

CPD REVIEW

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USING TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

How can I keep students engaged with their learning? What can I do to improve student focus during lessons? How can I ensure students complete their homework? These are some of the numerous questions teachers regularly ask themselves to improve their practice and to improve the outcomes of their pupils. On Friday 20th March 2020, the UK government decided to close schools until further notice except for children of key workers and vulnerable children, as part of the government's response to the coronavirus. As a result, schools were suddenly required to shift all their teaching online overnight and their efforts have been tremendous but the questions surrounding student engagement came back into the spotlight. Will students engage with online learning? What happens if students do not complete their work? How can I ensure nobody falls behind?

I should start by making it clear that I have not found the answer to all these existential questions. However, I thought I would share some of the strategies I have been using over the last 12 weeks to increase student engagement. I will also start by pointing out that the transition to online learning was made easier by the fact the school I currently work at already uses IT softwares and platforms such as Google Classroom, Google Drive, Google Doc, Google Hangouts extensively. As a result, students were already accustomed to online learning.

Nonetheless, I used this lockdown to improve my IT skills and embrace the use of technology to increase students' engagement with their learning. From the beginning, I have followed the school's timetable to schedule lessons for 8am every morning. Although I tried hard to make lessons more suitable for online learning, I initially received dozens of emails from students, who despite their best efforts, were struggling with the transition to working from home - 'Sir, I don't understand', 'How do I open the file?', 'Where do I write everything?', 'How do I upload my work'. After extensive discussion with colleagues at school and on Twitter, I decided to download software such as Screencastify and Loom to record myself talking through lessons. As a result, I am now able to provide extra instructions, model activities, and provide feedback in short video recordings. You won't be surprised to hear that since I started using video instructions, the number of student emails I have been receiving has plummeted whilst the number of students engaging with their learning has significantly increased.

