

PDS Governance Subcommittee “Student Engagement”

How is engagement defined in the research?

- “The student’s psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote.” (Newmann, 1992, p. 12).
- School engagement is ‘the attention...investment, and effort students expend in their school work.’ (Marks, 2000, p. 155)
- Student engagement in learning is the centerpiece of the Framework for Teaching; all other components contribute to it. When students are engaged in learning, they are not merely “busy,” nor are they only “on task.” Rather, they are intellectually active in learning important and challenging content. The critical distinction between a classroom in which students are compliant and busy, and one in which they are engaged, is that in the latter students are developing their understanding through what they do. That is, they are engaged in discussion, debate, answering “what if?” questions, discovering patterns, and the like. They may be selecting their work from a range of (teacher-arranged) choices, and making important contributions to the intellectual life of the class. Such activities don’t typically consume an entire lesson, but they are essential components of engagement. (Danielson Framework Rubric, Domain 3C, p. 69)

How does research describe engaged behavior?

- Instructional approaches that require student-student interactions (eg – cooperative learning), encourage discussions, or support the expressions of students’ viewpoints (eg – use of dialogue) have been found to facilitate student engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000)
- Much research has linked engagement to teacher warmth and responsiveness (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Fredericks et al., 2004)
- Cognitive engagement is an internal investment of cognitive energy, roughly speaking, the thought processes needed to attain more than a minimal understanding of the course content. (Finn & Zimmer, 2012, p. 103)
- The best evidence for student engagement is what students are saying and doing as a consequence of what the teacher does, or has done, or has planned. And while students may be physically active (e.g., using manipulative materials in mathematics or making a map in social studies), it is not essential that they be involved in a hands-on manner; it is, however, essential that they be challenged to be “minds-on.” (Danielson Framework Rubric, 3C, p69)

The elements of Danielson’s component on Student Engagement (3c) are:

Activities and assignments

The activities and assignments are the centerpiece of student engagement, since they determine what it is that students are asked to do. Activities and assignments that promote learning require student thinking that emphasizes depth over breadth and encourage students to explain their thinking.

Grouping of students

How students are grouped for instruction (whole class, small groups, pairs, individuals) is one of the many decisions teachers make every day. There are many options; students of similar background and skill may be clustered together, or the more-advanced students may be spread around into the different groups. Alternatively, a teacher might permit students to select their own groups, or they could be formed randomly.

Instructional materials and resources

The instructional materials a teacher selects to use in the classroom can have an enormous impact on students’ experience. Though some teachers are obliged to use a school’s or district’s officially sanctioned materials, many teachers use these selectively or supplement them with others of their choosing that are better suited to engaging students in deep learning—for example, the use of primary source materials in social studies.

Structure and pacing

No one, whether an adult or a student, likes to be either bored or rushed in completing a task. Keeping things moving, within a well-defined structure, is one of the marks of an experienced teacher. And since much of student learning results from their reflection on what they have done, a well-designed lesson includes time for reflection and closure.

How can we frame a pilot study of student engagement? The desired outcome is measured increase in student engagement.

Can we use Danielson’s rubric for critical attributes and possible examples,

1. What challenges might a teacher perceive in addressing the critical attributes?
2. Are there ways to operationalize, beyond the given descriptors, the critical attributes?