



Classroom Engagement

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Why the education system is not engaging our students...

In schools African Americans face:

Curricula and reading selections reflecting white experiences and preferences (Ogbu, 1972)

Living with higher rates of poverty (Gibbs, et al., 2003) and family stress (Ward, 1995) than their non-African American classmates.

Structural discrimination: overrepresentation in special education and remedial classes, higher suspension and expulsion rates (Holzman, 2006)

Symbolic discrimination: subtle preference for white students evidenced by culturally biased pedagogical style and interactions with students (Herr and Anderson, 2003)

Higher rates of placement in racially or ethnically segregated schools than white students (Gibbs, et al., 2003)

Higher rates of placement in building facilities rated as "inadequate" and residential environments rated as "unsatisfactory" than white students (Gibbs, et al., 2003)

In schools boys are:

Perform 2.5 grade levels below girls in reading (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)

Read literature written for a female audience 80% of the time (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)

Read fiction that features weak, disabled male characters (Sax, 2005)

Typically sit in the back of the classroom, despite not hearing as well as females (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)


Are generally asked to be seated and work quietly when they tend to learn best while moving (Sax, 2005)

Are generally reluctant to ask for help when they need it (Sax, 2005).

These effects are compounded for African American boys

African American boys are more likely than any other segment of the population to:

- Be identified as learning disabled (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)
- Not participate in Advanced Placement classes: 50% less than white males according to overall enrollment (Gurian and Stevens, 2005; Holzman, 2006)
- Underperform in math and science (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)
- Underperform in reading: in 2005, 76% of white males, 43% of African American males at or above Basic nationally in Grade 8 reading (Holzman, 2006).
- Perform below grade level on standardized tests (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)
- Drop out of school: 25% more likely than white males (Holzman, 2006)
- Not graduate with their 9th grade class: 55% (Holzman, 2006)



“Our school systems are actually contributing to the growing gender gap in language arts by denying boys the content, curricula, and multimedia techniques they need in order to gain some parity in verbal learning” (Gurian and Stevens, 2005).

Consequences

High unemployment rates

Little chance to attend and graduate from college

High imprisonment rates

Unstable families (Holzman,, 2006)

What can be done?

Assess and teach according to learning style

Provide a relevant and diverse curriculum

Incorporate culturally sensitive teaching practices into pedagogy

While this presentation will focus on strategies increasing engagement of African American male students in the classroom, employing these suggestions can benefit the entire class.

Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner viewed intelligence as “the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting”. Based on this view, he developed the theory of multiple intelligences in 1983. The idea that there is a broad range of intelligences which account a diverse array of capabilities is the foundation for his theory. Gardner formulated a list of an initial seven intelligences, a work in progress (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).



Multiple Intelligences (cont'd)

- **Visual Learners:** Visual learners learn best through seeing. They benefit from seeing the teacher's body language and facial expressions in order to help them completely understand the content of the lesson. They tend to think in pictures and learn best when visuals like diagrams, illustrated text books, overhead transparencies, videos, etc. These learners also like to take detailed notes in order to "take-in" information. In addition, physical obstructions may influence learning negatively.
- **Auditory Learners:** They learn best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say. Written information may have little meaning until it is heard. These learners often benefit from reading text aloud and using a tape recorder.
- **Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners:** Tactile/Kinesthetic learners learn best through a hands-on approach, and being active participants of lessons. These learners need to move around in order to maximize their engagement. If asked to sit for extended periods of time, they may get distracted and seek to explore, take frequent study breaks



Reaching Different Types of Learners

- Visual Learners

- use visual materials such as pictures, charts, maps, graphs, etc.
- have a clear view of your teachers when they are speaking so you can see their body language and facial expression
- use color to highlight important points in text
- take notes or ask your teacher to provide handouts
- illustrate your ideas as a picture or brainstorming bubble before writing them down
- write a story and illustrate it
- use multi-media (e.g. computers, videos, and filmstrips)
- study in a quiet place away from verbal disturbances
- read illustrated books
- visualize information as a picture to aid memorization

- Auditory Learners

- participate in class discussions/debates
- make speeches and presentations
- use a tape recorder during lectures instead of taking notes
- read text out aloud
- create musical jingles to aid memorization
- create mnemonics to aid memorization
- discuss your ideas verbally
- dictate to someone while they write down your thoughts

- Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners

- move around to learn new things (e.g. read while on an exercise bike, mold a piece of clay to learn a new concept)
- work at a standing position
- chew gum while studying
- use bright colors to highlight reading material
- dress up your work space with posters
- if you wish, listen to music while you study
- skim through reading material to get a rough idea what it is about before settling down to read it in detail.

