

## ***GOTCHA! Effective Ways to Improve Student Attention***

More and more attempts are being made to recognize the differences in learning styles that students possess in hopes of creating more positive teaching environments. If educators are going to be successful at keeping students involved, they'll have to rely on a variety of techniques. The following discussion covers the implementation of the *Games, Openness, Tickets, Chaos, Humor, and Abracadabra* that help make up the *GOTCHA* method of teaching.

### **Games**

A popular strategy, games not only increase student involvement, but enhance performance as well. Whether it is a battle to determine who earns extra credit points or simply who scores higher on a test, students love competing against one another. It is in our nature to survive, even academically, so why not use that to our advantage as educators? The most common use of games in instruction is the exam review. While smaller class sizes can benefit from *Family Feud* or *Jeopardy*, games like *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* work better with larger audiences. And with the advancements in software that exist today (i.e. *TurningPoint*), educators can even “poll the audience” on certain questions, similar to television, using remote keypads that provide immediate feedback. If that type of technology is not available, however, you can always “phone-a-friend” in the audience for help. Either way, the students will enjoy themselves and learn in the process.

### **Openness**

The atmosphere you create within the first sixty seconds of your first day can set the tone for an entire year. It is up to you, as an educator, to create an environment that is conducive to learning, while also open to expression. One way that this can be accomplished is through the use of multiple intelligences to engage and evaluate students. People have a wide range of abilities. A person's strength in one area is simply not reflected equally across all areas. A classroom may be comprised of students who learn best by speaking (verbal/linguistic), solving (logical/mathematical), seeing (visual/spatial), touching (bodily/kinesthetic) and so on. The more that we incorporate, the more students (and diverse learners) we reach and the greater their chances of success. However, this is only part of the solution. Students also need to know that their views and opinions are not only welcomed, but a valuable contribution to the learning process. A student that has an active voice in their education will place more value in that education. Make every attempt to learn student names (preferably the first class meeting or two) and build rapport immediately. Treat them as colleagues in the learning experience opposed to establishing dominance based on a number of degrees earned. Not only will you gain their attention, but also their respect.

### **Tickets**

No, we are not talking about speeding tickets or issuing citations for being late to

class. However, the next time you give an exam (preferably multiple choice); start handing out tickets at the door as students are filing in. In doing so, notice the commotion you will have caused regarding the purpose of the tickets. What are they for? Can we win something? Not only will you cause excitement and curiosity among your students (which both increase divergent thinking), but you also will simultaneously decrease the amount of test anxiety typically felt by students prior to an exam. Students will be so focused on what they might win that they won't be stressed about how little or much they know compared to the student next to them. Explain to them that a ticket will be discretely drawn every ten minutes until the exam period is over. This will encourage them to take their time on the exam because the longer it takes to complete, the better their chances of winning (more potential tickets/winners). More importantly, the time between each ticket selection will be spent checking over answers; which, hopefully, will increase student performance.

### Chaos

Young and old, we all like to dress up and pretend we are somebody (or thing) we are not. Well, we do not have to wait until Halloween to come around anymore. Nothing grabs a student's attention faster than a teacher walking through the door looking ridiculous (which, arguably, happens a lot anyways even without a costume). Not only does it show your "human" side and establish greater rapport with your students (see *Openness*), but it also causes students to show up on time so they will not miss your grand entrance. The best way to break up the monotony of a stagnant class is to deviate from the norm. Costumes are great at creating fun, relaxed, environments more conducive to learning. And the sillier the costume you wear, the better. Whether the costume relates to the subject matter or not is up to you. Regardless, I guarantee that all eyes will be on you hanging onto your every word (if, for no other reason, simply to try and understand why you look like that).

### Humor

Whether describing what we look for in a mate or what we remember about our favorite teacher, chances are you will get the same response—a sense of humor. Time and time again, I have referred to teachers not only as educators, but also entertainers. Each of us is a sage on "stage" performing to an audience of students we want to keep glued to their seats. With numerous studies supporting the effects of humor on student attention and performance, as educators we would be doing our students a disservice if we did not include it in our repertoire of teaching strategies. Like a good costume, it has the ability to keep students guessing and always coming back for more. And because of the environment you've created, you won't only have students eager to attend, but to learn. Sanity is the playground for the unimaginative...so explore your silly side and see what happens.

### Abracadabra

Every time you step in front of a class, you have a chance to create magic. By

generating a sense of wonder and amazement, you not only engage your students, but make teaching more fun as well (and you don't have to be Houdini). The key is to connect with your audience by capturing their attention quickly. Whether you use magic to start a class or break up its monotony, it all boils down to showmanship. So what will *you* do to leave your audience wanting more?