



TextProject's Teaching Tips: Increase Engagement

Engagement in reading is essential if students are to become proficient and lifelong readers. As teachers, we know the truth of this statement but results from national and international assessments also underscore the importance of engagement. In the National Assessment of Educational Progress, students who identified themselves as interested in reading had higher achievement levels and high-school grade-point averages than peers who identified themselves as less interested (Donahue, Daane, & Grigg, 2003). On an assessment of ninth graders from 32 countries, engagement also predicted students' reading performances (Kirsch, De Jong, LaFontaine, McQueen, Mendelovits, & Monseur, 2003).

Often, we think of engagement as internal to students but recent work shows that the tasks of classrooms have a strong effect on engagement. The essential components of engaging tasks have been identified (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014): (a) choice, (b) importance, (c) collaboration, and (d) competence.

These three tasks support features of choice, importance, collaboration, and competence:

- **Choice:** Even small choices, such as getting to pick one of two or three texts to read or one of two to three topics to write about, can increase students' engagement. Using texts on a topic, such as ReadWorks' paired texts (readworks.org), lets students choose which texts to read. Putting students in pairs, where each student has read a different text, adds the element of **collaboration**—another feature of engaging tasks.
- **Importance:** Devote a portion of a classroom library to the publications of current and past students. When students see that their work is valued, their engagement increases.
- **Competence:** Everyone has special skills and/or interests. Design occasions, such as poster fairs, where students share their areas of expertise. Everyone in a class doesn't have to share every time, but a handful of students sharing topics can stimulate their own engagement and that of their peers.

References

Donahue, P., Daane, M., & Grigg, W. (2003). *The nation's report card: Reading highlights 2003* (NCES No. 2004452). Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. National Center for Educational Statistics.

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Kirsch, I., De Jong, J., LaFontaine, D., McQueen, J., Mendelovits, J., & Monseur, C. (2003). *Reading for change: performance and engagement across countries: results of PISA 2000*. Washington, DC: OECD.

