

**DOES FOCUSING ON THE ENGAGEMENT OF TEACHERS PRODUCE BETTER
ENGAGEMENT OF STUDENTS?**

by

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Dedication and Acknowledgements

I dedicate this project to my wife Cynthia. Without you, none of this would have been possible!

I would like to acknowledge Charles Scott, Judy Chapman, Des McKay, and Wendy Rines for their unwavering support they gave me through very tough times. I feel human again!

Abstract

Educational research pertaining to engagement has traditionally been student-focused. There are many techniques (when implemented properly) that are proven to increase the engagement levels of students to their learning, including Project/Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Distributed-Learning, Flipped-Classroom, and other experiential, student-centred initiatives. It is assumed, however, that all teachers are involved in the process of continually creating engaging classrooms. Teachers, like students, can become disengaged in their work for many reasons. Once disengaged, it is difficult to inspire these teachers to go beyond their comfort zone and engage in the process of learning as they once had. I suggest that educational leadership needs to focus their efforts on increasing teacher-engagement which will have a direct impact on the desired outcome of increasing student-engagement. A student who is engaged in their learning has a teacher who is engaged in teaching.

Table of Contents

Dedication or Acknowledgement..... iii

Abstract..... iv

Table of Figures..... vii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

 Background and Context..... 1

 Statement of the Problem..... 1

 The Purpose of this Study..... 2

 An Example of Student Engagement..... 3

 The Importance of this Study and Research Question..... 5

 Outline of the Paper 6

Chapter 2: Literature Review 7

 Disclaiming Teacher Ability..... 7

 Student-Success and Student-Engagement..... 8

 Defining What Engagement Means 11

 The X Model of Employee Engagement 12

 The Factors of Engagement 16

 Motivation..... 17

 Autonomy. 18

 Recognition..... 19

Teacher Engagement	vi
What Engaged Teachers Are Currently Doing: Examples from Classrooms.....	20
Who Is Responsible For Teacher-Engagement?.....	23
How Do We Increase Engagement?.....	26
Chapter Three– A Story of Engagement	31
Chapter Four– Increasing Teacher Engagement	39
Practice One: Recognition of Responsibility.....	39
Practice Two: Embrace Vulnerability.....	40
Practice Three: Authentic Communication.....	40
Practice Four: Authentic Feedback.....	41
Practice 5: Recognition.....	42
Conclusion.....	43
References	46

Table of Figures

Figure 1: The "X" Model..... 15

Figure 2: The "X" Model Overlap of Success..... 15

Figure 3: The 5 Categories of the "X" Model..... 15

Figure 4: The Golden Circle 29

DOES FOCUSING ON THE ENGAGEMENT OF TEACHERS PRODUCE BETTER ENGAGEMENT OF STUDENTS?

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background and Context

Every person you talk to has a story about a teacher they once had. These stories can range anywhere from attributing personal successes in life to them, to blaming one's lack of success due to what a certain teacher may or may not have done. In every positive story there is some sort of connection to who the teacher was, what he or she believed, and their ability to inspire. In every negative story there is some sort of reference to how boring, uninspiring, or unsympathetic a teacher was perceived to be. These stories are told from people of all ages, whether they are current students or they left the school system fifty years ago. Everyone can remember the names of certain teachers and the personal effect they had. What I find interesting is, in most cases, people who recall a positive story remember the content of specific lessons and make reference to how the teacher "made learning fun". The opposite is true for the negative stories. These people hardly remember any of the lessons and make references to how bored they were, and how they "didn't learn anything". In all the stories however, every person had a personal connection with how the teacher made them feel. These feelings never seem to go away and when these people become parents and their children enter the school system, they influence personal biases towards educators based on their own experiences.

Statement of the Problem

So what is the difference between the teachers in these stories? Why is it that some teachers have the ability to create great lessons and inspire students beyond expectation no matter what model

of learning they use? And why do these teachers have the ability to do this year after year while other teachers do not seem to have the same positive impact on students over time? All teachers have university training and specialty degrees. They are offered the same access to professional development and resources, and every teacher has the ability to create innovative lessons and inspire learning within their classrooms; so why is it that some teachers get stigmatised as uninspiring, or possibly ridiculed for perceived lack of ability to teach, while other teachers are glorified as innovative educational leaders? Parker Palmer (2010) wrote: “Good teaching does not come from technique. It comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. If we want to teach well, we must learn more about the human dimensions of our craft” (p. 2). It is prudent to note that there are external factors (social, cultural, economic, and political, etc.) that can be attributed to a teacher’s success in the classroom: as an educator I fully understand and recognise the significance of these factors; however, they will not be the focus of this capstone.

The Purpose of this Study

I believe there is a relatively simple answer to all of these questions that has been documented by educational theorists such as Parker Palmer (2010). The difference between a perceived “innovative and inspiring” teacher, and one who is not has nothing to do with one’s abilities; rather, it is connected to the level of engagement a teacher has to their teaching environment and the process of learning: “Bad teachers distance themselves from the subject they are teaching – and in the process, from their students. Good teachers join self and subject and students in the fabric of life” (Palmer, 2010, p. 11). Engagement is the thread that will weave this project together, and the purpose of my project is to examine teacher engagement and the roles it plays in effective, meaningful teaching and learning. I believe engagement is an essential component to “classroom education” as there are so many other avenues of learning that happen outside the

classroom that are engaging. If we look at education through the lens of engagement we can start to see some of the differences between the perceived successful/unsuccessful stories.

An Example of Student Engagement

I have a very real example to illustrate this point. I was recently having a discussion with a colleague who is a teacher in a rural part of British Columbia. We were discussing the levels of student engagement between our schools and I was told a story that enlightened me to what student engagement truly is. In this particular school there is a student who is academically average, but he understands the importance of effort and his need to graduate from high school. He does not believe, however, that the school is offering him anything he needs in order to be successful after graduation. This point resonated with me because it is the student who is now defining the parameters of what he considers “success”. My colleague went on to inform me that even though the school has not had any influence on his individual talent, this student will graduate a millionaire. This statement left me surprised and intrigued at the same time. When I inquired as to how, my colleague told me that this student takes videos of himself playing video games and comments while he is playing. He then posts these videos on his own YouTube channel. His channel became so popular with the gaming crowd that he was approached by Coca Cola who wanted to advertise on his channel. In the contract, Coca Cola gives this student ten dollars for every subscriber to his channel. It is Coca Cola’s way of finding new ways to advertise in an age where traditional avenues, such as television commercials, are not being viewed by the younger generations. This student (at this present time) has over 100,000 subscribers to his channel. It was an eye-opening moment for me. No longer could I use the phrase “you will not be successful just sitting around playing video games!” My colleague and I continued our discussion talking about what the school did to help or influence this student’s

success. I immediately thought that it must have a great computer department and the teacher was introducing them to all these different avenues for generating online success. He informed me that there was nothing happening in their school or departments that encouraged this type of innovation. The student himself created the idea of video blogging about the games he liked to play. There was no intention of making money doing it; it was just something that he liked to do and obviously had a talent for verbally communicating his objectives because he had so many people subscribing to listen to him, which Coca Cola recognized as a worth-while investment. He now has plans to expand what he does on his YouTube Channel and essentially create his own “job” after graduation.

This story is an example of engagement from both the student and teacher perspective. The indicated message was that the student was not engaged in the learning opportunities that were offered at his school. He was engaging in opportunities that were happening outside his current educational model. Looking at this story from the opposite angle, we could also make an argument that there was not a teacher who recognized the passion and talent of this individual (Note: there is no indication if there was an opportunity to do so). There could be many reasons for a teacher not recognizing or engaging the student in his talent (lack of understanding of the gaming world, biases about wasted time or effort due to gaming, interests falling outside designated curriculum, etc.) This story created a few questions that piqued my inquiry. What benefits would the student have had if a teacher was able to connect and engage with the student and his talents? How many students’ education is similar to this one where they are disengaged from the curriculum and finding avenues of passion outside of school? These are questions I will explore in this paper.

