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Fostering Engagement in a Middle School Classroom

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Research Question

How to create a classroom environment that fosters engagement?

Literature Review

- Student engagement has been a central topic in discussions of classroom reform (Trowler, 2010).
- In a three year study, the role of the teacher was found to be significant in creating opportunities for engagement (Turner 2014).
- The student's role is outlined into three categories: intellectual, social, and physically active learning (Edwards, 2010).
- By encouraging and challenging students with interest-based lessons and activities, the teacher and the students create a bond that will allow for mutual respect and overall engagement in the classroom (Kiefer, 2014).

Figure 1: Science lessons included more hands on activities that invited more classroom engagement.

Methodology

- Student teaching experience was conducted in five (47 minute) classes in a rural middle school with 94 sixth grade students. The subject areas included Science and Literature and Composition.
- Data collection included lessons, daily field notes, and student work.
- Data analysis was conducted by analyzing lesson activities and recording accounts with field notes. Student work served as evidence assessing engagement in the classroom. See Figure 1.

Data Collection	
Reading Learning Objectives: Understand Plot Cite Evidence Explain POV Understand Plot; Engage in Discussion	Strategies: Student Interest (3), Discourse (4), Hands On (1), Group Work (3)
Science Learning Objectives: Developing and Using Models Gathering information Predicting Motion	Strategies: Hands on (3), Student Interest (4), Discourse (4), Group Work (3)

Results and Data Analysis

- The reading lessons tended to foster less engagement due to less hands on activities while the opposite was found for science lessons.
- Student work in the science class showed increased engagement due to active learning style.
- Overall, student engagement was higher in classroom settings that fostered hand on activities, student interest, discourse, and group work.

Conclusion

- An effective way to foster engagement in the classroom is to connect active learning to all subject areas.
- This research has helped me to better understand the needs of the classroom and I plan to further my research by applying what I have learned in my future classroom.