



## "School was boring!"

After school, I often ask my kids, "How was school today?" Now, let me start with a big disclaimer. My kids go to a terrific school. They've been lucky to have teachers that range from good to excellent so far. The school's academic achievement is fabulous. So I'm not complaining.

Yet, I'll get the occasional response, "School was boring!" I'm sure I'm not the only parent who has heard this response. And I suspect this comment is far more common from students at schools that don't have as skilled or motivated teachers. The reality is, school can be boring.

At Kagan's recent Winter Academy, trainer Rob Jutras shared with me a comical experience he had after a workshop. His workshop focused on Kagan Structures to actively engage all students. At the end of the workshop, a participant—the headteacher, if I remember clearly—stood up and made an announcement to the group. In a serious voice he proclaimed, "There's a very important message we learned here today: Students don't come to school to watch old people work." The comment is so funny because it is so true. "Old people" are obviously teachers from the eyes of a student. And "work" is what the teacher does as she stands in front of the class and demonstrates or lectures. From students' perspective, watching old people work is, to put it bluntly, boring!



So if students don't come to school to watch old people work, what do they come to school for? Good question. As part of our dinnertime routine, I'll often ask my kids, "What was your favourite part about school today?" Almost invariably, their responses will fall into one of the following three categories: 1) something they did with a friend, 2) an activity or sport at PE or break, or 3) an exciting, novel event such as a field trip, class visitor, or an animal guest.

Granted my kids are still in Primary school, but to my chagrin, they rarely respond about the fascinating curriculum. Some of the exceptions include when they learn fascinating new facts, a mnemonic to make long division easy, or study something they find intrinsically motivating. Both my kids are in an after-school science club and they love the projects and experiments they do in there. While my son is crazy for science, my daughter was much more thrilled about the class when she found out her good friend signed up too.



Above all else, students crave action and they crave social interaction. Sitting still watching the teacher teach for too long is boring. Working alone on practice problems for too long is boring. "Drill and kill" is aptly named. We all know this. Yet much of the school day is still characterised by teacher instruction and independent work. Of course there is a time and place for both, but couldn't we infuse some boredom-busting interactive instructional strategies to create novelty and engagement?

Think about this: Why do kids love to go to the park? They

can be active. And they can be interactive. They can run and jump and hang and climb. They like to move and do. But probably even more so, they like to play with other kids. When I take my kids to the park, they have fun playing on the monkey bars and slides. But it's really the peer interaction that thrills them. If we pull up at the park and there are no kids there, I hear their disappointment: "awwww." I would argue that for many kids, social interaction trumps action. Kids love playtime, right? But what would happen if you took away all the kids? Would they love it as much if it was freetime for one kid and a giant playground? Would it be as much fun? Would it be as formative? My experience says no way!

The driving need for social interaction is not unique to young children. Look at high school kids. What's their favourite thing to do? Hang out with friends. It's enough to just hang out. Two of the greatest causes of boredom are inactivity and repetition. If we do nothing for too long, lethargy sets in and we get bored. Passively listening to a teacher teach without actually doing anything else for too long becomes boring. It's all input and no output. Even as an adult with a much longer attention span, I get bored listening to a long lecture, or sitting through a long meeting when it is not structured for participation. Repetition also causes boredom. Doing the same thing over and over again gets monotonous. Action and interaction are not boring! Action and interaction are the antitheses of inactivity and repetition.

How could we design the school day to not be boring? If you buy my argument—and I'll bet you find a lot of truth in it—we would make learning more active and interactive. We would create experiences where students get to move and do things, and more importantly interact with their peers. That's what the Kagan approach is all about. It's all about making the school day more motivating and meaningful for students by infusing more movement, interaction, and variety into learning. It's all about creating frequent and equal participation. It's all about engagement!

Let Kagan help you make your teaching day less boring for you and your students!  
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