

Is Student Engagement Key in Reducing Disruptive Behaviour?

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To become a proficient teacher, one must provide a suitable learning environment, where students are successfully learning and developing as individuals. If we were to take Reece and Walkers approach to the role of teaching where "the modern teacher is a facilitator: a person who assists students to learn for themselves" (2006 p.3), then one of the key elements to a successful lesson is student engagement. For students to learn for themselves, they must first actively engage with the lesson content.

A lack of engagement in the learning environment can lead to lack of motivation or lack of interest in the course. Also, this lack of engagement has the potential to 'manifest undesirable student behaviours such as passive lecture attendance, distracting behaviour, or avoiding campus' (Marshall, 2020, p.405). This indicates that there is a clear correlation between behaviour and engagement, therefore, behaviour management must consider how one facilitates effective learner engagement.

As Marshall states 'effective teaching methods can help overcome many of these issues and, thus, facilitate better student learning' (2020, p.405). To 'overcome' something is to reduce it, and in teaching there are many efficient methods that can be utilised to increase engagement and as a result minimise disruptive behaviour.

One such method is to implement group work. Race states that 'group work can prevent students from feeling isolated...to get to know people with different backgrounds, viewpoints, and opinions, to help them to develop their ability to 'fit in' comfortably' (2020, p.214-216). Group interactions therefore assist with facilitating discussions, but this can also assist with behaviour management within the classroom. For example, those who may isolate themselves due to anxiety can engage with a more manageable number of people when taking part in group work. Also, more outspoken students who may dominate classroom discussions, have a chance to interact with other students in a controlled manner. This method of group work can therefore assist with catering for a range of different learners, engaging them in an effective environment, it also mitigates behaviour issues and makes the setting more manageable.

These types of interactive teaching method, encourages learner engagement and allows students to form social connections. An important aspect of behaviour management as 'students learn better by doing something active, to move them out of 'passive recipient mode' towards becoming active agents in their own learning' (Race, 2020, p.168). As a result, this engagement within the lesson around lesson activities mitigates undesirable behaviour.

It is clear using a variety of in-class tasks and assessment methods throughout a lesson helps to retain engagement, interaction, and interest amongst students, giving them good reasons to attend lessons. Passive knowledge transfer isn't enough, as this can easily be obtained in their own time, which can lead to undesirable behaviour such as little to no attendance. This is echoed in academic literature whereby Race states 'to engage students through a variety of different activities so they feel there is a real benefit to attendance rather than just staying home and downloading the slides and other resources at their leisure' (2020, p.168).

However, is the above effective in a post-compulsory setting, the events of the past two years have forced an incredible increase in online teaching and learning, it has become part of education for the foreseeable future. Teaching is not only now confined to a physical classroom setting, and with this,

the challenge of learner engagement and behaviour management has taken on a new form. To ensure engagement and behaviour online is addressed effectively, is it a transfer and application of traditional teaching methods? Or is it a more complex issue?

Of course, there are common issues when it comes to online teaching and learning such as technical disruptions like connectivity and individual technological capabilities. However, when it comes to behavioural disruption, problems such as little to no visible or audible students, and minimal engagement with chat functions fuel disruption. Lebor specifies that 'disruption is normally defined as activities that are 'perceived' to stop learning from taking place' (2018, p.4). In other words, disruptions are actions that actively interfere with the learning process.

With online teaching, it is common that students are not visible or audible, with little to no communication during the lesson, this in essence is disruptive, as it is creating an environment that has little engagement. 'The most productive learning environments tend to be the ones where the student and teacher co-create the educational experience' (Swenson, 2012, p.1). Therefore, if the students are not participating or communicating during lessons, then this 'productive learning environment' will not exist. Online, how do we combat this disruptive behaviour and facilitate a productive learning environment which engages students?

In a traditional classroom implementing various teaching methods such as group work and discussions in a physical environment heightens engagement through verbal communication and body language, which can maintain and lengthen attention spans when engrossed in activities. Race comments 'maximum student attention spans are up to around 10 minutes if there is a single activity going on without any variation' (2020, p.168). However, when online we do not have that physical presence and can sometimes struggle without these forms of communications.

To tackle online engagement, we must revisit some core teaching elements, the lesson presentation, and consider how best to implement a variety of tasks. Our aim must be to engage the students, encouraging them to interact with the lesson content, whether verbally or written.

One method that can be implemented to facilitate this engagement is to use imagery which conveys and contextualises ideas providing visual stimulus for students, giving them reasons to engage with the lesson rather than passively listen. Imagery can be expanded to other forms of dynamic assets, as Chan states 'the use of animation can help students to develop their critical thinking, problem solving skills and their engagement to the subject content' (2015, p.2). Integrating imagery and animations along with the Socratic method, elevates the analytical and cognitive nature of tasks. This results in varied tasks that encourage students to engage both verbally and written. Other technologies could assist with this, for example, shared white boards or notice boards, where students can collectively express ideas and share answers. This mirrors the physical classroom and provides a social aspect to the online environment. This allows teachers to calculate engagement efficiency in a more challenging virtual environment.

