

Individual Paths to Literacy Engagement: Three Narratives Revisited

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Abstract

What does it mean to be engaged, especially when it comes to literacy learning? It is this question that drove my doctoral research in 2007 when I became a participant observer in a grade two classroom with the goal of making the everyday visible while sharing a greater understanding of classroom life in relation to engagement. Six years later, I returned to the original school where the grade two students were in grade eight to revisit and expand student understandings of successful engagement in learning. In this paper, I revisit the narratives of Spike, Jasper and Avery (Scheffel, 2012) to consider themes of change and continuity, including ways in which initial success and struggle appeared to influence their journey over time. I also propose a revised Framework for Engagement that draws upon grade eight students' insights.

Keywords: engagement, literacy, student perspectives

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Introduction

Student engagement has continued to be a popular topic in Canadian schools just as it has worldwide, especially with reference to research surveys such as The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Butler-Kisber and Portelli (2003) described engagement as a “popular catch phrase in education circles, both in schools and in the academy” (p. 207). More recently, Fredricks and McColskey (2012), in a comparative analysis of student engagement measures, identified a “growing interest in student engagement” (p.763), and recommended researchers continue to explore this multidimensional construct using multiple methods.

Using a mixed-methods approach in response to this recommendation, the present paper expands discussions about the complexity of engagement that first began with my doctoral work in 2007. During this time, I became a participant observer in a grade two classroom with the goal of sharing a greater understanding of classroom life in relation to engagement, specifically during literacy learning. Six years later, I returned to the original school when the grade two students were in grade eight. I wanted to revisit and expand student understandings of successful engagement in learning by continuing to put students’ understandings at the forefront of educational discussions about engagement (Scheffel, 2009).

In particular, I revisit an earlier paper published in *Brock Education Journal* [Volume 21(2), Spring 2012] where I presented a *Framework for Literacy Engagement*, along with three narratives to represent individual paths to literacy engagement. As I revisit the narratives of Spike, Jasper, and Avery from this earlier paper, I consider themes of change and continuity, including ways in which initial success and struggle appeared to influence their journey over time. I also rework the framework based on grade eight students’ considerations of engagement, which often moved beyond literacy-specific moments towards broader conceptions of engagement in learning.

Engagement Literature

Previously, I outlined three areas of engagement literature that moved from a broader focus on school engagement (McMahon & Portelli, 2004; McMahon, 2003), to reading engagement (Baker, Dreher & Guthrie, 2000; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Guthrie, 2004) and then more specifically, literacy engagement (Cambourne, 1988). Specifically, I situated myself within a sociocultural approach to the study of engagement with the goal of considering practices that encouraged engagement in literacy learning (Scheffel, 2012). This approach placed learners at the forefront, recognizing the multifaceted nature of literacy and the social nature of learning (Cambourne, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). While this theoretical underpinning remains, I focus here on prominent categories of school engagement to set the stage for considering what engagement looks like and feels like in the classroom from the perspective of students.

Within the literature, two central understandings of school engagement include: (1) behavioral, referring to participation, and (2) emotional, or psychological, referring to sense of belonging (Strambler & McKown, 2013; van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2013; Willms, 2003; Zyngier, 2008). Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) add a third

category, that of cognitive development, which focuses on efforts in comprehension. Parsons, Malloy, Parsons and Burrowbridge (2015) highlight the recent conceptualization of engagement as “a multidimensional construct consisting of affective, behavioural, and cognitive components” (p. 224). Their understanding is drawn from the work of Fredricks et al. (2004), their own research (Malloy, Parsons, & Parsons, 2013; Parsons, Muland, & Parsons, 2014) and that of Shernoff (2013). Expanding upon each category, Parsons et al. (2015) explain that affective refers to “interest, enjoyment, and enthusiasm,” while behavioural involves “effortful participation” and cognitive encompasses “strategic behavior, persistence, and metacognition” (Parsons et al., 2014, p. 224).

