

Survey Question

3. This class keeps my attention – I don't get bored

Australian Professional Standard

Professional Knowledge Domain

Standard 1: Know students and how they learn

Focus areas:

- 1.2 Understand how students learn
- 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds
- 1.5 Differentiate teaching to meet the specific needs of students across the full range of abilities
- 3.1 Establish challenging learning goals

What does this sound like in the classroom?

"I love coming to this class! It's always so interesting and before I know it, the class has finished and I wish we could keep going!"

Why is this important?

Student engagement and school connectedness underpin effective student learning. (DEECD, 2013) Engagement is complex internal process, and it has been challenging for researchers to pin down exactly what interventions increase student engagement, and how student engagement impacts learning outcomes. Student engagement has thus been notoriously difficult to 'measure' in the classroom, but can be defined as three interrelated components: behavioural, emotional and cognitive. (Fredericks et al, 2004)

When students are cognitively engaged, they are "not just students doing things but it is something happening inside their heads". It is the perfect storm for students, where they concentrate, focus on achieving goals, are flexible in their work and cope with failure. Behavioural engagement refers to the students' participation in classroom and learning activities, as well as punctuality, attendance and adherence to classroom rules. Behavioural engagement often leads to cognitive engagement. It can be the easiest type of engagement to observe and measure in the classroom, as it is quickly detected as being 'on/off task'. Emotional engagement is the relationship between students and their teachers, classmates and school. (Frederick and McColskey, 2012).

The three aspects of engagement are intricately linked. Government focus on student engagement has been heavily weighted towards behavioural engagement, and attendance often deemed synonymous with engagement. By this measure, almost all Australian primary school students would be deemed 'engaged'. In the classroom, teachers can infer concentration and

enthusiasm for a task by observing students' facial expressions and posture, reaction time and verbal utterances. (AITSL, 2014) There may also be other key markers to observe, such as persistence on task, attention to detail, and level of satisfaction with the coursework and enduring understandings.

What strategies have been shown to work in the classroom?

AITSL (2014) states that there is a striking lack of evidence on the impact of various learning and teaching strategies on engagement, but some studies have shown that engagement is increased through flexible, individualised teaching in a supportive learning environment. Project-based learning is one method that allows students to 'own' their task, as they can pursue a topic of interest or personal passion. Flexibility to explore and research something that is relevant to the student may develop cognitive engagement.

Strong classroom management and student-teacher relationships have a significant impact on engagement and achievement. (Hattie, 2009) Strong student-teacher relationships ('emotional engagement') create a classroom where students feel safe, respected and engaged. Ongoing, close monitoring of student progress combined with targeted feedback can go some distance to ensuring students are engaged in the classroom.

Working with colleagues is essential to learn how to engage students and identify disengaged students. Professional collaboration, observation of practice, feedback and appraisal can be important ways for teachers to learn from one another about how to engage students. (AITSL, 2014)

See also Resource Pack 4, 8 and 19 for related information.

What three things can I try in my classroom tomorrow?

1. Act on student interest. Determine an area of student interest (individual or class) that aligns with your course curriculum and allow students to explore, research and report back to the class.
2. Identify disengagement. Use a similar approach to below (collaboration with colleagues).
3. Have a change of scene. Renew interest in the subject matter by getting out of the classroom. Take a fieldtrip, bring in a guest speaker, or head to the library to conduct research. Shake things up!

What opportunities are there for collaboration with my colleagues?

Ask a colleague to observe your class and how the students respond to opportunities for comment. This may be as simple as giving your colleague a copy of your class roll on which they can 'tally' the number of times each student is either:

1. Actively involved in answering questions (puts hand up voluntarily)
2. Passively involved in answering questions (answers a question when asked by the teacher)
3. Asks questions of the teacher

They may be able to identify students who are feeling engaged in the learning activities and safely contribute to discussion. You may wish to ask individual students after class to ascertain why they are reluctant to contribute and seek to work with them to remedy this.

Where can I find out more?

Referenced articles, books and other great reads:

- AITSL (2014) Engagement in Australian Schools background paper
- Department of Education and Training (NSW) (2006) School is for me: Pathways to student engagement, accessed 16 April 2013
- Fredericks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C. and Paris, A. H. (2004) 'School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence', Review of Educational Research, 74(1), p 59-109
- Jensen, B. The Grattan Institute. (2014) Turning around schools: It can be done, accessed 20 July 2015.
- The Innovation Unit and Learning Futures. (2012) The Engaging School: A handbook for school leaders. Published by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Accessed 12 July 2015.