

Alien Education

Jennifer Cady, Ph.D.
Southwestern College

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Stepping into the classroom now-a-days is like walking through Times Square. Students come equipped with vast levels of knowledge just like the diverse individuals navigating the streets in the heart of New York City. The interactions embedded within the classroom often mimic the commotion found as spectators eagerly await the infamous ball drop. In the field of education though, once the ball drops, it is hard to pick up the shattered pieces that fall to the ground. Thus, it becomes imperative to determine how the teacher, grounded with the same solid foundation as the Statue of Liberty, can use her skills in order to avoid offering the same traditional education that quite simply no longer works for the intricate individuals of our nation.

To establish a firm foundation, educators should first seek to build a classroom that thrives on respect for one another (Tomlinson, 2001). This is done through verbal praise and acknowledgement of individual strengths. Moreover, it is done through the teacher's ability to express the value of each and every student. It isn't enough to take a personal survey of each student at the beginning of the year – only to throw it in a filing cabinet so that later it can be shredded. The teacher has to go above and beyond the basic collection of knowledge about each individual in order to weave the core of who each individual is into the depths of each lesson (Connell, 2005). It takes time, energy, and effort. As the year progresses though, the results are priceless – similar to the bargains one might find on the streets of the Big Apple.

Teachers must also possess the ability to establish an environment in which collaboration thrives (Bruce & Calhoun, 1996). This does not mean that one individual shares his/her ideas and everyone else must agree. Rather, the relationship between all individuals must be one in which everyone feels safe in sharing his/her ideas (See Appendix A & B). This can be accomplished by looking at answers via a multi-leveled approach. There is never just one answer to a problem. Sharing this reality with students allows students to feel as though they may in fact have a reasonable solution – though it may be different from others. When teachers open up the classroom to accept that everyone has a unique way to arrive at the final outcome, a structure of thriving subways will begin to emerge.

One of the key ingredients to education is the simplicity of movement (See Appendix C & D). When teachers allow students to move and learn they allow for retention of material (Connell, 2005; Wolfe, 2001). Too often, teachers fear losing control, but when movement is involved the opposite occurs. Students begin to focus in on the task at hand while displaying less behavioral issues. This can be done in a variety of ways. Teachers can provide uncomplicated directions such as, “Find someone in the class who shares the same favorite color as you do then share your answer with him/her.”

After the teacher provides directions she can set a timer for two minutes and allow the students to take responsibility for their own learning. After the timer sounds, the teacher could hold the students accountable for their learning by having them write their answer, coupled with that of their partner's answer, via a Venn diagram – on a small personal whiteboard (think green). This allows the teacher to visually identify mastery, or lack thereof, and it allows the students to reflect. Often times, once students communicate with others they will alter their outlook to reflect the desired outcome that the teacher intended to begin with. Those who do not need to alter their answers are still provided the opportunity to build communication skills, share their ideas, and express how their ideas compare to others. The visitor in NYC will often flag down a taxi to navigate from one location to the next. Learning through movement is much the same.

Teachers of modern learners must understand that when flying into an area that is highly populated, full of relevant history, and fascinating on every level – it is no longer enough to provide a tour of the land through verbal communications while spectators sit quietly by. The opposite is true. To be a successful teacher it is essential to tap into the resources surrounding the population, weave the individual histories of its members into the lessons, and allow for the independent expression of movement so that participants retain the information in a manner that allows for future problem solving. To the countryman, New York City may very well seem chaotic, but when chaos has a valid purpose it can no longer be viewed as chaos. Rather, it should be deemed an intricate city that many long to visit. The same is true for the prosperous classroom. When constructed properly, visitors will flock to vacation in what is still viewed as alien to the field of education. Once enough visitors have walked the beaten path the element of alienation will dissipate and comfort will set in. At that point, post cards can be written and new territories discovered.

References

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Appendix A

Cooperative Learning via a Safe Elementary Learning Environment



When students are assigned specific job tasks (e.g., recorder, writer, material's manager, or speaker), within their cooperative groups, learning is heightened and classroom management flows much smoother than when tasks are not clearly defined. Furthermore, when teachers use items such as tickets to promote positive behavior expectations, instead of removing recess as a punishment, the students gain self-confidence, self-control, and are afforded the much needed opportunity to exercise and engage in social interactions while enjoying fresh air. As well, a deeper understanding of probability can be obtained when teachers share with students that the more tickets earned for positive behavior the greater chance they have of winning a small prize at the conclusion of class. The prizes do not have to be expensive. Teachers can use free homework passes, one-on-one lunch coupons, or classroom privileges.

