



NATIONAL
DROPOUT
PREVENTION
CENTER/NETWORK

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 26 NUMBER 2

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

I WAS EXCITED TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM AND WATCH A TEACHER CANDIDATE TEACH. I WAS GREETED WITH A NEATLY TYPED LESSON PLAN, A LEARNING TARGET PRINTED ON THE WHITEBOARD, AND CHILDREN IN PERFECT ROWS. NOTHING APPEARED TO BE AMISS, SO WHY DID I HAVE THAT FEELING IN THE PIT OF MY STOMACH THAT SOMETHING WAS OFF? THE BELL RANG AND THE TEACHER CANDIDATE BEGAN TO GIVE THE LESSON PLANNED. THE STUDENTS SAT POLITELY, YET IT WAS EASY TO SEE THAT MANY HAD TUNED OUT. THERE WAS NOTHING IN THE LESSON THAT CONNECTED TO THE STUDENTS, SPARKED THEIR INTEREST, OR CHALLENGED THEM TO CRITICALLY ANALYZE THEIR WORLD. WHERE HAD THE CANDIDATE GONE WRONG?

In the midst of a rigorous curriculum, the teacher candidate forgot the importance of knowing the students in the class and developing lessons that capitalize on their experiences. Unfortunately, this experience is becoming more common. Teachers and students enter the classroom amidst the “perfect storm.” Classroom teachers are working under tremendous pressures to meet new accountability standards, teacher evaluation, and high-stakes testing, just to name a few examples, all in the midst of increased class size. In their quest to juggle all of this, engagement can be the ball that drops. To help encourage teachers to keep the ball of engagement in the air, and to make this doable, this newsletter offers examples and ideas for all of us.

In her study with high school students in a rural district, Dr. Andrea Farina shares the perceptions and experiences of 80 junior and senior students currently enrolled and 10 students who dropped out. Her article, “Engagement and Dropout Decision Making in Rural Schools,” challenges us to consider the organizational level factors that could be contributing to student dropout and provides a reminder that, without engaging students in the learning process, students will question the relevance. Finding none, they will choose to tune out and disengage. Therefore, pedagogy becomes critical. So, how do we engage our students? How do we foster a love of learning?

Dr. Yune Tran found one answer by teaching computer coding to elementary students. Capitalizing on the cognitive benefits computer programming provides, she describes her groundbreaking work with elementary students in her article, “A Changing Perspective: Providing Access Early to Drive Innovation Later.” Dr. Tran piqued the interest of more than 400 students, including female, minority, English Language Learners, and students from economic disadvantage, to engage in complex, analytical computer coding. The popularity of this course has grown, resulting in Dr. Tran expanding her work to 20 classrooms.

Classroom teacher Heather Brown describes the joy of watching learning come to life through field trips. She makes a case for this in her article, “The Necessity for Field Trips.” When children can truly experience a phenomenon they have up to that point only read about, their learning comes to life and they engage deeply in the content.

Through her review of *Total Participation Techniques: Making Every Student an Active Learner*, Dr. Rebecca Addleman points us to a resource for all classroom teachers as they seek methods, strategies, or techniques to engage all learners. The authors of this book recognize the busy lives of teachers by developing strategies that are easily integrated into lessons.

Dr. Julie Nicholson and Dr. Linda Perez continue the discussion on the significance of trauma-informed teaching.



Students who have been impacted by physical, social, or emotional trauma can view the classroom as an unpredictable and threatening place. They sit in classrooms with a divided focus between attempting to navigate their education and making sense of their world in light of the trauma they have experienced. As classroom teachers, we have the power to mitigate this.

In “Viewpoint” Kristina Peterson encourages us to remember that the efficiency model that the educational system has adopted is counter to engagement. There is no substitute for knowing students and designing learning around student choice and ownership.

As you plan this year, I encourage you to deeply consider the needs of students. Are they engaged? If no, what are the barriers? What do you have the ability to change? Educators’ roles have changed significantly in the last few years. Students have profound needs that we often feel unprepared and/or untrained to address. Yet, I have tremendous faith in our profession because of teachers like you, who will read this newsletter, reflect on their own practice, and find ways to engage their students and cause another student to persist, and successfully graduate. May you find the strength and encouragement you need to do great work again this year!

