



CONNECTING TO THE CLASSROOM: **Helpful Hints for Out-of-School Time Staff**

The following information has been gathered from trainings offered by Bridging the Gap, training series for out-of-school time professionals. The strategies provided are common themes discussed in each of the trainings offered that can be applied to all grade levels and all subject areas.

Strategies for Staff to Employ in their Programs

Keep in mind that **learning a new concept is not easy** or simple and that connections are not always made immediately. For someone to learn something new, it must be repeated 8 times on average, and to unlearn something and replace it with something new, it must be repeated 28 times.

The best way for students to learn, especially English language learners (ELL), is by **connecting lessons and activities to common experiences**. Some ways to do this are: drawing on students' life experiences and culture, explaining things several times using different vocabulary, and doing activities together and in groups.

Students need to share in the ownership of the program by participating in decision-making. Students need to explore ideas of importance to them to increase their investment, engagement, and motivation.

Look for teachable moments when students are calm and ready to listen and learn. Opportunities to teach a concept or behavior may happen spontaneously, and not at a prescribed moment and staff should always be prepared to take advantage of these opportunities. Also, adults must model the behaviors they want to see in students.

Always begin by asking students what they already know or have observed about the subject or activity, and build upon that knowledge, whether it is correct or incorrect. This is known as **establishing a baseline of information**.

Become familiar with the vocabulary used in the classroom and on the standardized test. As you are assisting students, especially with mathematics, you should phrase your prompting questions in the same way as their exams, and avoid using slang or layman's terms (e.g. "times" instead of "multiply" or "take away" instead of "subtract"). If this is not done, many students may become confused by the questions, even if they know the answer to the problem.

Praise students for correct answers, but **show an interest in how the problem was solved**.

Make students become problem solvers by **asking them leading questions**, however do not provide answers or do the work for students. Examples of leading questions include: Who was involved? What were the main events and ideas? What did the main characters in the



story want to achieve? How would you act in a similar situation? How do you distinguish between facts and opinions? What problem are we trying to solve? What is the question? What do we need to know to answer the question? Does the information we have contribute to answering the question? What is the likely solution or answer? How can we test to find out if our guess is correct or not?

Don't be afraid to tell students, **“I don't know the answer, but let's figure it out together.”** This provides students with confidence and self-esteem knowing that they are not the only ones who don't know. It also teaches students that learning is a life-long experience.

Homework is the students' responsibility and if it is forgotten, lost, or none was assigned, you should substitute homework time with another type of learning activity such as reading, writing, research, etc. **Out-of-School Time staff should not be made responsible for teaching what was not learned in school**, and if the student is unable to complete the assignment, help them write a note to their teacher explaining the situation and asking for help.

As often as possible, **expose students to learning opportunities other than educational texts**, such as poetry, photographs, maps, journals, biographies and autobiographies, virtual journeys, educational movies, music, artwork, debating, etc.

Keep in mind that a major obstacle for all students is a **fear of failure** and that all students want to be liked by and acknowledged by caring adults.

Competencies Staff should Foster in Students

Help students **set goals or establish purposes for their learning**.

Ask students how they knew the answer, but do not accept “I just know.” Have students **explain their thinking**. Students should **have at least 2 ways to figure out every problem**, especially in mathematics.

In addition to having students explain their thinking and observations, as often as possible, have students **write down their process of thinking and use writing as a way to express themselves (reflection)**.

Help students to analyze problems by **breaking problems into segments** and bringing the segments back together in an organized way.

Have students make **pictures and/or movies in their mind** (with eyes open or closed) to solve problems.



Encourage learning to be interactive experiences by having **students imagine themselves in the problem or story** using group discussions, your stories, and students' stories.

Have students **draw inferences by thinking ahead** to make judgments, speculate, or predict what is to come.

Students should learn to synthesize or **combine new information with existing knowledge** to form original ideas or interpretations.

By **reviewing, sorting, and sifting important information**, students will discover new insights and interpretations.