

Better Teaching[®]

Classroom Ideas to Improve Student Achievement

Secondary
EDITION

Wilderness Trail Educational Cooperative



Bringing Lessons to Life

Create a pizza for the world market



Pizza is the favorite food of America's youth. What would it take to market this favorite food in other parts of the globe? Here's a fun activity that combines nutrition education, business and technology skills—all as part of a celebration of National Nutrition Month:

1. **Divide students into groups** of three or four. Tell them their task is to create a new pizza that will be popular in another part of the world.
2. **Divide up the main parts** of a typical pizza—dough, sauce, cheese and toppings. Make each student responsible for one of the elements.
3. **Have each group select a country** and create a unique pizza.
4. **Have students do some research.** What might be some unusual pizza combinations? (Think about a Japanese pizza with squid ink and seaweed. Hawaiian pizzas are often topped with fresh fruit.)

5. **Ask students to create spread sheets** outlining the ingredients they want to include in their pizzas.
6. **Have students specify** why they have chosen particular ingredients.
7. **Make sure the ingredients** go together. If they are creating a kosher pizza, for example, they should be sure they are following appropriate dietary rules.

Once students have their ingredients, have them brainstorm their target customers. Then have them create a marketing plan for their pizza.

- Have each group:
- **Create a global pizza company.**
 - **Select a name for the company.**
 - **Devise a marketing plan** on how to sell the pizza in the United States and also internationally.
 - **Present their pizza plans** to the rest of the class.

Source: "World Pizza," Microsoft Education, www.microsoft.com/education/worldpizza.mspx.

Building Responsibility

Expect responsibility from your students



Responsible students are ready to learn from the moment your class begins.

Establishing this expectation can maximize achievement for every student. And when you communicate your expectations using a positive approach, rather than focusing on what you will punish, you'll be off to a good start.

The Discipline Without Stress approach developed by Dr. Marvin Marshall has helped many teachers spend more time on teaching and less time on reprimanding students. He suggests the following strategies:

- **Speak positively.** Say, "When you take your seats, we can begin our discussion of the Bill of Rights," instead of "If you don't take your seats right away, you will be serving detention."
- **Give choices.** "You may work independently on the questions or work quietly with a partner."
- **Promote reflection.** Ask rather than tell. For example, ask, "What could you do to make sure you remember to bring your homework to class every day?" "What steps will you take to solve this problem?"

Teachers who follow this responsibility system try to influence student behavior rather than just react to it. They report that this approach not only improves student responsibility, but also reduces their personal stress.

Source: Dr. Marvin Marshall and Kerry Weisner, "Using a Discipline System to Promote Learning," *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 2004 (Kappa Delta Pi, 1-800-284-3167, www.kdp.org).

Building Writing Skills

Hook students with a 'word splash'



Tired of the same old chalk and talk lesson format? Try a “word splash” to liven up your class.

Before the lesson:

1. **Identify key words** or phrases connected to the lesson.
2. **Write each word** or phrase on a file card.
3. **Put all the cards** in a container.
4. **Spill the cards** “accidentally.”
5. **Ask students to gather up** the cards and help you organize them for the lesson.
6. **Have students arrange** the cards in a way that shows their connections to each other. (Your students’ logic may produce some crazy ideas, but they will be engaged.)

7. **Conduct your lesson.**

Following the lesson:

1. **Ask students to organize** the cards in logical order again, using new insights.
2. **Ask them to use the words** or phrases to summarize what they have learned that day.
3. **Have them use all** their “splash words” to write a paragraph summarizing the lesson.

Source: Rick Wormeli, *Summarization in Any Subject*, ISBN: 1-4166-0019-1 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1-800-933-2723, www.ascd.org).

Response to Intervention: Part One of a Three-Part Series

RTI—what is it and how can it help my students?



Teachers have always known that it doesn’t make sense to allow students to fail if early action can address the problem. That, in a nutshell, is the philosophy behind response to intervention (RTI).

Why allow struggling students to fail repeatedly before referring them for special education services? And what if the student’s problems are caused not by a learning disability, but by one of the many other factors that can impede learning—language barriers, poverty, family dysfunction?

RTI offers educators a way to think about providing support to all the students who need it.

