

More Discipline Ideas

When your students are engaged in the learning, they won't be misbehaving. Conversely, it's often true that discipline problems occur when your students aren't engaged with what's going on in your classroom.

How good you are at keeping your students engaged, whether you're a student teacher on a practicum or a first-year teacher, will go a long way to determining how successful you will be in the classroom.

Here are some techniques to help you keep your students engaged in the learning that goes on in your room.

Enthusiasm

In many ways, a teacher is like an actor. Your passion for the lesson draws the students into the topic, and holds their interest. The students won't be enthusiastic about the lesson unless *you* are. Bring your passion for what you are doing to every lesson you teach, and let it show in everything you say and do.



Keep focused on the lesson.

Develop classroom management techniques that will allow you to stay focused on the lesson without having to stop to deal with behaviour problems. Use non-verbal techniques such as eye contact, prompts, proximity or hand signals. Use your voice for questioning, not correcting behaviour. This skill takes a while to master, and must be reinforced often.

Make your lessons 'real'

Instead of introducing a topic by saying something like: "*Today we're going to learn the rules for writing a paragraph*", make the topic more appealing by describing it this way: "*Let's write to the Principal and tell him why we need longer breaks*".

Instead of introducing a math lesson on area by saying: "*Turn to page 56 and read problem 14*", say instead: "*Let's design a new classroom*".

Let students practice their new addition skills by calculating the cost of an upcoming field trip, or the cost of a meal at the local restaurant. (Keep copies of the menu in your classroom!)

There's always a way to make any lesson more interesting. *Students become engaged when the topic is something which is meaningful to them.*

Use good questioning techniques

You will probably insist that students raise their hands to answer a question. That's a good thing. But there is *nothing stopping you from asking someone else to answer*. Some students never raise their hands, and some always do. Every student should expect to be called on to answer at least one question in every class, and they should never know when they're likely to be asked. This forces them to pay attention.

In addition, you will always use the TESA principles when asking questions and responding to answers, to ensure that all students are comfortable about answering questions and are engaged in the lesson.

Another trick that experienced teachers use is to focus their questions on students whose attention might be wandering. It helps to bring them back. Don't be tempted to always pick the same three students to answer who always get it right, to help the lesson progress. Take your time.

Vary the questions you use according to Bloom's Taxonomy; ask questions at all levels; direct the lower-level ones to weaker students so they can experience success and stay involved, and direct the upper-level questions at capable students to force them to think about what's being discussed.

Vary your lesson styles

It's OK to use a 'stand-at-the-front' lesson once in a while, as long as you feel you can keep everyone engaged. But it's tough to keep students engaged day after day if you teach this way all the time. Instead, vary your techniques.

Move around the room while teaching. Ask questions from all over.

Plan lessons where students have to get out of their seats to record data, interview others, discuss strategies, or create things. Use learning centres. Switch from individual work to group work. Let students teach each other. Encourage students to use all the different learning styles ... visual, oral, tactile, and kinaesthetic.

Be creative in your lesson planning, so that students will never know what to expect. They will come to your class eager to learn.

Use technology every day

Use technology in your lessons, and as a way for students to practice what they've learned. Use it as a tool for learning, not a privilege. Student teachers should find out from practicing teachers how games, puzzles and other learning activities on a Smartboard are used in their classrooms.

Give students choices

Different people learn in different ways, which is why differentiated instruction is so important. Allow your students to learn material, or to show what they've learned, in a variety of ways.

For learning, use 'centres' that let students experience concepts in a variety of ways. For assessment, be flexible. Some can write. Others can explain orally. A few might want to demonstrate with concrete objects. Maybe some could prepare a multi-media presentation.

ASIDE: Be careful using student-prepared presentations as a learning tool. This can be very effective, and I used it often, but students tend to put a lot more effort into making it look 'pretty' than making sure the content is thoroughly presented.

Also be careful with plagiarism. Students love to cut and paste from the internet. When they do this they learn nothing. To solve this problem, allow them one period for research, but they must print on paper whatever they've found, and use only those papers (no internet) when preparing the presentation, and hand in those papers with their digital slideshow.

Students are much more likely to actually read through the material and understand it, if they are forced to type it themselves. Use this opportunity to teach them about writing concisely and paraphrasing, and citing sources.

Also, remember the rule about slideshows: no more than three bullets per screen, in large font and in point form. And NO annoying transitions. (I once had a student who prepared a PowerPoint presentation where, on each screen, every single word 'flew' into the page!)

Students are more likely to be engaged in their own learning when they have choices: choices about how to learn, and choices about how to demonstrate what they've learned.

Add some motivation

Some students will be engaged because they want to learn, and they want to do well. Others may occasionally need some extra motivation. Don't be afraid to make your lessons fun. Include some challenges, some contests, some learning games and even the occasional reward or incentive. Reward for good work, not good behavior.

Model the engagement you expect from students.

If you expect students to be fully engaged in the lesson you are presenting, then you should be too. Allow no interruptions; close your door and ask other school staff not to disturb you while you're teaching. (I once had a colleague regularly walk into my classroom while I was teaching to hand back homework. Eventually we had words).

During the lesson, stick to it; don't be filing things, marking, writing notes or putting away books while the lesson is proceeding, even if the students are working in groups. Be with them. Engage with them. Check their work. Ask questions.

OK, that was a little extreme. I know very well that lots of teachers assign class work periods so they can get some marking done. I did it. But try to stay engaged as often as you can, But maybe not of Fridays ...

While you're actively teaching and asking questions, model good questioning techniques. When students are answering questions, give them your full attention. Make eye contact. Give them feedback.

Students who are engaged rarely create discipline problems. However, whenever discipline problems occur, the cause is sometimes poorly planned lessons; students finished early, had nothing to do, or were easily distracted from tasks that weren't engaging them. It's your job to make sure that doesn't happen.