

Engagement and Assessment – A Student’s Perspective

by Nancy Knowlton

Today everyone is talking about the challenge of engaging children in a 21st-century learning environment. We all hear the complaints about the trouble in today’s classrooms – absenteeism, bad behavior and generally unmotivated students. Are we looking at the root causes of poor performance, or are these just symptoms of children’s disengagement from the learning process – a process that, for many, is uninspiring and downright boring?

At SMART we have been talking about engagement for many years – even before there were any data to suggest its particular importance to 21st-century learners. We knew what we saw in the classroom when children experienced an environment that more closely matched their expectations. We saw students’ reactions firsthand when the learning environment was one that energized them and responded to their learning and participation needs.



We have continued the tradition of delivering the best in learning experiences with the introduction of our student response system. Many people know the value of these products from the teacher’s perspective, but just what can they mean for student engagement?

Active Participation for Every Child

These nifty devices mean that all students have a voice in the classroom, whether or not they are called on to provide an answer. Every student answers every question, thinking through the options and arriving at a selected response. It’s not just the keeners who participate. Every child is heard.

Students cannot sit passively back and coast during class. Knowing that they will be required to answer questions means that students will stay involved and engaged every day. More than that, students will look forward to participating in classes and showing what they know – and the use of technology will make the difference.

Confidentiality

Through the anonymity of the clicker, all children can answer questions and assess their own progress without revealing answers or scores to their classmates. The most important thing is that all students know how they are progressing – or not.

Knowing how they compare to others can also be very important to students. Knowing that they are ahead of the majority of the class in understanding a complex subject can be helpful in building self-esteem, just as knowing that they are behind can spur commitment to further effort.

Formative Assessment

Taking stock of their progress prior to end-of-term tests can assist students in pinpointing where they have mastered key concepts. Regularly using a student response system with targeted, well-structured questions is a no-risk way for teachers to have students take greater responsibility for their own learning.

If undertaken on a daily basis, formative assessment gives students an up-to-date understanding of where they are and an opportunity to recover if they are behind and need some remedial work.

Students don’t have to view testing as a negative experience if they can see it as their route to better performance and understanding.

Sharing Points of View

Not everything in class is designed around assessing mastery of various concepts. Some of the best input comes from inviting students to express their opinions, which they can easily do through the anonymity of the student response system. Using the clickers, they cannot look around the room to see who is raising a hand in support of a particular position on an issue. They must think for themselves.

Young, but Definitely Not Indifferent

Many students today may seem indifferent and disengaged from learning and participating in class, but that observation is simplistic and far from the truth in many cases. They are looking for an engaging and active learning experience. How do we know? Well, in classroom after classroom where our products are used, we hear about a positive change in student engagement and participation with the introduction of our products.

Want children to be committed to their learning? Give them the tools to allow them to commit. Get them involved. Tell them that what they think, learn and know matters. Let them in on everyday assessment. Personalize the learning. Put the tools in their hands – literally.

Nancy Knowlton is the co-founder and CEO of SMART Technologies, the world’s leading supplier of interactive whiteboards. Nancy’s husband and SMART co-founder, David Martin, is the inventor of the interactive whiteboard category. Together they have built a company that is focused on delivering easy-to-use, yet feature-rich collaboration tools, including the SMART Board interactive whiteboard. Nancy can be reached at CEO@smarttech.com.