To conclude, there is a link between behaviour and engagement. How one facilitates classroom engagement will result in desirable behaviour. Nonetheless, as a tutor we must be aware that not all disruptive behaviour is done with malicious intent. Students' personalities and learning disabilities need to be taken into account when considering classroom behavioural management and facilitating effective learner engagement. After all, The Equality Act 2010 which 'legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society' (Equality Act 2010: guidance, 2022), ensures we consider individuals and their unique needs.

Reflection

Once again for my observations I return to the lessons of John Keating and Severus Snape, with the specific focus to observe how they both manage learner engagement. For these observations John Keating was in a virtual classroom whereas Snape was in traditional physical classroom. I will also reflect upon my own experience of managing behaviour and engagement considering what I observed from these teaching professionals.

John Keating

'Typically many teachers use ground rules and various contractual methods for beginning the process of operating in challenging climates' (Lebor, 2018, p.2). This is also an approach used by Keating. I observed that this tutor opened the session by announcing classroom expectations, which included those students would be expected to engage in discussions, whether that be verbally or via the chat functions; also, Keating strongly encouraged the students to turn on their cameras. I learnt that this approach was used to establish an engaging online environment, as the social aspect in an online environment can be challenging. As previously discussed, communication in online lessons can be disruptive with a lack of visible or audible students. Keating's main aim was to create an active learning environment by starting the lesson in this manner. This strategy also follows the Community of Inquiry model developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, which has become one of the more popular models for online teaching. This model is used to support the design of active learning environments online whereby learning communities are 'dependant on instructor and students sharing ideas, information, and opinions' (Picciano, 2018, p.173).

Keating throughout his lesson encouraged students to share ideas and opinions through discussions, this was achieved via the Socratic method of questions and answers which 'can lead to "truer" ideas than the one originally held by the student' (Hlinak, 2014 p.3). I observed that Keating could be regarded as ascribing to a social constructivist theory of teaching. Which 'affirms that human development is socially situated, and that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others' (Brau, 2022). His emphasis on knowledge being constructed in this manner puts great significance on the engagement aspect of the lesson. Creating a social presence online was used to heighten engagement, I learned that he used humour and memes to facilitate this.

Keating often encouraged students to partake in discussions by calling on them directly and created a non-threatening environment by injecting humour into his exchange. He also seemed to engage with individuals, by addressing them and referencing previously stated ideas or visibility on camera. This social aspect was also enhanced with the tutor's use of humorous memes in the chat, this created a relaxed environment that allowed students to engage more comfortably with the lesson content and discussions.

I've later realised that Keating's approach and strategies used in an online lesson were all to create a relaxed learning environment, one that would encourage all students to partake in discussions. However, upon reflection I believe this strategy of incorporating humour into the learning environment can be at risk of being overused. This then can result in behaviour management issues whereby the students are not focusing on the session content but are preoccupied with pursuing the comical aspects linked with this social approach.

Severus Snape

Lebors definition of disruption, 'activities that are 'perceived' to stop learning from taking place' (2018, p.4) best describes the beginning of Snapes observed lesson. During the beginning stages of the lesson, a student acted in a disruptive manner verbally objecting to the notion as to why a practical based course requires them to write essays. The student persisted with some aggressive questioning, however, in doing so this mind set slowly infected some of the other students who were present. This experience taught me that one instance of disruptive behaviour can in fact spread negative emotions across the classroom, creating resistance to any learning from taking place. Snape reacted to this situation and approached the altercation in a calm and controlled manner, talking to the student directly. I believe that Snape opened a simple, yet direct line of communication with the student, as Race would say 'find out why a person is being disruptive. Sometimes there are identifiable reasons for such behaviour' (2020, p.234).

Snape continued to attempt to calm the situation, offering various solutions to what was believed to be a lack of confidence in essay writing. This included communicating the relevance of essay writing and how research informs practice, along with additional support that was available to meet the deadline, also reiterating the current lesson was tailored to assist those with difficulties with essay writing. I've later realised that 'their behaviour is often interpreted as resistance but from their perspective it is the best course of action' (Cox, 2018, p.83), Snape also realised this and recontextualised their concerns and offered the group solution of help and support. This resulted in defusing the situation ensuring that students engaged with the lesson content as they become aware that it was essential for their assignment completion, and part of their practice.

