

Chapter 38

Using Creativity to Facilitate an Engaged Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Student achievement, learning, and engagement are at the forefront of the educational concerns for both school administrators and teachers. While it seems to be common knowledge that engaged students tend to retain more from the lesson, a bigger question is how does a teacher create lessons that lead to this engagement? How can teachers structure these learning experiences in a creative way to obtain their objectives? One approach to this is by designing lessons with creative brainstorming to promote different ways of thinking. Creativity is the springboard that allows for critical thinking and engagement. The first instance of this should be in the planning of lessons. This chapter demonstrates how a simple lesson can be redesigned through creative practices and concludes with a checklist that can be used by school administrators, program coordinators, and teachers to quickly evaluate how engaging and creative their teaching truly is.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher preparation programs have in large been driven by federal and state rules and procedures, policies and meeting requirements, all while having to prepare pre-service teachers for the field of teaching. These rules create an atmosphere that allow very little room for autonomy or design when it comes to implementing the required curriculum. While there is little flexibility within these rules, teaching pre-service teachers how to utilize creativity within their curriculum is one way to promote engaged classrooms while still adhering to these rules. How can teachers begin to infuse curriculum and lessons with critical thinking and creativity?

During the elementary school years students are quite excited about entering school and the new experiences, however, as students get older there seems to be a shift in this excitement and teachers

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suddenly are faced with how to motivate students and keep them interested in the task at hand. Cothran and Ennis (2000) reported that most public school students seemed to be disengaged from learning, and become placeholders as these students move through the system. Student engagement seems to fall to the side as the students move through middle and secondary schools. Shernoff and Ciskiszentmihalyi (2009) defined student engagement as “the simultaneous occurrence high concentration, enjoyment and interest in learning” (p. 133). Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn (1992) found that students become more engaged in classroom learning when meaningful inquiry occurs.

Engagement is so crucial that it has even been suggested that students that are “at risk” have the greatest benefit from participating in engaged classrooms; however, academic success should not be a defining term for engaged students (Zyngier, 2005). It lies with the teacher to engage students and the direct result will allow for more interaction from both the students and the teachers; fostering an environment where the learning is driven by the students themselves and the teacher then becomes a facilitator of this learning. This chapter focuses on how teaching faculty can instruct pre-service teachers to utilize creativity, thus allowing their students to experience the curriculum set forth in a new light. The chapter concludes with recommendations as to how creativity can be implemented and monitored at both the school and classroom level.

Theoretical Framework

The idea of using creativity in the classroom is not something that is new to the realm of education. Pre-service teachers are introduced theorists such as Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky when thinking about how they will teach their students and how to structure lessons. A greater challenge is how to encourage these teachers to apply these theorists in their classrooms. Vygotsky (2004) stated that

we should emphasize the particular importance of cultivating creativity in school-age children. The entire future of humanity will be attained through the creative imagination; orientation to the future, behavior based on the future and derived from this future, is the most important function of the imagination. To the extent that the main educational objective of teaching is guidance of school children's behavior so as to prepare them for the future, development and exercise of the imagination should be one of the main forces enlisted for the attainment of this goal (p. 87).

Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist learning theory adheres to the premise that while individuals are learning, their own understanding is reflected through what they have experienced in the past and what they are currently experiencing. Constructivism has had a large impact on education as social and personal perspective. Constructivism that was put forth by Piaget (1970) was personal constructivism and that of Vygotsky (1978) was social constructivism. When this theory was introduced into the classrooms, teachers were called upon to shift the responsibility of learning solely on themselves and to allow a greater participation from their audience, the students. The key to this theory is that students **MUST** experience what they are learning and be actively engaged. The introduction of this theory to classroom practice and learning provided a paradigm shift from the standard direct instruction that teachers had often embraced.

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