

Better Teaching[®]

Tips & Techniques to Improve Student Achievement

Secondary
EDITION


Northeast USD 246
Making Success Our Business



Getty Images

Bringing Lessons to Life

Students teach 'basic skills' to parents

 Anyone who has ever tried to send a text message, find a blog or use TiVo[®] to record a TV program, knows that students are the absolute experts on today's technology. Here's a fun lesson plan for a technology class that will get students to teach their parents some of the new "basic skills." Have students:

1. **Create a two-column chart** with one column labeled "Me" and the other "My Parent/Guardian."
2. **Brainstorm about ways students** use technology—to communicate, for recreation, for research, to listen to music.
3. **Identify how their parents** use technology ("omg my mom uses her cell phone to *call* people") and how proficient they are.

Divide students into small groups and have each group:

1. **Decide on a relevant technology** that they feel their parents or guardians need to learn more about.

2. **Write a course outline** designed to teach the adults about the technology they've selected. Lessons could be created on "How to TiVo," "How to text-message," "How to start a blog" or "How to upload pictures from the camera to the computer."
3. **Give their course a title.** They should write a course purpose and a course overview. Include materials required and the length of time it will take to teach the course.
4. **Identify prerequisites** or skills necessary to take the course.
5. **Create visual aids** or other curriculum materials.

For homework, assign students to actually teach the lessons they created to their parents or guardians. Later, have them evaluate the success of their curriculum designs.

Source: Michelle Sale & Yasmin Chin Eisenhauer, "Teach Your Parents Well: Educating Adults to Help Bridge the Digital Divide," *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20070608friday.html.

Ideas to Share

Help every student write an A paper



It's important for students to be writing, but a pile of ungraded essays can ruin your plans for Sunday afternoon.

English teacher, Denise Morton of Mountain View High School in El Monte, California, suggests assigning a whole-class essay at the completion of a unit.

Here's how it works:

1. **The entire class works together** to write the introductory paragraph. Morton guides them to make sure they have a valid thesis.
2. **The class breaks into six groups.** Each group writes a paragraph on an assigned topic derived from the thesis. Morton also requires students to include at least two quotations to support their topics.
3. **Each group uses markers** to write its paragraph on a large page of newsprint.
4. **The paragraphs are then posted** in order on the walls of the classroom.
5. **Students edit the paragraphs** as a class.
6. **Each student makes a final copy.** Morton says she then has "thirty-five copies of a well-written essay for their portfolios, and I only have to grade it once." Her students have fun working together, finding quotes, correcting grammar and writing sentences.

It's a lifesaver for Morton and it's also a great way to engage students of all abilities in the writing process.

Contact: Denise Morton, Mountain View High School, 2900 Parkway Drive, El Monte, CA 91732, 626-258-4660.

IN THIS ISSUE: Monitor the pace of your teaching, page 2 • What is RTI and how will it help students? page 3 • Use RAP for reading comprehension, page 4

Classroom Management

Monitor the pace of your teaching



Have you ever been halfway through a lesson and noticed that you had “lost” your students? Perhaps you need to adjust your pace.

To keep students engaged:

- **Check your “teaching tempo.”** If possible, videotape yourself teaching a class. Then ask yourself, “Did I talk too fast?” “Did I repeat too often?” “Was my voice animated?” “Would I have been bored?”
- **Watch for nonverbal cues** that indicate students are distracted.
- **Break up longer activities.** Next time you show a film, stop at a key point and start a discussion.
- **Give students a break** if the lesson is more than 30 minutes.
- **Vary the type of instruction.** Move from a 20-minute lecture to 15 minutes of small-group discussions to 10 minutes of individual work.
- **Don’t overwhelm students** with paperwork. Expect students to complete worksheets, but not for an entire period.

Source: Vernon F. Jones and Louise S. Jones, *Comprehensive Classroom Management: Creating Communities of Support and Solving Problems*, ISBN: 0-205-31850-9 (Allyn and Bacon, 1-800-666-9433, www.ablongman.com).

Discipline: Part Three of a Three-Part Series

Case studies in discipline: Missy the Misfit



With her extensive body piercings, tattoos and pink hair, Missy made a grand entrance into class again—ready to provoke a comment.

Of course, she gets what she wants. All eyes turn to her. A student makes a comment—to generalized laughter.

Every school has its own groups of misfits. They are the kids who think they are not pretty enough to be “popular,” not smart enough to be “brains,” not athletic enough to be “jocks.” Teens have a high need to belong and these kids often band together in a group whose main link is a desire *not* to fit in.

