



Chapter 4

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These students are engaged in the reading lesson.

How Do I Promote Engaged Learning?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

Samia had just finished the first day of her clinical placement in kindergarten. She had always wanted to teach kindergarten, so she was ready to soak up everything she could learn during her experience. When she arrived at the classroom, she saw her mentor teacher, Miss Pugh, waiting by the classroom door to greet each child as they arrived. Miss Pugh called each child by name, and she smiled warmly as they entered the classroom. She seemed to know each child so well that Samia wondered how she could know all 23 students.

Throughout the day, Samia observed Miss Pugh reading to and with her students and the students participating in hands-on learning activities, discussions, and partner work. Samia loved how involved the students were throughout the day. Samia had a million questions, and she planned to talk to Miss Pugh about how she got to know her students so well and how she got them excited about and involved in their learning. Samia was looking forward to learning from Miss Pugh how she built relationships with her students and created such a positive and inviting classroom environment.

Have you ever been in a situation that just exuded positive energy? Think about classes, workshops, events, groups, and even parties that left you feeling good about yourself. This is the kind of feeling we want in schools. Learning can be fun, and we want you to learn how to foster engaged learning, so you have the kind of classroom that Samia saw in Miss Pugh's room.

You are probably thinking a lot about the skills and strategies you will need to teach and the methods you should use to teach literacy in your classrooms, but the most important consideration is who you will be teaching—your students! In this chapter, we explore engaged learning and how you can get to know your students so well that you can use those insights to teach all of your students effectively.

What Is Engaged Learning?

Think of a time when you were really interested and involved in a class you were taking. Maybe you were excited to go to the class, found that the time passed quickly while you were there, and you looked forward to doing the reading and completing the assignments. You could say that you were engaged in the class. Why were you so interested and involved? What did your instructor do to foster your engagement? Chances are that you found the focus of the course interesting, you may have had some background knowledge about the topic, and you may have found the work challenging and interesting but not too hard. This is engaged learning.

The term **engaged learning** has become so common and overused that it is important for us to define it. Engagement is not just one thing. In fact, there are actually three dimensions of engagement: behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Fisher, Frey, and Quaglia (2018) have taken the three-dimensional model of engagement and applied it in the classroom situations.

BEHAVIORAL ENGAGEMENT. Behavioral engagement focuses on the actual observable behaviors that are present when a learner is engaged. Think of the typical types of actions that students do such as sitting up, looking at the teacher, paying attention, and following directions—these are examples of what behavioral engagement may look like. Although these behaviors are easy for teachers to observe and although they can form the foundation of engagement, they alone are not sufficient for real engagement to occur. For example, some students who appear attentive are listening carefully and thinking deeply during a lesson. However, there may be other students who appear to be attentive but who are unable to tell what the lesson is about. Sometimes these students have become adept at “doing school” where it looks as if they are engaged but looks can be deceiving at times.

COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT. An important goal for engaged learning is for students to demonstrate cognitive engagement. **Cognitive engagement** is a deeper level of engagement that requires students to put effort into their learning through planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own thinking and learning. Cognitive engagement requires students to welcome challenges that will help them enhance their learning and develop perseverance. When students are cognitively engaged, they are able to discuss what they are learning and they are interested in and in control of their learning. They also have the persistence to work through learning that requires effort and presents at least a modest challenge to them.

You may have heard the term *grit* (Duckworth, 2016). Grit is an important component of cognitive engagement. It's the tenacity and persistence to stick with challenging tasks to work toward long-term goals. For more information about grit, be sure to check out the video of Angela Duckworth in Margin Note 4.1.

Margin Note 4.1: Interview with Angela Duckworth about Grit

<http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3758297>



EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT. The third dimension of engagement is **emotional engagement**. Emotional engagement focuses on how students feel about their relationships with their teachers and peers as well as their general sense of belonging in the school and classroom community. Emotional engagement also encompasses students' interests, enjoyment, and enthusiasm for learning.

Students who are emotionally engaged are comfortable talking with the teacher and other students, working with partners and in groups, and asking questions. They generally enjoy and look forward to learning. In short, when students are emotionally engaged, they are comfortable, confident, and excited to learn in the school setting. When these three dimensions of engaged learning—behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement—are intentionally combined, teachers can create “engagement by design” to promote optimal student learning (Fisher, Frey, & Quaglia, 2018).



