

A Framework for Encouraging Authentic Engagement

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Research has shown that engagement plays an integral role in a student's education. It can influence behaviour, relationships, academic achievement and attendance. However, as most educators can attest, achieving authentic and sustained engagement with their students can be difficult. The goal of this project is to advance educators' understandings of key factors of engagement as well as provide them with the necessary strategies to authentically engage with their students. In the project proposal, the importance of engagement and the rationale behind the project are discussed. In the literature review, influential factors of engagement are examined. In the third chapter, strategies that are associated with each of these factors are presented and a framework is offered as a tool for engaging students more effectively. In the final chapter, the overall findings and changes to professional beliefs are discussed and recommendations are suggested for educators who are interested in the topic of engagement.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my family, especially my amazing wife Myriah Foort. Her continued support and dedication throughout the two years of the program made this possible.

Chapter 1: Project Proposal

Prologue

It seems as though almost everyone has had at least one influential teacher in their life. They might have been the type of teacher that was quick with a joke, was extremely knowledgeable around a certain topic, or just had the ability to build genuine rapport. The relationships that these types of teachers were able to achieve tend to be long lasting and meaningful for both the teacher and the student alike. We tend to look back on these types of teachers with a fondness and a great deal of respect. On the other hand, most people are able to reflect on their educational experience and recall a teacher that might have had an adverse impact on them as well. They might recall a teacher that was quick to anger, one that might have been solely driven by the curriculum and deadlines or experienced a teacher that viewed relationships as inconsequential to student success. In both examples, the teacher carries a great responsibility and potential for influencing students both positively and negatively. As a result, it is essential that educators are aware of the implications that they impart onto their students. In this proposal, I examine both negative and positive experiences, through my personal experiences as an elementary and middle school student, and discuss the impact that resulted from those experiences. Further, I reflect back on both of those experiences, from the vantage point of being an experienced educator, and examine how important the teacher-student relationship is and discuss how to promote authentically engaged students.

Opportunity Lost: Disenfranchisement of an Early Learner

"I think that your son may have to repeat the second grade."

My hands immediately became clammy and my mouth became like a desert. How was I going to repeat the second grade? I had hated it the first time I had taken it. At that moment, I

had a sudden realization that there would be a price to pay for all of the time that I had wasted sitting in the back of the class. My heart sank as the look of shock on my mother's face hit home. I had let her down and now I would realize the cost.

My teacher in grade two utilized what most would consider a "non-traditional" approach to teaching and learning. After the first week, through some form of anecdotal evaluation that she alone was privy to, she had separated the class in to two distinct groups. The students who had some form of engagement with her, the curriculum or both for that matter, were strategically located near the front of the class. The rest of the students, with whom I was not alone and numbered close to twelve, were located near the back of the class. We were an eclectic group to say the least. We were a mosaic of students with physical and mental disabilities, hyperactivity was rampant, there were both visible and non-visible minorities, and an array of other issues that were undiagnosed at that point in our education. For some reason unbeknownst to us, a large proportion of the group were males. Alternately, the group at the front of the class were a collection of what the teacher liked to refer to as her, "bright and shining stars." One can only surmise that the students at the front were academically ready to take on the rigours of grade two and had all of the tools that they would need to be successful.

Essentially, this created a two-tiered learning model that consisted of students who were most likely going to succeed in the class and then there were the rest of us, which did not stand a very good chance. We embraced our situation; however, as any group of grade two students would and we accepted our fate to wallow in the back of the classroom. There was an unfortunate sense of unabashed acceptance that went along with our group and an almost sagacity of brotherhood. Unfortunately, after a few days we realized that we were on our own and would have to, in essence, fend for ourselves. Lessons continued and teaching still occurred,

but our questions for clarification were met with frustration on the part of the teacher and snickers from the students from the front. Before long, questions from the back of the class became less frequent and divisions soon formed. Almost automatically, students from the front began to shun the students from the back. At recess we were ostracized for being different and soon found that we only associated with the other students who shared a similar fate.

Unfortunately, being at an early stage of my academic career as well as being young in my cognitive development, this created a great opportunity for unsupervised and unstructured free time. We quickly turned our attention away from the goings on at the front of the class and soon our interests spiralled into chaos. We wrestled, laughed, tickled, and completely ignored, and in turn were ignored, with what was going on in the rest of the class. When it was time for weekly spelling, we would draw pictures, math class would quickly deteriorate into pandemonium when counting on our fingers became too tedious and circle time was an excuse for sleeping. Unknown to the group at the back, we were forging a pathway in our academic careers that would set the tone for future struggles. The opportunity for engagement and enticing the group at the back of the class had been missed by the teacher. She surmised that she would devote her time and energy into students that wanted to learn and were obviously interested in what she was teaching them.

Results of an Unengaged Learner

In the years that followed, I struggled with the fact that I had some serious gaps in my learning, but what I began to realize was more damaging was the fact that my experience with segregating had repercussions in the form of a deep-rooted psychological impact as well. Each year when I would begin a new class I would gravitate towards the back, almost as a preconditioned response. I would rarely offer my opinion or seek clarification because of the fear

of being shunned by the rest of the class or the fear that I would be seen as different. I found that in my lack of engagement with my teacher or fellow students a situation has been created where school soon became loathed. Regrettably, I did not find any solace in the unengaging curriculum that neither enticed nor seemed to find a foothold in my mind. I drifted along in a miasma of routine. The energetic young boy, who was excited with the concept of experiencing school at the beginning of grade two was replaced with a nervous and anxious shell that was lacking in any form of self-confidence or connection to learning in. Boredom set in and was replaced with misbehaviour as I gravitated towards other students who seemed to also be lacking in any form of engagement. Inevitably, the excitement of my attention seeking behaviours resulted in several trips to the office and a few suspensions. I remember one evening my mother crying at the dinner table after a lengthy conversation with the principal. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and simply asked, "Where is that boy that I know loves school?"

In the years leading up to grade seven, I had felt lost in a sea of students, teachers, spelling tests, art projects and office referrals. None of it had made any perceptible impact on me and I casually shrugged it off as being inconsequential. I did not care about where I was headed and that flicker of hope that my mother still held onto was all but extinguished. I had developed a reputation as a troubled child who was difficult to teach or make any connection with. In the academic sense, I was not content to vacillate in mediocrity; I wanted to flourish as an abysmal failure.

Auspiciously, by the time that I had reached the end of grade six I stumbled upon a life changing encounter that righted my course and reignited the academic flame that I thought had flicked out long ago. I was walking down the hallway between classes when a teacher approached me. I did not know who he was and only saw him occasionally in passing. That day

he walked right up to me and said, "Hey John, I've made sure that you are in my class next year." That was it. He left me wondering why any teacher would want me in their classroom, let alone a teacher with whom I had no previous relationship. Teachers tended to avoid me and this one had said that he wanted me in his class. This brief encounter left me confused, but at the same time excited to think about what the next school year might hold.

The Value of Authentic Engagement: A Student's Perspective

The previous narrative, based on my own experiences, addresses the poignant implications of what can occur when an educator fails to create a learning environment where engagement is valued or utilized with all the learners in a class and the far-reaching consequences that can result for students. Alternately, the spark that was ignited from the encounter in the hallway at the end of grade six produced a turning point. My reflection on that pivotal encounter and the personal success of the ensuing school year that followed it enables me to realize that when an educator understands what a multi-faceted approach to engagement is and utilizes strategies that foster authentic engagement, then the ensuing results can be life changing for a student.

The optimism and resurgence of engagement with learning that was created in grade seven and the ability of the teacher to facilitate such a positive experience enabled me to find hope in a system, as a student, that I had previously thought was lost. From that time, I came to the understanding that when a teacher has the ability to engage so thoroughly and create an atmosphere where each student is valued and feels safe to take academic risks, then growth in every sense of the term is inevitable. For me as a student, the excitement, the hope that was renewed, the joys that were experienced and the confidence that was regained is captured in my following poem,

First Steps

My eyes were opened to the wonders of learning
When you enlightened my path to lifelong searching
My hand gripped the pen tightly
As it scritch-scratched across the page
Fervently trying to keep up with regalements
Of battles fought long ago in far off lands
My feet fell into cadence with the soldiers marching
Yet I never even ventured from the confines of your class
My imagination ascended to new heights and possibilities
When we closed the book and thought for ourselves
To take risks was encouraged and to question was expected
Nothing was to be taken as gospel
My voice was quiet and unsure
But you enabled me to discover that which I valued
My choices were not always right
But you allowed me the freedom to decide that for myself
Because I learned from that too
My heart sensed a calling when you empowered it to
Inspire others as you had done

The Value of Authentic Engagement: An Educator's Perspective

Looking back on those experiences now, from the vantage point of being an educator myself, I realize that the positive experiences of that grade seven school year, and the ability of

the teacher to fundamentally rekindle the ember that had all but been snuffed out, helped to shape the person that I am today. It is the primary reason that I became a teacher. The ability of that teacher to understand how to engage students and to motivate each individual student through a genuine interest in building positive relationships, create a meaningful curriculum, cultivate a safe learning environment where students felt comfortable to take risks, as well as having the ability to facilitate the knowledge that each and every student was entitled to their place in the classroom helped to not only right a wrong, but inspired each student to strive to reach their full potential and truly engage in their learning. Fortunately for me this contrast from my earlier schooled experience of being shunned and utterly disengaged from my learning solidified for me the type of teacher that I wanted to be, and the type of students that I wanted to work with.

Both the negative and positive experiences of my early childhood schooling guide me in my present daily teaching practices; to reflect upon ways that I can learn from those early encounters and also seek ways that I can further engage with my students. I want to be the teacher who understands that engagement for learning is achieved by creating positive relationships and facilitating opportunities where students are inspired towards lifelong learning. Like my grade seven teacher who was able to engage me and other students so authentically, I hope that I will be able to further understand what engagement is and how to win back students who are predominantly detached from their learning- those who tend to seek out that place in the back of the class.

Purpose of the Project

In 2007, I began work in an alternate classroom setting, with students who were typically unmotivated and lacked any form of engagement. While working with these students, I began to

further understand the eclectic nature of engagement and found that most students desire success and to find their "place" in the learning context. I was fortunate to have had a great personal example of an engaging teacher and some understanding of what I thought engagement should look like in the classroom. I applied strategies that I thought might work in terms of engagement, and although I did have some success, once students left my alternate class they seemed to fall back into the rut of becoming disengaged once again. I began to realize that many teachers do not have the training, experience, insight, nor understanding of how engagement plays such a vital role in the bigger picture of educating students. I began to wonder how I could be able to instill a desire for lifelong learning with students who were no longer in my care?

Due to funding cuts in my local school (and many other districts) most alternate programs were shuttered around 2010. Students who would typically be placed into alternate programs were positioned in the regular classroom setting. In terms of engagement, this situation created an extremely difficult teaching environment for teachers and students alike. There were, and continue to be too few classroom resources and not enough professional knowledge or experience to best meet the needs of these unengaged learners. A stop gap approach has been allocated in the form of an Integration Support Teachers (IST), Youth Care Workers (YCW) and School Based Team (SBT) intervention groups. Unfortunately, these solutions are only a temporary fixes in the form of an hour or two of intervention with the most unengaged or disruptive students. The interventions vary from year to year and from district to district. Unfortunately, this situation creates a discrepancy within the system. In my daily experiences as an educator, more students are falling through the cracks and the reality of more office referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and lower graduation rates are becoming the norm. Teachers are feeling deflated because they are not able to connect with all of the students in their charge, and students

are feeling let down in a system that does affectively engage them or fully meet their learning needs.

Project Focus

Student engagement is an issue that is fundamental to the teaching profession. Through research of the literature and the creation of an engagement framework, the goal of my inquiry is to assist people who work in the field of education to understand the nature of engagement and how there are several factors that contribute to whether a student will or will not engage in the learning process. The conceptions of student engagement are varied and multifaceted; however, it is my goal through this project to forward educators' understandings of key factors that are fundamental in creating learning environments where students become more engaged and to provide educators with the necessary strategies to authentically engage with their students. The factors that I have identified are engagement with teachers, engagement with peers, cognitive engagement and community engagement.