As a developing teacher, it is vital that I make sure that all students achieve a level of knowledge and understanding of the lesson content, to minimise confusion and alleviate stress levels surrounding assignments. My next step having observed this situation, is to ensure I build trust with students, creating a relaxed environment and relationship whereby students feel comfortable to raise concerns or ask questions. I've realised that when students are approaching deadlines this can create a challenging situation and communication strategies are essential. Without this approach 'these feelings can manifest undesirable student behaviour' (Marshall, 2020 p.45).

My Lesson

The main aim of this physical session was to introduce new technical software skills to a cohort of students and to provide them with basic skills to design and assemble a short title sequence. As this was a new subject area for my students, involving new technical skills, my main challenges were the potential lack of engagement, along with confusion. To overcome these challenges, I contextualise the lesson content at the start of the session, outlining the lesson objectives and how the class would apply to the students existing knowledge. This approach was derived from my observations of Snapes session. Also, I implemented Keatings approach by conveying lesson expectations and ground rules of what was expected from the students during the lesson. These approaches I believed would enhance engagement during the lesson, as it would provide a better understanding of what the students were about to learn and how they were expected to participate.

My approach to knowledge development in this session was that of cognitive constructivism, whereby 'the role of the teacher is to facilitate this discovery by providing the necessary resources and by guiding learners as they attempt to assimilate new knowledge to old' (Cognitive constructivism, 2022). I felt like this was the best approach as I could build new knowledge of title sequences on the students existing knowledge of storytelling.

The result of including the observed teaching methods as well as applying a cognitive constructivist method, I believe was the correct choices as students did engage with the session. This included repeating technical processes that were demonstrated in class as well as implementing basic technical skills to construct their own title sequence. However, my expectations were hoping for a higher rate of participation from the students, in the form of discussion and idea generation, assembling a narrative into their designs. Therefore, I made a choice to implement more questioning and answer-based tasks at more regular intervals than planned, using open discussions to further develop the students' concepts and engagement with the lessons content.

From this experience as well as my observations of teaching professionals I have learnt the importance that 'maximum student attention spans are up to around 10 minutes if there is a single activity going on without any variation' (Race, 2020, p.168). Upon reflection I needed to implement more tasks to maintain engagement levels, particularly question and answers to encourage idea generation and discussions. As Marshall comments, 'effective teaching methods can help overcome many of these issues and, thus, facilitate better student learning' (2020, p.405). My next steps are to continue observing teaching professionals to widen my practical skills and also gain more experience in both a physical classroom and virtual environment.

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Appendices

Teacher Observation Form 01



Teacher	John Keating
Date	07/04/2022
Group	Online – Chinese Module (33 attendees)
Topic/Context	Archetypes and Story Telling

Notes on the Lesson:

- Initial start of lesson, casual meet and free with the students. Humour being used
- Introduces lesson, lays out context of class, what is expected. Mentions interaction will be required from them, questions will be asked. Some direct, some general. (Sets out rules/boundaries of lesson?)
- Lesson content being explained and explored. Asking students questions on their experience with the content, heard of archetypes? Is there an Eastern equivalent? Using culture to explore. Students using char function as main form of communication.
- Relates content (archetypes) to real life examples. Family, politics.
- Set's task: asks for real life examples, identify archetype, why are they this archetype etc.
- Using humour to apply archetypes to students, during the task.
- This pattern of lesson content followed by questions and task, continues for several times.
- Final task is to apply archetypes to a story piece, they have previously written/explored. Some questions to rejuvenate stories and ideas. Using humour to increase engagement, help students engage with task and what they need to do.
- Various pieces of feedback and humoristic comments during the allotted time of the task.
- End of task, final hand-in instructions and comments, summary of lesson
- Ends lesson on fun comments and feedback of the lesson.

What I have Learned:

- Chosen lesson content helped with overall engagement (careful selection required)
- Humour helped to settle class, added to increase in engagement
- Small tasks, building up to larger task, helped lesson structure
- Over reliance on humour? Did concentration levels waver because of constant effort with humour?

Targets to Improve my own practice (Mapped to professional standards where appropriate):

- Selection of lesson content, important to lesson structure (K1, K2)
- Devise mini-tasks during lessons, helps with lesson management but also breaks structure into manageable segments (A1, K3)
- Humour/personality is key to increasing engagement with lesson content (A4)

Teacher Observation Form 02



Teacher	Severus Snape
Date	08/03/2022
Group	In-person class (20 attendees)
Topic/Context	Preparing for the Assessment - Essay Writing (Workshop)

Notes on the Lesson:

- Causal meet and greet as students enter the room.
- Disruptive student has entered the lesson questioning the essay and the assessment method (due to being a more practical based course)
- Snape attempts to explain the context of the lesson to the disruptive student, to diffuse the situation, however the student is getting more agitated, potentially not understanding.
- Some students echoed the same questions as the disruptive student.
- Snape contextualises content of the workshop to the entire class. Class settles with this.
- Snape proceeds to introduce the lesson and onto main body of content.
- Some student interaction within the body of work.
- Snape is offering some writing tips. Using referencing information published by the university.
- Class interaction with previous writing experiences, and how available assets could improve writing ability.
- Concludes workshop with a refresh of the essay brief and things to think of.

