

Teaching Strategies

Think of what you take away from a conference presentation or how you react to the initial impression the speaker had on you. Often, what we remember most are the beginning and ending of the presentation, and if the first impression made by the presenter was not good, we may not remember even those. There is an important lesson here: starting the day well and opening and closing lessons with pizzazz have a big impact on teaching success.

Beyond these featured teaching practices, I am discussing two relatively new strategies: teaching differentially and using picture books with older children. All of these strategies are visible attributes of powerful teaching.

Kick-Starting the Day: A school day often goes as well or as poorly as the first few moments; these precious minutes can be powerful enough to set the stage for whatever else is to come. The teacher who provides invigorating beginnings to the day will foster eager students and more fun in the class.

Opening a Lesson Well: It is best to capture the students' attention through a hook before beginning a lesson. Many teachers refer to such hooks as "motivational, or anticipatory, sets." I refer to them as "smart, powerful, teacher behavior." The teacher who uses hooks attracts student attention and enjoys personal satisfaction, pride, and confidence.

Closing a Lesson with Impact: Most of us remember how conversations, stories, movies, and activities begin and end better than we remember the medial details. The same is true for students. The teacher who makes good lesson closes capitalizes on this knowledge by providing students with an immediate summary of learning or behavior, strengthening accountability for learning.

Teaching to Diversities: Students do not learn in the same way; nor do they come to class with the same preparation, ability, culture, and motivation. As a result, teachers must tap into the power of differential teaching to reach and teach to the diversity in their classrooms, which seems to increase all the time. Teaching differentially leads to more student success and parental support, as well as less student frustration and personal disappointment.

Using Picture Books with Older Students: All teachers have experienced reluctant and struggling readers—the students who either won't or can't read. Some people frown upon the idea of providing these students with books below their "supposed" reading level; however, if the books are presented with passion and enthusiasm, and the follow-up activities are authentic and stimulating, their use will lead to further reading for many students.

24. Kick-Starting the Day

... with more than a smile and a “hello”

Have you ever noticed how first thing in the morning some students come in with a smile, but others drag themselves to their desks looking like they would rather be anywhere but there?

The students were huddled outside the school eagerly waiting for the bell to allow them entrance. The teacher on supervision wandered over to them to see why they appeared so excited to get to class and overheard students talking.

“I wonder what it’ll be today?” the first said.

“I bet it’ll be a joke,” replied another.

“Nope!” put in a third. “It was a joke on Tuesday. Gotta be different today!”

When the teacher inquired about what the students were discussing, one of them told her, “It’s the morning kick-start! It’s cool!”

Ten Ways to Kick-Start the Day

1. Occasionally greet students at the door with a handshake and address each one by name. (*Good morning, Miss Jones.*)
2. Have a minimal cues message waiting on the board for them to solve immediately. For example: To_ _ y we _re going to _ _ _ gy_ to p_ _ _ b _ll.
3. Feature a cartoon or joke on the overhead for students to see when they enter.
4. Meet students at the door wearing a hat that will fit with a particular lesson during the day. Keep them in suspense until the lesson.
5. Begin the day by reading a humorous poem, such as one from *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, by Shel Silverstein.
6. Display a chant or short song on the board or overhead. Teach it immediately and begin the day with the group chanting it.
7. Have the pole and noose for the game Hangman drawn large on the board. Before they do anything else, students must figure out one thing they will be doing that day by playing this game.
8. Begin with a brief naming activity where each student says his or her name and a greeting of choice. Examples: “Hi, I’m Anna.” “Cheers from Derek.” “Yo, bro, Cal here.”
9. On a rotating basis, let students take attendance “the old-fashioned way” by calling out names and checking. Add your name to the list, so that you must answer “present” too. The attendance-taker gains a sense of worth.
10. Model an unusual greeting—a salute, bow, curtsy, “alien” expression, “Yo,” “Top of the morning,” or “Greetings”—when meeting students at the door, and encourage them to respond the same way.

25. Opening a Lesson Well

... so that all of the students are engaged to learn

Have you ever thought that you spend more time “getting ready to teach” than teaching?

The students were silent. They sat in awe, wide eyes focused on the teacher who was quietly and slowly digging around in a big, brown-paper shopping bag. What would she bring out? They knew that as soon as that bag showed up, something interesting was going to appear from it. Suddenly, out popped a miniature statue of the Sphinx. There was a mutual gasp. “Yeah!” one student shouted with joy, “Today we get to write about Egypt.”