Connection to the Field: Observing Engaged Learning

Even though you can't always tell if students are engaged by their behavior, you can learn about engagement by observing students in the classroom. Select an activity, such as when the mentor teacher is giving directions or reading aloud. Sit in the back of the room and record the behaviors of the students. If needed, you can select part of the class to observe. When you are finished, share your observations with your mentor teacher and discuss what they observed while teaching.

Why Engagement Is Important

You probably know instinctively that engagement is important, but you may not know that engagement is one of the greatest predictors of student learning and achievement. It makes sense, right? If students are not engaged, it is very hard for them to learn. Fisher, Frey, and Quaglia (2018) explain that there are neuroscientific processes that account for how engagement leads to learning and achievement. Neuroscientific processes are the thinking and behaviors that are involved in learning.

Let's look at an example that shows what happens with engagement that promotes learning. First, the engaged learner uses selective attention to focus on specific things, rather than other things such as distracting information, to promote learning. Then, the student has to move to sustained attention to focus long enough to process information through working memory; making connections from prior knowledge to new information; and practicing, rehearsing, and applying the new knowledge.

When students are engaged, their learning tends to be effective which can lead to increased motivation to stay engaged or become even more engaged. For example, if Ian is engaged in learning about rhyming poetry, he will be more likely to read and think about the poems he is reading. Since Ian is thinking about poetry more, he can then acquire more knowledge about poetry, he is more likely to become even more interested in learning about other types of poetry, and he may even want to try his hand at writing original poems that incorporate what he has learned. In other words, engagement feeds the development of more engagement. Therefore, one of the greatest benefits of engagement is that it gets students on a positive cycle of learning that can spiral upward to promote even more engagement and learning.

When students are not engaged, on the other hand, the opposite effects can quickly take hold. For example, if Charlotte is disengaged when learning about informational text features such as the table of contents and headings, she will not learn much about these things which will then make those topics even less interesting to her. This will lead to decreased engagement when Charlotte's teacher expects her to use these features in her own informational writing. In short, engagement leads to learning and reinforces engagement to learn more and more.

What Research Tells Us about Engagement and Literacy Learning

You might be wondering whether there is research to back up these claims about engagement. Engagement has a robust research base. One of the most critical research studies for you to know is that students' engagement predicts their learning, grades, achievement test scores, retention, and even graduation (Parsons, Malloy, Parsons, & Burrowbridge, 2015). This is true not just in the United States, but in international studies like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which surveyed students in 63 countries. The researchers concluded that engagement is the most important factor in student reading achievement (Kirsch et al., 2003). Furthermore, research by Campbell, Voelkl, and Donahue (1997) concluded that reading engagement is such an important factor in learning that it can compensate for students' low socioeconomic status and low family education levels. And, most importantly, classroom instruction and teacher practices can promote and enhance student engagement. For example, researchers Pressley and Allington (2015) concluded that exemplary reading teachers had higher levels of student reading engagement in their classrooms as well as higher academic performance and outcomes. In other words, exemplary teachers are able to teach while supporting student engagement which leads to increased learning and reading achievement for the students in their classrooms.

In addition to those general research findings about the positive benefits of reading engagement on student learning and academic achievement, researchers have examined the types of learning tasks that contribute to increased reading engagement. Learning tasks that are associated with high levels of student engagement are characterized by “authenticity, collaboration, choice, appropriate challenge, and sustained learning” (Parsons et al., 2015, p. 224).

Authentic tasks match the types of real world activities that people do outside of school. Collaborative tasks are motivating to students because they can work and learn with their peers. Tasks that are challenging but not too difficult motivate students to work hard and cause them to feel proud of what they are doing. Finally, tasks that promote sustained learning allow students to dig in and commit to learning over time. When teachers consider how to incorporate literacy tasks that are authentic, collaborative, appropriately challenging, and promote sustained learning, they can help their students become and remain engaged in their literacy learning.

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Collaborating in reading and writing boosts this group's engagement.

What Is Motivation?

You have probably heard about motivation in your courses, but do you know what reading motivation is? **Motivation** is the “likelihood of engaging in reading or choosing to read” (Gambrell, 2011, p. 172). When students are motivated to read, they become engaged readers and learners, which can then lead to increased motivation, learning, and achievement.

