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## The Engaging Educational Practice

In October 1994, I left a message on the district's substitute teaching hotline indicating that I was available to teach the next day. At 7 o'clock that evening, the call I received from the substitute office wasn't exactly the one I wanted. I was told that I would be going to one of the worst middle schools in one of the roughest areas of the city. In a panic, I called a friend who had some experience teaching in schools with students who could be *quite* the behavioral challenge.

I nervously said, "Mr. Houston, you know they're sending me over to M. L. King Junior High School. Those students are known to be among the *worst* behaved in the city. What should I *do*?" He paused and said,

Some of the biggest mistakes teachers make when going into new situations is that they neglect to connect. One of the most important things you have to do is to temporarily ignore the academics and find ways to connect or bond with them first. First introduce a topic or idea that has meaning to them. Then try to frame as much content as possible around something they like, value, or have experienced or that is familiar to them from their community.

I wanted to ask him for more specific ideas, but respecting his time, I politely thanked him and ended the conversation. I pulled

together the materials I could that evening and hoped it was good enough to help me *survive* the day.

The community of King Junior High had been blighted by riots occurring a few decades earlier and decimated by a steady decline in residents. Some blocks in the school community had as many abandoned houses as occupied homes. Bars protected the homes while bulletproof glass partitioned the store clerks from customers.

As I drove into the school parking lot, the unique design of the school caught my eye. Built like an impregnable fortress, it looked like an ideal prototype for a "supermax" type of maximum security prison. After what seemed an eternity, I finally made it through the long line of students waiting to go through the metal detector and to be searched by the security officers. The assistant principal, who was assisting with the search of students, introduced himself as I walked through the metal detectors.

Mr. Anderson, affectionately called "Mr. A" by the students, was a cordial gentleman in his early forties. Among the many hats he wore was that of coordinator of the assignment of substitute teachers. As we briefly talked in his office, he sternly looked down his nose through thin-rimmed glasses and asked me, "Son, do you think you're *really* ready for this?" He explained that I was to cover a classroom where one teacher had literally walked off the job during the middle of the period, her predecessor had quit after just one week, and the current teacher had been so frustrated at the end of the previous day that she had hinted she might try to seek a stress leave. "Yes sir!" I assured him, though I tried to cloak my anxiety and cover the intimidation caused by the uncertainty that lay ahead.

As we walked up the steps to the classroom I was to teach in, we heard loud noises long before we saw the students. Little did I know they were coming from the room in which I was to teach. Loud laughing, profanity-laced tirades, and other noises suggesting a party atmosphere could be heard coming from Room 232 as we strolled down the long, dimly lit corridor. When students saw Mr. A in the doorway, the basketball game played with wads of paper and the trash can stopped, conversations among students shifted to silence, and the boys who were horse playing returned to their seats. He eased some of my anxiety, which was no longer hidden, by assuring me he would be in to check on me periodically during the day. He said, "If things get out of hand, hit the 'panic button' (intercom) on the wall; this will signal me or security to come."

Having had the fortune of prior substitute teaching experiences where no lesson plans were left by the teacher of record, I knew that

if I didn't come in with my own "stuff," I would be overwhelmed by student-induced stress. However, the teacher of record, Mrs. Washington, had indeed left a well-thought-out, meticulously planned algebra lesson for her seventh-grade classes. I started to write the first few variables from problems on the board but suddenly felt the breeze of a balled up piece of paper whiz by the back of my head. I had a feeling that the conversational murmur behind me would quickly turn into chaotic mayhem that would consume the classroom. I tossed the chalk on the ledge of the chalkboard and figured it would be much wiser to use the content I had prepared.

Clearing my throat as an attempt to get their attention, I said as loudly as I could, "Tupac Shakur. If you are a fan of the rapper Tupac, raise your hand." The majority of students raised their hands. "Who knows who Christopher Wallace is?" One of the students who had smiled blurted out, "Ah man, that's Biggie Smalls! Whadda you know about him, teach?" I explained that I had listened to a few of his songs and thought he was a talented lyricist. On that day, the content I had brought was a lesson on life and how to better negotiate the choice-consequence paradigm. For the rest of that period, I was surprised that the students hung on every word I uttered.