Ten Ways to Open a Lesson Well

1. Begin by capturing the attention of all with a well-established cue, such as a particular sound, maybe a whistle, bell, or piece of music, or a visual signal, perhaps a hand raised.
2. Use “wait time.” Avoid starting until all students are attending.
3. Use the brown-bag technique by drawing from the bag surprise items pertaining to the lesson.
4. Use a colored overhead in a darkened room. Ask students to observe it silently for thirty seconds and to speculate about why it’s there.
5. Wear a hat that is specific to the lesson or subject. (One teacher always wore an Italian beret when it was time for students to do art.)
6. Provide a few general clues that invite students to guess what they will be doing. “It’s Science. We’ll look at something that has an effect on how we come to school.” (weather)
7. Tie the lesson to students’ interests. For example: If teaching a lesson on long division, begin by inviting students to think of anything—candies, hamburgers, baseball cards, bracelets, movie passes—they would like to have 100 of. Ask them to use their “choices” in such tasks as dividing the 100 items among twelve friends. Or, if the task is a writing project, provide an umbrella theme, perhaps adventure, then allow students to choose specific topics, such as camping or playing hockey.
8. Explain the purpose of the lesson. Students are more interested if they know why they are doing something.
9. Explain your expectations for the lesson. At the lesson outset, tell students exactly what they will be expected to do.
10. Use alert, confident body language and demonstrate passion for what you are about to teach or share.

26. Closing a Lesson with Impact

... instead of just “working till the bell”

How often have you been in the middle of a sentence when the bell sounds and students start packing up and rushing off?

The teacher was watching her Grade 6 students leave at the end of the day when she heard James ask Billy, “Did we have Social Studies homework?”

Billy replied, “Did we even have Social Studies today?”

The teacher sighed. So much for what she thought was a powerful lesson about governments leaving an impact.

Ten Ways to Close a Lesson with Impact

1. Watch the time and leave two or three minutes for closure.
2. Insist that students spend a few seconds in silent reflection to encourage information retention.
3. Ask students to jot down what they learned in their journals.
4. Provide an oral summary of the lesson. (See STOP below.)
5. Invite students to do the summary orally. (*Tell me what we talked about ... Summarize for me ...*)
6. Call for a silent response from every student. (*Close your eyes and summarize in your head.*)
7. Link the closing to your opening activity. (*We started today by ... and we learned that ...*)
8. Note the relevance of the lesson. (*We just learned that ... because ... This ... will help us when ...*)
9. Invite students to pair up and share what they just learned.
10. If time has truly run out, then at the least quickly say what you have just done.

S “We Started the lesson ...”

T “The Topic (Theme) was ...”

O “Our Opportunities for practice were ...”

P “The Purpose of learning this is ...”

27. Teaching to Diversities

... so that all your students have equal opportunity to learn

“What a motley crew! How can I ever reach them all when they are all so different?” How often have you looked at your class and thought that?

After her first day in Mrs. Klein’s class, the student teacher said in amazement, “I didn’t realize you taught a special needs class. And I thought there were fewer kids in special classes.”

Mrs. Klein smiled. “It’s not a special class,” she said. “This is a normal Grade 4 class. All classes these days have very diverse populations. But they are all great kids, and their differences make our classroom all the richer.”

Ten Ways to Teach a Diverse Population in the Class

1. Allow students to complete tasks at their own rates. That may mean providing extra time for some, additional activities for others.
2. Allow students choices about how they complete a task, whether they work alone or with a peer, and where they do the work.
3. Implement peer modelling, where capable students work with less capable ones and model the correct way to carry out a task or activity. (Remember to change partners often.)
4. Use Step Demos. Explain that you will fully demonstrate the task, such as making a mind map, and that students may choose to begin on their own at whatever step in your demonstration they feel capable. Those who are experiencing difficulty will wait until the demonstration is over, but some will begin almost immediately. Once you have finished making and describing what you are doing, leave your model as a sample.
5. Use Step Scaffolding. Similar to Step Demos, this process allows students to “fly solo” whenever they are ready or to stay with the teacher for continued assistance. The difference between this and a step demo is that with scaffolding, the teacher may not complete the entire process, but pull away as soon as students are on their own and provide intermittent help to individuals, as needed. For example, to teach students to print the letter “B,” the teacher would say, *Put your pencil on the top line* (demonstrates), *then make a straight line to the bottom line* (demonstrates). *Put your pencil back at the top and make a clockwise circle to the midline* (does not demonstrate). *What do you think we do next?*
6. Encourage cooperative learning, which recognizes that students learn from each other.
7. Change expectations for students. For example, slower students may do only every other question or every third one, or write one paragraph rather than an entire essay.
8. Use prompting techniques that are specifically geared to struggling students. For example, word your questions for *yes* or *no* responses as opposed to open-ended ones for the rest of the class.
9. Discuss and demonstrate a variety of ways to respond to a question or complete a task in order to accommodate diverse student backgrounds.
10. Once directions have been given (see Providing Clear Directions, page 55), simplify them one more time for strugglers, ESL students, or others with individual needs.

