The EdTechEnergy Podcast
Episode 9: If student engagement is low, what is missing?

In my recent blog posts, I talked a lot about what engages our students in our classrooms. You learned that community, technology, instructor presence, and more are real game changers when it comes to engaging our students from the start of our lessons to the end. Here is a list of those blog posts for easy access:

- May 7, 2021 - [Provide Meaningful Feedback that Increases Student FUTURE Engagement, Participation, & Achievement](#)
- June 2, 2021 - [What is the #1 Influencer for Student Engagement?](#)
- June 10, 2021 - [How does instructor presence impact student engagement in your classroom?](#)
- June 16, 2021 - [How does technology empower student engagement?](#)

But in in this episode, I'm going to talk about what prevents student engagement from happening if it's not included in your classroom.

INTRO

Whenever I'm trying to solve a problem, I always ask the easiest questions: the What, the Who, the Why, the Where, the When, and the How, and not in any specific order. If we look at the disengagement of students in a classroom, let's begin by finding the answers to these questions.

Let's start with people; the **Who**. When I think about reasons why engagement isn't happening in the classroom and I think about the Who, the first word that pop in my head is **relationships**. If students don't have a relationship with the teacher, that's a huge deficit in getting students to engage in anything we do in our classroom. And then, we think of their classmates and ask, do they have relationships with the other students in the class? I can tell you from experience, when students have close relationships with their peers in a classroom, participation increases because there's an intrinsic motivator to participate with their friends in our classroom. When they're participating in student learning activities and assignments, if their friends are part of the picture, they're motivated to participate. It's super important for us teachers to find ways to connect our students and nurture the relationships they have in the classroom with their peers. Teambuilding exercises, icebreakers, group projects, pairs and shares, gallery walks, the list goes on and on how we can specifically nurture the relationships students have with the other classmates in class. And us, teachers can do a variety of things to build our

individual relationships with each student. I discuss these ways in strategies in prior episode posts such as building your instructor presence, providing personal feedback, integrating technology, and giving each student the opportunity to be seen and heard in every class.

These people pleasers either way get students on our side in the classroom. We build relationships with our students by finding out about each student outside of our classroom, for example, what are their interests and their hobbies? What are they proud of? What do they do in their free time? Who is their family?

f you think about the numbers, students spend six hours with their teachers and their classmates each school day. Multiply that by five, Monday through Friday, and you have a lot of time together. If we teachers offer opportunities for students to build relationships in all we do, participation will increase and so does the engagement, because of those relationships.

The second question I'm going to ask is the **Where**. So where are they learning? How would your students describe your classroom? The **learning space**? And when I think about the police they're learning, we know that creates the way they are feeling in the environment. If you're in the virtual space how does a virtual classroom feel to our students? How would they describe your live virtual classes? If we are the physical classroom, how welcome does our classroom feel? Does it feel inviting? Is it inclusive? And a lot of about the physical space also has to do about the culture we create in our classroom. Do your students know your values, your goals for the class, what you want most for them? Do your students know the policies and procedures and can recite them easily which creates a foundational stability in your environment and in your culture? Is there a vibe that is conducive to strong learning and student sharing? Is there acceptance of diversity and awareness of that diversity in a way that is respectful and honors each and every student? Is there a safe haven to learn in your classroom? And is trial and error learning not only welcomed but encouraged?

Again, the place whether we're talking physically or in a way atmospherically according to the classroom culture we build is extremely important in allowing the type of student engagement that results in learning. Your classroom environment sets the tone for EVERYTHIHNG that happens in it! The learning environment is powerful in guiding, encouraging, and making students feel comfortable and confident when they learn in our place. Because of this ever present dynamic, we teachers need to be cognizant of the place our students are learning.

The next question I'm going to ask after the Who and Were, is the **How**? And this one is an easy answer especially in the 21st-century. If you are not using **technology** from the start of your lesson to the end in different ways, and different measures, and in different options, you're not going to engage your students for very long. Our 21st century students need the media, the interaction, the community, the accessibility, and the fun that technology brings to their learning and as an end result their engagement of learning to the learning. The June 16, 2021, blog post listed above provides the five reasons why technology is such an engager in the classroom. Click here to read more.

The next question I'm going to ask is the **Why**? This answer is very important to know and consider when we want to engage our students in our instruction, their student learning activities, and their assessments. This answer has to do with **relevance**. Do students know not only why they are completing activities and assessments and lessons, but do they know how it's going to benefit them? Do they know how it's going to prepare them? Do they know how it's going to inspire them? And how are you connecting the content to the real world? Do they see connections? Can they apply with their learning to their outside world? Can students relate their learning in a way that they can personalize the learning and make it their own? Again, relevance when it is alive and thriving in a classroom, fuels the highest student engagement in the classroom. Naturally, when we have relevance in your classroom, we have student buy-in.

