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Joy In Education

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Abstract

Making connections and ideas that students are enthusiastic about has been verified in research. Students are excited and engaged when they feel a genuine connection with the material they are studying. Teachers can be the nucleus of excitement and passion. When teachers share the things that they are enthusiastic about they can make a meaningful contribution with students. If that passion is music the teachers love, or a hobby, it does not matter so much if the students feel the same passion for the topic as the teacher. The important thing is for the students to feel passionate in their own way about things that are important to them. It is a way of teaching students to be passionate to enable them to feel the joy of learning.

Keywords: *connections and ideas, passion is music etc.*

Introduction

It is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day routine of being an educator or a student and lose sight of the joy there is in learning and teaching. Success as an educator only comes by nurturing students' sense of wonder about learning. Effective teachers can build on a student's sense of wonder and curiosity about the world. Education at best can open a willingness to care for the human condition.

Making connections and ideas that students are enthusiastic about has been verified in research. Students are excited and engaged when they feel a genuine connection with the material they are studying. Teachers can be the nucleus of excitement and passion. When teachers share the things that they are enthusiastic about they can make a meaningful contribution with students. If that passion is music the teachers love, or a hobby, it does not matter so much if the students feel the same passion for the topic as the teacher. The important thing is for the students to feel passionate in their own way about things that are important to them. It is a way of teaching students to be passionate to enable them to feel the joy of learning.

Joy has a ripple effect. When we center joy for ourselves, it affects our students and the school community around us. Creating a joyful practice can

have a positive effect on students' outcomes and our ability to thrive in work. (Cawdery)

Teachers and students are more successful when there is pleasure in learning with a focus on essentials. Being a student or a teacher should be a joy.

Ten joys will be discussed in this article that is enhancements to education.

Joy 1: To Find the Pleasure in Learning

There are always challenges to learning, and that is part of the learning process. Learning is what gives us the ability to survive and enables us to build on survival to improve our quality of life. To those ends we do not mind the difficulties in learning. Learning can enable flow where the learner becomes completely immersed in the learning experience itself where nothing else matters. The learning experience becomes enjoyable and is done for the sheer joy of learning. The learner's interest may vary from a love of cars, or history, or dancing, but everyone can achieve flow in learning something.

Schools can be about creating workers and test takers. Schools can also be about nurturing students as human beings to find pleasure in learning in a way that makes learning more successful. By rethinking how and what

we teach we can enable students to experience more flow in learning.

Joy 2 Give Students Choice

Students have extraordinarily little control over how their time in school is spent. This is typically seven hours with no ownership of how their time is spent. In contrast outside of school their interests are what they pursue. It might be learning to play a sport, play music or engage in video games. No control over engaging in activities that may or may not interest them leads to unmotivated students. The joy of learning can be influenced by giving the students some control over their learning activities.

Learner ownership can be increased by several different techniques. The learner can choose the books they want to read through independent study. Students can also be involved in writing workshops with topics in which they are inspired. Having the students work more independently in math, science, art, and social studies can also be made motivating by having them present their learning to the class as the experts in those studies. Students can choose science fair projects to solve real world problems that affect them. One such example was a student who optimized the balance in their bowling ball to improve their game as a competitive bowler.

Consider that one option is to read a book and take a test on a topic such as say the civil rights movement in the United States. Other options may be to do research on the topic and demonstrate the learning through activities of interest to the students. There is no limit to what these might be, but could include writing a graphic novel, performing a play, interviewing people, and turning that into a podcast. Having control over the medium that is used to demonstrate the learning motivates not only learning the topic, but also skill in how to present the material.

It is useful to have an exploratory time for students. For instance, one hour of the day can be given to students to study a topic of their choice. In the same classroom for exploratory time students can be spread out and studying whatever topics are interesting to them. One student might be studying a nature topic, while another is studying a social science topic. This creates an environment that nurtures curiosity and inspires a love of learning.

