

# Positive Attitudes Toward Learning

## Addressing the Question “Why Do I Need to Know This?”

- At some point, your students will ask the infamous question, “Why do I need to know this?” There are a variety of approaches that could be taken in the way you answer them. Here are some suggestions:
  - Offer concrete examples of how various subjects get used by adults in everyday life.
    - When will I use math?
      - Making a schedule
      - Measuring for construction
      - Keeping track of personal finances
      - Thinking through the steps of a problem
      - Figuring miles and gas mileage when traveling
    - When will I use English or grammar?
      - Writing a resume
      - Work communications, such as emails, reports, and presentations
      - Engaging with media and discerning what is true in it
      - Reading and understanding God’s Word
      - Reading manuals and following instructions
    - When will I use science?
      - Predicting the weather
      - Understanding medicinal issues
      - Agriculture, farming, and gardening
      - Personal health and hygiene
      - Food and nutrition
    - When will I use social studies?
      - As a missionary
      - Knowing where countries/cities/states are
      - Relating to people of different cultures
      - Awareness of historical events and how they affect current events
      - Relating to history of the Bible
  - Point out that even if students do not end up using the specific facts, the more general processes and thinking strategies are used often.
    - Math: The skills of logic and problem-solving are used all the time in real life. Even though the precise math book problems may not show up, the skills used to solve them certainly do.
    - English: Clear communication in writing, speaking, reading, or listening is essential to relationships, engaging with the culture around us, and expressing oneself clearly.

- Science: Understanding how to examine a problem and experiment how to solve it is helpful in many areas of life.
  - Social studies: The knowledge gained through social studies allows Christians to relate well to the world and the varying cultures within it.
- Push back against the assumption that everything that is worthwhile is useful. In fact, most of the best things in life are not useful, such as relationships. Many students would say their favorite part of the school day is recess, which is not useful.
- Try to determine what is actually driving the question. Often a deeper issue is driving their wondering.
  - The student may feel confused. Students don't ask "Why do I need to know this?" after they've gotten a lot of questions correct. They always ask it after they've gotten stuff wrong. This is a calling for you as a teacher to be clearer in your instruction and more inviting in your approach.
  - The student may not have fully developed the intellectual character trait of curiosity. Curiosity is noticing the interesting and puzzling both in the everyday experiences of life and in what's unexpected. As students get older, they tend to lose the innate sense of curiosity that children are born with. As a teacher, make sure that you are involving students in the learning process so their curiosity can flourish. If you are spoon-feeding them everything instead of inviting them to explore it themselves, their curiosity will wither.
- Help students understand with a metaphor. School is like weightlifting. People don't lift weights because they often encounter barbells that they must lift in the course of their daily activities. People lift weights to grow stronger, enabling them to do things they could not otherwise do. Similarly, many of our learning exercises in school are important not for their own sakes, but for developing abilities that will later be applied to diverse situations.

### **Addressing the Comment "I'll Just Google It"**

- Students may point out that there is no need for them to learn facts because they can just look it up on the internet. A comment like this shows several assumptions the student is making: that education is about information and education is about facts. But really, education goes much deeper and further than just "knowing stuff." It involves learning what to do with that information.
- Another assumption that a student is making is that they can readily discern between facts and fiction when they read something online. This shows a lack of humility, a character trait that you should actively work to develop in your students.
  - Teaching intellectual humility involves helping students to recognize their dependence on God and their nature as fallen. As a fallen human, they are not perfect in their pursuit of truth. They have false motives. They have poor processing sometimes. These things can mess up the pursuit of truth.
- Helping our students grow in humility benefits them in many ways:

- A growth of knowledge and insight—if they can rejoice when they’re proven wrong because they got to learn something, they will be a wiser and more well-rounded individual.
- A widening of their worldview—a posture of intellectual humility makes their worlds richer and larger.
- An increase in their influence—a refusal to see someone else’s point of view or recognize their own fallibility will hinder their influence.

### **Addressing the Comment “I Don’t Care”**

- Apathy is a manifestation of human nature, and teachers usually deal with it on some level. The only real solution is for students to discover for themselves the value of knowledge. There’s no switch you can flip to turn their apathy off, but we can encourage and direct students to apply themselves more fully to learning.
- The statement “I don’t care” is generally a symptom of a deeper issue, such as:
  - Fear of failure—a student not engaging with the material may actually be afraid of failing. Help them to develop intellectual courage and an understanding that failure provides opportunities for learning and growth.
  - Misplaced priorities—the student may be saying that their outside life is more important than what is happening here. Help students connect learning to real life and also encourage them to take personal responsibility for making those connections.
  - Malformed love—the student is communicating that they love something else more than they love school. Students don’t need to love school itself, but there are things going on at school that ought to be shaping the loves of your students. Students get shaped by what happens repeatedly. Choose to implement practices that will foster in your students a love for learning and a yearning for a deeper understanding of God’s world.

## **Sources**

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- I’ll Just Google It by John Mark Kuhns: ["I'll Just Google It" - The Dock for Learning](#)
- I Don’t Care by John Mark Kuhns: ["I Don't Care" - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Caring About Apathy by Peter Goertzen: [Caring about Apathy - The Dock for Learning](#)