Keeping Students Engaged in CTE

Part 1
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Part 1: The Do’s & Don’ts of Student Engagement
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Engaged students are the Holy Grail in education... It’s something all teachers search for, but not all are successful at obtaining.

But why does it matter? Engaged students are more interested in the content, which makes them more likely to succeed.

**Disengaged students do the minimum, are less likely to succeed, and will have a higher rate of failing.**

We’ve gathered expert advice from teachers, students, instructional designers, and from within AES to provide you with some best practices, tips, and strategies to get your students engaged and re-engaged.
CHAPTER ONE

What’s Killing Student Engagement
The ability to catch and hold the attention of today’s learners may be the achievement most elusive and most coveted by you, the teacher.

There are more distractions than ever before, which means students have shorter attention spans. A traditional lecture-based classroom will no longer capture your student’s attention and keep them mentally active in the classroom.

These “digital natives” require interactive learning rather than passive learning. They expect immediate response and instant assessment. They are bored by traditional textbooks and lectures.
From a young age, today’s students are constantly entertained by video games, TV, movies, and everything and anything on the internet. To expect them to sit in a classroom and learn with no “entertainment” is almost unrealistic.

**Students’ motivation needs a boost.** The promise of employment after education looks grimmer than in the past. This leaves you, as educators, with the need to find ways to revitalize students’ interest and passion in their education.

Students now, more than ever, need to **actively participate** in and **take responsibility** for their learning success.
CHAPTER TWO

Forced Learning Doesn’t Work
Don’t Try to Force Your Students to Pay Attention

We’ve heard from some teachers using e-learning curriculum they don’t like it because some students just “click through” the content, rather than spending several minutes on each screen.

These instructors want to know if we can modify the curriculum to force the student to spend a couple of minutes looking at each screen, before they were allowed to click “next” and proceed.

Here’s what we have to say about the idea of forcing your students to pay attention:
Would Forcing Longer Time on a Screen Help?

As an educator, would you glue down the corner of all the pages in a textbook before giving it to your students? (We hope not).

Remember – a textbook is not just a front-to-back read, but can be used for reference, reviewing before testing, to quote in projects, to refresh memory during open-book tests, and so forth.

E-learning content in the same respect, can be used in many different ways by a learner:

• Start at the beginning and go from front to back
• Dip their toes in at different places
• Scan for subjects of interest
• Go back and review a tough section
Don’t forget: As educators we don’t get a vote in this. It’s how learners build knowledge in the world today.

So we need to understand that, and build it into our understanding of how we help our students facilitate their learning.

- Facilitate
- Frustrate

Learners expect to be able to make a lot of decisions about what and how they’re going to learn. (They make good and bad decisions, of course. That’s to be expected.)

Our job as teachers and facilitators is to help guide students. We must show them how to make good choices, and measure the outcome of their choices and achievement. The learners own their success or failure.
Technically, it’s easy to set a minimum screen time. Practically, we’ve found that learners just go browse the web or read email or paint their nails or do something else.

Much like gluing the pages down in a textbook to force students to spend more time on each one, you’re just going to frustrate the participant.

The larger question that needs to be asked here is why does the learner skip through the content, not learn, and end up with quiz and test scores so low?
Given Good Content and Teaching, Why Don’t They Learn?

If we assume the content is good quality, and the teaching is good quality – why do students skip through it and fail the tests?

Motivation.

If we’re trying to teach a student about proper digital citizenship, and the student sees no reason that they need to learn it – You could make them stay on that page for an hour and they probably won’t learn the content.

But if you show the students how not protecting themselves online can impact them, they are more likely to pay attention. Doing this will help your students see the value.

So as a teacher, one of the most useful things you could possibly do is to show your students that what you’re teaching is connected to their real lives, and actually means something to them. And that’s a huge, huge job.
CHAPTER THREE

Student Perspectives on Engagement
Keeping students engaged for longer than a roller coaster ride is a tricky thing.

What can you do to avoid those students who are notorious for napping in class?

