

Engaging Students in the Learning Process



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Introduction

It can often be easy to think of teaching and learning as a one-way interaction; one in which students passively receive instruction and learning principles, and teachers facilitate that learning. Traditional learning techniques tend to use this philosophy as a starting point. However, that can result in bored students and ineffective teaching practices. Updated research tells us that a more effective and enjoyable way to invest in increased student learning outcomes exists. Prioritizing student engagement can increase many metrics of student success and happiness, but this technique does require thinking outside the box.

In this course, we'll go over the ins and outs of student engagement to aid you in helping your students have a good learning experience.

Case Studies

Creating a space specially oriented to student engagement

Drawing on previously-completed research that linked innovation to the physical space surrounding potential innovators, one school decided to invest in student engagement by creating a makers space on campus that was specifically designated for students to delve deeper into their studies by researching, experimenting, and having discussions with their peers. Teachers monitored this space, but it was made clear that this was a location for students to learn to be autonomous thinkers and self-directed learners. After building, decorating, and implementing the space, the school staff noticed that students who routinely used its assets completed more creative work, seemed more focused and alert while in class, and reached out more to students and teachers to broaden their learning experiences.

Curating an engaging online community

One school that had an all-remote learning structure realized that students who didn't have the full spectrum of classroom experiences - including a carefully-designed learning environment, interactions with peers, and the ability to easily reach out to the teacher or resources to resolve issues or learn more - weren't receiving nearly as well-rounded of an education. The school sought to correct this by inviting their students to chat with the rest of their classmates online, making suggestions and hosting events to help students modify their at-home studying spaces to make them more satisfying and helpful to work in, and having their remote teachers spend a few minutes at the start

and end of every lesson making it clear that students should feel free to reach out. The teachers were also asked to host virtual office hours. As students began taking advantage of these opportunities, the school was pleased to see grades rise, participation increase, and counts of student dropouts decrease.

Engaging the totality of the student body

One academic institution with a very diverse student community was struggling to connect with each and every student. Many students were admitted to this school underprepared by their previous teachers, so the school realized that making up for a lack of preparation by investing in healthy student engagement would make a large difference for every student. To work toward this, the school created several opportunities for students to volunteer during their extracurricular hours in initiatives that would benefit the community, invited students to tutor one another, hosted career fairs during which they proactively connected the lessons of the students to future job potential, and they educated all teachers and staff members in ways to drive student engagement on a class-by-class basis. As a result, the students seemed happier, more dialed-in to their lessons, and less likely to underperform or drop out of school.

Summary: Lessons Learned from Case Studies

All teachers want to help their students learn. The way that teachers often channel this inclination is by preparing robust, logically-laid-out lesson plans. While this is undoubtedly helpful, the above case studies show us that focusing on the experiential parts of learning that are not strictly found in lesson plans can improve the entire student experience - and drive active learning, student motivation, and student participation during in-class activities. While investing in classroom decor, the ways in which teachers instruct, student socialization, and other student engagement practices may not seem like the most strategic investment for a school, the levels of student happiness and student retention that typically follow these investments make a strong case for prioritizing student engagement.

Section 1: What Is Student Engagement?

Before we delve into the research supporting best practices for student engagement as well as practical tips to support student engagement in your classroom, it might be best to spend a few minutes discerning precisely what the term means.

Why It's Difficult to Define Student Engagement

If you didn't have any teaching background and were wondering what 'student engagement' meant, it might be difficult to put together an ad-hoc definition. This is because the term is inherently vague. In itself, the phrase doesn't have any information as to the targeted object of student engagement, in fact. A relevant follow-up question might be: When referring to 'student engagement', what are the students engaging with? In academics, this could be assumed to be the teacher, various learning activities, the courses they're studying, or even their own innate sense of decision-making (ViewSonic, 2020).

The definition of student engagement has changed over time. In many modern cases, when teachers speak of student engagement, they're noting a general goal that their students are involved in every aspect of their academic environment - which can include social activities and extracurriculars (ViewSonic, 2020).

Others argue that true student engagement begins where the basic necessities of minimal student participation end. When students do merely what it takes to pass their course or complete their assignments, they're just participating. When they're engaged - according to this idealistic definition - they're clearly invested, they're excited to learn, they want to do the work (to a certain extent), and they're interested in more than just memorizing facts. They seek to understand (ViewSonic, 2020).

What are the different types of student engagement?

Perhaps another reason that student engagement is difficult to define is that there are a few different dimensions in which this engagement can be displayed. There are three main types of student engagement:

- **Behavioral Engagement:** This type of student engagement reflects the level to which students participate in their classes. As such, it depends on both student attendance and student concentration levels. Students are behaviorally engaged if they are involved in all aspects of learning, including social facets. Behavioral engagement will also be shown if a student participates voluntarily in extracurricular activities (ViewSonic, 2020).
- **Emotional Engagement:** This type of student engagement is geared toward a student's feelings. With respect to their chosen field of study, their teachers, their experience, and their peers, emotionally engaged students appear satisfied,

curious, and (when asked) demonstrate that they feel that their education and lessons have value for their own lives (ViewSonic, 2020).

- **Cognitive Engagement:** When students are cognitively engaged, they are invested in their own education from a mental standpoint. They are motivated to do the work and attain an understanding of complex topics, they are excited to really take ownership of their education, and they are able to pursue their own educational goals with some measure of success (ViewSonic, 2020).

It's important to note that because there are at least these three dimensions of engagement, it's possible for a student to be fully engaged in one respect but not in others. Because of this, it's vital to prioritize working with your students in such a way as to maximize the different types of engagement for each individual student (ViewSonic, 2020).

How can you measure student engagement?

In the past, teachers have measured student engagement primarily based on reports from the student. Students are expected to be able to gauge their own levels of engagement and provide accurate feedback on how they feel about their teachers, courses, and lessons. From this feedback, teachers have been able to deduce the levels of engagement from their students (ViewSonic, 2020).

In many cases, this type of self-reporting comes from anonymous student surveys at the end of courses. Whether by paper or through tech-based systems, these questionnaires have been one of the main tools used to measure student engagement. Regardless of whether tech-based tools are involved, some level of observation is required (by both student and teacher) in order to get a sense of how engaged a student is (ViewSonic, 2020).