Here are some ways you can deal with the misfits in your class:

- **Pick your battles.** Of course you have to enforce the school rules. But within the realm of common sense, let students feel they are able to express individuality in your class.

- **Get to know Missy** and her friends. As you get to know these students, help them develop something positive—an interest in band, a talent for art or plans for the future. Help them focus their talents in an area where they can shine.
- **Don’t allow put-downs.** Make sure all your students know that you appreciate each of them as individuals and that you will not allow anyone to say mean things to or about others.

Get to know all your students as individuals. It is when misfits feel they will never fit in anywhere that they may turn to negative behaviors—or even violence.

Source: Vickie Gill, *The Ten Students You’ll Meet in Your Classroom*, ISBN: 1-4129-4911-4 (Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Setting High Expectations

Do you set high expectations for yourself?



Research says that one factor contributing to teachers’ low expectations for their students is teachers’ low expectations for themselves. When teachers think they cannot raise their students to the levels of achievement expected, they settle for goals for themselves.

For example, a math teacher coping with unruly students settles for a goal for herself—maintaining classroom control, instead of a goal for her students—mastering skills.

As Jerry D. Bamberg writes, “In practice, this means that despite rhetoric implying a commitment to student achievement, some teachers emphasize ‘survival and convenience’ goals, passing time in ways that are as

pleasant as possible for themselves and their students.”

When teachers focus on control, student learning may actually decline. Why? Because students no longer feel compelled to take responsibility for their own learning. A key motivator is missing—the students’ belief that they can contribute to their own academic success.

So, when you’re setting goals, remember to set high expectations for yourself first. If you only work for a well-ordered classroom, you’ll be overlooking the untapped potential in your students—and yourself!

Source: Jerry D. Bamberg, “NCREL Monograph: Raising Expectations to Improve Student Learning,” North Central Regional Educational Library, www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le0bam.htm.

The Struggling Student

What is RTI and how will it help students?



Response to Intervention (RTI) has been getting a lot of attention. Just exactly what is RTI? It's a way of diagnosing learning disabilities in students with academic delays. The diagnosis consists of one or more monitored interventions. If the student doesn't improve, the student is identified as failing to "respond to intervention" and can be identified as Learning Disabled according to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.

How will RTI help students?

- **Quicker diagnosis** leads to earlier intervention.
- **Instruction is based** on specific strategies to help the student.

Here's how RTI would work in your classroom:

- **Tier 1:** All students receive instruction in a research-based core curriculum. Data is collected

to identify students who meet achievement benchmarks.

- **Tier 2:** Students who do not meet the Tier 1 benchmarks are provided additional instruction.
- **Tier 3:** Students who do not respond to the Tier 2 instruction receive more intensive intervention. Tier 3 students who do not respond to intervention are eligible for special education services.

With the introduction of RTI, it is no longer necessary to label students with a specific disability before additional instruction can be provided.

Schools using RTI are finding reduced numbers of students placed in special education with corresponding savings to their district budgets.

Source: Rachel Brown-Chidsey, "No More 'Waiting to Fail,'" *Educational Leadership*, October 2007 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1-800-933-2723, www.ascd.org).

Resources



Celebrate Albert Einstein's birthday on March 14th.

Listen to explanations of his famous equation, $E = mc^2$, by 10 top physicists on "Einstein's Big Idea" at www.pbs.org/wgbh/now/einstein. You'll find "The Theory Behind the Equation" which explores Einstein's "eureka moment." It includes quotes, interactive pages on the speed of light, time travel and converting mass to energy.



Looking for extra funds for that special class project or for a continuing education program? Check out grants on the Teachers Count website at www.teacherscount.org/teacher/grants.shtml. Classroom grants offer support for art, literature, math, music and science. Continuing education grants provide opportunities for professional development in content areas and through travel. Each listing gives the amount of the grant, the deadline and a link to the funder.



"Why do we need to know that?" It's a question teachers hear all the time. *Teaching Money Applications to Make Mathematics Meaningful* provides plenty of answers. Authors Elizabeth Marquez and Paul Westbrook use authentic material from daily life. (Is it better to buy or lease a car? What are money market accounts?) All activities are tied to NCTM math standards. (ISBN: 978-1-4129-4139-6, Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com.)

Helping Students Get Organized

Help ADD/ADHD students get organized



Teens with ADD or ADHD are disorganized. They not only forget their homework—they are likely to forget their backpacks with the homework in them! Their desks are messy; their notebooks are worse.

