

Engaging teaching styles

Student motivation comes from within when they are interested, challenged and involved by engaging teaching styles

How do you motivate students? That's a question I am often asked, and I always reply that motivation comes from within. What educators can do is engage students by harnessing their ideas, interests, curiosity, abilities, talents and skills, and through that engagement, students are more likely to choose to be motivated.

Compelling topics, connections to their interests, personal relevance and meaning and authentic experiences are likely to motivate students. They want to move, talk, experiment, stretch, meet challenges, make choices and be surprised. They have questions and want to discover answers that propel the learning process. Educators can integrate protocols and strategies that increase positive dynamics of inquiry, critical thinking, reflection and participation in every classroom. I have found success using the following strategies to engage students.

Accurate Image Language

Words help students create an image in their mind. That image is clearer when the words are more exact and descriptive, which often means more positive than negative. This approach establishes clarity for the listener and a greater likelihood of meeting the desired learning and behavior outcomes. For example, instead of saying, "Don't slam the door," say, "Close the door quietly." Instead of saying, "Don't forget your homework," say, "Remember your homework." With accurate, concrete language, confusion is mitigated.

Similarly when building skills, replace statements or questions that lack specificity, such as, "Can't you just listen to me?" with specific requests, such as, "Eye contact helps with listening; let's practice this first." This simple, powerful adjustment in language establishes a climate conducive

to responsiveness and engagement. Be transparent; students quickly understand that a poster that says, "Don't forget to come" is less effective than one that says, "Remember to come" or "Join us!"

Be the Concept

Have students dramatise a concept to demonstrate understanding or to teach others. Adding this kinesthetic construct helps students understand and recall as a result of personal experience. For example, to develop collaboration skills, introduce the

introduce a fiction or nonfiction book, not a textbook. Distribute the book to each student, advising students to keep the books closed until told otherwise and follow this sequence of directions 100%.

Tell students to look only at the front cover and tell you what the book is about. Write their comments on chart paper or the whiteboard in one of the colours in a random design, not a list.

Tell students to look only at the back cover and tell you what the book is about. Write those comments in a different colour.

Have students hold the book looking at the back cover, then flip the pages of the book from back to front quickly, noticing anything that pops out to them. Be sure to model the technique first. Ask them once more what the book is about and record their comments using a third colour.

Repeat the flipping and question one last time, adding comments in the fourth colour.

"What educators can do is engage students by harnessing their ideas, interests, curiosity, abilities, talents, and skills, and through that engagement, students are more likely to choose to be motivated."

word support, a word that educators use often yet rarely examine for meaning. Group two to six students randomly and simply say, "In 20 seconds, show 'support.'" They may lean on one another, form a chair out of their arms, pat someone on the back, or provide a thumbs-up. Students will have multiple images to trigger thinking and varied associations. After leading this activity during a professional development session, one teacher said, "I'm going to have my students become mitosis!" Teachers use this strategy to seal an idea or concept in a short amount of time with high participation.

Book Flip

To spark student interest in reading a book, review the book as a group. Use an easel pad or a whiteboard and four differently coloured markers. This process works to

Ask students what happened during this process. Students typically say that they previewed the book, and usually everyone finds something in it that sparked their interest or curiosity.

As a follow up, allow three minutes for students to open to any part of the book and read. Then have them form triads and allow two minutes for them to share what they have learned.

This entire sequence takes less than 15 minutes; interest in the book, however, will have increased through examining and foreshadowing. Remind students that they now have a quick way to preview many books: look at the front cover and the back cover and flip twice back to front to see what jumps out. This is a great strategy for librarians to highlight as well.

Book Puzzle

When handing out a new textbook, ask students to form groups of four to look at the front cover and back cover and pause at the table of contents. Each student then selects a single chapter of his or her choosing to review. Allow three to four minutes for students to review the chapters, suggesting that they first browse through all of the pages before settling in to finding highlights. Give each student two minutes to share highlights with his or her small group. Debrief by discussing what was learned and what students may anticipate in the class. This can lead to further discussion of the resources and understanding they bring to their learning environment.