Joy 3: Let Students Create Things

The educational process enables students to learn new things. It also needs to help students with the skills to bring what they have learned to life in a tangible way. Students get a lot of joy from making things. Being in control and using their hands to create something of interest to them is a very satisfying experience. Students can use whatever medium they choose to create newspapers and magazines, brochures, stories, picture books, posters, mural, websites, podcasts, PowerPoint presentations, interviews, oral histories, models, diagrams, blueprints, and floor plans, plays and role-plays, mock trails, photographs, printings, songs, surveys, graphs, documentary videos.

Joy 4: Show off Student Work

The classroom and school hallways should serve as a canvas for the great work that is going on in the classroom. Instead of a sterile environment the school can and should be brimming with original work created by the students. Blank walls reflect a joyless environment. When someone walks into a classroom it should speak to them, telling them the learning and creations being developed by the students. The students take more pride and ownership of work up on the wall with their name on it and their picture beside it than having completed a worksheet on a topic. The classroom and school building should be vibrantly brimming with the work the students are doing. On a monthly basis in my classroom I would have the student decorate the class room based on one of the topic we were studying or some seasonal art project.

Joy 5: Take Time to Tinker

Children from 7 to 13 build things in a tinkering school that offers exploratory curriculum. Children learn by fooling around with basic and advanced building techniques through a collaborative environment. The activities are supervised but allow for improvisation. Encouragement is provided for firsthand out of the box ideas and the use of intuition and imagination to encourage fertile thought. Students produce their own ideas for what to make and the tinkering school allows them to dream what it can be and how to make it. The role of the faculty and staff is to help them through the design and building process. Most schools are too planned and do not have leave room for happenstance. This type of creativity needs to be continued through education past kindergarten. Education post kindergarten focuses on getting students to leave learning by tinkering behind and conforming to sitting at a desk reading textbooks and listening to lectures. They then demonstrate what they have learned through filling out worksheets and taking tests. Tinkering is a wonderful way to come up with new ideas and everyone, students and teachers should do more of it. Lessons are planned now to fit into an hour a day lesson plans by textbook creators. They are designed to be teacher proof. Schools are more of an assembly line than productive think tanks with firsthand workshops. Teachers should be free to take risks. They need to be able to experiment and play with pedagogy. This will enable them to feel the joy of tinkering with how to teach.

Joy 6: Make School Spaces Inviting

What if the paradigm of a classroom were more like a family room. A comfortable place to be with a library and comfortable furniture to sit on, and a warm inviting carpet to lay on. Cozy nooks could be provided for students to work in groups, or alone, and read and write or tinker. Appreciation and learning about art and architecture would be enhanced by how the rooms were decorated with art decorations and curtains. Warm task appropriate light could be designed into the various sections of the classroom. The students could be active participants in how the room is decorated, which should include creating some of the artwork. The classroom could also be linked into outdoor

gardening spaces that also serve as a labyrinth sculpture garden to relax and walk through and read. Compare how this type of an environment would be conducive to the joy of learning to a ridged grid where students need to sit in an uncomfortable chair at a desk and look at a white board and listen to lectures. DECATS is one of the examples of Tinkering school that our daughter was selected to attend in summers from third grade to 6th grade. DECATS classes were hands on classes. Hands on activities that were provided were science, math, art, performing art, cooking etc.

Joy 7: Get Outside

Spending time in nature helps kids do better in school, in a number of surprising ways. (Kuo, 2019)