—Brenda Morton, EdD
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A Changing Perspective: Providing Access Early to Drive Innovation Later

by Yune Tran

Technology jobs are expected to grow faster than any other job category over the next decade. The increasing need for computer science (CS) education has led to recent initiatives from nonprofits and the federal government to broaden science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) efforts, including computer programming, in schools. STEM skills involve problem solving, critical thinking, and conceptualization that complement many academic content areas. A report by the National Research Council (2012) suggested that teachers should develop students' understanding of computational thinking by embedding its content in existing STEM curricula, given the essential role that computational thinking plays in the 21st century (Rushkoff, 2010).

A successful 10-week pilot program of CS education that leveraged access for all students in several third-grade classrooms—particularly underrepresented students, females, minority populations, English Learners (ELs), and children from economically disadvantaged situations—began in 2014 in Oregon. As a result of that pilot's success, this model was implemented in 15 elementary classrooms in fall 2015 in the Newberg School District in Oregon and will continue in fall 2016 in approximately 20 classrooms across several Oregon school districts.

Through the program, more than 400 students have received hybrid CS lessons that were delivered during the regular school day. As a part of program delivery, university students majoring in education and those majoring in CS were strategically paired. Education major students brought classroom management skills and an ability to communicate with third-grade students at their level while the CS majors brought necessary coding and computer troubleshooting skills. Classroom teachers' participation capitalized on the program's ability to provide opportunities for interdisciplinary learning situations. The team teaching approach provided an ideal setting to maximum effectiveness.

For one hour each week, students learned interdisciplinary lessons in CS concepts such as sequence, algorithm, debugging, conditionals, and events adapted from CSUnplugged, code.org, and Scratch. Before transitioning to the online platform from code.org for application of learned content, students participated in 30 minutes of hands-on activities.

Research supports expanding computational thinking in elementary classrooms to increase the quality and quantity of students in the STEM and CS pipeline to provide elementary-aged students appropriate learning experiences around STEM and CS topics.

Beyond specifically encouraging STEM participation later in life, CS literature has argued that elementary-aged children who participate in computer programming have improved cognitive ability, mathematic scores, and reasoning and problem-solving skills compared to children who did not participate (Clements, Battista, & Sarama, 2001; Liao & Bright, 1991).

From understanding human behaviors and solving problems efficiently to error correction and heuristic reasoning, computational thinking is a fundamental skill for every child's analytical ability that cuts across various academic domains, including reading, writing, and arithmetic skills (Wing, 2006). Despite misconceptions, children are capable of taking on these mental challenges even at the earliest grades (Bers & Horn, 2010; Harris & Rooks, 2010). Elementary-aged students need exposure to interdisciplinary



STEM and CS content to collaborate, explore, pose questions, analyze, create and test models, and draw conclusions. Thus, establishing the nation's youngest students with a strong foundation in basic computing and computational thinking is a vital ingredient in propelling STEM and CS education, as well as promoting success in college, career, and STEM professional paths that can reduce the high cost of interventions later (Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Arteaga, & White, 2011).

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Meet Our Guest Editor

■ Dr. Brenda Morton is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at George Fox University in Newberg, OR. She cofounded the Trauma-Informed School Initiative, working with both in-service and preservice teachers to become trauma-informed practitioners. Her research interests focus on marginalized children in schools, including foster children and at-risk youth who have historically underperformed in academic settings. She is a former foster parent who continues to be active in local and state committees to improve the foster care system. She has published several research studies sharing the lived experiences of foster youth.



Upcoming Solutions to the Dropout Crisis

■ Join *Solutions to the Dropout Crisis* webcast on Tuesday, December 13, to hear about overcoming obstacles in launching a successful dropout prevention initiative in rural Alaska. *Solutions* is available for viewing free at 3:30 p.m. ET the second Tuesday of each month at dropoutprevention.org/webcast. Archived sessions are always available for viewing.

