Dennis-Yarmouth RSD

Instruction Office Newsletter

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The Difference Between Compliant and Engaged Students

(Originally titled "4 (Secret) Keys to Student Engagement")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, author/consultants Robyn Jackson and Allison Zmuda draw a distinction between compliant and engaged students. "The compliant, dutiful learner is easy to manage, does what's expected, and participates when there's little risk of being wrong," say Jackson and Zmuda. They follow directions, complete assignments, and get good grades, but their hearts aren't in it.

Engaged students, on the other hand, follow their own train of thought, focus on the learning, and share their thoughts without being prompted, sometimes without consideration of their classmates. "Straightforward questions bore them, but questions that are personally relevant or that require teasing out ambiguity fascinate them," say Jackson and Zmuda. "These learners take risks; they're not afraid to try something new. Engaged learners can be needy. They're often annoyed by interruptions, they question everything, and they'll follow an idea even if it takes them outside the parameters of the assignment."

"Compliance may make for a smoothly run classroom," they continue, "but it doesn't help students expend the effort they need to meet the demands of challenging standards or take what they've learned and apply it to their lives." But how do we get real classroom engagement? Jackson and Zmuda suggest four strategies:

• ***Provide clarity.*** "When you're in the weeds of daily instruction," they say, "you may lose sight of the larger purpose. It's vital you make sure that every assignment, question, and conversation is connected to a clear learning goal." Ask yourself, what am I asking students to do? How do

Important Dates:

- **Read Across America Day**
  - **March 2**
- **Early Release Days**
  (PK-5 – Parent Conferences & 6-12 – Professional Development)
  - **March 10 & 12**
- **Mentor Meetings**
  - **March 16**
- **All Day Professional Development**
  - **March 20**
- **Project Success - New Mentor Training**
  - **March 28**

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The Difference Between Compliant and Engaged Students Continued

all these pieces fit together? What's the point of learning this? How can students track their progress over time? Students should ponder big-picture essential questions about the unit. Rather than just having students memorize various energy sources – nuclear, coal, oil, solar, and wind – get them thinking about a bigger question such as, How can the United States become more energy independent? Then give students clear structures to answer the questions you pose.

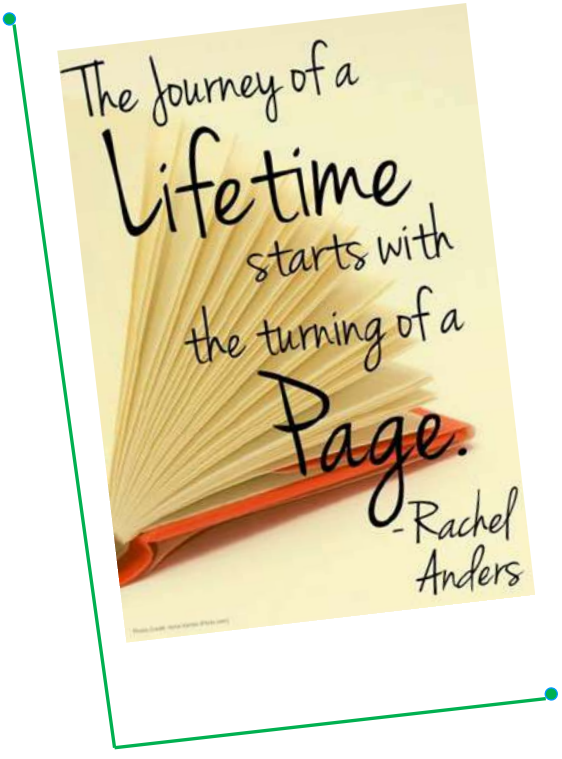
• ***Offer a relevant context*.** Jackson and Zmuda describe a teacher's frustration when she introduces a new unit on perimeter and area and students ask, *Why do we need to know this? Why is it so important to be able to do this?* and *Why will we ever need to know this in life?* "Our students need to know that the work they're being asked to do is relevant and important to them – right now," say Jackson and Zmuda, and quote a workshop participant saying, "*Someday* is not a day of the week."

