
Teaching Strategies for Intrapersonal Intelligence

Thomas Armstrong

When students need quiet time and a change of pace.

Most students spend about six hours a day, five days a week in a classroom with 25 to 35 other people. For individuals with strongly developed intrapersonal intelligence and an introverted personality, this intensely social atmosphere can be somewhat claustrophobic. Hence, teachers need to build in frequent opportunities during the day for students to experience themselves as autonomous beings with unique life histories and a sense of deep individuality. Each of the following strategies helps accomplish this aim in a slightly different way.

One-Minute Reflection Periods

During lectures, discussions, project work, or other activities, students should have frequent “time outs” for introspection or focused thinking. One-minute reflection periods offer students time to digest the information presented or to connect it to happenings in their own lives. They also provide a refreshing change of pace that helps students stay alert and ready for the next activity.

A one-minute reflection period can occur anytime during the school day, but it may be particularly useful after the presentation of information that is especially challenging or central to the curriculum. During this one-minute period (which can be extended or shortened to

accommodate differing attention spans), there is to be no talking and students are to simply think about what has been presented in any way they'd like. Silence is usually the best environment for reflection, but you occasionally might try using background "thinking" music as an option. Also, students should not feel compelled to "share" what they thought about, but this activity can be combined with Peer Sharing to make it both an intra- and interpersonal activity.

Personal Connections

The big question that accompanies strongly intrapersonal students through their school career is: "What does all this have to do with *my* life?" Most students have probably asked this question in one way or another during their time in school. It's up to teachers to help answer this question by continually making connections between what is being taught and the personal lives of their students. This strategy, then, asks you to weave students' personal associations, feelings, and experiences into your instruction. You may do so through questions ("How many of you have ever. . .?"), statements ("You may wonder what this has to do with your lives. Well, if you ever plan on . . ."), or requests ("I'd like you to think back in your life to a time when . . ."). For instance, to introduce a lesson on the skeletal system, you might ask, "How many people here have ever broken a bone?" Students then share stories and experiences before going on to the anatomy lesson itself. Or, for a lesson on world geography, you might ask, "Has anybody ever been to another country? What country?" Students then identify the countries they've visited and locate them on the map.

Choice Time

Giving students choices is as much a fundamental principle of good teaching as it is a specific intrapersonal teaching strategy. Essentially, choice time consists of building in opportunities for students to make

decisions about their learning experiences. Making choices is like lifting weights. The more frequently students choose from a group of options, the thicker their “responsibility muscles” become. The choices may be small and limited (“You can choose to work on the problems on page 12 or 14”), or they may be significant and open-ended (“Select the kind of project you’d like to do this semester”). Choices may be related to content (“Decide which topic you’d like to explore”) or to process (“Choose from this list a method of presenting your final project”). Choices may be informal and spur of the moment (“Okay, would you rather stop now or continue talking about this?”), or they may be carefully developed and highly structured (as in the use of a learning contract for each student). How do you currently provide for choice in your classroom? Think of ways to expand the choice-making experiences your students have in school.

Feeling-Toned Moments

One of the sadder findings of John Goodlad’s “A Study of Schooling” (2004) was that most of the 1,000 classrooms observed had few experiences of true feeling—that is, expressions of excitement, amazement, anger, joy, or caring. All too often, teachers present information to students in an emotionally neutral way. Yet we know that human beings possess an “emotional brain” consisting of several subcortical structures (see Goleman, 2006). To feed that emotional brain, educators need to teach with feeling. This strategy suggests that educators are responsible for creating moments in teaching where students laugh, feel angry, express strong opinions, get excited about a topic, or feel a wide range of other emotions. You can help create feeling-toned moments in a number of ways: first, by modeling those emotions yourself as you teach; second, by making it safe for students to have feelings in the classroom (giving permission, discouraging criticism, and acknowledging feelings when they occur); and finally, by providing experiences (such as movies, books, and controversial ideas) that evoke feeling-toned reactions.

Goal-Setting Sessions

One of the characteristics of highly developed intrapersonal learners is their capacity to set realistic goals for themselves. This ability certainly has to be among the most important skills necessary for leading a successful life. Consequently, educators help students immeasurably in their preparation for life when they provide opportunities for setting goals. These goals may be short-term (“I want everybody to list three things they’d like to learn today”) or long-term (“Tell me what you see yourself doing 25 years from now”). The goal-setting sessions may last only a few minutes, or they may involve in-depth planning over several months’ time. The goals themselves can relate to academic outcomes (“What grades are you setting for yourself this term?”), wider learning outcomes (“What do you want to know how to do by the time you graduate?”), or life goals (“What kind of occupation do you see yourself involved with after you leave school?”). Try to allow time *every day* for students to set goals for themselves. You may also want to show students different ways of representing those goals (through words, pictures, etc.) and methods for charting their progress along the way (through graphs, charts, journals, and time lines).

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