Engaged Student Assessments

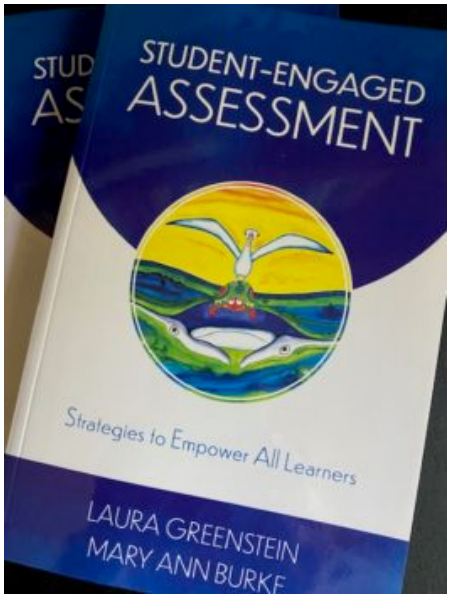
Engaged Student Assessments

This post is fifth of a series based on excepts from my book on *Student-Engaged Assessment: Strategies to Empower All Learners* by Laura Greenstein and Mary Ann Burke (2020). You can purchase the book from Roman and Littlefield for charts, examples, and worksheets on how to engage students to become owners of their learning successes.

What Do Engaged Students Look Like?

Teachers have observed that engaged learners:

- Find motivation and personal meaning in learning and assessing.
- Rely on verified practices and routines for practical and participatory assessment.
- Display indicators of engagement including interest, purpose, and resolve.



Engagement is at the heart of motivation. This applies to preschoolers playing tee ball as well as to adults in the workplace and teachers in the classroom. When 3rd grader Torrance says he is not interested in playing ball but wants to ride a horse, his father says they can't afford riding so he has to play ball. As a result, he's disengaged and wanders around the outfield without purpose.

After reading about "boring" poets and traditional poetry forms in English class, Keenan hastily decides he loathes poetry, so he writes an original rap to describe DNA. When his teacher returns his "poem," the note says that it doesn't align with the school's writing standards for supporting claims with evidence. Here's a small segment of Keenan's poem in which he explains deoxyribonucleic acid, it's structure, and purpose.

Listen to a story that I'm going to tell.

How DNA is found inside all your cells.

In your hair, blood, skin, and lungs as well;

Even got some DNA to help me smell.

My DNA is not for your replication.

Use your own nucleic a' for your mutation.

Keenan’s wants no part of your creation.

I need my DNA for life’s duration.

Fortunately for Keenan, his uncle is a teacher and explains there are two writing standards that are part of supporting claims with evidence. These include “developing the topic with relevant facts” and “providing a concluding statement that follows the argument.” He also clarifies that poetry can take make forms.

While the standards don’t specifically mention poetry, his teacher is willing to listen as he reasons that writing is about communicating; and his rap clearly communicates some principles of DNA. As a result of his teacher’s aha moment, there are two positive outcomes: higher engagement for Keenan and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives on writing by the teacher. Additionally, Keenan uses the assignment to learn about how DNA is collected and whether organ transplants can change a person’s DNA.

Another Example of an Engaged Student

Kennan’s third-grade sister, Keanna, gets so excited about his rap, that she asks her teacher if she can write one. The goal and intention is to prepare a summary of their unit on animal adaptations. In it, she is expected to explain the key ideas with evidence. With her brother’s help she writes:

They say penguins and gulls are alike because

Both have feathers and bones from past history.

(The teacher suggests antiquity, so she looks it up and changes her rap.)

Yet, one soars through air, the other through water.

Adaptation means adjusting to some type of change.

Maybe I'll grow feathers when the climate's rearranged.

Both of their teachers develop scoring rubrics based on the district's criteria: clarity of information, organization, use of evidence, focus on topic, and accuracy. They decide to add their own indicators for reflection and creativity. At the dinner table, both students are enthusiastic about this personalization of learning and talk about rewriting their work in response to the feedback they received.

What Does an Engaged School Look Like?

When students aren't performing up to expectations, it is typical to start by assessing their academic skills. When the causes aren't academic, then inattention, mental health, or problems at home are explored. Sometimes, it's just plain boredom with the repetitiveness or irrelevance of the classroom that leads to a student's lack of interest and disengagement. However, there are numerous substantiated reasons to

make student engagement a priority. An essential component of engagement is that it changes a school and classroom culture of testing and assessing learners to one that is a culture of involvement in learning and improvement in outcomes that include:

Personalizing Learning Is Motivational

- *Learning is personalized:* There are multiple pathways for achieving goals. Students may decide to display their achievement of the learning criteria in an infographic, model, video, or medium of interest to them.
- *Builds trust:* Social and emotional skills are the mainstay of learning. Relationships and mutual respect are developed when a child feels their ideas are valued.
- *Compels various types of learning opportunities:* In an engaged classroom, options for learning are essential. For students who may not have the highest writing scores, relying on images or recordings to show their learning can be just as effective as writing them.
- *Recognizes the explicit learning expectations:* Students feel more confident when they understand how much and how deeply they are expected to master the learning standards and can see their relevance before starting their learning journey.

Involvement in Learning Is

Motivational

Encourages effort: When a child feels that their classroom is a safe place to express their ideas, they are more willing to reach towards higher levels of learning. They know that mistakes are part of learning.
Supports intrinsic motivation: A desire to learn is essential. When students are comfortable and interested, they are more apt to take ownership, set goals, and determine a course of action.
Boosts metacognition: The use of prompts and questions such as “What would you do, and why?” or “What evidence do you have of progress?” helps students dig more deeply into their thinking.
Leads to ownership of learning: Ultimately students become the owners and proprietors of assessment who take responsibility for their own learning outcomes.

Our December 7th post will explain how students assess their learning outcomes. For more charts, examples, and worksheets on how to engage students to own their learning, you can purchase *Student-Engaged Assessment: Strategies to Empower All Learners* by Laura Greenstein and Mary Ann Burke (2020) from Roman and Littlefield.