

Build Connections for Classrooms: Overview

CURIOSITY

WHAT IS BUILD CONNECTIONS?

Build Connections is an activity that helps students understand how their existing interests relate to the content they learn in school.

In other words, Build Connections taps into students' intrinsic curiosity. What's more, it encourages that curiosity to flourish in class.

The benefits of this 30-minute activity are manifold. Day to day, students engage more in school. And in the long term, students who build connections take more challenging classes in the subject and pursue related careers.

WHEN CAN I USE IT?

You can introduce Build Connections after covering the first major topic of your course. It shouldn't be the very first activity, though; students first need to understand enough content to create meaningful connections.

The frequency will depend on your content and pacing. There isn't a "best" number of times to use Build Connections in a year, but many teachers use it once per unit. For instance, you could have students Build Connections to review before a unit exam, or you could use it to consolidate new learning after the unit performance task.

Keep in mind that it's possible to overdo it. Build Connections loses effectiveness if it becomes rote.

WHO SHOULD USE IT?

Build Connections is flexible enough to use with any subject. So far this activity has only been tested in core subjects, but we hope educators use it to support learning and engagement in non-academic classes and even outside of school.

One of the most exciting findings is that the students who benefit most are those student who don't expect to succeed. For students who see little value in school and often struggle to engage, Build Connections is particularly potent.

WHY IS IT EFFECTIVE?

To make content relevant, many teachers use news stories, hooks, and real-life examples. But in these cases, it's usually the teacher doing the thinking, and no single example applies to every student.

Build Connections is different because it's student-centered. It creates an opportunity for students to make meaning on their own terms.

WHAT'S THE SCIENCE?

Build Connections was developed at the University of Virginia by Dr. Chris Hulleman. In randomized, controlled field experiments, Dr. Hulleman and colleagues have shown that this personal connections can help students see how what they're learning is something that matters to them.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO WORK?

Like any skill, Build Connections takes time to learn and teach well. At first, it might seem like students aren't making effective connections, but evidence shows that simply being encouraged to connect life with school improves student outcomes. So be patient when introducing it to students, and try, try again.

RESOURCES:



FACILITATION
GUIDE

STUDENT
ACTIVITY

PREP
ACTIVITY

EXAMPLES