

Section 4: Arrange the Learning Activities on Your Blueprint

Question 3: How do we keep students engaged in our unit?

Whether we're teaching number patterns to kindergartners, or an AP Physics unit on Newtonian mechanics, student engagement is critical to our success. That's why so much research has been conducted over the last few years on the mysteries and benefits of student engagement. In summarizing the results from over 75 studies on engagement in the classroom, Robert Marzano (2007) concludes, "Arguably, keeping students engaged is one of the most important considerations for the classroom teacher" (p. 98).

In our recent work investigating the links between learning styles and student engagement, we set out to identify a "set of reliable motivators" that teachers could use to engage all four learning styles. We called these motivators the "Eight Cs of Student Engagement" (Silver & Perini, 2009). In Figure 4.7, we show how teachers can use these Eight Cs to increase engagement in any classroom.

Figure 4.7: The Eight Cs of Student Engagement

The Eight Cs	Description	Examples
Competition	To maximize the motivational power of competition, focus classroom activities around mild and friendly forms of competition that allow everyone to experience success.	Use tried-and-true gaming formats like Teams-Games-Tournaments, Vocabulary Baseball, and Jeopardy to help students shore up gaps in their comprehension and prepare for tests.
Challenge	Many students love a challenge. Encourage them all to strive for excellence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use strategies like Graduated Difficulty and Graduated Warm-Ups, which allow students to select tasks at the appropriate level of challenge. • Communicate expectations and goals clearly and enthusiastically. Encourage all students to "go the extra mile" in pursuit of learning goals.
Curiosity	Look for opportunities to puzzle your students, to engage them in solving mysteries associated with your content. Provoke students to go beyond the obvious with "Yes, but why?" questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did a ragtag militia of untrained soldiers defeat the most powerful army in the world? (American Revolution unit) • Did you ever wonder how Renaissance artists were able to carve so much detail into solid rock using only basic technology? Let's find out. • Yes, $5^0 = 1$, but why? • Why have comic books gotten so dark? What happened to the "comic" element?

(continued)

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Figure 4.7: **The Eight Cs of Student Engagement (continued)**

The Eight Cs	Description	Examples
Controversy	Our content areas are loaded with controversies, arguments, and intellectual disagreements. Invite students into that controversy by challenging them to take and defend positions on hot-button issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the Beatles deserve to be studied alongside Beethoven, Duke Ellington, and other giants of Western music? • Is algebra a discovery or an invention? • Do men and women write differently? • Why do we need insects, anyway? Wouldn't life be easier without them?
Choice	Capitalize on this powerful motivator by giving students more opportunities to make selections and decisions about their learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Learning Centers and Shared Interest Groups (small groups of students working together to learn about a topic or common interests). • Offer choice-based assignments and projects that give students the chance to decide how to demonstrate what they have learned.
Creativity	Give students the opportunity to express their own unique ideas as they explore the content.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use metaphors and similes to explore content: <i>How is a colony like a child?</i> • Encourage divergent thinking: <i>Can you find a different way to represent your thinking?</i> • Use non-routine problem and design tasks: <i>Can you create an interesting logo that includes at least two different transformations?</i>
Cooperation	Allow students to learn with others—as part of a community of learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate cooperative learning activities, partnerships, and small group work into the learning process. • Encourage lots of discussion. • Use cooperative learning strategies such as Jigsaw, Reciprocal Learning, and Collaborative Summarizing.
Connections	Find ways to connect learning to student's values, feelings, experiences, and lives beyond the school walls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When is rebellion justified? • Have you ever used fractions to settle a dispute? • What do you think of George's decision at the end of <i>Of Mice and Men</i>? Did he do the right thing? • How do advertisers use color theory to influence consumers?