About halfway through the period, out of the corner of my eye, I glanced and saw Mr. A peek through the window of the door. He returned a few minutes later with a lady, who I later found out was the school principal, veering into the room with a look of amazement. Near the end of the period, a few students literally begged and pleaded to stay with me for an additional period.

At the end of the day, Mr. A called me down to his office. When I walked in, he introduced me to the school principal. They asked me what I had done to captivate and keep the attention of students who were notorious for their bad behavior. I explained that I simply went in and intentionally connected with the students through deliberately starting in their world. The principal and Mr. A both expressed how pleased they were with the job I had done of maintaining order in a chronically chaotic classroom. To my surprise, they offered me a long-term substitute teaching placement. I politely declined, explaining that I was assigned to teach at another school four days a week. At the beginning of the next school year, however, I accepted their offer and decided to give it a try.

I never thought that the little piece of advice from Mr. Houston would have such a profound impact on my career. After more than 20 years of experience with high-poverty urban schools, I have

come to embrace the importance of making initial connections with students and enveloping content around them as the foundational pathway for successfully engaging them. Furthermore, I became inspired to intentionally make student engagement a defining element of my professional practice. As you probably already know, when students are engaged, teachers are less likely to be stressed by student misbehavior, and students are more likely to do well in class. As a result, I ravenously fed off their interest and enthusiasm to learn and became more engaged with the instructional process.

## What Is Student Engagement?

Trying to teach without engagement is like trying to send a text message without a service provider. Without the service provider, you can type as many messages as you like, but when you try to send them, the intended receiver(s) never get them. In the classroom, messages sent to students are never received because of the missing service provider, student engagement. Student engagement is to achievement what reality programming is to network television ratings. In each case, without the former, the latter would significantly decline. You, like most teachers, probably know the importance of engaging students in the learning process. You know it's the green instructional "send" button that makes the learning go. However, increasing numbers of teachers struggle with not only what it is but also how to make it happen for them.

How do you define the term *student engagement*? I've asked participants this question many times during professional learning workshops. Most conceptualize engagement as observable actions carried out by students. The most common responses I hear are "the majority of students are on task," "really into the lesson," "act as if interested," and "show effort."

Though the forms and degrees of engagement may vary from classroom to classroom, you won't find effective learning happening without it. Though there is no universally accepted definition of student engagement (Appleton, Chrisenton, & Furlong, 2008), I define *academic engagement* as the extent to which students are interested in, emotionally involved with, and willing to participate in the task at hand. Although dissension exists regarding a concise definition, researchers monolithically agree that there are three principal dimensions or elements of student engagement.

## The Elements of Engagement

Engagement is often conceptualized as having three main elements: the emotional, the cognitive, and the behavioral (Appleton et al., 2008). Simply put, it's about the interaction of students' feelings, thinking, and actions. These are not mutually exclusive; they are often thought of as interrelated parts that are fused together. For example, Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) noted the following:

The fusion of behavior, emotion, and cognition under the idea of engagement is valuable because it may provide a richer characterization of children than is possible in research on single components. Defining and examining the components of engagement individually separates students' behavior, emotion, and cognition. In reality these factors are dynamically interrelated within the individual; they are not isolated processes. (p. 61)

A fourth though lesser used component of engagement, reaction to challenge, entails how students use strategies to deal with difficulties, especially challenging situations of perceived failure (Klem & Connell, 2004). However, several bodies of work have examined the three dimensions separately, and much of the presentation of the topic in this book will follow suit.

*Emotional engagement*, sometimes called *psychological engagement*, refers to the connection students feel to your classroom and the important elements that compose this connection. It's about the extent to which students see you and your learning environment as warm, affectionate, and caring. The degree to which students feel close to people at school, feel that they are themselves valued members of the school community, and like being in school is the essence of emotional engagement. It's greatly impacted by the relationship teachers have with their students. Terms such as *identification*, *belonging*, and *school membership* fall under this umbrella.

*Cognitive engagement* is thought of as the degree to which students are willing to psychologically invest the needed "thinking energy" to learn (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). It includes students' understanding of the importance of the task at hand. When higher levels of cognitive engagement are present, students show more willingness to persist with complicated tasks and difficult-to-understand ideas, and to keep trying after experiencing failure.

