

Motivating and Engaging Students

Teachers can help students build confidence in their ability to comprehend content-area texts and make meaning of increasingly complex and abstract concepts by creating and promoting a supportive, collaborative environment to motivate and engage students in learning.

As teachers establish meaningful and engaging content learning goals, teachers can provide a positive learning environment that promotes students in seeing themselves as an active participant in their own learning. The teacher and students can identify and set realistic learning goals. Teachers should provide students with descriptive feedback that helps them achieve the learning goals. Engage students in self- and peer-assessment activities that provide opportunities for them to give and receive feedback and make adjustments in their own learning in order to be successful.

Engage students in collaborative activities that range from peer partners to small groups to whole group activities. Students interact with their peers to discuss, analyze, comprehend, compose, teach, question, research, and explore various concepts related to the content being presented. Opportunities such as these enable students to critically think about the content, increase their comprehension and understanding of the topics being investigated, and make connections between disciplines such as mathematics and science or language.

Variations:

- **Elbow Partners:** Teachers provide an opportunity for students to partner with an “elbow partner” that is sitting in close proximity to them to briefly discuss a particular prompt or question related to the content. This provides students the chance to think about what has been presented as they talk with their partner. In addition, it focuses student attention and re-engages them in the learning.
- **Turn and Talk:** Similar to elbow partners, the students do a turn & talk activity for a few minutes. This allows students to talk about the information presented or shared and to clarify thoughts or questions. This provides an effective alternate to asking questions to the whole group and having the same students responding. All students have a chance to talk in and be heard for a short period of time.
- **Chum Check:** Students turn to their elbow partner to check their understanding of the content.
- **Yes-No Cards:** Provide students with a sheet of cardstock and have them write, “Yes! Got It!” on one side and “No! No Clue!” on the opposite side. Teachers might use this to introduce or review content or assess if students understand vocabulary words associated with a specific unit of study. Tell students they will hold up a card to signal their response. If they know or think they know the answer, they hold up the “Yes! Got It!” card. If they don’t know the answer they hold up the “No! No Clue!” card.

- **Closing Circle** – Have each student share one thing they now know about a topic or a connection that they made that will help them to remember the information or how this new knowledge can be applied in real life.

Additional Resources:

- Garmston, Robert J. and Wellman, Bruce M. (2009). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups*. 2nd Edition. Norwood, MA. Christopher-Gordon.
- Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., and Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices: A Practice Guide (NCEE #2008-4027)*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>.