Strategies for Classroom Teaching Success

Adapted from "A Place for All"
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Lesson Planning / Teaching Strategies

Three **key factors** of *good lesson planning*: **experiential** (either create a common experience or tap into one known universally by the 'audience', **participatory** (requiring student involvement – skits, role playing, etc.) and **entertaining** (this does not mean funny necessarily, but rather to hold the attention of). Other important criteria for successful lesson plans include:

- *Learner-centered and interactive* – focuses on the audience being taught to and engages them to become involved
- *Innovative and Creative* - teaching something old in a new way or with a new twist (keeping it fresh for the audience)
- *Multisensory* – makes use of all of the senses
- *Incorporative of multiple learning styles* – visual (see it!), auditory (hear it!), kinesthetic (do it!) and/or tactile (touch it!); addresses different learning needs of the various students
- *Constructivist* – builds upon previous lessons
- *Prepared and organized* – ensures continuity in the lesson and makes relevant connections between points, lends itself to good pacing of material
- *Safe and welcoming* – be enthusiastic when addressing the students
- *Flexible* – ability to capitalize on teachable moments as they arise
- *Inclusive* – based upon the diversity of the classroom, is the content relevant to all?

Some traps to avoid in lesson planning,

Unprepared, Disorganized, Boring, Repetitive, Rigid, Uninspiring, Wrong pace, Unchallenging, Unimaginative, Teacher-Centered, Joyless, Disconnected, Passive and Over-structured, just to name a few!

Jesus as a model of teaching (Watch YouTube video):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADet__-36R8 – *Rich Young Ruler from Jesus of Nazareth*

This experience was a personal encounter; Jesus made direct eye contact with the young man and was concrete/specific in his teaching to him; Jesus allowed the rich young man to repeat the expectation and affirm his acknowledgment of it; Jesus unpacks the teaching and uses this opportunity as a teachable moment for his disciples.

Attention – Gaining it and Keeping it

How to gain their attention:

- Use **signals** that you establish, teach, practice and use in class – include a variety of verbal, visual, musical and/or kinesthetic signals when seeking attention. Practice it with the class and defend it. If not performed the way you intend, re-teach it. Some examples:

- Flickering lights
- Clap patterns – FBISD uses this
- Song lyrics which the children echo back
- Music box (close it when you have 100% attention)
- Come up with a chant that the children respond to (i.e. Teacher: I love Jesus, yes I do! Children: We love Jesus, yes we do!)

- **Wait for 100% attention** before you begin to speak (scan the classroom)
- Use other tools to get the attention of those not responding , i.e. narrate "almost there" and move closer to those not responding – continue to 'narrate' until you have 100% compliance
- Don't use the pre-determined **signal(s)** in order to regain lost attention as it will lose its power if used all of the time. Only use the signal initially to gain attention when the students are supposed to not be paying attention.

How to bring them back: Students typically don't lose focus or daydream on purpose. **Try to _avoid_ _using the following methods_** to regain their attention, which can be hurtful and ineffective:

- Stern correction or impatient 'shushing'
- Inserting name loudly or sharply
- Hurtful jokes like "Earth to Johnny!"
- Separating students

Instead, recognizing that students are not choosing to become distracted, try these techniques to regain their attention:

- Proximity (move closer to them) or a light touch on the shoulder
- Volume variation, including silence (which will accentuate the noise the students are making)
- Cues or signals
- Ask a favor
- Soothers

Classroom Management

Techniques:

- We want to approach the children from a **developmental rather than a character posture** recognizing that some of their behavior is not necessarily willful, but in fact may be developmentally appropriate due to the lack of development of certain executive functions of their brains. These functions involve decision-making, problem-solving and getting things done and depending upon the state of development and/or presence of these functions, a child may actually not be able to control certain behaviors. **(see Addendum #1, *Executive Functions: The Brain's Orchestra Conductor*).** When a child behaves outside of their normative behavior, we should recognize that this is something outside of the norm and shift ourselves from judgment to curiosity as to the cause of the behavior (i.e. developmental? Environmental-i.e. something else going on?)

- We want to be **welcoming** when we greet the children and have a positive attitude. If we are prepared and organized in advance, this is easy to do since we won't be focused on last minute lesson details or preparations.
- As children arrive, provide a **'sponge' activity** which occupies them with a specific activity while you greet others and they wait for the lesson to begin. Coordinate this activity with the lesson for the day for greater impact or effectiveness. It should be an activity which the students can administer themselves either alone or with each other.
- To accommodate different learning styles of students, **provide different choices** in the work/assignments that are completed in class.
- Keeping in mind that 'one size does not fit all,' when having students break-out into small groups for classroom work or projects, **provide choices regarding the size of the group** – i.e." you may work alone or with up to 'X' number of people."
- Since labels and how we approach children can impact how they are able to aspire to achieve, we want to focus on using **'People First' language**. The denotes the person first and then the disorder, disability or behavior secondly **(see Addendum #2 ,"*Describing People with Disabilities"*)**

Students with Learning and/or Neurological Differences:

We all have some form of learning differences - we have just learned how to personally make adjustments or accommodations for them on our own. Some biblical examples of heroes with their own strengths and weaknesses:

Moses (Ex 4:10, 14)	Samson (Judges 14-16)
Noah (Gen 9:21)	Jacob (Gen 32:25-33)
Peter (Matt 16:16-18, 26:33,69-75	Paul (2 Cor 12:7)

For a more thorough explanation of certain neurological differences that we may encounter in some of our students, please see **Addendum #3, "*Neurological Differences***."

Sometimes, our task as teachers is to meet a child where they are at and help them figure out what type of accommodation will help them learn better in our classroom setting. We may need to become more tuned in to the decorations or set-up of our room and the distractions that they might provide. We can also do that by providing an environment or classroom framework that is flexible enough to recognize and incorporate what a particular student needs. One method is by using 'soothers' which are child specific behaviors which are determined as allowable or appropriate in the classroom setting and provide the student with a means of resetting themselves or redirecting an unacceptable behavior. One such means of introducing soothers is to provide a soother station in each classroom.

Implementation of a 'Soother' station

It is estimated that approximately 30% of all children need a 'soother' to help them focus and/or reset their attention. By pre-approving certain items as 'soothers' and making them available you can help to redirect certain behaviors and make them "allowable" in the classroom setting. By placing a 'soother station' or box in the classroom, you invite the children to redirect distracting behaviors with them ultimately taking ownership or responsibility for the management of that behavior. To implement this concept in the classroom:

- **Create a 'soother' box containing items of differing textures, colors, shapes, sizes and elasticity (see example)**
- **Place the soother box in the rear of the classroom**
- **Introduce the concept of the 'soother' box to the class**
- **Invite students to come speak with you if they think that they need use of a soother or if they think that it would help them**
- **Establish the 'rules' for the use and care of a soother such as,**
  - What signal or sign that the student needs a soother will be used on-going in class?
  - How should the student retrieve a soother? (i.e. quietly, without distraction to the rest of the class, etc.)
  - What is the student allowed to do (and conversely not to do – i.e. throw, etc.) with the soother?
  - How should the student treat the soother?
  - When and how should the soother be returned to its rightful place?

Initially, it may be up to the teacher to gently suggest when a student may need to use a soother. Eventually, the student will take responsibility for determining when it is necessary and will take ownership for managing the behavior by being pro-active. Keep in mind, that a 'soother' may not be something in the box, but rather a need to be active in which case a pre-determined action that 'soothes' directed to the back of the room (where it will not distract others) may be agreed upon.