Appendix B

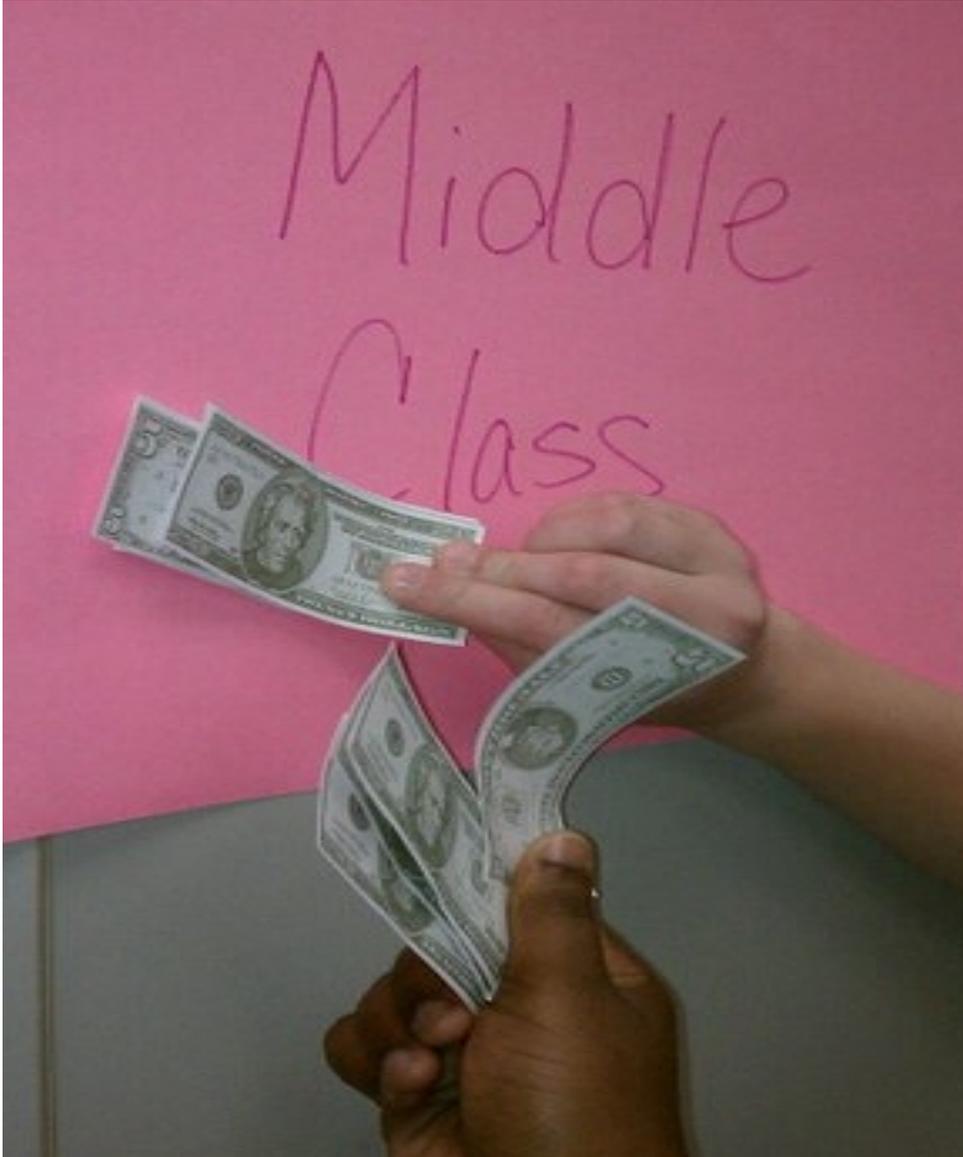
Cooperative Learning via a Safe Post-Secondary Learning Environment



At the college level, learners can engage in meaningful cooperative learning opportunities in which each individual is assigned a specific task with the outcome resulting in the ability to rationalize and reason through course content. Too often, the classroom environment at the college level follows a teacher-centered approach with less emphasis on student-centered learning. If we are to promote successful educators, competent and knowledgeable in what it means to engage all learners, we have to not only verbalize our expectations as college faculty, but also provide hands-on opportunities that will solidify what effective cooperative structures entail.

Appendix C

Integration of Meaningful Movement at the Elementary Level



Signs can be strategically placed throughout the classroom in which students are prompted to navigate to the area that corresponds with their answer choice. Upon arrival at their destination, students can engage in meaningful conversations with those who have a similar answer/response. This promotes critical thinking and helps students to learn to effectively cooperate with one another. Furthermore, communication skills and a deeper understanding of diverse outcomes can be enhanced by having groups report their findings to the whole class. As well, this process provides a visual assessment for the teacher to gauge the success, or lack thereof, of targeted learning objectives.

Appendix D

Integration of Meaningful Movement at the Post-Secondary Level



When faculty members, at the college level, provide learning experiences that extend beyond the traditional method of lecturing, learners are afforded the opportunity to engage the mind and body. Such learning opportunities not only build content knowledge and peer relations, but they also extend a deeper understanding to pre-service teachers regarding what it means to teach to the multiple intelligences. As an added bonus to this teaching method, adult learners unveil heightened focus and attention to the task at hand. The same is true for elementary students. This method works well for the majority of learners, but particularly well for individuals diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).