In the following literature review, I will explore and explain how these factors impact student engagement. In my third chapter, I present and discuss how to utilize strategies associated with each of these factors; to enable educators to engage students more effectively. In that chapter I create a framework that will give educators more of an understanding of the dynamic nature of engagement and strategies that they can utilize or early onset intervention so that more students are able to find their academic footing, engage more authentically in their learning and ultimately, better reach their full potential. The end goal of this project is to help more students find more successes in the school setting.

Through research into the aforementioned factors of engagement, and with a spirit of inquiry I endeavour to answer the question:

What strategies can educators utilize to encourage students to authentically engage in their learning?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There has been a shift in education during the past 20 years. Educational research has identified the importance of educators moving from a teacher-centred model of instruction, to one where students actively seek knowledge through inquiry and personal learning models (Boyer & Crippen, 2014). The BC Education Plan (2013) suggests that educators should create learning environments where there is less focus on specific content, to one where students find meaning and understanding for themselves (para. 2). This increased prominence of students taking ownership in their own education has potentially created learning opportunities, while at the same time it possibly creates a further deficit and consequences for students who are disengaged from their learning (Lagana-Riorden et al., 2011). The increased role that students are expected to play in directing their education and the learning process may be beneficial for students who are already engaged in their learning processes; however, where does this approach leave students who have habitually struggled with connecting to their schooling?

Rationale for Approaches to Inclusive Educational Practices

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the foundation of authentic student engagement, while trying to understand if engagement is linked to enhanced behavioural achievement, establishing and maintaining emotional and community connections, as well as the acquisition and enhancement of cognitive abilities. Framing this work within a social constructivist model of learning, I will work to understand if the literature supports the idea that engagement is a combination of the different factors listed above, and I will endeavour to contribute to the overall body of knowledge by correlating my findings into strategies that educators can utilize to encourage students towards an authentic engagement in their schooling.

Why are Student Disengaged?

Most educators can agree that they want their students to engage in their education and become lifelong learners. A vast majority of students do, but unfortunately, there is an ever-present minority that find it difficult to meaningfully engage and who tend to come from ethnic minority groups, low-socioeconomic status, have a disability, and whose first language is not English (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). There are a number of reasons why students may be disengaged and can range from a lack of connection to peers and adults, lack of parental involvement, socio-economic status, academic failure, behavioural issues and any number of life issues. In *Shades of Disengagement: High School Dropouts Speak Out*, the authors found that the contributing factors of why students are likely to disengage and ultimately, drop out of school are due to behaviour problems and risk-taking activities. More specifically, results indicate that behaviour problems, such as aggressive behaviours or delinquency, contribute to increasing the risk of dropping out as well as internalized behaviour problems like depression or anxiety (Lessard et al., 2008). The authors go further and suggested that "dropout risk factors most often reported in the literature are low socioeconomic status and elements related to family functioning" (p. 26). Lessard et al. also believed that disengagement can also be a result of "boys and girls who perceive little cohesion, conflicts and a lack of organization within the family [that] show a higher dropout risk than other students" (p. 26).

In Relationships Matter: Linking Teacher Support to Student Engagement and Achievement, Klem and Connell (2004) stated that, "...students with low levels of engagement are at risk for a variety of long-term adverse consequences, including disruptive behavior in class, absenteeism, and dropping out of school" (p. 263). Further, Willms (2003) found that:

Student disaffection is a precursor to other activities that render youths vulnerable to more serious problems. Other studies have documented a link between disaffection and substance abuse delinquency, and dropping out of school. Disaffection from school is therefore associated with engaging in activities that can have long-term harmful consequences. (p. 55)

Zyngier (2008) asserted that research in the understanding and teaching with engagement "has important implications for pedagogies that make engagement central for all students" (p.1767). Student engagement is viewed in contemporary literature as being fundamental for learning, and is one of the seminal factors of present and future academic success. As there is an ongoing shift in the way that teachers and learners interact in the classroom, then there may also need to be a shift in the way that educators engage learners for their present and future success. This begins with an understanding of what engagement is.

Defining Engagement

Engagement is definitely not a new concept in the field of education. There is a long standing view, beginning with research from John Dewey in the 1930s to Paulo Freire in the 1960s, that connects engagement with learning (Zyngier, 2008). Jimerson et al. (2003) identified specific indicators of engagement that recur throughout the research literature including "participation in school-related activities, achievement of high grades, amount of time spent on homework, and rate of homework completion" (p. 10). Taylor and Parsons (2011) agreed that "The majority of these measures track levels of achievement (outcomes such as high scores, full attendance for the year) but not levels of student engagement in learning (interest, time on task, enjoyment in learning)" (p. 5). Fortunately, contemporary research has taken the idea of engagement further by looking at qualitative measures, rather than just quantitative

indicators, to find that engagement includes a wide range of constructs that help define how students act and how they internalize their emotions. This type of engagement - of both internal and external markers - is described as "Energy in action, the connection between person and activity" (Russell, Ainley, & Frydenberg, 2005, p. 1).

Newmann (1992) found that students who are engaged "make a psychological investment in learning. They try hard to learn what school offers. They take pride not simply in earning the formal indicators of success, but in understanding the material and incorporating or internalizing it in their lives" (p. 1). Also, when faced with challenges and hardship, students make a conscious decision to face the challenge and overcome it. This form of academic resiliency is important because this process of "authentic engagement" may lead to higher academic achievement throughout the individual's life (Zyngier, 2008, p. 1776). Finn and Voelkl (1993) also suggested that engagement in school is a combination of "having both a behavioral component, termed participation, and an emotional component, termed identification" (p. 249). Taylor and Parsons (2011) raised an interesting counter-point when they asked the question of whether a learner must be able to function "in all arenas of engagement for successful learning to take place? For example, some researchers studied students' need to 'belong' to achieve high grades and graduate. But, must students belong to be academically successful; or, must they simply behave?" (p. 5). While there does not appear to be a single definition for engagement, Coates (2007) amalgamated several definitions when he stated, "Engagement is seen to comprise active and collaborative learning, participation in challenging academic activities, formative communication with academic staff, involvement in enriching educational experiences, and feeling legitimated and supported" (p. 122).

The BC Ministry of Education (2013) proposed that student engagement involves "recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people through the provision of real opportunities for youth to become involved in decisions that affect them at individual and systemic levels" (para. 1). Jones's (2011) qualitative case study titled *Narratives of Student Engagement in an Alternative Learning Context* found that engagement is "A dynamic process, rather than a static outcome" and that engagement "provides a representation of the development of motivation and learning in real time, through the subjective experience of youth" (p. 220). Additionally, Fredricks et al. (2004) in *School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence* considered student engagement as a "metaconstruct" or an organizing framework – one that integrates such areas as belonging, behavioral participation, motivation, self-efficacy and school connectedness (p. 60). As a result, most contemporary researchers believe that engagement is comprised of three distinct concepts of: student behaviour, social and community connections, as well as internal cognition. Willms et al. (2009) agreed with this stance and iterated the importance of academic challenge as well as teaching the skills to be able to meet the challenge, as being an integral aspect of all three components when they stated that "The relationship between instructional challenge and all three dimensions (social, academic and intellectual) of engagement is significant" (p. 4). Foliano et al. (2010) took this idea further:

Behavioural engagement draws on the idea of participation: it includes involvement in academic and social activities and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out. Emotional engagement encompasses positive or negative reactions to teachers and school and is presumed to reflect emotional ties to an institution which influence pupils' willingness to do the required work. Cognitive engagement indicates the willingness of the pupil to exert mental effort to comprehend

complex concepts and ideas at school. These three dimensions of engagement are dynamically interrelated. (p. 7)

Taylor and Parsons (2011) also attempted to expand on the idea of three components of engagement when they added an additional dimensions to the description that included "academic, cognitive, intellectual, institutional, emotional, behavioral, social, and psychological engagement" (p. 5). In complete contrast to this theory, and most schools of thought in general, Carlson (2005) purported that there does not need to be any form of special consideration when engaging students, "It is very common to hear people say, 'Here's the Millennial or the digital generation' and we have to figure out how they learn. Poppycock. We get to mould how they learn" (p. 2). Fortunately, this narrow view of engagement is in stark contrast to most contemporary beliefs. The idea that educators mould how students learn does have merit, but to absolve the student, community and any other contributor of any responsibility of engagement seems like a theory that will fall by the wayside.

Through an examination of the literature, it is clear that engagement is a combination of several different factors that are interdependent. To have authentic engagement, a student cannot simply act according to the school rules, they have to also be able to build and maintain relationships with not only teachers, but peers as well. Likewise, engagement will not be achievable if the curriculum is not relevant and purposeful. The philosophy of the school environment also plays a significant role in engaging and maintaining engagement with students. In coming to a working definition of engagement, a further question emerges: who is responsible for engagement? Does the responsibility fall on teachers, students, parents, the school community, or is it an intricate relationship of responsibility amongst all of these stakeholders?

Who is Responsible for Student Engagement?

Teachers. To understand the complex and fluid nature of engagement, we need to identify if responsibility lies with one group, individual or all of the stakeholders involved? Smith et al. (2005) stated that, "Engaging students in learning is principally the responsibility of the teacher, who becomes less an imparter of knowledge and more a designer and facilitator of learning experiences and opportunities" (p. 88). Here teachers are responsible for providing environments where engagement is attainable; moving ideas outside of the textbook and providing experiential learning opportunities beyond lecture and rote learning approaches. As Smith et al. wrote, "teaching is not covering the material for the students; it's uncovering the material with the students"(p. 88). Windham (2005) recommended that, to engage learners, curriculum as well as educational activities must include "Interaction, Exploration, Relevancy, Multimedia and Instruction" (p. 5). This approach positions the teacher alongside the students, where there is room for mutual discovery of knowledge, rather than the teacher simply imparting information.

Students. The idea that teachers are responsible for creating an engaging atmosphere in the classroom is plausible, but the responsibility does not rest solely with educators. Students have an important stake in that they need to be accountable for their learning. It is the responsibility of the student to attempt to make an effort to engage, even if they do not feel that they will engage in every aspect of their learning or that they may not have the support systems in place to foster authentic engagement. Unfortunately, the student voice on this matter has not been thoroughly addressed in the research. Carlson (2005) identified this when he stated that, "We must better understand these youth to determine how to best engage them in learning; yet, there is a notable lack of 'student voice' or student perspectives in the literature on student engagement" (p. 6). If the student voice has not been sought out in the past or thoroughly

understood, then where does the responsibility fall? Does the responsibility lie with parents or guardians if the student is not of an age where they might understand the importance of engagement or realize that "Engagement in learning is both an end in itself and a means to an end" (Russell et al. 2005, p. 3).

Parents. Parents do play a vital role in whether a student will or will not choose to engage in the aforementioned factors of engagement. Research points that either direct or indirect involvement has long-lasting benefits to a student's success. Davis and Lambie (2005) found that:

Both students' stage of development and growing interest in peers and others outside the family and the schools' lack of a planned approach to continued parental involvement in school activities and academics lower the participation of parents in their children's academic and social life at school. Yet, the evidence suggests that parental involvement is not only still important for middle school students' school success, but also for later academic success. (As cited in Yun & Kusum, 2008, p. 2)

Parents are in a unique position because they impart their cultural values and ideals onto their offspring. If parents value education and put an emphasis on the importance of achieving an education, then their children will most likely be influenced by those ideals and engage in the education process. As Yun and Kusum (2008) found, "Students whose parents stay connected to their children and schools are likely to have higher school engagement and better performance" (p. 9). Unfortunately, this position of influence can have negative implications as well. If parents do not place value in education or if their culture does not share in the idea of the importance of an education, then their offspring will most likely be influenced by these ideals and will be less likely to engage authentically. As parents play an integral role by influencing whether a student

will engage or not, the school culture and philosophy also play a vital role in providing opportunities that will determine if a student will choose to engage or not.

