

Keys to Student Engagement

When students are engaged they are motivated to learn. We, as teachers know this and yet in the realities of the educational world and the practicalities of running an everyday classroom, we often get caught up in such factors as the rush to cover information, lack of classroom (and planning) time, along with the numbers and educational diversity of students in our classrooms. Various articles in this newsletter will describe a number of concepts and strategies that increase student engagement. Today's strategies are related to two very important key concepts: Movement and Choice.

Movement.

Strategy: Move and Learn. Movement influences the brains of students. Students in today's world thrive on movement, change, novelty, and diversity. **Movement enhances learning.** "Sit and Get" doesn't work for most students. Dendrites (fibers) grow out of brain neurons when you listen to, write about, talk about, or practice something. Dendrites grow only when you are actively doing something. Dendrite growth equals learning! **Remember that the person doing the work is growing the dendrites.** If the teacher is doing more work than the students, then he/she is getting more learning out of the lesson. Differentiation may mean changing where the students sit, varying the students' method of feedback, or exposing them to new methods of learning. Movement boosting brain power doesn't mean that students need to be up doing jumping jacks in the classroom. It can be as simple as having three different colored highlighters when doing an assignment or it may mean students getting up and pairing with a partner to discuss what they have learned that day. Here are several tips from John Medina's Brain Rules book. 1. Exercise boosts brain power. That can be simple movement in the classroom such as response cards; 2. Stressed brains don't learn well. Eustress (good stress) can be introduced in the classroom to improve student performance; 3. We don't pay attention to boring things; 4. Stimulate more of the senses; 5. Vision trumps all other senses. More on these in later newsletters. A key point to remember is: **Letting students move in class isn't a break from learning. It IS learning.**

Choice.

Strategy: Give students choices. Allow for student creativity. Research has shown that providing real choices to students of all age levels often increases their intrinsic motivation. Choice in the classroom has also been linked to increases in student effort, task performance, and subsequent learning. It is important to give students influence over how and what they learn. That might be related to the material they study (with guided direction), the means by which they demonstrate their learning, or it might be by the peers with whom they work. However, to reap these benefits, a teacher should create choices that are robust enough for students to feel that their decision has an impact on their learning. Providing students academic choices increases engagement.

The two most common ways that students demonstrate their learning are written and oral reports. However, students may also choose to present information through debates, video reports, demonstrations, drawings, photos, or dramatic presentations. To give students a particularly powerful choice, a teacher may also ask students to create their own learning goals. When giving students the option to design their own learning goals, a teacher should hold students accountable for both their self-identified learning goal as well as teacher-identified learning goals for that unit.

Please share your experience with these or other keys to student engagement on our TLC Blog at:

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