



ENGAGING STUDENTS IN LEARNING

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Abstract

It is important for students to learn and to be successful. Learning is a goal each teacher aspires for their students. The success of a student depends partly on how much the student is engaged in the learning process. Several teaching techniques and engaging strategies are provided to assist in engaging students in the learning process. Teachers are working each day to provide content to their students in a way that will be remembered. Learning activities that challenge students to construct an understanding is vital to the teaching and learning process.

Engaging Students in Learning

Learning is a goal each teacher aspires for their students. The success of a student depends partly on how much the student is engaged in the learning process (Student Engagement). How does a teacher know their students have learned? For students to be engaged in learning the teacher must be engaged in teaching. Assessment of student work is essential to the learning process. Providing feedback to students often allows the student to evaluate their own learning and also assists the teacher in improving instruction (On Purpose Associates, 2003a).

A requirement of true engagement in learning is not just working with manipulatives. Being mentally engaged is a key element to achieve the desired success. Think of this as “minds-on” as opposed to “hands-on”. Teachers are working each day to provide content to their students in a way that will be remembered. Those teachers that are remembered by their students may be remembered because of their skill in making the content real (Indian Hill Exempted Village School District, 2003).

Students must be able to participate in learning activities that will challenge them to construct an understanding. Requiring students to complete assignments and activities without thinking does not engage the students. Students must be required to think. Activities must be relevant and authentic to the desired knowledge. Students should be involved in making choices and taking initiative. Some other elements important to student learning include the grouping of students, use of instructional materials, structure and pacing, and lesson structure. It is important to a student to know where they are

within the structure of a lesson (Indian Hill Exempted Village School District, 2003). They must be provided with enough time to complete the learning and not feel rushed. However, too much time allows for waste of time and promotes procrastination. Monitoring and involvement of the instructor is a crucial element to the success of the learning.

Teaching to the whole-brain is another instructional approach that assists in the engagement of students in learning. Active learning is the emphasis of whole-brain teaching that uses both the left and right side of the brain. Another element is controlling the environment of the classroom to relieve stress and anxiety. This can be done by playing soothing music or in the arrangement and color of the classroom. Learners should be encouraged to visualize, draw, or role play to retain information. Acting out the meanings of words by the students will assist in the retention of the definitions and a stronger understanding (On Purpose Associates, 2003b).

Learning is a team effort with the team being composed of the teacher and the students. Working together as a team will provide the student with skills that can be taken with them for further education or to a workplace. Students need the experience of working with others to be successful in their future careers in the business world. Being engaged in learning activities will provide the experience to be a strong team player as well as assist them in being successful in their learning.

Keep on the lookout for ideas to enhance your content by using engaging whole-brain learning activities. Creating the comfortable classroom climate is essential to the success of engaging students in learning. Attending professional organization conferences assists in learning what other teachers are doing in their classrooms. Also reading professional organization magazines and newsletters provides other ideas that will be usable in a classroom situation.

One idea that I use is to have my students on the first day of class draw 5 things that represent them on a large index card. Time is allowed for them to complete this task. Markers and cards are provided. When all students have completed this task, they are to introduce themselves to the class by telling about what is on their card. Other varieties of this activity can also be done by having the students to share their card with one other person then that person introduces the student to the others in the classroom.

Based upon an article in the Business Education Forum (Olivio et. al., 2001) I have used their method of utilizing playing cards to group students for classroom activities. The newsletter, Teaching Business Education, provides in each issue ideas and activities that business education teachers have used in their classroom that were successful. One of these activities is called Penny Puzzle (Teaching Business Education, 2003). Students are provided 12 pennies and are told to make a square with 5 pennies on each side of the square. This activity causes students to think beyond their linear way of thinking and think outside of the box.

One of my students shared an activity with me that I used in a graduate class recently on the first day of class called Personalized Plates. Each student is to describe themselves in eight or less letters and/or numbers or just design their own license plate that best describes them. They are provided with large index cards and markers to complete the task. It was a great success. These graduate students were very proud of their work and some were very artistic but all were well done. This can be done in a computer lab with a template or just have the students create their own according to your specifications. Their plates can be hung on the wall of the classroom.

Another activity the emphasizes problem solving is using a large index card and a small index card taped to each other so that it looks like part of the smaller card is sticking up and two chunks have been cut from each side. Each student is given a large card then several smaller cards and a pair of scissors. They are told they can only make 3 cuts in the smaller card. Looking at the example it looks obvious there must be at least four cuts made. It is crucial that the example be made of a small index card without lines or the students will be able to figure out the example quickly. It has been my experience that someone will either solve the problem quickly or they will not be able to solve it at all. This is also an excellent group activity. This activity was used in a conference I attended several years ago.

These are just a few examples of some activities that may be used to enhance a lesson, introduce students, or to make a point. It does not always have to completely relate to the subject matter. Relating these activities to the learning is the job of the teacher. The activity just makes that learning memorable and sometimes never forgotten.

References

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Appendix

Resources for Engaging Students in Learning

Teaching Business Education – subscription needed

www.teachbused.com

Three Common Cooperative Learning Structures

<http://is.dal.ca/~oidt/taguide/ThreeCommonCooperativeLearningStructures.html>

Jigsaw Classroom

www.jigsaw.org/steps.htm

Teaching Methods: Active Learning

<http://tltc.findlay.edu/strat14.html>

Synergistic Activities – Fay Ortiz-Golden and Ann Kieser – presented NBEA 2003 Dallas

www.synergisticbiz.net

Issues of Teaching and Learning

www.csd.uwa.edu.au/newsletter/issue0398

Classroom Activities for Active Learning

<http://ctl.unc.edu/fyc2.html>

New Research Points to the Importance of Using Active Learning in the Classroom

http://web.mit.edu/tll/published/new_research.htm

Top Ten Web Resources for Active Lecturing Ideas and Techniques

<http://php.indiana.edu/~jhardenb/top10.html>

A Jigsaw Experiment

<http://www.libraryinstruction.com/jigsaw.html>

From Teaching to Learning

<http://borg.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JVME/V21-1/Seeler1.html>

Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom

<http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/91-9dig.htm>

Active and Cooperative Learning

http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Cooperative_Learning.html

Roger Greenaway's Guide to Active Reviewing

<http://www.reviewing.co.uk/>

All Sources Retrieved July 15, 2003.