



# Teacher Tip of the Week

## New Teacher Support Program 2009-2010

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April 2010

Vol. 5 Issue 27

Teacher Tip of the Week  
New Teacher Support  
Program  
Wilson County Schools  
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### Student Grouping in the Classroom: Four Ways to Divide Your Class for Lessons

#### HOW TO DO IT— CHECKLIST



#### Desk Groups

When doing group work, have students temporarily rearrange their desks in small groupings. If your classroom has desks, you can have students move their desks in groups on an as-needed basis. Group work in desks can be a challenge because there is no shared flat surface and desk groupings take up more space. Nonetheless, students benefit by the opportunity to gather together in small groups.



When planning your lessons, instead of defaulting to whole group teaching, consider splitting the class up into smaller groups. There are several ways to do this including interest, ability, random choice and student choice, and depending on your desired outcome and particular mix of students, one grouping may work better than another.

#### Grouping Students by Interest

When assigning a group project in social studies or science, it may be helpful to group students together by interest. Allow those students who are interested in the same topic work together. This can be done through student choice, where the students are allowed time to talk to each other about what topic they would like to do their project on and group themselves accordingly. Or you can write topic choices on the board and allow students to assign themselves to a group based on their interest.



#### Grouping Students by Ability

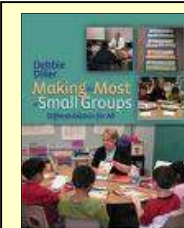
Although controversial, it is one method of grouping students. With this method, you would look at the ability of each student, and place him in a group with other students with the same ability. So for example the advanced math students will all be placed together in a group, just as the advanced reading students are all in their own group. These groups may look different based on the subject and abilities in the classroom. You can also use ability grouping to specifically group students with different abilities. Spreading the student abilities throughout each group is heterogeneous grouping, and allows students of all abilities to assist each other.

#### Random Student Groupings

Grouping students by random can help prevent the students from pegging other students as slow or advanced. It also may allow for improved classroom management as you will not always have the same troublesome students in the same group, and provides you opportunities to separate students who need to not work in the same group. Random student groupings can be accomplished by having students count off, pair up, or any other method of class division you come up with.

#### Grouping by Student Choice

Allowing students to choose their group partners is another method of grouping that may work well for some projects. As in student interest groups, students can be allowed to pick a partner or group of students whom they desire to work with. This runs the risk of having students left out, or having a group of students who instead of working together, simply goof off. Careful planning and a watchful eye can help prevent these problems though. Your particular choice of student grouping, whether by interest, ability, random choice or student choice depends on what your desired outcome is for the group. Think through your grouping choice as carefully as you do your lesson plans and group students in a way that will most efficiently complement your teaching style and desired learning outcome.



**Making the Most of  
Small Groups :**  
**Differentiation for  
All**

by *Debbie Diller*

## Be Remembered as an Interesting Teacher: Teachers Must Respect Student Attention Spans to Improve Instruction

Virtually all teachers are concerned with motivating students. Many special motivational plans are used across the nation, and many show promise, if only temporarily. Rewards and bribes tend to lose effectiveness over time. Teachers with pleasant personalities are favored over those who are mean-spirited. But nothing matters if a teacher is boring.

### Student Attention Spans Affect Learning

Beginning with those things that must be done, the teacher must be aware that students will not pay attention simply because it is expected by the teacher. Consequently, planning each and every lesson must be a goal. Plans should be influenced by what we know to be true about youth, and chief among those is the issue of *attention span*, which varies with age. Various estimates place attention span dedicated to a given task at three to five minutes for toddlers to perhaps thirty minutes for adults.

These figures assume that the activity is of high interest. Clearly, everyone has seen children involved in activities for much longer periods of time than those above, and many adults can read a book for hours. The explanation is the level of interest and the attitude of the person involved. Adults involved in

college classes can push attention spans, but the wise rely heavily on notes.

### How to Keep the Attention of Students

Classrooms are not the best places to maximize attention spans, but there are techniques that help. No teacher should assume that students can or will pay unrelenting attention in any class. Polite ways of pulling student back in should be available. While there are many specific ways to hold attention short term, longer term needs to involve some of the features below:

- Set the "hook." Stand and enthusiastically tell students what the day's lesson will be. Make an effort to relate it to something important in their lives.
- Keep notes and lecturing to a minimum – especially in elementary and middle school. Experienced teachers know that taking note keeps some of the most unruly classes quiet because it keeps them involved. Unfortunately the notes are often lost or never used again. Students can take notes without necessarily paying attention to what they men.
- Don't lecture in the traditional style. Rather offer brief, comprehensible expla-

nations in response to questions or to clarify something in an activity. Use humor while speaking. Laughter helps people wake up and improves the attitude. Digress occasionally and tell a personal story.

- Be noticed. Dress well. Be animated. Move around the room and monitor what students are doing. Be available to students. Make eye contact.
- Vary activities. Don't assign an hour's worth of worksheets and expect absolute quite. Show the class something: a demonstration, a picture, a rock and have an interesting dialogue to accompany it.
- Consider a five-minute break for students to stand, stretch, and talk quietly. This should come preferably as the teacher is changing from one activity to another.