The Importance of this Study and Research Question

21st Century pedagogy is predicated on engaging the learner. My understanding of this concept is that we, as educators, are transitioning our paradigm from teaching a student what to learn, to teaching a student how to learn. The Ministry of Education, for the Province of British Columbia, has developed a new curriculum showcasing this new paradigm that will be implemented in September of 2016. In order to accomplish this task, teachers are going to have to morph aspects of their teaching persona. At least a part of their teaching practice is going to have switch from the “keeper and disseminator of knowledge”, to the “facilitator of learning”. Theoretically, this concept seems both logical and easy to implement in a short time-period with the internet giving us access to all kinds of information at our fingertips and the incorporation of technologies as teaching tools. In reality, the practical implementation of this new strategy is predicated on one thing; the teacher has to be engaged in the process of shifting their paradigm. A teacher who is not fully-engaged, or possibly disengaged, from this process is going to resist the implementation of 21st Century learning and personally justify it for any one of the noted aforementioned reasons. One could conclude from this notion that the level of teacher-engagement could have a dramatic effect on student-engagement. The concept of a teacher’s level of engagement predicating a student’s level of engagement is the backbone of this capstone project. I will look at engagement in its entirety to determine its impact on success by defining what it is and how we create it. My thesis is that teacher engagement is a vital component in the relationship between students and the teacher and that it has a significance influence on the students’ learning. To focus this project I will answer the following question:

Does focussing on the engagement of teachers result in higher engagement of students?

Outline of the Paper

First, I will review the literature on teacher ability, student success and engagement followed by a story of engagement that relates the literature to personal experience. Finally I will make recommendations on how to increase teacher engagement in everyday practice which will have the by-product of increased student engagement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Disclaiming Teacher Ability

To disclaim the notion of the difference in teachers being connected to one's abilities, we can briefly review the similar access teachers have to skill-building and training. There is over 100 years of educational research defining different models of learning. Examples of this include: Dewey's Model of Learning, Piaget's Model of Learning and Cognitive Development, and Lewinian's Experiential Learning Model (Kolb, 1984). For decades, universities have been producing highly-educated teachers experienced in current pedagogical theories and practice, and in order to practice teaching in British Columbia, a teacher must provide proof of attaining one of these degrees. If all teachers have similar training, then how can we unjustifiably accuse a teacher of being "bad" due to a lack of ability? Most School Districts in British Columbia confirm this notion with their tri-annual teacher evaluations. At the culmination of an evaluation a teacher will receive feedback, based upon his or her abilities, in the form of "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory". This all-encompassing feedback clearly sends the message that teachers who receive a "Satisfactory" (which is almost all) have the same abilities to teach; however, student output is still reminiscent of the Bell Curve with the bulk of the population in the average C, C+, or B range of grades. Also, high-school completion rates average approximately 90% over the last decade (Kozlovic, Sahota, Balzer, Sargeant, & Coulbourn, 2013) which clearly indicates that not all teachers are created equal, just as all students are not created equal; however, recent educational research and theory suggests that the cause of this phenomenon is due to the engagement levels of students. Students are disengaged at school which is having a profound effect on their academic success: "At the high school level, many students are not making a serious personal investment in their learning. School has become only a process that they need to

go through to get to the next stage in their lives (Kozlovic et al., 2013, p. 2) School Districts and individual schools recognise this problem and have been, or currently are, developing action plans (Kozlovic et al., 2013) for increasing student-engagement for overall student-success. These action plans make perfect sense philosophically as they are predicated on educational research by Willms, Friesen, & Milton (2009) where they define engagement as “the extent to which students identify with and value school learning outcomes, have a sense of belonging at school, participate in academic and non-academic activities, strive to meet the formal requirements of schooling, and make a serious personal investment in learning”. These action plans can be summarized with the equation:

Increased Student Engagement = Increased Student Success

Student-Success and Student-Engagement

The product of the equation is student-success. Any educator will tell you that the reason they got into teaching was to make a positive impact on success of students (as it certainly was not for the money!). The problem with the term “student-success” is that there is no clear definition of what success is. As well, just as teachers have external factors that can impact their classroom, students also have similar (if not greater) external factors that will determine what success looks like for them. Some students come from broken homes and success to them is actually getting to school every day. At the other end of the spectrum a student may have goals of an Ivy League scholarship and success means retaining a 99% academic average. I believe student-success is a qualitative analysis; however, I understand there needs to be quantitative data in order to assess whether or not engagement is a factor of student success. For the purposes of this paper the reader can assume student-success is related to the quantitative data regarding

grades and completion rates. In other words, qualitative forms of analysis can capture the many of the dimensions of students' success.

To help define student engagement, I will take an objective examination of the historical philosophy and needs in education resulting in perceived engagement. There is an abundance of research explaining how to increase student engagement through child-centered learning. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1762), John Dewey (1904), and Maria Montessori (1948) are the icons of child-centered learning. The child-centered approach came about generally, and not as a result of one person's theories; however, nativist bias in western educational thought is the primary culprit, because all Western (North American) theories of education assume natural maturation of cognitive processes (Jean Piaget's stages (1964), Noam Chomsky's LAD (1994), Erik Erikson's Psychosocial stages (1998), etc.). Teachers are supposed to provide the right environment for the children to learn, thus ensuring each child gets the optimum experience for success; an idyllic philosophy connected to educational progressivism.

Progressivism in education has its roots in the philosophical criticism of European philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In Locke's (1689) "Essay Concerning Human Understanding", he stressed the importance of experiential learning, writing that all reason and knowledge come from personal experience. Rousseau (1762) also criticizes educators who teach by requiring students to merely memorize facts in his 1762 book *Emile, Or on Education*. He illustrates this by stating "you think you are teaching him what the world is like; he is only learning what is on the map; he is taught the names of towns, countries, rivers, which have no existence to him except on the paper before him" (Rousseau, 1762).

David Kolb (1984) validates the importance of experience by researching three key models of experiential learning from Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget in *Experiential*

Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Kolb (1984) went on to define learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p.38). John Dewey was the American educational reformer who played a significant role in developing progressivism in education as we know it. He was a strong advocate of pragmatism, preferring proven evidence over beliefs. Dewey brought pragmatism to education, asserting that a reliance on an unchanging “canon of knowledge” hurts a student’s ability to thrive in an ever-changing, modern world. To Dewey, progressivism in education was deeply rooted in American democracy and was held to contribute toward its development; therefore, there was no room for authoritarian models of education in a democratic society. In each of these models there is evidence of theory and research which shows that an increase of child/student learning, or output, can be related to increasing the child/students’ engagement. The problem I see with the aforementioned equation is that it is missing a key component. The teacher is the one who creates the learning environment of his or her classroom. If a teacher is not engaged in the process of implementing these educational philosophies and models, then the students are less likely to benefit from their intentions. Educational leadership needs to recognise that it is the *teacher* who needs to be engaged in the process in order to incorporate philosophies and strategies embodied in the research of child-centered learning. Throughout this paper I will argue that the solution to this problem is to add another factor to the equation:

Increasing Teacher Engagement=Increased Student Engagement=Increased Student Success

As part of this equation, school leadership will need to change their mindset to include a focus on teacher engagement as a means of increasing student success.

In order to be able to analyse teacher engagement we need to look at engagement as a whole. The abundance of research pertaining to engagement is relevant to different

organizations. Originally, I was trying to focus on the research concerning teacher engagement. After many frustrations and failures, I succumbed to realization that there was little research specific to teacher engagement. I did however, find research (related to business) pertaining to employee engagement that can easily be applied from business to education. To examine the concept of increasing teacher engagement, I broke the research down into five categories.

1. Defining what engagement means
2. What the factors of engagement are
3. What engaged teachers are currently doing
4. Who is responsible for teacher-engagement
5. How to increase engagement

Defining What Engagement Means

Kevin Kruse (2012) wrote a book called *Employee Engagement 2.0: How to Motivate Your Team for High Performance: A Real-World Guide for Busy Managers*. In his research he exposes the myths of what engagement is and relates it to an organization's success. Myth #1: Some people believe employee engagement is the same as employee satisfaction. This myth states that if an employee is satisfied with their job, they will be engaged in the overall goals of the organization. Kruse debunks this theory by looking at what engaged employees offer their organizations. Engaged employees always give more to their job than what is required of them, commonly referred to as "going the extra mile": "An employee can be satisfied and do what is asked of them, but satisfaction does not raise the bar high enough" (Kruse, 2015). Myth #2: Some people believe engagement is about happiness. This myth states that if you keep your employees happy they will become engaged and give that extra effort the organization is looking for. Kruse (2015) also debunks this myth by assessing the traits of engaged employees. Engaged employees

believe they are a part of the organization as opposed to just “working” for the organization: “Just because you are happy does not mean you are working on behalf of the organization”.

