

## **Tips for Presenting to Adolescents**

### **Joe Zenisek, Science Teacher, Molalla High School**

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Being a guest speaker in a middle or high school setting can be exciting and valuable for both you and the students if you keep in mind some basic principles.

#### **Principle 1: It's all about the relationships: Students are people.**

- **DO NOT:** Assume they are going to be captivated by your mere presence. Yes, you are something 'new and different' in the classroom and that will garner you some initial attention - but that can wear off fairly quickly if you don't recognize the most important persons in the room - the students!

- **DO:** Establish rapport with the students immediately. Show interest in who they are. Ask some opening questions to discover something about the group you are working with and/or to gauge their background in relation to the information you are about to share.

EX: "Tell me about this class - what are you studying? Why do you think your teacher invited me here? How do you feel about this topic?"

EX: "How many of you have ever: been to ....., done, seen, thought about, wondered about....."

- **DO NOT:** Spend the period engaged only with a select few who 'click' with you and/or the topic. Your challenge is to engage all the students.

- **DO:** Pay attention to your audience. Use body language and other cues to gauge student engagement *and respond accordingly*.

#### **Principle 2: It's all about the relationships: Learning is active.**

- **DO NOT:** Assume that the students have the necessary background knowledge, attitudes or skills to appreciate and understand the content of your presentation. And...

- **DO NOT:** Assume that the teacher has adequately prepared the students for the topic you are presenting.

- **DO:** Give the students an overview of what the presentation will be about and what you want them to come away with. Then check-in with the students at the end to find out if they learned what you hoped they would. *If you can handle it - ask them for suggestions to improve your presentation for next time.*

- **DO:** Connect the information you are presenting to student interests and their previous knowledge and understandings. In order to make meaning of the content of the lesson students must be able to fit it into their current mental models and/or modify those models to accommodate the new information. It is an *active* process - not a passive one of merely absorbing new information by listening.

- **DO:** Check in often to see if the students 'get-it'. A quick check-in can be as simple as asking the students for a 'thumbs up - middle - or down' to show how much they are understanding. Ask often if students have questions about the presentation.

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#### **Principle 3: Ask - don't tell**

- **DO NOT:** Lecture for extended periods of time: For every minute you talk without involving the students actively in some way you can expect to lose the attention of 10-20% of the students!

- **DO:** Ask students what they see or observe about an artifact, image or process rather than just tell them about it. EVERY student can make an observation about something even if they are not familiar with it. Then work from the process of observation to develop understanding.

- **DO:** Give students a chance to think before answering. Get comfortable waiting for 10-20 seconds before calling on someone. Try having students "discuss the question" with a partner or their lab group first. Try randomizing who you call on - or have the last respondent select the next one.

- **DO NOT:** Answer your own questions. Rephrase them, back up to a simpler question, or fall back to an observational question.

- **DO NOT:** Respond to incorrect answers by telling a student they are "wrong." Make some possible connection, or simply move on to other respondents with a simple "OK" or "We're not there yet..." Egos are fragile at this age (despite appearances) and easily shut down.

#### **Principle 4: Conflict Avoidance and Resolution**

- **DO:** Express your needs and expectations for attention, handling artifacts or equipment, raising hands to answer, etc.... as necessary to maintain order and safety *and to fit your comfort level.*

- **DO:** Stay on topic unless you choose to deviate. It's OK to ignore frivolous random questions. However, serious questions that may lead off topic should be respected. For instance, have the student write the question down for later consideration by yourself or perhaps the teacher sometime in the future. You might even offer to get back to them via email or through the classroom teacher (but only say you will IF you really will).

- **DO NOT:** Get into power struggles with disruptive students.

- **DO:** Let the inviting teacher handle class discipline. That's part of their job.

**Be enthusiastic. Enjoy yourself. Have fun. But remember -**

**"IF IT DOESN'T MATTER TO THE STUDENTS, IT DOESN'T MATTER"**

\*Wink, J. (2005). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world.* Boston: Pearson.

[Audio Interview with Joe](#)