To make sure these students stay on track, help them:

- **Attend class with necessary supplies.** Ask parents to donate extra sets of pens, pencils and paper that you can keep in your classroom. Ask parents to keep an extra supply of these items at home, as well.
- **Turn in their homework.** Get a two-pocket folder for your class. One side holds work to go home.

The other side holds work to return to school. Set up a regular routine for collecting homework. If students turn in work in the *same way every day*, it is more likely to be turned in.

- **Keep track of their assignments.** A homework hotline or a class website can be an invaluable aid. Or assign student buddies to call for assignments.
- **Keep backpacks** from becoming black holes. Ask parents to schedule time to clean out the backpacks regularly.

Source: Chris A. Ziegler Dendy, *Teaching Teens with ADD and ADHD: A Quick Reference Guide for Teachers and Parents*, ISBN: 1-89062-720-8 (Woodbine House, 1-800-843-7323, www.woodbinehouse.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](mailto:BetterTeaching@teacher-institute.com), 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 Differentiated Instruction

Project-Based Learning

Use checkpoints for large projects



Teachers often use project-based learning to differentiate instruction. Requirements can be modified for students with disabilities or other learning difficulties.

But it's important to build in frequent checkpoints. Otherwise, a student may work hard—only to miss the mark.

Suppose you are having students produce an illustrated report. This is to be a major project, counting for a sizable portion of their grades for this marking period. Here's how you might check in with students:

- **Topic selection.** Students write a short description of what they want to research. They meet with you to discuss ideas and focus topics.
- **First draft.** Use a checklist: Is the report organized? Do ideas flow? Does the student use correct grammar?
- **Storyboard of illustrations.** Students use a rubric to see that the illustrations meet requirements (illustrating key points or using variety.)

By the time the project is complete, each student's work should meet standards. In addition, frequent contact can reduce the chance that a student will plagiarize the work.

Source: Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, *Checking for Understanding: Formative Assessment Techniques for Your Classroom*, ISBN: 978-1-4166-0569-0 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1-800-933-2723, www.ascd.org).

Learning Strategies

Use RAP for reading comprehension



Teaching specific learning strategies to students with disabilities is one way to help them succeed. If reading comprehension is a challenge, teach them the following RAP method:

- R • Read** the paragraph.
- A • Ask** questions about the content.
- P • Paraphrase** the content.

To help students put this strategy into action, create a poster that reminds them of each step. Introduce the three steps. Then model the strategy by reading a paragraph with the students, formulating your own questions and paraphrasing the content.

Create a worksheet for students to complete as they read an assignment. Include spaces for them to identify the main idea and supporting details in each paragraph.

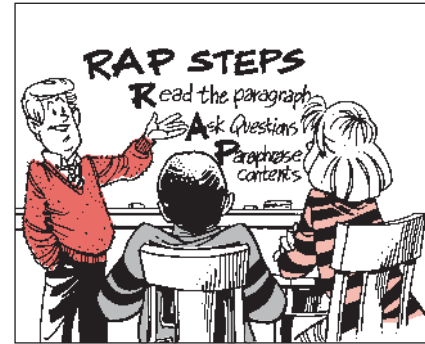


Illustration by Bob George

Check how the strategy is working after a day or two. When students have practiced for several days, they will be able to draw on the strategy for other reading assignments.

Source: William N. Bender, *Differentiating Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities: Best Teaching Practices for General and Special Educators*, ISBN: 0-76194-517-2 (Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Classroom Management

Set up classroom to support all students



You strive to provide instruction that meets the needs of all your students. But do you set up your classroom to support differentiated instruction, too?

Consider the following tools to help learners with different needs:

- **Desks.** Arrange your room so you can quickly move desks from a lecture setup to small discussion circles. Set one desk aside in a "quiet zone" for students who are easily distracted.
- **Centers.** This tried-and-true elementary concept may also work for students in a secondary classroom.

- **Textbooks.** Build a collection with different reading levels.
- **Computers.** Bookmark appropriate websites in languages other than English. Once students understand lessons in their own languages, they can go on to gain understanding in English.
- **DVD and CD players.** Visual and auditory learners who may struggle with information in print may gain understanding when they can use their seeing and hearing senses.

Source: Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe, *Integrating Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design: Connecting Content and Kids*, ISBN: 1-4166-0284-4 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1-800-933-2723, www.ascd.org).