

20 Teaching “Big Ideas”

1. Take sufficient time at the beginning of the year **to get to know your students, establish routines and expectations together, and build community**. This will save time throughout the year, allow for flexibility while maintaining classroom management, and smooth out transitions between activities. Student-centered teaching responds to **what each student knows, can do, and cares about**.
2. Regardless of your teaching style, **predictability and support** are the primary factors influencing student satisfaction, enthusiasm, and performance.
3. Explicitly discuss **objectives, applications/purposes, and metacognitive processes** with your students. As part of teaching them to learn, give feedback on and assess the **quality of the questions** they ask.
4. The average teacher wait time is 1.5 seconds. Allowing students more than 3 seconds of **“think-time”** produce higher-order answers and reduces “I don’t know” answers. Avoid “cuing” students to urge responses. **Encourage them to create their own retrieval cues**.
5. **Courageously try** new ideas, just as you encourage your students to do. Watching you **handle failure and grow** from it is a powerful lesson for students. Also, though you should have deep and current knowledge of your discipline, you no longer need to be the “expert in everything.” We can and should learn from our students, as well.
6. When creating a lesson, chunk it into **10-15 minute segments**. This does not mean you have to change topics or activities necessarily, but you need to **“rehook” or redirect** the students. Using odd amounts of time for group activities (4, 7, or 13 minutes, as opposed to 5 or 10), helps keep students on task.
7. **Anything the students can be doing, they should be doing**. As developmentally appropriate, shift the responsibility for learning to the students, providing them with a balance of support, scaffolding, and perceived **adult-like roles**.
8. **Planning is everything**. Having a good objective-based plan allows you to spend your mental energy in class observing students at work and providing descriptive and prescriptive feedback. Clear objectives also allow you to be more flexible, adjusting your plan according to student interests.
9. Motivation is essential for maintaining attention. **Intrinsic motivation** is primarily influenced by a sense of **autonomy, mastery, relevance, and relatedness**. *Autonomy*: Having choice and voice in the classroom. *Mastery*: Successes and continual **growth**; *Relevance*: Students should understand why they are learning something. *Relatedness*: Students work harder for people they are connected to.

10. **Content is important** because you cannot think critically without something to think about. However, we are freer now to **let students choose the content** (because we have little idea what they will need to know in the future), so give them *choices* as often as possible, using **content as a vehicle** to develop essential **skills**. The most important skill you can teach your students is **knowing what to do when you don't know what to do**.
11. In any given learning episode, **students best remember what they hear first and last, and least what they hear just past the middle**. If only one activity is scheduled, students are subjected to a long and less effective middle. If two or more activities are scheduled, students gain the positive impact of the novelty of **multiple beginnings and endings**, and are subject to shorter middles.
12. **Reflection** that requires students to engage in an interior or exterior dialogue increases the likelihood of long-term retention. Ask students to summarize, evaluate, organize, connect, etc. after each activity and at the end of class.
13. **Movement** activates the brain and learning the same information in different physical spaces increases long-term retention.
14. Encourage **growth mindsets over fixed mindsets**. Praise effort over ability and behavior over the child. Attribute successes to effort and failures to the need for more effective strategies.
15. When in doubt, **ask the students**. Get frequent feedback about how they are experiencing your class. It will improve your teaching and let them know you care about them and **value their ideas**. Don't be afraid to scrap an activity that isn't working!
16. To whatever extent possible, create **authentic learning experiences** that relate directly to a real-life application. Make sure they can recognize and verbalize the purpose.
17. **Students should be allowed and encouraged to collaborate**. It no longer makes sense to always require students to "work on their own." In the real world, collaboration is not cheating, it's an expected skill.
18. **Teachers should collaborate** as much as possible. Not only do better ideas come from groups than from individuals, but a collegial and collaborative faculty also provides a more predictable, structured, and cohesive environment that is optimal for student learning.
19. **Don't be afraid to learn about and use technology** that can support your teaching. Acknowledge what computers can do better than you and what you can do better than computers, so your time and expertise are used most effectively. Technology should *support* your curriculum and objectives, not drive them.
20. **Reflect** regularly on why you have chosen to teach. **Appreciate, reward, and nurture** yourself so that you feel glad to be at work every day. **Have fun** and don't take yourself too seriously.