



# Teacher to Teacher

## Teaching for Life

I often hear teachers from different schools and who teach at different levels complain about students' lack of interest in school assignments and studying. This, as teachers see it, often leads to low achievement. The situation gets worse since every year students are less motivated than the preceding one. Could there be an explanation for this phenomenon?

I believe that there is so much change going on in the students' environment which is affecting their lifestyles and interests. On the other hand, teaching methods, programs, materials and even the physical surroundings are still unchanged. This definitely will create a discrepancy be-

tween the students' reality outside the classroom and their academic one. The consequences are undesirable when it comes to students' motivation and interest. This was the drive behind the



integration of all the new activities and the constant modifications to our teaching strategies at AEC. The ongoing search for new methods to our practices and the new activities we integrate into the curriculum are at-

tempts to make the academic activities at school more compatible to the students' reality and to make those activities more meaningful to students, thus more interesting. Therefore

we have integrated a tailored speaking program, hands-on activities, project work and research, presentation assignments and so on into all classes. And the results were always positive. This has been done on our part, but we still have to wait

for change to occur on a national scale where the whole Lebanese curriculum is modified so that we are not forced to do two types of teaching; one for the official exams and another to suit the students' lives.

**Amal Farhat**

## Classroom Learning Centers

Students of all ages enjoy working in groups. groups allow students to work together and to share ideas. Centers as well are what students, especially at the kindergarten and early elementary levels, enjoy the most. They are independent stations set up around the classroom where children can go, to actually engage in some learning activities. These centers provide children with hands-on learning experiences, cooperative learning, social interaction, and open-ended activities.

In general, learning centers should aim:

- to give children a chance to make their own choices,
- to provide a wide variety of activities for the children to complete,
- to provide activities that meet the varying abilities

of the students,

- to give children a chance to work independently, and
- to encourage children to try new things.

**Neha Berheet**

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## The Rewards of Extra Help for the Low Achiever

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This past year at AEC I have been assigned to provide extra help to kindergarten students needing assistance in acquiring certain language skills. The extra help is offered directly inside the classroom. Whether the lacking skill is related to speaking, writing, or comprehension, it is my goal to ensure that each and every low achieving student receives one on one time with me at least twice a week. The rewards of offering the extra help to these students are endless. All involved may benefit from this experience by first developing a personal relationship with these students, and making them feel safe and loved was the way we began our process to success.

Teaching ESL can be very challenging at times, even more so when the teacher has to deal with those students who are hearing, experiencing and learning English for the first time in their lives. Having the extra help can ease the stress and

frustration that many teachers experience from the fear that their low achievers may not comprehend the lesson being given. By having an extra teacher come directly inside the classroom while the



lesson is being given benefits the student that may have difficulty in comprehension skills. The lesson can briefly be given again one on one to these students while the class teacher proceeds in her lesson plan.

The majority of the time the teacher is unable to sit down one on one with those students in need for extra attention due to the minimal time available to us and due to

the classroom sizes. This is why having an extra teacher come in to the classroom is very beneficial. Some students may have difficulty using their fine motor skills when it comes to writing, coloring or drawing. Having an extra set of hands in the classroom to help these students overcome this common problem found especially in KG students is tremendously accommodating. To solve, overcome and deal with the problem as soon as it appears or occurs is my objective.

Speaking English is a major step in the process of learning English. When students produce what they have been taught in writing and in speaking, as teachers, we should be reassured that they have comprehended what has been taught. What can be more rewarding than to see and hear your students use their English language?

Progress, as we all know, takes time, effort, determination and patience. When given enough time, students will produce results.

**Mona Farhat**

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## Making Writing Interesting

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Our students often go through a writer's block when they are asked to write. That could be majorly attributed to their not knowing what to write or how to go about the writing assignment. Providing clear, specific instructions in the first stages of writing or when students have their "writers' block" could prove very useful in the language classroom. The following are tips on what to ask students to include in their writings so that to aid them on general guidelines in their process of writing:

### To Make Writing More Attractive

#### 1. BEGINNING

- Begin with a story: Keep in mind that using narrative to illustrate a point or to arouse the readers' interest must be related in some way to the rest of the essay.
- Begin with a startling statement: a fact or an opinion. A second way is to begin with such a statement that any reader will be intrigued or shocked enough to want to read further.
- Begin with a question. Asking a question at the beginning of a composition offers two advan-

tages: making clear what the article is about, and stirring an immediate response in the reader.