Kruse (2012) goes on to define what engagement is which I believe holds the essence of how to increase engagement. “Employee engagement is the emotional commitment we feel to our organization and their goals” (Kruse, 2012). The emotional commitment is the key. Employees who are emotionally committed (engaged) always give what Kruse (2012) refers to as “discretionary effort”, or what is commonly referred to as “going the extra mile”. What is difficult for managers to understand is that the relationship between satisfaction, happiness, and engagement is not proportional. An employee cannot be engaged if they are not happy or satisfied with their work; however, the same employee can be both happy and satisfied in their job, without being engaged in the organization. If we look at a school as the “organization”, a connection can be made inferring that the engaged teachers are the ones who are volunteering their time to sponsor clubs, coach teams, and help run events in the best interests of representing their schools beyond the classroom. Disengaged teachers are not bringing anything else to the school other than what their teaching load demands and they are or appear content. These teachers’ disengagement can range anywhere from happy and satisfied, to unhappy and dissatisfied. The key element is that they do not have an emotional commitment to what happens in the school beyond the walls of their classroom.

The X Model of Employee Engagement

Engagement in education is summarized by two factors: first, a teacher’s emotional commitment and willingness to perform beyond stated standards and expectations for their students. Second, students identifying with and valuing their school while making a serious personal investment in their learning. Now that we have defined engagement, we need to look the differences in

employee engagement within the structure of an organization. Blessing White (2012) created a model that explains every level of employee engagement within an organization. It is called “The ‘X’ Model of Employee Engagement.” This model connects the path of the organization’s success with the path of the individual employee’s success. Where the two paths overlap is the “job”. Figure 2 illustrates this aspect. Managers and employers are constantly trying to align the success of the organization with the success of the individual. Giving a financial bonus for hitting a sales target is one example of this philosophy. (Daniel Pink calls this the “If-Then” model of employee engagement which we will explore in the *Factors of Engagement* section). The problem with trying to align an employee’s success with the success of the organization is that it does not take into the account the aspirations of the individual: “Individual employees are on a separate path toward their own and unique definition of success at work” (BlessingWhite, 2012).

The “X” model describes 5 different categories of engagement that employees fall into (illustrated in Figure 3). The 1st category is the zone where maximum-satisfaction (personal) coincides with maximum-contribution (to the organization). These employees are classified as “The Engaged”. The 2nd category is the zone where high-satisfaction coincides with low-contribution. There are two different types of employees in this category. First, there are the “new to the role” employees classified as. These people are generally highly satisfied but contribute little because they are not fully aware of the organization’s overall goals. These employees are classified as “The Honeymooners”. Second, there are the employees who are working very hard, but not focussing on the correct elements running around and around or, there are the employees who found a nice little “cozy spot” in the organization where they are content with little contribution to the organization. These employees are classified as “The

Hamsters”. The 3rd category is the zone where high-contribution coincides with low-satisfaction. These employees are classified as the “Crash and Burners”. This category needs to be carefully managed because their contributions are needed for the success of the organization, but if left unmanaged there are only two exit routes. The employee either quits, leaving the organization to fill the gap of contribution immediately, or stops contributing (essentially quitting and staying), which is harder to recognise and the effects are gradual over the longer term. It is also harder to recognise. The 4th category is the zone where low-satisfaction coincides with low-contribution. This group is classified as “The Disengaged”. The problem with the members of this category is that their attitudes and demeanor pull the members of the 2nd and 3rd group “down” to them. The 5th category is the zone in the middle where there is moderate-satisfaction and moderate-contribution. These employees are classified as the “Almost Engaged”. They are usually the largest demographic of employees and are usually reasonably satisfied and performing decently at their job. The problem with this group is that they have no loyalty to the organization and they are hard to manage because they do not need the same attention as the members of categories 2, 3, and 4.

Figure 1: The "X" Model

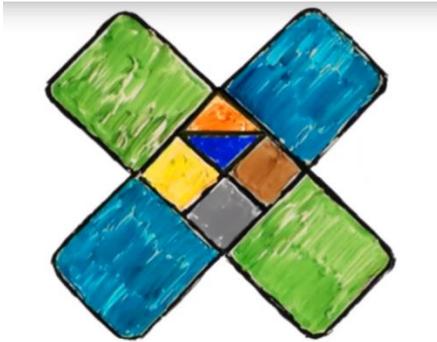


Figure 2: The "X" Model Overlap of Success

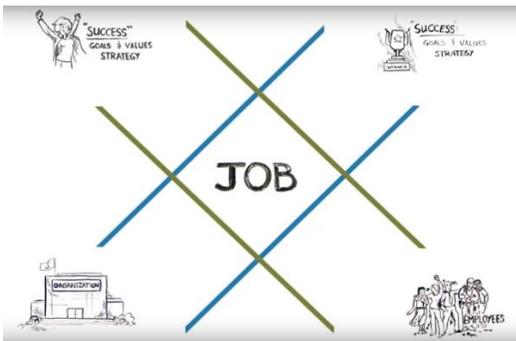
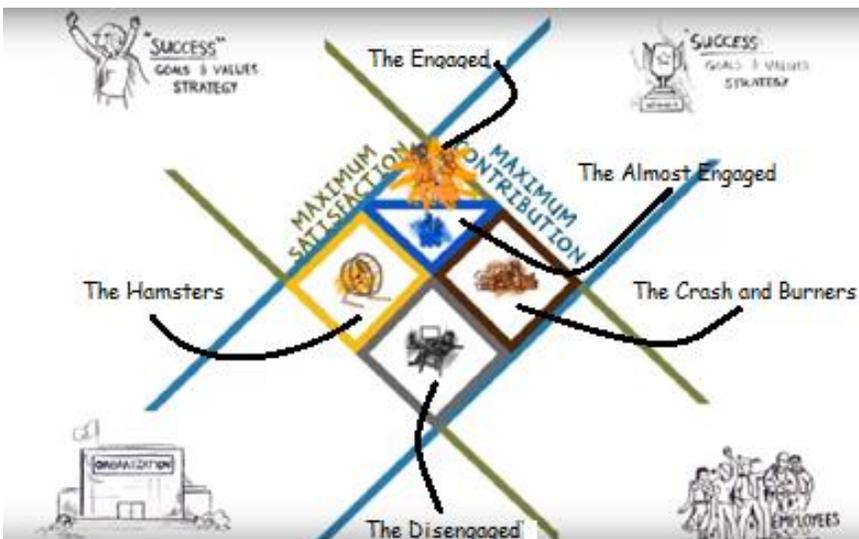


Figure 3: The 5 Categories of the "X" Model



If we are to look at the X-Model (Blessing-White, 2012) through an educational lens, we can make connections to the terminology and the zones. The “Organization” can either be the District or individual school. The goals (vision) of the individual schools can vary across a District depending on the demographics making the definition of success different; however, the individual school goals (vision) should align with the Districts creating an overall picture of success. The “Employees” are the teachers. Educational leadership such as Principals and Vice-Principals, even though are a big part of the learning environment of a school, are considered part of the management of the Organization. “Maximum Satisfaction” correlates to teacher-success and “Maximum Contribution” correlates to the teaching environment of the school. The big difference in the business version of the X-Model and the educational version is the engagement level of employees in a business model will have a dramatic effect on the Organizations financial bottom line. In the educational version, the engagement level of the teachers will have a dramatic effect on the success of the students.

The Factors of Engagement

Now that we have established what engagement means, I will take a look at the factors that contribute to engagement. While researching engagement experts such as Daniel Pink, Kevin Kruse, Gagne & Deci, Simon Sinek, Gever Tulley, and Ramsey Masallam, I have established that there are 3 main elements that contribute to increasing/decreasing engagement: Motivation, Autonomy, and Recognition. It is important to distinguish that engagement is a two-person process (within an organization) between a mentor and a mentee (teacher-student, Vice-/Principal-teacher, manager-employee, etc.). Teachers have to interact with multiple students just as a Principal has to interact with multiple teachers, or managers with multiple employees; however, creating engagement, or disengagement, involves a person to person interaction.

Remember that engagement is an emotional commitment to the organization (Kruse, 2012), and emotions are deeply personal to an individual. In this two-person process, levels of engagement can be established by the mentor increasing or decreasing motivation, supporting or un-supporting autonomy, and encouraging or discouraging self-direction.