Classroom Scenerio

During Math, Mrs. Jones is giving her fourth grade students a lesson on long division. She writes down the steps needed to complete the long division problem and does a few examples with the students. Afterward, she passes out a worksheet with several problems so that the students can practice independently. Soon thereafter, Mrs. Jones is frustrated because many students aren't on task and most of the students didn't quite understand the lesson.

What could Mrs. Jones have done differently in order to teach and engage the students more effectively? Keep different learning styles in mind during your discussion.

Curriculum Suggestions

English and History

1. Books with story lines that include spatial-kinesthetic action (ex. thriller, suspense, science fiction, and sports bios) or have technical and mechanical content. (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)
2. Newspaper articles (Sax, 2005)
3. Graphic novels (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)
4. Books that have a strong male character (this works across cultures, even if the character is not of their ethnicity): Harry Potter, Robinson Crusoe, Huckleberry Finn, anything by Hemingway, stories (Sax, 2005).
5. Comprehension assignments: having debates, acting out scenes, creating maps, building dioramas (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)
6. Ask "what would you DO if you were this character/leader of this country?" not "how does ____ feel?" (Gurian and Stevens, 2005).
7. Writing assignments: choose someone to interview and write about him or her--student picks person they are interested in (builds motivation), fuses connections to community, and helps find role models (Gurian and Stevens, 2005)



Curriculum Suggestions Math and Science Suggestions

Stress RELEVANCE

1. Connect material to athletics, finances and budgeting.
2. Use architecture and construction-based math problems and test the results of those problems.
3. Use experiments to open a lesson.
4. Bring in guest scientists and others that use math in their jobs (Gurian and Stevens, 2005).

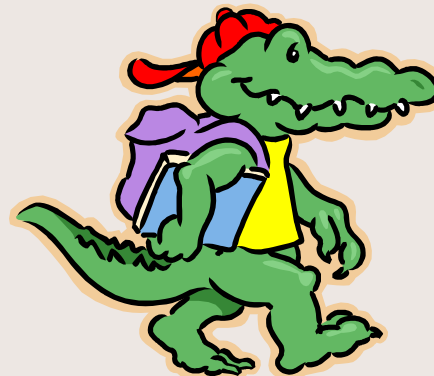


Class Management Suggestions

1. Boys friendships are "shoulder-to-shoulder": make eye contact when disciplining, but not while helping a student do their work (sit next to him)
2. Be direct: boys respond best to confrontation (Sax, 2005).
3. Use time-constraints, not "take however long you need" (Sax, 2005).
4. Rowdiness and class disruptions are usually an indicator that a student needs help, since boys usually do not raise their hands and ask the teacher (Sax, 2005).

Appropriate teaching practices

Specific strategies can improve behavior and academic performance in schools by engaging young children who might be at-risk. A learning environment that includes student feedback, cognitive challenges and interesting visuals are psychologically stimulating and have positive effects on student academic performance. Teaching practices are very significant for class engagement.



In one case study, African American elementary and middle school children were positively affected when the teachers established family, community and home-like characteristics along with culturally connecting with students (Howard, 2002). Ogbu (1992) argues that some minority groups will have limited increase in school performance if cultural diversity is left out of a core curriculum.



Multimedia can be used to bring awareness to cultural differences and serve as an instrument for creativity. One example of using technology to facilitate cultural connectedness is a video project about a cultural tradition where the whole class participates. The teachers and students are able to learn about diversity. A video project about Carnival was produced in a classroom to better appreciate diversity and educate. Interestingly, it included important elements of the national curriculum. Potter (2006) explains that this video project contributes to antiracist education practices.



Resources

Some resources to assist in applying the information presented:

-*What Works Clearinghouse*: <http://w-w-c.org>;

-*National Research Council Committee on Research in Education*: <http://www.nationalacademies.org/core/>

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*I like a teacher who gives you something to take
home to think about besides homework.*

~ Lily Tomlin as "Edith Ann"

