

Engage Your Students, Increase Learning, and Defeat Apathy

Bill Wengelewski

William.wengelewski@rps205.com

True or False (Use your experience to answer)

1. I feel great when my students learn.
2. Seeing students succeed makes me so proud of them and, also, myself.
3. Some students seem to just plain want to learn. They're great.
4. Some students seem to just plain NOT want to learn.
5. When a student does not care about what I am teaching, it bothers me.
6. I want all students to care so they can succeed in my class.
7. I teach an important and interesting subject. It is hard to understand why someone wouldn't care. Maybe something is wrong with them? And their parents! And this stupid curriculum! And me?
8. And besides, everyone is so darn high strung about those ISAT or PSAE tests! I want good scores so that I can feel good about all of the hard work that I am doing!
9. But I can't make someone care. Can I?

Essentials to consider:

Good classroom management always comes first. Few can learn in chaos.

All people must feel safe in order for them to feel comfortable learning.

The teacher must work hard to ensure that all involved are respectful towards each other, teacher to student, student to student, and student to teacher. No bullying. No ridiculing poor performance.

Be a leader, not a friend, or you risk getting manipulated.

Students are apathetic for too many reasons to discuss here. As teachers, we may need to let go of wanting to solve the *why*.. We are limited in our ability to help a student outside of school. Non-academic issues are mainly the realm of the counselor and should be prevented from intruding into the classroom if possible.

One of the main reasons students are apathetic is because they cannot do the work. Even the thought of trying may be a reminder of failure. You will need to be prepared to differentiate instruction and/or tutor these students to build up their confidence.

In my experience, success, combined with positive regard, kills apathy.

To go from being apathetic to caring is a risk. Be positive, encouraging, and forgiving of failure when dealing with apathetic students. The last thing you want is for them to become resentful of you.

Teaching with engagement may require you to teach in ways that you have never taught before. Welcome the change and the joy it brings.

Tools to consider using to engage students:

Remember: some things serve as to only get your foot in the door. THEN, you can begin actually teaching a student that has been unengaged.

1) Love of the subject/Contagious Enthusiasm

- A. Be excited (and still focused on effective teaching)
- B. Establish theme days for different topics
- C. Wear clothes/play music/dance/sing/draw/paint/etc. about your subject. Express your love for it.
- D. Tell them what you really like about your subject.

2) Genuine concern for the student

- A. Ask them how you can be better.
- B. Ask them how they are.
- C. Notice little things about them but do not judge them (“That’s a green folder.” “I noticed that you like to wear a lot of colors,” “It seems like you’ve been feeling better about what we are learning. Am I right?”)
- D. Differentiate instruction when it takes the unengaged to engaged (If you don’t know how, look up books or articles by Carol Tomlinson)
- E. Teach to Multiple Intelligences (if you don’t know them, Google Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences.)

3) Frame the information you are giving as important

- A. Do not tell them it is important to them. They don’t believe you.
- B. Show them how it is important to you (or someone)
- C. Tell them stories where the topic made a difference in your life.
- D. Share with them the perspectives of other students.
- E. Connect the topic as essential to learning other lessons so they can at least see the point of taking this step of knowledge.

Worksheet:

What do you teach that students often do poorly in, blow off, don't do the homework for, are cynical of, or just don't care about?

Is it likely that they do not have the required skills for the topic?

Would differentiation of the material raise the willingness to learn this topic?

How could you share with them, in a way that shows your love for this topic, how important this topic is to you?

When you teach this topic, to what intelligences are you mostly appealing?

How could you involve other intelligences to reach more students?
