



Helping Hand

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Gradebook

Promoting Independent Thinking

Below are three strategies that can help develop improved focus and independent thinking in the classroom.

1. Sequencing instruction

Finding unique ways to sequence information can promote a student's sense of discovery. For example, one science teacher divides his class into circus labs. Instead of the class all doing the same activity during the period, each student works independently to learn and teach one aspect of the lesson. The small labs allow students to collaborate as they uncover new information, resulting in a full picture when the labs are all complete. Students are able to focus on an individual task, bringing together all the information to gain a complete understanding.

2. Recovery from mistakes

Learning from past errors is an important way for students to continue to develop their learning capacity. One math teacher begins each class by asking the question, "Who made the biggest mistake on their homework last night?" By encouraging students to learn from failure, they're able to work on finding solutions without judgment or fear of mistakes. Another way to learn from mistakes is by having students improve their writing by revising papers they've already written. This personal source of learning can be seen as more motivating and worthwhile than learning from textbook examples.

3. Setting goals

Setting purposeful goals in the classroom can help to motivate exploration and discovery. Asking big picture questions to begin the class can help synthesize course readings, class discussions and research into a purposeful focus. By testing and analyzing unique ideas, students are shown the value of thinking independently with a clear focus.

SOURCE: EDUTOPIA.ORG





Healthways

Farm to School Programs

What is a Farm to School program?

Farm to School is a program that connects schools (K-12) and local farms together. The purpose is to serve healthy meals in cafeterias; improve student nutrition; provide educational opportunities around agriculture, health, and nutrition; and to support local and regional farmers.

What does the program usually include?

Farm to School programs address many important issues, including childhood obesity, proper nutrition, and helping students lead healthy and academically successful lives. Students learn what real food is, where it comes from, and why it's an important part of a healthy diet. The curriculum helps students understand the link between a healthy diet and

healthy individuals and communities. Farm to School programs include (but are not limited to):

- Incorporating local products in all school meals, and
- Introducing food-related curriculum development and experiential learning opportunities. This is accomplished through school gardens, farm tours, farmer in the classroom sessions, chefs in the classroom, culinary education, educational sessions for parents and community members, and visits to farmers' markets.

What are some of the program benefits?

- It strengthens student and community knowledge about agriculture, nutrition, food and the environment.

- It increases children's consumption of fruits and vegetables. This helps improve childhood nutrition, reduce hunger, and prevent obesity and obesity-related diseases.
- It benefits school food budgets when schools consider which fresh foods are in season when choosing menu options.

To learn more about the programs near you, visit the National Farm to School Network's website: farmtoschool.org.



Career Quest

STEM Resources

Getting students more involved in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and math) is important, especially with today's technology-driven workforce. Having skills in these areas can help prepare students to be successful in future STEM based careers. Schools have started using activity, project and problem-based learning to engage students in relevant learning experiences and get them excited about the STEM fields. All of these are important for college and career readiness.

Below are some of the top STEM resources from the National Education Association.

NASA - Educators

On NASA's website for educators, you can find lesson plans, teacher guides, classroom activities, video clips, games, posters and more for teachers and students in grades K-4, 5-8, 9-12 and higher education.

Exploratorium

The Exploratorium is a learning laboratory for the 21st century. Even if you can't visit their exhibits in San Francisco, their website provides information, web features, activities, programs and events for grades K-12. There is a section dedicated for educators, including professional development programs and teaching tools.

eGFI: Dream Up the Future

eGFI is brought to you by the American Society for Engineering Education. eGFI has an interactive website as well as a colorful and inspiring print and digital magazine. Their website promotes engineering education with lesson plans for grades K-5, 6-8 and 9-12, activities, outreach programs, and links to web resources.

EngineerGirl

The EngineerGirl website was created to bring national attention to the exciting opportunities that engineering presents for girls and women. Their website is a service of the National Academy of Engineering. It introduces girls in grades 5-8 to young women engineers and highlights careers. It has sections on why to become an engineer, what they do, and allows girls to try out a career.

STEM Education Resource Center

The PBS STEM Education Resource Center connects you to STEM learning through TV and online content. Their website provides nearly 4,000 science, technology, engineering and math resources for PreK-5, 6-12, as well as professional development, a video collection and webinars.