Motivation.

The first element is motivation. I do not know one teacher who has not had a conversation (at one time or another) about how to motivate a student. In my experience, the underlying tone of these conversations has to do with the academic success of the student within their classes. Carole Ames (1990) wrote an article called “Motivation: What Teachers Need To Know”. In the article she outlines what teachers need to understand about student motivation related to academic achievement: “Motivation is not synonymous with achievement, and student motivation cannot necessarily be inferred by looking at test scores” (Ames, 1990, p. 410). The problem with motivation is that it is often measured by achievement or outcomes. The reality of motivation is that it is a fragile behaviour. Motivation has been described as “the intensity of behaviour, the direction of behaviour, and the duration of behaviour” (Ames, 1990, p. 411). As a teacher I have many stories that involve class discussion on a topic where particular students were actively engaged in the conversation and showed motivation towards the related assignment or project, only to not get it done on time (or at all). I have also had experiences where people have been asked for input on the direction of certain initiatives (by the educational leadership) within a school, given very passionate feedback and opinions, only to never show any follow-through when it comes to implementation. In both these examples there was intensity and direction to the behaviour; however, the duration of the behaviour was minimal. This type of

behaviour is classified as amotivation: “Amotivation involves not having the intention to act, whereas motivation involves intentionality” (Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 340).

Motivated behaviour, as a factor of engagement, must have intensity and direction over the long term and must be fostered. The difficulty with fostering or changing motivation is that most educators have had training that stops after covering “the basic theories or motivational constructs. We cannot assume, however, that teachers are prepared to translate these ideas into classroom practice” (Ames, 1990, p. 415). So then the question at all levels of engagement becomes: who motivates the motivators?

Autonomy.

The second element of engagement is autonomy. Daniel Pink (2013) did a TED Talk called “Driving Employee Engagement”. In this presentation he summarized all his research related to engagement stating that “autonomy and self-direction are the key to engagement” (Pink, 2013). He encourages management to invest in the “technology of self-direction”, depicting that “management must look for ways to give greater amounts of autonomy over various aspects their (employee’s) job” (Pink, 2013). My favorite definition of autonomy I found in the research was “endorsing one’s actions at the highest level of reflection” (Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 334). It alludes to critically analyzing without judgment in my mind. Teachers often refer to the fact that we have autonomy in how we choose to teach our classes. How many students would say that they have autonomy in their learning? If we are looking at autonomy as a factor of engagement then I believe the key piece of the definition is “endorsing one’s actions”. To create a truly engaged teaching environment a principal must actively endorse a teacher’s autonomy to teach just as much as a teacher should endorse a student’s autonomy over their learning.

Recognition.

The third element of engagement is recognition. To be truthful, the third (main) factor of engagement is connection. At the end of the day, we are all human beings and “we are hardwired to connect with others, it’s what gives us purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it there is suffering” (Brown, 2012, p. 8). Recognition is the factor of engagement through connection. To fully understand the power of recognition as a factor of engagement, we must understand what connection is. Connection is defined as “the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement. Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us” (Brown, 2012, p. 145). “Connection allows one to be receptive to the feelings of others” (Ogilvie, 2014, p. 21). True recognition is a heart-felt message that values not only what a person has done, but also infers the value of who the person is, as well.

With an understanding of what connection is, we can now look at how recognition is a powerful factor of engagement: “Employees need to feel appreciated. For very few, this results from a big bonus check or winning a spot in the President’s Club. But for most people, appreciation comes from the more routine actions of their manager, on a day to day basis” (Kruse, 2012, p. 53). I believe Kruse has made a vital point. Whether you are a manager, an educational leader, or a teacher in the classroom, developing a routine of genuine recognition is key in the creation of engagement. You can never say thank-you enough if it is deserved. A heart-felt recognition has three parts: a message of thanks (saying thank-you), an explanation of what it means to the organization (why was it important), and honouring the behaviour or achievement (token of gratitude). I will explain possibilities of honoring the individual in chapter three of this capstone.

Now that we have an understanding of what engagement is, and what elements contribute to engagement, we can now focus the literature review on answering the inquiry question and validating the equation:

Increasing Teacher Engagement = Increased Student Engagement = Increased Student Success

What Engaged Teachers Are Currently Doing: Examples from Classrooms

If we look at teaching practices through the lens of engagement, we can start to understand the differences between what is effective and ineffective for student learning. Recent advancements in computer technologies have allowed student-centered learning to take many shapes in education. There are effective models of Traditional (teacher-directed) Learning, Distributed (student-directed) Learning and Blended (combination of Traditional and Distributed) Learning. Within these models there are a variety of effective strategies, such as “learning styles” (Kolb, 1981), “project-based learning” (Beatty, 2012) and the “flipped classroom” (Tucker, 2012). All of these can be very effective when both the student and teacher are engaged in the process; however, if either the student or teacher (or both) are not engaged in the strategies or models of learning, then the result will be largely ineffective. An example of this might be if students are not connecting with a teacher or the material because he or she lectures for the entire class. The teacher decides to try something new and innovative and incorporates a “flipped classroom”. The teacher videotapes him/herself giving the same lecture and uploads it for all students to study and have as a reference. Class time is thus devoted to reinforcement of the learning. When a student who has watched the video does not understand the concepts asks for help, the teacher simply states to go back and watch the video again. All that has changed is the medium by which the message was delivered. Adapting the content into a “flipped classroom” environment in this way

will not increase engagement of the students. The teacher believes that he or she is being innovative and inspiring; however, the teacher did not take the time to research what an effective “flipped classroom” environment looks like, or they struggle to communicate/teach effectively in the classroom setting so changing the medium does not bring desired change. They were not actually engaged in the process of incorporating this strategy effectively. So what are the traits that engaged teachers personify? Or perhaps, what are engaged teachers doing that allows these student-centered models to be so effective?

Rita Pierson (2013) gave a TED Talk titled “Every Kid Needs a Champion” speaking to one of the traits engaged teachers personify. Her message was all about teachers connecting with kids. As part of the connection, Pierson advocated that no matter what a child has done wrong, that child needs to know that in the end you (the teacher) still value them. Her entire TED Talk could be summarised into one word: passion. Engaged teachers have a passion for creating connections and finding a way to teach kids no matter what difficulties or problems may occur in their personal lives. Pierson explains that passionate teachers teach no matter what: “We (teachers) come to school when we don’t feel like it, we listen to policies that don’t work, but we show up anyway!”

Gever Tulley (2012) did a TEDx Talk called “The Secrets of Engagement-Based Learning”. In his talk he describes how people think, and therefore learn: “We think with our hands. It’s true, 30% of our brain is dedicated to processing information through our hands. Tulley goes on to state that our brains are wired for tools. Our brains reshape the things we put in our hands to become extensions of our body. He took this concept and started a school called “Tinkering School”, where students learn through physical creation. Students create their own learning through trial and error. In his school the students have built things like rollercoasters with 30

meters of track, cars that were propelled by rowing, and human-propelled boats. In this model of learning, students have the chance to come up with an idea, build a prototype, and test it in the real world. If the prototype does not work, students have to problem solve as to why and go back to the drawing board. Tulley uses the example of building a boat that might sink: “Not just their minds, but their hearts are involved in that project. They are passionate about the result”(Tulley, 2012). In Tulley’s opinion, the problem with traditional schools is that we “ask children to sit in desks and use the exact same tools hour after hour, never getting the chance to expand their brains with the use of different tools”.

Aspects of this creation model are starting to be incorporated in traditional schools by engaged teachers. Traditional “Industrial Arts” of building projects that incorporate skills are starting to add inquiry-based questions or problems that have to be solved by creating. Classroom teachers of all levels are incorporating projects like “Genius Hour” (Kesler, 2013) where students have dedicated time to either research, or build projects that they are passionate about. The basic concept is that the students are learning through their passions.

Ramsey Musallam (2015) is a science teacher who researches and investigates student engagement. He posted a video on the internet called “Sparking Student Curiosity”. In his video he talks about how to engage students in traditional classroom behaviour and learning. Musallam uses science experiments as an example. Traditionally, the students are taught a concept, then they perform an experiment that either proves or disproves the theory. Unless a student is already passionate about the learning, there is nothing particularly engaging about it. Musallam continues his argument by stating that he incorporated all the latest up-to-date technologies that are supposed to make the learning more engaging, but his findings were that the students were still not anymore passionate about their learning as a result of these technologies.