The challenge is to make curriculum relevant, meaningful, and designed for an audience beyond the teacher. "Once they understand area and perimeter," they say, "students have a much greater understanding of space, and they can use what they learn to make all kinds of decisions about space – from installing carpet or a pool, to figuring out how many books they can reasonably stuff in their lockers, to determining how many props can comfortably fit on the stage for the spring play."

• ***Create a supportive classroom culture*.** Students get discouraged and disengaged when their work is criticized and given low grades. Can students access the material, understand the discussion, and meet the challenges you're giving them? Have likely misconceptions been anticipated, have students been introduced to difficult vocabulary, is there a scaffold for handling new concepts, and is individual support available to help them revise their work when it isn't up to par?

• ***Provide an appropriate level of challenge*.** Students may be able to complete assignments that can be easily Googled or "Khanified", but they don't respect them and there's little value-added. "We have to train them for the world they'll inherit," say Jackson and Zmuda, "and in that world it's unlikely that employers will pay them to solve a non-problem." Teachers need to give assignments that ask students to frame ideas, questions, or predictions; to figure out a real problem; and to risk failure to get to the final product. "Offer experiences that enable them to play with ideas; solve complex, real-world problems; and dig deeper" – for example, interviewing a personal hero, figuring out a way to cover themselves so they won't get poison ivy next summer, and designing headphones that won't cause long-term hearing problems.

"4 (Secret) Keys to Student Engagement" by Robyn Jackson and Allison Zmuda in *Educational Leadership*, September 2014 (Vol. 72, #1, p. 18-24), http://bit.ly/YMbriS; the authors can be reached at rjackson@mindstepsinc.com and zmuda@competentclassroom.com



The Double Payoff of Better Physical Education Classes

In this *Harvard Education Letter* article, Laura Pappano reports on new thinking about physical education, which is moving more PE classes from dodgeball and basketball to activities that promote fitness, fun, and fairness. "We are teaching kids to take care of themselves beyond school," says Lisa Daly of the Plymouth, Connecticut schools. Not only do cutting-edge phys. Ed. classes get more students actively involved (less sitting on the sidelines waiting your turn and no opt-out for "non-athletes"), but there's also evidence that physical activity boosts academic performance. "Kids who are active and fit do better in school, better on achievement tests, better on measures of brain health," says James Sallis of the University of California/San Diego. In one study, kids who exercised regularly outperformed a control group on executive function, working memory, response speed, cognitive flexibility, and multitasking. Pappano lists the following characteristics of new PE classes:

- **A focus on wellness rather than athletics;**
- **Fitness games that value teamwork, build confidence, and encourage self-expression;**
- **More choices so students can find activities they enjoy;**
- **Recreational activities that students can enjoy outside of school;**
- **Teaching skills like throwing, catching, and kicking as physical training, not sports prep;**
- **More use of technology, including heart-rate monitors;**
- **Use of music to enhance activities;**
- **A fast, energetic pace, providing students with a real workout.**

"The 'New PE' Aims to Build Bodies and Brains" by Laura Pappano in *Harvard Education Letter,* January/February 2015 (Vol. 31, #2, p. 4-6), www.edletter.org

Igniting Enthusiasm in Middle-School Students

(Originally titled "Motivating Young Adolescents")

"The era of blaming young adolescents for their lack of motivation is over," says author/consultant Rick Wormeli in this *Educational Leadership* article. He starts off with twelve things that *de*-motivate students:

- **Telling them how important today's lesson will be in high school and beyond;**
- **Teachers who talk the whole class period or speak endlessly when disciplining;**
- **Complex assignments that students don't have the skills to complete and have no clear evaluative criteria;**
- **Telling students what they're probably feeling and thinking;**
- **Teachers who see teaching middle school as something to do until a high-school position opens up;**
- ***F*s, zeroes, and other marks of failure;**
- **Spending the day working on weaknesses;**
- **Treating middle-schoolers like elementary-school kids;**
- **Belittling a student's strong emotional response to something minor in his or her life;**
- **Classes that claim to be relevant to students' lives but deny them access to technology;**
- **Unwavering program fidelity or blind adherence to pacing guides;**
- **Sarcasm.**

Teaching young adolescents, says Wormeli, is a "dance between middle schoolers' lingering childlike curiosity and their mounting distractions: peers, sex, risk-taking, pop stars, and keeping track of body parts in time and space." He suggests seven strategies and says, "Although any one of these motivational elements may not work every time, several in tandem likely will."

