

Engaging Lessons

“Get-up and move!” is my motto for getting through the school day. Sitting down, copying notes all class period can lead to a zoned out class, which makes everything taught that day irrelevant. Students who are actively engaged, mentally and physically, are more likely to succeed and retain information in the classroom according to Aleta Margolis, founder and executive director of the Center for Inspired Teaching, “moving isn’t a break from learning; movement *is* learning, and the opportunities for thoughtful exploration in the classroom are endless.” (The Washington Post)

Starting off the day with an Engage will help set the tone of the class. Engage activities should be light hearted and require minimal/simple content knowledge so students have time to “wake-up” their brains. Students tend to be competitive when you let them, so presenting challenges where groups compete with other groups can help liven up the class and pull everyone in (because who doesn’t want to be the group that wins, or finishes first?)

During my lesson on two column proofs, which can be a dull and challenging subject, I gave my students a bag of Uno cards and one designated “Starting Card”. The students had to find the sequence of plays only allowing the next card to be the same color or number. They then moved groups and I timed them on which group could find the pattern the fastest and let them go a few rounds. This really woke them and got them moving around the classroom, 5 minutes into the period.

Connecting the Engage to the lesson objectives is key to a smooth flowing lesson. My students took the Uno card patterns and wrote a two-column proof: putting the card pattern on the left side, and reason on the right (same color or same number). Later in the lesson, when conducting algebraic proofs, the students were able to connect a challenging format to a less intensive Uno example. Engage lessons should be a stepping-stone for the lesson to help introduce lesson material.

After engaging students, it is still important to keep the movement going throughout the lesson. Placing students in groups encourages students to interact with each other and allows the teacher to monitor who is actively participating. Students can re-explain what was explained on the board to their groups members and then move groups a few times to hear other group ideas. Periodically changing group members during class not only gets students up and moving, but also allows the students to hear different ways of explaining material. This is helpful for those who might not have understood the material the way it was originally presented.

Before the lesson is finished, it is imperative that the student’s connect the material with real world applications so they can understand the importance of the topic. Finding out what hobbies or future occupations the students are interested in can help a teacher find relevant channels of application. “The development of relationships between students and teachers and of collaborative forms of engagement based on those relationships improve student experiences and learning at school.” (Learning from the Students Perspective, pg. 239)

Designing lessons that peek student interest will help keep students focused in class. Giving students the opportunity to collaborate with a variety of classmates not only gets them up and moving, but also allows for

Sources:

Cook-Sather, Alison. *Learning from the Students Perspective: a Sourcebook for Effective Teaching*.
Paradigm Publishers, 2010.

“Letting Kids Move in Class Isn't a Break from Learning. It IS Learning.” *The Washington Post*,
WP Company, 19 Jan. 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2015/01/19/letting-kids-move-in-class-isnt-a-break-from-learning-it-is-learning/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.dddfaad3da56.