

# keeping learning going...

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how can we keep our primary learners  
motivated + engaged?

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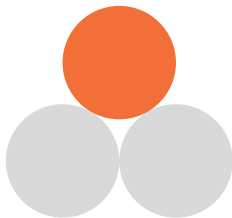
# why is this important?

Motivation and engagement are paramount to achieving the best learning outcomes, but with such a variety of learners in every classroom, it's one of our biggest challenges.

In fact, research tells us that up to 70% of students don't think about a lesson again once it is over! In our classrooms we are highly skilled at knowing which students are not engaged in particular activities and in getting them back on track. Now we have the additional challenge of keeping our learners motivated and engaged in a remote learning environment. Whilst using the eyes all teachers have in the back of our head is harder when we're learning remotely, there are some great opportunities for designing and delivering engaging and motivating learning experiences.

There is a lot of information available on student engagement and no doubt you already implement a bunch of successful strategies with your students. In this kit we break our thoughts into three areas:

## key ideas in this kit



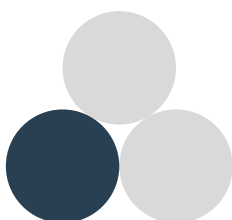
### **real-life learning**

Making learning authentic and linking it to the lives of our learners.



### **gamifying learning**

Taking all of the lessons from computer games and applying them to remote learning design.



### **play-based learning**

Using play as a tool for learning from home.

# real-life learning

## reflection

Great educators are always trying to connect learning to the lives of our students. We're usually armed with the answer to the inevitable question, 'Why are we learning this?', but it's not always easy with a broad curriculum and lots of learning to cover. The best learning happens when students can dive deeply into a concept or skill and connect it to their experiences of the world.

Take a moment now to look at the plans you have for your lessons for the next week with your class and do a tally. How much of the learning is clearly linked to the lives of your students? If you asked your learners, 'Do you know why we are learning this?' how many would be able to respond with the purpose of the learning (in their own words of course!).

## tools

There are a couple of key things you can do to ensure you maintain energy and momentum when designing and delivering lessons.

- **Real world projects:** Whilst real world learning and service might be a little more challenging in a remote learning context, especially for our young students, we can design learning that is linked to projects at home. We have seen some great service learning where young students are taking on new tasks at home, like cooking a simple meal with their parents. Cooking spaghetti carbonara can be easily linked to specific learning outcomes like recording the steps of the process as a writing procedure and calculating quantities needed to prepare the meal for the family. The learning design doesn't need to be revolutionary, just purposeful. Engagement and motivation is enhanced through a real sense of purpose to the learning (and hey, parents are going to thank you for getting their child helping around the house more!).

# real-life learning

- **Current events:** Linking learning to the changing world and current events has never been more pertinent! With the news cycle rolling on most televisions across Australia and Spotify playlists being interrupted to tell us to wash our hands, young people are bombarded by COVID-19 media every day. Capitalising on this exposure and natural curiosity of our learners, we can use websites like Newsela to give us ideas about linking lessons and learning sequences to current events. Make sure you're focussing on the positive stories, though, especially for lower primary kids. Share hopeful news with them! Let them read about the local heroes helping out vulnerable people in the community and ask them to write a letter of gratitude.
- **Let students follow their passions:** While our students might not know everything that they are passionate about yet, there will be some obsessions floating around your class. Sport, Frozen, dancing, Minecraft, blowing things up... The list is endless. One of the most engaging things we do as teachers is allow students to follow a learning journey that lets them explore their passions or at least link their passions to the learning experience. Find opportunities to build the fundamental skills within the things that individual students are most interested in. In remote learning, parents are key here to helping you with this information! Try giving young students a variety of storybooks to choose from (rather than all having to engage in the same text), or asking upper primary learners to write creatively to describe a day-in-the-life of an inanimate object that is linked to their passions. There are some great podcasts and articles about the life of a pillow and the life of a CocaCola bottle to inspire learners. We are all more engaged and motivated when we are learning about something that we are invested and interested in.

## action

Take a moment to design a learning experience for your students this week that applies to some real life learning. Get them to send you a photo of the outcome, along with some feedback, to measure their level of engagement and motivation in the task. .

# gamifying learning

## reflection

We all love games. Whether it is playing a board game with our family, Candy Crush on our phone or simply leveling up in a specific skill we are learning. When we gamify learning we can tap into primary learners' natural motivation and increase their engagement.

Think about the current games that your students love. What are they all talking about? How might you be able to use this when you are designing and delivering your remote learning, linking it to specific learning outcomes?

