

Enrichment News

Wenatchee School District Enrichment Program

Mission: To find and nurture talent in students by providing and supporting opportunities for them to pursue their interests at an appropriate pace and level of complexity and regular opportunities to spend time with students of similar abilities

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Different Kinds of Boredom

How often have you heard a student say, “I’m bored!” This can be very frustrating to teachers who work hard to make their lessons interesting and relevant. It is also distressing to parents when their child comes home and relates that a class is boring. It recently occurred to me that there are different kinds of boredom, and it is very important to pin-point just why the student is bored. I had a major epiphany when I realized that *there’s a difference between being bored and being uninterested!*

If a student is bored because she already knows the information or wants more challenging material, there are many options available to address this issue. Here are a few ideas:

- Assess the student to determine if she really does know the material as opposed to “I’ve had this before!”
- If she has demonstrated mastery of the required material, allow her to eliminate the assignments and work on something more appropriate to her learning level. Let her have input on the alternative assignment so she’ll be motivated to complete it. (By 4th grade, students should be able to propose their own alternative learning assignments as long as they meet your non-negotiable requirements. They can help you develop a contract that includes a timeline, expectations, and a rubric.)
- Provide “tiered” assignments, i.e., give them a choice between a grade level assignment and a more demanding one. Be careful not to give “more of the same” work, but more complex work.
- Give choices and open-ended assignments.
- Allow a small group of advanced students work together on a difficult task. They challenge each other and will often far exceed your expectations.
- Provide advanced reading materials (use lexiles as a guide).

However, if he’s bored because he’s uninterested in the subject matter, that poses a different problem. I’ve watched teachers try all kinds of motivational techniques to get students engaged in the subject, and it works to some extent. It takes a great deal of energy, but some students are very hard to satisfy. This can become a never-ending cycle of “please entertain me!”

There’s a difference between being challenging and entertaining. All students love being entertained, but only some students want to be challenged. It’s important to determine the difference. A student will feel trapped in an environment that doesn’t offer opportunities for a faster pace or more complexity. However, some students are provided with many opportunities, but they are just not interested in pursuing them.

Students need to take some responsibility for the solution. If they want more challenge, they should let the teacher know by proposing a more difficult task that fulfills the general assignment. If they already know the information, they should ask the teacher if they can prove their prior knowledge or skill and advance to a different assignment. Teachers cannot read students’ minds, so it is important for them to become self-advocates.

Students who are uninterested in a topic need to find ways to apply their own interests and talents to the task. Be creative in response to the assignment. If the situation does not allow for creativity, fulfill the basic requirements and move on. You shouldn’t be expected to “live up to your potential” by doing more demanding work if you are truly uninterested in the subject.

Both parents and teachers need to make an honest appraisal of the situation before they begin a conversation about dealing with boredom. Simply ask the student if he or she wants more challenging work. The answer will tell you how to solve the problem.

Important Announcements

WAETAG Conference is October 19-21 in Bremerton. The Washington Association of Educators of Talented and Gifted is offering an excellent conference featuring Bertie Kingore, an author and consultant in Gifted Education, and Robert Doman, Jr., founder of the National Association for Child Development. Learn more at www.waetag.net.

Dead Sea Scrolls Exhibit. The Northwest Gifted Child Association (NWGCA) is a support group for the parents of gifted and talented children. The Wenatchee Chapter is planning an event for students who have been to (or are planning to go) the Pacific Science Center's Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit in Seattle this fall. Interested? Please call Carol Springer at 665-0946 for more information.

Lesson Idea: Philosophical Chairs*

Philosophical Chairs: a technique to allow participants an equal opportunity to defend their beliefs through critical and logical thinking.

1. Pose a statement that is controversial enough for students to take sides. Examples: Students at our school should wear uniforms; all high school students should complete a college entrance curriculum; Jack in the Beanstalk should be charged with three counts of theft.
2. Arrange two parallel rows of chairs, facing each other. Students who support the statement sit on one side; students who oppose it sit on the other. Undecided students sit on either end. They may not voice an opinion unless they choose a side. All students have the opportunity to move to the opposite side or the undecided chairs as their thinking grows and changes.
3. Use a “scrunchy ball” or soft toy and toss it to someone on the Pro side who is willing to make the opening statement. No one else may talk or interrupt. Once that person has finished, toss the ball to someone on the Con side to respond. The ball alternates back and forth. A person may speak for a second time only if no one else on that side has a response.
4. The teacher serves as moderator and may answer clarifying questions but should not express an opinion. Decide when to end the debate, and debrief the experience with the students.

Alternate activity: Have all students prepare ahead for the discussion by reading a common newspaper article, short story, essay or literacy selection, taking notes as they read. Write questions to submit for the opening statement. The teacher can decide which question(s) will be discussed. They should refer to the text to defend their arguments.

This technique may also be used at a staff meeting to debate an issue!

*Source: AVID Summer Institute (Achievement Via Individual Determination)



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