*Behavioral engagement* refers to the current behavior patterns of students. It includes your students' desire to attend class, initiative to start tasks, attention to the task at hand, time on task, effort expended, and persistence shown, as well as the characteristics of how they respond to the you. Rates at which students complete homework, attend school, and are attentive in class indicate levels of behavioral engagement.

You may be thinking of the question teachers often ask: "Can my students be *fully* engaged if one or two of the above elements are missing?" Given that there is no agreed-upon definition of engagement, whether or not they have achieved full engagement is inconsequential. However, students can show evidence of one or two dimensions and not the third. For example, Mrs. Klein's fourth graders may be *interested* in a lesson about the plight of poverty and hunger-stricken children of Ethiopia but have no emotional involvement with the topic, and they may also be reluctant to participate in a lesson about it. Mrs. Jones's seventh graders may be highly interested in and passionately emotional about curfew times for teenagers but have no *intention* of completing any assigned tasks about it. Mr. King's sophomores may be willing to complete a required essay because it is necessary to pass the class and yet may have little interest in or emotional involvement with the project.

## **The Challenge of Creating Engagement in HUMS**

Two of the biggest challenges in teaching are to successfully establish orderly, well-structured, learning environments that consistently produce substantive student achievement gains in high-poverty, urban, largely minority schools (HUMS). Many classrooms in HUMS have students who have greater-than-average chances of faring badly with respect to either school or developmental outcomes. That is, they are what Werner (1986) called students at risk. Contributing to the difficulty is that many students in HUMS, such as some African American students, simply don't identify with school (Taylor, 1991).

A failure to identify with school is at the root of issues such as inattentiveness during instruction, low persistence on tasks, minimal effort, high levels of truancy, and a host of other concerns. Rising participation of African American youth in gang activity, abuse of drugs, and youth violence, for example, has been attributed to the evolution of a subculture that simply doesn't identify with school (Taylor, 1991).

Some students are in desperate need of varying degrees of psychological support services, which the underresourced HUMS often inadequately provide. Therefore, mental health issues that masquerade as bad behavior frequently spill over into the classroom. Of further concern is the fact that too many students in these classrooms face daunting issues outside of school. Factors placing students in precarious positions at great risk of failure are ever present.

Many of these students are saddled with the responsibility of clothing and feeding younger siblings, ensuring their homework is completed, and walking them to and from school. Some are fearful of the journey between school and home because they must pass drug dens, abandoned abodes, or threatening thugs. Others are careful about creating close bonds with classmates because of the hurt they have felt from frequently changing schools. The burdens of these tremendously challenging life issues outside of school often make the job of engaging these students quite a formidable task.

To compound challenging home issues, many students at risk do not fare well academically. They are often teased by classmates over such issues as reading three levels below their grade. As they get older, they become numbed by repeatedly receiving poor grades, resist giving effort to persist, and eventually become resigned to a perceived inevitable fate of academic failure. As a result, many of these students find solace in successfully honing their ability to disrupt the learning process. Other impediments to engaging students in HUMS come into play as well.

An additional challenge that often negatively impacts a significant number of students in HUMS is the fact that academic achievement is not a number one priority in their homes. Because their parents struggle to make ends meet, may be intimidated by the school or the work sent home, or may even be indifferent toward the academic gains of their children, doing well in school and qualifying for higher education often takes a back seat in the home life of these students. A second grade HUMS teacher shared a story about a discussion around college she had with her students. One of her male students raised his hand and said, "Mrs. Howard, my momma told me I shouldn't worry about going to college because we can't afford it. She said don't talk about college 'round her no more!"

Some of the apathy is attributable to the perception of an inescapable condemnation to a life of being poor. Some families believe that because they have experienced generational poverty, it is inconceivable to think that any offspring can break the cycle. In other cases, poor prior academic experiences lead parents to myopically view education as a dead end with no meaning versus a means to an end.

## The Barrage of Mismatches

Certainly you're familiar with the oft repeated definition of insanity: "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." As each school year begins in many HUMS districts, the way learning is structured in schools remains the same. This results in far too many students failing over and over again. In HUMS, an important mismatch exists between the students and the school structures, learning environments, and instructional techniques. For instance, it's been well documented that lecturing is at best a marginal teaching method, yet it's still the predominant method of delivery in far too many classrooms. Class periods are structured in a way that addresses the needs of the average student, while the needs of those who lie above and below the norm are infrequently met. The learning styles, or ways in which students in HUMS learn best, are often at odds with the delivery method most often used. Moreover, a smaller proportion of teachers are highly qualified than in other schools, and these teachers are less likely to be able to deliver pedagogy that adequately meets students' needs. All of these factors make it tremendously challenging to engage students in HUMS.

## Developing an Engaging Educational Practice

Unfortunately, even in classrooms where academic engagement is a priority, the focus is on making a single activity more interesting or a given lesson more exciting. This is problematic because of its short-lived nature. Your students' attention may be momentarily captured by a short video clip but quickly turned elsewhere after they've viewed it. They may be instantly interested in learning about cancer, but interest may wane after they realize that the cost of completion is an up-front investment of intellectual energy. Their desire to participate may dwindle after they have been repeatedly dealt devastating blows by the fists of failure.

Developing an engaging educational practice diminishes the ills associated with capriciously implemented strategies of engagement that target isolated lessons or activities within lessons. An engaging practice is about creating a true learning experience. It's about embedding supportive structures into practice. It's about emphasizing the creation of emotional connections between student and teacher, and between peers. Such practices include integrated elements that sustain emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement.



Engaging educational practices are known for customized educational content for the unique learners in each room.

As stated, a key component of an engaging practice is emotional engagement of students with their teacher. In HUMS, this is a critical prerequisite for creating the engaging experience. Without this emotional connection, students are much less likely to do the required thinking or actions for a given task. The emotional bond is the link that gets students to move from intention into action. The emotional connection is the catalyst of the classroom. It drives the engaging reaction into existence with even your most challenging students. When you get the emotional connection, you improve the chances that students will *do* even when they *don't* feel like doing. Not only does sustained emotional engagement cultivate fertile ground for growing cognitive and behavioral engagement, but it also is an essential step in the development of an engaging educational practice.

## What Does an Engaging Educational Practice Consist of?

You may be thinking, “What’s the difference between academically engaging students and creating an engaging educational practice?” An engaging educational practice is more comprehensive in scope than academic engagement. Academic engagement is one, albeit essential, component of an engaging educational practice. When you deliver activities, lessons, or units of instruction that promote greater levels of emotional, behavioral, and intellectual involvement on the part of your students, you are engaging students academically. However, when you develop a system of processes that continuously promotes and sustains the emotional, intellectual, and behavioral engagement of your students, you’re creating an engaging educational practice.

An engaging educational practice is known for the sustenance of the engaging experience. It’s about having students experience *flow* where their levels of engagement lead to them becoming less aware of space and time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Highly engaging practices are known to have students *find* new passions and interests and *lose* track of time. Engaging educational practices have collaborative structures in place that reduce the sense of isolation and alienation often associated with students who drop out of school, and these structures help students to become more socially competent as well.

Cornerstones of engaging educational practices are the use of research-based practices. Differentiated instruction and using assessment as an instructional tool for learning are examples of such practices in that they both significantly enhance the likelihood of learner success. Embedded structures to support the development of student academic and social competencies are in place. Furthermore, positive versus punitive behavioral supports are proactively used. A hallmark of these supports is that student buy-in is negotiated via student voice and choice. Reflective practice is another cornerstone, in that teachers reflect to refine and improve their instruction, and they have students reflect on strategies and techniques they used to learn.

Students' personal lives are a critical element of this pedagogical practice. Practices such as these are structured such that students are provided ample opportunities to chart the course of their learning. These practices are characterized by a customization of the overall educational experience uniquely around each student's interests, issues, preferences, and potential. Processes for planning, preparing, and presenting content are focused on creating engagement. An engaging practice is a system of interrelated methods that move the engagement forward. Unlike discrete practices, such as making individual lessons more academically engaging, an engaging educational practice comprehensively creates an engaging educational experience.

## **Rationale for Developing an Engaging Practice**

What would happen to the temperature of your house during the winter if there were no ducts for hot air to move throughout the structure? Of course, you know that your home would be much cooler or perhaps downright frigid! The thermostat monitors the temperature and triggers the kindling of the fire in the furnace. It is then blown through the insulated ducts, which results in a warmer home. If one of the elements were missing, your house would not be properly heated. If you remove the blower from the furnace or the ductwork, for instance, only the area around the furnace would be warmed. In essence, there is a *system* in place for not only warming the home at a given moment but sustaining that warmth over time.

Teachers are the thermostats of their classrooms, in that they monitor the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral temperature of the learning environment. If the emotional temperature is too cool (boredom), they can *ignite* the learning with engaging instructional

strategies and techniques, such as an energetic presentation of material. They also monitor elements such as pacing of the presentation and difficulty of material to make adjustments that are *just right*. However, engaging strategies delivered in isolation are not enough to sustain the engagement of one student, let alone a full class of 30, each of whom has a unique set of characteristics. There needs to be a system in place that structures practices in such a way that engagement is sustained.

An engaging educational practice is the system that *heats up* the students' educational experience. Collaborative processes are the ducts through which ideas, information, and support are mutually exchanged. Like the screws that connect ducts, structures for relationship building bond members of the caring learning community together. Supportive structures, such as peer-interactive strategies, surround the learning process like insulation surrounds the ducts. As a blueprint specifies the layout of the ducts for each home and the rooms within it, the teacher customizes the blueprint for learning for different classes and individual learners. In a word, an engaging educational practice provides a system for organizing interrelated practices that lead to engagement. It is needed to fully address the complex classroom elements; it not only creates engagement but sustains it over time as well.

Two statements I hear most often from teachers who struggle with student apathy and boredom are these: "My students just don't care" and "These kids just aren't motivated." I argue that *all* students *do* care. They care a great deal about many things, a majority of which aren't going on in enough classrooms. In my experience, I have found that in any given HUMS classroom, about 20% of students are intrinsically motivated. As you probably have observed, these are the ones who act as if they care about learning when, indeed, they don't. They hang onto every word that flies out of your mouth, remain engaged and on task even if your lesson is incredibly boring, and consistently give 110% effort. Then you have about 70% of students who are extrinsically motivated by something you do or give them. They are engaged and on task some of the time, but it takes a bit of effort to gain and sustain their attention and desire to learn. The remaining 10% of students are seldom engaged, rarely show that they care about any content or anything, and are classic case studies of apathy, disinterest, and boredom. Developing an engaging practice helps to consistently rekindle classroom flames for these latter two groups.

Part of the success in engaging students lies in incessantly doing your homework to uncover everything that touches them, makes

them tick, and means the most to them. It lies in discovering how to “dress up” the process of learning in garments they would don on any day. The other part of that success comes from framing the learning around critically meaningful ideas, issues, and information. In classrooms with a smaller proportion of intrinsically motivated students, the extent to which students are engaged is inextricably linked to the teacher’s ability to customize content around students. Creating an engaging educational practice minimizes levels of boredom and apathy through the creation of continuously evolving student-centered pedagogy.

Do you remember a time when more students than not would follow most of the rules and demands of teachers and school administrators? Indeed, there was a time where most students would willingly complete the majority of classroom tasks and comply with most rules (Modell & Elder, 2002). An engaging practice is called for given that you can no longer assume your students will come to school ready to comply with the majority of school mandates. Students in classrooms today are dealing with more challenging social issues. Pedagogy that addresses these issues is called for. Methods that pique interest and stimulate the desire for them to *want* to be there are essential to maintaining order as well as laying the foundation for engagement.

It will be no surprise to you that the pressure to increase standardized test scores in America’s schools has never been greater. Improved standardized scores reflect enhanced pedagogy and other learning processes in the classroom. An essential first step in corralling attention and motivating students to, at the bare minimum, *begin* the process of learning is the establishment of an ongoing yet effective framework for engagement. Not only does the engaging practice greatly increase the chance that greater numbers of your students will become more academically and socially competent, but you will be less stressed, and you will also increase the chance that they will stay in school until graduation. Additional reasons for making engagement a priority are listed below.

## **Laying the Foundation for Creating the Practice: Sales Situations in the Classroom**

With the understanding of the importance and benefits of student engagement as an important part of the teaching practice, why do so many teachers find it difficult to create engaging educational practices?

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: UNDERLYING REASONS FOR THE ESSENCE OF ENGAGEMENT

- One of the most pivotal factors affecting achievement in the classroom is student engagement. When students are highly engaged, it lowers the likelihood they will take part in risky behaviors (Connell, Halpern-Felsher, Clifford, Crichlow, & Usinger, 1995).
- There is a positive, strong link between engagement and performance across diverse populations of students (Finn, 1989; Finn & Rock, 1997).
- Academic engagement has been found to be an important factor in increasing the likelihood of educational success for low-income African American students (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994).
- Understanding why students drop out of school is principally theoretically modeled by engagement (Appleton et al., 2008).
- At-risk students in HUMS are more likely to do well when engaged in school (Finn & Rock, 1997).
- Nearly 50% of high school students cite being bored in school each day (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). Students who are male, nonwhite, or Asian, lower SES (socio-economic status), or special education have reported being less engaged than other students while in high school (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).
- School engagement predicts a significant part of how students perform academically irrespective of gender, grade, cognitive ability, or mother's education (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005) and robustly predicts student success in school (Lee, 2012).
- When students are engaged, it aids their cognitive and social development (Finn, 1993; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992).
- Engaged students have a greater chance than others of learning, graduating, and pursuing education after high school (Marks, 2000).
- Student engagement predicts student achievement and behavior in school. When students are engaged in school, they get higher grades higher test scores and are less likely to drop out. Between 40% and 60% of students experience chronic disengagement from school by ninth grade (Klem & Connell, 2004).
- Student engagement has been found to postpone pregnancy for high-school students (Manlove, 1998).
- The best place to begin school reform that improves the likelihood that poor African American students will succeed in school is student engagement (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994).

As mentioned, many teachers simply neglect to connect. That is, they pay little attention to connecting with students through the creation of emotional or intellectual bonds. They don't do enough to entice students to buy into what they have to offer. Their purview lies only

with designing lessons and delivering the curriculum. They deliver the curriculum as is, with no extras or upgrades.

Reexamining what teachers actually do also sheds light on part of the challenge. You would probably agree that the main duty of teachers is to facilitate the process of learning, but does any of that involve selling? Would you say that teachers are in the business of sales? Is it not true that teachers have an inventory of solutions, strategies, skills, ideas, competencies, and knowledge that they continuously try to get the curricular consumers (i.e., students) to buy? Ms. Klein tries different strategies to get her fourth graders to *buy* her ideas about quantity and patterns during math class. Mrs. Jones strives to sell her seventh graders skills for them to become competent readers and writers. Mr. King works to get his sophomores to *purchase* ideas about the production of goods and services and laws of supply and demand. If you would agree with the notion that teachers *are* salespeople, why is it often difficult to get curricular consumers to become repeat buyers?

Imagine going into a newly opened store that you knew nothing about and that you were unfamiliar with the store's employees, products, and services as well. What are the chances that you would swipe your debit card before leaving that day? Thinking of the last big-ticket item (e.g., large screen LCD television set) you purchased, what were all of the things that happened before you actually completed the sale? Chances are you didn't just make a blind purchase without knowing something about the reputation of the store, salesperson, or product. Someone probably referred you to them, you saw an ad lending credibility, or you dug up some information about them. At some point before making the payment, you probably had a strong *feeling* that you *needed* to purchase the product. It's highly likely that in the places where you are a repeat customer, your customer loyalty springs from the presence of people you know, like, and trust.

The classroom is the marketplace where teachers work to meet their sales quotas. Teaching is composed of a series of sales situations that are sometimes successfully closed. However, many classrooms are full of reluctant customers who are mandated by state law to be there. While there, many disgruntled customers do everything possible to make the job of the curricular salesperson very difficult. In high-poverty classrooms with a preponderance of underprepared students, this is often the case.

When students are introduced to teachers for the first time, their reluctance to buy may stem from questioning who the salesperson (teacher) is and whether or not that person is reputable. Resistance to

buy may lie in the fact that the salesperson has yet to earn their trust. Hesitancy may also stem from past poor experience (e.g., lack of success) with the product itself (curricular content) or a related product. For instance, a high school freshman may have repeatedly been teased and embarrassed about being a poor reader for the last five school years. The chance that his ninth-grade English instructor will sell him on reading fluency ideas is small. Additionally, the sale may be nullified because the instructional salesperson hasn't demonstrated adequate knowledge of the product. The confluence of these issues in the sales process precludes high sales volumes and promotes the frustrations of teachers.

The currencies used to transact buying and selling in the classroom are attention and emotion, which help procure interest, trust, and desire. They happen to be one of the most short-lived yet highly valuable classroom commodities. If you want students to pay you with their attention, impart their interest, and dole out desire, you've got to first give them compelling reasons to buy. Trying to grab and keep them before emotionally connecting is like the televangelist asking you to write the big check before hearing him or her preach the first sermon. You would be naïve to believe they will lend you their attention on credit before they know who you are, develop rapport with you, and know what the product will do for them. You have to first make deposits into their bank of trust. Everyone knows how important interest, trust, and desire are, but not as many strategically prepare and meticulously plan to pull out all stops to capture them. Other important considerations need be factored in to complete the sale.

When the challenge of engaging students is framed from the position of continuous buying and selling propositions, you are able to ferret out underlying reasons that help you close the sale. Reasons for refusal to buy are unearthed as well as ways to overcome sales objections and to negotiate student buy-in. Addressing engagement from this framework helps you build a wealth of achievement from the accumulation of attention, emotion, interest, trust, and desire.

## Chapter Summary

The provision of an engaging educational experience, particularly in HUMS, is most powerful when it is spawned by an engaging practice. The foundation of an engaging educational practice consists of embedded structures that continuously facilitate the creation of

emotional bonds between teacher and student and among students. Furthermore, engaging practices have a greater chance of developing when the teacher approaches teaching as if it were a buying and selling proposition. Your success at getting curricular consumers to buy into you and your educational offerings, and to become repeat buyers, stems from how well you are able to sell them on your reputability and trustworthiness as well as the extent to which they believe your product will benefit them. Ideas for getting loyal customers are explored throughout the rest of this book.



**ACTIONABLE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Please respond individually initially, and then discuss with your collaborative learning team.

1. If you had to choose, which component of engagement—emotional, cognitive, or behavioral—would you say is the greatest challenge for you?
2. Part of the resolution of any issue begins with accurately identifying the issue at the outset. Think of your typical daily interactions with your students. What are a few of the specific barriers that prevent you from consistently engaging them?

Barriers to emotional engagement

Barriers to cognitive engagement

Barriers to behavioral engagement

3. Though it may require a bit more planning and preparation, how might the development of an engaging educational practice benefit you and your students? Explain.
4. What strategies or methods have been most effective in helping you get students to buy into you and what you have to offer? How might you more effectively be able to garner more buy-in and increase sales in your practice?
5. Thinking of a few of your more engaging lessons, what are some common elements that were present in all?

Teacher commonalities (e.g., great energy during delivery, emotionally expressive delivery, theatrical presentation of content)

Student commonalities (e.g., actions, words they expressed about the lesson)

Content commonalities (e.g., highly relevant to them, framed in their world)

Lesson structure commonalities (e.g., interaction with peers, students moved, shorter periods of direct instruction)

**Exploratory Observations**

Arrange an observation of a lesson of each one of the members of your teaching team to be conducted by another team member. The

purpose of the observation is to explore elements of engagement for your team. Elements to be examined are the following:

1. General student engagement in the classroom.
2. Component(s) of engagement (emotional, cognitive, or behavioral) that appear to be either significant strengths or significant challenges
3. Any other elements that may impact engagement in the room

During the next team meeting, have each member share two strengths and two challenges and any other interesting findings gleaned from observation of each teacher. Teachers can use the observations and shared feedback to identify areas of challenge to focus on.

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