NDPC/N Releases Major Issue Brief and Position Paper

■ NDPC/N and the Moriah Group, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), announce the release of an issue brief examining trends and findings related to improving high school graduation rates among males of color. The issue brief is a part of *Forward Promise*, a \$12 million commitment from RWJF. Coauthored by Dr. Sandy Addis, Director of NDPC/N, and Cairen Withington, Assistant Director of NDPC/N, the issue brief examines research and trends, but mainly presents recommendations for improving high school graduation rates among males of color.

This fall NDPC/N also released *Weaving Engagement Into the Core Practices of Schools* authored by two NDPC/N Research Fellows, Terry Pickeral and Dr. Rob Shumer, along with colleagues Teri Dary and Anderson Williams. The position

paper defines student engagement and identifies four key elements stakeholders must address to support sustainability of student engagement. It further focuses on the roles and responsibilities of both students and adults, with the goal of moving youth from externally driven youth activity to internally owned youth action. Both publications and related materials are available at www.dropoutprevention.org/resources/major-research-reports/

NDPC/N Announces Rural Dropout Prevention Resources Videos

■ NDPC/N is pleased to provide access to a collection of videos focusing on dropout prevention strategies used, or challenges faced, specific to 14 states: Alaska, Arkansas, Iowa, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. The videos are the products of a Rural

Dropout Prevention project awarded by the U.S. Department of Education to Manhattan Strategy Group, which executed the project with assistance from the American Institutes for Research, the National Dropout Prevention Network, and Clemson Broadcast Productions. The videos are available at www.dropoutprevention.org/rural-dropout-prevention-resources-videos/

NDPC/N Celebrates 30th Anniversary

■ NDPC/N celebrated 30 years in October by burying a time capsule containing memorabilia and documents from 1986 to the present and planting a white oak to symbolize the strength of NDPC/N's commitment to the future. The ceremony and after-ceremony interviews with past NDPC/N Directors and Dr. Sandy Addis, current NDPC/N Director, are available at www.dropoutprevention.org/who-we-are/our-history/

Upcoming NDPC/N Events

■ Join administrators, policymakers, practitioners, coaches, and those who work with at-risk youth at these exciting NDPC/N conferences.

For more information, visit our website at www.dropoutprevention.org/conferences

Engagement and Dropout Decision Making in Rural Schools

by Andrea J. Farina

Each year too many students in the United States take part in a procession out of high school for the final time. This final walk is not symbolic of their success in attaining a diploma and the skills necessary to compete for 21st century employment, but rather it marks the abandonment of their educational journey.

The necessity to curb the epidemic of high school attrition by exploring the organizational factors of schools was the impetus for my mixed-method study exploring the school organizational and social relationship factors that influence dropout decision making in rural schools. The study incorporated perceptual survey data from 80 students currently enrolled in 11th and 12th grades and the surveying and interviewing of an additional 10 students who had previously dropped out of a single rural high school in south central Pennsylvania. The data were utilized to reveal what school organizational elements these current and former students identified as being associated with their decision to persist through or drop out of high school.

While schools from every geographic classification possess their own unique set of challenges, rural schools have been documented in the research as having limited curricular options which result in limited offerings of elective, vocational, and advanced placement courses, limited financial resources, lower expectations for postsecondary options, and limitations due to transportation—all of which have the potential to impact dropout decision making (Edington & Koehler, 1987).

The study revealed that how students perceive school structure (credit accrual, course requirements, and learning pathways) and teacher relationships within their high school was indicative of their at-risk status and illuminated how critical student engagement is to promoting student persistence. A key finding showed that personalized learning pathways and random prevention strategies alone will not promote school persistence. Students must be actively engaged in learning to find relevance in the instruction being offered in school.