Teachers need to recall their experiences as students and remember how they responded to different teachers. Likely the most remembered and favored teachers be recalled as "interesting." It is no accident that the countless teaching methods and machines that have flowed across the years are almost always designed to improve student attention.—  
*Suite101*



**"The task of the excellent teacher is to stimulate "apparently ordinary" people to unusual effort. The tough problem is not in identifying winners: it is in making winners out of ordinary people."**

~K. Patricia Cross



## A New Series: Testing Tips for Students #13

Now that standardized tests are drawing near, a new series to help students and teachers prepare for the months ahead:

Help your students learn to recognize when they are feeling stressed and know how to deal with it. Teach students such relaxation techniques as slow, deep breathing, imagery and visualization, counting backwards from 10, and muscle relaxation techniques to decrease anxiety.

'09-'10

## NEW TEACHER SUPPORT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



Robert Brindos

Mt. Juliet Middle School

Math Lab, grades 6-8

### WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER?

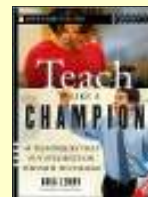
"I am a teacher by accident. I began with a career in Plastics Manufacturing. After ten years of advancement and reaching for more, I discovered that the shrinking manufacturing sector was squeezing non-degree engineers out of the market. So I went back to school to re-tool for another career.

I went through the Accounting program at Tennessee Tech University in 2 1/2 years. I had quit work to study full time and get through school as soon as possible. But after graduation the accounting field was just as limited to me as manufacturing had been before.

My mother-in-law, whom I love dearly, suggested that I try substitute teaching while I was planning what to do next. It was like a fog lifted and I could see clearly what my experiences and education were leading me toward. I had been a Youth Director at my church for the years I went to school. So, I had a love for kids and a desire to help them grow in faith, but also in how to deal with life in general.

I have come late to teaching and I envy those who figured out earlier their calling. But I'm here now, doing what I'm good at and what I love to do."—  
Robert Brindos

## Off the shelf:



### Teach Like a Champion : 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College by D. Lemov

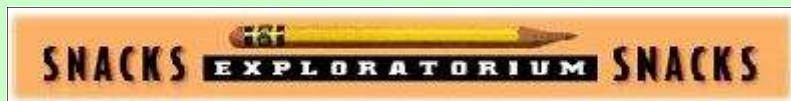
*Teach Like a Champion* offers effective teaching techniques to help teachers, especially those in their first few years, become champions in the classroom. These powerful techniques are concrete, specific, and are easy to put into action the very next day. Training activities at the end of each chapter help the reader further their understanding through reflection and application of the ideas to their own practice. Among the techniques:

- Technique #1: No Opt Out. How to move students from the blank stare or stubborn shrug to giving the right answer every time.
- Technique #35: Do It Again. When students fail to successfully complete a basic task? from entering the classroom quietly to passing papers around? doing it again, doing it right, and doing it perfectly, results in the best consequences.
- Technique #38: No Warnings. If you're angry with your students, it usually means you should be angry with yourself. This technique shows how to effectively address misbehaviors in your classroom.

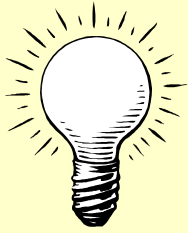
The book includes a DVD of 25 video clips of teachers demonstrating the techniques in the classroom.

## TEACHER WEBSITE of THE WEEK:

<http://www.exploratorium.edu/snacks/index.html>



These pages from the excellent Exploratorium hands-on science museum in San Francisco are full of Snacks...but they're not the kind you eat. They're the kind your kids can learn from and have fun with. These activities are miniature versions of some of the most popular exhibits at the Exploratorium and most take 30 minutes or less to complete. All of them include an overview of the lesson, a list of materials, instructions, and a short explanation of what's going on. Some of these activities should only be done with adult supervision and those have Adult Help listed as one of the materials needed. You can also purchase a book featuring a smaller collection of science snacks. A wonderful collection of science activities for the elementary or middle school classroom.



# Strategies for Teachers . . .

## Dictogloss

### What is it?

Students work in cooperative groups to recreate a text that has been read aloud to the class.

### What is its purpose?

- To introduce key words at the beginning of a work sequence
- To encourage students to focus on meaning when listening to a text
- To develop effective listening strategies
- To develop proof reading and editing strategies
- To provide an authentic opportunity for cooperative learning

### How do I do it?

- Find a suitable text - usually one that is short and cohesive
- Divide the class into groups.
- Ask students to write down the key words as the text is read. (Teachers might need to read the text more than once.)
- Have students work in cooperative groups to recreate the text.
- Groups proof read and edit their texts before presenting them to the class in spoken or written form.

Students compare their texts with the original, attempting to justify the differences between them.

### How can I adapt it?

- Students might be given title of the topic and asked to predict the key words
- Some (or all) of the groups could be given copies of (some or all) key words before the text is read.

Ask groups to work out definitions of the key words

### How can it be used to evaluate students' language learning?

Teachers and students might be able to collect information about each student's ability to:

- recognize key words in a piece of extended prose
- retell word meanings and definitions
- use effective speaking and listening skills
- work cooperatively
- share information with a group or the whole class
- create a written retelling and compare it with the original
- extend proof reading and editing skills



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

NATIONAL GARDEN MONTH

FROG MONTH

SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA MONTH

NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK April 4-10

NATIONAL NETWORKING WEEK April 5-11

WORLD HEALTH DAY April 7

NATIONAL SIBLING DAY April 10

LICORICE DAY April 12

THOMAS JEFFERSON DAY April 13