Define This

To engage students in active learning and build a better understanding and retention of words, terms and concepts, avoid offering definitions. Instead, have students construct definitions. Begin by offering a basis for understanding. For example, if introducing the word *apartheid*, describe how people were treated when this policy was in place. Once the foundation is established, begin the process for deductive reasoning in pairs or small groups. Definitions can be written, drawn or acted out. Often the framework is, “In a small group, come up with a definition for [a certain word or phrase] in 10 words or less and include an image.” To culminate, students can discuss each other’s definitions to refine them. When students discuss and deduce what a word means and create an image, the likelihood of recall can increase. Teachers also gain a landscape of what students do and don’t understand, can correct misconceptions, and more readily engage the class moving forward.

Each One, Teach One

Using index size cards or paper, give each student one fact, concept or quote to share with others. Allow students to walk around, form pairs to exchange information by reading the card aloud, and then find the next partner. With each pairing, the exchanges likely will become less about reading the card and more about summarising what is on the card from memory. Quote cards can be exchanged on the basis of a preference for the quotes. Fact cards can introduce a new unit or lesson or be a summary for review. To conclude, the class can discuss collective learning and how each segment of information contributes to the whole. Students also like creating the cards themselves, which can be

adapted as an effective approach to making engaging presentations.

One Minute Think Tank

How often does a teacher ask, “Any questions?” followed by minimal, if any, student response? Encourage all students to ask questions with the “one minute think tank.” After presenting a topic, have students find a partner and give them one minute to come up with a related question. The limited time plus the opportunity to talk gets students motivated and asking questions.

This activity has myriad applications; for example, you can give students one minute to work with a partner or group to craft the opening and closing sentences of an essay, resolve a query, rewrite a quote, develop five note-taking tips, reflect on an experience, or come up with a better homework assignment than the teacher (and they typically do!). This strategy reengages students whose attention may have wandered and gives students time to think about their ideas with one person before sharing as a class. Use it frequently to reignite individual and collective engagement and classroom discussions.

Social Relief

Simply put, students need to talk to one another. Learning is a social experience. Idea developers rarely work alone; instead, they have a series of conversations to advance their concepts. Similarly, students need times to talk out loud and to listen to others. Vary the time; how students are grouped; whether they sit, stand, or walk; and the numbers of students—and see how social relief solidifies and furthers learning.

Under Direct

While I was leading ninth graders in a workshop, I distributed cards with a different quote on them. They were seated at tables of four with one sheet of easel pad paper and four markers. I instructed them to “draw a quote.” Several hands immediately popped up.

Question: What do you want us to do?

My answer: Draw a quote.

Another hand: What do we do first?

My answer: Draw a quote.

And another hand: Do we do this together?

My answer: Draw a quote.

After a few more rounds, they looked at each other, and in five minutes had completed exceptional quote art.

When teachers give a direction, most often students raise a hand and ask, “What do you want me to do?” That is precisely the problem. They want the teacher to say what to do, point by point, so that the students’ priority becomes determining what will please the teacher, rather than demonstrating their learning or exploring what they want to know.

The antidote is to “under direct.” Provide directions that are clear and brief. If questions ensue, stick with the same exact direction. This encourages problem solving, collaboration, critical thinking, and authentic learning. If a student is getting particularly frustrated, you must respond further; teachers must be persistent in most circumstances, however, to break the cycle of students’ over dependency on teachers.

Closing Thought

Self-directed learning, participation and creativity mixed with a dose of inspiration draw upon students’ innate curiosity and desire to know. Through everyday integration of effective teaching strategies, teachers move students toward high levels of engagement and success.

Excerpts of this article were adapted from Strategies for Success with 21st Century Skills: A Learning Curriculum that Serves (ABCD Books, 2012) by Cathryn Berger Kaye.

This article was first published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in *Principal Leadership* magazine in March 2014. For more information about NASSP programs and services, visit www.nassp.org. 

Catherine (cathy@cbkassociates.com) is an international education consultant and the author of *The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, & Social Action* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2010) and two books co-authored with environmental advocate Philippe Cousteau. For more information visit www.cbkassociates.com.