable resource.

## 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](http://www.teacher-institute.com/ideas).

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

## Working Together

## Establish effective procedures for co-teaching



When special needs students are enrolled in a general education class, there may also be a co-teacher, such as a special education or Title I instructor, assigned. With careful planning and open communication, this arrangement can lead to better outcomes for all students. Here are some suggestions:

- **Avoid labels.** One of the ways co-teaching works best is by making it easier to see students as students, not as labels. Remember: They're *all* your students.
  - **Be clear about the rules.** Agree on a set of appropriate behaviors and consequences.
  - **Teach to your strengths.** Each teacher has specific strengths. Put them to use for students.
- **Use co-teaching to accelerate and remediate.** While some students are working to master a skill, a co-teacher can help another group with a more challenging assignment.
  - **Communicate.** Plan together. Reflect on what's working. Talk honestly about how to make improvements.
  - **Protect your co-teaching arrangement.** In some schools, co-teachers get pulled away to substitute, attend IEP meetings and so on. Co-teaching can only work if you're both committed in the classroom.

**Source:** Wendy W. Murawski and Lisa Dieker, "50 Ways to Keep Your Co-Teacher," *Teaching Exceptional Children*, March/April 2008 (Council for Exceptional Children, [www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)).

## Focus : Differentiated Instruction

Differentiating Learning

### Challenge with extension activities



One of the benefits of differentiated learning is that every student

has an opportunity to work on challenging activities. Ideally, the activities will also draw on students' personal intelligences.

Here are sample extension activities to adapt for any class:

- **Create a commemorative stamp** illustrating an important character, conflict or scene from a book.
- **Map a character's journey.** This may be a literal journey, but could also represent an emotional journey that the character makes.
- **Design front and back covers** of a CD, based on the book. The front cover should include an illustration that represents the book. The back cover could include notes and song titles that might represent the book.
- **Base a board game** on the theme, characters, plot or setting of a book. The game must be something students can actually play in class. Knowledge of the book is required to be successful.
- **Write an A-B-C book.** Students use each letter of the alphabet to represent some aspect of the book.

**Source:** Glenda Beamon Crawford, *Differentiation for the Adolescent Learner: Accommodating Brain Development, Language, Literacy, and Special Needs*, ISBN: 9781-4129-4053-5 (Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com).

Building Reading Skills

### Anticipation guides help with reading



An anticipation guide can help students predict the content of a reading assignment before they read it. Here's how it can help all students be successful:

Read through an assignment you plan to give to your students. Develop a series of statements that students can respond to before reading the assignment. These should be opinion statements ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

For students about to read *Hamlet*, statements might include:

- **Family members** should always stick up for one another.
- **"Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely."**
- **It is important to take a stand** against injustice, even if the personal cost is high.

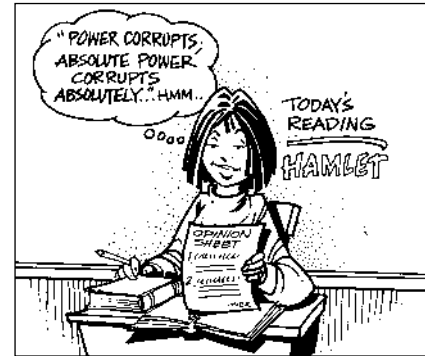


Illustration by Bob George

After students have completed the reading, ask them to respond a second time. They may find that their opinions have changed—or they may find that the reading reinforced what they already thought.

**Source:** Suzanne F. Peregoy, *Reading, Writing and Learning in ESL: A Resource Book for K-12 Educators*, ISBN: 0-205-41034-0 (Pearson Education, www.pearsoned.com).

Learning Centers

### Learning centers—not just for elementary



Elementary classrooms are filled with learning centers. But learning centers can also help middle and high school students work on projects that match their ability levels, interests and learning styles.

Here are some tips:

- **Decide on learning goals.** Think about different ways students can master that content.
- **Identify specific learning tasks** that can go in a learning center. Students might listen to a podcast, work on a computer program or read a journal article.
- **Gather the resources** you will need. Write a clear task assignment for each learning center. Students should be able to work on the assignment without having to ask, "What do I do next?"
- **Be sure every learning center** requires students to produce a product that you can evaluate. That keeps the focus on the "learning" part of the center!
- **Give students an orientation** to the center. Show them what they are expected to turn in when they visit a center—and how to turn in their work.

**Source:** Sheryn Northey, *Handbook on Differentiated Instruction for Middle and High Schools*, ISBN:1-930-55693-4 (Eye on Education, www.eyeoneducation.com).