

Breakthrough Education Strategies

In October of 2006, I began my work with Breakthrough Education Strategies (BES) in the Bassick @ Night Alternative School, a program for students who were experiencing behavioral and academic difficulties within the traditional setting of a large urban high school. Initially, the program appealed to me because the model relied heavily on the integration of technology in instruction. I quickly realized that while the use of instructional technologies played an important role in the program, its real strength was in the holistic approach the program takes to the delivery of instruction.

Breakthrough Education Strategies' model provides teachers and students with the tools they need to achieve success in the classroom. By altering the hierarchical relationships so prevalent in American schools to make teachers and students equal partners in learning, Breakthrough Education Strategies has established a new paradigm for education based on respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility for learning. This model has proven highly successful in the Bassick @ Night Alternative School. Students who had rarely, if ever, experienced academic success were engaged in their learning. More importantly, through the BES program, these students were acquiring the skills and behaviors that would enable them to learn in any environment.

The concept of "Learning How to Learn" is central to the success of the BES program. Too often, we, as educators, confuse "doing school" with real learning. The students enrolled in our alternative program had not been successful at "doing school" because they had never acquired the skills necessary for success in the traditional school environment, and this lack of success led to frustration and eventually lack of engagement for the students. BES helped us to address this critical shortcoming and enabled us to establish a learning environment where our students experienced success in school, many for the first time in their lives.

By enabling students to take responsibility for their learning through a program of modeling, reflection, cooperative work, and the development of metacognitive skills, the Breakthrough Education Strategies model helped us to reach a large group of students whom the traditional classroom model had failed. Students who traditionally "fell through the cracks" were engaged in learning, developed attainable goals for the future, and discovered a newfound motivation to succeed. Students who could be predicted with a high degree of reliability to drop out of school did not. We attribute this success to the BES model, entirely.

As powerful as the BES strategy has been for changing student outcomes at our school, it has proven even more powerful for changing the behavior of the teachers who use the program. The BES strategies have changed the way I deliver instruction, manage behavior, and promote an environment for learning in my traditional classes. In short, they have made me a better teacher. In adopting the BES model, my students and I have benefitted from a more open, cooperative, and mutually beneficial relationship with one another. Student achievement has increased by all measures and the need for behavioral interventions outside of the classroom has been virtually eliminated. My colleagues in the Bassick @ Night Opportunity School have benefitted from the same outcomes in their traditional classes.

Pete Ziegler
Teacher – Bassick High School
Bridgeport Public Schools
Bridgeport, Connecticut