#### 2. ENRICHING

- Enrich writing with specific details: writing is said to be specific when it contains a great many details and examples to support its general statements.
- Enrich writing with images and figurative language
- Enrich writing using adjectives to create specific images.

**Nizar Lutfi**

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## *Do Our Expectations Affect Students' Performance?*

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Many teachers claim to hold high expectations for all students. In reality, however, what is announced is not always practiced. We might view ourselves as good teachers who set high expectations for the students, but the truth is that in many instances low expectations prevail. It is not only students who have to be encouraged to set high expectations and persevere to achieve them, but it is mainly teachers who have to be taught that. Believing in the ability of all students to perform well encourages the students to believe in themselves, and thus they will learn and succeed.

My experience with one class proved this. Either consciously or subconsciously, teachers of this class behaved indifferently toward the students based on the previous belief and assumption they had about them. The students of this class were viewed as lacking in ability and motivation and were not expected to make significant progress. This perception was adopted by many of us teachers and was passed on to the students. Hence, the students achieved as much as teachers expected of them. I was one of those teachers until I decided to change my view altogether and give the students what they really deserved; commitment and care. These students just needed special work and concern from our part. What could we do to change and improve their situation? These students needed to be given more interesting activities, be held responsible for their own success, and be noted by others as exceptional in certain things, and indeed they were. We had to give these students the chance to prove themselves in doing what they liked best and to accept their mistakes and teach them with loving hearts. The results in this change of attitude were amazing; better achieving and more motivated students.

Don't attribute the students' weakness to insufficient intellectual ability. There may be other reasons for their poor achievement. Lack of effort and hard work may be recognized as direct causes for poor achievement, but these also could be treated with time and patience. When teachers maintain high expectations, they encourage in students a desire to aim high rather than to slide by.

To put high expectations is to make students work up to those expectations!

**Randa Hatoum**

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## *Learning Styles*

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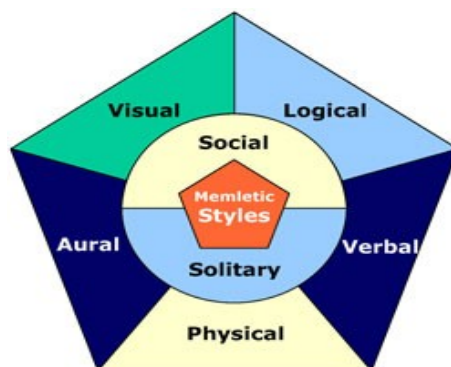
"My son loves singing. He memorizes the lyrics of dozens of songs, but when it comes to memorizing the times table, OH, OH, OH!"

"My daughter is a fluent reader but she struggles in math."

"My son is a whiz in math, but he needs serious help with his vocabulary."

Don't these comparisons sound familiar? Doesn't every child have his/her special interests, strengths, weaknesses, and own way of learning? Some students learn most by listening to songs and stories. Others learn best by reading and writing. Still others learn through pictures and diagrams. While others can't just sit still to finish their work. They have to be moving around all the time. All this, according to educators, is the result of different learning styles; the individual's approach to learning. Learners are classified as follows: auditory

learners, visual learners, reading and writing preference learners, tactile/kinesthetic



learners.

Of course each learning style has its specific approach to address. That's why knowing more about these learning styles is of a great benefit not only for the parents, but mostly for the teacher since he/she will know then how to vary the teaching strategies to help each and every student in his/her class. In every class there is

a collection of learning styles. Your class would have students who prefer to listen to your explanations (lecture) and maybe to every detail, students who prefer you present the lesson through pictures and diagrams, while another group prefers that you give them a written task where they have to work on their own to solve a problem or reach a conclusion. One important group, who usually give you hard time during explanation, are the move-around students who learn best by giving them tactile tasks that allow them to move and act and explain for others...