Here are some tips from student perspectives on what doesn’t work:
A lecture is the worst way to convey information to most students. It gets repetitive and boring, especially if there are no visuals to go along with the topic. Lecture alone has no hope of keeping students engaged.

Don’t Just Lecture!

How to get away from it:

• Try asking the students questions during the lecture to keep them alert, while also creating better student-teacher interaction. (Knowing names helps a lot in this situation!)

• Spend class time having discussions on the topic. Ask for questions and ideas to spark new thoughts and understanding.
Don’t be Bored!

It’s pretty hard for students to be interested in a topic if the teacher seems like he/she couldn’t care less.

If you are excited about the topics you cover, your students will see that. It makes a huge difference when the teacher actually enjoys teaching.

Some of the most effective teachers are the ones who really love what they teach and aren’t afraid to show it.
Don’t Forget What Engagement Means!

There are more opportunities and materials available to help educators get students engaged today than ever before. Why, then, is student engagement such a challenge?

Perhaps the answer lies in the definition of engaged students, and how it applies to the 21st Century classroom.

Engaged = “Involved in Activity.” The key here is activity. You can have all of the newest gadgets, classroom resources, and access to technology in the world, and they will not address the problem if the student is merely an observer.

Think about it: Your favorite teachers were able to make the lesson come alive with their enthusiasm, knowledge, and ability to keep your interest and attention.
CHAPTER FOUR

Increase Engagement with Technology
The Angel Oak Tree is thought to be the oldest tree east of the Mississippi river. It’s between 1400 and 1500 years old. And it’s huge!

While it doesn’t win any awards for its height, its canopy provides over 17,000 square feet of shade and its longest limb is 89 feet long.

The canopy is so large, it’s difficult to get a photograph of the whole tree in a camera’s viewfinder.

Tomorrow, you will forget about this incredible tree, because you only read about it.
You may have the same issue in your CTE classroom. You develop and teach your lessons, but you can’t always control what your students remember.

If you see this photograph of the massive tree, we just increased your chances of remembering it:

Photo courtesy of: Kristin Savko Photography

Using good media in your lessons can not only improve your students’ understanding of the subject, but make it more memorable.
Do’s & Don’ts for Using Video to Engage Your Students

Despite the hype, not all videos are engaging. So how do you effectively use videos as a part of increasing student engagement?

Here are 4 simple tips to help you stay on track:

**Keep Videos Short**
Can you keep the video between 3-6 minutes? Can you highlight key points or break it into smaller segments?

**Do Not Overuse Videos**
Videos can quickly lose their impact when overused.

**Videos Need Focus**
If a video gets straight to the point, it’s more likely to keep the learner’s attention.

**Have Instructional Purpose**
Use video only when there is a clear instructional purpose. Video for the sake of video is a no-no.
Do’s & Don’ts for Tech Integration

Technology integration has been growing in all aspects of education, but how can you make sure your new tools have a positive impact on the student engagement level in your classroom?

Don’t Use it “Just Because”

Yes, your students LOVE technology and would be happy to see new ways they can learn by using technology. However... If you have a tool with no real purpose other than saying “look at this,” your students may think of it as just another way you are trying to fit in.

Do Make Sure You Understand Your Tech

One of the worst experiences a student can have is a teacher using technology who doesn’t know how to use it properly. Any technology you bring into the classroom should make your life easier, and make your students want to use it.
Don’t Let the Tool do the “Teaching”

A piece of technology should not be teaching your students... that’s what you’re there for. Though a new tool may seem like it can function all on its own, don’t let it.

Any good technology is not meant to replace the teacher, but should enhance the classroom and give your students a new way to absorb the material – in a way they can relate to!

If your students feel that you are relatable, and know how to use technology to benefit the class, you will see a difference in your student engagement.
Don’t Forget:

“Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important.”

- Bill Gates
Read Part 2: CTE Teachers Keeping Students Engaged

Now that you know the Do’s & Don’ts, check out these real-life stories of how CTE teachers keep their students engaged.

Read Part 2 Now