SOURCE: NEA.ORG



Safety Matters

Building Trust

Building a relationship of trust between school educators and students is important not only for the success of the students, but also for school safety. When students are distrustful, educators are forced to deal with the symptoms of their distrust, such as defiant and disrespectful behavior. A lack of trust that goes unnoticed or unaddressed can undermine the learning and teaching process and threaten the safety and security of the learning community.

By modeling caring and respectful relationships with students, over time you allow your students to build trust. You can begin building this type of relationship by helping students find personal meaning and relevance in their work. Additionally, it's important to have high expectations of

Having high expectations shows faith.

students, even when they may be struggling. This shows you believe they have what they need to be successful. A trusting environment helps create a supportive school climate, which then can help prevent bullying and other safety issues.

Researchers Bryk and Schneider considered the relationships between principal and teacher; teacher and teacher; and school professionals and parents.

They identified four vital signs for assessing trust in schools:

1. **Respect.** Do we treat each other with dignity and acknowledge one another's ideas? Are we courteous in our actions? Do we genuinely listen to each other?
2. **Competence.** Do we believe in each other's ability and willingness to fulfill our responsibilities effectively?
3. **Personal regard.** Do we care about each other, both professionally and personally? Are we willing to go beyond our formal expectations if necessary?
4. **Integrity.** Will we put the interests of our children first, especially when tough decisions have to be made? Do we keep our word?

SOURCES: WHOLECHILDEDUCATION.ORG & ASCD.ORG



Drug Free Zone

Moving Away From Zero-Tolerance

A new form of methamphetamine was discovered among a group of middle school girls in Texas. Six 8th grade girls were caught with the drug that was placed on a small, stamp-like paper that gets dissolved when placed in the mouth. School officials said the girls started behaving deliriously and "freaking out." Their parents were called, who then took them to a local hospital to be treated. The Sheriff reported the drug is so potent, it can be absorbed through the skin when touched, something that has never been seen before. The girls were all suspended from school. However, some question if this is truly the appropriate disciplinary response and if there is more that can be done, especially as a preventative measure.

With drug use becoming more common, even in middle school, some people like UCLA Professor Emeritus Rodney Skager,

urges educators to take a critical look at drug prevention programs and move away from "zero-tolerance" punishment and scare tactics. Skager believes drug education that ignores the views, intelligence and experiences of students are bound to fail. He recommends that programs should be participatory, interactional and non-didactic. He believes schools need reality-based approaches to drug education that foster open, honest dialogue about the potential risks and consequences. These programs respect student's intelligence while giving them the tools to stay safe. The belief is that when schools move "beyond zero-tolerance" in handling school discipline, they can begin to address root causes rather than strictly punishing students and casting them out.

SOURCES: NEWSFEED.TIME.COM & HUFFINGTONPOST.COM



Doing Good

Books With No Bounds

Emma (age 14) and her sister Julia (age 16) Mogus are on a mission to share their love of reading by sharing books with children in remote Aboriginal communities. "My sister and I always had a passion for reading, but we knew that there are children out there who don't have that same opportunity," Julia says. In 2012 they founded Books With No Bounds, shipping over 29,000 books to 49 First Nation communities in northern Ontario, Canada and even as far as Ghana and Uganda. After learning about the lack of funding for education and the inequalities that Aboriginal youth face, the sisters hope their work will further Aboriginal youth's literacy skills by providing the necessary tools for their educational success. Books With No Bounds believes every child deserves the opportunity to read and should have access to quality books, no matter where they live.

Publishers, authors, schools, individuals and organizations donate the books being sent. The books are then organized, catalogued, packed and sent to the Nishnawbe Aski Nations and beyond. Additionally, Books With No Bounds also collects and donates crafts and school supplies. In return, they have received hundreds of photos and letters from children they've sent books. Julia says this is one of the most rewarding parts of starting Books With No Bounds. "If kids don't have access to books, they can't foster the same love of reading. So by sending books, that's what we're trying to do, give them a better future."

You can learn more about Books With No Bounds on their website: bookswithnobounds.com.

Every child
deserves the opportunity to
love reading.



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