And, the way you can disintegrate student buy-in pretty fast is giving work to students that look and feel like busywork. It's one of the most harmful things we can do as teachers in our classroom. For example, during virtual learning, we learned that the amount of time students wanted to invest in school was not equal to those six hours they used to invest daily, Monday through Friday in school. While we had their attention in those early months of virtual learning, we better make sure we have valuable learning tasks planned for the time we were in virtual classes. For example, should no longer search for definitions for vocabulary words on the word wall. In fact, searching for definitions should be an obsolete task that we never ask our students to do. Simply, all the students are doing is carrying out Google searching skills. We need to go higher on Bloom's Taxonomy when they are in our classes, and we have their attention.

Additionally, I highly recommend it to all the teachers I coached or taught once virtual learning started was to place a maximum of five vocabulary words in a lesson and to make sure teachers include the definitions so students can do a higher-level learning activity with those words instead of just searching for their definitions.

Also, always start assignments and assessments with the purpose, the Why. I liked to talk about the purpose of an assignment when I introduced it to my students because I believed it increased their buy-in to complete the assignment with good effort. Additionally, I tried to word the purpose of assignments so students could relate to the purpose and I hoped it would increase not only the number of submissions, but also the effort, time, and excitement students invested in the assignment. After introducing the purpose, I asked students if they had any questions about the purpose, and then asked them to predict past the purpose. What will happen if you complete this assignment according to the purpose at hand? For example. now that you know the purpose, what do you think you can do with what you're going to learn inside this assignment or assessment that can make you a game changer in either something personal or something in your community or something in your future academics? This type of questioning caused students to think about their future learning and possibly in that exercise, feel a bit of ownership in what they were going to learn.

Also, give students choice in assignments. When students can choose, for example, what form their assignment will take on, it gives them the opportunity to connect the content with their interests and passions, creating a personalized experience.

Project-based learning is another great way to add relevance to what students are learning and showcasing. I remember when I taught high school sports and entertainment marketing in the first high school where I taught. The project I had was an Apprentice project. I split the class up into two teams each team how to plan and offer a high school dance. Whichever team made the highest profits, got the A. Super relevant, super realistic, and super real world. I don't know what better way to add a relevance to an assessment then to bring the real world into your assignments.

After an big project, ask students to share how the learning has helped them. Students hearing other students talk about their learning and the benefits of their learning, adds the type of relevance that can transition into the next assignment, and build on this momentum. Having students express their connections to the content, their trials, and victories, can cause everyone in the classroom to develop a deeper connection to what was learned and showcased in the project. This type of relevance has the DNA to exponentiate students' relationship to the content, which is a higher level of learning and usually results into a transfer of that learning.

The last question, the **When**, has a simple answer. When are you going to use technology in the lesson, student learning activity, assignment, or assessment? When are you going to build relationships? When are you going to share the relevance of what students are

doing in the classroom? When are students going to feel safe in a trial and error learning environment? The answer? From the start of your lesson to the end of your lesson. From the start of your student learning activities till the end. From the beginning of that assessment or assignment throughout the assessment assignment and when they finish it. Student learning should continue even after they submit assignment through your personal feedback and their response and revision if it is necessary for learning.

When we think about what stops student engagement in its tracks, think about what is missing in your instruction, student learning, and assessment. What is missing in your classroom? Your culture? Your community? If you put your intentions on building relationships, showcasing and connecting relevance, integrating technology, creating the kind of culture where students feel welcome, safe, confident, and comfortable, engagement will happen almost effortlessly. Students show up and engage because you have all the ingredients present that they need to engage with whatever you present to them.

Another way to finetune what you are doing in the classroom in providing opportunities to build relationships, communicate relevance, nurture the environment, integrate the technology, and time and schedule the engagers is to ask students for input. What do they need to engage in the content? What motivates them to engage? What makes them comfortable to engage? How do they need to feel in the classroom to engage? Collecting feedback from your students is valuable intel in creating the type of experience that students naturally want to engage.

Introduce, intersperse, interject, and include relationships, relevance, environment, technology, and timing to build the type of student engagement that leads to the best student performance!

Please comment below—*What technology integration victories do you have in your classroom?*

Share your ideas in the comments below. Or share them on social media and tag @EdTechenergy. I would love to read all your technology integration magic!

Next week's episode topic: *Why does engagement have so much power in our classrooms?*

Get the show notes at edtechenergy.org/listen9, the number 9, or melanie.wiscount/listen9.

Outro