

# Classroom Connections that Cultivate Success

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Effectiveness in the ESL (English as a Second Language) middle school classroom can be obtained by integrating resources that motivate students toward success that relate real-life, social, physical, and emotional issues. Students reach the ESL classroom with various emotional problems that reflect their current social situations. Many of these students are surrounded by demotivation and low self-esteem which does not stimulate them to succeed academically or in life. Developing strategies and techniques that integrate real-life situations and solutions will give teachers the opportunity to have effective results in the learning teaching process. By understanding students' needs, teachers provide students with motivational aspects to help them deal with self-esteem issues and direct them toward the accomplishment of their academic and personal goals.

## **The importance of getting to know your students**

The impact a teacher has on students can make or break them. Dealing with low self-esteem and low expectancy drives ESL teachers, in many occasions, to conform, and as a result, they are not able to obtain the expected results for grade level. Teachers have to look deeper. A great majority of difficult students have lived through difficult experiences. Teachers should take advantage of the opportunity to make a positive impact on their students through positive relationships. Developing relationships with students provides teachers with the opportunity to motivate students toward the use of their capacities and direct them in a path that can give them a successful outcome in school and in life.

I have found the following resources and strategies to be effective in my ESL classroom.

## **Building positive relationships with students**

- 1) Value students' ethnic background: Students enjoy teaching their teachers. This is an opportunity for teachers to learn from students.
  - i) Ask them about what special holidays they celebrate.

- ii) Remember these special holidays and celebrate with them.
  - iii) Try learning basic words from students' languages.
  - iv) Value students' musical preferences.
  - v) Let them speak in their original languages.
- 2) Share your culture with students: Have students identify your cultural aspects and compare it to their own. Find similarities between the two.
- 3) Have students share their culture with each other:
- i) Give students the opportunity to bring foods from their country to share with others.
  - ii) Provide opportunities for students to present their musical preferences in class and compare theirs' to those of other students.
  - iii) Motivate students to teach each other basic phrases from their languages.
- 4) Allow students to share their stories and value their experiences: Students need a voice.
- i) By lowering anxiety levels and giving students structured time to speak about who they are, gives them the space to be heard, and teachers the opportunity to build relationships with them.

### **Motivating your ESL students:**

Many ESL students come with various emotional problems due to poverty, neglect, abuse, sickness, and many other situations. Survival is their priority. Students may also find themselves living and growing up in a deteriorated society. At this age, living within these circumstances, they usually need to be motivated in order to succeed.

Students need to be made accountable for their success or failures. Some of these students do not have parents that respond to their failure or success, so they do not find a reason or drive to progress in any way. As educators, conducting individual conferencing with students about academic progress pushes them to take responsibility for their academic success and gives them the attention they need to know that their achievement is important.

Individual conferencing:

1. Print out weekly grade reports for each student and discuss them.
2. Talk about why they are not successful in certain classes.
3. Remind students of their responsibilities.
4. Have them verify their missing assignments and find ways to help them complete each one.

Opening your class to your students during their electives, students can take time to make up work.

By working through a themed classroom, educators can motivate students to look to the future. At home, many students cannot find positive reinforcements or motivations that will stimulate their academic and social success. In a themed classroom, teachers prepare all their activities and educational topics around the classroom theme. Themes that can be used to focus students toward future success are:

1. I have a dream: Focuses students toward achieving their dream by working hard to achieve it and never stop believing in it.
2. Soar to Success: Focusing students to succeed in everything they do.
3. Making a difference: Motivating students not to conform to social standards and making a difference in their community.
4. Attitude is a small thing but makes a big difference: Helping students understand that it does not matter if they cannot speak the language; it is all about what attitude they have.

### **Engaging students**

Relevance is the key to engaging and motivating students in a positive academic and social setting by using their experiences to develop a better learning teaching environment. Teachers can develop better academic resources that relate to student's everyday life situations by truly getting to know their students. It is very important for teachers to be aware of the social, emotional, economic, and physical issues that their students are facing and provide motivation for them that will aim them towards success in school and in life through the development of resources that reflect their day to day reality.

Experiences become deeper than the knowledge. Learning language is important, but engaging students gives them a better possibility for success. When teachers connect students with the correct stories and experiences, students barely notice they are actually learning.

Integrations for the classroom:

1. Use authors that reflect students' culture and experiences.

1. Hispanic authors

- Gary Soto
- Sandra Cisneros
- Esmeralda Santiago

2. Asian Authors:

- Amy Tan

2. Reading and listening to songs: Because of the limited language, ESL students enjoy songs from YouTube with lyrics. They connect through real-life situations and develop reading and listening skills at the same time.

Recommended songs:

- Fight song by Rachel Platten
- Brave by Sara Bareilles
- I'm Good by The Mowgli's
- I have a Dream by Common ft Will- I- AM

3. Non- fiction: Auto biographies

- Malala
- Martin Luther King
- Famous figures that have overcome obstacles.
- Teacher's life story: What better example than ours. Our story of overcoming obstacles can impact students' lives, so they can continue to achieve excellence.

4. Movies:

- The Freedom Writers
- Take the Lead
- Gridiron Gang

5. Using folk tales and urban legends from students' countries: Students love to be scared, especially middle schoolers. They also like to be reminded of their childhood because it connects them to the essence of their culture.

Middle school is a tough time for students because of the physical and emotional changes that occur among teenagers especially students that are learning another language. These changes and circumstances can limit the learning process and demotivate students. As teacher we have to take the responsibility in our hands to make an impact on our students that will stay with them for a lifetime.