Indicator: Students are engaged and on task. (144)

Explanation: The evidence review confirms that teachers can heighten learning engagement that can strengthen content and skill acquisition. Teachers foster student engagement when they employ clear learning cues that show key lesson goals and directly teach how best to acquire the new knowledge and skills. Offering corrective feedback increases student attentiveness to the lesson at hand. Supplying authentic reinforcement, letting the learner know what he or she is doing well, can bolster student interest. In addition, using frequent behavior checks ensures that students remain “present” in the lesson and are cognitively “synced” to the lesson tasks.

Questions: How will the Leadership Team ascertain that teachers engage students in lesson content and materials and employ strategies to keep students on task? What types of clear, concise cueing do teachers use to support better understanding of lesson goals for students? What sorts of user-friendly corrective feedback do teachers use to encourage students to remain focused on the tasks at hand and which provide scaffold instruction so students may progress? Do teachers give frequent reinforcements so students are aware of what they have and still need to accomplish? Do teachers maintain high engagement levels using frequent behavior checks?

Evidence Review:
Originally conceived by Benjamin Bloom, Mastery Learning combines suitable amounts of time for individual students and behavioral elements of teaching (Walberg, 2006):

- “Cues” show students what is to be learned and explain how to learn it. Cues are more effective with increased clarity, salience, and meaningfulness of explanations and directions provided by teachers, instructional materials, or both. As the learners gain confidence, in ideal circumstances, the salience and numbers of cues can be reduced.
- “Engagement” is the extent to which learners actively and persistently participate until appropriate responses are firmly entrenched in their repertoires. Such participation can be indexed by the extent to which the teacher engages students in overt activity – indicated by absence of irrelevant behavior, concentration on tasks, enthusiastic contributions to group discussion, and lengthy study.
- “Corrective feedback” remedies errors in oral or written responses. In ideal circumstances, students waste little time on incorrect responses, and teachers rapidly detect and remedy difficulties by re-teaching or using alternate methods. When necessary, teachers provide additional time for practice.
- “Reinforcement” is illustrated in the efforts elicited by athletics, games, and other cooperative and competitive activities. Immediate and direct reinforcement make some activities intrinsically rewarding. As emphasized by some theorists, classroom reinforcement may gain efficacy mainly by a rewarding sense of accomplishment or providing knowledge of results.


de Frondeville (2009) has suggested ten steps to better student engagement:
1. Create an emotionally safe classroom: Students who have been shamed or belittled by the teacher or another student will not effectively engage in challenging tasks.
2. Create an intellectually safe classroom: Begin with a task that 95% of the class can do without the teacher's help, then make sure the students know that these initial easy tasks will always be followed by increasingly challenging ones, including tasks that will permit some students to excel and take on the role of helping others.
3. Cultivate your engagement meter: Teachers should be acutely aware of when students are paying strong attention or are deeply engaged in their tasks, noticing and measuring not only when students are on task but the quality of their engagement.

4. Create appropriate intermediate steps: Teachers tend to get a more enthusiastic response when they scaffold challenging tasks so that all students are successful.

5. Practice journal or blog writing to communicate with students: To change the pace of the class, students could be asked to write regular reflections on the work they've done, perhaps with a prompt such as, "What was the most confusing about the work you did today, and what new thing was the most clear?" – using their responses to guide future lessons and activities, and perhaps writing responses to individual students.

6. Create a culture of explanation instead of a culture of the right answer: When teachers use questions and problems that allow for multiple strategies to reach a successful outcome, students are given the opportunity to make choices and then compare their approaches – a strategy that challenges them to operate at a higher level of thinking than when they can share only the "correct" answer.

7. Teach self-awareness about knowledge: Since many students let too much of their knowledge float in a sea of confusion and develop a habit of guessing, sometimes without even knowing that they are guessing, it can be helpful to not only ask for the answer but to ask the students how certain they are of the answer they've given.

8. Use questioning strategies that make all students think and answer: To discourage only calling on the same hands going up, teachers can ask students to raise a finger when they're ready to answer and, once they all have their fingers raised, ask them all to whisper the answer on the count of three.

9. Practice using the design process to increase the quality of work: To break the habit of low-performing students getting used to doing poor-quality work, use a draft-and-revision process, driving them to produce higher-quality work than they are used to doing when they create only a first effort, and include peer evaluation as part of the feedback they receive.

10. Market your projects: When students ask, "Why do we need to know this?" engage students by developing an inventory of big ideas to help you make the connections between your assignments and important life skills, expertise, high-quality work, and craftsmanship.

Bright (2014) has suggested five do’s for engaging students in online courses:
1. Stay relevant: All content, headings, and subheadings should be relevant to the course.
2. Stay organized: Keep the screen neat and clutter-free, so you don’t distract the student away from the content.
3. Keep it interesting: Not only should the content be interesting for the student, but the design and presentation should be as well, including the colors, layout, images, font, etc.
4. Remain up to date: Every day things change and yesterday’s news is old, so it is important to update the course often to ensure the content is always accurate.
5. Add interactions: Interaction is great in an online course, though too much can be distracting, so only add interactions that are necessary, including clicking links, watching a video, downloading a file, etc.

Smith (2005) agrees that engagement is critical, and suggests that educators get their students invested and structure activities that excite their personalities as well as their minds. “But,” she stresses, “never, never, never lose sight of what those activities are supposed to be teaching. You have a classroom full of students who struggle with reading, writing, basic math, critical thinking and many other
essential skills. Those students are counting on you to highlight what they need to know. Pay attention to the gaps in your students’ learning. Translate their needs into objectives, and determine how you can measure their progress toward those goals. Then create the lessons that will really engage them — never losing sight of the purpose each lesson must serve.” She says educator Grant Wiggins calls this “backwards planning,” encouraging educators to design objectives first so they can create assessments and lessons with those objectives in mind. “Recognize the power of that process and the role you play in directing your students’ attention. Know what they need, then consider how they best learn.”

Evidence Review:

The teacher begins a whole-class instructional segment by setting the climate for attentive learning, cueing the students to focus in, reinforcing attentive behaviors, reminding students to have their necessary materials at hand, checking postures and facial expressions, and generally encouraging pro-social behavior. This is called a "behavior check."


References and Resources


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