Using Curiosity to Differentiate the Classroom

Teachers are always searching for new ways to engage their students, and spring is a time for reinvigorating practices. So how do we engage all students and make them excited about learning? Curiosity is the key. Too often, as teachers, we give the answers first...what would happen if we started with the questions? Here’s how to do it.

1. Practice. Get students used to asking questions, being curious, and not having the answers. Use Ian Byrd’s puzzlements (go to https://puzzlements.co/ to sign up to get weekly puzzlements in your inbox). Project them on the screen, and ask the students: What do you wonder? What do you see? This gives students a non-threatening way to experience asking questions and wondering in a classroom.


3. Apply the concept to your content. Show a conjugated verb in Spanish class and ask your students, what do you see or wonder? Or ask them to look at math equations and find patterns and highlight with two (or more) different colors. Important! Don’t tell them which patterns to look for. Let them figure out the puzzle on their own.

Examples

Using Cards:
Learning level one information (an example from the world language classroom) –

- Make sets of flash cards. There should be a different conjugated verb on each card. Do this for three different verbs. The easiest way is to print these from Quizlet, put them on cardstock, and have a student aid or volunteer cut them out.
- Put them in large envelopes all mixed up.
- Ask the students to work with a partner to put the verbs into as many categories as makes sense to them. Share out the categories. What you want is for them to discover the endings and the stems on their own. This is an organic process that may take multiple directions but will eventually get to where you want them to go.
- Do the same with stem-changing verbs. Irregulars...is there a pattern? Why not? What do we do with these? What do we call them? Do you want to know what “verbologists” call them?

- A similar thing can be done with adjective agreement or word order if you print whole sentences on to the cards.
- Keep the cards for future use. Color code them on the back and have them laminated.
- How could you use this in your content area?

Using a Box:
Asking questions –

- Put an object in a box related to the content you are teaching.
- Play 20 questions. Students ask yes/no questions until they can draw or describe the object. Or if they know the vocabulary, they can say what is in the box.

When students are guided toward being curious, their brain releases positive chemicals that are not only pleasurable, they help put them in state of anticipation. All humans remember better when in this positive state of anticipation. How many times a day are any of us in that state? Can we make that number higher for our students?

THP

Resource