

## Spring Fever – What do I do?

By Rebecca Aubrey



We all know the signs. In elementary schools, it's mud tracked all over your floor after recess. The kids start to take just a little longer to settle into their seats, and get distracted more easily. Your classroom begins to smell differently and the smell lingers long after they leave. Spring fever has hit, and once your students are infected with it, they can be hard to teach. How do you re-hook your students and re-capture their attention, even when the days get longer, the air is warmer, and the birds start to sound different? While the suggestions in this article are based on experiences in a K-8 setting, many of the strategies are also applicable to older students. What follows are three main strategies: Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS), giving students a real-world mission, and shaking things up by testing new activities and offering students choice.

### PBIS

If you don't already, try using a PBIS approach to classroom management in the target language (TL). Using PBIS helps to develop rapport with students and sets clear expectations for behavior. With novice learners, it is also a great way to reinforce directions and expectations in TL. Reward students who are doing the right thing, and do it often, more than you think you should have to. While the reward can be tangible, one of the best rewards is simply naming the student, identifying the positive behavior, and giving them an energetic thumbs up. Watch how the student glows and sits up taller! For example, if you ask students to get a pencil, as soon as one

student does it, compliment her. Others will look to see what she is doing, and follow the example; compliment them, and keep complimenting until everyone has picked up a pencil. It can be used in the same way to acknowledge on-task behavior and indirectly correct off-task behavior. A common critique of PBIS is that some students, i.e. "the good ones", always receive acknowledgement while others don't, and this reinforces the self-perception of the others that they are "bad", so they don't bother to try. Three things are critical to making PBIS work effectively. First, compliment students making the right choices, but keep complimenting until even those who were making poor choices have fallen into place, and then compliment them. This is essential. Second, look for opportunities to compliment those latter students about something, anything, before anyone else, so they have a chance to shine. Finally, ignore negative behaviors as much as possible, while at the same time acknowledging the positive. If you need to respond because it is disrupting class or someone is in danger, don't do it publicly; instead confer with the student privately. Preventing someone from getting hurt is one of the few times I use English in my classroom.

During these times when students are off-kilter, I try to shake up my PBIS system in some way. For example, this January I started each class by identifying a captain for each table on the whiteboard. Every time I saw the table on task I gave them a tally, with a verbal reinforcement in the TL. By on task I mean using the materials appropriately, using the TL, helping each other, and cleaning up. Slowly, the students started to realize what I was doing, and the captains began to encourage their peers. At the end of the class, we counted the tallies and identified the winning group. The first couple of days of this I gave that group school PBIS tickets; after a while, the prize didn't matter, as they were all just shooting to win. I have since stopped doing the table tallies, but the students are still rallying together in their groups to do what is expected.

### A Real-World Mission

A second strategy is to establish a real-world mission for student learning. Ideally, there should always be a purpose to what students are doing, and it should be something they can relate to. A real-world purpose that transcends the students' own needs and world is deeply engaging to them. The students are tired of learning content in all of their classes that they can't relate to, or see a purpose for. Give them a purpose other than "to get into college" or "to get a good job". If you are used to teaching from an established curriculum or textbook, this kind of change may be challenging, but it can be done by



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We hope to see you at our fall conference to culminate our 50th year celebration,

reframing the content. Now is a good time to try to take a step in that direction.

My first example is something I can't take credit for, as the idea came from my students. I once read a story from Guatemala about traditional Mayan weaving to a combined 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class. My students questioned why the girl in the story wasn't in school. This led them to start a drive for school materials to support the education of Mayan girls in Guatemala. We sorted the materials and did Math with them, like: "If each girl needs 2 pencils to go to school, how many girls

can go to school with a box of 12 pencils?" They also collected coin donations, which we counted and totaled, making comparisons to see which classes were collecting the most money. We charted monthly totals and progress towards our goal, and we did all of this in the TL. The students were deeply engaged, because it wasn't about learning to identify school supplies or how to count in Spanish, but it was about helping Mayan girls go to school.

Another example is our study of monarch butterflies, which I do every Spring with 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. Through this unit, the students learn that monarchs are endangered, and develop an understanding of how monarchs exemplify the interconnectedness between Mexico and the U.S. They study weather, life cycles, migration, and body parts. They also look at how deforestation and farming practices are contributing to the decline of the butterfly. The students become enamored with monarchs. We have created a large migration mural on a bulletin board, and students have written persuasive letters to the principal to ask the school to stop spraying pesticides on weeds around the school. They excitedly report monarch sightings to me in early June, and in the fall, many of my students come to school carrying armloads of milkweed covered in monarch larvae that they want to save. Again, they are no longer learning Spanish "just because", but instead because it happens to be the tool they use to help save monarch butterflies.