Barkley (2010) defined engagement as “the synergistic interaction between motivation and active learning” (p.8). Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) reported that teachers play the most important role in facilitating this interaction; therefore, it is important to discuss the qualities of

teaching that have been shown, through research, to promote student engagement. Claxton (2007) suggests that teachers frame their instruction to make learning relevant, transparent, challenging, and safe for students to take risks. However, merely establishing a culture for engagement is not enough. Teachers must implement instructional practices that transform their role to that of a facilitator for knowledge acquisition. Dunleavy and Milton (2009) shared common instructional practices that promote engagement:

- Emphasize conceptual learning and opportunities for students to work with authentic ideas and problems, develop a deep understanding of ideas, sort through misconceptions, learn new ideas and create or improve upon ideas, and see conceptual connections across disciplines.
- Incorporate authentic assessment as a strategy that helps students set goals and assess their own learning.
- Invite students to be co-designers of their learning in classrooms; support student voice and autonomy.
- Provide a high level of social support for learning and encourage students to take risks, ask questions, and make mistakes.
- Connect students with opportunities to develop abilities in critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, reasoning, analyzing, problem solving, communicating, etc.
- Bridge students’ experience of learning in and outside of school by exposing them to digital technologies in knowledge building environments. (pp. 13-14).

Dropout prevention reform efforts are multifaceted and require school leaders and educators to explore all facets of the organization to support student persistence. The findings of this study suggest that school structure and teacher relationships are critical to influencing dropout decision making; however, teachers’ instructional practices can be shaped to promote student engagement, which has been shown to promote greater completion rates in high schools (e.g., Lee & Burkam, 2003; Mulroy, 2008; Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

Principals play an essential role in ensuring that effective instruction is occurring in all classrooms. To facilitate the practice of classroom instruction that engages students, effective principals should offer teachers what effective teachers offer at-risk youth—support.

Assuming a proactive role that supports the inclusion of instructional practices that foster student engagement would include (a) engaging teachers in meaningful discourse about the importance of student engagement and dropout decision making, (b) allocating the resources necessary to implement instructional practices that promote engagement, (c) supervising instruction with feedback specific to instructional engagement, (d) monitoring of at-risk students’ progress, and (e) coordinating professional development to enhance teachers’ ability to implement instructional practices that promote greater levels of student engagement. If the instructional practices of teachers effectively engage students in learning, this may limit the numbers of students who are identified as at risk for quitting school and who need the targeted interventions necessary to curb attrition.

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How Trauma Can Create Barriers to Students' Engagement and the Need for Trauma-Sensitive Schools

by Julie Nicholson and Linda M. Perez

The third graders had just filed in from recess and they were sitting on the rug listening to Ms. Keller read a chapter from a book detailing immigration stories and the hardships many people faced in their attempts to reach America. The narrative took a dark turn as she described the heartbreaking details of a family who drowned in the course of their ocean journey. As Ms. Keller described their fate, Gabriella, a child in the class began pinching and kicking children all around her.

Ms. Keller asked her assistant to continue reading while she took Gabriella to the back of the classroom, inviting her to sit in the bean bag chair and to take some calming deep breaths while asking, "I wonder if that story made you feel worried?" Gabriella erupted into tears and began to yell while hitting her fists against the floor, "They were dying and I thought my whole family would die." Ms. Keller, using a soft and steady voice, leaned down and reassured Gabriella that she was at school and that she was safe, her family was safe, and nothing bad would happen to her. Later that day, Ms. Keller emailed Gabriella's mom explaining, "Gabriella had a rough day today. I think she was triggered by a book we have been reading and discussing in class. I realized that for her, this was not make believe. I need to think about how to adapt this unit so I don't accidentally trigger her again."

Evidence shows early trauma negatively impacts children's physiology and brain development. It can impair social, emotional, and cognitive capacities, including symbolic thought, language, memory, attention, and executive functioning which undermines self-regulated learning. Children like Gabriella, who experienced relational trauma from the early loss of significant attachment relationships, often struggle with classroom demands. They are neurobiologically focused on survival and have neural wiring that is hypervigilant to perceived environmental threats. Their hypervigilance and frequent defense behaviors can interrupt their classroom performance when they are required to concentrate for long periods of time.

Many students with histories of trauma also struggle with anxiety which can interfere with their ability to pay attention in school, especially in activities that require them to engage in risk taking, play (especially imaginary play), or creative and divergent thinking as doing so requires that they stop attending to their survival needs. Children with early disruptions in their attachment relationships may also have implicit memories of being rejected which can result in feelings of fear, self-doubt, self-hatred, and aggressive self-destructive behaviors, characteristics likely to interrupt their ability to form caring and responsive relationships with teachers and peers in school (Craig, 2016).

