



**Is students' engagement important in Primary Education?
Strengthening students' sense of connectedness to their learning is a worthwhile goal, and there are some simple ways to do it.**

Write about ways to spark engagement. Read the article below and you may find ideas for your essay

A growing body of research in education and the social sciences suggests that students' curiosity can be stimulated in ways that strengthen their connectedness to lessons, interactions with each other, and willingness to commit to learning goals. There are simple techniques that teachers can use during a lesson to boost curiosity, and thus engagement, among students—especially older ones, who are at greater risk for losing interest.

BOOSTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

1. Harness the power of mystery and puzzles: As storytellers from Scheherazade to the writers of *Stranger Things* have known, humans have a compulsive need to find out what happens next. We love solving puzzles and finding sequences and patterns. So, introduce your next new unit with a mystery.

Try posing a broad question to groups of three or four students, such as: "What would happen if a butterfly's habitat was suffering a severe drought during the pupa stage?" or "What if Tupac had lived?" Let the groups discuss and present their justifications to the class. The realization students need to come to: Conjecture is a legitimate starting point for learning.

2. Pause after asking a question—and again after getting an answer: Rushing through questions and answers doesn't help most students. We all process information differently and taking an answer from the first student whose hand shoots up means others may abandon the question before they've truly processed it.

Pause with purpose after every question, and again after every answer. That second pause helps other students reconsider the question and reflect on the first answer.

Remember, too, that choral responses aren't just for younger students: When everyone repeats and responds at the same time, the risk that they're not actively involved in the content is reduced. While we'd all like to see education become as



individualized as possible, there's something affirming about being part of the group every now and then, even for older students.

3. Craft fewer—but deeper—questions: One or two thoughtfully phrased questions can lead to a deep discussion. Try using questions that begin with “What if” or “How might,” and aim for questions that don't have an undisputed yes or no answer and that don't rely on simple recalling of facts. The goal should be to foster mature thought and collaborative discussion.

4. Introduce controversy: Debating an issue and trying to persuade others are great ways to become invested in a topic. This is true not only in current affairs, but in literary and historical analysis. You might pose questions such as, “Why do you think the character responded as she did?” or “What do you suppose happened to John Smith when the crew accused him of mutiny?” You'll have to be prepared to step in if the exchange of views threatens to deteriorate into an overly emotional argument.

5. Mine the gap: The knowledge gap, that is. A certain amount of background knowledge needs to be delivered by direct instruction; then a combination of guidance, self-direction, and curiosity can propel learning indefinitely. If you can lead a student to recognize that she knows something about a subject, and that she'll be better off if she pushes herself to learn a little more about it, curiosity will kick in and motivate her to make that extra effort.

Ask students what they know about a topic, and then ask what they think they don't know about it. Ask which of the “don't know” items they think are most important for them to learn. Do they seem to be guessing? That's all right—you're asking them to comment on something they've already conceded they don't know. Examining their knowledge and capacity to learn is the whole point.

6. Give students a WIIFM (what's in it for me?): A student who asks, “Why should I know this?” is pointing toward a promising teaching tactic. Students must see why content is important to them. How will they use it later in life? How do people use it in the real world? For instance, you might know how a given subject relates to students' families' quality of life right now. We can give students relevant projects through which to apply and show what they know.

7. Encourage dynamic collaboration: With the right guidance, collaborative small-group work leads students to build social skills while also obtaining knowledge. They learn how individual and group success are mutually dependent, and how to fill gaps in peers' knowledge—and they do this in an environment that's engaging because it's social. Teachers can consistently build in short, informal collaboration techniques such as Mix, Freeze, Pair.

Virtually all teachers already use these techniques to some degree. But they become much more powerful when we view them as part of a coordinated, intentional strategy to boost student curiosity.



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Have you ever heard about **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING**? What about introducing in your teaching practice easy-to-plan creative activities to help students build strong relationships and improve their social awareness and self-regulation?

Here is an idea: Building Community with Friendly Fridays By Elizabeth Peterson.



