Student Engagement, Distilled*

Distilled (di-stild') adj. 4. Separated or extracted essence

Why student engagement is critical . . .

1. Learning is enhanced by "social" interaction.
2. People learn by doing, not by listening alone.
3. 21st century learning skills include the following: critical thinking, *collaboration, communication,* and creativity.

What it looks like

- Students don't merely answer teacher questions; they raise their own questions as well.
- Students offer differing points of view, not just required responses.
- Students evaluate feedback about their work (from peer and teacher) before revising, rather than just fixing identified errors.
- Students struggle but persevere when the task is challenging.
- Students search for additional resources but evaluate the validity of those resources before using them.
- Students work better and think more deeply when the tasks are not prescribed, discreet, or in isolation.
- Students work to apply information rather than to merely remember it.
- Students "muck around" in the midst of their work, creating a "messiness" as they discuss, hypothesize, test out, and research.
- Students move to work areas and flexible groups as they work.
- Students collaborate with each other to solve problems; discuss, pose, and answer questions; and to research issues of consequence to them.

What it sounds like

- The teacher sets the work in motion, but then merely facilitates, supports, and encourages the work of the students.
- The room is often filled with students talking among themselves.
- There is inherent "messiness" as students delve into the content.
- The noise is about the work.
- The teacher moves around the room, interacting with small groups or individuals, guiding the individual work as a consultant rather than "the sage on the stage."
- Student groups often work on different projects or problems related to the central concept of the lesson or unit.

A checklist for student engagement:

√ Are students merely jumping through the hoops?
√ Are the students rewarded for the quality and depth of their thinking rather than the packaging of their work (neatness, compliance)?
√ Is the noise in the classroom focused on the task, with student groups debating, questioning, justifying, supporting, and clarifying?
√ Are students consumed by their work or are they easily distracted or intent on distracting others?
√ Is the focus of the work to "uncover" some important topic or to "cover" as much content as possible?
√ Does the time go by too quickly or has the clock seemed to stop?
√ Are students challenged to dig deeper and try another avenue or are they frustrated when they can't find "the answer" quickly?
√ Do the students strive to dig deeper and question what they learn rather than accept the superficial, easy answer to the problem?

Six steps to creating an engaging learning environment

1. Build a caring and supportive community of learners where all opinions are valued.
2. Continually check in with students, provide feedback, and ultimately check out their final understanding.
3. Give students voice and intentionally-designed choices in their learning.
4. Provide opportunities for students to work in a collaborative environment in which relationships matter and reflect "real-work situations."
5. Challenge students with rigorous, relevant learning experiences that are as authentic as possible to avoid boredom and compliance.
6. Celebrate their learning and personal accomplishments, setting students up for future success.

Sources:
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