



EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

Increasing Student Learning through Simultaneous Engagement

What is Simultaneous Engagement?

Simultaneous engagement increases the percentage of time in a class period when *all students are actively engaged in learning*. Engagement can take the form of interaction (as when all students are in pairs interacting) or it can take the form of individual action (as when all students are formulating answers, reading, collecting ideas using a graphic organizer, or writing at the same time). In periods of simultaneous engagement, the room might be silent, but all students are accountable for actively thinking/working. Evidence of engagement collected by the teacher by walking around with a checklist or other data tracking tool, thorough conferences, by collecting work, or ultimately by pairing or grouping students for discussion (interaction).

Why Strive for Simultaneous Engagement?

When a teacher assigns a task to students and then calls on one student in the class to respond and/or share work at the board, the result is that only one of the learners in the room is accountable and/or is verbalizing thoughts. The other students may not even be on task. In a traditionally-structured classroom, all but one student in the class is somewhere between partially to fully disengaged as they look at the back of the head of the student responding to the teacher. This means that too many students spend too much time thinking about things other than learning!

How do I Increase Simultaneous Engagement?

It's important to use structured opportunities (in Expeditionary Learning, we call these structures "protocols") to create simultaneous engagement. Simply asking students to complete a task or seating students in groups and encouraging them to talk to each other doesn't result in focused learning. Another downside to unstructured engagement is that the less ready or less confident learners "hang back." This means the very students who would most benefit from working with peers tend to miss opportunities. In order to support our Second Language and otherwise challenged learners, it's important to use structures/strategies/protocols like those described below.

Strategies to Increase Simultaneous Engagement

Showdown: Each student writes his answer on his individual response board (whiteboard). When everyone in the group is ready, the teacher says "Showdown" and students reveal their work. The teacher might encourage some students to share with each other while he/she talks with a specific student or group of students.

Rallytable: Students are working in pairs. Students will take turns writing on one piece of paper or completing a task. Each student uses a different color pen or marker.

Write-Pair-Switch: Each learner begins the activity by working alone at his or her seat. This first step often asks the learner to write answers to specific questions. The second step, “Pair,” involves each learner sharing answers with the shoulder partner, the person sitting next to him or her. In the final step, “Switch,” learners change partners and talk to their face partners seated in front of or behind them.

Timed Pair-Share: Students pair off, then number off, 1-2. The teacher chooses a number, 1 or 2, to speak first. That student speaks about a specified topic for a specified length of time. The other student listens quietly and can nod or smile, but cannot speak or interrupt the speaker. After the allotted time has elapsed, the other student speaks for the same period of time on the same, or another, stipulated topic, with her or his partner in the listener role. After both partners have had equal opportunity to speak, the teacher randomly chooses a number of students, and asks them to summarize what their partners have said. (In a small class, all students could perhaps report.)

Team Pair Solo: Students do problems first as a team, then with a partner, and finally on their own. It is designed to motivate students to tackle and succeed at problems which initially are beyond their ability. By allowing them to work on problems they could not do alone, first as a team and then with a partner, they progress to a point they can do alone that which at first they could do only with help.

Numbered Heads Together: Students within the team number off from 1-4. The teacher poses a question and the students put their heads together to discuss the answer. The teacher randomly calls a number and from each team the student with that number writes the answer on the team response board and/or shares the answer with the class.

Teammates Consult: Students all have their own copy of the same worksheet or assignment questions. A large cup is placed in the center of each team, and students begin by placing their pencils in the cup. With pencils still in the cup, they discuss their answers to the first question. When all team members are ready, they remove their pencils from the cup and write their answers without talking. They repeat this process with the remaining questions.

Gallery Walk: A Gallery Walk requires a report-out that can be visually depicted, preferably on butcher paper. It can be a picture, an outline, a concept or mind map, or any other written or drawn product. In this case a designated student stays by the desk or table or next to the butcher paper if it is taped to the wall and serves as the group spokesperson. The other students rotate around the room examining the products of other teams' thinking, asking questions of the designated spokesperson. (The spokesperson role should be rotated so that no one is left without the stimulation of exploring the different student creation.