If you're a teacher, you can look for these signs of student engagement and, conversely, disengagement:

Signs of Student Engagement

There are several times in your class when you can watch your student's behaviors in order to gauge their engagement. Pay attention at the following times and you'll get a good idea of how your students are doing:

- **At the beginning of your class period:** If you're looking for the correct actions, you should be able to discern student engagement from the moment your students walk into your classroom. As you're starting your class period, look for the following behaviors signaling the different types of engagement:
 - **Emotional engagement:** If your students are emotionally engaged, they will smile and make eye contact with you when they walk into the room. They will greet you with politeness and respect. When you are giving any instructions for how the class period will proceed, they should nod and make eye contact.
 - **Behavioral Engagement:** Your students will have all of their proper paperwork, books, homework, and tech materials to participate in your class. When they reach their seats in your classroom, they begin to review work or scan their homework to ensure that it's ready for your perusal. When you begin the class, they listen to you and respond to your introduction in a way that makes it clear that they're listening (for example, by asking questions or laughing when you make a joke). If you're playing a video or showing an animation at the front of the class, you can see their eyes track the movement.
 - **Cognitive Engagement:** You'll be able to tell if your student is cognitively engaged if, once he or she enters your classroom and sits down, the student takes out materials that might help during your lesson (such as a pen, a notebook, or a calculator) (Fulton, 2019).
- **During the class, and especially during any teacher-led instruction:** Even if you're diversifying the way that you present information to your students, you likely spend at least some time directing your students by presenting from the front of your classroom. When you're doing so, don't focus on just the students who are mirroring your enthusiasm for your subject. Instead, focus on every student - including those whose minds are clearly wandering. For signs of fully-engaged students, you'll want to keep an eye out for:
 - **Emotional Engagement:** Students who are emotionally engaged will likely show it on their faces with interested, open, curious expressions. They'll also react in real-time as you're delivering the lesson - looking concerned, surprised, or laughing as your presentation deems appropriate. When you ask a question, engaged students will likely respond enthusiastically instead

of looking anywhere but at you; and, finally, emotionally engaged students will offer their own input (often, whether you ask for it or not).

- **Behavioral Engagement:** If your students are behaviorally engaged in your classroom, you'll find that they appear to be actively listening. They'll ask questions, they'll take notes, and they'll be able to answer any questions you pose that are very simple (tracking attention and very basic comprehension). Finally, you'll find that your students are engaged in this way, they'll respond immediately when you give them a classroom direction.
- **Cognitive Engagement:** When your students are cognitively engaged in your classroom, they'll be able to do a bit more than simply answer rote questions: They should be able, in fact, to ask questions themselves that show that they're deeply curious about the material that you're presenting. They'll also be able to offer insights of their own - for example, to connect what you're teaching currently to other concepts presented at other times (Fulton, 2019).
- **While your students are busy with group activities:** Group activity participation is one of the best ways to help your students enjoy increased engagement in your classroom. You may also naturally have more opportunity to observe your students' engagement while proctoring a group activity, so taking the time to walk around your classroom to monitor your students and look for these indicators will be time well spent.
 - **Emotional Engagement:** Check to see whether your students seem to be interacting well as a group. If everyone seems to 'fit in' well together and there aren't any 'outsiders,' it's a good indicator that everyone is emotionally engaged. As you observe all the members of the group, check to see whether they're offering input without reservation and that everyone is speaking to one another with respect. Finally, everyone should seem interested and enthusiastic about the assignment. You can read this in the various tones of voice used by the students in each group.
 - **Behavioral Engagement:** You'll be able to gauge how behaviorally engaged your students are by observing how closely your students follow the rules and parameters you set down for them. If every student listens when it's time to do so, pitches in to help with the project, and otherwise functions

well as a team player, they are likely quite behaviorally engaged. Further, simply check to see if the students focus on the activity at hand for the duration of the time that they are working together.

- **Cognitive Engagement:** Check to see whether your students are discussing the concepts at hand with a clear aim to learn about the subjects further. If they're doing a good job of probing into the material, making connections, and asking questions of each other, they are likely very cognitively engaged (Fulton, 2019).
- **While your student is expected to get work done alone:** While group activities are among the easiest ways to promote student engagement, individual desk work may be the hardest! Perhaps because of this, it's an especially good time to observe your students in order to ascertain whether they're engaged on their own. Look for the following indicators:
 - **Emotional Engagement:** When students are emotionally engaged in a class, they usually appear interested in the work. The student will exhibit a focus on the work and will enjoy completing activities and assignments in your classroom.
 - **Behavioral Engagement:** When students are behaviorally engaged, you'll find them working at their desks diligently and carefully. They'll read the instructions all the way through; they'll follow even difficult or complex instructions, and they will persist through difficult assignments. If students have questions related to the assignment, they will raise their hand and ask you for help. Finally, they will keep an eye on the clock, plan out their time accordingly, and submit the completed assignment on time.
 - **Cognitive Engagement:** Indications of cognitive engagement abound when a student is working alone. Firstly, you'll notice that a cognitively engaged student will be proactive about using methods or tools that help process large amounts of information (such as note-taking, writing in margins, or highlighting). They may also go above and beyond the requirements of your lesson for their own best performance (such as making a written plan themselves or drawing out a diagram before beginning a project). Cognitively engaged students will do the extra practice problems, will ask probing questions, will check their work once they're done to correct any

mistakes, and may even go to the library once done with the assignment to get resources to learn more (Fulton, 2019).

- Lastly, just as you can often tell how engaged a student is by his or her entrance into the classroom, you can often gauge engagement by the exit of a student at the end of class. To measure student engagement, consider the following:
 - **Emotional Engagement:** As your students leave your classroom, they should politely say good-bye to you, make eye contact, and smile. It should be evident that you didn't tire them out, and that the material you presented wasn't overly confusing or frustrating.
 - **Behavioral Engagement:** If your students are behaviorally engaged, they will be able to sustain good habits as they leave your classroom. They'll follow your end-of-class instructions, they'll clean up all of the different work areas in your room, and they'll work together to get these tasks done.
 - **Cognitive Engagement:** Finally, if your students are cognitively engaged, they'll make use of a notebook or organizer to keep track of any further assignments you're giving them (Fulton, 2019).
- In a later section, we'll discuss how to boost each type of student engagement specifically. Knowing where your students are, to begin with, will give you an idea as to where to begin your efforts.

Why is student engagement important?

Student engagement is important for several reasons, including the following:

- Students learn more when they're engaged - often, very easily, or subconsciously. One article out of Harvard very specifically showed that using classroom techniques that are designed to invite students to participate in the learning process (instead of being passive observers of it) produces better learning outcomes. In other words, if you're looking to help your students learn more, learn more quickly, and even have higher success with heightened academic metrics such as standardized tests and quiz scores, investing in student engagement is one of the best ways to do so (Reuell, 2019).
- It makes your job easier and more enjoyable. When students are engaged in the learning process, they are far more likely to ask questions and deepen their understanding of your topic on their own. They're also far more likely to sit still,

not be disruptive, and be easier for you to manage. Student engagement supports student focus - which means that you won't have to spend as much time on classroom management. You'll be able to invest more time in actually teaching your subject (Reuell, 2019).