Schools. As the research suggests, when parents are involved in their children's education and parents have a close connection to the school, then students will most likely be able to achieve a higher form of engagement. It is the responsibility of the school to encourage parents to engage in some form of involvement. For example, Yun and Kusum (2008) advised that schools should encourage parental engagement by:

Including and informing parents of school activities, projects, and co-curricular activities. Schools can also invite parents to participate in activities both curricular and co-curricular, provide them with information on the social and emotional development of their children at this stage, and seek their input and guidance in educational decisions about their children. In sum, schools and parents can create formal and informal ways to have positive and ongoing two-way flow of information and care to support higher school engagement and achievement of young adolescents. (p. 9)

Research demonstrates that student engagement is not the sole responsibility of one educational stakeholder or group. To achieve authentic student engagement, there needs to be a combination of support systems in place from teacher, parents, and school community as well as a willingness on the part of the student to want to engage when the supports are there. How do educational stakeholders implement a combination of these factors to achieve the goal of authentic student engagement? Taylor and Parsons (2011) argued that there needs to be a fundamental change in the way that we educate for engagement, and the majority of the literature supports that change. A firm understanding of what engagement is, who is responsible for achieving it, and how educators can support it are all important in understanding potential change. A review and

change in education policy and pedagogy is paramount. In fact, Taylor and Parsons confirmed that there needs to be a systematic change from "Kindergarten through post-secondary and strongly believe we fail to meet the needs of students who have grown up in a digital world and are heading into different cultural and economic futures rich in ever-advancing technology and information" (p. 8). Systematic change begins with an understanding of how to achieve change through different facets of engagement.

Authentic Engagement

In the school setting, authentic engagement can be identified as constructive behaviour; making positive choices and adhering to expected school and societal norms. Russell et al. (2005) hold that for higher learning outcomes to occur, students must engage authentically in their learning because "Engagement here is not optional but rather a necessary condition of learning" (p.4). Klem and Connell (2005) asserted that having positive authentic engagement allows student to use "coping strategies for dealing with a challenge, particularly whether they engage or withdraw when faced with perceived failure in school" (p. 262). Students who are able to overcome a difficult challenge have the ability to develop an "optimistic attitude...and plan to prevent problems from occurring in the future" (p. 262). On the other hand, students who are not authentically engaged tend to do the opposite. When difficulties or challenges arise, they tend to avoid the situation by using delaying tactics or removing themselves entirely from the situation. Usually, "Negative emotions such as anger, blame, denial, anxiety, and hopelessness accompany these behaviors" (p. 262). Main and Bryer (2007) understand that there is a need for reform in the educational system that "aims to meet the academic and socio-emotional developmental needs of young adolescents" (p. 91). Most researchers understand that the fundamentals of how

educators teach and engage students has to fundamentally change, in the entire education system, from the ground up.

In the qualitative phenomenological research article titled *Teachers' Conceptions of Student Engagement: Engagement in Learning or in Schooling?* Harris (2011), conducted semi-structured interviews, with 20 different teachers, to determine what factors increase student engagement. The author believed that research has been conducted in the past that reflected engagement as a quantifiable measure by examining "pupils' attendance, compliance with school rules, and participation in classroom and extracurricular activities" (p. 377). In the study, the author found that to be authentically engaged, students must "understand the purpose of their learning and see it as being related to their personal goals in order to engage and learn" (p. 383). If students do not feel the learning directly relates to them or connects to them on a personal level, then their engagement will not be authentic or enduring. Correspondingly, Saeed and Zyngier (2012) worked to understand the connection between motivation and engagement. In their qualitative case study they found that students who are engaged in their learning have a positive relationship with their teacher. These students "demonstrate commitment to their learning tasks and find inherent value in the work being prepared by their teacher". The authors concluded that "Engagement is students' participation in academic, social or extracurricular activities and is considered important in achieving desired learning outcomes" (p. 259). Authentic engagement guides students' interest into important learning activities. Likewise, Klem and Connell (2005) asserted that having positive authentic engagement allows student to use "coping strategies for dealing with a challenge, particularly whether they engage or withdraw when faced with perceived failure in school" (p. 262). Students who are able to overcome a difficult challenge have the ability to develop an "optimistic attitude...and plan to prevent

problems from occurring in the future" (p. 262). In contrast, students who are not authentically engaged tend to do the opposite. When difficulties or challenges arise, they tend to avoid the situation by using delaying tactics or removing themselves entirely from the situation. Usually, "Negative emotions such as anger, blame, denial, anxiety, and hopelessness accompany these behaviors" (p. 262). Resultantly, as authentic engagement is paramount to personal learning, so too is engagement with teachers and peers important in creating and maintaining connections within the learning process.

Engagement with Teachers

Klem and Connell (2004) stated that students who are able to "perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environments in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school. In turn, high levels of engagement are associated with higher attendance and test scores" (p. 270). Likewise, in *Do Girls and Boys Perceive Themselves as Equally Engaged in School? The Results of an International Study from 12 Countries*, Lam et al. (2012) found that among the diverse factors that influence student engagement, the teacher and student relationship has received substantial support for being one of the predictors of engagement. They wrote that, "Teachers have a very important role to play in enhancing student engagement in school. When students perceive care and concern from their teachers, the chances for them to be engaged in school are higher" (pp. 90-91). Equally, Saeed and Zyngier (2012), found that the majority of the students in their study revealed that they had "good relations with their teacher as they viewed their teacher as 'okay, nice and helping' and they reported being happy in their classroom" (p. 259). All of these factors contributed to the students' success in the classroom and motivation in their engagement. Taylor and Parsons (2011) declared that "[r]espectful relationships and interaction – both virtual and personal – are

shown to improve student engagement. Students today are intensely social and interactive learners" (p. 8). Students need to feel that their social interactions are meaningful and have purpose. Taylor and Parsons understood the importance of building meaningful relationships and found that through those relationships, students are able to weather the emotional storm of adolescence, "As students progress through middle and secondary schools, they face increasing complexity. Students themselves consistently say that what most helped them thrive in spite of these challenges was the quality of relationships they developed with adults in their schools" (p. 10). In contrast, Baloğlu (2009), in *Negative Behavior of Teachers With Regard to High School Students in Classroom Settings*, found that the biggest negative factor that increased students' disengagement from learning was teachers "behaving aggressively, threatening with low marks, and making discrimination among students" (p. 76). Students also found that teachers who were more apt to insult them and their performance, who acted in an 'authoritarian way', and who did not find importance in building relationships had an increased negative impact on their overall engagement and connection to their learning (p.76). Alternately, students found that teachers who provided a "supportive climate" for their learning and "behaved more friendly towards them" as well as "smil[ing] and encourag[ing] more" created an atmosphere of engagement and positive learning (pp. 77-78). Similarly, Harris (2011) stated that "[s]ocial support from teachers [is] an important factor in school engagement, even after parent demographics (i.e. single parent, poverty, gender, level of school)" (p. 377). In contrast, Furrer and Skinner (2003) understood the negative implications that can occur when there is a lack of meaningful relationships or social engagements in a student's life. Furrer and Skinner identified that "feelings of boredom, frustration, sadness, and anxiety in the classroom are exacerbated when children feel alienated" (p. 160).

In *Narrative of Student Engagement in an Alternate Learning Context*, Jones (2011) conducted an ethnographic qualitative research project structured through observation, semi-structured interviews and narrative inquiry. The author found that engagement is a social and academic progression. Student engagement is "most accurately conceived of having an affective and a behavioral component. Identification with school reflects an emotional and internal psychological state. It is theorized to consist of a feeling of belonging and a sense of value" (p. 221). Likewise, Saeed and Zyngier (2012) found that educators need to be able to focus on several different attributes that consist of "student individuality, academic tasks, the school and classroom community and the external community that may influence the student and school" (p. 262) to increase authentic engagement. Jones (2011) attributed "social and academic or a combination of social and academic" issues as being strong contributing factors for a lack of engagement (p. 225). The emotional engagement that many students experience can have a positive or negative consequence on the individual, depending on the type of relationship that they experience. Research today is from a foundation of social cognitive perspective that realizes that engagement is a function of human cognition situated within a particular context (Jones, 2011). Dunleavy and Milton (2009) agreed with Jones in terms of context when they found that:

When students have opportunities to connect with adults who approach these relationships with a spirit of caring, empathy, generosity, respect, reciprocity and a genuine desire to know students personally, they can make a unique contribution to young peoples' emerging adaptive capacity, self-sufficiency, resiliency, confidence, and knowledge of themselves as learners. (p. 15)

Educators play an integral role in building relationships with students, and will affect how a student will engage in the school setting. It is up to the teachers and other school-based educators

to create environments where students are more apt to want to engage than choose to be disengaged. Knesting (2008) called this creating, "caring, supportive, and respectful" environments that give students the "ability to succeed in school [and having] a significant impact on their lives" (p. 8). Likewise, the relationships that students build with peers are determining factors in establishing engagement and deciding factors in whether the engagement will be sustained over extended periods of time.

Engagement with Peers

Just as a student's sense of belonging and feelings of acceptance from teachers plays an integral role in determining their level of engagement, so too does the relationships that are established with peers. Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that an influential factor is "children's perceptions of the support they receive from peers. A number of studies have demonstrated a link between children's perceptions of peer social and emotional support and their academic goals, engagement, and self-concept" (p. 150). When students feel a sense of support and security in their relationships with peers, they have a higher sense of understanding of who they are and their place in the school context, which have a direct influence on their behaviour and their academic commitments. Additionally, Dornbusch and Brown (1992), found that "peers are the most potent influence on their [students'] day-to-day behaviors in school (e.g., how much time they spend on homework, if they enjoy coming to school each day, how they behave in the classroom" (As cited in Furrer and Skinner, 2003, p. 150). In contrast, Jimerson (2003) found that "some children [who] are victimized by peers and others at school, such unrecognized abuse may cause pervasive emotional, social, and academic problems" (p.5). Furrer and Skinner (2003) agreed and found that "children who are rejected by their peers, who experience more loneliness and social isolation, and who affiliate with more disaffected peers are themselves more likely to

become disaffected from academic activities and eventually leave school" (p. 150). On the other hand, Furrer and Skinner established that "feeling connected and important is not just a by-product of doing well in school; a sense of belonging or relatedness plays an integral role in children's motivational development" (p. 160). Just as building relationships with teachers and peers is important for the individual and school community as a whole, research has demonstrated that cognitive engagement also plays an important function in determining whether a student will engage authentically in the learning context.

Cognitive Engagement

Appleton et al. (2006) in *Measuring Cognitive and Psychological Engagement: Validation of the Student Engagement Instrument* (2006) found that cognitive engagement includes "internal indicators, such as self-regulation, relevance of schoolwork to future endeavors, value of learning, and personal goals and autonomy" (p. 429). Likewise, Fredricks et al. (2004) stated that, "Students who adopt learning rather than performance goals are focused on learning, mastering the task, understanding, and trying to accomplish something that is challenging" (p. 64). Saeed and Zyngier (2012) agreed that "When students' need for competence, relatedness and autonomy are fulfilled by their teacher, then student motivation and engagement is enhanced" (p. 262). It is therefore the teacher's task to design work that motivates their students "to realize their potential by engaging them in intellectually challenging learning experiences" (Krause et al., 2006, p. 267). Correspondingly, Taylor and Parsons (2009) understood this concept when they found that students also "want their teachers to know how they learn. They want their teachers to take into account what they understand and what they misunderstand, and to use this knowledge as a starting place to guide their continued learning" (p. 8).

Students who are cognitively engaged tend to be able to self-regulate and minimize their participation in distracting behaviour. They have some control over their learning and are able to make conscious decisions that directly affect their progress. Jones (2011) stipulated the importance of providing engaging learning environments that "meet students' unique academic and socio-emotional needs" (p. 221). To further attest to this, Windham (2005) stated in *Educating the Net Generation*:

Just as we want to learn about the Web by clicking our own path through cyberspace, we want to learn about our subjects through exploration. It's not enough to accept the professor's word. We want to be challenged to reach our own conclusions and find our own results. The need to explore is implicit in our desire to learn. (p. 5.8)

The value that students place on their learning has a direct correlation with the environment that they are submersed in, the content and the connection that they find in the content. Alternately, Windham (2005) found that, "If the community in which learners explore is sterile and lacks context, there is a chance transference of knowledge will not occur beyond the classroom" (p. 5.12). Further, Baloğlu (2009) stated that the challenges that educators face is "to examine what they are offering their pupils, how it is offered and whether it meets the needs of the pupils" (p. 70).