Here are three levels of support RTI can provide to students:

- **Tier 1.** Think of Tier 1 as the things you already do in your classroom every day. You design lessons using the best instructional strategies you know. You assess students to see how well they are mastering content. You provide support to

students who need extra help.

- **Tier 2.** There are some students who won’t be successful with the instruction you provide to the entire class. They need extra support. You might provide small-group instruction for students who need additional time to master challenging material. It’s important to assess students frequently to measure their progress.
- **Tier 3.** Even with in-class support, some students will continue to struggle. These students may need special education services. The data from your efforts in Tier 1 and Tier 2 will be helpful as experts evaluate these students.

Involve parents during the entire RTI process. Home-school efforts can help more students be successful.

Source: Andrea Canter, Mary Beth Klotz and Katherine Cowan, “Response to Intervention: The Future for Secondary Schools,” *Principal*, February 2008 (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1-800-386-2377, www.naesp.org).

Connecting With Students

How do you know if your students ‘got it’?



You just presented a great lesson to your class—or at least you thought it was a great lesson. But it’s only great if your students learned the material being presented and can apply it in an appropriate manner. So how do you know if they “got it”?

Try the following strategies:

- **“I didn’t get it!”** At the end of class give students one or two minutes to write a response to this question: What concept or procedure was not completely clear to you in class today? Or you can be more specific and ask: What was not clear to you in our discussion of (topic) today?

- **“Wow!”** Ask students to write a short response to this question: What surprised you in our lesson today? Why? Or have students complete the following sentence: “I never knew that”
- **“The Fish Bowl.”** Have each student write one question about the lesson on a slip of paper. Put all the questions in a bowl. Then draw out questions and answer them. Or ask students in the class to answer them.

Source: Donald R. Paulson and Jennifer L. Faust, “Active Learning for the College Classroom: Techniques of Active Learning,” California State University, Los Angeles, www.calstatela.edu/dept/chem/chem2/Active.

Getting Organized

Create a system for organizing lesson plans



As a secondary teacher, you prepare several lesson plans for each day. It's a lot of work! Having an effective system for storing your lesson plans will make teaching the same class much less time consuming next year. Here's a way to organize your lesson plans.

Get a binder. Then:

- **Store each lesson** in the binder in its own sheet protector. Write notes about each lesson soon after the class. Include questions raised by students, items to delete and other ways to improve the lesson.
- **Store a copy of each test**, quiz or handout you used for the lesson.
- **Shred duplicate copies** of tests and quizzes. It's unlikely you will use that version again.

Use computer files. Be sure to:

- **Save all files** in a common place. Avoid saving files for the same class on different computers.
- **Give each file a name** that will allow you to link it to a lesson in your binder.
- **Back up all your files.**

Use storage boxes. Use these for:

- **Bulletin board items.**
- **Teaching tools** that are too large or cumbersome to fit in a binder, or can't be stored on a computer.

Be sure to take photos of these items to store in your binder with corresponding lesson plans.

Source: Thadra Petkus, "Organize Classroom at End of Year," Suite101.com, http://classroom-organization.suite101.com/article.cfm/teachers_organize_their_classroom.

Resources



You'd *like* to use more technology in the classroom, but you're pressed for time and your district doesn't have the funds to buy new software. *Microsoft Office to Enhance Student Learning* shows you how to use software already on your computer. You'll find lesson plans that incorporate technology into math, science, social studies and language arts. (ISBN: 9781-4129-4122-8, Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).



Looking for funding for your special project? Check out NEA Foundation's website at www.neafoundation.org/grants.htm. Learning & Leadership Grants award \$1000 for individuals seeking professional growth. Student Achievement Grants provide \$5000 for students engaged in critical thinking and problem solving. The site includes information on award recipients, grant writing tips and more.



Everyone wants students to graduate on time. But some students invariably fall behind and become potential dropouts. A compilation of articles about credit recovery programs and virtual learning designed to help students get back on track is posted by eSchool News at www.eschoolnews.com/resources/online-learning-for-high-school-success.

Mathematics

Turn March Madness into math madness



This is the month that the entire nation goes mad for basketball. Capitalize on your students' interest by engaging in some fun math activities based on the NCAA Basketball Tournament.