- Student engagement is more reassuring to students themselves. When students engage with their learning material, they feel far more competent in the subject. They feel more confident in their ability to learn a new thing. This confidence will go a long way in a student's overall learning experience - which is important in determining just how much (and how effectively) the student actually learns (Reuell, 2019).
- Student engagement provides the building blocks for eventual student autonomy. When you're teaching elementary and high school students, the teacher is expected to do much of the groundwork for inviting their students into the learning process. That expectation more or less ends when a child graduates and goes to college. At that point, students are expected to take responsibility and ownership of their own education, enthusiasm for learning, motivation to do hard work, and more. However, that transition cannot happen instantly or magically. As the teacher, you have to provide some of the groundwork in order for that to happen. If you start by making your lessons more engaging and showing your students the value of engaging in their education, you're helping your students with their future chances of success (Reuell, 2019).

Section 1: Summary

It could be easier to say that student engagement is a soft science, not a priority, or the responsibility of the student alone. In later years, as students are in college or participating in other avenues of higher education, these students will be in charge of their own engagement practices. However, when students are younger, this motivation must usually start with the teacher. It isn't all for the benefit of the student. Having a classroom of more engaged students will make the job of the teacher much easier in the long run. While it can feel strange to shift focus from strict teaching skills and the quality of lesson plans and practices, the case studies and research show that this time invested will be well worth it.

Section 2: The Research on Student Engagement

We've covered why student engagement is important, as well as the different types of student engagement and how it can be accurately measured. These are all good practices, as well as good priorities to keep in mind. However, the science behind the benefits of cultivating student engagement goes far beyond what we simply see. Cognitive therapists and pediatric neuroscientists have been studying the way children learn for a very long time now.

As it turns out, many of our best practices for increasing student engagement are biologically-backed to help student's brains form well - now and in the future.

The Link Between Classroom Organization, Emotional Support, and Student Engagement

When it comes to gathering the correct ingredients for student engagement, a good place to begin is understanding why certain classroom and relational practices result in more active learning and more engaged students. After all, knowing the link between labor-intensive practices and their results make the process much easier to stick with.

We'll start with the classroom organization. In order for students to take more ownership of their own education, they need to have some idea of the tools that are available to them - and how to use them. A similar analogy might be if you wanted to become a better cook in your kitchen, or if you wanted to learn how to build a deck in your backyard. If you wanted to have the maximum chance of success with your new venture, you'd probably want to take some time to clean out, organize, and label your pantry; or to go through your toolbox and make sure that none of your tools are broken.

This way, even if you're not sure what you're doing and you're depending upon a recipe or an instruction manual for every step of your project, you know that you have the tools available to succeed.

In the same way, making sure that your classroom is organized equips your students with the tools they need to be more engaged in their learning overall. Students that understand the way that your classroom is set up and the rules by which your classroom functions will also be more likely to behave - because they'll have a better chance of understanding why disruptive behavior doesn't really work in a productive classroom (Hadden, 2018).

Here are some additional practical ways that good classroom organization allows students to engage more with their studies:

- Students in organized classrooms will spend less time hunting for a resource or a tool (or, perhaps more accurately, getting distracted in the process of doing so) (Hadden, 2018).
- Students in organized classrooms won't have to set up their own learning space in order to start an activity. They'll be able to spend less time off-task, and, instead, be able to devote more of their in-class time toward completing the desired learning activity (Hadden, 2018).
- Students in organized classrooms also tend to learn more about proper executive functioning - that is, organizing their own time, attention, and energy well. Even if it's subconscious, students tend to mirror what they see around them. If they're in an organized classroom, you'll find that their projects and papers start to become more organized, as well (Hadden, 2018).

Next, we'll discuss the necessity of a healthy atmosphere of emotional support for student engagement. As a teacher, your goal is to help your students connect to the educational subjects you're presenting. You're asking students to pay attention to you as a person - even if you're simply setting up a video for your students to watch. Particularly if you're asking your students to pay attention to you for a class-length lecture, your students need to have a reason to trust that listening to you will be worth it (Hadden, 2018).

One of the ways that you can facilitate this is by creating an atmosphere of emotional support in your classroom. If your students see you as caring and responsive, they'll naturally see your presentations as participative activities (and not so much passive lectures, to be mostly ignored).

Another practical way that emotional support strengthens student engagement lies in the confidence that students have to tackle problems - and their resilience when, at least occasionally, they struggle with a topic or concept. Emotional support from you can buffer any negative associations that your students may have with a specific approach to learning. Emotional support from you can also help if a student has any problem behaviors that might normally stand in the way of becoming invested in the learning process (Hadden, 2018).

According to research out of the Journal of Educational psychology, classrooms that demonstrate high levels of both classroom organization and emotional support tend to have increased levels of student engagement. The researchers decided to assign a group of sixty-three different 5th grade classrooms a measured score for student engagement, and see whether that score correlated with how organized and emotionally supportive those classrooms were (Hadden, 2018).

The researchers measured student engagement through teacher reports on how engaged students seemed to be, student reports on how engaged they felt, and also by sitting in on the classrooms to observe student behaviors themselves. They also measured the three different types of engagement we mentioned above - the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of student engagement (Hadden, 2018).

The Link Between Digital Technology and Student Engagement

There is a popular argument against using technology in the classroom that boils down to a belief that technology reduces student engagement. Screens do not engage, the argument goes; and, sometimes, having information easily available and at our fingertips can reduce the value of that information in a student's brain.

While this argument and others like it could sound plausible, there isn't any real research to be found that supports it. Research does show that it's important to prioritize time away from screens in order for students to be happy and healthy, but there is no research to suggest that the presence of technology in the classroom leads to lower levels of student engagement.

Quite the opposite, in fact. A study out of the International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education found that the regular use of technology in the classroom has been linked to increased emotional, behavioral, and cognitive forms of student engagement (Bond, Buntins, Bedenlier, Zawacki-Richter, Kerres; 2020).

The researchers found this correlation by performing a meta-analysis of 243 prior studies on the efficacy of student engagement strategies juxtaposed with digital learning techniques. The researchers looked for many positive indicators of student engagement, with the most common being terms such as 'participation, involvement, interaction, and achievement', as well as any mentions of students interacting positively with their peers and teachers (Bond, Buntins, Bedenlier, Zawacki-Richter, Kerres; 2020).

