



VAI EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

Finding Time When You're Stretched Too Thin

Time. Teachers never seem to have enough of it — and there's no way to make more! But by taking a few practical steps to energize yourself and to teach in simpler, deeper ways, you can magically find the time to do everything you need, and more of what you want.

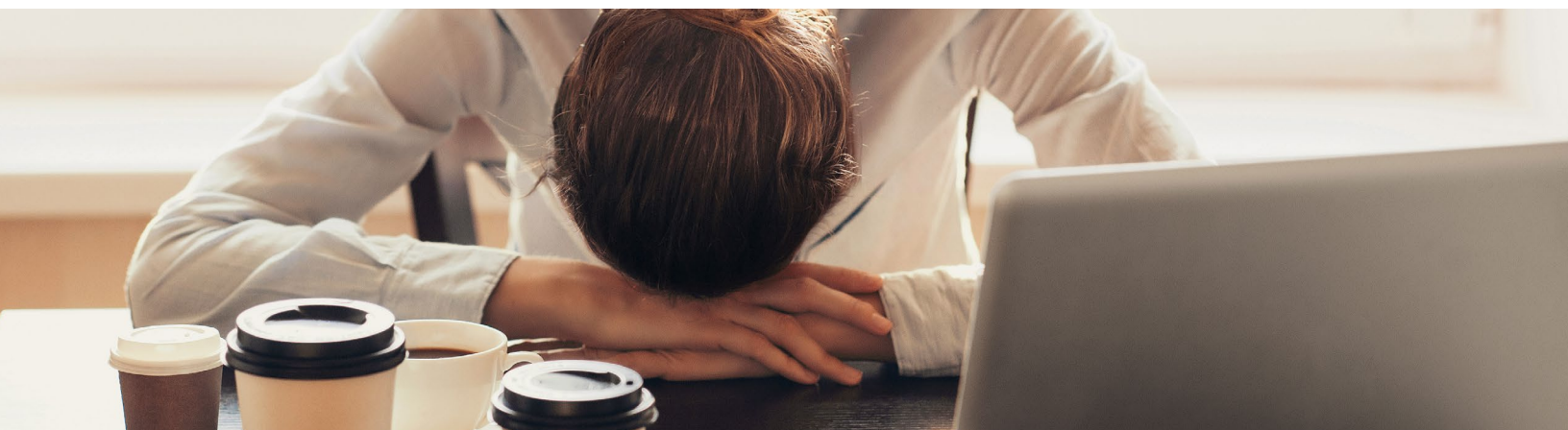
Let's Get Curious!

Before you give your time and energy to the world, you need to energize yourself. It's a simple idea, and an incredibly important one. So, before you tackle that to-do list, take the time to boost your own energy. To discover how, you can look to your students!

Children are filled with boundless energy when they live curious, creative lives. When you apply those same principles to your life, you'll be prepared to live with passion and to handle whatever your day has in store.

- **Mind-Blown Journal:** Keep your eye out for fun facts that blow your mind and keep track of them in a journal. Whenever you're in need of a jolt of wonder, open it back up and revisit the facts that fascinate you most.
- **A Question a Day:** When is the next time all the planets will line up? How many people are jumping in the air, right now? What is it like to be a crow? Hone your sense of inquisitiveness by recording one question that catches your curiosity each day.
- **15-Minute Masterpiece:** Every morning, spend fifteen minutes making something. It can be a painting or a poem, a song, or a wooden spoon. Pick something fun to make and make it! It doesn't matter if it's great or awful — the act of enjoyable creation will energize the rest of your day!
- **Funnify Life:** Play, connect, learn, and laugh! Whether it's board games or ball sports, chess, or table tennis, filling your life with exploration and play will make it richer and more rewarding, and will fuel your fire to embrace any challenge.

Our world is wonderfully interesting if you just look hard enough. These strategies can help you be intentional about living a creative, curious life!



Let's Get Moving!

We all know it's true: when we eat right and exercise, we just feel better. Making huge shifts can be overwhelming and unsustainable, so choose one of these simple tips to make a small change you can live with for good!

- **15 Minutes of Movement:** Start small! Schedule 15 minutes in your day where you'll hike, bike, stretch... anything that gets your blood flowing. By keeping it manageable and scheduling it regularly, you'll make every day more energetic!
- **League-al Aid:** Signing up can be a great way to keep you accountable and motivated — and the social aspects can be energizing as well! Join a race or a training club. Get yourself into a pickle-ball league. Whatever you're interested in, finding like-minded movers like yourself can help you get going!
- **The Single Salad Strategy:** It's not all-or-nothing. Use the Single Salad Strategy by choosing one small shift you'd like to make to improve how you eat, drink, or sleep. Maybe it's replacing one processed grain with a whole grain. Maybe it's adding one salad a day, or cutting out caffeine after 4 p.m. Small steps in the right direction can really change your energy levels!