Igniting Enthusiasm in Middle-School Students
Continued

- ***Realize that motivation is created with students.*** "Our goal should be a classroom culture that cultivates curiosity and personal investment," says Wormeli, "one in which students feel safe to engage in the activity or topic without fear of embarrassment or rejection."

- ***Understand that there's no such thing as laziness.*** "If a student appears lazy, there's always something else going on that we can't see – or can't control," he says. "Humans are hard-wired to do demanding and complex things. Young adolescents are developmentally primed for learning things that are intellectually and physically advanced and for getting excited about their growing expertise and the freedoms that come with competence." If they're disengaged, what's the reason? An exhausting job outside of school? Responsibilities at home? Skill deficits? Fear of looking stupid?

- ***Empathize and build trust.*** "Young adolescents intensely value teachers' opinions of them," says Wormeli. "[They] need to trust that teachers won't humiliate them or let them humiliate themselves." They must know we have their backs – specifically, what will the teacher do when a student gives a wrong answer in class?

- ***Remember where they are.*** For ideas on what's developmentally appropriate, Wormeli suggests the Association for Middle Level Education's list of effective practices at http://bit.ly/ZnlmeH. Wormeli mentions incorporating social interaction in lessons, switching activities every 10-15 minutes, helping students recover from bad decisions and failures, teaching each topic in more than one way, showing enthusiasm for the subject, and offering regular opportunities for students to include their own culture and develop a unique voice.

- ***Give descriptive feedback.*** Middle-school students are constantly asking themselves, *Am I normal? How am I doing?* Teachers must give them a clear sense of what's expected academically and clear feedback on where they stand in relation to goals. "Motivational teachers provide many exemplars, formative feedback, and opportunities for students to self-assess," says Wormeli. It's also important for students to have a chance to revise and improve their work in response to feedback.

- ***Teach the way the mind learns.*** Young adolescents crave vividness, structure, and patterns, says Wormeli. Prime their brains for each lesson with goals that relate to personal experience, show them a pathway to mastery, and build in links to the arts, social studies, math, foreign languages, and literature. "The key to solid learning," he says, "is for students to make these connections themselves, not just be told about them."

- ***Tell stories.*** "Young adolescents are like first-time visitors to an esoteric sculpture museum who don't understand why everyone's so impressed with a particular piece of art," says Wormeli. "Then a museum curator explains the story behind the artist or his technique, and the skeptic is jarred into wide-eyed appreciation and curiosity… Young adolescents are storytellers and story receivers. Narratives not only appeal to their theater of the mind, but they also provide connections among disparate parts."

"Motivating Young Adolescents" by Rick Wormeli in *Educational Leadership*, September 2014 (Vol. 72, #1, p. 26-31), http://bit.ly/1vSvqd9; Wormeli can be reached at rwormeli@cox.net.

What an Excellent Shop Class Suggests for Teaching Common Core ELA

In this *AMLE Magazine* article, Joanne Kelleher, an assistant principal in Long Island, New York, offers a succinct list of the key changes being introduced by the Common Core.

In Math:

- Favoring depth over breadth;
- Working toward automaticity of basic functions;
- Finding the balance between practice and understanding.

In ELA:

- Resetting the ratio of fiction and nonfiction;
- Incorporating close readings of complex texts;
- Including more academic vocabulary in lessons.

During a recent visit to an industrial arts/technology class in her middle school, Kelleher realized that it contained a number of lessons for Common Core ELA implementation:

• ***Learning is messy.*** "In the technology education classroom," she says, "there's the cutting, the sanding, the sawing, the drilling, and the finishing. You can count on paint spills, sawdust, and mismeasurements… The ELA CCSS require that students engage in critical thinking: analyzing, interpreting, delineating, assessing, and evaluating. As students grapple with new ideas, they argue, explain, and justify, building support for their ideas from within the text. This idea development can get loud and messy." It's messy for teachers too, but in the end, "something wonderful starts taking shape."

• ***Learning is noisy.*** In the technology classroom, it's hammers, saws, and power tools. In the ELA classroom, ideas are being expressed, explored, and argued, and sometimes it's organized chaos – and noisy.

