30 STRATEGIES TO BUILD LITERACY SKILLS

Engagement at Every Level of Thinking!

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Reproducible pages are in italics.

Connect with their interests using a "Who Are You?" Interest Inventory (Jensen & Nickelsen, 2008; see page 12 for a reproducible or visit **go.hbe.com.au** to download). Ask what they do in their spare time, what sports they like to play and watch, what genre of books they read, and overall, what they enjoy. For younger students, you can read the inventory aloud and have them answer the questions verbally. The answers will help you understand that student better and enable you to reach out to him or her in a way that will encourage a love for learning.

A *learning profile* can help you organize all of this valuable information. Just create a file folder for each student with relevant information, like the interest inventory. We use learning profiles ourselves, and anytime we need to understand a student better, create choices, reteach, help a student become an expert, or group students, we look at that student's learning profile to assist us (Jensen & Nickelsen, 2008). We also want students to know how they learn best, and these inventories will help them better understand themselves as learners. Students are welcome to keep the folder up to date, and we recommend revisiting the pieces in January since students change so much throughout the school year. Other information to include in a learning profile might be:

- **Strengths**—Parents will commonly talk about their own children as being very tech-savvy, musical, street smart, or hands on. These descriptions are typical of the varieties of ways that kids show their strengths.
- **Emotional intelligence**—Evidence suggests that social-emotional skills contribute to academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellingar, 2011). This is why it's important to value not only the skills of accurately perceiving emotions in self and others, using emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding emotions, and managing emotions but also programs or processes that build these skills.
- **Learning preferences**—We all have preferences when it comes to learning comfortably. For example, some prefer to work in small groups while others would rather learn independently. Some prefer to hear classical music during writing while others prefer no noise at all. For learning preference questions and questions about subject area interests and strengths, see pages 13–16 for reproducibles or visit **go.hbe.com.au** to download.
- **Observations—**Notes from previous teachers about a student's subject or test experiences can give current teachers great insight into the student's background knowledge as well as behavior and preferences.

Not only will connecting with your students improve your classroom climate, but it will also set an example for how students interact with one another daily. Setting high expectations for cooperative learning during group work is vital. Pointing out and praising good social interactions is key to improving social skills all day long.

Differentiating Instruction

This second ingredient is foundational for a positive learning climate and daily success with each student. Differentiation is about using various strategies, materials, and tools to help all students reach the standards they need for success. It involves changing the content, thinking processes, pace of instruction, or assessments so each student can get to the standard. Teachers need a powerful growth mindset to help all students reach the standard or daily outcome, knowing students will arrive via different strategies on different days. Differentiation is meeting a student's learning needs individually or in a small group so he or she can attain

Learning Preferences: Primary (Grades K–3)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Circle your favorite between the two choices. *(Note: For nonreaders, just do this interview style.)*

I would like to learn . . .

1. By myself OR in a small group
2. While listening to music OR while there is little noise in the room
3. By drawing a picture OR writing
4. By solving story problems OR adding or subtracting lists of numbers
5. Near a window OR away from a window
6. In the front of the room OR in the back of the room
7. At my desk OR on the carpet on the floor
8. By typing my words OR by writing my words
9. By being the leader of a group OR by being a part of a group
10. In the morning OR in the afternoon

Jensen, E., & Nickelsen, L. (2008). Deeper learning: 7 powerful strategies for in-depth and longer-lasting learning. *Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.*

CHAPTER 5

STRATEGIES FOR ZONE 1

In the previous chapter, we explored how you can consciously prepare and prime your learners' brains and helped you discover what your learners already know (good, bad, right, or wrong). This step supports the process of making sense. Meaning-making becomes more powerful when we help students connect the new information to what they already know.

The CCSS ask us to plan more opportunities for students to speak, listen to one another, and write. Taking that directive into account, we've compiled ten strategies for building background knowledge and activating prior knowledge to help your students make more meaningful connections. While the other two zones have daily and long-term strategies, all strategies in Zone 1 are short and sweet. They can be done daily with any content and any target.

Building Background Knowledge Strategies

We have four great ways to build background knowledge in this engagement zone, including Pre-Exposure and Priming, *The Important Book*, the Historical Event Web, and Kinesthetic Vocabulary.

