

Bringing the FUN Back to Learning

By: Kim Campbell



Data, rigor, relevance, and standards are certainly terms that are important and vital in the world of education, but so is the FUN factor. When students feel and experience learning as fun, we know they are more engaged, more on task, and more willing to dig deeper into the content.

Whenever a new teacher visits my classroom to observe, I immediately turn the conversation over to my students. I simply ask them two questions to share with the new teacher: "What makes a great teacher?" and "What makes a not-so-great teacher?" (without using names, of course).

Inevitably, students in every class will say, "A great teacher makes learning fun." When I plan my lessons, I try to think of ways to make what we are learning fun, but please note: not every second or every activity is fun. However, I do plan at least one or two fun activities per lesson. A little sprinkle of fun helps the learner engage and the atmosphere in the classroom come alive. What could be better?

Various ways I add fun to my class are through "brain breaks" or little games students can play with each other. For example, the brain break called Egg, Chicken, Cow, and Human is played using the concept of rock, paper, scissors. All students begin the game as eggs ... they must walk around the room making the egg sound, which is bloop, bloop, bloop. They find a fellow egg, play one round of rock, paper, scissors, and if they win, they evolve into a chicken and now walk around making the chicken sound, looking for a fellow chicken to play. If they win, they evolve into a cow making the cow sound looking for a fellow cow, and if they win again, they find a human.

If a person becomes a human, they run to the front of the room with their hands in the air saying, "I'm a human, I'm a human." Once at the front of the room they find another human and play rock, paper, scissors ... if they win they play another human that has come to the front. However, if they lose they go all the way back to an egg and go looking for a fellow egg.

The critical piece of this brain break is that no matter what animal they are, if they lose they go all the way back down to an egg and begin the process again. This game is a great way to break up the lesson, get kids moving, and add some fun to your lesson. To find other brain breaks go to YouTube and search for brain breaks. You will find all kinds of quick, fun, and engaging brain breaks to add to your repertoire.

Another way to add fun to your lessons is to create review games that involve a hands-on competitive nature to the review. Have students make a vocabulary review card for each vocabulary word assigned. The vocabulary word is written on one side of an index card (or a piece of paper) and the definition is on the other side. Students join a partner and use one of the students' cards. Place all the cards face down and mix them up. Students play concentration (memory game) to learn the vocabulary words.

To add some excitement, tell the students that when you call "time" the person with the most cards wins. If you like, you could have a prize for the winner, or you could record the winners and the next day pair the winners from the previous day with each other and have a mini tournament. You would pair the losers from the previous day, as well, to play each other. Hint: if the students finish before you call time, they **MUST** start all over, and the winner is determined by who has the most cards when the teacher calls time.

Finally, using theater or drama to engage kids is a must, simply because everyone is laughing and learning ... what a great combination. I like to call this activity: Drama Mamma. I use this activity after I've given a short lecture on a specific topic. For example, recently I was teaching my students about the history of China. After our brief lecture/smartboard introduction to China, students joined a partner and acted out the story with their partner: talking, making gestures, and retelling the story in a creative fun way!

To add some fun and spice to this activity, you could have the students react the story without speaking, by only using hand gestures and acting out scenes. Get your camera ready because the images are going to be priceless.

Teachers know that being creative in your delivery helps everyone in the class feel engaged and more excited about being part of the learning community you have created. So, yes: data, rigor, relevance, and standards are important and must be part of our teaching, but without adding a little fun, I have found that much of my lessons is lost.

I decided a long time ago that I could either cover the content or teach the content in a way that students will remember. I think we all want them to remember what we are teaching, and when students come to class knowing that at any moment fun could break out, they arrive ready to engage and learn.

Join me in Columbus, Ohio for the 2015 AMLE Conference, October 15-17, where I will be doing several sessions that have practical, fun, engaging activities you can implement the Monday you return to your classroom. See you in Columbus!

Kim Campbell has been a proud middle level geography teacher for more than 20 years. She is also a Positive Behavior Intervention Specialist (PBIS) coordinator, team leader, and member of Hopkins West Jr. High School's (Eden Prairie, MN) Equity and Literacy Teams

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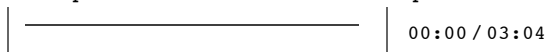


Meet Kim at **AMLE2015** in Columbus, Ohio, where she is a featured presenter on Motivating Students; Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships; Engaging Boys; and Classroom Management.



View a webinar with Kim Campbell: **After School Programs in the Middle Grades: Rigor without Mortis**

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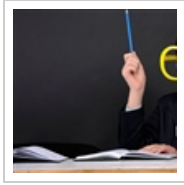


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