That's why it's very important for successful teachers when planning their lessons to put in mind all these learning styles and to modify their teaching styles so that to address every learning style present in their classrooms.

**Diana Dassouki**

*Teacher to Teacher*  
Please submit your articles for the  
next issue of *Teacher to Teacher* to  
your coordinator before  
May 5, 2009

Visit the following blogs for  
discussions of educational  
issues and links to useful  
classroom activities :

<http://www.dianawl.blogspot.com/>

<http://amalenglish.blogspot.com/>

## *From My Diary*

### *The Pleasure of Teaching*

Sara Salla

Ever since I was in preschool I had a dream. Every time someone would ask me what I wanted to become when you grew up, "I want to become a teacher," my answer would be.

At the beginning of this year when I found that this job, as any other job, is so demanding, I paused and asked myself, "Is this your dream? Is this the job you want to have for the rest of your life?"

At times I'd nod yes, and sometimes when there seems a lot to do in no time, I'd give up and answer, "NO I'll find myself some other job."

Now as I look back to the times I spent with my students, I say, "Why so fast?"

I want to be able to come back next year and spend more quality times with my students, with my kids at school.

Sentences nor paragraphs can express my love to my family in Abrar.

## *Helpful Ways to Obtain Children's Attention*

We all know how frustrating it can be when students lose interest or refuse to listen during a lesson. This not only disturbs the teacher but most of all distracts the rest of the class. I found really helpful ways and ideas on how to obtain the attention of students in the class, literally at all times in an article by Leah Davies titled "25 Ways to Obtain Children's Attention in a Classroom Setting". Here are some of the ideas I have tried and that have worked out in my Kg1 and Kg 2 classes this year, and I know you will find helpful.

- Hold up your hand and say, "Give me five." The children put their hands in the air and shout "five!" As they count down to one, they gradually get quieter until "one" is said in a whisper. Or, after saying, "Give me five," everyone puts their hand in the air and counts loudly using their fingers from one to five.

- Teach your students that the five fingers on their right hand stand for the five things they must do when you hold up your hand. Say, "Give me five," and wait until all the children hold up their hand. Then lead them in saying the five things together.

1) Eyes-- look

2) Ears-- listen

3) Mouth -- closed

4) Hands -- still

5) Feet -- quiet

- Clap or tap in a pattern, for example, clap slowly twice and then clap fast three times. The students are to stop what they are doing and repeat the pattern. If necessary, do it again until all the children have responded and are quiet. You can modify it the way you see fit.

- Teach the difference between being silly and serious. Tell them that there is room for both of these behaviors. Then practice by saying, "Act silly!" Let them be silly. Then say, "Now, act serious."

- Use a piece of poster board to make a noise level monitor. On the left side label it 1,2,3, and on the right side, list the type of noise acceptable:

1- No Talking

2- Normal Talking

3- Too Loud

Use a large clip to indicate the acceptable noise level at any given time.

Note: you can even modify this according to your class e.g. using colors or shapes.

- Use an object that makes noise like a chime or a rain stick. When the children hear the sound, they are to stop what they are doing and listen.

- Let your voice get quieter and quieter as a signal for the children to be quiet. Talk softer or not at all until they are still. Or say softly, "Tootsie Roll, lollipop, we've been talking, now let's stop."

- Teach children the following chant:

\* Teacher says; "one, two." Children say: "Eyes on you."

\* Teacher: "three, four." Children: "Crisscross on the floor."

\* Teacher: "five, six." Children: "No more tricks."

\* Teacher: "seven, eight." Children: "Sit up straight."

\* Teacher: "nine, ten." Children: "Let's begin."

- Sing the following words to the Frere Jacques tune: "Are you listening? Are you listening? Everyone! Everyone! If you are listening, if you are listening, look at me, look at me." Other ways to end the song are: "Snap your fingers" or "Pat your head."

- Sit in your chair and start singing one song after another with no pauses. The children all join in the singing and come to group time.

I hope you find these ideas helpful for your classes. I have tried them and they work wonders!

Rana Ajram