Where Musallam (2015) started to make progress is when he reflected upon the process and started to incorporate Joseph Campbell's (1972) "Hero's Journey". According to Musallam, In the "Hero's Journey" there is a "'call to adventure' at the beginning, which is then followed by some sort of struggle and introduction of 'The Mentor' then leading to a transformation"(Musallam, 2015). What is interesting about stories or movies that use the "Hero's Journey" is that the mentor, or mentorship is always delayed. Think about the movie "Good Will Hunting". The mentor (Robin Williams) "does not show up in the movie until about 42 minutes in, and he won best supporting actor!" (Musallam, 2015).

Musallam (2015) stated that he started incorporating this "call to adventure" in his teaching. Only when students started having trouble did he step in with what he calls "delayed mentorship". Musallam used his science experiments as an example, once again. What he did was reverse the lesson. The "call to adventure" became the experiment. After the students completed the experiment it created a lot of questions that needed guidance, and that is where Musallam (2015) stepped in with his "delayed mentorship", explaining the function and premise of the experiment.

After looking at these three examples, we can outline what engaged teachers do. First, they have a passion for creating connections and teaching kids. Second, they understand how learning is individualized and personal. Third, an engaged teacher realises that their role in learning is that of the mentor and that learning has to come from the student, not the teacher.

Who Is Responsible For Teacher-Engagement?

The engagement level of teachers is paramount when we are looking at the success of students. Some of the teachers referenced in this capstone thus far clearly have high levels of engagement to what they do; unfortunately, there are far too many teachers who have been engaged at one

point in their careers but have become disengaged. The question that has been burning in my mind for a while is “Who is responsible for teacher-engagement”? This question needs to be explored and answered in a timely manner as the teachers of British Columbia are about to embark in a curriculum change that focusses not on “what we teach”, but rather on “how we teach”. Teachers who have high levels of engagement will not have any problems because they are probably already teaching in the style of the new curriculum; however, what about the teachers who do not have high levels of engagement, or could be classified as disengaged? Who is going to inspire them to change, or is this new curriculum going to cause greater numbers of teachers to become disengaged? I would argue that it is the responsibility of the educational leadership (Vice-Principals, Principals, Superintendents, etc.) to shift their priorities to engaging teachers.

Scenario: Try to imagine that you have been doing the same job for anywhere from fifteen to thirty years. You are very confident in how to execute the needs of your job and you truly believe that what you do is the best thing for the organization. You have proof of this because you have years of reports that state your work is “satisfactory”, which is the highest praise you can receive in writing. Now an external force tells you that you have to change how you do things because it is believed that what you are doing no longer meets the needs of the organization. You will receive no formal training on how to implement these changes, nor receive any extra funding to find training on your own, and your salary will not increase to reflect the extra time needed in order to meet the new requirements. Your upper management has also made it perfectly clear that you have complete autonomy as to how you wish to deliver the content of your job. How likely are you going to be engaged in the process of change? Would it

not be easier to justify what you are already doing as meeting the needs of the proposed change in philosophy?

This scenario is exactly what our experienced teachers are currently facing. There is an inherent problem in the current educational reform as teachers are at a crossroads between what is familiar versus what is unknown. This is coupled with the increasing disconnect between the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) and the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA). Educational leadership must find ways to reconnect, inspire, and support teachers to become engaged in this reform. Simply telling teachers what can, or must be done, will not have the desired effect of increased student engagement equalling student success. There are human factors of connection and trust that leadership needs to explore before they can expect to have any influence over engagement levels in their teachers.

Kim Moore (2014) gave a TEDx Talk titled "Schools For Student Engagement – The Main Ingredient". In her talk she explains how, as a principal, she was able to turn a school from being one of the worst academically in the country (America) into one of its best. Moore (2014) explains that there were some very hard decisions that needed to be made and it is never easy reforming a school: "Leadership is the key ingredient". It is the leadership of the school who have to create, inspire, and maintain change: "Leaders have the power to empower everyone in a building".

The concept of educational leadership changing their mindset around engagement comes at a very important time in the history of education. Recent trends in educational leadership are to hire people who are gifted teachers and think educationally, rather than people who have exceptional managerial skills. Although I believe that educational leaders need to be educationally minded, there is an inherent problem that they have created. Any Vice-Principal

(or higher) who has been hired as of September 2016, will have absolutely no experience teaching in the new curriculum. Thus, an argument could be made that they are no longer educational leaders. They can no longer use their prior experience as an example to inspire teaching; however, if these educational leaders can shift their mindset to inspiring and engaging other teachers based on their individual talents, then these leaders can still be relevant and effective in their responsibilities.

How Do We Increase Engagement?

For a long time I believed that there were teachers who were totally dissatisfied with their jobs. I kept asking myself “Why do these teachers not just leave the profession if they are not in it for the kids?” As part of my Masters’ course work in Leadership, I had a professor who said something that changed my mind about my perceived teacher dissatisfaction. He said that “nobody wakes up in the morning, puts on their shoes, and goes to school to do a bad job. This goes for students and teachers alike” (Comeau, 2014). This really got me thinking about teachers and the differences between the ones who are actively participating in the culture of a school and the increasing number of teachers just showing up to “do their jobs”. This is when I realised that the problem is not that teachers are becoming more dissatisfied with their jobs, they are becoming disengaged in the process of performing their jobs effectively. Now the question is how do we reverse the process and find ways to re-inspire, or re-engage these teachers?

In my research of engagement I have discovered four key factors that appear to be vital in order to increase engagement. The first factor is *vulnerability*. Understanding vulnerability in education is realizing why people (teachers, students, leadership, etc.) do not try anything new. Those reasons are fear and uncertainty, and the cause of both of these reasons is shame. Brene Brown (2012) wrote a book titled “Daring Greatly”. The book is a collection of all her research

on shame and vulnerability. One of her chapters is devoted to education and engagement. Brown makes reference to the similarities of the challenges faced in education and corporate models:

“No corporation or school can thrive in the absence of creativity, innovation, and learning, and the greatest threat to all three of these is disengagement” (p. 187X). Brown goes on to explain how people in education become disengaged:

Learning and creating are inherently vulnerable. There’s never enough certainty. People want guarantees. I’m not sure if there is a name for the problem, but something related to fear keeps people from going for it. They focus on what they already do well and they don’t put themselves out there. (Brown, 2012, p. 186)

As teachers, we all face this problem. Students who do not seem willing to try and are satisfied with minimal effort. I am sure that educational leadership has the same feelings about teachers. What Brown (2012) did was describe the feeling as to why we as humans put up these barriers. She classifies it as shame: “Shame can only rise so far in any system before people disengage to protect themselves. When we’re disengaged, we don’t show up, we don’t contribute, and we stop caring”(Brown, 2010). A mentor, or leader, has to find ways to make connections and humanize the “work”: “A leader is anyone who holds her- or himself accountable for finding the potential in people and processes” (Brown, 2012, p. 185). To hold yourself accountable to finding the potential in people you must have an understanding of vulnerability. If you understand what makes you feel vulnerable, it creates empathy which helps make the connections necessary for transformation.

The second factor of increasing engagement is *authentic communication*: “Communication is so critical because it forms the backbone for all other forms of engagement efforts” (Kruse, 2012).

There is a difference in communication and authentic communication worth noting when it

comes to engagement. Regular communication results in keeping everyone informed, which can empower people to feel a sense of belonging, or part of the organization in the short term.

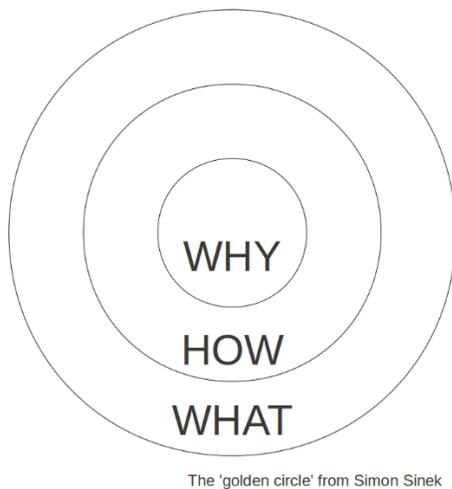
Regular communication is always about the “what” and “how” we are doing things. In the long run this type of communication can become stale and boring. It can actually lead to disengagement. For example: have you ever deleted an email, pertaining to an initiative in the organization, after reading the subject line because you believed it did not matter to you or what you were doing? I could even take this notion a little further. Are there people in your organization where you constantly delete their emails? Or the opposite, is there someone in your organization whose emails you open up no matter what the subject line? With our inboxes becoming more and more flooded with mail, our time for reading becomes less and less. If there is a connection to a certain person the likelihood of you taking the time to read their emails becomes higher. This connection comes from authentic communication.