1. Pre-Exposure and Priming

Pre-exposure is a long-term advance notice. Just as studios and theaters want us to preview a movie to garner interest, pre-exposure is the process of covertly preparing students for future content or skills days, weeks, months, or even years before accountability. If you find yourself frustrated over the lack of background students have in a subject, you can build the background in class through pre-exposure. This process can be a bonanza for teachers who often get a blank stare from students when presenting new information. Pre-exposure is often based on skill acquisition (for instance, we prepare ourselves to eventually drive a car by driving a tractor, go-cart, or bumper car as a kid). We believe that "in a well-planned curriculum, students are getting pre-exposure all the time. For example, fourth graders can be exposed to algebra by working with symbols in basic problem solving, or they can prepare for geometry by building models that expose them to points, lines, planes, angles, solids, and volumes" (Jensen & Nickelsen, 2008, p. 74).

Priming is a short-term notice. It happens minutes or even seconds before exposure to a learning event. It prepares the learner for the understanding of concepts and gives the brain information to build into a semantic

How would you sort and label these groups of words?

How does _____ compare/contrast with _____?

What are the pros/cons for/against _____?

What might the next section be about, and why did you say that?

What was the purpose of this section/paragraph/sentence? Give evidence from text.

How could you compare and contrast _____ with _____?

Why is/did _____? Give evidence from text.

Can you explain _____ in more depth?

Where else was that said? Where else could _____? Why?

What is the effect of _____ on _____? Give evidence from text.

Why did the author believe/say/write _____?

What was the MVPI (Most Valuable Piece of Information) and why? Give evidence from text.

If you could change _____, what or how would you do it? Why?

Ideally, a student's first question is good and the second question is better. Guide students by asking, "Are you sure that is a better question? How do you know?" These better questions should be more open ended but shouldn't require you to think as much as the next level (best).

Finally, for the grand finale, have students create and ask the best, highest-level questions about the photo. Congratulate them on generating their own questions. Your students will understand the photo so much better after they go through all question types: good, better, best.

Tell them there is a three-step process they can go through to brainstorm the best research questions (adapted from Rothstein & Santana, 2011). The stronger their background knowledge on a topic, the better the questions can be (they should have been learning about the topic somewhat before doing this activity if it is leading them to a research project). Sometimes we use this three-step process just to generate great questions before closely reading text. Questions are powerful and help the students stick with a challenging text rather than abandoning it.

1. Produce your own questions:
   - Ask as many questions as you can.
   - Don't stop to discuss, judge, or answer the questions.
   - Write down everything exactly as it is stated.
   - Change any statement into a question.

As a whole group, discuss the major points from each group. Facilitate this time with questions that you heard and ones that you created as well. Eventually, choose a student leader for this facilitation role (be sure students understand how to perform this role). This stage should take about thirty minutes.

When finished, simply say, "This is a good place to stop." Students should return the room to the original set-up and then begin evaluations. Each student should complete the Socratic Seminar Evaluation and ask another student from his or her small group to complete the peer section. This is a powerful evaluation that gets students writing about the topic too.

Assessment

There are a couple ways to assess a Socratic seminar.

- Give students these questions to ask others in the group as part of a peer evaluation:
  - Here is my view and how I arrived at it. How does it sound to you?
  - Do you see gaps in my reasoning?
  - Do you have a different interpretation? Different data?
  - Do you have different conclusions?
  - How did you arrive at your view?
  - Are you taking into account something different from what I have considered?
- Last, but not least, evaluate. See the Socratic Seminar Evaluation reproducible.

Your students will relish the opportunity to have a debate in the Socratic seminar style. We encourage you to gradually release the responsibility with this strategy. You will be amazed how quickly they will want to take on the teacher's role.

Conclusion

We hope that you will enjoy taking your students to Zone 3: Engage to Own. This level does more than connect with the Common Core; it challenges students beyond what they're used to. It is tough and requires quite a bit of reasoning skills. But ultimately, it's the most satisfying level of engagement. As students complete these activities, they'll develop a level of academic self-confidence that prepares them for far greater challenges next year.

ASQ Time

1. **Action step:** What is the single most valuable next step you will take after having read this chapter?
2. **Summary of learning:** Summarize in three to five sentences what you learned in this chapter.
3. **Question:** What discussion questions do you have for other readers, for the authors, or for self-reflection to explore more from this chapter?