By screening the studies in this way, the researchers were able to ascertain that 48% of all student cases (where students were exposed to digital learning techniques) found

positive identifiers of healthy emotional, cognitive, and behavioral student engagement. 22% of all student cases portrayed their students as fulfilling two of the three types of engagement, and another 29% of cases mentioned that their students were engaged in one specific way (Bond, Buntins, Bedenlier, Zawacki-Richter, Kerres; 2020).

All summed, that represents 99% of cases where students were exposed to digital learning techniques yet reported (and were consistently observed to have) engagement with their studies.

When the researchers performed the same analysis concentrating on positive indicators of student disengagement in classrooms where digital learning techniques were often pursued, they analyzed the cases for terms such as 'frustration', 'rejection', 'opposition', 'disappointment', and 'disengagement.'

These indicators were found far less frequently among the disparate analyses (Bond, Buntins, Bedenlier, Zawacki-Richter, Kerres; 2020).

Finally, the researchers cross-referenced the student engagement and disengagement indicator terms with the type of digital learning media that the different classrooms used. Across the 243 studies in the meta-analysis, there were many different types of technological tools used. They included:

- Online discussion forums
- Recorded lectures
- Videos
- Online chat programs
- Assessment tools (e.g., online quizzes, etc)
- Website creation tools
- Social media and networking
- Text-based information sharing (e.g., blogs and articles)

Students in classrooms where text-based information sharing technology was used showed higher levels of engagement, whereas students who used website creation tools, social media tools, and online assessment tools showed indicators of disengagement. However, the levels of disengagement these students showed were small compared to the overwhelming presence of indicators of positive student

engagement; so, if anything, these tools specifically may have caused students anxiety or (particularly in the case of social media) made students disinclined to combine their personal and academic spheres (Bond, Buntins, Bedenlier, Zawacki-Richter, Kerres; 2020).

The Difference Between Feeling Like You're Learning and Actual Learning Juxtaposed with Student Engagement

All of the efforts that go into increasing student engagement might feel like a lot - and, potentially, a lot wasted - if you're not getting any measurable benefits from your endeavors. When it comes to measuring how well your efforts are working, you're going to be seeing a lot of qualitative (instead of quantitative) effects, at first.

That is, in the long run, you might enjoy seeing higher grades and other number-and-goal-based learning objectives increasing. That would be great - after all, that's one of the goals of investing in your teaching skills: seeing evidence of higher comprehension from your students.

However, you might not see that for a while. In the beginning, you might struggle to tell if your efforts are going anywhere. You may wonder if you're just amusing your students, or making them happier in your classroom. You may wonder if you're putting all of this work in to see actual learning increase - or if you're just wasting your time.

One recent study out of the University of California, Berkeley, took the time to question why many teachers (particularly STEM teachers) still rely on traditional teaching methods to present their material. These methods can be easier, of course. The researchers performed a survey and found that many educators seem to use lecture formats because of their simplicity (McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, Kestin; 2019).

The efficacy - in terms of the student experience - of active learning techniques versus passive learning techniques, when the two techniques were compared across different classrooms with identical course materials, was unchallenged. Students in active learning classrooms learned more. Those students felt like they learned less. The researchers in the University of California, Berkeley decided to study this perceived gap in learning and discovered that the difference was caused in part because active learning techniques require a lot of mental energy from the student - in addition to merely learning the academic part of the lesson (McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, Kestin; 2019).

When you consider the techniques often incorporated in active learning, this makes sense. With active learning, students are asked to go above and beyond a typical

learning objective to solve a problem, create a full-fledged project, or find a way to use a theoretical concept in a practical way. The mental energy required for generating that framework, as well as comprehending the subject matter (as opposed to simply listening to a lecture about the subject matter) alters the students' perception of how much subject matter they are taking in (McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, Kestin; 2019).

The University of California, Berkeley researchers advised teachers adopting active learning frameworks to find ways to address this misconception. As active learning techniques are proven to be more efficient and effective at helping students comprehend tough subjects, it's not necessarily that teachers need to change their methods. It is, however, important that students feel like they're learning quickly and well. If students feel that they're learning poorly, that can have a hugely detrimental effect on their own motivation to continue - and the ability to successfully self-regulate their studying habits. In order to help the students realize this, the University of California, Berkeley researchers conducted a large experiment where they compared the self-reported perception of learning from students in different programs, as opposed to their actual learning as measured by examinations, one-on-one interviews, and anonymous surveys followed by statistical analysis of all responses. After all of this assessment, observation, and research, the University of California, Berkeley developed several recommendations for teachers incorporating active learning techniques to help them help their active-learning students feel like they are learning adequately - or, more to the point - help their active-learning students feel like they are learning as effectively as they, in fact, are (McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, Kestin; 2019).

Their recommendations are:

1. Active-learning instructors, or instructors who are looking to vary their teaching methods specifically in order to increase student engagement, should **be very transparent about what their teaching style is meant to provide for the student.** To this end, every active-learning teacher should be clear up-front (perhaps on the first day of school, for example) that they will be taking a slightly different approach to teaching - and that their varied teaching style leads to increased cognitive benefits for students. Children are practical people. They will appreciate this information. They may also need reminding of it from time to time (McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, Kestin; 2019).
2. In order for children to get a handle on how well they are actually learning, it's important to **provide a baseline.** It may seem unkind, but providing some kind of examination or assessment as early on in the year as possible can help students

realize where they're starting from. Then, when a similar assessment is given later in the year, students will very concretely realize how much they've improved. (It may be a good idea to make students aware that the first exam won't count for a grade or something to that nature; rather, that it's a tool to help them realize how much they're learning). This way, even if your lessons are so fun and engaging that learning is painless and even subconscious, your students have something to point to when they seek proof of their progress (McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, Kestin; 2019).

3. After this, as you go throughout the year, teachers should encourage their students to work hard even during fun activities, remind them that it's important to think carefully about their work even when it may seem like an amusing field trip and encourage students when they're having a difficult time with advanced subjects (McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, Kestin; 2019).
4. The active-learning teacher should, according to the University of California, Berkeley researchers, constantly ask for student feedback throughout the year and prioritize quick responses to any student concerns (McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, Kestin; 2019).

Ultimately, active learning and other student engagement strategies work best if students understand that it will lead to deeper learning (instead of teachers hoping that they can 'trick' their students into soaking up knowledge through fun activities). To the extent that sometimes it seems like these learning activities can actually make students learn less, students need to realize that that is usually a simple misconception. There are specific actions teachers can take in order to mitigate this, and, when possible, they should (McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, Kestin; 2019).