Authentic communication comes from “why” we do it. The “why” is the core beliefs of the individual, or organization, and it is what creates the connection. Authentic communication explains the “what” and “how” through the lens of “why”. “The goal is not to do ‘business’ with everybody who needs ‘what’ you have. The goal is to do business with people who believe what you believe” (Sinek, 2011). To illustrate this point we can look to the “Golden Circle” (Sinek, 2011). Figure 4 shows the “Golden Circle” that Simon Sinek (2011) explained during one of his TED Talks. Human beings act from the outside of the circle in. We act from the clearest thing (the what) to the fuzziest thing (the why). Every teacher knows what they do (teach). Some of these teachers have a grasp on how they do it (Learning Styles, Project-Based Learning, Flipped Classroom, etc.); however, not many teachers know why they do it. They are told in meetings, conferences and professional development to use “this” model, or “that” technology and the

result will be a more engaging classroom. If and when the model of learning or technology does not have the desired effect, then they are put aside and never tried again. There is no connection to the “why”. “If you don’t know ‘why’ you do ‘what’ you do, and people don’t respond to your ‘why’, how can you expect to ‘sell’ (teach) anything? (Sinek, 2011).

“Inspired and engaged leaders all think and act from the inside out” (Sinek, 2011). These leaders think and communicate by understanding that “people do not buy ‘what’ you do, they buy ‘why’ you do it!” (Sinek, 2011). Authentic communication always has the underlying tone attaching it to the “why”. Authentic communication is also a two-way street. It cannot only come from top-down. Educational leaders need to find ways for teachers to become part of the communication process. If a teacher feels that their input is encouraged and being heard, the result is engaged communication.

Figure 4: The Golden Circle



The third factor of increasing engagement comes from *authentic feedback*. A culture of engagement is a “culture of honest, constructive, and engaged feedback” (Brown, 2012, p. 197). Far too often in education (and outside education) people are afraid to give honest, constructive

feedback due to fear of retaliation or defamation of character. This is true of teacher-to-student feedback, teacher-to-parent feedback, Principal-to-teacher feedback, etc. Critical feedback can either be downplayed in the hopes that the behaviour will correct itself, or it can be delivered in such a harsh manner that it has the effect of belittling the person, rather than addressing the behaviour. In these two instances the gaps between feedbacks become larger and larger, creating an inherent problem:

The problem is straight forward: Without feedback there can be no transformative change. When we don't talk to the people we are leading about their strengths and their opportunities for growth, they begin to question their contributions and our commitment. Disengagement follows. (Brown, 2012, p. 197)

The fourth factor of increasing engagement is *recognition*. In the "Factors of Engagement" section of this capstone, I outlined what recognition is and how it can be effective. To increase engagement, a leader must actively recognise and consistently honor the contributions of the members to the organization. There are many low cost ways to do this; however, they all involve a 3-part thank you (Kruse, 2012). These things will be examined further in chapter three.

Chapter Three– A Story of Engagement

In this chapter I would like to share a story resulting in engagement that portrays most of the aspects outlined in chapter one. It is because of this story that my initial interest in engagement piqued my interest.

I first had an inkling to the problem of teacher engagement in 2010. The school I worked at was very large, approximately two thousand staff and students. The people on staff were always proud of the fact that we were a large school that felt like a small school. One of the traditions of the school was the annual Christmas skit that the staff put on for students. It was a highlight and usually involved some sort of play that one of our staff members wrote and directed. I was always involved when I could be. It was something that I considered a lot of fun and the students generally enjoyed it. I was starting to notice that over the previous years, attendance for the event was getting smaller and smaller (student disengagement). The students were not sticking around for the Christmas assembly (last block of the day on the last day of the year) as they would rather start their holiday early and skip out rather than stick around and wait for the teacher skit which was the last part of the assembly. In previous teacher skits, a couple of the male teachers and myself got dressed up and danced like the sugar plum fairies. That one aspect of the skit got an immense reaction from the crowd.

During the summer of 2010, I was building a deck with my friend and colleague who was also one of the sugar plum dancers in that previous performance. As we were conversing over lunch we started talking about the Christmas skit and agreed that it needed to change. The ideas for the “plays” were becoming less exciting and the teachers were choosing not to participate as it was not worth the effort. The province-wide job action in 2008 did not increase the desire of teachers

to volunteer or give any extra effort. There were still a lot of disgruntled teachers a year-and-a-half after the strike happened and the mood and the culture of the building had shifted away from its original pride (teacher disengagement).

One day after work I was searching on YouTube for an introduction to the upcoming dance unit in P.E. when I stumbled across a video of the Ohio State Dance team who did a Flash-mob in their student union building. It was really well done and the song they chose was sung by the cast of Glee's version of Journey's "Don't Stop Believing". The television show Glee was very popular at the time so the song resonated with a lot of people. The flash-mob was so well done that I immediately thought that I could pull this off with the staff at the Christmas assembly. I pitched the idea to my principal who was skeptical, but he just happened to be the father of one of my best friends so he gave me permission to pitch the idea at the end of the next staff meeting (personal connection). I immediately went to my colleague who usually wrote the teacher play and told him about my idea. He was excited to have someone on board who was willing to help him out. He even mentioned that maybe he should just back down and let me just take over. That was not the point of my idea, and as the look on his face was sad, I believe he thought I was there to tell him that he was no longer wanted. I convinced him to stay and that we still needed a play for teachers to perform so that the flash-mob would be a surprise for the students (motivation/recognition). We got up at the staff meeting and pitched the idea together. My colleague explained the history of the school and the teacher skit and I showed them the Ohio State flash-mob and asked for people to come and see me to sign up if they were interested. What happened next surprised me. I was hoping to get maybe twenty staff members to join up. Right after the meeting my door was flooded with people willing to dance. Before I knew it, I had 45 people sign up (initial engagement).

There was only three weeks until the performance and I realized very quickly that I had better start choreographing the moves. I decided to use the same version of the song as the Ohio State Dance team, mostly because I love that song and I knew “Glee” was really popular with the students that year (relevant to audience). The first practice was at lunch in the drama room. Everyone showed up with their lunches to practice. I had to pick a few people to be the ones who were going to start the whole thing. I was amazed at how everyone else still stayed to watch what was happening. By the end of the day, word got out how fun it looked and eleven more teachers emailed me to sign up and said they would be at practice the next day (communication and motivation). I had to move practices to one of our gymnasiums as there were just too many people to practice in the drama room. By the end of the second day I realized what I got myself into. There were a lot of people to organise, and some people were not the most coordinated dancers in the world so I had to choreograph to the level of the people involved (feedback). It started to consume every moment of my nights. Conflicts arose, because not everyone was able to make the lunch time practices, but they all wanted to be part of it. I had to start doing morning tutorials for people who had missed and demonstrate new moves every lunch break (communication/connection). It got to the point where I asked a colleague, (who was very good with digital filming), to help me make a “how-to” video for everyone to practice on their own. In order to pull this off I had to be innovative and create a “flipped classroom”, even though I had never heard that term at the time (what engaged teachers do). That turned out to be one of the best things I did. I heard stories of teachers practicing their moves at night with their kids, or spouses, or both trying to help them (feedback). Every day I would start the practice by looking around to watch our staff laugh and chat about what they had been doing the night before. My original purpose for doing this flash-mob was not for teacher satisfaction, but rather I thought the

students would enjoy it and they would get a good laugh. Even though teacher engagement was not the purpose, it quickly became an unintended benefit. Every day during those three weeks, I would pass people in the hall and they would pat me on the back, or give me the thumbs up, or they would stop me to clarify if a certain move started on the right or left foot, etc. (feedback). The energy that I was getting from my colleagues drove my passion for the project and I was determined to pull it off. I found myself noticing the pride in the building coming back very quickly and even my principal at the time said he could not believe that this is what it took to turn things around again (recognition).