The notion of “effortful participation” is important as it suggests more than simply being present, a concern that arises with measures of engagement that focus on participation and time-on-task. As Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn’s (1992) definition of engagement reminds us, engagement is “active involvement, commitment, and concentrated attention, in contrast to superficial participation, apathy, or lack of interest” (p. 11). Shernoff (2013) explains: “Engagement is a complex construct, encompassing both observable (e.g., attending class) and unobservable psychological events (i.e., “investment”), a persistent *quality of interaction*, and positive emotions (e.g. enjoyment)” (p. 47). It is the distinction between the visual and internal that was portrayed through my initial study, specifically in the narratives of Spike, Jasper, and Avery.

Understanding the distinction between the visual and internal reinforces the need to consider what engagement looks like beyond the observable. Working with grade six students, Parsons et al. (2015) highlighted 10 tasks for both high and low student engagement. Findings suggested that the most engaging tasks offered “opportunities for collaboration and appropriate support for completing tasks” (p. 227) while the least engaging tasks were “difficult or confusing,” often requiring little involvement (p. 227). Their analysis was framed around 5 features of engagement tasks found in the literature: authenticity, collaboration, choice, appropriate challenge, and sustained learning. Similar features were found by Gambrell (2011) in relation to the motivations of engaged readers. Offering seven rules of engagement, Gambrell (2011) highlighted the importance of relevancy, access, sustained reading opportunities, choice, and interaction with others, success through challenging texts, and incentives that value reading itself. With similar understandings arising in the original study, I turn next to an overview of my initial findings, which set the stage for returning to talk with grade eight students.

The Original Study

The original study, through an elaborated ethnographic approach that included 53 observations days, found that visual manifestations of engagement, similar to those shared by teachers within the literature, reinforced the use of visual filters to determine the “look” of engagement (e.g. raised hands, proximity to teacher, and smiling) (Scheffel, 2012). Additional research methods included informal conversational interviews with students, picture-talks and student/parent journaling. The elaboration of three individual portraits (Spike, Jasper, and Avery) pondered the ways in which engagement moved beyond the visual towards recognition of internal senses, resulting in a proposed *Framework for Literacy Engagement* (Scheffel, 2012).

The *Framework for Literacy Engagement* elaborated four filters through which engagement is perceived: personal, term, observable visual, and internal senses (Scheffel, 2012). The *personal* filter asks educators to consider their life experiences as they seek to determine their students' engagement, with the reminder to continually get to know their students. The *term* filter considers other descriptors such as interest, enjoyment, attention, and work ethic used by researchers and educators to make sense of the term engagement. The *observable visual* filter refers to visible behaviours that suggest a student is engaged: positive facial cues, proximity, upright body language and raised hands, focus or concentration and the physical demonstration of action. Finally, the *internal senses* filter moves beyond the visual to consider perceptions of student's feelings about a learning activity. The *internal senses* filter encompasses eight senses: novelty, purpose, challenge, achievement, active participation, responsibility, ownership, and belonging.

Methodology/Research Methods

Both the original study and this subsequent one considered the ways in which students conceptualize engagement. In addition, the present study asked, "In what ways have students' understandings of engagement in literacy changed or evolved over time?" The *Framework for Literacy Engagement*, developed in the original study, served as inspiration for a mixed methods research design, offering both a theoretical and methodological underpinning to the study's direction.

As noted previously, my selection of a mixed methods approach reflected Fredricks and McColsky's (2012) recommendation for multiple methods to explore the complexity of engagement. Calfee and Sperling (2010) highlight similar goals for complexity in their consideration of mixed methods approaches to language and literacy research. Like Calfee and Sperling (2010), I recognized how "...mixed methods within one research project can allow one method to 'talk to' the other, each helping to shape how we understand and interpret the other" (p. 9). For example, a qualitative approach allowed for an interactive workshop design that served to re-introduce me to the original participants and to involve all grade eight students regardless of their original participation. It was also fitting of my goal to speak with original participants following the workshop. A quantitative approach, on the other hand, offered individual feedback on the *Framework for Literacy Engagement* through a rating scale, ensuring all voices were heard during a limited time frame. For original participants, the rating scale also served as a discussion point for changes over time during the interviews.