For any game during the tournament, have students:

- **Compare the winning team's** statistics with the losing team's statistics. They can calculate and compare free throw shooting percentages, field goal percentages and three-point shot percentages, as well as the offensive and defensive averages. Ask students to present their findings in an interesting visual way. They can use charts, graphs or tables.
- **Calculate the average score**, defensive points allowed, and the greatest point spread between the

offensive average and the defensive average. Present this information for each team that advances, their favorite teams, or the teams that make it into the Final Four.

As the tournament progresses, assign students to:

- **Learn more about the teams** in the Sweet Sixteen.
- **Calculate each team's win-loss** record, offensive and defensive average for the first two rounds of the tournament, and the difference between the two.
- **Devise a method of seeding** the top 16 teams, based on information they've collected from their calculations.

Source: H. Gary Keplinger, Ph.D., "March Madness Math," Tennessee Sports Math Project, <http://volweb.utk.edu/school/tsm/act22.htm>.

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.

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Focus Discipline

Classroom Management

Use visual aids, increase compliance

Connecting With Students

Try using Two-by-Ten strategy



Most teachers are willing to try just about anything to turn around the behavior of their most challenging students.

Why not try the Two-by-Ten strategy? It will take you just two minutes a day—and it works!

Focus on your most difficult student. Spend two minutes each day, for 10 days in a row, talking with the student about anything he's interested in. If he likes sports, talk about the big game. If he likes computers, share your thoughts on interesting websites.

The only requirement is that the conversation remain appropriate for the school setting. In choosing both the topic and the language, remember—you're still the adult.

One research study found that the behavior of a difficult student improved after this two-by-ten strategy was used. In fact, teachers said their biggest "problem student" sometimes became one of their strongest allies in the class.

Sometimes, "problem students" are those who most need a personal connection with their teacher. In addition, teachers found that the behavior of other students in the class improved.

Source: Debbie Rickards, "One-Minute Inservice," www.worknotes.com/LA/Shreveport/DebbieRickards/TheTwo-by-TenStrategy.pdf.



"Class, get your math books out. I said," Many teachers feel like broken records—repeating the same instructions over and over.

Try using visual aids to help. Create a PowerPoint® slide that says "Math books out in 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1." Flash a slide of a desk with the math book out and open.

Visual aids won't work for all situations. But routine directions—turn in your homework, clean up your lab space, save your work to the flash drive—can easily be communicated with simple visuals.

Humor and variety are effective ways to reach middle and high school students. Create two or three eye-catching visuals. Change them

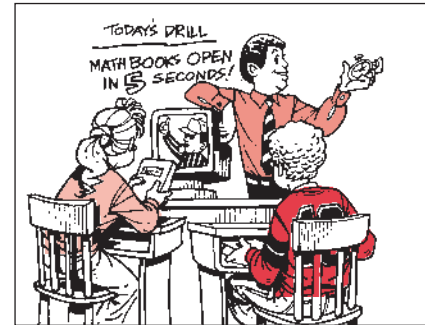


Illustration by Bob George

frequently so students continue to pay attention.

You'll save your voice, reserve oral instructions for the most important information—and you'll increase students' compliance!

Source: Rick Smith and Mary Lambert, "Assuming the Best," *Educational Leadership*, September 2008 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1-800-933-2723, www.ascd.org).

Discipline Strategies

Help students with a three-step approach



Your students are just getting started on their spring history projects when they're distracted by Meghan humming and tapping a pencil on her desk. "Here we go again," you think as you move to the back of the room to remove the pencil and try to get her to focus on the task at hand.

To keep the problem from escalating, try these three steps:

1. Empathy. Before you publicly reprimand Meghan, try to find out what's going on. Make a neutral observation. "I see you haven't started working yet, Meghan. What's going on?"

2. Define the problem. You see the problem as: Meghan is disrupting the class. But Meghan may express her concern as: I don't know what to do first.

3. Invitation. Ask Meghan to help find a solution that works for both of you. "I wonder if we can find a way to get you going. What do you think would help?"

Remember, you want to find a solution to the problem that is *realistic* and *mutually satisfying*.

Source: Ross W. Greene, Ph.D., *Lost at School: Why Our Kids with Behavioral Challenges Are Falling Through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them*, ISBN: 978-1-4165-7226-8 (Scribner, a division of Simon & Schuster, 1-800-456-6798, www.simonsays.com).