

More ideas for *Getting Attention*

Location Anchors

Explanation and Research

Location anchors are when the teacher uses certain locations in the room for only one purpose, such as teaching, telling a story, even yelling at the class. If the teacher is very meticulous and only does certain activities in those specific locations, that activity has been “anchored” in the minds of the students. If you only tell stories when you stroll over and stand in the “story spot”, the students brains will begin to anticipate a story as you walk over to that area.

Researchers (Hall et al., 2001) found that neurons (brain cells) in the hippocampus (which is the part of the brain needed to create long-term memories) are active when memories are cued by seeing the context, or location, of the memories. This is an area that can be a double-edged sword for educators, with the potential to be harmful or helpful.

Here's how you do it

It is helpful when we anchor certain parts of the room for specific activities. For example, at the front of the room is usually what I call the “Teaching Spot”. This area may be a large area at the front of the room, and most teaching occurs when you are standing in this area.

Anchored spaces can be harmful to your facilitation of the group if you scold the class from your teaching spot. If the students need a bit of berating, you should move away and reprimand the students from an area far away from the “Teaching Spot”. Perhaps the anchor spot for bad news is in the back corner of the room where you rarely go. When you are done giving the students a talking to, the slow walk back to the

“Teaching Spot” not only gives some time to decontaminate the negative energy in the room, but also allows you to regain composure, catch your breath, and refocus on the lesson at hand.

Try having different location anchors. I mentioned the “Teaching Spot”. I also suggest having a “Story Spot”, where you stroll to when telling a story, or a “Joke Spot”, to which you saunter to tickle your student’s funny bones.

Prop Anchors

Explanation and Research

Bringing out certain props only when you do certain activities can help to prime neural pathways to receive and recall information. You may not have thought about it, but using props as touchstones for memories seems to be why souvenirs are so important to travelers (Morgan and Pritchard, 2005). When a souvenir from a journey is held, it helps to mediate the recall of memories from that trip. We can tap into that power when teaching by using prop anchors.

Here's how you do it

You bring out a certain prop and show it to the students when it is time to do a routine activity. For example, John Le Tellier, a Quantum Teaching facilitator, uses a goofy hat to signify it is time for the group to “recap” information, and a picture frame when it is time for his students to “Frame questions they may have”.

Dress

Explanation and Research

Scene One

The new teacher wants to bond with the students and build rapport, so he regularly wears jeans, a faded tee shirt and a shell choker on a hemp string. He has great rapport, but has difficulty when he wants the students to settle down and listen while he is teaching.

Scene Two

You wear a suit and tie every day. You actually have a great sense of humor, but you have a reputation for being a stick in the mud.

Think about the message you want to send to the group you are teaching, and dress accordingly. Wardrobe absolutely sends a message to the students and can make a difference in your effectiveness as a presenter.

Numerous studies have shown the effect that wardrobe has on the perception of those around us. One such study indicated a significant change in student perception of a teacher's ability to teach and even the teacher's intelligence, based solely on the teacher's clothing style (Behling, 1991)! Again, the bottom line is clear; what you are wearing does make an impact.

Here's how you do it

- I do not give any specific advice on what to wear, just a caution to raise awareness. You should carefully consider what kind of message you want to send to the students, and dress accordingly. If it is a serious lecture, and you show up in flip flops and a sports jersey, that would send one kind of message. If you were working on team-building activities that will be done out of doors in a field and you showed up in a professional business suit, that sends a different message.
- If you have a new class and are unsure what to wear, I recommend going for the middle of the road. For example, a male can wear casual slacks and a sports coat

and tie. To become less formal, the coat and tie can come off and shirt sleeves can be rolled up.

- You may consider doing some action research and try switching up your wardrobe a couple of days in a row to see the impact on the students. On Monday, try wearing something very casual, like jeans with sandals (if the school dress code allows). The next day wear your nicest clothes, what my mom used to call our “Sunday Clothes”, and see what differences you notice in the student’s behavior.

Proximity

Explanation and Research

Don't forget the power of proximity! We all have a pre-established, invisible boundary around us that I call the social bubble. When someone is too close to me, you will know it because I will step away and may look uncomfortable. Proximity uses this biological imperative to let students know we are aware of them, and they need to focus their attention on you. Proximity is effective regardless of age, including adults. If you are working with school-aged children, be sensitive to the fact that some students may, for various reasons, feel very uncomfortable and even threatened having any adult stand close to them during a lesson.

Nothing New Under the Sun

The use of proximity in the classroom is not new to teaching. It has been studied in numerous contexts for many decades. For example, studies have shown that proximity and teacher attention have been found to also reinforce the behaviors that teachers desire out of their students, such as on-task study behaviors. Even with disruptive and “dawdling” first and fifth grade students, on-task behaviors were increased when reinforced with proximity (Hall, 1968).

Proximity isn't just useful to keep students attention. In one study, it was found that college students who sat in the front row and had closer proximity to the teacher consistently got better grades (Holliman, 1986).

Here's how you do it

1. Proximity works just by standing close to a student.
2. As you are teaching, cruise around the classroom and stand by a student or group of students that are not paying attention.
3. Even more effective is to place a hand on the desk of the student, or on the back of his chair.

Notes:

If you are lucky enough to have student teachers or classroom aides, use them as your wingman. Don't stand side by side when you are trying to get the student's attention. The other adult in the room should always be working as your wingman, and using proximity by standing next to students when you are trying to get their attention.