Trauma-informed teaching changes how teachers, administrators, and school staff view children with a traumatic history. Using a trauma-sensitive lens, children's negative behavior is understood as a result of injuries due to physical, emotional, or social maltreatment (Craig, 2016). The behaviors represent an overactive brain stem that suppresses the use of the prefrontal cortex necessary for problem solving, planning, and self-regulation. Importantly, children remain open to protective environmental factors that reduce stress and anxiety, and learning improves if teachers attune to the children's needs and foster feelings of safety. Feeling safe optimizes behavior by interrupting defensive acting out and increasing social behaviors.

According to Bessel Van der Kolk (2015),

The critical challenge in a classroom setting is to foster reciprocity: truly hearing and being heard; really seeing and being seen by other people. We try to teach everyone in a school community—office staff, principals, bus drivers, teachers, and cafeteria workers—to recognize and understand the effects of trauma on children and to focus on the importance of fostering safety, predictability, and being known and seen. (p. 354)



Educators can learn to see the world through the eyes of children and youth who endure the hardships of toxic stress and traumatic experiences. Using a trauma-sensitive lens, educators can enhance children's ability to heal at school by offering frequent reassurances of their safety and by providing them with consistent and predictable routines throughout the day. According to Stephen W. Porges (2015), "Safety is based on social connectedness providing a 'neural' expectancy, which promotes both mental and physical health. Being safe is not the equivalent of removing threat."

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The Necessity for Field Trips

by Heather Joy Brown

Rushing to the left side of the school bus, the whole third-grade class shouted almost in unison, “Look at all the TREES!” At first confused why they were mesmerized by the trees and the countryside scene, I soon realized the reason. Many of the inner-city, Title 1 students in my class that year had never been outside the city streets of Washington, DC, much less seen this much of nature. This trip was like going to a foreign country. Their eyes sparkled at this new discovery of nature before them.

Simply put, field trips are opportunities to visit and observe something firsthand. As a public school elementary teacher, I have seen the impact field trips can have. Keeping students engaged in content is a challenge every teacher faces. How can we make content real for our students?

School Without Walls at Francis Stevens (SWWFS) recognizes that a learning experience can be more authentic when students experience it for themselves. SWWFS is part of the DC Public School (DCPS) system and sits one and a half miles north of the Lincoln Memorial on the National Mall. Every day we teach and learn right in the heart of Washington, DC. In fact, one third-grade unit is named *Washington, DC: It's Right Outside My Door*. No wonder our school's mission statement enforces the concept that firsthand experiences support the highest level of learning. SWWFS' mission statement is in part to incorporate “global and local resources in an experiential and interdisciplinary methodology to teaching and learning.” We strive to provide a world class education by scheduling and aligning relevant trips to supplement our students' experiences and background knowledge and prepare them for the real world by expanding their understanding of that world.

When I first took a group of DC students out of the city limits, I was shocked. We had been discussing geography and land forms for weeks, but nothing could compare to the joy on every single face as we drove through the countryside and hiked deep underground in the Luray Caverns of Virginia. Pointing to various stalactites and stalagmites, they exclaimed, “This is just like it was in the

book!” Learning needs to be experiential and, in its finest form, hands-on and real. When we returned, we spent the following weeks finishing the unit. Many students now supported answers to questions with phrases and examples based on that trip experience. The content was real to them and they could relate their experiences to the book content clearly.

Another example occurred when our second graders studied pollination. To learn about the life cycle of a plant, we read texts such as *How Do Plants Grow?* and spent a week on the poem *Life of a Plant*. Their culminating task was to act out the life-cycle of the plant to show content comprehension. *Mariana Becomes a Butterfly* by the Engineering Is Elementary team challenged students to learn the process of pollination and the struggles some plants have when natural pollinators are unsuccessful. Students read how agricultural engineers created tools such as hand pollinators to assist pollination. Then, we took a trip to the United States Botanical Gardens on the National Mall where we spent time dissecting actual plants and seeing the benefits of hand-pollination. Staff explained that because the Gardens house a variety of plants from all over the world, natural pollinators are not always available. Hand pollination is an essential process. Students took these engaging, hands-on lessons and applied the newly acquired knowledge to responses and essays back in the classroom.