Section 2: Summary

As student engagement has become more of an interest, researchers have devoted more of their time and resources toward studying its efficacy and probing practices which may make it even more helpful to students and teachers alike. By incorporating their suggestions regarding classroom organization, emotional connection, student feedback, and more, it is very possible to reorient your classroom toward active learning techniques and increased student engagement. As a result, your students should have a more productive and enjoyable learning experience.

Section 3: How to Engage Your Students

In the previous sections, we've talked about the importance of student engagement, as well as some of the latest research on why an engaged student is happier and more likely to succeed on a scientific, neurological level. On a more practical level, though: Are there surefire ways to ensure that your students are more engaged whenever they're in your classroom?

While the specific practices you employ will depend greatly on the students you have in your classroom as well as your specific teaching style, there are a few best practices that you could consider in order to help your students feel more engaged. Later in this section, we'll discuss ways that you can do so in specific circumstances - for example, when your students are distracted because of a large event, or if your school policies recommend that you teach remotely for a time.

For now, focus on the student experience of engagement. Student engagement is at its best when your students care about the material that they're learning when they feel welcome in your classroom environment when they understand the expectations you have of them (and how to meet them!), and, of course, when they have fun learning both alone and together.

That's a tall order! However, as the science shows, when students are more tuned-in in this manner, they're far more likely to achieve the goals you set them (or the ones they set themselves).

By crafting lessons that engage your students, you'll be helping them be willing to learn. Next, we'll cover some actions you can take to improve student engagement.

The Seven Principles of Engaging Students for In-Person Classrooms

When you're thinking about putting together a range of engaging lessons for your students in your classroom, think about using the following seven principles:

Start by using a range of different teaching methods

Your students are all different, and each of them will most appreciate a differing teaching and learning modality - for example, watching a presentation or movie, getting their hands messy with a fun experiment, or working quietly by themselves on an intriguing problem. In order to capture the interest of each of these different types of students, you should probably already be incorporating several different teaching

methods into your rotation. However, switching up your methods to present concepts and practice them in several different ways will engage different parts of your student's brains - even if they don't particularly seem interested in a teaching method that you're trying out.

As an example, consider when you're teaching your students vocabulary words - either in a different language or in a discipline such as science that has its own vernacular. It might be a good idea to begin by introducing this vocabulary in a textbook setting. However, that only really appeals to a subset of your students naturally and constitutes only one repetition of the material you want them to learn. After that initial exposure to the lesson, consider going over those vocabulary words again by having the students draw the words on large sheets of paper, act out the definitions as part of a game like vocabulary charades, write a story using those vocabulary words to share with the class or any other interactive ideas that you can offer.

The beauty of these different activities is simply that, after a while, your students won't really think about the drudgery of learning - they'll be so caught up in playing a game or writing a fun story that they won't think twice about the vocabulary they're naturally incorporating a little more each time.

This type of conscious planning might take more effort on your part, but the effects will definitely be worth it - and it'll be more fun for you, too, once you're able to laugh with your students while you're all playing a strategic learning game together (Brown, 2019)!

Spend some of your classroom time specifically getting to know your students

It might seem counterintuitive, but your students will, very likely, not care very much about learning from you until they feel they know you a little - and that you care about them.

This could take time. More importantly, it will likely be an ongoing commitment: You can't just take a few minutes out of your first class period to get to know each other, and then drop it for the rest of the year! If you can show students that you care about each one of them (and you know how to speak to each one at least a little about their lives), they'll be more able to see that you're putting in the time and effort because you want them to succeed. They'll respond to that!

One simple practice you could follow is to set a timer at the beginning of class to chat with your students about what's going on in their lives - or, if that feels too formal, 'breaking up' your class time by setting a short timer to allow students to catch up with

their peers in small groups (while you join in the fun). It's easy to feel like this is wasted time, but it goes a long way toward making your classroom feel like a more homey, secure, and safe place to be - as well as one in which your students feel like putting in the mental effort is worth it.

As we mentioned above, allowing your students this social time covers another base of student engagement, as well. If your students have had time to chat and socialize, with you or with a friend, before your class formally begins, they'll be more relaxed and able to 'tune in' to your activity or presentation with a higher level of focus (Brown, 2019).

Help your students use technology-based tools whenever possible in your lessons

Children almost universally find technology, particularly devices that they can control themselves, to be engaging and fun. Technology can allow you to have a lesson that's a little more student-oriented, giving you the ability to walk around and speak to each student more personally. Technology can also assist with catering each lesson or topic to a specific student's learning style and learning pace.

When you're thinking about introducing more tech elements into your classroom, turn to the Internet first to see how other teachers are safely, strategically doing so. There are student-gearred websites, now, that help teach students how to code through fun, dynamic games - or others that piece together learning quests for each individual student that can help your students get more excited about studying off-screen, too. Helping students get the most out of technology and set healthy practices to use it well also sets them up spectacularly for a future career, for good screen boundaries in the future, and to have more ownership over their own studies.

There are also some instances in which technology-facilitated learning is actually much easier and better because of the collaborative tools found online. When you teach your students how to work effectively in tools like Slides and Google Docs, they can comment on each other's work in real-time, get feedback from you quickly, and learn more about how projects are completed in a modern workforce. It also engages your students simply by facilitation: When the logistical barriers to an interesting academic activity (such as feedback lag time, figuring out how to share files, etc) are lowered, students become much more interested in active participation (Brown, 2019).

Invest in project-based learning

This practical form of educating appeals to children, who enjoy figuring out real-world applications to more theoretical concepts. A good framework for a simple project-based learning lesson might be to pose your students a question related to your subject matter at the beginning of class. Then, allow your students to work together in small groups to find a real-life answer to this question, using textbooks, approved websites, or other resources. This challenge will teach your students a lot about the logical process of completing projects and answering questions, as well as the actual content of the question or topic you're asking them about.

As an added bonus, this type of learning, while undoubtedly instructive and valuable, will tend to feel more like an art project, scavenger hunt, or competition to your students. Because of this, they'll be far more likely to get excited about doing it well. Your preparation for these types of lessons can be far less constricting as well - you need only set up a prompt, provide supplies and resources, and be able to help your students as much as you can (perhaps by going around the classroom and spending a few minutes with each group during the course of your class.) Allow your students the option of presenting their project or findings to the class in any way they prefer, to vary a less-than-exciting day of student presentations. They could make a video, put together a tech-based project like a simple website, design and print a brochure, or anything else that feels right to them.

