

Key classroom strategies for all teachers.
By Samantha Cleaver

Maximize Your Teaching

Here's an awesome thought! Teaching means your impact on students will last a lifetime. And despite the negatives

we hear in the news, a 2010 ING Foundation poll found that 98 percent of adults believe a good teacher can "change the course of a child's life."

This year, you'll affect every child in your class. Over the course of a career, you'll have an impact on thousands. The best thing you can do is "be deliberate," says Renee Moore, teacher leader with the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ). "Everything we say and do in our classrooms has some effect on students." Here are eight key strategies for deepening your effectiveness.

1 Get to Know Your Students

Terri Cloyde, a fifth-grade teacher in Madill, Oklahoma, remembers one of her most challenging students. At the age of 10, Jerome was acting out in school and was starting to hang out with a gang. Still, Cloyde knew he had potential. In his beginning-of-the-year inventory, he'd talked about wanting to be a doctor. When the administration moved to put Jerome on long-term suspension, Terri asked to be able to give him one more chance. She pushed his interest in medicine and his quiet



ambition as hard as she could to engage him in school. Now he's a successful sophomore in high school, and Cloyde continues to follow up on his progress.

From the start of the year, learn as much about your students as you can from talks with them and their parents, curriculum-based and standardized test data, individual education plans, notes from former teachers, and student inventories and writing. Connecting with your students is as important as teaching lessons. Trust goes a long way toward building motivation.

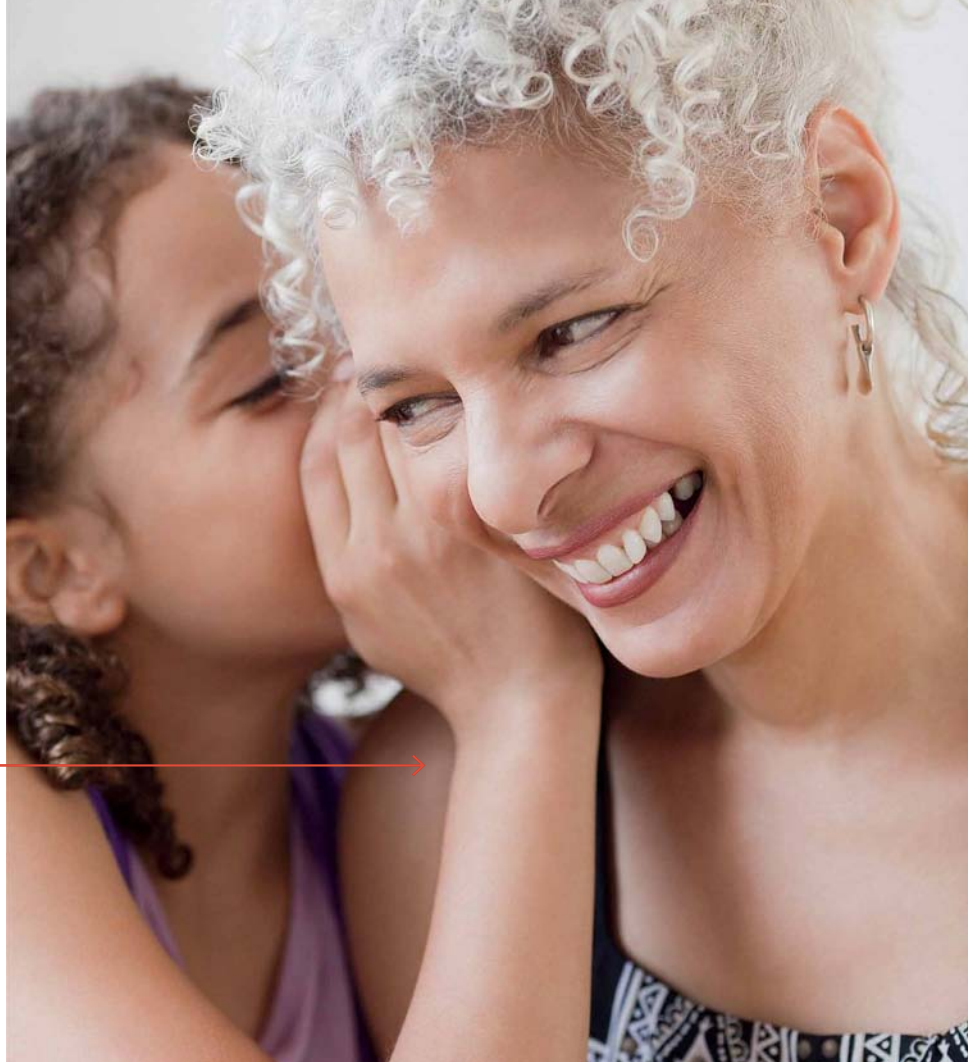
2 Get Into Data Tracking (Really)

Early each school year, John Pearson, a third-grade math and science teacher in Dallas, Texas, and author of *Learn Me Good*, asks students to try a skill that doesn't appear in the curriculum until spring—identifying fractions, for example—then asks them again in April. At first, says Pearson, only a few kids will know how to identify the fractions, but by April, most of the kids will easily find the fractions. The impact of his math class is obvious.