When teachers provide learning environments where students are cognitively engaged, the research has shown that they will likely engage more authentically. Providing environments where students are cognitively engage is only part of the puzzle, Klem and Connell (2005) asserted that "[s]tudents also need to feel they can make important decisions for themselves, and the work they are assigned has relevance to their present or future lives. Some researchers refer to this as autonomy support" (p. 262). Therefore, teachers need to create curriculum that is

"relevant, meaningful, and authentic – in other words, it needs to be worthy of their time and attention" (Willms, et al., 2009, p. 34). Additionally, students need to understand that their engagement with the content is far reaching in both the present and the future, and that they see purpose in what they are learning. In contrast, some students may have the ability to put in a minimal effort and might still find a level of short-term success. That is, they can be disengaged and complete some of the work with only minimal effort. But Newmann et al. (1992) found that if most students' learning is "approached in this manner, it will yield only superficial understanding and short-term retention, unlikely to be applied or transferred beyond a few school test" (p. 14). Fortunately, students who authentically seek to engage in the learning context are able to see past short-term gains and understand the investment they are making will have long term benefits.

Equally to cognitive engagement, constructing a philosophy of positive school environments promotes a sense of belonging and involvement that has a long-term influence on students' feelings of acceptance and understanding of place in the school community as a whole.

Community Engagement

In a detailed study, Dunleavy and Milton (2009) asked students what they thought the ideal learning situation would look like in the school setting, and what would increasing engagement entail? Findings from this study include students: (1) want to have opportunities to learn from each other and from others in the community; (2) have resources, outside of the school setting, with whom they are able to make positive connections with and learn from their expertise; and (3) have more opportunities for dialogue with those community resources over an extended period of time (p. 10). When a student has the option of learning from a mentor or an expert in the field, this takes the learning experience to a new level of possibilities. Building

strong collective ties only serve to create a stronger community of learners as well as stronger shared relations.

Hazel and Allen (2013) found that, "The process of creating an inclusive school community is often elusive" (p. 337). Interestingly, Willms (2009) established that "[d]ifferences among schools in their levels of student engagement have less to do with students' family background than they do with school policies and practices" (p. 3). In the broader context, Ministries of Education set the direction for each district through setting curriculum standards, professional development and regulation. This direction can shift according to which government is in power at the time, or at the direction of an education minister. In the district context, educational needs are varied and philosophies are set around specific requirements and goals. Unless a district has an identified and clear set of goals that are shared throughout each school in the district, then schools are essentially left to the direction of the administration to set that direction, or lack thereof. Unfortunately, Hazel and Allen (2013), found that there is a surprising amount of schools where "systems aren't systems. They are only boundary lines drawn by somebody, somewhere. They are not systems because they do not arise from a core of shared beliefs about the purpose of public education" (p. 337). Hazel and Allen (2013) contended that "[m]embers of the typical neighborhood school community come with diverse beliefs and attitudes related to learning and teaching; thus, rarely does a common pedagogical vision naturally form" (p. 353). This inconsistent trend makes it difficult for schools to set their direction in terms of creating environments where community is valued and utilized. However, it is possible. When a school makes the commitment, it requires "a shared commitment to a common purpose, to each other in pursuing that purpose; and diverse views on the collective decision-making process " (Sautner, 2008, p. 150).

How does this commitment benefit students in the learning context? Hazel and Allen (2013) found that with each school studied, the data illustrated that:

Pedagogy can play a role in creating a unique school culture that influences the daily flow and structure of learning. Having a common pedagogical vision facilitated trusting relationships, provided a framework and reasoning for decision making, and served to protect the school from drastic changes due to outside influences. (p. 352)

The positive benefits of sharing a common philosophy around community are quite obvious in the research literature. Adelman and Taylor (2011) felt that creating a sense of community creates "options and choices for students, both in school and in the community, can better address barriers to learning, promote child and youth development, and establish a sense of community that supports learning and focuses on hope for the future" (p. 4). In agreement, Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that when a student has a sense of belonging and feel that they are part of the bigger school community it "is hypothesized to trigger energized behavior, such as effort, persistence, and participation; to promote positive emotions, such as interest and enthusiasm; and to dampen negative emotions, such as anxiety and boredom (p. 149). Schaps (2009) also found that emphasizing community created opportunities for "social and civic participation: for example, fairness, concern for others and personal responsibility. This emphasis on high purposes establishes common ground and shapes the norms that govern daily interaction" (p. 9). These daily interactions create, what Schaps referred to as, "opportunities to cooperate and to be of service, [where] students can learn the skills involved in relating to others and can develop wider networks of positive relationships" (p. 9). In contrast, Furrer and Skinner (2003) stated that "Children who feel unconnected to key social partners should find it harder to become constructively involved in academic activities; should more easily become bored, worried, and

frustrated; and should be more likely to become disaffected" (p. 149). Schaps (2009) countered that there are long term benefits associated with building community into the school social fabric:

Having some choice in how one goes about one's own learning, and some voice in the decisions that affect one's group, also helps to prepare students for the demanding roles they will assume in later life. Developmentally appropriate 'voice and choice' is also affirming for children, just as it is for adults. (p. 9)

Maintenance is difficult, however, in a system with high teacher turnover, attrition, and issues with students' mobility. Hazel and Allen (2013) found that for continued success "activities around community-building, conflict-resolution, and teacher and staff collaboration were paramount to creating and maintaining a strong school community" (p. 351).

Conclusion

In reviewing the research literature, it is apparent that students become detached from their learning due to one or a combination of factors including behavioural, social, community or cognitive disengagement(s). This process tends to occur over a period of time and is usually not the result of a one-time identifiable event. The process of disengagement can be mitigated, however, through a series of engagement intercessions involving educators, teachers, peers, other professionals as well as the student themselves. When engaging students, educators need to be mindful of the fact that it is a process and is most effective when children (1) have the opportunity to experience continued connection to their learning context; (2) have the opportunity to develop positive relationships with both their teachers and peers; (3) are able to understand that they are part of a school community of learners; and (4) are also able to actively personalize and apply curriculum to their personal lives. As educators work to make schools

more engaging places for learning and to foster the engagement of students, students' views and opinions must also be recognized and validated. Students need to feel that they have a reason for learning, be included in the purpose for what they learn, and have a realization and understanding of future academic goals and how their learning applies to their goals. The intimidating task of integrating an entirely new pedagogical system along with the idea of including students in their own education may be a daunting task, but students' input will be invaluable for change. As Kellet (2005) stated, "[c]hildren are party to the subculture of childhood which gives them a unique 'insider' perspective that is critical to our understanding of children's worlds" (p. 1). That understanding and shared partnership will be integral in the era of 21st Century learning with expectations of implementing personalized learning models. Ultimately, the interdependence of behaviour, relationships, connection to community and personalized cognition are all facets that need to be established and maintained in an on-going basis if students are going to find success in the present and future of learning.

Throughout this literature review, I have found that even though the current research does acknowledge that there are specific factors of engagement, authors have not yet created a cohesive strategy to integrate all four aspects of engagement. For that reason, in the next section of this project I create a framework, based on themes within the current research as well as my personal experiences, which will be a useful tool for educators to promote authentic engagement.

Chapter 3: Project

Project Focus and Rationale

As illustrated in chapter one, engagement can be the result of one individual, a positive experience or a collective vision that is enacted on a daily basis. Research reminds us that engagement is a concept that is in constant flux and is challenging to achieve at the best of times, but is critical to student success (Newman, 1992; Jimerson et al., 2003; Coates, 2007; Zyngier, 2008; Taylor and Parsons, 2011; and Jones, 2011). The topic of engagement has been an area of interest for most of my teaching career and a philosophy that I am constantly trying to refine and improve upon. Positive experiences in both my personal and professional career have enabled me to have a better understanding of how to engage students for authentic engagement. There are many different factors that have an impact of engagement including: teachers, peers, curriculum and the school community.

This chapter focuses on synthesizing existing research and personal experience into a workable framework for authentic student engagement (see Appendix A). As Case (2008) suggested, a framework is necessary because it allows us to "Move beyond the realm of anecdotal descriptions, and enables theorising on the reasons for impoverished student learning experiences, which in turn suggests ways to improve this situation" (p. 322). While there has been considerable research and interest around the topic of engagement, none seems to include all four areas of engagement, namely teacher, peer, cognitive and community engagement. This project presents a framework reconciling all four areas of engagement into a workable resource for educators. While theory is important for direction, without context, it is difficult to evaluate and implement. Thus as the framework is defined, it is augmented with specific examples of strategies throughout this chapter. Ideally, explaining specific approaches within the context of

the learning environment will enable educators to have a better understanding of how to effectively utilize each strategy.

The components of the framework can be used together as a collection of recommendations and strategies or they can be used individually. Educators are reminded that what might work in one situation might not work in others. More specifically, it is important to find a balanced or personalized approach to each child's needs, rather than a rigid or fixed approach to engagement. Finally, the framework is not intended to replace sound practice, rather, it is meant as another resource that teachers can utilize as they work with students who struggle to authentically engage in the learning process.

The following section addresses what authentic engagement is and asks the question- what can teachers do to improve student engagement? Three strategies are suggested to answer this difficult question, namely checking in with students, alternate learning environments and providing specific students with choice.

Authentic Engagement

In chapter two, authentic engagement was defined as conduct that was productive, making positive choices as well as following the expectations that are set out in the school community (Jimerson et al., 2003; Taylor and Parsons, 2003; Newman, 1992; & Finn and Voelkl, 1993). Engagement also operates within an organizational framework (Brooks et al, 2012), is dependent upon autonomy (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012), relatedness and a sense of belonging (Goodenow & Grady, 1993) as well as providing relevance and choice (Abbott, 2014). Students are constantly faced with difficulties and conflict in their everyday school lives and their emotions can range from feelings of depression, detachment, anxiety, etc., to feelings of contentedness, fulfillment, and connection. These emotions are fluid and can fluctuate not only

from day to day, but from hour to hour. So how do educators recognize these fluctuations and influence students towards feeling connected and authentically engaged?

Engagement with Teachers

Most teachers understand that the students with whom they have had a positive and supportive relationship are more willing to take academic risks, more willing to seek help and are more likely to thrive academically. Davis & McPartland (2012) understood this correlation when they stated that "Students are likely to be more engaged when they have a personal and respectful relationship with the teachers they encounter during the school day" (p. 526). When a student feels a positive connection with their teacher they are more likely to follow classroom behavioural expectations, and be more academically engaged. Skinner and Pitzer (2012) established that this type of relationship is mutually beneficial when they stated that "Teachers have their own needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy, and when they are met, it provides opportunities for more constructive engagement and coping, everyday resilience, vigor, vitality, and the development of teaching expertise" (p. 34). So where does one begin to build this type of complex and dynamic relationship? Consider student check-ins, alternate learning environments and the use of a choices chart for strategies to improve engagement with teachers.

This section looks at checking in with students as an effective strategy for establishing engagement with teachers. Davis & McPartland (2012) understood that checking in as an effective tool that allows teachers to show "affection and appreciation for their students, know a lot about their students, [and] dedicate time and energy to their students" (p. 526). The subsequent sections investigate alternate learning environments and the use of a choices chart to further promote student engagement.

Check-ins. The strategy of checking in with students is an effective tool for promoting

and maintaining engagement. Reschly et al. (2012) suggested that checking in "is a structured mentoring intervention to promote student success and engagement at school and with learning, through relationship building and systematic use of data to design personalized connected interventions" (p. 7). Checking in with students is not just an exercise where superficial questions are asked, it is an in depth process and an opportunity to demonstrate genuine care. Finn and Zimmer (2012) found that "Substantial research has linked engagement to teacher warmth and supportiveness. In this research, teacher warmth is a collection of attributes including liking and being interested in their students, believing in their capabilities, and listening to their points of view" (p. 105). There are three distinct types of check-ins: whole class, individual and targeted intervention.

Whole class. The first type of check-in is termed whole class and usually occurs in the first block of the day. It ranges from teacher directed questions to student lead discussions around a given topic. Discussion topics like current events are a good opportunity for a whole class check-in. This gives the teacher the opportunity to guide the discussion around what is happening in the world today, and enables students to critically reflect on world events. These discussions allow for open and frank discussion where differing opinions are valued and respected. This type of check-in allows the teacher some insight into the thoughts and emotions of individual students as well, while simultaneously providing students a chance to further understand the feelings and beliefs of their peer group as well. This type of check in also supports connection making, further communication, and relevance of students' education to the world. Whole class check-ins also allow the teacher to read each individual student as topics are being discussed. A teacher can do a visual scan to see who is tired, agitated or might have missed breakfast. A visual scan of students enables the teacher to make a mental note of who might need

more support, more patience or even a sympathetic ear.