Another example of a fun hands-on activity is a make-believe crime scene investigation. Your school's history and science departments could work together to stage a historical crime, with as much scientific integrity and accuracy as possible. (The drama department could likely get involved, as well). After everything's set up, allow your students to go in and figure out what happened by conducting scientific experiments, gathering evidence, and using safe, effective online research habits to learn more about the setup. This type of activity can teach your students so much about many different types of disciplines, and - simply because there are so many people and novel elements involved - will be so engaging that your students really won't even have the choice to look away (Brown, 2019).

Whenever possible, allow your students to make choices about their education

This will help your students learn good decision-making practices for their future, and also help them become more interested in the process of their education now. This will

result in less decision-making for you, and a lot more freedom and confidence for your students.

Of course, you'll have to exercise caution figuring out which choices are safe for your students to own, and which are better left to you and other authorities. However, the choices that your students make don't have to be drastic in order for everyone to experience their benefits. For example, you could:

- Allow your students to choose their own seats on occasion
- Tell your students that they can complete even-numbered or odd-numbered problems on a homework project
- Allow your students to pick topics for projects, when prudent, or give them the opportunity to pick books for discussion from time to time.
- If you're proctoring technological topics, allow your students to pick the subject for the website they're building, or allow them to use the program of their choice to learn new material.
- For older students, you can provide a loose outline or guide for a topic they need to learn more about and allow them to pick something that interests them, a method of exploration, and a schedule that works for them (with you as a constant resource).
- This ownership, freedom, and responsibility will naturally lead to more student engagement (Brown, 2019).

Incorporate learning games

Children are naturally curious - and naturally competitive. Even the quietest of students will likely be eager to prove themselves when matched up against another team (or even their own previous record). Leveraging that initiative to increase your students' interest in learning is fair game - literally.

There are hundreds of ideas for friendly, productive competition that you can use in your classroom. Depending on the specific subject matter, it might be a good idea to introduce the subject material first from a textbook or more traditional presentation, and then use a good game to help your students really incorporate that information. Some easy examples of games that you can bring into your classroom without much of an investment or required extra materials are:

- Hangman
- Trivia
- Bingo
- Jeopardy
- Charades
- Pictionary
- And others!

As an added benefit, these types of games will also help appeal to a wider range of student learning modalities.

Analog games aren't your only option. You can make an interactive quest that incorporates learning objectives for your students, or pit remote classrooms against each other in trivia competitions. Make some easy point system to promote the benefits of gamification in your classroom, and you'll be taking full advantage of this strategy for student engagement (Brown, 2019).

Finally, concentrate on making your teaching style more personal for each of the students

This can take time, but it will have vastly helpful results. If you can connect the material that you're teaching to each of your student's lives, each student is going to want to hear what's going on because, suddenly, you've made what might have been an extremely vague, nebulous, or 'out there' lesson extremely relatable. Finding a way for each student to relate to the lesson, to connect it to their world, is a fantastic strategy for student engagement.

This may require thinking outside of the box a little bit. If your students are learning about percentages in math, for example, don't just talk about math problems in the abstract. Take them to a store (virtually, through a web browser) and walk them through the mechanics of sales on items that they might want to purchase. Give each student a hypothetical allowance, and ask them to pick out which items are actually the cheapest based on percentage-based sales happening around the store (or, if you choose to make real-life displays, around your classroom).

Not only is this way more fun and memorable than a simple word problem, it also helps teach your students a very real skill that they'll have to use in real life.

Extend this same concept to other disciplines. Talk about the reason why the sun goes up in the morning, topics related to your student's favorite TV shows and musical artists, or the physics and statistics that go behind your student's favorite sports. This will make your students feel like what you're teaching is more practical, more interesting, and more worth paying attention to (Brown, 2019).

These seven principles will take more work, but will ultimately lead to a far more interesting and productive experience for both you and your students. Apply them wherever you can; your students will thank you for it in the long run!

How to Increase Student Engagement While Teaching Remotely

Sometimes, it may become necessary to teach your students fully remotely. Whether this is because of a disaster, a pandemic, or simply because a student requires an at-home learning setup, it's still important to figure out how to boost engagement from the other side of a screen.

It's still very possible to do so, though it may take some creativity on your part. To make it a little easier, we've corralled several tips for remote engagement in this section:

1. Start by considering your students and their specific lives, as well as the conditions that have made remote learning necessary. They likely go back and forth from being scared and excited about this new change in their lives - and being bored because school is still school. Make sure that you cater your remote lessons to the well-being of your students. Check-in on them. Assess how they're doing. Track data regarding their happiness and excitement, as well as their grades. Speak to the challenges that they're going through, as well - that'll make it feel more like a conversation, and less like a remote presentation (Heick, 2020).
2. Consider simplifying your subject as much as you possibly can. Especially if remote learning is a transitional or temporary arrangement for your students, you may not need to barrage them with thousands of details. Instead, cover the basics, and give your students opportunities to deepen their knowledge of the subject through self-directed activities at home. Then, focus on imparting those basic pieces of information in as friendly and fresh of a way as possible, instead of getting bogged down in specifics (Heick, 2020).

3. Break up the amount of time that you're in class. If at all possible, try to meet with your students a few times a week for twenty minutes as opposed to once a week for an hour (or a similar version of your expected schedule). This creates rituals, repetition, and regular check-ins that will prompt productivity. This is particularly helpful if the students you are teaching are extremely young (Heick, 2020).
4. Invest in a good-quality audio and visual system. Young students are extremely visual people, and, if you're transitioning to remote learning, you just became a much smaller part of their field of vision. Get yourself good lighting, an audio system that won't drop or cause static, or simply download some fun Zoom backgrounds and happy music to play during activities. Every little bit helps (Heick, 2020)!
5. Use games as often as you can to break up your day (or, subtly, to teach). There are many online resources that you can use to make custom games based on your subject (for example, Jeopardy-style trivia games). Teach your students how to 'buzz in' remotely upfront to reduce frustration, and then make it clear that you'll be playing fun games often (Heick, 2020).
6. While you're proctoring your remote class, try to conserve as much privacy for each student as possible. This can be difficult; after all, you're used to a very different form of classroom management. Try not to call out students in front of the rest of the class, speak with your student's parents about what is featured in the background of their screens, and when students are acting up, it may be better to let them run their course (and follow up later) instead of using up the remote classroom time managing an antsy student from afar (Heick, 2020).
7. Assume that you will need to be an IT troubleshooter, as well. You're depending upon a lot of internet connections, a lot of different computers and devices over many operating systems, and several other factors. In the face of all this, it's a good idea to know up-front that something (and, likely, many things) are going to go wrong. After you've tested all of your own personal A/V equipment, try to brainstorm a list of what tech problems your students might experience, and come up with a quick fix for each scenario. Having these kinds of answers ready to go will save a lot of time later (Heick, 2020).
8. Adopt a 'before, during, and after' framework when it comes to your lessons - for yourself and for your students. When you're putting together your lesson plans, make a list of what you would like your students to have completed beforehand

(watched an introductory video, for example, or read a section of a book and completed a questionnaire), what the specific goal of your remote classroom time is, and then what you'd like for a student to complete directly after your lesson. Send these expectations to your community, and mention them in class. This three-part framework will be easy to remember for both you and your students (Heick, 2020).