Often teachers are surprised that our administration encourages taking students on one field trip a month. Questions such as “How does your principal feel about that?” quickly arise. Our principal, Richard Trogisch, encourages teachers to provide hands-on experiences for students. SWWFS is a family- and community-based school where parents and the community have the opportunity for involvement in the growth of students' learning. Because of administration's support, teachers feel the freedom to expand students' knowledge outside the classroom and to apply the content of learning to the real world.

SWWFS classes are able to take so many trips because we live in a historic and accessible city that caters to students'



public transit needs. Many other cities and schools may not have that luxury. I would then challenge my fellow educators to find what is local to their school and to get students out into their communities to learn more about their environment.

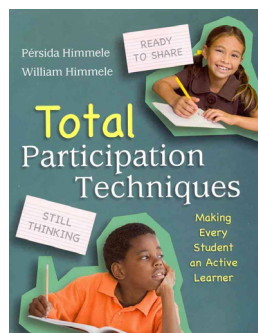
Others may ask, “How do you deal with disruption to classroom time?” Real-life experiences are rich for students and they are more engaged because of their experiences. Finding purposeful field trips linked directly to curriculum is key to boosting the engagement and connection students have with learning. Their writing is enriched with examples from trips and their partner-collaborative conversations are full of examples from their experiences.

Overall, field trips bring a spark of excitement into the classroom for my students. Too often, classrooms are forced to limit or eliminate field trips, perhaps due to budgetary concerns or the perceived need to prepare students for assessments. However, I have experienced the tremendous benefit that relevant, real-world experiences have for students, both for academic development and global citizenship. We would be remiss to overlook the growth of our students in both of these areas. Field trips empower student learning, helping students relate the information to their personal growth and to their comprehension of content. Our students today deserve cultural exposure, hands-on learning experiences, and the opportunity to implement what they have learned in the real world back into the classroom.

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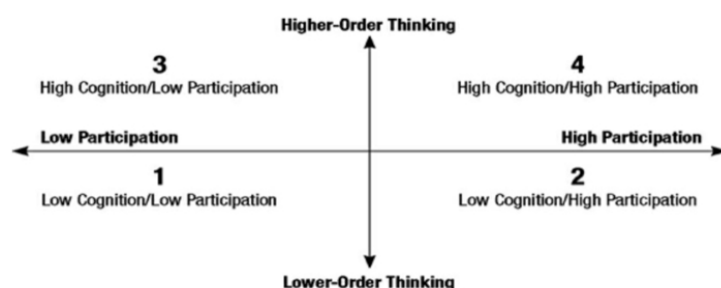
BOOK REVIEW



Total Participation Techniques: Making Every Student an Active Learner. (2011). Pésida Himmele and William Himmele. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 133 pages. [ISBN: 978-1-4166-1294-0]

“If we were given the opportunity to choose just one tool that could dramatically improve teaching and learning, we would choose *Total Participation Techniques* as the quickest, simplest, most effective vehicle for doing so” (Himmele & Himmele, 2011, p. 7).

This book dissolves visions of unengaged students doodling, whispering, or peacefully drooling on desks while teachers participate in the learning process. The Himmeles promote student engagement as indispensable for preventing high dropout rates and increasing critical thinking in the classroom. Their book begins with a four-quadrant framework for engagement aimed at whole-class participation and higher-order thinking (Figure 2.1, used with permission below).



The Himmeles continue with step-by-step instructions for 37 Total Participation Techniques (TPTs): “. . . teaching techniques that allow for all students to demonstrate, at the same time, active participation and cognitive engagement in the topic being studied” (p. 7). Teachers can use this rich collection to immediately implement a variety of strategies: individual reflection, group discussion, manipulatives, and movement. For example, in the paragraphs devoted to Chalkboard Splash, the authors provide specific instructions, sample prompts, an example of the strategy in an actual classroom, and suggestions for application. The Chalkboard Splash TPT follows the basic structure of quick-writes—reflecting on learning through writing or drawing—while scaffolding higher-order thinking through student analysis of the quick-write responses for similarities, differences, and surprises. The book concludes with a holistic view of student engagement related to assessment and classroom atmosphere.