Individual check-ins. The second type of check-in is termed individual and supports the establishment of a mentorship type relationship with specific students. This type of check-in typically occurs before the start of the school day and lasts from 10-15 minutes in duration. Students on this type of check-in are the type who might consistently struggle academically, exhibit anxiety and/or might not have a close connection with a peer group. This type of student may display that they have some of the greatest needs in the class.

When teachers have a better understanding of their students' needs, they are better equipped to be able to suggest strategies or solutions that students might not be able to discover on their own. For example, if a student consistently exhibits anxiety in certain situations, individual check-ins provide opportunities for the teacher to develop strategies to identify triggers to the anxiety and develop a covert signal for the student to indicate when they need to leave the classroom. Teachers can also use the individual check-in time to review strategies that students can use when they feel that their anxiety is heightened. Michail (2011) reiterated the positive benefits to this type of relationship when he stated that "In the many programs that have been reviewed in the literature, the one component that is consistently associated with positive outcomes is the establishment of a close relationship between the student presenting with challenging behaviours and a supportive adult" (p. 166). In some situations; however, individual check-ins might not be successful so targeted intervention may be necessary.

Targeted intervention. The third type of check-in, which is termed targeted intervention, applies to students who have been recognized as having sustained and ongoing behaviour struggles after whole group and individual check-ins have proven to be unsuccessful. When the teacher's tool-kit of strategies has proven to be less successful, then assistance may be needed.

Counsellors and youth care workers work closely with students who are in need of direct, one-on-one intervention. Both counsellors and youth care workers are invaluable resources in a school. In most situations, they are able to develop engaging relationships with students that would struggle with being in a regular classroom because of their prevailing behaviour issues. Davis and McPartland (2012) suggested the benefits of these types of resources when they stated that "Student engagement with their high school program can also be better ensured when every individual has their own adult mentor or advisor in the school who can advocate in various ways for their success" (p. 527).

Targeted intervention that counsellors and youth care workers facilitate should occur several times throughout the day. Targeted intervention check-ins where students have access to a professional who can intervene or advocate on their behalf represent a successful strategy and result in fewer suspensions and expulsions (Davis and McPartland, 2012). Counsellors and youth care workers are also able to further the teacher's understanding of what Michail (2011) referred to as the "context which is commonly hidden from teachers, and may provide a depth of understanding of the challenging behaviour" (p. 167). Rather than the teacher viewing the student as a behaviour issue, counsellors and youth care workers are able to advocate for the student and develop a workable program where the student is more likely to find success and eventual stability in the classroom. Research suggests that utilizing counsellors and youth care workers is one of the best pathways to reducing challenging behaviours in the classroom and school (Drolet et al., 2006).

Alternate learning environments. Just as check-ins are important for creating and maintaining relationships with students who may require it, alternate learning environments can create opportunities for positive engagement as well. Many educators find it difficult to engage

all of the learners in their classroom. In the daily struggle to teach the necessary curriculum, many teachers feel that they just are not afforded the time to be able to establish and maintain meaningful, positive relationships with their students. As a result, teachers find it more difficult to attain a high standard of success in each subject area when they are not able to establish respectful relationships with each and every student. Alternate learning environments enable teachers the ability to build positive relationships while still maintaining a high curricular standard.

Positive relationships with students reduce management issues, require less effort on the part of the teacher, and contribute to a positive climate in the classroom. Fortunately, alternate learning environments enable opportunities for teachers to meet students' needs for relatedness, autonomy, proficiency, relevance and provide rewards for challenging opportunities (Skinner and Pitzer, 2012). Alternate learning environments also create opportunities where learning is less rigid and provides avenues where students can discover enjoyment in a less formal setting.

Teachers need to be mindful to create learning environments and provide opportunities that foster a positive learning experience, which will increase the likelihood of students being more authentically engaged. So often, teachers feel that learning has to occur only in the confines of the classroom and are hesitant to take the learning outside of the comfort of the four walls. Teachers hesitate to expose students to alternate learning environments for many reasons, which can include: fear of the losing control, safety, lack of comfort in routine, red tape, and even finding volunteers. However, the benefits of taking students out of the confines of the classroom are many and relationships improve as a result of students having more educational freedom. Davis and McPartland (2012) found that "Good teacher-student relations and a positive climate conducive to learning include schools organized into smaller learning communities" (p. 526).

Alternate learning environments can occur anywhere outside of the formal confines of the classroom. For example, students study early exploration and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada in grade 8 social studies. Teachers can utilize the Foods Room to teach their students how to make pemmican, which is a traditional staple of Aboriginal peoples. Another alternate learning environment is the creation of a sustainable garden on the school grounds. Research has shown that student engagement increases substantially when they have the opportunity to create a class garden (Wolsey and Lapp, 2014).

When students are released from the confines of the class, amazing things tend to happen. Students that typically might not work together might be seen helping each other for the sake of the cause. New relationships have the opportunity to develop through collaboration and shared experiences and engagement increases when students are exposed to shared challenges and opportunities.

Choices chart. When teachers, along with their students, develop a cohesive classroom set of expectations that are maintained and reinforced with consistency, then classrooms tend to run more smoothly, with fewer behaviour issues. Such consistency leads to increased student engagement.

Working with challenging students can be one of the most taxing, yet rewarding aspects of the teaching profession. Skinner and Pitzer (2012) viewed teaching and management as a:

Fascinating challenge, an interesting puzzle which they are confident they can solve, then the boredom, passivity, or disruptive behavior students show in class can be opportunities for teachers to learn more about teaching and more about how to cope successfully with challenging students. (p. 36)

Working with students who are behaviourally and socially challenged comes with many struggles. Unfortunately, inappropriate student behaviours usually result in punitive responses. Michail (2011) found that there is evidence to suggest that the “Consequences of an infraction from school are severe and enduring for all involved. This includes not only the students themselves, but school staff, the school community, parents and families and the society at large” (p. 158). So how do educators limit the amount of infractions and mitigate the long-term effects on the individuals involved? One strategy is in the form of a choices chart (See Appendix B). In essence, a choices chart was developed to mitigate office referrals and guide students towards making positive choices over negative ones. A choices chart enables teachers the ability to visually explain to the student the negative behaviour and the steps that it took the student to come to that decision, it also addresses the antecedents to the negative behaviour and seeks to offer positive replacement alternatives. The result is students guiding their decisions towards positive choices rather than negative ones. Choice charts work well, but the process must be consistent and follow through is vital. Rewards for positive behaviour as well as restoration for negative behaviour must be established in each incident for there to be any form of progress and ultimate sustained engagement from the student.

Engagement with Peers

Research suggests that when students feel a sense of support and security within their peer group they will have a better understanding of who they are in the school context, and this is more likely to lead to positive behaviours and authentic engagement (Goodenow et al., 1993). Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that "Feeling connected and important is not just a by-product of doing well in school; a sense of belonging or relatedness plays an integral role in children's motivational development" (p. 160). Alternately, a lack of peer engagement can be detrimental to

participation, academic achievement and positive relationships (Buhs, Ladd & Herald, 2006).

Given this evidence it seems that teachers should be interested in fostering inter-student relationships and creating opportunities where students are more apt to want to build relationships with their peers. Three strategies that teachers can use to cultivate a high degree of interconnectedness include employing a self-regulation program, setting up matched groups, and creating opportunities for problem based learning.

Zones of regulation. Classroom teaching experience suggests that a student that struggles with self-regulation more often than naught, struggles with building and maintaining relationships with their peers. Skinner and Pitzer (2012) stated that engagement has a "reciprocal connection to teachers, parents, and peers. The key idea is that students' motivation, as expressed through their engagement, is salient to their social partners and so has an impact on the way that others respond to them" (p. 29). Students who struggle with self-regulation, tend to alienate themselves from their peer group due to their behaviour that is seen as strange or unnecessary. Alternately, students who are able to effectively self-regulate may not understand the difficulty that students endure when they struggle with self-regulation and the resultant alienation from their peer group. Implementing the zones of regulation program (Kuypers, 2011) is an effective tool for helping students who struggle with self-regulation and it gives them strategies for building positive peer relationships.

Students who struggle with self-regulation are faced with numerous issues that are not only behavioural based. They tend to also struggle with executive functioning, setting or maintaining goals, record keeping, organization, self-evaluating and even self-consequating. The classroom teacher usually finds it difficult to not only understand the many issues that students face, but how to effectively facilitate strategies that promote positive inter-peer engagement.

The zones of regulation is a program that was developed by Leah Kuypers in 2011. The goal of the program is to help students recognize how their impulsivity impacts their ability to maintain focus and build engaging relationships. The program also helps students recognize how their lack of self-regulation may affect how they are viewed by their peer group. The zones of regulation program assists teachers in developing strategies to help impulsive students become more aware of their emotions, better understand how others view their behaviours and devise ways to independently control their emotions and impulsivity (See Appendix C). The program also systematically outlines how student's emotions and impulsive behaviours drive their classroom behaviour and how those behaviours impede their ability to engage with their peer group (Kuypers, 2011). By arming students with strategies for addressing their self-regulation issues, regulated students are able to view the impulsive student in a different light as well. When students are able to develop strategies towards self-regulation, new relationships, understanding, acceptance and increased engagement are a direct result.

Matched groups. If the benefits of implementing a self-regulation program for impulsive students are apparent, then it makes sense to expand the program to meet the needs of students who may struggle in other ways. Matched groups usually consist of students with similar needs or issues who have been identified by their school based teams (or parent/student request). Each matched group has a sponsor/educator who acts as a facilitator.

Brooks et al. (2012) understood the benefits of students working in small groups when they stated, "To feel comfortable relating with others and to rely on effective interpersonal skills with peers and adults alike. This enables them to seek out assistance and nurturance in a comfortable, appropriate manner" (p. 543). Groups can be set up with supporting activities and themes - like hiking, cooking, board games, active living, grief and loss, anger management, and

self-regulation. Matched groups can be facilitated by teachers, administrators, counsellors, youth care workers and even support staff who are often willing to volunteer if the result is increased engagement.

Imagine a program whereby any new student that enters the school for the first time is welcomed into a group of peers with similar interests or needs. The inclusion of new students in these groups may alleviate anxiety and pressures around fitting in and may increase the opportunity to build new friendships, which may result in an increase in student engagement as well.

With the benefits of small group interaction and enhanced peer engagement in both the class and school-wide setting, the next initiative of problem-based learning enables students to further develop relationships, foster interpersonal relationships and in turn, improve engagement across a multitude of contexts.

Problem based learning. Another strategy to enhance engagement is to provide students with an opportunity to help others. Students experience a more positive attachment to school and are more motivated to learn if they are encouraged to contribute" (Brooks et al., 2012). Problem based learning (PBL) can provide these kind of peer learning and engagement opportunities. In traditional PBL, students are given an ill-defined, but curriculum relevant problem and iteratively work through the problem solving process (understand, plan, do it, reflect) until they arrive at a satisfactory solution. An example of a problem that could be presented to a class might be- what could they do to help local businesses increase environmental sustainability?

When PBL is used as a tool to support peer interaction, students discuss, explore and resolve a problem in a collaborative and student-centred manner. Based on the discussion about the problem, students create learning goals as a form of self-directed learning. Students then

decide which learning goals are important to the group and how they will approach the problem. Finally, students then share their findings and newfound knowledge about the topic and come up with a solution (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011). In the context of problem based learning, students better understand the process of how they learn, they increase their content knowledge, and they engage more effectively with the content as well as with their peer group.

There are several benefits to incorporating PBL into the curriculum. Students benefit from the fact that it is student-centred, which means that it is specific to their areas of interest. It also encourages students to think about how they learn because it is about the process of learning, not the final product (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011). There is usually a noticeable improvement with student engagement within the class in terms of peer engagement, engagement with the teacher, as well as an increase of engagement with the curriculum. When students are engaged with a project that is moving forward, and to which they are making positive contributions, then they are more likely to want to attend on a regular basis. There is also a reciprocal effect as well. Students are accountable to their group and a shared responsibility is usually a direct result from the process of PBL. With PBL the class is typically fully engaged in their learning which provides teachers with the time to observe and work more closely with individual students. Finally, students are more likely to demonstrate pride in their product and personal satisfaction when they accomplish the task that they set for themselves.