#### **Shake Things Up**

While I am a big believer in having clear and consistent routines for students, now is a good time to shake up the routines to re-engage them. Consistent routines provide a structure and context to support a 90%+ TL classroom. By this point in the year, however, they have the routines down, can follow directions, and know how to engage in a variety of learning activities. While structure builds confidence, it can also start to get boring, and lead to off-task behavior. So, this is a great time to do something completely different or try something completely new with the students. As their energy level increases, try some physical activities to re-engage your students.

At NECTFL 2018 I learned about doing yoga animals as a way to engage students physically. My 3<sup>rd</sup> graders come to Spanish right after recess and lunch and are hard to settle on a good day, never mind after so many snow days interrupting their routines. When my next 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class came in, I got their attention, started to do a cat pose, and said "gato". My students are used to me being a bit weird, but they rarely see

me in such a position, encouraging them to follow along. We did this for about 5 minutes, but it was the perfect movement break to get them on task, and it was all meaningful TL use. Twister is another great physical game that can be played as a station in the TL. Take some time now to look back at your notes from conferences, articles, or Webinars, or reflect on conversations with colleagues, and try something new.

Finally, another way I like to shake things up at this time of the year is to give my students more choices of learning activities and more ownership over what they are learning. This can be choices in a project or centers, or choices in how they are learning content, like through a video, books, or teacher-led, as long as they all have a common theme. If you haven't yet introduced your students to the ACTFL Can-Do Statements, or don't fully use them to empower students to self-monitor, there is no better time to try it than now. Ask the students to consider where they started the year, and how far they have come. Invite them to set goals for themselves for what they want to be able to do by the end of the school year. Use this feedback from the students to establish choice learning activities. Again, if you've never used the Can-Do Statements before, this is a great way to begin to dabble in them, so that incorporating them into your practices next year doesn't feel as overwhelming. At the same time, it is a great way to empower students and re-engage them.

So, as we head into the last couple of months of school, seize the opportunity to do something new. Take risks, and test some new activities or techniques; they very well might inform your planning for next year. As the weather warms up, and your students just want to be outside, they need novel experiences to re-engage them. Try giving them a real-world mission to what they are learning or try giving them some choices in their learning experiences. Most importantly, as frustrated as they might make you feel, stay positive. Last year, around this time, I saw signs in the grocery store right in each cashier's line of vision if they were looking at a customer. The signs said "look up and smile". I imagine that cashiers deal with a lot – busy lines and short-tempered customers – and they need that reminder to stay positive. At this time of year, I keep a visual reminder of that in my mind, and when my students start to get particularly frustrating, I take a deep breath, look around the room for someone who is on task, someone who is taking risks with the language, or the trouble-maker who is a split second away from making a poor choice, and I smile and shout out in the TL: "Excellent \_\_\_\_! I love how you are being so respectful of your peers!". Try it – you'll feel better.

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## Technology

### **Adobe Spark: An Engaging Form of Communication for Students and Teachers**

By Laura Martino, Clinton Public Schools  
and Theresa Biagiarelli Criscio, Guilford Public Schools

At the late March's annual CCSU Conference for Language Teachers, we, Theresa Biagiarelli Criscio (Guilford Public Schools) and Laura Martino (Clinton Public Schools), presented a workshop on the topic of Adobe Spark: An Engaging Form of Communication for Students and Teachers. We had chosen this title because this free online site and app/s truly does engage teachers and students (as well as family).

If you already are hooked on Adobe Spark then you know that it is available through both a free online site (<https://spark.adobe.com/sp/login>) and free phone apps. Educators can also see <https://spark.adobe.com/edu/> for sample works. Students create visuals with layered text, icons, photos, music, videos and, last but not least, voice through three different means: the **Spark Post** for social media posts, the **Spark Page** for vertical work and the **Spark Video** for video pages. All three of these options can be used on the online site; download each option separately to use as an app on cell phones. Our students have used Spark Video for projects, conversations, and to practice writing and speaking about vocabulary or grammar. They love the stylish appearance of their work; it is, well, 'engaging'!

When sharing the work, for purposes of student privacy we recommend the students turn off the 'Get Noticed' feature so that the work will not be featured on the Adobe Spark website. In addition, students' faces do not have to be featured in the Adobe Spark videos; rather photos and icons can be used.

We hope that you will get started on using Adobe Spark in the classroom. Students who have computers in the classroom will understand how to use it and/or you can use a single