Three Free Games!

Play is a great way to instill your life with creativity and curiosity. Check out [Games, Games, Games!](#) Three free games from the creators of Blue Apple projects; you can use them with your students, or you can play them yourself... just for fun!



Let's Get Efficient!

A teacher's job is to help students learn. But sometimes, our days are filled with tasks that distract us from our most important goal. Here are a few ideas for ways you can do less to do more — ideas for taking things off your plate so that you can focus on doing what you do best: teach!

- **Don't Mix Feedback and Grading:** When students receive a grade, they don't attend to feedback. So don't waste your time doing both. If you're providing feedback, don't grade it. If you're grading it, don't provide feedback — instead, invite students to ASK for feedback if they are interested, so the feedback you do give is well-received.
- **What, Not How:** Students benefit from specific feedback — but you don't need to do the work for them! Tell them what needs to be fixed, but not how to do it; let them explore, experiment, and discover for themselves. Remember: feedback should improve the STUDENT, not the work.
- **Rank the Rubric:** Use the [Rank the Rubric](#) strategy to help students know what to improve. Instead of filling the entire thing out yourself, have students look at the categories to rank them from best to worst. Then, you can focus your time and energy on the areas where students are open to feedback.
- **Brain Dump:** Retrieval practice helps students remember what they've learned. But that doesn't mean you need to grade daily quizzes! Instead, periodically have students record as much as they can about a topic, then share it with a friend. This simple act will solidify their understanding, whether you ever see it or not!
- **Fist to Five/All Hands Up:** We use formative assessment to help us gauge student understanding — but it doesn't need to involve grading! Instead, ask students to rate their confidence in a topic on a scale of zero to five. Or, to add accountability, have students answer questions by raising their hands to a height that matches their confidence: the higher they raise it, the more certain they are. Students expressing great confidence know they may just have to prove it!

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(Let's Get Efficient! continued.)

- **Open Their Gifts:** Help your students feel like valued parts of your classroom community — and save yourself time and energy! For each student, identify a gift. Then, put that gift to use in your classroom to accomplish tasks that would otherwise take hours! Use the [Gifts Organizer](#) to help you get started!
- **Own the Worksheet:** Instead of spending time finding, printing, and grading worksheets, have students create their own! Have them create a dozen questions that deal with the topic, then put their questions in order from easiest to hardest. Students can challenge each other with their worksheets, and you can find and correct misunderstandings without having to pick up a pen!
- **Truth Contagion:** Students learn best when they make discoveries for themselves. Take advantage of this key idea with the [Truth Contagion](#) strategy. Start by giving students a question you want them to be able to solve at the END of the lesson. Have students work independently before sharing their ideas, discussing why they are right or wrong, and working to prove their thinking to each other. To test their collaboration, have them vote on which answer they think is correct both before and after their discussions, to see if connecting with each other helped truth spread throughout the room!
- **The Relevant Elephant:** Instead of working to identify how student learning is relevant to their lives, let students do the work for you! Post the [Relevant Elephant](#) in your room, and tape papers to it with the topics you're studying. Challenge students to identify ways in which that learning might enrich their lives. Bonus: once students have identified a way they can apply their learning, you can have them develop a project-based learning experience where they actually use what they know to impact the broader world!

“Before you give your time and energy to the world, you need to energize yourself.”

— George M. Johnson





If you'd like to try a project-based learning unit that will REALLY up the energy in your life and save you time, check out the Blue Apple project, [High Energy](#), where students learn about energy — and how we can save it. The project includes lesson plans and project supplies, saving you time so that you can focus on what you do best: teaching!

- This [Project Overview](#) provides a lesson-by-lesson summary of this project.
- Here is a [Recommended Book List](#) of rich, diverse literature on the topic of respectful discourse.
- Check out [K-8 Content Standard Connections](#) for this project.
- To see this project in action, check out the [project video](#).

Conclusion

Teaching is hard. You have a lot to do, and not a lot of time to do it. By making sure you take care of your own needs, and by working efficiently on tasks that relate directly to student learning, you can make sure you do everything you can for your students, and still have time to enjoy a rich, full life.

**[Click here](#) if you would like to see a 30-minute webinar presentation of this content:
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