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- ◆ Celebrate successes both big and small. Success at a task is motivating, exciting and encourages students to continue their efforts.

## ■ What is boredom and engagement?

In my discussions with teachers about how to effectively engage students, it seems that engagement and boredom are a bit like art. I may not know exactly how to define it but I know it when I see it. In the context of the classroom, I have defined boredom as a temporary emotional condition marked by disinterest in the information, context or events provided by the teacher that may sometimes result in inappropriate behaviours. Conversely, engagement in the classroom can be defined as a state of emotional and cognitive commitment or willingness to participate in the task or learning goal.

Engagement seems to be related closely to motivation and, like motivation, it is multifaceted. Traditionally engagement was defined and measured by student on-task behaviour (Stronge, 2002). More recent research suggests that engagement involves cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions as well (Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). For classroom teachers, it is easy to consider engagement as attending to the instructional activities of the class (Marzano, 2007). However, teachers must consider more than just student participation. A teacher must consider the tasks and activities that students are asked to participate in. The learning tasks themselves must be interesting and engaging. Eric Jensen, author of *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, points out that if our students are bored, they are still learning. They are learning that school is pointless, that teachers don't care, that it's not worth trying, that learning is a waste of time or that school is irrelevant. Effective teachers take the time to consider how they might overcome these assumptions by students. They also take time to consider what students are truly communicating when they say "This is boring." When students communicate that they are bored, via overt statement, inappropriate behaviour or lack of participation, they might be saying:

- ◆ "I already know this, why do I have to do it again?"
- ◆ "I'm frustrated or confused"
- ◆ "I don't understand what is being asked of me"
- ◆ "I understand what is being asked, but I don't want to do it"
- ◆ "I don't see the value in what I'm being asked to do"
- ◆ "I've done this so many times, it's not interesting anymore"

Regardless of exactly how engagement is defined, why do some people get bored while others become engaged in learning? According to Dr Mark Minter from Washington University, boredom is a temporary emotional state in which "The brain has concluded that there is nothing new or useful it can learn from an environment, a person, an event, a paragraph." The good and bad news is that an individual rarely stays bored for long. The brain longs for input, exposure, stimulation and interest. Bottom line: the brain doesn't seem to want to stay bored. That's the good news. The bad news is that if the teacher doesn't provide engaging learning opportunities, many students will find something that is engaging. And, like Chad, the new things they find to occupy their time may get them a one-way ticket to the principal's office.

## Personal Goals

### ■ Overview

Most students do better when they have a clear goal and understanding of the expectations and learning outcomes. The creation of personal goals helps to focus students on learning priorities and can cause them to listen differently during the lesson. When learning tasks are connected to personal goals, the learning becomes more relevant.

### ■ Step by Step

1. Provide a brief introduction to students regarding the content and focus of the lesson and ask students to brainstorm what they already know about the topic.
2. If appropriate, ask students to share with partners some of the ideas they brainstormed.
3. Ask students to consider what they already know about the topic as well as what they would like to learn. Help them to make personal connections and encourage them to ask unique and out of the ordinary questions.
4. Provide students with 6x10 cm cards, Post-it notes or sheets of paper to record their **Personal Goals**. (See Personal Goals on page 119.)
5. At various points during the lesson or unit, instruct students to pause, read their goals and track achievement towards completion of the goals.

### ■ Tips and Variations

- ◆ Have students review goals at the end of the unit or lesson.
- ◆ Ask students to place written goals in a location where they will be seen often. Students could track and reflect on progress towards the goals through a **Journal Response**.
- ◆ Some students benefit from the use of a **Sentence Starter** when creating goals such as “I most want to learn about...” or “I am curious why \_\_\_\_\_ happens when...”
- ◆ The number of goals a student creates can be differentiated based on the needs of the students as well as the depth of the goals they write.
- ◆ **Critical Thinking Connection** – Ask students to thoughtfully self-evaluate the goals they have created. Ask them to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how demanding the goals were. Challenge them to create and track goals that will stretch, them beyond their comfort zone.

## Rank It

### ■ Overview

This strategy asks students to consider and rank, on a scale of 1 to 10, their understanding of key terms ideas or concepts that will be presented in the lesson.

### ■ Step by Step

1. Provide each student with a **Rank It** form. (See Rank It on page 120.)
2. Display a listing of the key terms or concepts that will be presented in the lesson.
3. Lead students to read each of the words listed and think about what they know about the words.
4. Provide students with pronunciations if needed, but do not provide definitions or examples. Explain to students that the goal of **Rank It** is to think about what they already know about the terms.
5. Provide students with an explanation of the scale they will use to show how much they know about the words. Students will respond with a number between 1 and 10 to indicate their understanding of the words. A rank of 1 to 3 will indicate little understanding of the word, a rank of 4 to 7 will indicate moderate understanding while a rank of 8 or more will indicate a higher level of understanding. Lead students to rank their knowledge of each word.

