

---

# Introduction

Going to a professional baseball game provides me with a great deal of fun and relaxation. There are those who think the sport is too slow, but for me the pace of the game is just right. With a seat down the first-base line and access to a gazillion concession stands, I can spend hours enjoying the game. Having met the people near me in the stands, I can talk with them about weighty matters like which pitchers have their stuff and which hitters are in the midst of a hot streak. Those conversations provide me with new information and insights from other fans. That said, I never kid myself into thinking I'm anything other than an attendee. I'm *attending* the game, and never suffer under the illusion that the manager is going to ask me to play second base or left field. That is perfectly okay with me; I paid for the privilege of sitting in the stands and watching the professionals do the work. I'm on the bench, so to speak, with no expectation of shifting from a relatively passive role (unless one of our guys hits a home run, in which case my popcorn and soda are in imminent danger of flight) to one that is more active. I can talk with whom I like, get up when the spirit moves, and even leave the stadium when I want. I'm in charge. I'm there to watch, and the baseball teams are there to win; for me at that time and in that place, *there is great balance in the universe*.

While a case can be made for wanting to field the best sports team to win as many games as possible and draw the line between players and fans, our educational system ought to be geared toward engaging *all* our students in ways that take advantage of the particular talents and interests that become apparent for each of them over time. There is *something* they do well, and as educators we need to help them discover and develop those strengths as partners in the learning process. The alternative, as James, Allison, and McKenzie (2011) affirm, is that "children who are bored in school become disconnected from what happens in the classroom" (p. 6). This is particularly true of boys faced in school with "enforced inactivity," the antidote to which is "any lesson that provides control, choice, challenge, and complexity, together with a teacher

who cares” (p. 6). Students, especially those at the secondary level, can mostly be found at their desks, facing the teacher and the screen. They are not normally free to stand at will or leave when they like. Theirs is a passive role that keeps them in their seats most of the time.

The gap between enforced inactivity in school is particularly wide because students today have so many more things competing for their time outside school, all of which put the passive nature of school in stark contrast to the incredible array of extracurricular choices available to them in the twenty-first century—electronic and otherwise. It may not be until they leave school that they come off the bench and into the game at home and with their family and friends in a decidedly more social—and for them more desirable—setting. They want to *do* something, not sit and watch someone else have all the fun.

Teachers and administrators can—and should—create learning experiences that get everyone into the game in meaningful ways; after all, we want everyone to succeed when it comes to their education—boys and girls alike. This means differentiating instruction in ways that incorporate the visual, the auditory, and the kinesthetic. It means allowing and encouraging students to tap into the plethora of information available to them outside the traditional sources (textbooks and lecture). It means getting students to cooperate and collaborate in ways that improve the finished product or project, as well as their own comprehension and communication skills. It means incorporating instructional techniques that will make students at times independent and interdependent learners in an age where teamwork and collaboration are much valued. Graduates of our K–12 system need to be able to stand, perform, and succeed on their own two feet as we help them become confident life-long learners capable of solving problems and making quality decisions in life and on behalf of their employers in the workplace.

To the extent that students can feel disengaged and disconnected while sitting at their desks day in and day out, we must begin to present them with learning experiences that get them up, moving, sharing, processing and analyzing information, making inferences, defending their choices and conclusions, and—to a much greater extent—receiving opportunities to display the kind of creativity and innovative impulses that drive the world today. This will involve an increasingly hybrid educational system that decreases the amount of face-to-face direct instruction even as it taps into modern technological advances that harness the power of things virtual. In the end, it is about balance.

For teachers close to retirement, like the fictional high school social studies teacher we’ll meet in Chapter 1, it may be enough to simply increase the amount of student engagement and accept a world less dependent on lecture, worksheets, and the still-ubiquitous half-hour educational videos. Every teacher can commit to reducing the amount of seat time and replacing seatwork with feetwork—shifting students

at every level from passive observers to active participants in their own learning. All teachers can replace the teacher-to-student information flow with a much more multidirectional system where student-to-student discourse and processing becomes the norm.

The purpose of this book is not to predict exactly what the brave new world of education will look like in a decade or two, although we will touch on that occasionally; it is intended rather to help teachers begin to make the transition from a more passive environment to a much more active one along a change continuum. It is meant to help teachers make that shift to a lesser or greater extent, even as our educational system shifts in fits and starts toward what I believe will be a much more customized and individualized environment over time. Teachers a few years from retirement may never take part in this *ultimate* transition, but they can serve their students well by getting them off the bench and into the game on a regular basis. Teachers at the beginning of their professional careers will no doubt see an incredible—and inevitable—makeover of the entire educational system.