

Best Practices

by Jennifer Glueck

Environment

I believe that the biggest reason that my kids are successful is the environment that I have created in our classroom. I tell my kids right from the first day of school that we are a family and a team and that we are each responsible for helping the whole team to be successful. I utilize a number of cooperative learning strategies every day, and they have become integrated into everything that we do, there are very few things that my students do in isolation. This provides opportunities for a great deal of social and academic conversations happening almost constantly. They are practicing listening and speaking skills, while also learning social skills. My kids learn how to compromise, collaborate, support, and encourage each other.

They are also all well aware of my expectations and know that I will accept nothing less than their best efforts. I have told them that I don't expect them to know all of the answers, if they did then they would already be in second grade. They are here to learn and they are responsible for making sure that they are learning every day. They are allowed to make mistakes and will never get in trouble for wrong answers, but they will be in big trouble if they don't try. Our class motto, "I Can Do It!" is not just words, my kids have learned what it signifies and when they say it, it carries real meaning for them.

In summary, I have tried to create an environment where my students are constantly engaged in social and academic conversations with myself and/or their peers, so that they are always practicing and using the English skills that are the focus of my instruction. They also build confidence in themselves and their abilities because they are allowed to practice in a risk free place where it is okay to make mistakes and learn from them and they are encouraged and celebrated by all when they are successful. They have a whole class full of support to help them when things are tough and they have learned strategies for effectively helping their classmates to learn and understand-not just tell them the answer or do it for them. We have set very high standards of ourselves and they all work very hard to live up to those expectations.

High Powered Strategies

I use all of the High Powered Strategies in my classroom and I find them all very effective. It is hard to say which are better than others, because they each have value for their specific purpose.

For conversation practice, we like This or That and Function Junction because they give us the opportunity to think and share our ideas and opinions. I always try to generate scenarios that are relevant and situations that the students could easily find themselves in every day, and this gives them the motivation to learn and they can then practice in the real world. For example: we might use Function Junction to practice asking for our choice of food for lunch, and then, later that same day, go to lunch and use what we have learned in a real world situation.

For Vocabulary practice, we really enjoy Vertical Sentences and Morph House. I usually pick words and sentences that come from stories that we have read and are familiar with, or perhaps a sentence that we created during one of our other activities (Verb Tense Study, This or That, Function Junction, etc.).

For writing practice, we use Verb Tense Study and Syntax Surgery because they are both very effective at helping us learn how to put words in the right order when we are writing or speaking, and we learn how to "listen" to a sentence to see if it sounds right. We also really enjoy Human Sentences because we practice putting our sentences together correctly and we also have a lot of fun because we are moving around and interacting with each other as we "become" a sentence.

I can't say that one strategy is more effective than the other; rather it is the integration of ALL the strategies used on a regular basis that makes them the most effective.