

ABC Graffiti Reading Selection

Teaching with Poverty in Mind, p. 133 – 136

Engaging Instruction

Kids raised in poverty are often victims of inattention in their own homes and, consequently, have poor social skills. How can you reverse the effects of years of neglect and persuade them that school can be personally productive and meaningful? The best way is to engage them in instruction that includes them and their interests in the process.

Theory and Research

In recent years, researchers have formed a strong consensus on the importance of engaged learning. In general, classrooms are not very engaging. The largest annual survey on engagement is conducted by the University of Indiana, which asks an extraordinary sample size of 81,000 kids about their school experiences. Its results are consistently depressing: almost one-half of all secondary students are bored every day, and one out of every six high school students is bored in every single class (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). If you're looking to make some changes in kids' everyday experiences, this is a great place to start.

Many teachers would rank keeping classroom discipline as one of their top challenges, so much so that there are countless discipline programs on the market for teachers to follow. Not surprisingly, the percentage of 8th grade teachers who reported spending more than one-fifth of their time on classroom discipline increased sharply from 12 percent in low-poverty schools to more than 21 percent in schools whose student populations are more than 40 percent low-SES (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). This means that in poor schools, a significant percentage of teachers are frittering away more than one-fifth of their precious hours on power and control struggles. In a school year with 1,000 teaching hours, that's 200 hours—*five work weeks*—spent on behavior corrections! No wonder so many kids from poverty struggle. You don't have time for that. Change your mind-set and start thinking how you can engage their minds and emotions. Engaged kids stay out of trouble; bored kids get into mischief.

Generally speaking, engaging instruction is any strategy that gets students to participate emotionally, cognitively, or behaviorally. Engagement happens when you as an instructional leader stimulate, motivate, and activate. Engagement can result from fun games, intellectual challenges, social interactions, and your own enthusiasm. This process has been well explored, and everyone (e.g., Jensen, 2003; Marzano, 2007; Reeve, 2006) has a different way of understanding, describing, and prescribing engagement. Often, what high school students enjoy most is what they get to do least: engage in

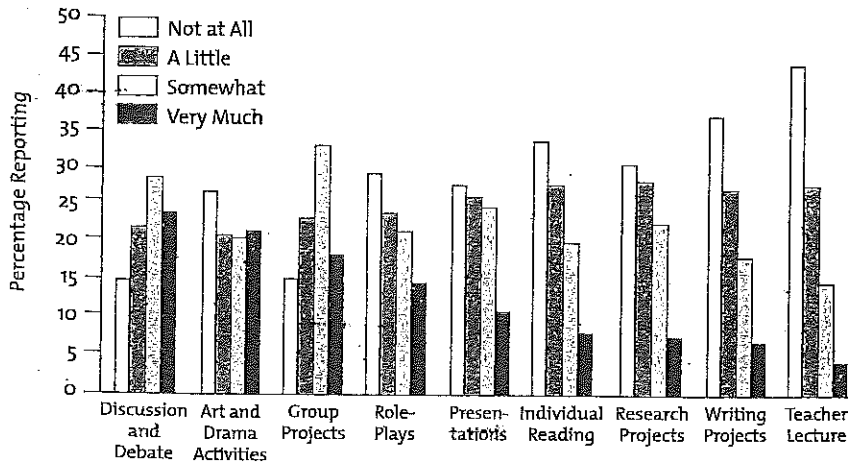
discussions and debates, the arts, group projects, and drama (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

Although the everyday experiences of elementary kids are typically far more engaging than those of secondary students, there are still concerns. The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development was conducted over the course of three years in more than 2,500 1st, 3rd, and 5th grade classrooms and based on live observations of more than 1,000 children around the United States. Pianta, Belsky, Houts, and Morrison (2007) discovered that 5th graders spend 93 percent of their time sitting and working alone (see Figure 5.3)!

Here, according to Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, and Rasmussen (1994), are the principal indicators of student engagement:

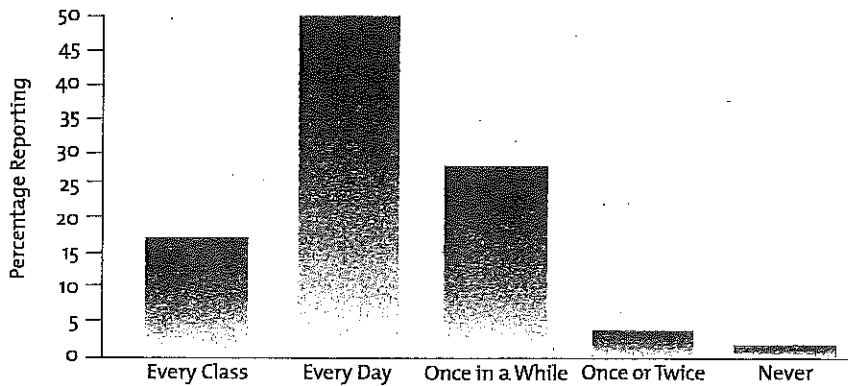
- Students volunteer for class assignments, to complete chores, or simply to answer questions.
- Students do things the first time they are asked and do not have to be nagged.

5.1 What Do Students Enjoy Most?



Source: Adapted from *Voices of Students on Engagement: A Report on the 2006 High School Survey of Student Engagement*, by E. Yazzie-Mintz, 2007, Bloomington, IN: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University.

5.2 How Often Are Students Bored?



This bar graph depicts student responses to the question “Have you ever been bored in high school?”

Source: Adapted from *Voices of Students on Engagement: A Report on the 2006 High School Survey of Student Engagement*, by E. Yazzie-Mintz, 2007, Bloomington, IN: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University.

- Students participate in after-school activities, such as clubs, sports, or social events.
- In cooperative groups, students listen actively, ask questions, and make contributions.
- Students actively participate in their own learning, get involved in making decisions in the course of their study, conduct vigorous research, think of ideas for projects, and use technology to make discoveries based on their choices.

Student engagement speaks volumes about teachers and schools’ academic climate. Engagement happens when students are choosing to attend, participate, and learn. Every one of the schools I have profiled in this book makes engagement a high priority, but let’s take a closer look at a few that epitomize the principles and benefits of engaged learning.

Jensen, E. (2009). *Teaching with poverty in mind: What being poor does to kids' brains and what schools can do about it*. ASCD. p. 133-36. ISBN: 978-1416608844, \$26.95.