Supporting learner engagement in the classroom with NetSupport School

Student engagement isn't just a buzzword these days; it is a crucial focal point for educators and administrators as both students and staff return to in-person teaching and blended learning. Multiple studies have shown us what so many educators already know – motivation and engagement has decreased because of COVID.

Key factors influencing the drop in engagement are distractions, decreased interest in content/coursework against the backdrop of the pandemic, and a disconnect from their classmates and teachers from being physically separated. Even now, as students return to the classroom, we see continued difficulties with engaging them in learning. So how can we turn this around?

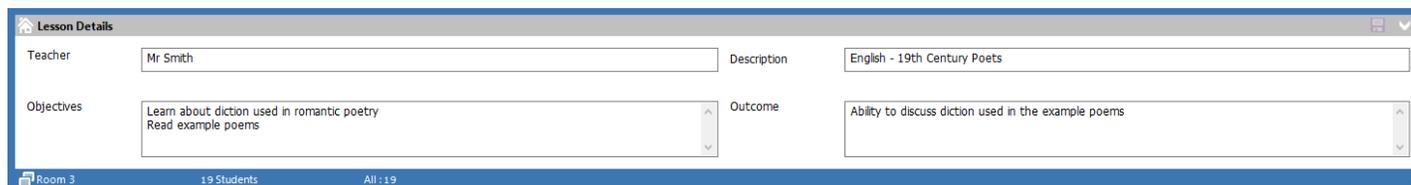First, let's look at elements that positively influence engagement:

- clear expectations
- collaboration, communication, and active involvement in learning
- scaffolded levels of challenge
- sense of belonging/supportive environment.

Knowing these, there are several best practices that can be implemented to promote positive student engagement. NetSupport School classroom management software can help to support these practices in a classroom environment, allowing teachers to continue using the technology their schools have invested in, but in new and engaging ways.

Objectives and outcomes

Effective educators know that a core element of lesson planning is objectives and outcomes. Objectives define the goals of instruction, and outcomes indicate what the learner will be able to do as a result of participating in the class. You cannot successfully complete instruction without both elements, nor can you expect participation and engagement from learners if these objectives and outcomes are not made clear from the start. Students need to know what they are learning, why they are learning it and how it will impact them.

With NetSupport School, teachers put their expectations front and center through the lesson details. These are shared directly with the students and are visible throughout instruction. With students spending so much time on their devices, this helps keep expectations clear and accessible.

Collaboration, communication, and active learning

Collaborative learning has multiple benefits, including developing leadership skills, increasing learners' responsibility and self-esteem, and encouraging critical thinking – which are all skills that are crucial in school and beyond. Incorporating techniques such as the Jigsaw Method (where students have a home group and an expert group they participate in) or Think Pair Share (where students work with partners to come up with a cohesive solution), provide opportunities for students to connect to their classmates and take ownership of their learning.

In a digital but socially distanced classroom, collaborative learning looks different. Using the group leader tools in NetSupport School, teachers can assign a group leader and allow teams to chat without having to sit next to each other. Leaders can share their screen with students to support collaboration and help them take control of their learning.
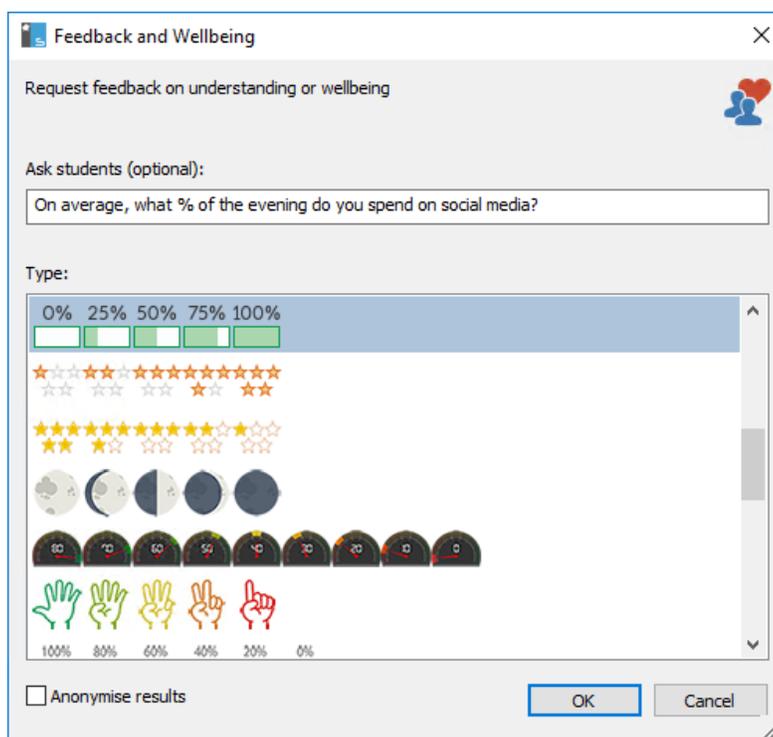
Scaffolded levels of challenge

