

Engagement behaviors are responsive to teachers' and schools' practices, allowing for the possibility of improving achievement and attainment for students.

(Finn and Zimmer 2012: 99)

The principal assumption underlying the material in this book has been that engagement is key to successful learning in general, and to language learning in particular. If learners are not paying attention and do not become engaged in their work, then learning simply cannot take place. Therefore, we genuinely hope that it is empowering for teachers to learn that engagement can be consciously crafted and generated – there are specific actions that teachers can take to positively impact on learner engagement.

This book has drawn on a host of disciplines and has led us through varied fields of education, business management, leadership studies, psychology and gaming among others. This means we have drawn on a substantial body of relevant literature in our attempt to provide an informed understanding of the topic, as the reference list indicates. Our choice of principles and suggested actions has inevitably been based on a subjective selection from a broader potential menu, in accordance with our understanding of the field (and especially motivation theory and other dimensions of psychology) and our own practical experiences as educators. We do hope that despite any omissions, readers will find the material comprehensive yet not prescriptive or overwhelming.

It has definitely not been our intention to imply that a teacher should use all the actions every lesson and all the time. Instead, we hope that teachers will see this as a palette to select from, as suits them, their learners and their context. Each teacher will need to start where their learners are and what they feel comfortable with. For some, this may mean just small adjustments to their current practices, at least at the outset, but it is the sense of exploration and reflection on how to engage learners actively in their language learning that we hope to foster. For those who wish to read further into a particular facet of engagement or learning design, each chapter provides a brief list of annotated references.

The book started by outlining what engagement is and why we think this is important to understand in language teaching. Chapter 1 moved on to outline the backdrop against which language teachers work. We reflected on the range of contextual factors that tend to be out of the direct control

THE CONTEXTS OF LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

Learner engagement in class is connected to attitudes and beliefs stemming from a host of contextual factors that affect both the learner and the school.

- **Principle 1:** Recognise that individual languages have sociocultural status and social capital
- **Principle 2:** Connect language learning in class to life beyond the classroom
- **Principle 3:** Families are a valuable resource for learner engagement
- **Principle 4:** School priorities, curricular relevance and testing policies have a bearing on engagement
- **Principle 5:** Whole-school culture can cultivate or kill learner engagement

THE FACILITATIVE LEARNER MINDSET

Learners are more likely to engage with language learning if they feel competent to do so and have some ownership and control over their development and experiences.

- **Principle 1:** Promote a sense of competence
 - **Principle 2:** Foster a growth mindset
 - **Principle 3:** Promote learners' sense of ownership and control
 - **Principle 4:** Develop proactive learners
 - **Principle 5:** Develop gritty learners
- **Action 1:** Think and act like a coach
 - **Action 2:** Make learning progress visible
 - **Action 3:** Discuss beliefs explicitly
 - **Action 4:** Build in choice and voice
 - **Action 5:** Teach how to learn

TEACHER–STUDENT RAPPORT

In order to develop learner engagement, we need to work on developing a positive relationship with our students and reflect on how we make ourselves available and interact with them.

- **Principle 1:** Be approachable
 - **Principle 2:** Be empathetic
 - **Principle 3:** Be responsive to learner individuality
 - **Principle 4:** Believe in all your learners
 - **Principle 5:** Support learner autonomy
 - **Principle 6:** Be passionate about what you do
- **Action 1:** Take care with teacher talk
 - **Action 2:** Be thoughtful about feedback
 - **Action 3:** Listen to learners
 - **Action 4:** Use questions to engage
 - **Action 5:** Deal with discipline relationally

POSITIVE CLASSROOM DYNAMICS AND CULTURE

For learners to be willing to engage in class, they need to feel safe and accepted as valued members of a cohesive classroom community, who also have specific responsibilities for their own and the others' learning.

- **Principle 1:** Lead by example
 - **Principle 2:** Promote group cohesiveness
 - **Principle 3:** Promote TEA among learners: Trust, Empathy and Acceptance
 - **Principle 4:** Foster a culture of collaboration and support
 - **Principle 5:** Resolve conflict constructively and respectfully
- **Action 1:** Connect learners personally
 - **Action 2:** Develop a sense of 'we' and 'us'
 - **Action 3:** Prepare learners for groupwork and cooperation
 - **Action 4:** Structure using the three 'R's: rules, roles and routines
 - **Action 5:** Foster democratic participation

Three Central Themes

As we have reflected on the range of principles and actions ourselves, we noticed three strong recurrent themes:

and

Here is a brief recap of the lessons we have drawn regarding these themes:

- Many of the principles across the different themes centre on a common issue, that of the learners feeling comfortable, confident and safe to approach their language learning without any fear of making mistakes or being ridiculed, and being surrounded by relationships of trust and respect. Emotions create the foundations on which engagement is built and they also emerge from the processes of being engaged: if learners are engaged and enjoying working on a task, this will generate positive emotions with positive expectations for the next and future language task encounters. Success does breed success. As teachers, we need to be sensitive to the feelings generated by the L2 and its learning, most notably emotions associated with enjoyment, curiosity and interest on the positive side and anxiety, embarrassment, boredom and risk on the negative. As a field, we know relatively little about how best to harness the emotions that have featured prominently in this book (for early exceptions, see Arnold 1999), but recent advances in emotion research (e.g. Dewaele 2018) as well as in establishing a link between positive psychology and SLA (MacIntyre, Gregersen and Mercer 2016) indicate that this situation is in the process of change.
- The importance of autonomy for engagement is well established, and we saw repeatedly how impactful for engagement it can be when learners are empowered to make decisions and express their voice through democratic participation in all aspects of their education and learning process. Treating learners as partners in their own learning means teachers and institutions showing respect and trust to the learners, and also giving them the power and opportunities to take responsibility and direct their own learning within the bounds of the contextual constraints. Engagement is about action and so learners benefit when they are directing that action in ways that are authentic, meaningful and purposeful. We also saw that any genuine learner empowerment has a relational basis, as learner-led tasks frequently require collaboration and cooperation with others and trustful, positive rapport with the teacher-facilitator.

- . Finally, the most important dimension of engagement is active participation by the learner. There are no two ways about it: engagement is about action. Having said that, it has also been stressed repeatedly that being engaged is not the same as being busy – genuine student engagement is purposeful, meaningful and leads to learning. Yet, the truth remains that teaching with engagement in mind means teaching with learner action and participation in mind. Learning can never be a spectator sport.



REFLECTION TASK

Think of your classroom and your upcoming classes. Which of the above three themes are most relevant to keep in mind in your lesson design? Are there any particular actions that lend themselves to be tried out in relation to this selected theme?

Final Words

We know that it is highly unlikely to ever achieve 100% high engagement from ALL learners at any one time. The best we can realistically aim for is what Schlechty (2011: 32) explains as ‘most students are engaged most of the time’. The fact that some will just be complying but not deeply engaged and some others will be fully off task or even engaging in rebellious behaviour is part of the daily challenges of being a (language) teacher. We hope, however, that this book has shown that the level of student engagement in a class is not a mysterious phenomenon that is attributable to coincidence or factors completely outside our control. L2 lessons and tasks be designed to be more engaging, following some relatively straightforward principles. In addition, it is worth remembering and drawing hope from the fact that the learners themselves do not like to be bored or passive; they would usually prefer to be engaged. So, our job is to engage learners in their learning by designing language learning experiences that provide learners with the opportunity and encouragement to engage. Our hope is that this book can help you to do just that.