

Classroom Management Through Engaging Lessons

The Student Engagement-Classroom Management Connection

How does student engagement impact classroom management? Students that are interested and engaged in learning are far less likely to need the distractions provided through misbehavior. Conversely, disengaged and bored students are likely to seek out alternative activities to entertain themselves; it is these activities that tend to lead to misbehaviors in a classroom. Since engaged students are less likely to occupy themselves with undesirable behaviors, the question of how to keep them engaged becomes part of the effective behavior management plan.

Student Engagement Strategies

Relate material to students' lives. When teachers relate content to what is going on in students' lives and worlds, students are able to internalize the learning experience and become involved in it on a personal level. This will take creativity and planning, but it is worth the effort. For example, instead of asking her students to answer questions about an article discussing global recycling and garbage statistics, a teacher could ask them to measure and record data on their household recycling and trash then compare their data with classroom and global data.

Provide students with choices. Allowing students to make some choices in their learning shows them respect and helps raise their motivation—just as involving students to collaborate on classroom rules and procedures invites them to feel ownership over the classroom. Examples include allowing students to select a preferred topic from a list of options or allowing them to choose a preferred assessment option from a list of approved choices.

Assign varied tasks based on student ability. Classrooms contain diverse students with a variety of skill levels and talents. Acknowledging these differences through varied tasks allows each student to perform at his or her own level. This could involve providing gifted students with additional challenges or providing additional resources to students with learning difficulties.

Provide opportunities to solve real-world challenges. Students love to solve problems or puzzles; the amount of time they can dedicate to overcoming challenges in the latest videogame testifies to this. When given the opportunity and authority to take responsibility for their learning, students can become very creative and even elevate their learning to new level.

Assess student learning with authentic assessments. Authentic learning deserves authentic assessment. Authentic assessments, such as projects, presentations, or demonstrations, allow students to showcase their learning while sharpening their critical thinking skills.

The Art and Science of Teaching

Robert J. Marzano emphasizes the role of good instruction in effective classroom teaching in his 2007 work *The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction* (ASCD, 2007). In the book, Marzano provides a “comprehensive framework of effective teaching” using ten instructional design questions (p. 6). He answers each question by providing educators with a series of practical actions steps. Of the ten questions, design question 5 asks “What will I do to engage students?” The question’s action steps are as follows

Action Step 1: Use games that focus on academic content. As long as they are focused on academic content, games can turn learning or review into fun. Marzano suggest teachers look to classic shows like *Jeopardy!* and *Family Feud* for inspiration.

Action Step 2: Use inconsequential competition. As long as it is in the name of fun, invoking a competitive spirit in students can engage them in the learning process.

Action Step 3: Manage questions and response rates. Silence can speak volumes. Pausing before an important statement can create drama and anticipation. Not only can pausing be used as a dramatic technique when speaking, it is critical during the questioning process. While silence may seem uncomfortable when waiting for a student response, teachers should allow students at least 3 seconds to process their responses before speaking.

Action Step 4: Use physical movement. Engaging in learning requires energy, so providing opportunities for students to stretch may help boost their energy levels. Moreover, working kinesthetic activities into the learning process, such as having kids represent a math concept with their bodies, can help raise attention and *retention*.

Action Step 5: Use appropriate pacing. Effective pacing minimizes student down time, which can initiate the disengagement process. Well-developed procedures for completing administrative tasks, such as distributing materials, help keep the pace moving. Smooth, logical transitions from one activity to another minimize downtime, as well.

Action Step 6: Demonstrate intensity and enthusiasm for content. Salesmen don't speak in monotone voices; they act excited and enthusiastic about their product. Effective teachers sell their content to students through enthusiastic teaching.

Action Step 7: Engage students in friendly controversy. Allowing students to have differing opinions and giving them a place to share those opinions can make for

lively and engaging class discussions, as long as ground rules designed to keep discussions friendly and respectful are established.

Action Step 8: Provide opportunities for students to talk about themselves.

Students are naturally most interested in topics relevant to them. Allowing them to talk about themselves gives them an opportunity to create connections between themselves and the content.

Action Step 9: Provide unusual information. Inserting unusual facts related to the content can make the lesson more interesting. In addition to adding the "Wow" factor, it provides the student with something memorable in which they can connect to the new information.¹

Conclusion

In a well-managed classroom, students are truly engaged in the learning experience, removing opportunities for unwanted behaviors. Finding ways to interest more students in the content can be challenging and does require planning but should be a part of a comprehensive and effective classroom management plan.

¹Marzano, R. J. (2007). *The art and science of teaching: A comprehensive framework for effective instruction*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.