However you track data for your class—graphs of words correct per minute on reading fluency passages or a record of how long it takes students to master a skill—make sure you know just how much each student can do at the start of the year so you can see how far you've brought them!



KEY STRATEGIES



3 Listen to Your Students

When a student asks for more information on a topic, says Pat Kaynaroglu, a special education teacher in Leadville, Colorado, she's achieved something. "When a nonreader wants a book to read, that's success." If your students ask you to read a story one more time, teach more about coral reefs, or stock the classroom library with more of those awesome Big Nate books, do it.

4 Ask for Kids' Opinions

Lisa Goglio-Zarczynski, a fifth-grade teacher in Racine, Wisconsin, asks her students to evaluate her at the end of each year. Her students write down what they think she does well and what she could improve on. At first, Goglio-Zarczynski's students are surprised their teacher wants their feedback, but soon they are eagerly writing away.

5 Talk to Your Former Students

Kaynaroglu had one middle school student who loved art but struggled with reading, so she incorporated art into reading lessons. A decade later, she ran into her student, who introduced Kaynaroglu to a friend as "the teacher that taught me how to read."

When you see alumni in the hall, stop and talk to them. And listen to

siblings of former students. Marsha Ratzel, a middle school teacher in Leawood, Kansas, learned about her reputation when a student said, "My older brothers and sisters say you'll teach me things in sixth grade that I'll use all the way through high school."

6 Keep a Teaching Journal

During her time as a teacher, CTQ's Moore kept a journal with information about student performance and her actions, reactions, and questions. After 21 years, she has a collection of letters, gifts, and testimonials from students that remind her of the impact she's had on their lives.

7 Start a Professional Learning Community

Teachers who collaborate increase student achievement, according to the

Center for Teaching Quality. Create your own professional learning community by connecting with other teachers in your school to talk data, interventions, and instruction strategies that work. Every school and student population is unique, and having the input of fellow teachers who are working with your kids makes a huge difference.

8 Don't Forget the Small Stuff

Kids notice every little decision and action that you take. You have the potential to become a lasting role model for each student in your class. After all, more than 80 percent of the grown-ups (former students!) polled by ING say a teacher helped them to build confidence, and 79 percent say it was a teacher who motivated them to follow their dreams!

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AND THE RESEARCH SAYS...

These four simple research-based strategies could have a big effect on your teaching success.

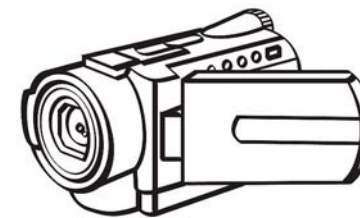
Focus on One at a Time

In the first month of school, choose two students (two "hard nuts to crack"). After each lesson and assessment, try to figure out what worked for these students in particular and use those insights to plan your instruction. Homing in on one

or two students, says Wendy Baron, chief academic officer of the New Teacher Center, helps teachers "see the difference they make...and it builds a level of persistence." This kind of focus has surprising benefits, as the effective intervention spills over to the rest of the class. Next month, choose two more "focal points."

Think About How Kids Think

Don't worry as much about the right answer as how your students get there. Constructed responses, essay questions, or oral responses will give you an idea of how kids think, providing much more information than multiple choice. Even in math, give short-answer questions that require kids to explain their thinking.



Go Visiting

Here's a goal: Three times this year, spend an hour or two in the classroom of a colleague whom you admire. It's amazing what you can learn by watching a teacher at the top of her game, particularly if she has a style similar to your own.

Get It on Tape

Charlotte Danielson, author of *Talk About Teaching!*, suggests you watch yourself teach and then reflect on your lesson. "Videotape a lesson, and watch and discuss it with colleagues," says Danielson. "Those are very rich conversations."

As you watch, consider your students' points of view. How are you at explaining concepts in a variety of ways? Who's doing the work in the room—are you spending a lot of time having the kids watch you model, or are the students challenged to solve problems on their own? "One of the things that we know about learning," says Danielson, "is it only happens when the learner is doing the thinking." □

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