One story in particular got me really emotional. One of my colleagues (who was nearing retirement) wrote an email to the staff telling us the story about how his wife had cancer. It was not a secret and most of us on staff knew she was ill. What we did not know is that every night for the last two weeks he took a computer to the hospital and would play the video and practice the dance moves for his wife. He told us how they would laugh together when he messed up and how the practicing helped transcend both of their journeys through that incredibly tough road to recovery (vulnerability/feedback).

The last few days before the performance were very stressful, and I called an emergency meeting at 6:00 pm the night before the performance (communication). I asked our principal if he would pay for pizza for anyone who came and he whole-heartedly agreed (recognition). Almost everyone showed up. Nobody wanted to be left out. Those few who couldn't make it made sure to come and see me personally to tell me why they could not make it and to tell me they were sorry (communication). Some brought their kids or their spouses to see what this venture actually looked like. We were still learning new moves and after two straight hours of practice we finally

had it down. We ran through the teacher “play” and set up exactly how we were going to get into position and start it. Everyone was so excited.

It was the next day at lunch that really made me emotional, however. Everyone came for one final tune up before the big event. I was about to start when one of my colleagues stopped me. The entire staff pitched in and got me a gift, thanking me for the time and effort I put in for them (recognition). When she was addressing the crowd in a speech of thanks I lost control of my emotions. Here was a six-foot-five male jock, who was crying his eyes out because his colleagues were so appreciative of him teaching them this dance (vulnerability). One last gift that my tech colleague and I put together was that he arranged to have his class film the entire thing so we could have a record of this moment. The result of this effort can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfI4-zOgETE> (Fast, 2010).

What transpired next was way beyond any expectation that I had anticipated. After it was all over, and the cheering stopped, we all went home to start enjoying our holiday break. My colleague went home and put together a video of the dance and put it up on his YouTube channel for everyone to see. My wife and I, along with many of the teachers and students, watched it over and over again. The next day we woke up to watch the video once again. What we discovered was that it had been viewed 3000 times since the previous day. We were taken aback by this. Every teacher was emailing back and forth talking about what was happening. We read messages from students, parents, and random people who just loved what we had done (recognition). The next morning we woke up again to find that there were over 30,000 views in one night. It was put on the local news program and was starting to be recognised by lots of people. By the end of the break we had broken 100,000 views. The first question that every teacher asked me the first day we got back was “what are we doing next year?” and “whatever

we are doing, sign me up!” This is when I realized what true engagement felt like (a total and complete buy-in from everyone involved). Even people who were not part of the dance came up to me and said they were sorry they had missed out. They had no idea it was going to be like that, and I could count on having them participate next year (communication/recognition/motivation).

Months later, people were still talking about it. My students looked at me in a different way and I was able to make connections with my students on a different level. It was like that shared experience broke down a wall of hesitancy from the students’ perspective and the rest of that school year was a complete joy. This did not just happen to me, though. Other teachers who had been part of the performance were stating that the atmospheres in their classrooms were better, as well. The grade 12 students that year adopted “Don’t Stop Believing” as their anthem and at their graduation dinner and dance, when that song came on, all the grads got on the dance floor and locked arms in one giant circle of embrace and sang at the top of their lungs. I remember thinking it was a perfect end to a great school year!

In the years to follow, the production got bigger and bigger. I recruited my good friend and colleague, who is a self-taught master of digital arts, to become one of the “brain-trusts” behind the scenes. We started doing pre-taped digital videos that were incorporated into the story and there was always a dance component at the end. What was great is that because of the videos, people were more willing to get involved in the overall performance, even if they did not want to dance (honoring talents). It became a goal of mine to find a way for every staff member (Teachers, Special Education Assistants, Custodial, Secretarial, Administration, etc.) to be a part of this event. These videos started to have the dual purpose of creating a fun teacher-skit and globally promoting our school. I had to be creative to find ways to get people involved so that

the majority of the school culture was incorporated. I started to look at the talents of people on staff and found ways to involve them into the performance (recognition). The creation of an all-teacher band called “Staff Infection” was an example of this. Every year we added something new. More and more people were coming to me with suggestions on what to do, and the level of engagement around this once per year, twenty-five-minute production was immeasurable. We started having management issues that we had to overcome, including alumni from years past were coming back to watch the new performance. There were so many people attending that we did not have enough seating for all of our current students.

After the second year of these performances I had a colleague, who was formerly a very influential teacher to me when I was in high school, pull me aside to have a chat and thank me for putting in the time and effort for these performances. He asked me if I understood what I had achieved. I did not understand the question which was apparently evident by my facial expression. He explained to me that I had changed the culture of the school for the better and that I had become a person of influence (recognition). The concept was something I had never considered before. I started to realize that the staff was fully engaged in the process of these performances and without intending to, I had changed the culture of the school.

The level of engagement in these performances was so high that I felt I could ask the staff to do anything and they would stop what they were doing to make sure they were a part of it. This was proven to me in 2014 when the “brain-trust” had an idea to make a music video themed from the movie “Frozen”. My colleague and I re-wrote the lyrics to “Let it Go” (sung by Idina Menzel) to reflect the teaching staff and culture of the school. The problem was we wanted to keep the secret from the students in true Christmas fashion. So I introduced the idea at a staff meeting and told the staff we were planning to shoot this video on a Sunday afternoon (authentic

communication). We invited anyone who wanted to be a part of it to show up thinking we would not have as great a turn out due to it being on weekend. To our surprise, sixty-three staff members showed up ready to go, wearing their school spirit attire. It took four hours to shoot and everyone was elated by the process and the final product.

In between these performances I started to get involved in more educational initiatives within the school. I started running professional development seminars on collaboration based on the experience I had working and collaborating with the staff on the Christmas skit. One initiative changed an entire department. At a Physical Education Collaboration meeting, the issue arose of how to get females more actively involved in class, and inspire them to enroll in PE classes as an elective for their senior years. My colleague and I started experimenting at the grade ten level by changing the current course from a sports-oriented one to fitness and wellness for life orientation. As part of the course we both agreed that if we asked the girls to participate in the activity then we as the teachers would also have to participate. In two years it became the most popular course in the school and we expanded it into an elective course offered in grades eleven and twelve. As I was reflecting on why these courses were so popular in such a short time period, I had an epiphany. The two teachers involved were so passionate about the courses that the students became passionate about their own wellness and fitness levels. It was then I conceived what would be the premise of this capstone project. The perceived successful and “master” teachers are ones who are engaged. Concurrently, a successful student has an engaged teacher.

Chapter Four– Increasing Teacher Engagement

Literature predicated on engagement has clearly indicated that increasing teacher-engagement has the desired effect of increasing student-engagement. In order to establish if the desired outcome of student-success is the predicted result of focussing on teacher engagement, a human research study would be needed. In lieu of actually performing a study, I offer here a detailed outline of the suggested practices of school administrators to help increase teacher-engagement.

Practice One: Recognition of Responsibility

As the management of the organization, educational administration needs to take responsibility for the levels of teacher engagement within their schools. One of the draws to becoming an administrator is the fact that you can have a broader range of influence over a greater number of students; however, particularly with the implementation of the new curriculum, administrators need to focus that influence on teachers to help them become masters of their craft: “We can’t control the behaviour of individuals; however, we can cultivate organizational cultures where behaviours are not tolerated and people are held accountable for protecting what matters most: human beings” (Brown, 2012).

Empowering and engaging teachers needs to be done individually; however, it needs to have a school wide approach. Administrators need to look at school-wide policies and procedures through the eyes of the teachers in that building.

Efforts at the classroom level can be undermined by school-wide policies and procedures. Thus, a given classroom teacher can be working hard at making learning intrinsically meaningful only to have the principal announce the establishment of a school-wide academic contest associated with extrinsic rewards. Or a teacher’s effort to evaluate students on the basis of progress and improvement can be subverted by a school-wide honor roll system based on relative ability. In short, the classroom is not an island. It is part of a broader social system, and it is difficult to develop and sustain changes in the classroom without dealing with the wider school environment. Moreover, teachers alone

cannot carry the burden of significant school change; one must also engage school leaders in school change if the deepest structure of teaching and learning is to change (Maehr & Midgley, 1991, p.406).

