

Keeping Diverse Students Engaged in Alternative Teaching Environments

By Paula Jacoby-Garrett & Rachel Ziter-Grant

This year has caught us all by surprise - students and educators alike. As educators the uncertainty associated with the shift to teaching remotely and perhaps as a hybrid or in person during the COVID crisis has been tremendous. The same is true for our students. They are uncertain of what the future holds and overall we see mixed success using current teaching modalities. In a recent survey, “teachers estimated that only three out of five students are regularly engaged in distance learning, with wide gaps across racial and socio-economic lines” (Kraft & Simon).

This new normal is especially difficult for our diverse learners. Engagement is already a difficult task and successful strategies can be unique for each individual student. Normally utilized techniques like engaging multiple learning styles and scaffolding instruction might be difficult or potentially impossible in our current learning environment.

To be successful, first and foremost, understand your students' access to technology and their family's technology knowledge. Creating a list for yourself of each student's available devices and their comfort and knowledge of those devices will be helpful when planning lessons for that student. Understanding the technology knowledge of others in the home can be helpful to determine if there is a household member that can assist.

Providing activities and lessons that don't need technology is useful to reduce overall screen time for students and can be essential for those families that may not have access to technology. Content can be delivered in multiple ways to help solidify the learning process. For example, a short video on ecology can be followed up with reading the chapter in the textbook on that topic or perhaps a 'field trip' to their backyard or a local park. Many students prefer having options in their assignments. Choice gives students a sense of control, allows them to use skills they feel they are good at and gives a sense of ownership.

Establishing routines for communication and for class structure whether in person or remote is beneficial for our diverse learners. The routine allows the students to prepare themselves mentally and emotionally for the school day and what will be expected of them. Easy access to class calendars and assignments lists helps students organize themselves and can also be shared with family members for support at home. For many students, having instructions repeated multiple times in various ways can help support the learning process.

Last but not least, taking time for downtime is beneficial for not only our students, but us as teachers. Take a few minutes to discuss with students how their weekend went or to show off their artwork or pets. Making meaningful connections is key to creating a positive relationship with our students and is even more important during these trying times.

Resources:

<https://www.future-ed.org/teaching-under-quarantine-a-new-large-scale-survey/>

<https://www.theabilitychallenge.org/ten-ideas-for-keeping-students-with-diverse-learning-needs-engaged-at-home/>



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