The Seven Types of Tricky Students & how to engage them (& lead them towards success)
Andrew Fuller

Despite what you may think, the seven types of tricky students don’t include grumpy, sleepy, cranky or dozy. However there are predictable types and once you learn to recognize them you can craftily develop cunning plans to engage them.

1. The invisible worriers

These kids master the art of invisibility. They go missing in action. You won’t hear a murmur from them. They won’t ask for help, ask a question if they are confused or offer an answer if they know it. Wide eyed, they shun the spotlight and cringe if picked out from the crowd.

One of the oldest parts of the brain called the basal ganglia is likely to be in overdrive. This brings with it vigilance, anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed.

The neurochemical surging through their brains is cortisol.

The key to engaging the invisible worriers is to lower cortisol and the level of activity in the basal ganglia.

Take your time- if you push things they clam up.
Develop calm repetition in classrooms
Remind students how something new relates to things they have already accomplished
Meditation and focusing activities
Mindfulness
Theatre sports
Challenges, quizzes, puzzles, Fermi questions.
Rhythmic activities
Hand warming
Biofeedback games
Concentration and memory games
If you have a few invisible worriers in a class you may have to reduce small group work until they feel more confident.

Hooks of Engagement

Greeting at the door
In English
SRA activities
DVDs, TV series
Enacting, theatre sports
Word sorts, puzzles
Thematic activities
Role play, dress ups
Word of the day
Books
Cloze activities
Chatter box
Readers theatre
Parody
Story cubes

This is material drawn from Andrew’s most recent book “Tricky Teens” (Finch Press, 2014).
2. The defense attorneys

Dispute? Complain? These kids will complain until the cows come home.

The part of their brain that is running hot is the anterior cingulate gyrus. These kids often have laser brain they get so focused on an idea or a dispute that can’t let it go. They don’t know when to stop. They get brain lock.

Because they get brain locked they really don’t know how to let things go. This means that if you don’t change their direction they will battle on and on. At the first instance of a dispute, move these kids.

The defense attorneys are often quite high on adrenaline and dopamine. They can be highly motivated especially when it comes to battles of wills.

These kids can hold grudges for a long, long time.

If you assert that the moon is blue they adamantly will say it is greenish. If you say, “you always seem to argue with me”. They’ll reply, “no I don’t!”

The main way to engage defense attorneys is to lower their level of adrenaline while utilizing their dopamine.

Movement is critical to engaging these students. They get so locked in mentally unless they have a physical shift they don’t change.

Other strategies include:

Devil’s advocate debates
Out do your own argument
Find what is wrong with this information games
Spot the error
Challenges and personal bests

The tricky students are vulnerable to getting stuck. Their ideas go around and around in repetitive loops. Their behaviours are often repetitive. To shift these kids it is desirable to alter the scene, timing, and content of the dispute.

In Science

Doing an experiment
Having the experiment already set up
Field trips
Gadgets: digital microscopes, testing equipment
Room set up: lab coats, specimens, posters, sensory stimulators
Building set up
Personnel technology
You Tube
Images
PPT zoomed in
Google pictures
Gross things
Big books
Show and tell,
Making things
Squishy toys

In SOSE

Use an interesting letter (spies) as they walk in
Plays, modeling, costumes
Graphic organisers, flow charts
Reading groups
Thinking hats
Philosophy
Mock trials
Newspapers/news clips
Bones in sandpit
Forensic
3. It’s my way or I don’t play

These kids are over-focused and rigid. This includes the perfectionists, the stickers for rules and the nitpickers.

The pre-frontal cortex is likely to be in over-drive creating a focus on rules and being a stickler for details. Their behaviour often conceals an anxiety about not being able to structure the events in their world.

The key to engaging these budding control freaks is to increase the use of tools that help them to structure.

Planning
Anticipation and prediction games
Mazes
Concentration games
Ladders of understanding
Scaffolding
Music
Increase their levels of dopamine using humour, challenges and puzzles.

4. The Perpetually Disgruntled

Everything is too much trouble for this group. Let’s sweat the big stuff the small stuff and middle sized stuff while we are at it.

Students who get this often wake up in the middle of the night and can’t get back to sleep. Sleep disturbance is common.

The emotional processor of the brain, the limbic system is often in over-drive. They are negative and stuck on being so

The key to engaging the disgruntled is to help them step away from their own thoughts.

Gratitude exercises
Being the thinker behind the thoughts
Evaluating different perspectives
Thought stopping
Challenges
Humour
Dopamine increasing activities- social interaction, repetitive movements

In Mathematics

Engaging conversations
Practical applications
Brain teasers
Perplexity in the classroom
Mr. Meyer
http://mysa13.mrmeyer.com

Square and Triangular Numbers Investigation
Grades 3-7

Mathematics games and activities: cards, blocks dominoes, dice

Real world applications
Hands on activities
Mini whiteboards
Group work rotations
Surveys
Background of formulas
Maths jeopardy

Volume and proportions
snow/slime

Angry Bird slingshot
Super maths world
Skittles counting sorting eating
Terminator

Blocks, tiles and dominoes
5. Listless do-littles

These kids are like sloths- they don't do much, they don't say much, they don't move much. They are motivationally deficient. Despite their low energy for learning some of them manage to muster enough energy to be the court jesters of the class.

The key to engaging the listless do-nothings is to use activities that raise dopamine—social interaction. Humour, challenges and thought stopping.

6. Ticking time bombs

These kids stand out. They often have literacy problems and poor memory. Some of them misinterpret others’ actions as negatively intended. A few have white coal incendiary temper.

The part of the brain that is most likely involved are the temporal lobes.

The key to engaging the ticking time bombs is exercise, movement and brain gym. Calming activities will also assist this group.

7. The lights are on but….

The lights are low nobody's home. These are spacy, dreamy kids who often feel overwhelmed by the demands of school and life. Usually they have poor concentration and find it difficult to articulate their thoughts.

These students often put off schoolwork until it is too late to complete it in time.

They appear sluggish, tired and often complain of being chronically bored.

Get a Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) completed if you have access to a psychologist.

To get major shifts with the engagement of these students you will need to get parents working with you. Life-style issues such as diet, sleep, physical activity and lowering family stress are critical elements.

It may also be important to organize a more stimulating environment for these students.