Scaffolded learning involves taking learning and breaking it into chunks, with each section having structure to support overall learning. A key aspect of that is informal assessment, which allows teachers to evaluate learning and adjust instruction to match the students' pace. If instructors can identify early on which learners are struggling to understand or connect with the content, they can improve learning outcomes by changing plans to meet needs.

Several informal assessment tools are built into NetSupport School, including Q&A, instant surveys, feedback and wellbeing, and 1:1 chat. Q&A creates a gamified environment, allowing students to respond to questions so teachers can evaluate their learning. Creating exit slips via the survey tool helps teachers and students assess their own learning, while the feedback and wellbeing tool uses the common language of emojis to allow students an opportunity to express their confidence/mood.

Informal observation is incredibly useful in driving successful outcomes. Seeing what your students are doing is just as important as them seeing you modeling it. If you were a chef teaching a course on how to decorate a cake, you would first demonstrate the technique while explaining it. But to fully assess the students' progress, you would need to watch them while they practice the technique.

With the thumbnail view, teachers can discreetly watch student progress while they work on assignments or in groups, removing the pressure of standing over their shoulders! Using 1:1 chat, teachers can provide feedback directly to students and answer questions they might have.

Sense of belonging/supportive environment

If you were asked to describe your favorite teacher, odds are words like "caring," "engaging," or "passionate" would come to mind. A supportive environment first stems from educators who make it a point to welcome students into their classroom and make them feel as if they belong there. One way to achieve this is to acknowledge and plan for multiple modalities: providing diversified learning which includes multiple experiences of the content so that students connect on different levels. Even the best student can struggle to engage if they don't feel like their teacher is accounting for their needs or how they learn best.

The built-in whiteboard feature in NetSupport School not only lets teachers share a virtual whiteboard directly on student devices, but also gives the option for students to interact with it and contribute to it. Alternatively, teachers can share their screen or exhibit a student's screen directly to the class and record the presentation so students can review it later while working on assignments.

Key takeaways

Successful digital-led learning has a positive impact not only on students' engagement, but also on their participation and outcomes. Students are more likely to do well in class if they feel the teacher is doing all they can to make their learning varied and interesting.

Having a way to give clear expectations to learners provides them with direction, purpose, and motivation. And collaborative learning nurtures the development of critical skills while informal assessments allow for teachers to adjust instruction based on their students' progress. We know that when we provide multiple methods of connecting with information, students' levels of engagement and learning increase, so having the digital tools to do this effectively is key.

Out students are growing up in an increasingly digital world and the jobs they will be doing in the future are as yet unknown to us. Therefore, investing in learning solutions, tools and techniques to provide a high-quality technology-led education right now is the very least we can do to put them on the path to success.

About NetSupport School

NetSupport School has evolved to become one of the most recognised school classroom management and instruction solutions. Supporting all major platforms – Windows, macOS, Chrome, Android and iOS – it offers huge flexibility for varied teaching and learning. It has been independently verified by Education Alliance Finland, scoring 94 percent for its pedagogical approach. NetSupport School is used across the world and is translated into 27 languages.

Find out more at https://www.netsupportschool.com/