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Entertaining Education

I'm Sarah, and I'm in the entertainment business. Not that kind of entertainment, but the kind of entertainment that is desperately needed to increase learning in my classroom. Every hour a crowd of emotional teenagers enters my classroom, and they expect to be wowed. They've heard the rumors, and so I must continue to be "the craziest teacher" while teaching a class that "has a surprise every day." This edutainment is exhausting, but I mustn't allow old school pedagogy or teacher lounge grumbling to convince me that making things fun isn't an essential element of the job.

I've read many teacher resumes touting degrees from prestigious universities and high ACT scores, but these same applicants have failed to keep my attention while conducting their interviews. Imagine these monologuing masterminds in front of 32 teenagers at 3 pm on a beautiful summer day, and we immediately see the need to change our perspective of what a qualified teacher looks like. After all, we're not teaching the same kids that we used to, and their needs have also changed.

Do any of your teachers have classroom management issues? Then, it's likely their students need to be entertained. Do some kids seem unaware instead of engaged? Seriously, entertain them. Do teachers in your district complain about having to teach while competing with SnapChat, video games, sports, YouTube, and fidget spinners? The battle is real, and your teachers need to be even more entertaining.

The issue with teachers as entertainers is that most of us don't consider ourselves as naturally funny,

and we never expected to be hosting a daily variety show when we selected this profession. As the newbie grin fades and our shortcomings are realized, many simply conclude that including entertainment

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isn't actually valuable, because participation issues can be cured with strict rules and harsh consequences. However, we must acquiesce to the fact that eye contact from students

doesn't mean anything of value is entering their brains. In order to meet student learning needs, based on student engagement and achievement research, teachers should feel some relief to know that entertainment in education can be implemented in a variety of ways, besides just becoming a comedian.

For example, have you heard of differentiation? Many agree that it provides a pathway to excellence for every type of learner, but for some kids it's the only way to stay awake as they spend seven hours glued to tiny polypropylene chairs. Some teachers live by a set, hourly routine for planning ease and classroom management, but a lack of variety, spontaneity, and wonder can lead students directly to LaLa Land. We

should cook, play games, take our lessons outside, perform skits, wear costumes, integrate PBL to change the

world, debate, Skype with unique people, dance, and work hard to convince our students that our nine-month curriculum is fun! This differentiation as entertainment is exactly



how students begin to fall in love with learning.

We have some excellent storytellers in our school and they can fabricate their way through every unit as they connect the content to crazy or heart-wrenching life experiences. It's okay to embellish the truth if it's for a good cause, especially since our history teacher used to be a secret agent!

And do you know who students think is the most entertaining? Themselves. Show-and-tell is appropriate for all ages and curricula, and shouldn't be limited to speech class and the hand-raisers.

While some of us only became teachers because our 'America's Got Talent' auditions failed, centerstage should regularly be occupied by our students. In addition, as peers are learning the material from each other, teachers are facilitating cultural awareness as a by-product. It's impossible for teachers to have a complete understanding of every cultural norm in order to teach it without furthering stereotypes and oversimplifying. Alternatively, allowing students to share their own practices and perspectives establishes an awareness of uniqueness without blanket generalizations for entire groups of people.

Similarly, family communication and support increases student achievement, and sometimes these connections can happen during class time. I periodically call parents on speakerphone during class to allow the pre-informed students to tell their parents what we're learning. The audience is entertained by the family-peer interaction, and it's a great way to complete formative checks.

A teacher should rarely be sitting at a desk, except for attendance and for running necessary technology, because physical separation precedes disengagement. If it makes sense to sit, we should sit amongst the children. If not, teachers can use a FitBit or a Swivl camera to periodically measure class-

room movement. Uncommon teaching locations, frequent movement, and friendly proximity will surprise and help minimize those pesky classroom management issues.

Hay políglotas en la mayoría de las clases, y hablar en otro idioma es una forma de entretenimiento. The act of including our student linguists and world language teachers to share things in different languages is easy to do in all content areas. New sounds, lexical teasers, and phonemic personal connections are

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enriching and fun. *¿Comprende?*

Is there an odd teacher in your district? Embrace the oddness for the sake of entertaining education. Recently, I bribed kids to prepare for an assessment in exchange for a demonstration of my unicycling talents. Students united for the unconventional reward and helped each other to learn the material. I've also taught grammar with puppets, worn

shirts with the lesson objectives ironed-on, sung a song to end an argument, henna tattooed student names on my arms to become a walking certificate of academic achievement, told many jokes without punchlines, taught vocabulary with magic tricks, and made it mandatory for my live-streaming puppy cam to be the inspiration for Spanish class journal entries. Every single talent, quirk, and creative idea can be used for educational entertainment, so administrators should be looking for

teachers who do things differently.

Perhaps your teachers don't embrace becoming teachertainers or

don't have the extra time it takes to tackle entertaining education. When I'm in a rut, I grab the calendar and call my favorite guest speakers. We all have many community experts, such as business owners, veterans, farmers, and school board members, who can provide real-world connections to my curriculum. Some of them are even a little entertaining. □

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