What I have Learned:

- Management of dealing with a disruptive individual, but the potential of how this can 'infect' the rest of the class.
- Classroom management. Having confidence in the content and context of the lesson to support the direction of the lesson, even when students may not agree?

Targets to Improve my own practice (Mapped to professional standards where appropriate):

- Creating a positive environment for working (A4)
- Understanding the whole context of work, not just for the purpose of the lesson, bigger picture (K1)
- Students may not fully understand purpose of context of the lesson, better outline or introduction needed, to assist more individual needs and levels of understanding. (V1)

Title Sequences Lesson Plan

Topic: Title Sequences (1/3)		Class: Title Sequence	
Date: 26/01/2022	Length of lesson: 4 hours		Number of students: 16
Resources required: For Teaching: Computer, projector, internet access For Students: Computers, internet access			
Aim of Lesson To break down title sequences and understand the fundamental story telling abilities of title sequences			
Learning Outcomes – The Learners Should Be Able To: To examine a title sequence to: • Discover the purpose of why title sequences are used • Breakdown and analyse sequences • Differentiate elements that make up titles • Understanding typography • Produce their own version of a Title (Basic After Effects Introduction)			
Previous student knowledge required for the session: Range from none / basic experience of After Effects			
Anticipated difficulties (if applicable): - Lack of engagement - Confusion (when contextualising Content) - Technical Issues (e.g internet access, pc's) - Range of abilities during tasks			

Lesson Detail:

Stage	Focus	Strategy	Time
<u>Introduction</u>			
Introduction to the lesson	<i>What are titles sequences</i> <i>Historical significance</i> <i>Purpose of Titles</i>	General Talk to the class Questions	15 mins
<u>Development</u>			
Breakdown and Analysis	<i>Play Titles Sequences (x3)</i> <i>Analyse Structure, style, imagery, music</i> <i>Examine story, what does it tell us?</i>	Note taking during playback Class interaction Questioning	1 hr
Mini Task	<i>Find Examples</i>	Class research, with discussion	
Dissecting Titles	<i>Dissecting titles to find the core elements:</i> <i>Imagery</i> <i>Information</i> <i>Music/Audio</i> <i>Brand</i>	Class discussion/interaction Questioning	45 mins
Mini Task	<i>Find examples</i>	Class research, with discussion	
<u>Break</u>			20 mins
Introduction to Typography	<i>What is typography</i> <i>Examine Font Types</i> <i>Analyse Examples</i> <i>Highlight Examples</i>	Class discussion/interaction Questioning and exploration	25 mins
Main Task	<i>Produce Titles Sequence based on example</i>	General talk	1hr 10mins
	<i>V01. Students with experience</i>	Start straight away with a skills criterion to include	
	<i>V02. Novice Students</i>	Technical Demonstration (option to follow along with tutorial)	(40 mins)
		Task time to explore software, design and produce titles.	(30 mins)
<u>Conclusion</u>			
End of Lesson	<i>Quick summary, covered and achieved</i>	General talk with option for questions	5 mins

Assessment Strategies: when and how are they included within the lesson?

- Using open ended questions throughout the lesson to encourage deeper thinking, explore students' own answers
- Task and class discussions will help indicate student level of understanding. Learn off each other's knowledge base, film and tv choices etc.
- Practical will gauge technical ability, creativity level, application of gained knowledge.

Informal reflection (to be completed after the session)

- Overall went ok. Happy with the lesson
- Time management of lesson sections was good, however potentially seemed rushed to conclude the lesson, as students enthusiastic with practical task
- Initial engagement was a little slow, introduced more questions and open discussions to develop engagement.

Action Plan

Action	How	Timescale	Intended Result
Increase knowledge in mini task methods	Reading, research, trial and error, continued experience	6 months	Break-up larger pieces of content during lessons, better structure with more engagement, reducing disruption/boredom
Create more visual content	Implement my skillset, Explore creative freedom and new techniques	1 year	Visual stimulus that enables student engagement. Application of theories and context to imagery can help create more cognitive and analytical elements to lessons. Increased engagement.
Contextualise lessons (currently too specific)	Deeper research, Expand scope of the individual lesson	Immediate	Students will have a better understanding of content in terms of the bigger picture, not just that individual lesson. Increased engagement with lesson content.
Introduce Expectations of lessons	Better introductions, include specifics on what is expected of students during lesson.	Immediate	Students will know what to expected during lessons relating to tasks, completed work, discussions, group work etc.