### ■ Tips and Variations

- ◆ Consider combining **Rank It** with **Content Nameplates**.
- ◆ Clarify for students what the 1 to 3, 4 to 7 and 8 to 10 rankings may mean by explaining that a low ranking may mean that the word is recognised, but can not be defined. A moderate ranking may mean that the student can provide a brief, but incomplete definition. An 8+ ranking may mean that the student can both define the term and provide an explanation.
- ◆ Since the goal is a simple pre-assessment of student knowledge, there may not be a need to challenge students who may provide a ranking that is higher than expected. At this point, there is no need for students to prove their knowledge.
- ◆ **Critical Thinking Connection** – Have students keep the **Rank It** forms and compare their rankings before and after the lesson. Ask them to explain, update or modify their rankings based on new learning.

## Ticket In the Door

### ■ Overview

Effective teachers know it is important to get students involved in a learning task from the very beginning on the lesson. This strategy provides students with a tangible, clear task but it also allows them the opportunity to become an “expert” in one of the ideas that will be presented in the lesson.

### ■ Step by Step

1. As the lesson begins, give each student a Post-it note or 6x10 cm card with a key word idea, or concept listed on it.
2. Tell students that they will become experts on the term or idea listed on the card. Explain that an expert not only knows how to define or explain an idea but they can also share examples, give characteristics and answer questions about the concept.
3. Provide students with time to find or share definitions, characteristics or key words associated with the term on their card.
4. After students have spent time adding ideas, definitions and examples on their cards, instruct them to place the cards on their desks.
5. Tell students to listen carefully as the lesson begins because when they hear their term talked about, they’ll be asked to share some of what they know.
6. Begin the lesson on the topic(s), pausing at various points to ask students to share what they have listed on their cards.

### ■ Tips and Variations

- ◆ Combine **Ticket In the Door** with a **Give One and Get One, Gallery Walk or Found It!**
- ◆ If necessary, list both the term and the definition on the cards. Students could use their cards to create **Flash Cards 2.0** or in combination with **Teach One, Guess It.**
- ◆ It is not necessary to have a separate term for every student in class. While each student should have their own card, multiple students could become experts on the same idea.

## Choral Response

### ■ Overview

Choral responses are a staple in classrooms with active learning. Although typically associated with primary year levels, **Choral Responses** can be a valuable tool with all age groups.

### ■ Step by Step

1. Prior to a lesson, determine key words, concepts, definitions or facts that students need to recall.
2. During the lesson, pause and tell students that they will be asked to repeat aloud various important words ideas or facts.
3. Either on the board or on a sheet of paper, provide students with a listing of the ideas or words to be repeated.
4. Instruct students in the method they should use when chorally responding to teacher prompts. This should include the prompt that will be used to cue them to respond as well as the way they should respond.
5. Pause during the lesson and lead students to chorally respond to questions or prompts.
6. Example: For students studying terms related to fractions:  
“Students, in just a moment when I say the words *your turn*, I want you all to say aloud the term that we use to describe the top number in a fraction.”

### ■ Tips and Variations

- ◆ For older students, ask them to chorally respond regarding assignment details such as due dates or essential components to be included in a task.
- ◆ For a fun twist, ask students to chorally respond using different voices such as a whisper, a growl or with an accent.
- ◆ Some teachers prefer to use the “My turn, our turn, your turn” method when having students chorally respond.
- ◆ Consider combining a **Choral Response** with **20 Questions** or **Outcome Statements**.



## Stump the Teacher

### ■ Overview

This strategy is a variation of **20 Questions** where students are challenged to create questions, hints and lists with the purpose of trying to **Stump the Teacher**.

### ■ Step by Step

1. Provide students with time to review materials, handouts and books related to the content being studied.
2. Instruct each student to write 5 to 10 questions about the content being studied. Students must provide both the question and the answer.
3. Provide students with time to research, write and answer their questions.
4. Place students in pairs or small groups and instruct them to review all the questions written by each group member.
5. Lead the groups to select the five most difficult questions that they believe will **Stump the Teacher**.
6. Back with the whole group, call on students to ask their questions. The teacher then either guesses the term or idea or asks follow-up questions in order to get more information.

### ■ Tips and Variations

- ◆ The groups of students could arrange the questions according to different criteria such as easiest to most difficult or one word to multiword answers.
- ◆ Consider combining **Stump the Teacher** with the **Add On** or **Team Web** strategies.
- ◆ **Critical Thinking Connection** – The power of this strategy is in the creation of the questions, not in guessing the correct answer. The process of creating questions forces the students to think more deeply about the content.

