Zoom Engagement: ADHD and Other Tactics

Since the pandemic has begun, teachers have been struggling with how to engage their students. Student engagement can be difficult for multiple reasons, especially in a virtual world of video conferencing. This medium requires more discipline on the part of the student who may have multiple things competing for attention in the comfort of their home.

Some students may have additional reasons why they struggle to focus. It can be difficult enough in school, but now with the current atmosphere of zoom, it makes it nearly impossible. One example is students with ADHD. ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Some of the hallmark traits of this disorder are impulsivity, inability to focus, fidgeting, and distractibility. Some of these traits can be commonplace because they are children and have still developing brains, but for a child with ADHD, these traits can be more difficult to control. In the zoom environment, students are home without the ability to have one on one attention or possibly may not even have a parent at home to help them stay on task like a teacher would while in person at school.

So, what can we do to help these students? Some of the tactics that will be shared in this article can be beneficial for all students both with and without ADHD or other learning disabilities.

While technology has created some of these problems by taking away the one-on-one interaction component, there have been many great apps created to keep students' attention during class. These apps give students the opportunity to engage and participate in class just as though they are there. They allow teachers to see if a student is participating, even if they do not have a camera or if the camera is off, because it will show names of those who are participating. One of the functions available through Zoom is the chat box. Students and teachers have the ability to chat as a class for questions or send the teacher a private message when desired. This is a great way for students to respond with answers or to just have the student enter a specific word or some identifying factor to show they are still there and engaged. There are two apps or software called Eventzee or Goosechase that you can use to do a virtual scavenger hunt throughout the day or week. This allows students to capture items with their cameras. Then there are apps like Kahoot!. This app is for trivia that can be done live or at the student's pace. The students' scores decrease with time on each question. This prevents students from "googling" answers. There are also survey apps like Nearpod. This allows you to gather feedback through a second screen or browser. This is great for games like "Would You Rather". One last app worth mentioning is BreakoutEDU. This helps engage students of all ages and creates a series of clues or challenges that students have to discover themselves. Teachers who use this usually use the "breakout" feature on Zoom and have teams solve challenges or questions in a specific timeframe. You can use the "Build Your Own" resource so you do not have to purchase a subscription.

Another way to help keep students on task is having a schedule and sticking to it. Consistency is key to having successful students. If they know what to expect, it can help lower anxieties about the unknown. It is also important to have consistency in consequences. So, working with parents and staying in communication about how their student is doing with engagement and participation in class is key.

One last big piece in helping students be successful with zoom learning is brain or movement breaks. Everyone, even adults, need a break from the screen every now and then. Our

minds are only able to look or focus on a screen for so long before we lose interest, get a headache, or get restless from sitting still. Students normally have a break about every hour in school, whether that be from changing classes by walking in the halls, moving to grab items for a different subject, etc. Breaks are key with students and adults to keep the body and mind focused to the best of its ability. Even during a zoom training, the people hosting the training will often try to give a break every 45 minutes to an hour and encourage participants to move, get away from their screen and give their brain a real break. Utilizing apps, such as GoNoodle, would be beneficial. Even though students would not be away from the screen, it would get their body moving to expend some excess energy.

All in all, educators and parents are struggling in this virtual environment. As learning continues via zoom, more and more teachers and parents are finding new and innovative ways to engage their students. Whether that is thinking outside the box, utilizing an old tactic, or modifying it to fit with this technological age, it doesn't matter. Utilize each other, utilize the internet, and most of all, do what you all have been doing and work hard to accommodate students where they're at and help them be successful. Hopefully there is an end in sight soon, but until then, implementing some of these strategies may help enhance student engagement.

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