Students work diligently on their latest message to a classmate. It's a big secret and they must work quickly. In just a few minutes, each will have the chance to present their unique creation to a classmate and end the week on a bright note. Why would a child work so hard on such a small project? It's Friendly Friday!

WHAT IS FRIENDLY FRIDAY?

Sometimes Fridays can be tough, especially in the afternoon when everyone is ready for the weekend. After trying a few ideas over the years—from continuing with curriculum content to giving free time—I finally decided to institute Friendly Fridays. During Friendly Friday time, my fourth-grade students do something creative to help them stay focused after a week of working hard.

Students pick a classmate's name from the popsicle stick jar. Keeping the name, a secret, they create a friendly, unique note or card to give to the



classmate. At the end of the time, I collect the creations, check them over quickly, and then ceremonially distribute them. Students are motivated to do quality work in this fun, positive activity.

FRIENDLY FRIDAY IS MORE THAN PASSING NOTES

But giving notes to a classmate is really only the beginning: There are many other ways to create an engaging Friendly Friday activity.

Friendly Hands: For this collaborative piece of artwork, each student contributes their own uniquely designed hand with a friendly message written on it. We start with a brief discussion about kindness and patience, and then I pair up students who typically don't work together. They trace each other's hands and forearms on poster board and then brainstorm sentences that describe ways to be friendly to others. (Examples include: "Say hi to someone in the hall" and "Let a classmate borrow a pencil.")

Once I check each partnership's chosen sentences, each student writes it on their drawn hand and decorates the rest of their cut out with crayons, markers, and/or coloured pencils. Finally, we glue all of the students' work together to create a beautiful illustration of how to be friendly to others.

Positive Self-Talk: Sometimes we need to remember to be friendly to ourselves. For this activity, we start with a discussion about how the words we say to ourselves affect our own mood and motivation. Then we create a fun display of speech bubbles that hold these positive words.

Students can create cartoon heads of themselves or used printed pictures of themselves to attach to the speech bubble. The message is simple but strong: Be friendly to yourself.

Who Needs a Pep Talk? This Friendly Friday activity involves a little bit of drama and storytelling. Using prewritten situations, ask your students to give a fictitious character a pep talk to help motivate them to do well or keep on trying.

Here are two example situations you could give. First, Suzie has studied hard for the science test, but when she sits down at the beginning of class, she feels like she has forgotten everything. Second, Gino is out mini-golfing with his friends for his birthday party. He is missing the ball every time he swings and is getting frustrated with himself.

You can lead a discussion about what Suzie's classmates or Gino's friends might say to give a quick pep talk—or better yet, ask a small group of students to create a skit illustrating a pep talk for the situation. Following up with additional situations is key.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BENEFITS



The concept of Friendly Fridays comes out of a branch of arts integration that makes the most of the natural, powerful connections the arts have with social and emotional competencies.

Throughout nearly every activity, students are asked to interact and build social awareness. In the note-passing activity, for example, they can see where others may struggle—from paper folding to spelling—and yet, because each note is carefully created, each one is appreciated.

Students naturally build relationships as they create and experience art together. With each project, they see and appreciate each other's talents and challenges, watch as their art is placed together to create a cohesive piece, and—my favourite—interact with each other in positive ways. I see students assisting with cutting, commenting on good work, sharing materials, and smiling.

And there's no doubt that when students create, they're also working on their self-awareness and emotional regulation. With each project, they work through the creative process, budgeting time and materials and making decisions that will affect how their piece will look and what message it will convey. Friendly Fridays give students the opportunity to work through challenges with the guidance of their teacher and the encouragement of their classmates.

ADAPTING THIS IDEA TO YOUR SITUATION

The concept of having a Friendly Friday works great for me in my general elementary class, but there are many ways to adapt this idea. Some teachers enjoy using some of these ideas as an extension of their morning meetings. Other teachers in middle and high school adapt this concept by doing something monthly. I've even seen teachers introduce the activity in class, assign the creation outside of class, and then bring it back to the classroom in order to distribute the friendly notes and/or reflect on the experience.

Regardless, the emphasis is always on allowing for a consistent time for creative activities that promote kindness, friendship, reflection, and social awareness.