Due to the many positive benefits of engaged learning, Gambrell identified several research-based principles for teachers to use to promote reading motivation and engagement in their classrooms. These principles overlap quite a bit with the literacy tasks described above that promote reading engagement, but they also provide a nice set of ideas for you to keep in mind as you create your classroom environments, plan lessons, and develop classroom routines and procedures. Students are more motivated to read when reading tasks, activities, and materials are relevant to their lives. When students have access to a wide range of reading materials, they will likely have increased motivation to read. Opportunities to participate in sustained reading so students can “get lost” in a book contributes to reading motivation. Choice must be a cornerstone of developing reading motivation in the classroom. Choice should include text selection and the types of tasks they complete to demonstrate learning and comprehension. Social interaction around texts can also contribute to students’ reading motivation. Finally, appropriately challenging texts can reinforce students’ reading motivation as they work hard and over time to read such texts.

As you think about your field experience classroom or your future classroom, the strong research base related to developing reading motivation and reading engagement confirm that authenticity, choice, social interaction, appropriate challenge, and opportunities for sustained reading and work must be key considerations. When you are designing your classroom environment and planning learning tasks, you will want to address these ideas intentionally so your students can develop and sustain reading motivation and engaged learning.

Creating a Classroom Environment that Promotes Engaged Learning

In the previous section, we discussed the types of tasks and principles you will want to consider to promote engaged learning in your classroom. Although those components are important, they are not sufficient. You will also need to consider your approach to teaching and your students as well as the type of classroom environment you create. The idea of invitational education is an interesting one that may be unfamiliar to you.

Over two decades ago, Purkey and Novak (1996) wrote about an invitational approach to education comprised of four elements: trust, respect, optimism, and intentionality. Let’s consider each of these elements separately first and then collectively.

Trust is the bedrock of productive teaching and learning. In trusting relationships in the classroom, teachers and students work together and believe in each other. Students feel safe to take risks, try challenging tasks, ask for help, and resolve problems that arise. When **respect** is present in classrooms, students are valued and appreciated by the teacher and their peers for their unique attributes and identities. In respectful classrooms, teachers and students have shared responsibility for the well-being and success of others and the classroom as a whole. In such classrooms, **optimism** is the belief that each individual has untapped potential and that, as a member of the classroom, each person is expected to find ways to help others reach their potential. This means that cooperation and hope permeate the classroom, making it a positive and caring environment where every student can learn, grow, and succeed. The final element of invitational education is **intentionality**. This means that all practices, policies, and programs are designed to establish and support trust, respect, and optimism for all. It is not enough to assume that trust, respect, and optimism arise in the classroom or find their way into your teaching. This fourth element sits squarely on the shoulders of you—the teacher. By committing to creating a classroom where trust, respect, and optimism abound, you can ensure that your students have the right type of environment so they can become engaged (and suc-

cessful) readers and learners. See Margin Note 4.2 for video examples of how teachers create intentionally inviting classrooms.

So, if you work hard to create a classroom that aligns with invitational education, what does that mean for you as a teacher and how you interact with your students? Fisher, Frey, and Quaglia (2018) describe intentionally inviting teachers as those who know their students well because they spend time and effort in building relationships. They are consistent and calm in their interactions with students. They notice when students are learning and when they are struggling. They respond regularly with useful feedback, and they seek to build, maintain, and repair relationships so the classroom can function well, and all members can feel valued, comfortable, and supported.

We bet that you aspire to be an intentionally inviting teacher. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter is organized around ways that you can get to know your students, promote engaged learning, and use what you know about your students to provide relevant and appropriate instruction. Let's begin by looking at an intentionally inviting classroom and teacher in first grade.

Intentionally Inviting Teaching

Jasmine Ortiz is a kindergarten teacher with 4 years of teaching experience. From the time she decided to become a teacher, she knew that she wanted to be *that* teacher whom students love and other teachers want to be! She admits that things are not perfect every day, but she makes sure that each day she is focused on building relationships with her students, promoting cognitive engagement, and implementing engaging tasks with her 20 kindergarten students. Ms. Ortiz starts each day by warmly greeting her students at the classroom door. See Margin Note 4.3 for a video example of how a kindergarten teacher greets her students at the door each day.