9. Become a master of your sharing software. Once you've found out which apps and platforms you'll be using for communicating and teaching, watch tutorials, experiment with them, and figure out what every button does. It'll make you a more confident teacher, which will make your students more confident. It'll also allow you to really take the most advantage of your software, which can help you make your lessons even more engaging. If it helps to create a 'cheat sheet' while you're still learning the systems, do so (Heick, 2020).
10. Connect as personally as you can. If your school allows it, make sure to send your students individualized emails, chat over messages, and talk to smaller groups of students in video calls. That'll make your student's experience feel a little more like in-person school, and a little less like watching a remote presentation. Any opportunity you have to remind your student that you are a real person who cares about them instead of an impersonal screen is a good one, so, take it (Heick, 2020).

Creative Alternatives to Lectures While Remote Learning

When you're putting together your students' remote learning lesson plan, it's easy to simply plan a series of lectures. It's often the simplest way to get information across, especially when you're already dealing with the other difficulties of setting up a remote classroom. However, you may find that this isn't the best strategy for helping your students pay attention in class.

Here, we've listed out several different types of remote learning classroom activities you can pursue with your class that may be slightly easier for students to enjoy.

1. **Peer-to-peer learning:** Assign each of your students a subtopic within your subject, and have them teach each other. You'll be on hand to help, naturally, and if any supplemental instruction is needed, you can step in at the end of the class.
2. **Game-based learning:** Format your lesson in line with a classic game, a scavenger hunt, or a friendly competition among your students.

3. **Project-based learning:** Assign each of your students a project, and let them run with it. Instead of lecturing during class periods, have students present on their projects; discuss what the class what they're doing and what they could consider doing next; and how it relates to what all of you are studying.
4. **Question-based learning:** Every so often, schedule a class that doesn't have a specific topic assigned to it, and ask your students to come prepared with questions related to your subject. (You could even frame it as a 'stump the teacher' day for increased student excitement). Then, spend the class period going through student questions. You can answer them or other students could contribute (TeachThought, 2018)!

How to Engage With Your Student During Necessarily Distracting Times

Every so often, it could become necessary to teach your students while something very important is going on in the background (such as a local disaster or a global pandemic). As your students' educators, it can often be your job to act as a source of stability for your students amid uncertain times. It can also become your job to figure out how to make the often prosaic tasks of education work out when even your normal support systems are crumbling.

One team out of Singapore recently managed to create a thriving and fully engaging remote classroom structure during economic uncertainty and country-wide health concerns. Their educators offer advice for a three-pronged approach that worked for them:

1. **Work to strengthen daily student-teacher interactions.** One of the unfortunate results of going remote when you're used to in-person teaching is that your time with each student drops precipitously. Particularly if you have impressionable children - or ones that happens to require stimulation of their senses or a conducive work atmosphere to pay attention - this can feel somewhat akin to abandonment. In other words, when you are physically distant from your student, it becomes even more vital that you brainstorm a way to invest in your specific connection with each student. There are several ways that you could easily implement small ways to do this.
 - Make yourself available just before a video class is set to begin. Using the chat function on your class-sharing software, take a moment to ask a few students personally how they are. (Rotate among students so that you can

check in on everyone without taking up too much of your time.) If possible, spend just a few minutes doing the same after class.

- Dedicate a certain portion of your class to elucidating the ways that students can reach you and reach each other. This will not be intuitive to your students. This will make them feel more comfortable asking questions and making comments in your class-sharing system.
- Remind your students to turn on their video-sharing settings, if your course management software allows it. This reminds them that they're on camera, so they shouldn't be doing something other than participating in your lecture.
- Position your monitor so that the camera is at eye level, and practice looking in the camera (instead of at the screen, or down at your notes). It may be helpful to put a little sticky note next to the camera on your computer to remind you where to level your eyes.
- Along similar lines, it can be helpful to set up your monitor and recording equipment so that you have the option to stand. You use more body language when you stand (as opposed to sitting). This body language conveys more information than you may be aware and can give your students something to track with their eyes - helping them stay tuned in to what you are saying.
- If your school allows it, consider trying a team-teach approach - where you have multiple teachers engaging in a conversation-style presentation instead of a monologue. This will bring up different perspectives on your subject, and will naturally be more interesting for your students to follow (Fung, Magdeline & Kamei, 2020).

2. Take the time to request and read real-time student responses. When you're putting together your lesson, try to etch out some time to sit in the chat function and respond live to questions. This will make your students responsible for asking good questions, and it will be reasonably exciting for them to type out a question and see you respond and answer it in real-time. You can also use their responses to cater to the type of lesson material you will offer in the future. It can be very difficult for students to know how to raise their hand in a remote classroom setting. Using question boxes, polls, or other interactive systems to promote

engagement and really setting aside the time to use them properly can result in a world of difference for your student (Fung, Magdeline & Kamei, 2020).

- 3. Leverage student-to-student interaction as much as you can.** When you were able to teach classes in person, you may have used the opportunity to have your students ‘teach each other’ as much as possible through group activities and discussions. It can be easy to think that those days are over, at least for a time, when you have to go remote with your teaching structure. There are a few different ways that you can do this with remote classroom software. For example, you could divide your students up into teams - and assign each team a specific chatroom, that only they (and you) can see. Pose a question to your classroom, and hold a competition to see which team can come up with a solution first. Some nominal treat to the winning team can make this more interesting to school-age children (Fung, Magdeline & Kamei, 2020).

Aside from this general three-pronged approach, there are other hacks and tips that can make remote learning much more effective and easy, including ones that we have covered above. However, one incredibly efficient way to invest in your student’s learning experience is to ensure that your students’ parents know how best to support their education.

Helping Your Student’s Parents Understand How to Help Their Children

When it comes to helping your students, particularly those who are younger children, it is an inescapable truth that you need to help their parents. After all, even in a regular learning scenario, parents are pivotal players in helping with academics: Making sure children get their homework done, helping with more involved school projects, and answering simple questions if they’re able, among other actions.

When we turn to remote learning, the level to which parents must be involved becomes even more pronounced. Their children may not have familiarity with technological devices or video-chatting platforms prior to beginning remote learning. Your children’s parents will need to assist with a good audio-video environment at home. The parents will be the ones on-site with your children to help remind them that remote learning is worth their time and attention. In many ways, it could feel like the roles are reversed from a normal in-classroom learning experience.