Overall, the authors provide an invaluable resource for busy teachers—a collection of strategies that can be implemented easily into lessons to increase student participation without sacrificing higher-order thinking. For more information on TPTs—handouts, videos, articles, and links—see TotalParticipationTechniques.com. The Himmeles also recommend the resources available through the *New York Times* learning blogs and Edutopia.org.

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RESOURCES

Student Engagement: Resource Roundup includes a list of articles, videos, and other resources that offer strategies and advice for keeping students engaged in learning.

www.edutopia.org/student-engagement-resources

Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) provides training, research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs to encourage student engagement.

www.idra.org/

Non-Regulatory Guidance Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants—This guidance from The U.S. Department of Education focuses on providing students with a more well-rounded education under Title IV, Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAE). Examples and guidance on Well-Rounded Educational Opportunities (ESEA section 4107), Safe and Healthy Students (ESEA section 4108), and Effective Use of Technology (ESEA section 4109) are included.

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essassae-grantguid10212016.pdf>

TeachHub.com—This website provides Top 12 Lists, Quick Guides, and Blogs. Use the search terms “participation” and “engagement” from the Home page search box.

<http://www.teachhub.com/>

EVENTS

March 8–10, 2017 Dallas, TX
The National Alternative Education Association’s 23rd Annual Conference on Alternative Education, Unleash the Inner Star: Developing Potential in All Students
www.the-naea.org

March 22–25, 2017 Anaheim, CA
Annual National Service-Learning Conference
<https://nylc.org/conference/>

March 25–27, 2017 Anaheim, CA
ASCD’s Empower17 Annual Conference
empower.ascd.org/Default.aspx

April 5–7, 2017 New Orleans, LA
Second Annual Online Learning Consortium Innovate Conference
www.onlinelearningconsortium.org/innovate/

VIEWPOINT

Our role in a student's life tells a story: Our sense of humor, classroom management style, and dedication to our content define our practice just as much as a well-constructed lesson. We educate, mentor, mold, and challenge students daily. We plan lessons, adopt standards, compile data, assess, grade, and judge; crushed under the weight of teaching, we fear that what we are doing isn't enough. In a system where the word *student* is being replaced by the word *data*, where objective graphs and numbers are valued over teacher observation and anecdotes, who can blame us?

Good teaching does not succeed or fail based on our ability to produce data. Good teaching succeeds based on our ability to engage students, to guide them to think for themselves, and to interact with the world around them. While there is a substantial body of research out there on the importance of student engagement, our educational system is designed for

efficiency instead. This assembly-line model of schooling places the focus on data, forgetting that engagement is a complex process that does not happen the same way for each student each year.

Engagement in my secondary English classroom comes in two forms: ownership and shared experiences. I want my students to feel ownership over their work so I give them choice in what they read and write, as often as possible. I also read and write with them and these shared experiences help me become a stronger educator because I understand the humanity of my students: their strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, talents and stories. After all, we cannot hope to inspire our students unless we are engaged ourselves.

Four years ago a student, Stephen, wrote about his experience in his ninth-grade class: "You do more than simply teach. You show us how to express ourselves." Lexi, a student last year said: "You . . . inspired me to write my slam poem

about something meaningful and powerful . . . listening to you speak about the power of poetry really resonated with me." We underestimate the power of our connections with students, yet that is where our ability to engage, and thus educate, lies.

Our caring, compassion, and commitment to their learning speak volumes. Effective teachers understand that students are not simply numbers on a graph, letters on a chart, or the grades we assign to them. Effective teachers understand that while there may be a place in education for data, Common Core, even standardized assessments, there is something far more critical at stake: our responsibilities to our individual students themselves. Education is, and always should be, about the Stephens and Lexis.

--Kristina Peterson, MAT
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