Fitting of these goals, I used an embedded, exploratory 2-phase design where the quantitative data provided a "supportive, secondary role" to the qualitative data (Gelo, Braakmann, & Benetka, 2008, p. 282; also see Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). In both cases, the purpose was descriptive, not causal (Ercikan & Roth, 2006) as I sought to address both the broad question of students' understandings of engagement, as well as trends and departures in relation to the original study (Calfee & Sperling, 2010). The interviews were further informed by the goals of narrative inquiry, specifically, the use of story to share the lived experiences of individuals (Prus, 1996), and to invite professional development (Latta & Kim, 2010).

Workshop. The term "engagement" was not initially defined for students. Instead, I began the workshop with individual and group brainstorming, asking "What does

engagement mean to you?” and “What are some examples of times when you were engaged in learning?” The goal was to gather initial understandings of engagement while also setting an interactive tone to the workshop that valued the voices of participants. Next, I used PowerPoint to present 13 statements about engagement developed from the original study. For each statement, I shared examples from my observations of their peers when in grade two. I then asked students to indicate the relevance of each statement from their current perspective as grade eight students by ranking statements in order of importance from 1 to 13. An open-ended prompt was also included, asking students to consider anything that was missing: “Another statement I would add is...” In the final portion of the workshop, I invited to students to use digital cameras to capture moments that signified their engagement.

Individual Interviews. Following the workshop, I invited the original participants, including Spike, Jasper, and Avery, to participate in a follow-up individual interview to consider their engagement journeys. I included interview questions such as: What is a moment in your schooling that stands out for the way it engaged you as a learner? What makes you really want to learn something? During what type of language arts activities do you feel you are learning the most? In addition, I asked the original participants to elaborate upon their responses to the rating scale completed during the workshop. In this conversation, I shared the areas of the framework that had stood out for me as an observer of their literacy engagement when they were in grade two (e.g. sense of challenge or raised hands). I asked if there was anything they would change or that no longer applied.

Parent Survey. I also invited parent input through an online survey. The survey was offered to all parents but received a low rate of return (seven in total) unlike the parent journals collected in the original study. For the purposes of this article, I consider only the parent surveys for original participants, specifically Spike, to offer a point of comparison to his original portrait.

Participants

Participants were situated within a K-8 school of over 650 students in Southwestern Ontario. Unlike the original study, the follow-up study reflected the ethnically diverse population of the school (Scheffel, 2012). A total of 72 grade eight students participated in the workshop with 61 providing consent to share their ideas for the purposes of this study. An equal number of male and female students contributed to the workshop data. Of the original 17 participants, 11 remained at the school. Consent was received from 10 of these students to participate in the individual interview. An attempt was made to contact the remaining students still living in the area, resulting in 1 additional interview. In total, 62 rating scales were completed and 11 individual interviews were conducted.

Data Sources and Analysis

The present paper draws upon the following data sources: workshop artifacts (e.g. brainstorming charts, field notes), interview transcripts, rating scales, and parent surveys as relevant. I applied Calfee and Sperling's (2010) 3-step process for analyzing mixed methods research: (1) data cleaning, (2) data exploration and organization, and (3) data examination to look for meaningful patterns. Data examination procedures began with

simple descriptive statistics using SPSS to gain an overall picture of the ranked value between 1 to 13 given to each statement on the rating scale and to inform discussion of the *Framework for Literacy Engagement*. Responses to the open-ended prompt were categorized by topic for informational purposes. Next, I read/reread interview transcripts for overall understanding, and compared to previous findings. For this paper specifically, I looked for points of agreement and contradiction with previously published narratives of Spike, Jasper and Avery (Scheffel, 2012) to consider evolving understandings of engagement as well as questions arising. Finally, I re-examined all data sources to consider what I learned from speaking with the grade eight students about engagement.