Your parents might be very vocal about how remote learning should go. They might have very specific ideas that you don’t have the ability to implement. They could also be very busy with commitments of their own during school hours. Whatever the status is, in

order for remote learning to go successfully, you need to harness the enthusiasm of the parents to a productive end. Here, we'll list out a few ideas for doing just that.

Start by, if possible, identifying the virtual equivalent of parental volunteer positions. Some parents may be working. Others may have time to give. Some schools use parental advisory committees to help school administrators meet the needs of their students. In remote learning, the technical and very practical needs of the students skyrocket - so now, more than ever, this type of go-between support is needed. If you're able to form parent advisory committees comprised of the guardians of children in your class or school, you can ask them to do the following (while surveying anonymously or managing online discussion rooms):

- Gather feedback on the ways children and parents experience virtual learning
- Identify specific pain points and frustrations regarding virtual learning
- Put together recommendations from these conversations to bring to school teachers and administrators
- Target specific information from select student groups, such as students with special needs who are learning remotely, or students who speak English as a second language
- Disseminate information from the school that might otherwise get lost in a crowded email inbox, such as school deadlines and opening dates, updates to school policies, or posts that the school has issued on social media (Liu, 2020).

Ask these parent volunteers to lead virtual classroom activities from time to time. Prior to going remote, you might have done this occasionally - asking parents to come in and speak about their jobs, guide the students in a simple exercise, tell stories, or speak to their specific experiences. By doing this, you'll vary your student's lecturing experience, which will lead to heightened interest and engagement. You'll also get a few minutes to take a break from presenting yourself, during which you can take time to understand the student experience of remote learning or check-in with your students. Doing so could be easy: simply add the parent in through a video conference call. If the parent doesn't specifically want to present, the parent can also simply monitor students through a video conferencing platform while the students watch an informational video (such as an educational documentary or a virtual tour of a museum that you may be streaming). After this experience, parents can facilitate a discussion of what occurred. Involving parents in this way will help your student's parents feel overall more positively about

how remote learning is going simply because it's their project, too - and it'll make your students more excited to tune in, as they see increasingly familiar faces pop up on their screens (Liu, 2020).

Ask parents who have experience with your subject to serve as tutors for your students. If you know that a specific parent has an interest or a familiarity with your subject, ask them if they'd be willing to participate in a homework hotline or a virtual tutoring arrangement. This could be as simple as having them set aside an hour of their time to be available to students for questions, or the parent volunteer could be paired with specific students who may be struggling for more one-on-one support. If it's an option, you could provide this parent tutor with materials relating to your students' homework in advance so they could familiarize themselves with the content and facilitate student understanding from a different perspective than you may be able to offer (Liu, 2020).

Ask parents who understand and celebrate the remote learning format to hold their own office hours for other parents. As we covered above, parents of students learning remotely need support so they can adequately help their children. Motivated parent volunteers can host informal parent support meetings to talk about the best ways they've found to support their children (such as, for example, creating at-home routines and building a supportive virtual learning environment), and this could be a great way to encourage and involve parents. Creating a volunteer troubleshooting hotline could be a good idea, too, so parents can help each other solve any remote learning problems as close to real-time as possible (Liu, 2020).

If the parents of students at your school are pushing for specific remote learning policies, see if you can channel that enthusiasm into support that you can work with. Any of the above ideas are not only great to get parents more involved in their students' educational experience, but are also a surefire way to ensure that your students have the environment they need to be more engaged in their studies.

How to Help Your Students Find Ways to Socialize Remotely

Student socialization is an important part of the school experience - and often one which yields significant benefits for overall student engagement. Think back to your own school experience: It's likely that, in at least some part, the fact that you were able to discuss your subjects with your classmates contributed to your overall depth of learning.

Sometimes, those student-student connections happen organically, outside of the classroom. Other times, young children need a little bit of help figuring out how to create friendships with their peers. As school (and, traditionally, brick-and-mortar

classroom activities) is such an ingrained part of young student socialization, families may correctly wonder how their students are to receive the same benefits if current events dictate that school be taught remotely.

After all, many of the working mechanisms we already have in place for remote learning prioritize the main connection that defines education: Those between the student and the teacher. However, as we mentioned earlier, often, student engagement is just as much a function of the entire classroom experience as it is the relationship between each individual student and the instructor (Nikolajski, 2020).

The teacher who realizes this, and, in an emergency or routine remote learning scenario, takes steps to strengthen the student-student bonds and overall student experience in the remote classroom, can hope to benefit from these actions. To round out this course on student engagement, we'll take a look at ways to help students find ways to socialize when remote learning (and remote socialization) constitutes the new normal.

- Set up a remote dance, stretching, or cardio class for your students. If your students are at home, they may need help getting normal fitness levels into their daily routine; and, whether through recess, gym classes, or athletic teams, your students may already be used to working out together (Nikolajski, 2020).
- Conduct remote challenges and competitions. Have your students run a mile remotely, and compare their times to each other; host a trivia night, and encourage different teams of students to converse semi-privately in their own chat rooms (monitored by yourself or a parent volunteer) (Nikolajski, 2020).
- Host virtual game sessions. Technology has made it possible to play many games online (Nikolajski, 2020).

Ultimately, anyway that you can take your students' minds off the stress of current events and back to strengthening their relationship with each other (and having fun), the more you'll be able to provide them with a healthy mental re-set - and the more you'll be able to strengthen the backbone of your classroom, even if it's a virtual one. When your students feel that they aren't alone, even as they're sitting at home in front of a computer, they'll be more excited about tuning in. If they can remember that they're part of a close-knit learning community, they'll more naturally want to join in the conversation - and you can be a big part of making that happen.

Conclusion

As a teacher, you want what's best for your students. You want to find ways to teach them effectively; you want them to enjoy the time they spend in your classroom.

Sometimes, this comes naturally. Other times, this type of engagement can present a bit of a challenge.

When you're trying to find ways to increase student engagement in your classroom (in-person or virtual), it can be tough to know where to start. Following the research, spending time working on your classroom organization and student socialization techniques, and really prioritizing your emotional connection with your students can work wonders in this way.

The research also tells us one thing: Even if student engagement is difficult to define or measure in quantitative ways, it can be simple to tell when students are happy, productive, participating, and thriving. Increasing efforts toward student engagement seems to help towards those ends. When looking for ways to increase student engagement, finding ways to invest in your community, invest in your relationships, and be flexible about your teaching structure can go a very long way towards success.

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