LIC 9 – Building a Stronger Community of Practice (Engagement)

Building a Stronger Community Through Engagement

This year, the focus in all our schools will be to find the best way to implement blended learning so that all our students can be engaged effectively. To come up with the best solutions, we must ensure that all our teachers and peers are engaged in discussions that will help strengthen the teaching learning process!

We cannot have a strong community if we are unable to engage the people we work with. With so many tasks on everyone's plate, it is important to ensure that each experience is meaningful in different ways so that individuals want to be engaged and contribute!

What Do We Mean by Engagement?

Gallup[1], a **global analytics and advice firm** that helps leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems, describes engaged employees as 'feeling responsible for and committed to superior job performance'. **Schaufeli and colleagues** in their 2002 study define engagement in the working place as 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption'.

In her article on teacher engagement, Dr. Jeny Rapheal says 'Engagement' in the teaching profession essentially is a synonym for teacher commitment, dedication, and involvement in their workspace[2].

She goes on to say, 'Engaged teachers of the new millennium deliberately indulge in seeking newer avenues for experimentation and professional expansion. In this era of knowledge explosion and technological revolution, passionate teachers are conscious of strengthening and updating their knowledge on a daily basis. They keep a tab on current trends in education, research and related sciences and often redefine the boundaries of their roles as teachers.' Not only teachers, this is true for all individuals working as or with educators.

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[1] https://www.gallup.com/workplace/285674/improve-employee-engagement-workplace.aspx
[2] https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/teacher-engagement-what-works-dr-jeny-rapheal/
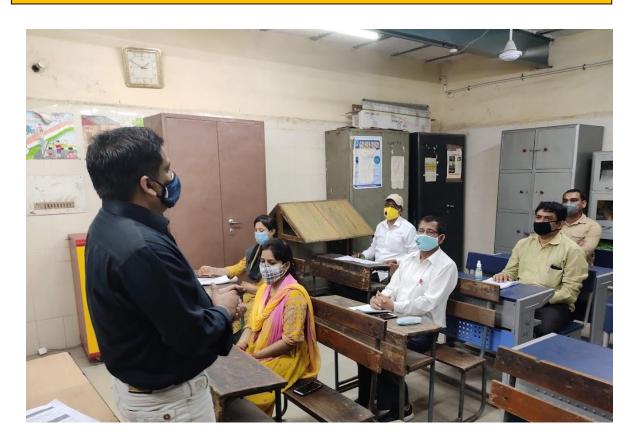
Different Forms of Engagements

Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) ran an insightful study that differentiated between 3 forms of engagement in students. However, these 3 forms of engagement also have a lot of relevance for the adults we work with! Let's take a look at what the study found.

The study defines engagement in three ways…
• <u>**Behavioural Engagement**</u> **is when individuals actively participate in the experience** and is defined in terms of participation, effort, attention, persistence, positive conduct, and the absence of disruptive behaviour
• <u>**Emotional Engagement**</u> **is when individuals have a positive outlook on their experience** and encompasses positive and negative reactions to peers, coaches, facilitators and the larger working ecosystem and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work
• <u>**Cognitive Engagement**</u> **is when individuals try to learn as much as possible** and draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills

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💡 **Time for Reflection!**

Think back to the different sessions you have been a part of or facilitated. What kind of behaviour would you see if someone was not 1) behaviourally engaged, 2) emotionally engaged, or 3) cognitively engaged?

Measuring Engagement

Based on the different forms of engagement, you can use this checklist to identify what kind of engagement may be lacking in your group/a particular individual *(or even in yourself!)* before planning how you might re-engage them *(remember, sometimes it may be a mix of different factors belonging to different types of engagement)*.

Form of Engagement	Checklist	Possible Strategies to Engage
Behavioural Enagagement	• Good conduct and participation • Completion of decided action plans on time • Complying with group norms during sessions • Punctual	• Easy ways through which people can participate (for ex. inviting responses on chat from everyone, cold calling etc.) • Using a collaborative approach when deciding deadlines • Clear and easy group norms to follow • Celebrating those who are punctual and participating
Emotional Engagement	• Showing signs/body language of excitement and interest • Sharing feelings (praise / laughter / anger/ pain/ hurt / guilt) • Feeling of belongingness to peers & institution / organization • Responding to questions with enthusiasm	• Developing strong relationships built on trust • Listening to their emotions patiently and nurturing their positive feelings • Moving from You & Me to We • Ensuring they feel heard • Make it fun!
Cognitive Engagement	• Asking probing questions (such as how and why questions) • Connecting concepts to previously learnt ideas • Sharing insightful comments based on experience and knowledge	• Clearly explaining the benefits of what you are asking people to do • Scaffolding the activity /instructions so everyone can follow • Including challenges from specific contexts of the people you are working with

Time for Reflection!

These are just a few pointers you can watch out for to identify the forms of engagement. What are some other behaviours you might notice? What are other strategies to engage?

Strategies for Re-engagement[3]

In order to re-engage individuals, **i**t is desirable to create a situation where it is feasible to **talk to them openly about why they have become disengaged**. This provides an invaluable basis for formulating a personalized plan to alter their negative perceptions and to prevent others from developing such perceptions.

It is also important to **change some of our facilitation/coaching methods** so that the disengaged individual **a) views you as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and b) perceives content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable**. It is important, for example, to eliminate threatening evaluative measures; re-frame content and processes to clarify purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences and underscore how it all builds on previous learning; and clarify why the procedures are expected to be effective especially those designed to help correct specific problems.

The focus throughout is on clarifying awareness of valued options, enhancing expectations of positive outcomes, and engaging the individual in meaningful, ongoing decision making.