A Framework for Literacy Engagement: Revisited

The Rating Scale

My goal in developing the rating scale was to create an age-appropriate, readable statement for each term within the framework in order to uncover patterns and raise questions for further exploration. Table 1 lists each statement from lowest to highest mean, with lower means indicating greater importance. The green rows denote statements within the framework that reflected the *observable visual* filter. Blue rows denote statements that reflect the *internal senses* filter. No gender difference was found in any of the statements.

Sense of Active Participation was rated the highest in terms of importance, while *Positive Facial Cues* and *Proximity* were rated as least important. The chart reveals that the majority of the *observable visual* statements are near the bottom of the list with the exception of *Focus or Concentration*, which was rated second in importance. Interestingly, all statements revealed a range of 12 or 13 with almost every statement selected as most important by some and least important by others. Such a range reinforces the individuality of each student's learning journey, suggesting there was importance in all of the statements to at least one student.

Students were presented with two statements for *Sense of Ownership* to reflect differing aspects of ownership displayed in the original study. As shown in Table 1, both aspects of ownership received equal calculations. A similar mean of 6.86 was also found when computing a new variable for ownership that averaged these two statements. However, it is important to note that many students offered greater importance to one or the other, reflecting a distinction that requires further study.

Another limitation of the rating scale was the absence of a statement for *Sense of Belonging*. In the original study, *Sense of Belonging* referred to "the process of working with another that creates a space for learning to be fostered" (Scheffel, 2012, p. 17). This aspect of the model arose in large part due to Avery's story, and for this reason, it was not included in the workshop to avoid her recognition by previous classmates. However, two of the eight open-ended responses indicated that a statement related to belonging was missing. These statements highlighted the role of "interact(ing) with other classmates," but not always with friends: "I am more engaged when I am not with my friends and are with people I don't usually talk to."

Despite the limitations discussed above, analysis of the rating scales offered a key distinction between the importance of what is observable and that which is internal. At the same time, the rating scale supported the previous findings that each of these factors contributed to perceptions of engagement. With this in mind, I turn to the narratives of

Spike, Jasper and Avery to look more closely at their understandings of engagement as grade eight students. As grade two students, their stories had stood out in relation to a painting by Brenda Joysmith that positioned three children around a doorway (see Allen, Michalove & Shockley, 1993). At the time, I pondered how “the open doorway became a path to learning that was clearly defined for some while unreachable for others. I wanted to learn what drew some through the door but turned others away” (Scheffel, 2012, p. 4). In this follow-up study, I now wondered, how have their journeys changed over time, or have they changed at all?

Table 1

Rating Scale Frequencies

Framework Term	Statement	Mean	Mode	Min	Max
Sense of Active Participation	I am interested and involved in what we are learning about.	4.43	4	1	12
Focus or Concentration	I am concentrating on what I am doing.	5.22	5	1	13
Sense of Achievement	I feel successful in what I am doing.	5.22	5	1	13
Sense of Challenge	I am challenged to learn something new.	5.85	5	1	13
Sense of Purpose	I can see the purpose or larger goal in what I am doing.	6.41	6	1	13
Sense of Novelty	The activity is out of the norm or something we don't usually do.	6.46	6	1	13
Sense of Ownership ^a	I am offered choice in what I am doing.	6.81	7	1	13
Sense of Ownership ^a	I can make decisions about what I am learning.	6.81	7	1	13
Action	I am able to move around and be active while I am learning.	6.88	7	1	13
Sense of Responsibility	I am able to take on responsibility for what I am doing.	6.91	7	1	13
Upright Body Language & Raised Hands	I raise my hand to share a response.	8.12	9	1	13
Positive Facial Cues	I smile while I am working.	10.43	12	2	13
Proximity	I sit near the front of the class.	10.55	12	1	13

Note: n=60. Frequencies are based on the ranked number between 1-13 that participants gave to each statement. Statements are ordered from lowest to highest mean with lowest means indicating greatest importance. The Framework Term refers to the original *Framework for Literacy Engagement* (Scheffel, 2012) to which the statements correspond.