Practice Two: Embrace Vulnerability

To become an effective mentor of engagement is going to take some serious self-reflection. There are many books on Principals' and Vice-Principals' book shelves involving leadership and engagement; however, I would predict that there are not many books on their shelves about vulnerability or shame, primarily because there are not that many out there. In order for school administrators to become gurus of engagement, they are going to have to investigate their own vulnerabilities. This is process that can be very difficult to go through, but once on the other side can transcend the lens in which you look at people and situations: "If you want a culture of creativity and innovation, where sensible risks are embraced on both a market and individual level, start by developing the ability of managers to cultivate an openness to vulnerability in their teams. And this, paradoxically perhaps, requires first that they are vulnerable themselves" (Brown, 2012, p. 65)

The first step to embracing vulnerability is to read "Daring Greatly" by Brene Brown. The book explains how having "the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent and lead" (Brown, 2012). The book, based on her research and studies, explains how people compare, measure and portray themselves in acts of shame and blame wrapped up in a culture of "never enough".

Practice Three: Authentic Communication

In order to practice authentic communication an administrator is going to have to be vulnerable in divulging the "why" of Sinek's (2011) "Golden Circle". Communication needs to be purposeful in order to be engaging. If teachers understand and internalize the vision and goals

(the why) of the school, and the administration's communication has underlying tones to the school's importance, then the teachers will become more engaged because they feel well informed and a sense of belonging to the overall progress of the school.

The Principal (and Vice-Principals) will need to foster a culture of two-way communication. Teachers must feel comfortable approaching administration, or giving opinions when called upon in group settings, to give feedback from their perspective. In order for teachers to feel comfortable giving their opinion they must feel like they are being heard. Administrators must develop skills in "active listening" and "paraphrasing back for understanding" in order to make the person feel like they have been heard.

Time is a big factor in this practice. Depending on the size of school it can be a lot of time. As an administrator I would find time to personally meet with every teacher once a week. Constant meetings become part of the routine and creates familiarity which opens up the door to vulnerability and authentic communication.

Practice Four: Authentic Feedback

Authentic feedback is essential to the growth of any teacher; unfortunately, the only system of consistent feedback is our tri-annual evaluations (if they get done at all). Once an administrator had embraced vulnerability and opened up lines of authentic communication, creating a system of authentic feedback should not be as difficult. The main difficulty is still time. In order to do this properly, time needs to be invested into every teacher in the building on an individual basis.

I would meet with teachers once a month to develop individual growth plans. A growth plan has the ability for the teacher to have some control over where they want to grow and allows the administrator to find avenues of support for that teacher. Meeting once a month specifically

on growth plans would help to focus teachers and keep their teaching practice aligned with their overall personal and professional goals. I believe constant support in a mentorship role, rather than a tri-annual evaluative role, fosters a greater sense of engagement to the teaching process.

Practice 5: Recognition

Recognition is the most powerful tool for creating teacher-engagement. A teacher should be recognized for anything and everything that they do to benefit the culture of the school outside the constructs of teaching time. There are so many ways teachers give beyond their classroom and a lack of recognition is causing some teachers to become disengaged and stop giving their time. An administrator recognizing one's efforts demonstrates to the individual that they are valued. When a person feels that what they are contributing is valued, they are likely to give more of themselves without extrinsic motivations.

To apply recognition as a blanket practice is difficult. Here is my belief on the giving of recognition. The recognition has to align with the beliefs of the school and or administrator(s). In a three-part recognition administrators need to (1) say thank you, (2) explain the importance of the contribution to the school both individually and publically, and (3) honor the teacher with a token of gratitude. The token of gratitude needs to align with the size of contribution. In a perfect world where financials are no object, this is easy. In reality, token of gratitude that have financial implications are at the discretion of the Principal. The key is figuring out the correct ratio of time spent vs token earned. For instance, if a teacher volunteers his or her time set up for a school wide assembly. A 3-part recognition would be: (1) Saying thank you to the individual for volunteering before the assembly; (2) At the end of the assembly publically thanking the person in front of the school for their efforts in allowing the assembly to happen; (3) After clean-up

another words of thanks followed by a hand-shake and a Starbucks gift card. This is a very low cost way of valuing the individual but acknowledges the volunteered time spent.

For a teacher who spends copious amounts of time over the course of the year volunteering their services that improve the culture of the school, the token of gratitude must match the significance of time spent. For example, a coach who runs a program that attracts kids to the school. There is no way to measure, or reimburse the volunteer time spent by the individual, but a three-part thank you could look like this: (1) Saying thank many times over the course of the season; (2) Acknowledging the efforts of the coach at a staff meeting highlighting the season; (3) Give the coach two days of in-lieu time. Now the allocation of in-lieu time is controversial as it has a dollar amount attached to it. Depending on the district it can be upwards of \$600 to cover the two days with a Teacher-On-Call (TOC); however, if you look at it through the lens of engagement, a principal is getting 100+ hours of service for the bargain price of 10 hours. By honoring the person with time, he or she will feel more engaged to the school and be less likely to take sick-days when feeling exhausted from the coaching. This type of token may actually help with the TOC budget for any given year. No matter what the service, time spent needs to be honored with appropriate tokens of gratitude in order to foster engagement.

Conclusion

According to the literature there is evidence that confirms a positive outcome of student-engagement when there is a focus of support from the educational leadership on increasing teacher-engagement. Engagement is defined as “the emotional commitment we feel to our organization and their goals” (Kruse, 2012, p. 6). Emotional commitment is influenced by the connections a person (teacher) has to their organization (school) and its management (administrators). If the desired outcome of a school is to increase student success (academically),

then an emphasis increasing the engagement levels of students is important; however, increasing the engagement levels of teachers is paramount in foster student-engagement. The desired equation of student success is:

Increasing Teacher Engagement=Increased Student Engagement=Increased Student Success

Educational leadership needs to embrace their own vulnerability and create connections through communication and recognition with teachers in order to increase their engagement levels. Not only will engagement have a positive impact on the teaching environment, but both staff and students will feel a connection to overall vision and goals of their school.

Continued technological advancements and changes in both societal and social global perspectives have reconfigured what constitutes “having a job” means. People have the ability to work from home, decide what hours of the day they wish to “work”, and make connections globally with the push of a button. This has created a conundrum for educators because we can no longer predict what jobs will be available in the future.

Fifty years ago, high school students graduated knowing perhaps 75 percent of what they would ever need to know to be successful in the workplace, the family, and the community. Today, the estimate is that graduates of our schools leave knowing perhaps 2 percent of what they will need to know in the years ahead – 98 percent is yet to come. (Barth, 2009, p. 204)

The concept of today’s graduates “not knowing” the majority of what they will need to know has created a need for educational reform and is the catalyst to a realization that students graduating from high school are ill-prepared for the ever-changing world they are entering. Educational and business experts have recently identified this problem and have been pushing for this reform, or rather what Sir Ken Robinson (2010) calls an “educational revolution”. There have been many reforms in education to date which have changed the model. These reforms were necessary at the time but they all had the same goal of changing the way we teach and assess a student’s abilities.

To create a revolution in education, educators are going to have to change their mindset because “human communities depend on a diversity of talent, not a singular conception of ability” (Robinson, 2010). The concept of educating students to find their talents and help them to explore, advance, and find avenues of success using these talents is what I believe Robinson’s revolution is talking about. The engagement of teachers needs to become a priority because we will be the ones to execute these changes in our classrooms.

The story I presented in chapter three about my own experiences confirms a need for an educational revolution because the jobs that educators are trying to prepare students for are not “traditional” in our industrialized society and perhaps, may not be “invented” yet. The reality is that our current model of educating students is not preparing them with the skills businesses are requiring of them. The leaders in business “lament that they must spend \$25 billion each year trying to teach recent graduates what they didn’t learn in school” (Barth, 2009). According to Barth, the skills and abilities employees will need in the twenty-first century include the following: teamwork, problem solving, interpersonal skills, oral communication, listening, personal development, creative thinking, leadership, goal setting, writing, organizational effectiveness, computation, and reading. These skills for success are not a new or revolutionary concept. The perceived “successful” students have already developed these skills and are applying them to their educational aspirations. The vitality of success for those aforementioned “average” students is going to be predicated on creating an educational atmosphere where they are actively engaging in these 21st century skills. Teachers will need to implement new lessons and find ways to actively engage students in these skills, which is not as easy as it seems, but in this essay I have mapped out some of the ways forward.

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