Cognitive Engagement

When teachers are able to create curriculum that focuses on the process of learning and are able to create opportunities for deeper understanding, rather than focus on retention and performance goals, then students will be more apt to want to engage in the curriculum. Krause et al. (2006) stated that it is up to the teacher "To realize their potential by engaging them in

intellectually challenging learning experiences” (p. 267). In this section, teacher teams, personalized learning and effective communication about learning are discussed as strategies for supporting cognitive engagement.

Teacher teams. Rather than being a silo-bound teacher, left to drift through the profession without support, teacher teams provide teachers with the opportunity to support each other through mutual planning, resource sharing, and problem solving. Teacher teams have significant positive impacts on improved student attendance, course passing, and grade promotions, and reduced disciplinary incidents and removals, as well as on measures of positive school climate and caring and respectful adult-student relationships (Davis and McPartland, 2012). Teachers need to redefine how they approach planning and implementation of curriculum with authentic engagement as their focus and teacher teams are a suitable strategy.

One teacher may find planning and implementing new curriculum intimidating and a difficult process. A group of teachers; however, with shared responsibilities, duties, and working collaboratively, are able to achieve so much more. When teachers are able to meet on a regular basis, with the common mindset towards collaboration, then planning becomes much more manageable (Davis & McPartland, 2012). For example, creating an integrated unit is a difficult undertaking, but a group of teachers planning and implementing the unit are able to achieve much more than a solitary teacher. By way of illustration, teacher teams might meet a few times a week and plan a unit together. Each teacher is responsible for their interdisciplinary component of the unit, which enables them to focus on their subject area in more detail, as well as planning for each learner in the class rather than in a general manner. Differentiation becomes more manageable because teachers are better able to focus on the needs of each individual learner in the classroom when they have the support of the teacher team. A teacher working alone, might

have a difficult time planning and implementing integrated units due to the sheer scope, but with the resource of teacher teams, the responsibility is spread over several people and the result is a more manageable approach to teaching. Teachers are able to brainstorm, adapt and make decisions as a group. They are able to synergistically evaluate, expand and support each other's ideas for the common goal of providing unique and more engaging curriculum.

Teacher teams are able to create unique and engaging opportunities for students to actively engage and participate in their learning by affording teachers more time, input and resources into planning, preparation and implementation of units. There are many benefits to utilizing teacher teams, namely a collaborative approach to learning, synergy and more resources towards planning engaging units.

In the next section personalized learning is discussed as a strategy for providing unique learning opportunities and as a result, increased engagement. Personalized learning provides opportunities where students are entirely responsible for their learning and guide the learning process with an end-goal of increased authentic engagement as well.

Personalized learning. Abbott (2014) defined personalized learning as a "diverse variety of educational programs, learning experiences, instructional approaches, and academic-support strategies that are intended to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students" (para. 1). Personalized learning is meant to take students beyond the regular curriculum by offering them the opportunity to have direct choice and influence over their learning. Skinner and Pitzer (2012) purported that educators should provide tasks that are "Authentic, challenging, relevant to students' experiences and concerns, hands-on, project-based, integrated across subject areas, and that allow students some freedom to choose their own direction and to work closely in cooperative groups over long periods of time" (p. 34).

Teachers want to meet the individual needs of each of their students, because they know that when students' needs are met, they find engagement and academic success.

Often students are not as engaged in the curriculum as teachers would hope. Most teachers provide unique learning opportunities and create meaningful relationships with their students, but still find that many students do not view the curriculum as relevant to their lives and as a result are not as engaged as teachers expect. Brooks et al. (2012) stated that "If a student is not learning, educators must ask how they can adapt their teaching style and instructional material to meet student's needs" (p. 550). Fortunately, implementing personalized learning provides opportunities for students to authentically engage in the curriculum by enabling students to grasp what Davis & McPartland (2012) referred to as "The relevance of school work for a student's long-run or short-run needs should be explicit or easily understood to have most value for increased student engagement" (p. 524).

Students tend to respond well to being able to choose a customized topic of study (Martin, 2004). However, as with any new approach, there are a few things that have to be kept in mind when implementing personalized learning. One issue that educators should be mindful of is the possibility that not all students might be interested in researching a topic. With new found academic freedom comes the responsibility that lie with the student being able to decide for themselves a topic of interest that they would like to research. Unfortunately, some students might not be ready to think outside of what their teachers typically present to them. At this juncture, if students struggle with choosing one of the broad range of topics, then teachers need to be able to present a narrower collection of options and facilitate the choice with the student.

Although personalized learning appears to have great potential, some students might not possess the required background knowledge about their topic area or have the necessary research

skills to be able to learn about their given topic. Students do not become personalized learners on their own (Martin, 2004). Schools need to support students throughout the entire process of personalized learning. Typically, supporting mini-lessons, workshops, teaching how to take effective notes, how to properly cite authors and the ability of the teacher to help students understand how to research are all necessary elements if personalized learning is going to be successful.

Another issue that teachers may face is the fact that personalized learning occurs in incremental steps. If a student is left with a challenge that is not achievable- they will most likely fail and become discouraged. Teachers need to be able to move students forward from where they are. They need to provide scaffolding, in the form of smaller challenges and other experiences that will help students make sense. Personalized learning is about the process that it takes to achieve a final product, not necessarily only about the final product itself. The process involves students reflecting and thinking about how they learn, not just about what they learn.

After students finalize their idea and research their topic, then they are ready to present their final product. It is important at this stage of problem based learning, that teachers provide students with the necessary tools to present their information. There are many options that students can choose from, rather than choosing the typical stand and deliver method.

Presentation tools like video, screencasting, storyboard comics, prezzi, glogster and voicethread are only a few of the many different platforms that students can share their research findings in unique and interesting ways.

After their initial research and presentation, students may feel that they might not be interested in studying another topic. The fact that students might not have further topics of interest could create the possibility of taking something that is engaging and replacing the

engagement with boredom. Skinner and Pitzer (2012) reminded us that educators should use student disaffection as a "diagnostic tool signaling that a student needs more warmth, involvement, structure, and/or autonomy support. View students' misunderstandings and failures as opportunities for students to learn something new about the subject and about how to cope more constructively (p. 34). The idea that students are done after the initial presentation comes from a misunderstanding of their role as students. Students need to have choice, they need to have encouragement, they need support, but they also need to accept responsibility and realize that they need to meet expectations that are set out for them. It is important that teachers challenge students to find new topics of interest and push them to think about new interests.

Done well, personalized learning has great potential. An individual who works through a complex sequence of connected activities should derive satisfaction and engagement from the mature planning and coordination required. Also, producing an end product can deliver a sense of accomplishment and pride (Davis & McPartland, 2012). Personalized learning can create a unique opportunity to customize the learning process, so a unique method of assessment is needed as well. Fortunately, communicating student learning provides the proper instrument.

Communicating student learning. The term assessment is used to explain the tool(s) that educators use to determine academic information about a student. It is a powerful tool that can support both teachers and students in understanding where they are and where they are going. It also helps educators to further understand their practice, and if appropriate, the changes that are necessary to better meet their students' needs. Types of assessment can include, but are not limited to: diagnostic, formative, summative, norm-referenced as well as criterion-referenced assessments (Nichols & Dawson, 2012). In this section, communicating student learning is discussed and the benefits are presented as a strategy for not only providing accurate and timely

feedback, but for encouraging engagement as well.

Most current assessment practices focus on scores and outcomes, dictated by policy, which leaves many students feeling like their value to the school community, particularly to the adults, is not based on who they are as developing adolescents. Their potential for learning and growing, their emerging passions and curiosity are not at the forefront of assessment, but rather on their performance on standardized assessments (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick 2012). To support engagement, students need to have the opportunity to participate in the assessment process. Davies (2001) stated, "When students communicate with others about their learning, they learn about what they have learned, what they need to learn, and what kind of support may be available to them" (p. 47).

Communicating student learning can take different approaches, but most educators choose monthly reporting as their form of communication with parents or guardians (See Appendix D). The communication rubric is an individualized tool that focuses on learning goals and tracks the progress that students make throughout the course of the year, ideally shifting from the left side of the rubric to the right. Along with the rubric, students chose their best work each month, sharing the process of how they created the final product and how they feel they met the learning goals for that specific assignment. Within this process, both assessment and communication are part of the same progression and are interchangeable. Davies stated that there are direct and measureable benefits from communicating student learning "When we involve students in collecting evidence of learning and in communicating that evidence to others, we help students initiate conversation about learning that support learning" (pp. 50-51).

There are a few components that should be followed for students to find academic engagement. First, teachers have to be willing to give up the control of assessment and allow

students to be partners in the process. They also need to be able to match the appropriate assessments with the curricular goals. Davies (2001) found that "Involving students in communicating their learning signals a shift in roles and responsibilities. Instead of searching for evidence that students have learned, teachers now help students find evidence of their own learning" (p. 49). Second, the work that students select should be a celebration of their accomplishments. Davies stated that "The process of selecting what evidence of learning to show, whom to show it to, and what kind of feedback to request, gives students an opportunity to construct their understanding and to help others make meaning of their learning" (p. 48). And third, parents or guardians should be active contributors to the process as well. The process of communicating student learning has a reciprocal effect. The more engaged the parents or guardians are and the more willing they are to offer encouragement or feedback, the more likely the child will be willing to accept the feedback and in turn, the more likely they will be engaged. Student engagement occurs during the actual experience of an activity or event. Engagement is positive when the individual finds the experience to be enjoyable, is successful in meeting the outcomes and fulfilling specific roles, or appreciates the value to be derived for personal goals and fulfillment (Davis and McPartland, 2012).

The process of communicating student learning with parents and guardians has the potential to more accurately reflect student assessment, while at the same time engaging students in the process of assessment. However, it involves a shift in the way that people view assessment practices and their preconceived beliefs about assessment as well. In the past, success was measured mainly around reporting letter grades. Higher grades meant success while lower grades usually equated in failure. Communicating student learning focuses on the process and the celebration of learning, rather than merely assigning letter grades. To pre-emptively address

possible parental concern and frustration, teachers might offer an explanation of the new approach – including process, reasons and implications for student success and engagement.

In the previous section, teacher teams, personalized learning and communicating student learning all demonstrated the potential for increasing student engagement across various contexts. For this to be achievable, however, educators need to be willing to undergo a philosophical shift in the way they view and approach collaboration, pedagogy and assessment. The next section addresses how to better achieve community engagement by engaging with culture-monthly cultural activities and celebrating school diversity.

Community Engagement

When students feel that they are a part of a community, they believe that they are valued and respected by the other members in the community, which has a positive contribution towards their engagement. Battistich et al. (1995) found that "Students experience the school as a community when their needs for belonging, autonomy, and competence are met within that setting" (p. 629). Conversely, the effects of a negative school climate can lead to any number of negative outcomes. Sautner (2008) found that a lack of community is created when there is a "poor school climate, negative teacher-student relations, and unclear or inconsistent enforcement of rules" (p. 138). Therefore, creating a sense of community where all students feel that they are included and are cognisant of the fact that they are a part of that community is something that all educators should strive towards.

Engaging with culture. Given the increasingly diverse composition of schools, it is of the utmost importance that educators understand how a sense of community and embracing different cultures affect student engagement. Having a sense of community is a "feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a

shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Students also need to feel that they are a positive contributor to the community and have a sense of relatedness and belonging. To be effective, embracing school cultures and developing a strong sense of community within that context with which students can identify is of paramount importance (Wehlage et al., 1989). The following section looks at two strategies, for engaging with culture that can increase students' and teachers' overall sense of community and belonging, and may lead to a direct and positive impact on students being authentically engaged. Monthly cultural activities is presented as a strategy for working with small groups of students and celebrating diversity is presented as an approach for encouraging community throughout the entire school.