There is the idea of “nature deficit disorder” in children. This idea was coined by Richard Louv in a book he wrote called the Last Child in the Woods. This comes from the extreme lack of time that children spend in nature. Not spending time in nature leads to more anxiety and stress. It also reduces the physical activity students get contributing to obesity, which leads to type two diabetes at a younger age. It is also a contributor to ADHD and other problems. Parents want their children to do well academically and may see a conflict with spending time in nature. Spending more time outside does not need to be a tradeoff for academic work. Research suggests differently. Nature has been shown to be good for students’ physical and mental health as well as academic performance. It improves a student’s ability to learn even with relatively small amounts of time exposed to nature. Also, as suggested above, learning can take place in a natural environment. The evidence for this comes from hundreds of studies, including experimental research. In one study, fifth-grade students attended school regularly at a local prairie wetland, where science, math, and writing were taught in an integrated, experiential way as Nature relieves children’s stress. Studies have found that holding a class outdoors one day a week can significantly improve the daily cortisol patterns of students—reflecting less stress and better adaptation to stress—when compared to kids with indoor-only instruction. The studies also found that children in more rural areas with greater access to nature were more likely to recover from stressful events that have happened in their lives. Adults also are less likely to be stressed when they have green space in which to recover from stress. This type of activity makes people more likely to be resilient to stress and better capable of learning.

Kids that participate in more outdoor activities have been seen by the parents to have less ADHD symptoms. Also, outdoor instruction tends to make students more engaged and interested in learning.

Outdoor learning has a persistent impact on student engagement. Contrary to what may seem to be intuitive for teachers, thinking that students will be wound up and bouncing off the walls if they come back into the classroom after being in nature. There is a continued increase in student engagement with the ability to have some learning in nature. Kids like learning outdoors,

and the benefits translate to all academic activities. The time outdoors increases physical fitness, and healthier students are more likely to be better in school.

It is widely known that whatever is good for heart health is also good for brain health. Cardiorespiratory fitness supports effective cognitive processing. Bottom line, kids with higher fitness levels do better academically. The more time kids spend in nature the better their cardiorespiratory health is. Natural setting promotes social connection and creativity and promotes people staying in shape better as they age. The social and physical environment children learn in is effective in their academic performance. Reducing stress in the environment is especially important. A structured natural environment is a calm socially safe and fun learning environment. Relationships with their peer to peer or student to teacher are very important as they are both needed for effective learning. Being outdoors and learning outdoors strengthens these relationships. More of these types of environments can be designed into schools. Architects and city planners need to be made aware of these needs and include them in designs. Green areas need to be planned near and into schools. Outdoor lessons need to be part of the lesson plan and more than just recess and a reward for good behavior. Time outdoors rejuvenates students’ minds for learning. This also develops a lasting connection to nature and fosters care for nature, developing stewardship for the natural world. Nature deficit disorder is the result of having an indoor childhood. We are seeing the cost of this in children. We know how to put this to an end and as educators we need to start acting.

Joy 8: Read Good Books

There are many different genres of books. The themes for books include, but are not limited to, biographies, fiction, non-fiction, sports, science, culture, history, and politics. No matter what a student’s interest there are books that they would love to read. Books that they would read for the pleasure of reading. These books are the ones that would bring joy to learning for those students. A good book surrounds the reader with joy.

Joy 9: Offer More Gym and Art Classes

A lack of funds can be devastating to the curriculum. The first things to go if things get tight are art and music. Things like visual arts, theater, music, or sports are excellent opportunities for students to experience joy in learning, and fun in general in school. These activities need to be protected.

Joy 10: Have Some Fun Together

It is important for all the stakeholders in the school, teachers, students, and administrators to have a break from the tense and serious school routine and have some fun together. Having a teacher students’ sports day is one way to foster having fun together. These activities bring students and teachers closer together. That closeness will continue into the classroom. Having a community service day like cleaning up the local street, beach or park can encourage bonding as well. The only limit is your imagination. Movie nights, field trips to museums, or star gazing are all fun and

within reach. A biography day where students pick a person that they find interesting to research and report back to the class on benefits the student in doing the research and creating the presentation as well as enriching the other students who listen to the presentation. They can even dress up as their favorite person. School sleep - in with a board game night is fun as well as school dances, and talent shows help to bring folks together to better know one another. This all leads to a less stressful and more joyful school experience. All of these activities are a part of our schools yearly routine.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is important to remember that fundamentally learning and teaching are some of the most important and joyful things we can experience in life. We can experience and share this joy through a variety of teaching methods that will excite students about learning and teachers about teaching.

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