• ***Learning is autonomous.*** "All around the technology classroom, students move about as if on a personal quest," says Kelleher. They find the right tool and put it to work: "creating the product is an independent, hands-on/minds-on experience. And so it should be in the ELA classroom. Students need to increasingly read and write on their own, with real purpose."

• ***Mistakes happen.*** Technology education teachers routinely order enough materials to allow for 20-25 percent waste; for them, mistakes are an integral part of the learning process. In ELA classes, says Kelleher, "We should expect mistakes and welcome them, because mistakes are students' way of showing us what they (and we) still need to learn."

• ***Craftsmanship matters.*** Skill and artistry are built into every successfully completed project, and the same is true when students read first-rate texts and write their own masterpieces. Kelleher points to Common Core Standard 4 (interpreting words and phrases), Standard 5 (analyzing text structure), and Standard 6 (point of view and purpose). "These elements are the craft," she concludes. "Craft grabs your attention. Craft leaves you in awe. Craft invites you to imagine that your work can be better."

"Common Core ELA: Lessons from Tech Ed Class" by Joanne Kelleher in *AMLE Magazine*, September 2014 (Vol. 2, #2, p. 21-24), www.amle.org; Kelleher can be reached at kelleherj@kpcsd.org.

Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey on Doing Close Reading Well

"What happens when close reading fails?" ask Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (San Diego State University) in this article in *The Reading Teacher*. "How can teachers provide guidance with complex texts without telling students what the text means?" After observing numerous lessons in grades 3-8 classrooms and interviewing teachers who are expert at close reading, Fisher and Frey concluded that the expert teachers used nine strategies (under two broad headings) to support students reading short, challenging texts:

Scaffolds during close reading:

- ***Repeated reading*** – This improved understanding when teachers had students re-read with a new question in mind or to search for evidence. Sometimes students needed to read a passage five or six times to get all the nuances.

- ***Text-dependent questions*** – Teachers queried their students on (a) what the text *says*, (b) how the text *works*, and (c) what the text *means*. Teachers rarely used all the questions they prepared, deciding in the moment which ones would help students unpack the text.

- ***Collaborative conversations*** – Close reading is not a silent or independent activity, say Fisher and Frey. It's interactive and inquiry-based, with students asking each other questions and debating interpretations of the text. Some teachers put language frames on the wall to prompt high-level discourse, for example: ***I disagree because___ Was anyone confused about___? What caused___? I wonder why___ What do we think the author is trying to prove when he says___?***

- ***Annotations –*** Teachers had students mark up the text to highlight confusing sections, identify central ideas, ask questions, summarize, or note inferences. One teacher said, "Annotations are really about getting students to slow down and pay attention to the text… Annotating a text causes students to use their comprehension strategies, such as monitoring, questioning, clarifying, and predicting."

Contingency teaching when scaffolds don't do the job:

- ***Reestablishing purpose*** – If students get bogged down in a difficult text, it's helpful for the teacher to have them step back and reflect on the purpose of the lesson and what they're really looking for.

- ***Prompting and cueing*** – "Sometimes they just need a little hint to unlock the understanding of the text," said a sixth-grade teacher. "When we first started close reading, I didn't think that I was supposed to do that." This could be reminding students about a previous experience, asking them to pause and think about their thinking, developing an informal problem-solving procedure, or using verbal or gestural cues – all without telling students directly what the answer is.

- ***Modeling*** – Teachers sometimes thought aloud about how they themselves would attack a difficult text. "I'm visualizing how these events are linking together," said one teacher as she annotated the text on a document camera. "That's a context clue that is helping me to begin to understand what the term means," said another.

- ***Calling time-out*** – Several of the teachers Fisher and Frey observed realized that sometimes the best thing was to discontinue a close reading, collect students' texts, and shift to another activity – and during a break look at what students were writing to figure out where their thinking went astray. "Then I'll know what to teach before they attack the text again," said a third-grade teacher.

"Contingency Teaching During Close Reading" by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey in *The Reading Teacher*, December 2014/January 2015 (Vol. 68, #4, p. 277-286), http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/trtr.1298/abstract; the authors can be reached at dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu and nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu.