TEACHING STUDENTS TO **DRIVE THEIR LEARNING**

A PLAYBOOK ON ENGAGEMENT AND SELF-REGULATION

GRADES K–12

VISIBLE LEARNERS

DOUGLAS FISHER
NANCY FREY
SARAH ORTEGA
JOHN HATTIE

CORWIN

Thank you

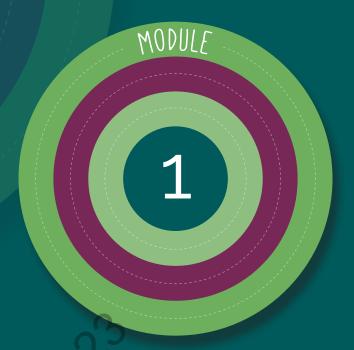FOR YOUR INTEREST IN CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from Teaching Students to Drive Their Learning.

LEARN MORE about this title!

CORWIN

1

ENGAGEMENT
From Disrupting to Driving Learning

LEARNING INTENTION

We are learning about engagement and the ways in which we can teach students to drive their learning.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can discuss the value of viewing engagement as a continuum.

- I can describe each of the levels of engagement and identify student actions at each level.

- I can identify factors that allow students to drive their learning.

Educators know how important engagement is for student learning, but do we ever teach it? Caring and responsive educators recognize the fundamental importance of acquiring the academic skills and accompanying language needed to succeed in subject areas and therefore teach both with intention. Yet curiously, we often leave investment in their own engagement almost entirely up to the students. Instead, there is an overreliance on external mechanisms, including classroom rules and extrinsic rewards like table points, but little in the way of instruction on engagement. This puts students at heightened risk for the punitive measures of punishment and exclusion. We'll put it another way: When school is viewed as a series of compliance hoops to jump through, rather than a place of learning and mutual investment, we all lose.

Nearly every student has a deep reservoir of motivation, but many choose not to invest their motivation in school work. So often the disengaged in class are absorbed with nonschool tasks (videos, social life, sport, music, etc.). Engagement is not a function of pushing and pulling students to do the work and love the subject, but an argument as to why they should invest in this work rather than that work.

But we all want to win. In fact, we want to create win-win situations in which students learn more and better, and their teachers recognize the impact of these situations on students. In the previous paragraph, we made it seem simple: *teach engagement*. And we do believe that students should understand what it means to engage in learning. But it's more complicated than that. As we will explore in this module, there are levels of engagement. Simply participating in class is not sufficient to ensure deep learning, much less assuming responsibility for your own learning. We see engagement as much more comprehensive and expansive. We won't bury the lede: *Students engage when they learn to drive their learning.* The question is, how do we create the conditions necessary for students to do so? What needs to occur for students to take increased responsibility for their learning, self-regulate their actions, and take ownership of their progress? That's true engagement. And that's the focus of this playbook.

TEXT IMPRESSION STRATEGY

The Text Impression strategy is used to activate a learner's background knowledge and invite predictions about a topic (McGinley & Denner, 1987). It uses a list of vocabulary words and phrases directly from the text. Learners use the list to write their own summary of the text before they have read it. They later compare their initial text impression with what they learn when they read the text. Text Impressions increase curiosity about the text and invite readers to engage more deeply in what they are reading. Importantly, curiosity has an effect size of 0.90, with a strong potential to accelerate learning. In each of the modules that follow, we'll invite you to engage in the Text Impression strategy.

Students engage when they learn to drive their learning.

TEXT IMPRESSION

Use the following words (in any order that works for you) to create an impression about what you think will be covered in this module.

behavioral engagement • cognitive engagement • emotional engagement • continuum • investing • withdrawing • engagement intention

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Engagement is at the core of learning (Eccles & Wang, 2012). Disengaged students learn less and are often negatively labeled as "unmotivated" or having "a behavior problem." Without question, a disengaged learner may well be a bored one. With an effect size of −0.46, boredom is a powerful decelerator to student learning. Many of us have witnessed this firsthand, as students put their hoodies up and their heads down. Or they turn their attention to something else such as a device or peer rather than the learning at hand.

Gauging student engagement is more than just cataloging who is turning in their assignments or leaning forward in their seats with eyes on the teacher. Engagement has historically been understood across three dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional (Fredricks et al., 2004). But these three dimensions are so interrelated that none of them is individually very predictive of student success. Of course, if a student is sleeping, they can't engage. And if students are asking relevant questions, they are more likely to be engaged. Following a review of a historical model of engagement, we'll turn to a model that presents engagement along a continuum, which we find more compelling from a learning perspective.

Berry (2020, 2022) took a novel approach to this engagement conundrum by asking teachers how these dimensions were manifested by their students. These interviews revealed that teachers saw engagement as a continuum of passive and active

forms of engagement as well as disengagement. Instead of seeing engagement as a dichotomy—students are engaged or not—the continuum suggests that there is a range of actions, which can include a mixture of the cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions that result in a state of being during learning. Berry called these stages of engagement *disrupting, avoiding, withdrawing, participating, investing,* and *driving.*

Since Berry's studies were published, classroom teachers around the world have utilized the continuum of engagement as a toehold for teaching students about its role in learning. Using the continuum as a visual, they name and label each stage of engagement, equipping their students with the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional language to take ownership of their learning by setting their goals and intentions. In other words, they teach the tools of self-regulation that are essential inside and outside of school. There are different ways that teachers help students to set their engagement intention and monitor their levels of engagement. Here are a few examples:

- A kindergarten teacher developed a graphic version of the continuum and placed it on each student's desk. Students placed a chip on the image that matched their intention and then were asked to self-assess at the end of the lesson.

- A third-grade teacher had students create posters for each stage. At various times during the day, students moved their nameplates to one of the posters to indicate their intention for that time period.

- A sixth-grade teacher gave each student a die and had them turn a number up to represent which stage they intended to be at, ranging from 1 for disrupting to 6 for driving.

- A middle school math teacher had index cards printed with labels for each stage. Each student was given a set of six cards on a ring. They could choose the card for the stage they were at and place it on top of their desk.

- A high school science teacher had students indicate their intention through the quiz feature in their learning management system. At the start of each period, students responded to the "quiz" so that the teacher would know where each student intended to be.

As noted in these examples, there is not just one way to invite students to set their engagement intention. But each of these ways allowed students to recognize their internal state of mind and communicate it with their teacher. A middle school teacher told us,

> Having students set their intention for engagement helps me make adjustments to the learning. And it helps me make decisions about how I approach different learners. For example, if a student tells me that they are withdrawn, it invites a conversation so that I can figure out what's happening and if there are things that I need to do because of that. When students are clear about their level of engagement, I take some of their actions less personally, which keeps me focused on the learning.

As Dewey noted many years ago, "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience. Reliving of an experience leads to making connections between information and feelings produced by the experience" (Dewey, 1933, p. 78). The essence of successful reflection is making evaluative claims—was the experience worthwhile, and did it have a positive impact on learning?

PAUSE AND PONDER

What is your reflection about teaching students about engagement?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How might you have students set their engagement intention and then reflect on their level of engagement?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

EXPLORING THE CONTINUUM OF ENGAGEMENT

Notice that the continuum locates passive thinking and actions in the center and radiates in both directions as students become more active. And yes, we've all seen students who are actively disengaged as well as those who were actively engaged. As we have noted, teaching students the language of engagement is helpful, but getting students to drive their learning is more complicated than simply labeling the stages. We'll consider each of the stages with notes about students who exhibited specific actions.

Many of the students who disrupt learning are actually struggling academically and would rather be seen as "the bad kid" than as "the stupid kid."

Disrupting Learning

In this case, students are actively disengaged, and their behavioral and cognitive actions indicate that they are not learning. They may be engaged in problematic behaviors, including actions that harm others. They may also yell out in class, make jokes, and generally cause a scene. In terms of their cognitive and metacognitive engagement, they are not in the learning space. Their attention is elsewhere and may even be devious or destructive. Interestingly, many students who disrupt learning are struggling academically and would rather be seen as "the bad kid" than "the stupid kid." We're not excusing the behavior; teachers need systems to interrupt the disruption, such as restorative practices and positive behavioral support systems. But we all recognize that disrupting learning means that there is likely very little learning occurring.

Avoiding Learning

Although they are not disrupting the learning of others, students at this stage along the continuum are avoiding tasks that allow them to learn. They are often off task but may be doing things that seem useful, such as sharpening a pencil or waiting for help. Of course, both of those can be useful in the right context, but often they are signs that the student is avoiding learning. They may also be off task doing things that are counterproductive to their learning, such as playing video games on their phone or leaving for the restroom when they don't really need to go. When the cognitive demands are too great, learners may need a break and may seem, at least temporarily, as if they are avoiding learning.

The ultimate avoidance behavior is absenteeism. At a time in education when we are witnessing unprecedented levels of this, we must be courageous enough to look into the "black box of chronic absenteeism" that includes student well-being and the learning climate (Childs & Lofton, 2021, p. 215). Unfortunately, these are not commonly considered when examining the root causes that lead some students to vote with their feet by not showing up at all. The key is whether or not students (and schools) have the tools necessary to recognize that they are avoiding learning and then to change this behavior.

Withdrawing From Learning

Sometimes, students withdraw more passively from learning and learning tasks, physically or cognitively. In some cases, students remove themselves from their peers to withdraw from learning, and other times they stare into space, put their headphones on, or hide their faces. The good thing is that they are not distracting others. The bad thing is that they are not learning. Cognitively, these students may not see relevance in the learning goals, or they may not have sufficient prior knowledge to make sense of the current learning.

Participating in Learning

The first level on the engagement side of the continuum is still fairly passive. Unfortunately, sometimes we accept participating as engagement and don't expect much more. After all, the student is doing the work and seems to be paying attention. Frankly, that is a pretty low bar, and it confuses compliance with learning. When students get to this stage, they're much more likely to learn some things than when they withdraw, avoid, or disrupt learning. However, they will not learn to drive their learning or take responsibility for their learning at this stage. It's just too passive, and we shouldn't accept

> Unfortunately, sometimes we accept participation as engagement and don't expect much more.

this as sufficient engagement but rather teach students the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional actions that allow them to invest in and drive their learning.

Investing in Learning

This is when students begin to take increased responsibility for their own learning. It's not just about doing work, but rather about valuing the learning. At this phase, students are much more curious and ask more questions. They engage with their peers and talk about what they are learning with others. In fact, they are excited about learning and anticipate future learning. Behaviorally, they are much more attentive and think along with their teachers, rather than observe their teachers doing the work.

Driving Learning

The highest level of engagement is reserved for students who drive their learning. Yes, they complete tasks and pay attention. They ask questions and think along with their teachers. But they take this to the next level as they set goals for themselves based on the class's learning intentions. They seek feedback from others and monitor their progress, often using tools their teachers have provided. They are so invested in their learning that they teach others, because they see that learning is valuable.

We have created a graphic version of this continuum with some of the actions that students take at each stage (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1   A Continuum of Engagement

ACTIVE ⟵──────────────────── PASSIVE ────────────────────⟶ ACTIVE

Disrupting	Avoiding	Withdrawing	Participating	Investing	Driving
Distracting others

Disrupting the learning environment

Engaging in problematic behavior

Destruction of materials

Persistent talking about something other than the topic of the lesson

Speaking with unkind words | Looking for ways to avoid work

Off-task behaviors

Packing backpack before class ends

Using various excuses to leave the classroom

Returning to class late from a break | Being distracted

Physically separating from group

Daydreaming

Sleeping in class

Acting or imitating participation

Hyperfocus on a task other than the one at hand | Doing work

Paying attention

Responding to questions

Observing teachers doing work

Following teacher instructions

Complying with a new rule | Asking questions

Valuing the learning

Recognizing that there are things worth learning

Collaborating with peers

Talking about their learning with others

Thinking along with their teachers | Setting goals for themselves based on what the class is learning

Seeking feedback from others

Self-assessing and monitoring progress

Teaching others

Being inspired to learn more about a topic or pursue an interest |
| **DISENGAGEMENT** | | | **ENGAGEMENT** | | |

Source: Adapted from the work of Berry (2022).

Wouldn't it be great if all it took to engage students and significantly impact their learning was to show them the continuum of engagement?? As every educator knows, it's not that simple. Yes, students should know what it means to engage, but they deserve to be taught what it means to drive their learning. Doing so is a daily exercise, one that requires shifts in the experiences that students have. To be clear, we believe that teachers also have responsibilities in the classroom, and they should help students drive their learning. We are not suggesting that educators abdicate their responsibilities in the name of students driving their learning. Teachers are a significant variable in students' learning, but it's what the teachers do that makes the difference.

To make recommendations about teaching students to drive their learning, we draw on the work of Absolum et al. (2009), Conley and French (2014), Frey et al. (2018), and a host of learning sciences and educational psychology research (cited in each of the modules in this playbook). We have organized the research evidence and our experiences into factors that guide experiences for students to learn to drive their learning, including the following:

- **I know where I'm going**. Students understand their current performance and how it relates to the learning intention and success criteria, as well as the longer learning progressions.

- **I have the tools for the journey**. Students understand that they can select from a range of strategies to move their learning forward, especially when progress is interrupted.

- **I monitor my progress**. Students seek and respond to feedback from others, including peers and teachers, as they assess their own performance. Students know that making mistakes is expected in learning and indicates an opportunity for further learning.

- **I recognize when I'm ready for what's next**. Students interpret their data in light of the learning intention and success criteria of the lessons, as well as the overall learning progression, to identify when they are ready to move on.

- **I know what to do next**. Knowing what to do *when you do not know what to do* is surely the mark of the educated person. It is the difference between knowing how to persist and simply giving up when faced with an early challenge. It is the essence of being a lifelong learner, one who knows how to research, organize information, and continue his or her own learning.

. . . .

CONCLUSION

We are not interested in gimmicks or bribes that temporarily gain students' attention. Yes, in truth, we have used those tools out of desperation. We want students to engage in learning and benefit from the hard work of their teachers. We want students to develop skills they own and can use in various settings, and not be dependent on their teachers to decide when specific learning tools should be used. And we want students to share responsibility for learning with their teachers and peers. In other words, we want to teach students to drive their learning. We'll explore the metaphor of driving further in the next module. For now, suffice to say that driving requires learning and the transfer of responsibility. Imagine what we can do for our students if we equip them with the skills necessary to increasingly own their learning, understanding that we're all on a path to learning more and better from those around us.

✏️ NOTE TO SELF

John identified the actions and behaviors of highly accomplished, lead teachers. In reality, these teachers did a lot of things differently and used a variety of learning strategies. There is no one right way to teach, but the key is to know whether or not you're having an impact. And when the impact is not acceptable, effective teachers change their approach. The actions that these highly accomplished teachers have in common are shown in the following table. How might you think about these actions in your classroom?

Actions of Highly Accomplished Lead Teachers	What This Could Look Like in My Classroom	Impact on Students
Communicate clear learning intentions		Understand the learning intentions
Have challenging success criteria		Are challenged by success criteria
Teach a range of learning strategies		Develop a range of learning strategies
Know when students are not progressing		Know when they are not progressing
Provide feedback		Seek feedback
Visibly learn themselves		Visibly teach themselves

↗ TEACHER ACTIONS

In each module in this playbook, we provide a list of actions we have observed in classrooms. Sometimes, well-intentioned teachers derail their efforts to create the learning environment that they want. Other times, their actions develop students' skills and knowledge. Consider the following actions that reinforce or derail efforts to ensure that students understand what it means to engage. How can teachers use (or avoid using) these actions to focus on teaching students to drive their learning? We have included blank lines for you to add your ideas.
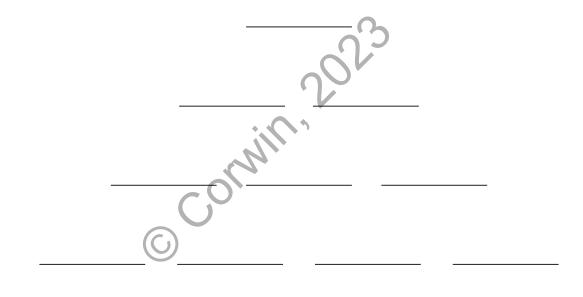
Teacher Actions That Reinforce Students' Understanding About Engagement	Teacher Actions That Derail Students' Understanding About Engagement
• Teaching students how to engage as explicitly as they teach academic content and language development • Recognizing that student acts of disruption, avoidance, or withdrawal are often attempts to hide struggles • Changing the approach when it's not proving to be effective • Providing clear criteria for success, so students can ask for specific feedback • Modeling being a lifelong learner; divulging to students the teacher's own goals in improving their teaching craft	• Assuming students know how to monitor their level of engagement • Taking it personally when a student is actively disengaged • Accepting participation as the end goal • Expecting students to engage in behaviors that have not been explicitly defined and modeled • Continuing with the same approach despite evidence that it is not having the desired impact
_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

RETELLING PYRAMID

Retelling content positively impacts learning as learners summarize information and share it in their own words (Morrow, 1985; Qin et al., 2019). Using a retelling pyramid is one way to encourage and support retellings of informational texts. Create a pyramid of words, using the following prompts, that provides summarizing information. You're more likely to remember this information if you share with a peer.

1. One word that conveys an important topic in this module

2. Two words that convey the value of an engagement continuum

3. Three words for actions you can take based on this module

4. Four words that are key to your understanding

5. Five words that convey a goal you have based on this module

Revisit the Text Impression summary you developed at the beginning of this module, and compare it to your current level of understanding. Where did your learning deepen?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Using the traffic light scale, with red being not confident, yellow being somewhat confident, and green indicating very confident, how confident are you in your ability to

- Discuss the value of viewing engagement as a continuum?

- Describe each of the levels of engagement and identify student actions at each level?

- Identify factors that allow students to drive their learning?