

Using Curiosity to Differentiate the Classroom

Tracy Cloninger

Peak to Peak Charter School, Lafayette, CO

Tracy Cloninger is currently the Gifted and Talented interventionist for grades K-12 at Peak to Peak Charter School in Colorado. Previously, she taught Spanish to all grades for 16 years. She enjoys family time in the great Colorado outdoors, travel, art, and reading (Harry Potter being a favorite series).

Teachers are always searching for new ways to engage their students, and spring is a time for reinvigorating practices. So how do we engage all students and make them excited about learning? Curiosity is the key. Too often, as teachers, we give the answers first...what would happen if we started with the questions? Here's how to do it.

1. Practice. Get students used to asking questions, being curious, and not having the answers. Use Ian Byrd's puzzles (go to <https://puzzlements.co/> to sign up to get weekly puzzles in your inbox). Project them on the screen, and ask the students: What do you wonder? What do you see? This gives students a non-threatening way to experience asking questions and wondering in a classroom.

2. Normalize questioning. Keep a book or wall of unanswered questions.

3. Apply the concept to your content. Show a conjugated verb in Spanish class and ask your students, what they see or wonder? Or ask them to look at math equations and find patterns and highlight with two (or more) different colors. Important! Don't tell them which patterns to look for. Let them figure out the puzzle on their own.

Examples

Using Cards:

Learning level one information (an example from the world language classroom) –

- Make sets of flash cards. There should be a different conjugated verb on each card. Do this for three different verbs. The easiest way is to print these from Quizlet, put them on cardstock, and have a student aid or volunteer cut them out.
- Put them in large envelopes all mixed up.
- Ask the students to work with a partner to put the verbs into as many categories as makes sense to them. Share out the categories. What you want is for them to discover the endings and the stems on their own. This is an organic process that may take multiple directions but will eventually get to where you want them to go.
- Do the same with stem-changing verbs. Irregulars...is there a pattern? Why not? What do we do with these? What do we call them? Do you want to know what "verbologists" call them?

- A similar thing can be done with adjective agreement or word order if you print whole sentences on to the cards.
- Keep the cards for future use. Color code them on the back and have them laminated.
- How could you use this in your content area?

Learning vocabulary –

- Make sets of flash cards.
- Make the categories and see what comes out of it. Connections to other words they already know? Prefix, Suffix?
- Ask the students: Can you make sub-categories?

Using Images:

Making connections –

- Post the image and ask: What do you notice? What do you wonder?
- With a partner or individually, write down all that you notice or any questions you have. This could be as simple as colors, or design details, all the way up to complex ideas and connections to prior knowledge.
- Share out.
- Record it on the board or somewhere all can see.
- Use wait time...the second questions are often the best.
- Start answering the questions that came up...let students go first.

Using a Box:

Asking questions –

- Put an object in a box related to the content you are teaching.
- Play 20 questions. Students ask yes/no questions until they can draw or describe the object. Or if they know the vocabulary, they can say what is in the box.

When students are guided toward being curious, their brain releases positive chemicals that are not only pleasurable, they help put them in state of anticipation. All humans remember better when in this positive state of anticipation. How many times a day are any of us in that state? Can we make that number higher for our students? **THP**

Resource

Byrd, Ian. "Recipes for Curiosity." *Byrdseed.com*, 2019, www.byrdseed.com/?s=curiosity.