Ms. Ortiz greets her students at the door when they arrive in the morning, and while they hang up their backpacks and get organized for the day, she circulates around the room to visit with as many students as possible. She asks them how their morning has been, what they ate for breakfast, how they are feeling, and other questions so she can get a sense of who might need a little extra encouragement, support, or space. She asks each question respectfully, keeping in mind that some students may not want to answer every question. Then Ms. Ortiz reminds students to visit the classroom library to browse and choose books they want to read that day. As students select their books, Ms. Ortiz connects with students by saying things such as, "Olivia, you picked a book that Classie read and enjoyed last week. You two should talk about the book after you've read it." Or, "Jamal, is that the first Frog and Toad book for you? When I was your age, I *loved* Frog and Toad. After you read it, let me know what you think." As the day unfolds, Ms. Ortiz reads aloud to her students and teaches small guided reading groups while the other children work with partners in literacy play centers such as a pretend store or restaurant.

After doing a shared reading lesson about magnets, Ms. Ortiz has her students work in small groups to explore magnets and record their observations in small lab notebooks. As the day continues, Ms. Ortiz provides opportunities for students to use math manipulatives to understand and apply math concepts, and she encourages students to read independently for a minute longer than the day before to help them develop their reading stamina. At the end of the day Ms. Ortiz is tired, but

Margin Note 4.2: Intentionally Inviting Classrooms

https://players.brightcove.net/268012963001/rJenLLPQx_default/index.html?videoId=5518274544001



Margin Note 4.3: Kindergarten Teacher Greeting Students

<https://www.newsflare.com/video/259487/health-education/awesome-teacher-lets-her-kids-pick-a-morning-greeting>



her students appear to be even more tired which she considers a “win” because, in engaged classrooms, students should be busy doing most of the hard work of learning.

Engaging Students in Literacy Learning

It’s generally pretty simple to learn your students’ names (and how to pronounce them correctly), but that is just the beginning. To promote engaged learning, it is imperative that you know your students well, so you understand them as individuals. An easy-to-implement yet effective strategy is called two-by-ten. Although this strategy was originally designed to help teachers understand and get to know students with challenging behaviors, it works great with all students. In a research study, Wlodkowski (1983) found that when used with students with challenging classroom behaviors, the two-by-ten strategy resulted in behavior improvements 85% of the time. The strategy is easy to implement but requires planning so that you can interact with all of the students early in the year to begin building and understanding each student as well as establishing positive relationships. For 2 minutes at a time for 10 days, you will spend time talking to a specific student. The purpose of talking with the student is to get to know (not to judge or assess) the student. The conversation should focus on positive things and not address any behavior or academic problems. For example, you might ask a student what they enjoy doing, how they spend their free time, about their favorite food or activity, and so on.

If you use transition times, individual conference time, walking time to or from recess or the lunchroom, and other available moments throughout the day, you will be able to talk to 10 students per day for a total of 20 minutes per day. If you have a class of 20 students who you want to talk with over multiple days in the first week of school, you may want to modify the strategy so that you speak to each student for 2 minutes two times the first week. You can then create a rotation where you focus on 5 or 10 students (i.e., 10 or 20 minutes each day) for 10 days before shifting your focus to the next group of students. You may find it helpful to jot down a few notes for each student to help you remember what you are learning about each student, but be sure your focus is on having a conversation with your students rather than conducting a formal interview or making it feel like an assessment. If you are in your placement classroom one or two days a week, you may want to modify the approach or wait to use it until your full-time student teaching experience.

Regardless of whether you use the two-by-ten strategy this term or not, you will definitely want to learn the names of all of the children in your placement classroom as quickly as possible. An easy approach that many of our teacher candidates have used successfully is to take a photo of each child holding paper with their name on it and drawings of things they like to do. You can use these photos on your phone, tablet, or laptop like digital flashcards. You can review the photos prior to being in the classroom each week so you can learn and remember each child’s name and a few things about them.



Connection to the Field: Learning Students’ Names

On the first day of your placement, ask your mentor teacher for a seating chart or roster of students. Practice saying each student’s name and ask either your mentor teacher or the child how to pronounce it correctly. Once you’re able to pronounce each name, find a way to memorize the names that fits your learning style. Make sure you can identify students when they are outside at recess or at lunch as well as sitting in the classroom.