

As a student, I was always the one who asked the “why” question: “Why do we need to know this?” As a teacher, I like to have two answers in the back of my mind when I’m planning curriculum, courses, and lessons:

1) “It’s important.” This is what I covered earlier while discussing teachers needing to have [an understood purpose](#).

2) “It’s awesome.” This is the passion I’m talking about. Teachers ought to love their content, curriculum and the classes they plan. They ought to be able to unapologetically infect the atmosphere of their classes with an inescapable level of enthusiasm. I am not at all suggesting that teachers put together circus performances for their students, but I am saying that if we want students to become “life-long learners,” they need to leave their classes more curious and excited than they were on the way in. It’s not enough that teachers love their classes, I want to see that they’re finding ways to help their students love the content. This is why so much of the 21st century rhetoric around teaching and learning says that students need to do more than “know” content. I can’t help but mention the work that @DaveBurgess is doing with his *Teach Like a Pirate* idea to promote passion in classrooms.

The passions in the room, though, also need to flow from the students to the teacher. There is enough research out there now that speaks to students learning best in classes where they’re treated with respect and afforded choice and voice throughout the course. What I love to know about a teacher and a course is that there are as many chances as possible for students’ passions to become part of their learning. Whether they are choosing topics for research, book titles for reading, means of expressing their understanding, or inserting their own interests and curiosities into the coursework in any other way, keeping kids’ passions in mind will improve learning in a number of ways:

- Sharing and including everyone’s passions will organically increase people’s (students and teachers) engagement, confidence and level of creativity.
- The students feel validated by having their interests help shape their work and assessment
- The course content is validated by showing that it has connections to things the students love
- A relationship will either get started or strengthened because students will see that their teacher is willing to respect and empower them.
- The class will naturally become more of a learning community in that assignments are no longer generated by teachers in isolation. The teacher will have to naturally ask questions of the student since he/she is no longer the complete expert.