^aThis category was divided into two statements.

Three Portraits: Revisited

A glance at Spike, Jasper and Avery's individual ratings for each statement revealed that they differed in terms of the statements they valued most (Table 2). While Spike and Avery were in agreement with the majority of their classmates that *Sense of Active Participation* was the most important, Jasper was one of few who selected *Positive Facial Cues* and *Proximity* as key signs of his engagement. In all three cases, there was little overlap in terms of the top five statements selected. The interviews offered greater insight into their understandings and set the foundation for revisiting their narratives.

Table 2

Rating scale statements selected as most important by Spike, Jasper, and Avery

Statement	Spike	Jasper	Avery
I am interested and involved in what we are learning about.	1		1
I am concentrating on what I am doing.			2
I feel successful in what I am doing.		5	
I am challenged to learn something new.			5
I can see the purpose or larger goal in what I am doing.	4		3
The activity is out of the norm or something we don't usually do.			
I am offered choice in what I am doing.	3		
I can make decisions about what I am learning.	2		
I am able to move around and be active while I am learning.	5	4	
I am able to take on responsibility for what I am doing.			4
I raise my hand to share a response.		2	
I sit near the front of the class.		3	
I smile while I am working.		1	

Spike. In grade two, Spike was the student who "...found spaces within the school day and at home to follow self-initiated literacy activities and to build his literate lifestyle" (Scheffel, 2012, p.8). This included creating a trading card series and writing a chapter book about Pokémon. While his teacher often excluded popular culture interests from the classroom, Spike used recess and other free times to work on his interests. Within classroom activities, "it was evident that when given ownership over tasks, Spike was most likely to feel engaged" (Scheffel, 2012, p. 10). Though he was not always attentive in class, Spike easily achieved Grade 2 standards. As a result, Spike was able to find his own path to engagement. Overall, his grade two journey towards engagement focused on sense of purpose, sense of challenge, sense of achievement, sense of ownership and the behavioural aspect of action.

Six years later, Spike's selection of statements differed little from when he was in grade two, though his understanding of active learning moved from the behavioural focus physical activity to one of active participation. Ownership also remained central to Spike. He selected both aspects of ownership in his top five statements (#2 and #3), revealing the

ways in which choice and decision-making were keys to his engagement, and perhaps empowerment as a grade eight student.

When asked to define engagement, Spike responded, “Participation. Doing work. Listening, but active listening, not just like ‘Uh huh. Okay.’” In fact, the role of active participation was a recurring theme in my conversation with Spike. When discussing what made him want to learn something, Spike shared, “If I’m interested in it, if it’s something I like, sometimes if it’s something new and I want to learn more. Just stuff like that.” When asked what still fit, had changed or stood out most, Spike again highlighted the importance of interest: “Interest would be the most important. Cause, like, if I’m not interested in something, I just don’t seem to push myself enough. If it’s actually something I’m interested in, I’ll really want to do it and work on it.”

However, when asked if there was a key moment that stood out in terms of being engaged as a learner, Spike laughed and said, “Not really, to be honest. No.” Prompting him to expand, Spike added, “Nothing just really specifically made me really want to push myself to do something.” He thought of himself as “engaged overall, kind of...” but a challenge, as in grade two, appeared crucial to the degree in which he felt engaged as a learner. One key moment that Spike did recall was a recent Science Fair as “some of the projects we did were kind of fun.” Reminiscent of his love for discovering ideas in grade two, this example offers a brief glimpse into why active participation stood out, for it speaks to Spike’s desire to build on interests and be actively involved in his learning.

Within Language Arts, what stood out most to Spike was the work they had done with children’s picture books: “We look at the art, and the bigger messages inside the kids’ picture books.” Though he could not remember any titles, it was clear this learning moment had been significant, perhaps because it challenged him to look beyond the surface and uncover layers of meanings. Reminiscent of the text analyst role within the 4 Roles of the Reader (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999), it appeared Spike was engaged by this opportunity to evaluate purpose and point of view.