To maintain re-engagement and prevent disengagement, the above strategies must be pursued using processes and content that:

- ✓ **Minimize** threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to others
- ✓ **Maximize** such feelings as mentioned above
- ✓ **Guide** motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice)
- ✓ **Provide** continuous information on learning and performance in ways that highlight accomplishments
- ✓ **Provide** opportunities for continued application and generalization (e.g., ways in which learner can pursue additional, self-directed learning or can arrange for additional support and direction)

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[3] http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdfhttp://m afgcw.org/pdf/articles/Article-5.pdf

Let us now discuss an example of building engagement!

TDC Arpita has been a TDC for 4 years. She is an active person and has a very strong connect with her Mentor and ART Members. Together, they have conducted successful ART meetings and also implemented teaching learning strategies. However, **the pandemic period has been especially hard because keeping the ART members engaged was quite a challenging task**. Also, becoming acquainted with technology and its tools has been an ongoing and difficult process.

TDC Arpita had been quite open about her struggles with her mentor teacher, MT Sandeep Sir. In their regular weekly call, **MT Sandeep Sir sent her the checklist of different kinds of engagement** and together, they discussed which kind seemed to be decreasing in most of her ART members. On seeing the list, TDC Arpita **realises that emotional engagement is quite low and that might be influencing their behavioural engagement as well**.

Once they have identified that the main problem is Emotional Engagement, Sandeep Sir and Arpita ma'am discuss what they could do to improve this. **After doing some research online and discussing with each other, Arpita ma'am decides to do the following**:
1) Have an **informal get together of the ART members** for half an hour at the beginning of every week. In this meeting, she decides she will just ask everyone to share how they are feeling, anything interesting – whatever they would like to share with each other!
2) She also decides that she **will speak to each ART members individually** once a week to find out how they are doing and what kind of specific support they need.
3) In her individual catch-ups, she decides, she will **also get updates on the ART meeting action plans.**
4) Finally, in her ART meeting, she decides to **dedicate more time to appreciating and celebrating** everyone's efforts.

Slowly and steadily she was able to re-strengthen the connect with all her ART members. **When she started to directly talk to the teachers about why they were feeling disengaged, she did not feel alone while tackling problems. The community around her became her strength and they tried solving the problems together.**

When she conducted an online ART meeting this time, she felt a renewed sense of connection. The engagement amongst all the members felt very organic. **Some of the ART members even took on a few responsibilities** and this helped in making the meeting very engaging and meaningful. **TDC Arpita followed a few simple things to make the ART meetings more engaging:** She made sure that the **positive stories of all the ART members were shared** during the meeting. **Successes and failures were celebrated** and the **HoS also shared specific appreciations** for the staff. **Action points were made by all** and the meeting ended on a positive note.

Further both the TDC and MT shared feedback with each other and thought out more creative ways to keep the momentum going.

1. What were the positive things done by TDC Arpita to keep everyone engaged?
2. What could have been done better by her?
3. What could she have done if cognitive engagement was lacking?

Using Technology to Enhance Engagement

What are some things we can do to enhance engagement and how can technology help us?

Increase opportunities for collaboration	• Get participants to collaborate and design parts of an upcoming session or meeting using Google Docs • Use Google Forms to identify individuals facing similar challenges	Think back to how collaboration can be made effective.
Increase opportunities for people to give their inputs	• Use tools like Mentimeter or Padlet to get anonymous feedback on sessions and meetings! Make sure you incorporate the feedback. • Use Google Forms to ask participants what they would like to see as part of the session – what questions do they want answered?	Instead of giving MCQs, give fewer but open ended questions asking for feedback. Such as – *What was your biggest takeaway? What question is still on your mind?*
Increase opportunities for celebrations	• Start the week by sending out appreciative messages through WhatsApp groups • Create short thank you videos using websites like Biteable or through your phone camera (it has premade templates so you can make videos in less than 5 minutes!) and share	Don't just celebrate success, celebrate the efforts that failed and the learning that came from them!
Provide visuals during online meetings	• Use video conferencing platforms like Zoom or Google Meet that allow you to share screen	Make sure the image/text being shared is connected to what is being said – but ensure it is not so much that individuals get distracted

Action Planning

Whatever the initial cause of someone's learning and behavior problems, the longer the individual has lived with such problems, the more likely he or she will have negative feelings and thoughts about it. The feelings may include anxiety, fear, frustration, and anger. The thoughts may include strong expectations of failure and vulnerability and low valuing of many learning opportunities. Such thoughts and feelings can result in avoidance motivation or low motivation for learning and performing. **So, what action can you take to help re-engage your colleagues?**

What signs of disengagement do I see? (Focus on 2-3 major behaviours that suggest disengagement. **For example, this person is not engaged in discussions during ART meetings**)	
Based on the signs, what forms of engagement need to be rebuilt? (Behavioural, emotional or cognitive? You can use the checklist above for help. **For example, lack of interest in discussion points to behavioural disengagement and also emotional disengagement**)	
What will I be able to see in their behaviour that will tell me they are re-engaged? (Think of 2-3 SPECIFIC behaviours you want to see in this individual, also think about when you will be able to observe these behaviours. **For example, in the next ART meeting, this person will ask at least 1 question during discussions**)	
What will I do to re-engage this individual? (Think of specific actions you can take to build the behaviour you want to see. **For example, next week I will have an open discussion with this person about why they don't take part in discussions, I will also send a message on the WhatsApp group recognising the value this person adds to our ART because of their experience of 20 years – I want them to feel valued**)	