Monthly cultural activities. Students who have been identified as being in need of a positive connection in the school, are lacking in engagement or would benefit from a culturally relevant experience are invited to participate in monthly cultural activities. Typically, they occur near the end of the month and are an informal way for students to make a positive connection with other students and adults alike. For example, an educator could host a group of Aboriginal students to create a traditional meal of salmon over an open fire, using traditional preparation and cooking methods. Students are involved in the entire process of planning, cleaning, preparing, cooking and eating of the meal. Much like the aforementioned problem based learning strategy, monthly cultural activities provide the opportunity for students to work as a team, develop new friendships with both peers and adults, and have opportunities to develop a sense of pride from their accomplishments. When students participate in culturally relevant activities, and take on leadership roles, there is an increase in their cultural connection, pride in self and increased engagement as well.

There are many benefits of the monthly cultural activities. Working with small groups of fifteen to twenty students at a time, once a month, can increase several different aspects of engagement. However, this strategy only reaches a relatively small audience. How can educators increase engagement and cultural awareness across the entire school, not just a select group of students? Cultural weeks are a unique opportunity to promote engagement, while at the same time increasing cultural awareness and promoting further understanding.

Celebrating diversity. Howarth (2004) stated that community is increased when there are opportunities for "relationships that offer positive and congruent representations of one's social groups" (p. 370). As mentioned, students who are able to celebrate their culture and be a part of a relevant activity are more likely to want to authentically engage. Therefore, if small groups of students have the opportunity to become more engaged from experiencing cultural activities, could there be a similar benefit to the entire school participating in celebrating different cultures in the school? A weeklong cultural immersion may be the answer.

Brooks et al. (2012) understood that "Students must realize that maintaining a caring, respectful classroom and school is the responsibility of each member of that classroom and school" (p. 543). If educators want students to learn to respect their peers and other members of the school community, then they need to have a greater understanding of each culture in the school. School culture weeks are an excellent opportunity to promote respect, but also further students' understanding of the diverse cultures that populate the school. Culture weeks also give what Brooks et al. state as the opportunity for students to take "leadership roles in representing and 'owning' the school, exhibiting energy and enthusiasm about their institution" (p. 549). Culture weeks can take many different forms, but they typically represent a group of students in the school community. For example, a school that has a high proportion of Francophone students

can celebrate their unique culture with engaging activities like maple syrup on ice, crepe making demonstrations and art exhibits. When student celebrate their culture and have the opportunity to share with other students, a sense of pride is achieved and the result is an increase in engagement in the school community as well. Another example might be celebrating Chinese New Year with cultural displays, student presentations and the possibility of each class presenting a different play from Chinese culture. Davis and McPartland (2012) found that a school with high levels of "Relational trust and social capital has individuals who strongly value their membership in this community, are willing to work together with others for the common good, and to look out for one another's legitimate interests" (p. 530). Implementing culture weeks provides unique opportunities to celebrate individual cultures, raise cultural awareness among the school community and further promote engagement. When implemented properly, building community becomes an integral part of a school's daily life. They become seamlessly woven into its policies and routines. They are not regarded as add-ons (Schaps, 2009).

Conclusion

Student engagement is a fundamental aspect of education. It is a precious and energetic resource that not only benefits students, but staff members as well. When students are engaged they are more likely to take risks, seek and provide help and make greater strides in their learning. When students are engaged it also creates a reciprocal effect that supports everyone involved. Hard work, joy, connectedness and learning occur more often as well (Skinner and Pitzer, 2012). When students display this type of commitment it reminds teachers what they value most about teaching.

There is no universal approach to engagement. What might work for one teacher or school in a specific situation might not necessarily work for another. It is; however, important to

understand that engagement is an active theoretical concept and the ability of teachers to be flexible and utilize strategies that not only work for them, but with their students as well, will ensure greater success.

Through the utilization of this framework, hopefully more educators will come to the understanding that engagement involves constant analyzing of personal practice and the ability to adapt appropriately for each subject area, student and situation. For students to authentically engage and to achieve lifelong engagement, educators also need to be able to successfully facilitate and promote engagement across all context areas as well, namely engagement with teachers, engagement with peers, cognitive engagement and community engagement.

Chapter 4: Reflections

This project has explored the topic of how to authentically engage students. The literature suggests that when students are more engaged, they are more likely to be successful in the school setting (Zyngier, 2008). I found engagement, however, is a topic that is not easily defined or even sustained on a daily basis. Indeed, contemporary research suggests that it is a concept that is challenging to achieve, but is necessary for student success (Newman, 1992; Jimerson et al., 2003; Coates, 2007; Zyngier, 2008; Taylor and Parsons, 2011; and Jones, 2011). Fortunately, completing this master's program has given me the ability to refine what authentic engagement means. I now understand that it is not only being able to build and sustain rapport with your students. It is creating opportunities for students to build positive relationships, providing academic freedom and creating a school-wide environment of inclusion. These realizations have had an effect on my professional career, opinions and future outlook.

Project Summary

Student engagement is a topic of interest for most educators and may even be the concept that causes the greatest amount of anxiety for people in the field of education. Educators understand that engagement behaviours are essential to learning (Finn and Zimmer, 2012). Most teachers are able to build positive rapport with their students in the first few weeks of school through building relational trust, but many teacher/student relationships falter after the routine of school sets in.

Often, curriculum becomes the driver for classes and maintaining engagement proves to be difficult. As engagement wanes, student misbehaviours rise, truancy may become more frequent and academic progress may decline. In response to these struggles, remediation may be attempted, which tends to provide minimal results at best (Michail, 2011). Unfortunately for

many educators who struggle with engaging their students, this result is usually predictable and can even become cyclical in nature.

In this project, the multifaceted nature of engagement is explored and several key factors are identified that contribute to authentic student engagement. In support of this, I have identified four key elements as being fundamental to sustained and authentic engagement. The first of these elements is engagement with teachers. It is the responsibility of the teacher to create opportunities where students are more likely to want to engage in the learning environment. Next, engagement with peers is discussed as an integral aspect of authentic engagement. We are reminded that when students feel a sense of support and security from their peer group they feel more confident in themselves and are more likely to exhibit positive behaviours and authentic engagement (Goodenow et al., 1993). Cognitive engagement has proven to be another critical aspect of authentic engagement – specifically, when students are able to focus on the process of learning, rather than performance goals, then they are more likely to be engaged in their learning. Finally community engagement is examined as a contributing factor of engagement. We are reminded that when students feel that they are a valued, respected and are a contributing member of a school community, then they are more likely to feel engaged. Battistich et al. (1995) found that "Students experience the school as a community when their needs for belonging, autonomy, and competence are met within that setting" (p. 629). To support teachers in developing engagement in their students I suggested several tools and strategies that can be used to authentically engage with their student.

Using current research and personal experience as the foundation for understanding, a framework was created to give educators insight into the dynamic nature of engagement, while at the same time offering several strategies that educators can utilize to positively influence

engagement. For further clarification, specific strategies that are unique and which educators might not have much experience with are discussed in detail in chapter three. Firstly, check-ins are suggested as a strategy for teachers to engage further with their students. Matched groups are suggested as another strategy that educators can utilize for increasing inter-peer relationships. Next, the suggestion of teacher teams is proposed as a method that teachers can use for cognitively engaging with students. Finally, the strategy of engaging with culture is suggested as a means to enhance community engagement in the school. I hope that this project will be of some use to other educators as they seek to build up their skills and abilities to engage their students across all aspects of school life – and ultimately help more students to find increased engagement and success in the school setting.

Changes to Professional Beliefs

Engagement with each individual student is a difficult concept to enact when there are many variables that are not entirely controllable. With staff turnover, grade promotion, the transient nature of some students etc., engagement can be difficult to enact and sustain over long periods of time. Fortunately, there is a great body of research that affirms that if students are engaged across several aspects of learning, then they are more likely to be authentically engaged and for longer periods of time. With this idea in mind, the project was created.

Before I began the Master's program I had a limited sense and understanding of what engagement was. A few different strategies were utilized to engage students and I witnessed engagement in a broad but undifferentiated manner. I knew that building rapport and establishing relationships with students was fundamental to engagement with teachers. I witnessed students who developed and increased their peer engagement when they experienced a problem that needed to be solved as a team. I also knew that when information was interesting, exciting or

presented in a novel manner that students would be more likely to be engaged with the curriculum. I also understood that providing a safe and nurturing environment in the school was essential if you want students to feel that they are a part of something bigger than themselves – to have a sense of community engagement.

Yet this was not enough. I knew that I wanted to have a deeper understanding of what engagement was and to pursue strategies that might help me to more effectively engage my students. As I advanced through the program I began to look at different avenues of engagement. I realized that it was not just students doing well academically, and the idea that engagement is multifaceted resonated with me. Fredricks et al. (2004) suggested that we think of authentic engagement as a “Metaconstruct or an organizing framework – one that integrates such areas as belonging, behavioral participation, motivation, self-efficacy and school connectedness” (p. 60). These ideas allowed me to construct a final project that would encompass four areas that I thought were key to understanding the body of knowledge in regards to engagement. The factors that I chose to research were in the areas of increasing teacher engagement, peer engagement, cognitive engagement and community engagement.

I had read a lot of research in regards to specific areas of engagement, but I had yet to discover a useable framework that reconciled the four factors that I felt were so important to authentic student engagement. Additionally, I chose strategies for the framework that were unique in their approach, manageable to implement and wide-ranging across several different constructs. Case in point, a strategy like problem-based-learning may engage students towards promoting inter-peer engagement may also have the ability to academically engage students through the student-centred approach to learning.

To create a framework of engagement I needed to go beyond understanding why students

were disengaged, and identify strategies that could be used to improve the situation. Reading through reams of research, coding themes and then prioritizing different approaches into a manageable framework proved to be a challenging undertaking. However, I wanted to create something that would be easily understood by educators, manageable and useful as well.

Hopefully the framework is a tool that meets those goals.

The Graduate Experience

Over the course of the two years in the program I have come to the realization that I have changed, and I know that change is for the better. I now know that engagement is not just me showing interest in my students or building a superficial relationship that is over at the end of the school year. Rather, I have an improved appreciation and understanding of what engagement actually is, and skills and strategies to better utilize ways to connect with my students.

In concert with writing this project, I would like to take the idea of sharing my new found knowledge further. I feel excited and reinvigorated with the findings and the framework that has been constructed and would like to share this resource with teachers and administrators in my school. There are strategies that we can enact in the short term for the remainder of this school year and there are some long term strategies that I know our school would benefit from putting into place over the next few years. I have also communicated these goals with our district pro-d chair and hope to have an opportunity to share my understandings at a professional development day.

Three Recommendations for Educators

Over the course of the last two years, through coursework and the subsequent creation of the framework, I have learned that teachers have a direct impact on whether a student will choose to authentically engage in the learning process.

When teachers create a classroom environment where students feel comfortable enough to take risks and are supported in those risks, then they are more likely to be engaged. Students are also more likely to employ engagement behaviours and be receptive to teachers' and schools' rules, routines and programs, when they are treated with kindness, respect and care (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

Teachers should also seek to constantly refine their practice and seek out alternate approaches and methods, rather than rely on a fixed set of strategies. Students are constantly changing as they develop and mature, so teacher's approach to engagement has to match that change as well. This equates to the fact that teachers need to engage their students across all factors of engagement.

The last recommendation that I have for educators is that when students are engaged in all aspects of learning, they are more likely to be successful and that success is not just measured as academic performance. Students who are authentically engaged are able to make and sustain relationships more easily and they want to participate and contribute to building school community. The result is a more interconnected school where students' school experiences are more authentic. I encourage educators to make authentic engagement an essential aspect of their daily teaching practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Project Framework

The following framework is a tool for educators to use for the promotion of student engagement. The four features of effective engagement are: engagement with teachers, engagement with peers, cognitive engagement and community engagement. The framework does not recommend one particular approach, but rather a collection of different strategies that educators may utilize at their discretion. The (*) denotes a strategy that is explained in detail in chapter 3.



Engagement with Teachers

This element of engagement relates to the ways in which educators can influence how students engage with their teacher.