## tools

Here are a few quick tips and tools to gamify your learning;

- **Utilise the technology:** Not all of our students will have access to technology, but many will and will already be engaging in games, something we can capitalise on. There are millions of learning games and applications available to your students, many of which your school will have already used (like Mathletics or Reading Eggs). But finding quality is hard. For example, don't just search for 'great education apps for students', search for 'the best free reading applications for 5 year old children in Australia recommended by teachers' and make sure you scroll down past the paid results. Finally, don't forget that using technology to personally deliver learning live that includes an element of games (just as you normally would play games with students in the classroom) is still one of the most effective ways to maintain motivation and engagement.
- **Set targets and goals for teams and individuals:** One of the things that makes games so motivating is our desire to reach milestones, targets or goals. We love to get badges and to 'level up'. In your remote learning design, find ways to set clear targets and goals for the whole class, small groups and individuals. Once these goals are achieved, celebrate students' success. With no coding involved this might not feel like 'gamifying learning', but it is built on the gaming principle of being set a challenge, solving problems and achieving the final result. The more explicit you make the end goal and the reward for the students, the more motivated they will be to achieve it.

# gamifying learning

- **Extrinsic rewards and fostering intrinsic motivation:** Using extrinsic rewards and fostering intrinsic motivation helps to motivate and engage students in their learning. In remote learning, tools like instant and sincere praise and obvious extrinsic rewards (like the good old scratch and sniff stickers!) are not as readily available. We have to get more creative. A good way to do this is to work closely with parents of your class to encourage them to give them targeted sincere praise and the occasional extrinsic reward when warranted. Encourage parents to give extra time on students' favourite educational computer game or coordinate a FaceTime call with a grandparent to show off work the student has done that they are really proud of are great.

## **action**

Find one new tech application that will promote learning. Test it out and if it is successful, share it with your colleagues or on socials along with a quick description of how it is improving learning, motivation and engagement for your students.

# play-based learning

## reflection

We all know that play is more than just 'playing'. Balancing on the log during the daily family walk promotes physical development; squishing PlayDoh through Dad's toes as he pretends to fall asleep promotes social development, and colour coordinating the build of a StarWars LEGO spaceship promotes cognitive development. When our students are at school we can see how they play in class and during the recess and lunch breaks. But the lines are blurred now in this new environment.

Take a moment to check in with how much 'play time' is built into current tasks you are setting your students.

## tools

If you're an early years or lower primary teacher you will have already incorporated some great play-based activities for your students to increase their motivation and engagement in learning in their new environment. Here are some of our quick tips and tools:

- **Using the home environment:** Our students are spending most of their time at home. It has become their classroom, their recreation space and is still their home. Our job is to help them transform their home into their learning playground, too! There are lots of ways we can do this. Check out Science Bob for some great play-based science activities. We can also foster motivation and engagement in play-based learning with activities like cooking, games involving imagination and characterisation or creating some great art with the natural resources around kids' homes.
- **Connect learning to their natural play:** Students are already playing. Connect the learning to the play that they are already doing by designing opportunities for students to reflect on the play that they are engaged in outside of formal learning time. For example, if students are playing in their backyard, we can ask them to tell us a little about what they did. Did they find some insects that they would like to learn more about? Did they play an imaginative game that they can write a story about? If we develop the mindset that learning is happening all the time, we can seize the opportunities to connect their everyday play to learning and extend their knowledge and skills.

# play-based learning

- **Give time to explore:** One of the key elements of play-based learning is giving it enough time. Students need time to explore, to get deeply immersed and to increase their opportunities to learn. While it is tempting to 'fill' the school day with highly structured learning activities (as parents may expect), it is important that we provide ample opportunities and time for structured play linked to specific learning outcomes. A great way to do this is to give students a question and then a set time limit for exploration and play through the lens of that question. Increase the complexity of the question for exploration for older primary aged students. A fun example we have seen recently is 'Create your own shadow puppet show! What questions do you have about shadows and what have you learned while doing this?' To make this effective, make the time uninterrupted and unhurried, giving the students the ability to naturally discover new knowledge and skills that can be drawn on during more 'formal' learning time.



## action

Reflect on the remote lesson planning template you've started to design or you use currently. Does it prompt you to differentiate content, process and product every lesson, to design formative assessment opportunities, and to provide feedback to learners? If not, modify your template now. You might then want to share your designed template for the benefit of colleagues at your school and beyond!



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**the EC crew**



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