



## The Art of Student Focus

### The Art - and Improvement - of Student Focus

Focus. It gets a lot of attention in the news these days, but many teachers have sought to improve their students' focus long the "[distracted generation](#)." Focus looks different at various ages and stages of development. For younger students, focus may manifest as students being able to pay attention to the teacher or to another student while they are talking. Later, students are expected not only to listen but to be able to illustrate comprehension of presented material and [transfer it to other subjects](#). Opportunities to practice focus and stay on task also arise when students are left to work independently or in small groups.

Distractions are as prevalent as opportunities to practice focus are distractions. While modern distractions are perhaps brighter, louder, and more absorbing than those previous generations faced, focus remains a skill that must be taught and practiced, rather than an inherent trait that students are simply born with...or without. How can school leaders and teachers help their students exercise focus?

### Growth Mindset of Focus

Growth mindset is more than a buzz term of the 2017 classroom. It suggests that students are empowered when they are taught that traits - like focus - are not inherent but are skills that can be practiced and "grown." Rather than being limited by the characteristics he is born with or without, the student believes that through time and effort he may develop important habits of success. This not only empowers the student but often the teachers and parents around him whose thinking or approach may also be limited by labels or beliefs about the student's inborn abilities. When everyone can agree that the student has potential for growth, they can look for tools to help build critical skills, such as focus.

### Tools to Help Students Develop Focus

#### Qball

[Qball](#), the throwable mic, made its debut on Sharktank and is now appearing in classrooms, conferences, and meeting rooms across the nation. Lightweight, squishy, and easy to use, Qball gets students engaged in the classroom conversation by adding a fun, game aspect to participation. Several elements catch and retain students' attention including the mic's bright blue color, the entertainment of watching teacher and students play toss, and the potential of being the person to whom the mic is thrown or rolled. The bottom line: raising our hands is out; Qball is in!

## Breath Listening

Students can practice mindfulness by [listening to their breaths](#). Focusing on something that occurs regularly helps students be in the moment. Have students count the number of breaths they take in a minute or the length of each breath. This can be a quick way to refocus on the task at hand and quiet a racing or distracted mind. After they're accustomed to the exercise, simply remind distracted or frustrated students to listen to their breath in the future, and the tool will become a habit.

## Rat-a-tat-tat

At the [Ron Clark Academy](#), an innovative, highly-acclaimed nonprofit middle school, one student is chosen in each class to be in charge of an African drum. The student is expected to strike the drum at various intervals in the classroom, including when a particularly impressive contribution is made by another student. The privilege of being chosen the drummer outshines its hidden use - in order to function as the drummer, the child must be paying attention at all times. Thus, the students who need an opportunity to practice focus are chosen as the drummers.

## Focus Curriculum

[Edutopia](#) reviewed author Daniel Goleman's strategies for improving focus from his *Cultivating Focus* series. The article made a bold case for the importance of focus, "The inability to focus and sustain attention can rob us of relationships, deep knowledge, career accomplishment, peace of mind, and high test scores." Goleman suggests incorporating a focus-based curriculum into the regular curriculum. For example, the teacher might read a list of words to students and ask them to clap their hands every time they hear the word, "cat." Drills then vary and become more difficult from there.

While the efficacy of fidget spinners is questionable in terms of helping students focus, certain technology, like Qball, has actually been shown to build students' focus muscles. If your teachers, parents, and/or students are clamoring for ways to improve focus in the classroom, one of our Troxell experts would be happy to inform you of available focus developing education technology. Contact us today to find out more at 1-855-TROXELL.