28. Using Picture Books with Older Students

... not only to turn them on to reading, but also to captivate and stimulate them

How often have you struggled to find a book an older student (aged ten or up) will read independently, enjoy completely, and actually want to respond to?

“I don’t read,” Tyler announced on the second day of the school year.

“Of course you do,” Mr. Gates said.

“Nope! I don’t!”

Mr. Gates looked at the lanky 12-year-old and sighed. Another reluctant reader. Now what?

That night when Mr. Gates was reading a particularly funny children’s picture book to his young son, he got an idea. The next day he enthusiastically introduced the picture book to his Grade 7 class and invited them to become involved in a variety of interesting projects based on the book. He was thrilled when Tyler picked up the book and began to skim through it. Step one—accomplished!

Ten Ways of Using Picture Books with Older Students

1. Share your personal interest in picture books. Give the students a few significant reasons such as “they are so colorful” or “they always have a good lesson.”
2. Introduce the book with excitement and pizzazz. For example, assume an excited pose, hands up and fingers spread, and call out briskly and fairly loudly “da da da da!” or hide the book from view and announce, “This is going to be soooooo great!” Students’ reactions will depend entirely on your ability to present the book well.
3. Be sure to display and talk about the best illustrations or pictures in the book so that students can enjoy them and see how they contribute to understanding the text.
4. Practise reading the story ahead of time so that you can maintain eye contact during reading. Doing so will increase enthusiasm for the book.
5. Prepare students for the reading by explaining that although the book was designed for younger students, you have an idea of how they can use it for some exciting projects.
6. Before reading, provide a purpose for the session by telling students what to listen for. For example, almost all picture books have a lesson or moral—invite the students to figure it out. Or, ask them to listen for any clues about the main character’s personality.
7. To avoid breaking engagement with the story, read it through without interruption. Follow with a second reading during which you stop periodically to point out interesting illustrations. Draw attention to detail. For example, discuss the art of book illustration and consider how difficult or easy it might have been in this book.
8. Stop every once in a while to ask questions such as “How do you think young children would feel at this part?” You thereby reassure your students that you still consider them “older” even though you are sharing children’s literature.
9. When you have finished reading, leave the book in the silent reading area of your room.
10. Suggest a variety of possible reader responses that will directly involve students in authentic reactions to the book, and also provide an audience, a younger class, for these responses. (See “Reader Responses to Picture Books,” next page.)

Reader Responses to Picture Books

- Discuss *dependent authorship*, where students write in the style of the author, and invite students to devise alternative endings or “sequels” to the book.
- Invite students to write Dear Abby questions and answers based on book content. The questions and answers should be relevant to younger children and shared with them.
- Have students rewrite the story, using the same theme of the book, in language more appropriate for students their age, or even for adults or seniors. For example, students could write personal narratives related to their own families in response to *Where the Wild Things Are*, which has a theme of being aware of what’s important, in this case, family. Let them share their stories with the chosen age group.
- Invite students to rewrite the book without benefit of the pictures; what happens in the pictures will have to be explained in words.
- Tell students they are going to “sell” the book. They must create posters, blurbs, and advertising materials, to promote the book to younger children. Post these materials in their classes; then, do follow-up to see how many students read the book as a result.
- Invite students to rewrite the book as a ballad. For example, the text from each page (or more, depending on the book) could be transcribed into rhyming couplets. The basic story would remain the same, but the presentation would be a long, narrative poem.
- Have students prepare a drama presentation of the book, perhaps with puppets, shadow plays, mime, or tableaux, to present to students in younger grades.
- As an alternate task, particularly relevant to students less enthralled by writing, suggest making a video or radio play of the book. Share with students in younger grades.
- Have students research young adult books that have themes similar to the ones presented in a particular picture book. For example, using *Where the Wild Things Are* again, students would read books related to the importance of family.
- Work with a teacher of younger students to create buddy pairs, where your students read the book with the younger students.