- Demonstrate a genuine interest and care for each individual.
- Set the tone for a respectful learning environment early in the school year.
- Teach and model self-advocacy skills.
- Understand that teachers and teaching are central to engagement (Zepke & Leach, 2010).
- *Three types of checking in.
- All students are included, treated consistently and fairly.
- Involve students in recognizing positive behaviours.
- Teach and model strategies for dealing with anxiety in the classroom. (I.e. deep breathing, positive self-talk and journal writing for reflection).
- Explain to students when and how they are successful in tasks.
- Allow opportunities for students to make authentic choices in their learning.
- Mutually create class expectations where students feel safe and valued.
- Do not have unrealistic expectations.
- Fairness, respect, trust and consistency are the cornerstone of class expectations.
- Set high expectations for students. Let them rise to meet the challenge.
- Use a variety of different room arrangements.
- Encourage and develop self-advocacy (Chris Weber, RTI Conference, March 12, 2015).
- Be approachable.
- Be adaptable to changing student expectations (Zepke & Leach, 2010).
- Utilize a variety of support services.
- *Alternate learning environments.
- Eliminate the feeling of competition and comparisons in the classroom.

- Explore, with staff and students the following “equation” **Behaviour = drive x habit / anxiety levels** (Chris Weber, RTI Conference, March 12, 2015).
- Create a classroom environment where students feel safe and valued.
- Be an advocate for your students.
- Investing class time to meet the social/ emotional needs of students will enrich learning, not create a deficit in academics (Chris Weber, RTI Conference, March 12, 2015).
- Understand that deep down all students yearn to be successful and if they are not successful, then teachers need to adapt their teaching style or the curriculum for success.
- Personalize teaching by using relevant and personal experiences as examples.
- Classroom behaviour contracts of expectations and responsibilities.
- Use frequent feedback and varied assessment practices.
- Show your enthusiasm and enjoyment of working with students.
- Create opportunities to make each student feel special and appreciated.
- Teachers establish criteria and assessment with student contribution.
- Teachers’ create a environment of shared responsibility and efficacy related to learning (Taylor and Parsons, 2011).
- Be willing to help students outside the classroom (I.e. Lunch and after school homework groups).
- Provide a *choices chart for students who struggle with classroom management.
- Promote opportunities for increased communication between the teacher and students (I.e. Student lead conferencing).

Engagement with Peers

This element of engagement relates to the ways in which educators can influence how students engage with their peer group.

- Model and demonstrate how to regulate for successful learning and positive peer engagement (I.e. *Zones of regulation program).
- Model and demonstrate how to be mindful of self and others.
- *Matched groups
- Provide opportunities for community volunteering (I.e. Soup kitchen, veterinary clinic, crisis lines and peer counselling).
- Create learning spaces in the classroom to promote collaboration with peers.
- Promote peer assessment and feedback.
- Create opportunities for *problem based learning to occur.
- Be sensitive to shy and withdrawn students and try to facilitate them into opportunities to play and positively interact with their peers (Hughes & Copland, 2010).
- Promotion of cultural awareness and pride in different cultural groups has proven to be a positive contributing factors to peer engagement (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997).
- Support reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) (I.e. students teach with group discussions using four strategies of: summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting).
- Promotion of cultural heritage in schools (I.e. course content, art displays, *monthly cultural activities and *celebrating diversity).
- Create a psychological sense of membership in the classroom where everyone feels valued and included (Goodnow & Grady, 1993).
- If students believe that others at school are rooting for them, are on their side and willing to help them when needed, they will be more likely to be engaged (Goodnow & Grady, 1993).
- Promote cooperative learning opportunities in the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Slavin, 1990)
- Jigsaw learning activities.
- Flipped classroom, which promotes peer interaction and collaboration

Cognitive Engagement

This element of engagement relates to the ways in which educators can influence how students engage with their learning and the curriculum.

- Content allows for critical thinking opportunities.
- Clearly defined expectations.
- Develop specialized assignments.
- Teach for deeper understanding, not trying to cover all of the course content.
- Exit slips at the end of each lesson for clarification.
- Teach strategies for managing time, attention, and their environment (Chris Weber, RTI Conference, March 12, 2015).
- Promote a consistent and continued message of high expectations.
- Involve students in decision making opportunities.
- Academic peer mentoring.
- Foster relationships with local community professionals.
- Global issues unit to promote critical thinking skills (I.e. Free trade, global warming, inequalities etc.).
- Create opportunities for students to lead the learning (I.e. Student experts, roundtable discussions and jigsaw activities).
- Build in time for academic support and enrichment of curriculum.
- Targeted support for students who lack engagement with the curriculum.
- Know your students and build on their strengths (Williams & Williams, 2011).
- Provide modified schedules with specific identified students (I.e. Frequent breaks, *targeted intervention check-ins and exercise breaks for students who struggle with attention).
- Teach students how to prioritize what is important and relevant.
- Plan and implement integrated units of study.
- Build in time for "body breaks" throughout the day.

- Break down learning into manageable steps for easier planning and execution of assignments.
- Build in opportunities for social interaction.
- Learn student's individual needs and adapt curriculum appropriately.
- Go outside the physical limits of the classroom *alternate learning environments.
- Create curriculum that is interesting, engaging and entertaining.
- Flexible and stimulating 'just in time' training and interactivity (Williams & Williams, 2011).
- *Personalized learning, which promotes ownership and student buy in.
- Provide feedback in a supportive and nurturing manner.
- Involve students in setting academic goals and reflect on those goals regularly.
- Teach and model resiliency.
- Reinforce positive engagement.
- Ensure institutional cultures are welcoming to all students, including diverse backgrounds (Zepke & Leach, 2010).
- Create a classroom where learning is personally relevant.
- Utilize *teacher teams for collaboration and planning of units.
- Use a variety of different technologies and internet resources such as websites, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and phone apps (Williams & Williams, 2011).
- Teach the principles of self-efficacy and self-concept.
- Connect academic examples to real world situations.
- Utilize *communicating student learning as an assessment model.
- Create educational experiences that are challenging, enriching and extend academic abilities (Zepke & Leach, 2010).
- Students self-assess their performance.
- Looping classes (I.e. Same students for two years in a row).

Community Engagement

This element of engagement relates to the ways in which educators and the school can influence how students engage with the school community as a whole.

- School satisfaction surveys for student input into planning.
- *Monthly cultural activities.
- A common program or philosophy among staff and students that promotes inclusiveness and community building (I.e. Tribes training).
- Actively build relationships with pre-admission or feeder school students (I.e. Youth care worker/ counsellor visits, feeder school visits, older student connect with feeder school students).
- Learning activities in which students collaborate on academic tasks and have regular opportunities to reflect on the ways they work together (Schaps, 2009).
- Have student groups present their ideas or concerns at staff meetings.
- Intramural program that promotes students participation across multi-grades.
- Theme days.
- Make clear to the student populous the contributions that they have made to the school community.
- Create and promote social spaces throughout the school (I.e. Community gardens, permanent chess boards on benches and games room).
- Award ceremonies that do not just focus on academics (I.e. Most caring student, helpful, responsible etc.).
- Build relationships early in the school year with newly transitioned students. Connecting them with the appropriate supports, youth care workers or *matched groups.
- Whole school Gym riots.
- School clubs (I.e. chess club, geocaching club, writing club etc.).
- Celebrating learning milestones (I.e. 100 days of school, Pi day etc.).
- School leadership team to promote community.
- *Celebrating diversity.

- Connect previous students and alumni with current students in a mentorship program.
- Celebration of school culture in several different areas of the school (I.e. Sports awards showcase, art displays, student painted benches/ tables/ murals/ banners).
- Culture team made up of staff and students with the specific task of organizing and promoting community in the school.
- Effective and consistent communication between staff, students and parent/ guardians.
- Acknowledge student citizenship and service in and outside of the classroom.
- Whole school events that involve students and their families in ways that acknowledge their diverse backgrounds and personal experiences (I.e. Family heritage week or a family hobbies fair) (Schaps, 2009).
- Create a clear set of school values that both staff and students understand and follow (Battistich et al. 1995).
- Group classes into "pods" and have monthly school challenges.
- Provide opportunities for community building outside of the bookends of the day (I.e. Anti-bullying fair, movie nights, playoff hockey night).
- The philosophy of school community is promoted and valued throughout the school.
- Designate specific areas of the school for showcasing students' work and accomplishments.
- Service learning opportunities inside and outside the school that enable students to contribute to the welfare of others (Schaps, 2009).
- Enable students to develop their social and cultural capital (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

Appendix B: Choices Chart

Choices Chart For: Student

Choices

Givens:

- Daily check-in with YCW before going class.
- Student needs a visual daily schedule of what his or her day plan is.
- Student can take a break when he or she feels they needs one. He or she will use a visual signal with his teacher to let them know that they are taking a break. Break could be: get a drink of water, take a quick walk.

On Task/ Respectful

Take a Break

Positive reinforcement:
-“Good job” or “You’ve been working hard”

- Go to a quiet place and take a break.
- Go to: YCW or Counsellor until they feel you are ready to go
- Walk the track until you feel calm and feel you are ready to go back to class.

Disruptive/Disrespectful / Aggressive

Have Left School

Choice of Rewards for being on task/ being respectful and staying on school grounds:

- Free block in 5th block on Friday
- Board game with a friend
- Computer time
- Chess game with counsellor/ YCW
- Approved activity of your choice

Go to the Office

Go home. Try again tomorrow

Return to class

Change behaviour:

Options:

- YCW’s room
- Counsellor’s office
- Support Teacher’s Room
- Or remain in the Office

Continue behaviour/ attitude- sent home





Appendix C: Self-Regulation Tool

The Zones of Regulation

How I Feel:

<p>Blue Zone</p> <p>Bored</p> <p>Tired</p> <p>Sad</p>	<p>Green Zone</p> <p>Calm</p> <p>Proud</p> <p>Good</p>	<p>Yellow Zone</p> <p>Frustrated</p> <p>Anxious</p> <p>Worried</p>	<p>Red Zone</p> <p>Aggressive</p> <p>Angry</p> <p>Yelling</p>
--	---	---	--

How Others View my "Engine" (Behaviour):

Blue Zone	Green Zone	Yellow Zone	Red Zone
Idling too low	Idling just right	Idling quite high	Idling way too high
			

What Can I do?:

<p><u>Blue Zone Tools</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stretch - Talk to an adult - Get some fresh air 	<p><u>Green Zone Tools</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get a drink of water - Pat on the back - Journal write 	<p><u>Yellow Zone Tools</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deep breaths - Count to 10 - Figure eight breathing 	<p><u>Red Zone Tools</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take a break - Deep breaths - Go for a walk
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Adapted from Zones of Regulation (Kuypers, 2011)

Appendix D: Monthly communicating student learning rubric



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Grade 6 Learning Progressions

Note to Parents: The following represents the areas of learning which will be a focus for your child during this school year. We know all students come to school at different starting points in their learning. Together with your support, our job will be to start where your child is at in their learning and move them forward...to the right... in the direction of the arrow. In this way, the learning journey for each child will be individualized.

Behaviours For Successful Learning				
Aspect	→			
Attitude	Is rarely positive about learning	Is sometimes positive about learning	Most of the time is positive about learning	Is always positive about learning and tries to influence others
Engagement Active Participation and Thinking	Not generally involved in learning	Sometimes involved in learning	Most of the time is a curious, fully focused and involved learner	Always a curious, fully focused and involved learner
Perseverance Not giving up	When challenged, gives up easily	When challenged, sometimes gives up	When challenged, seldom gives up	When challenged, almost never gives up; seeks new challenges
Teamwork	Rarely: •participates cooperatively	Sometimes: •participates cooperatively •contributes to the thinking and work •works well with some people	Most of the time: •participates cooperatively •contributes to the thinking and work •works well with most people	Always: •participates cooperatively •contributes to the thinking and work •respects and encourages all voices
Responsibility • Respects others' right to learn • Attends class on time • Refers to criteria to complete and improve work • Meets deadlines • Brings supplies to class	Rarely demonstrates responsibility	Sometimes demonstrates responsibility	Most of the time demonstrates responsibility	Is consistently a responsible student
Health (Student and Parent to discuss this together) • Makes healthy eating choices • Gets a full night's sleep • Exercises daily • Demonstrates and seeks positive relationships • Respectfully advocates for self and others	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Consistently

Communicating student learning. SD#72 (2015). Retrieved March 15, 2015, from <http://www.sd72.bc.ca/Publications/School%20District%2072%20Communicating%20Student%20Learning%20Pilot%20Project.pdf#search=communicating%20student%20learnin> g. Reproduced with permission.