His interest in books as a whole, however, had changed. Responding to the optional parent survey, Spike’s parents felt he was “very hard-pressed to find books he likes. Or friends who like books.” Interestingly, they felt many of his literacy practices had stopped around 3 years ago. It may be that Spike’s reading interests had moved beyond print to digital forms, an area for further research. At the same time, perceptions of being a reader, and finding engaging books, raise questions about potential limitations to engagement with reading.

Questions Arising. Though Spike’s “thirst for knowledge” stood out in grade two, this passion for learning was strikingly missing when I returned to speak with him. While I did not have the opportunity to observe his learning in this follow-up study, his answers support this difference. As a student who often found his own ways towards engagement in grade two, the ability to negotiate spaces of interest no longer stood out. In terms of what was important to Spike as a learner, his engagement journey had not changed significantly, raising questions about why he no longer appeared to be as engaged. Reflecting upon Spike’s narrative, then and now, I am left with the following question, “If Spike did not change, what did?”

Jasper. In grade two, Jasper was the student who was “compliant, just not involved” (Scheffel, 2012, p. 13). He often tried to “look the part” of engagement as he worked at his desk with a pencil in hand, but in reality, his page was often blank. He was

hesitant to speak with adults, with his friends offering the safest space for conversation. There was a distinct difference in his literacy practices at home in comparison to school but “he provided enough correct answers to demonstrate that he could do the work” (Scheffel, 2012, p. 13). Occasionally, however, there were moments where he overcame this disconnect, such as through the creation of his own game board. In this moment, he shared ideas with classmates and became fully absorbed in this open-ended learning opportunity. Overall, his grade two journey towards engagement, though a bumpy one, focused predominantly on action (e.g. physical movement) but also upright body language and raised hands, and sense of challenge.

Six years later, sense of action and raised hands remained important to Jasper. In fact, of the five statements related to *observable visual* aspects of engagement, Jasper included 4 of these in his top 4 statements. His fifth choice was that of success in relation to sense of responsibility, a new element to his individual journey that did not appear in grade two.

This idea of success played a predominant role in my interview of Jasper. When asked what made him want to learn, Jasper spoke of future purpose as a reason to engage: “When I know it’s gonna, like, if I don’t learn it, I know it’s going to affect my future.” Thinking back to a key moment that engaged him in learning, a similar sense of wanting to do well arose: “There’s been a lot of lessons and tests and stuff that I really wanted to do good, to...know it.” Underlying this goal for future is a desire to well, or achieve success towards this future goal.

Jasper was unsure when initially asked to define engagement. Prompting him to reflect on the workshop and to think about himself as a learner, he responded: “To want to learn – to want to do something.” This desire reflected the game board example in grade two where he wanted to do the task, and therefore engaged in the task and even had fun in the process. A similar understanding is conveyed in the Language Arts moments that stood out to Jasper where he spoke of writing a speech on basketball and writing biographies. Choice of topic is central to both of these tasks, reflecting the desire to want to do or learn something.

For the most part, Jasper was hesitant with his responses, suggesting an uncertainty in his personal understandings about engagement. When asked what still fit, had changed or stood out most, Jasper paused before pointing to *Sense of Action*, “Well...Yeah, I guess. Like, this one.” When asked to expand, however, he could not recall any specific moments. Instead, his focus turned to attention: “I guess when we are doing lessons, you always gotta be paying attention because you gotta know what to say.” It is here that we can see the “look” of engagement that still underlies Jasper’s narrative. For him, the visual observable statements are the way to show you are paying attention.

Questions Arising. While Jasper appeared to have found a stronger desire to participate in his learning in grade eight, there remained a strong visual perception of what it means to show engagement. He equated this, in part, to attention, a similar understanding that he displayed in grade two: “He knew what the expected image of working looked like...” (Scheffel, 2012, p. 13). While much of his engagement journey remained the same, the role of achievement, or success, represented a key change. It may be that this is a result of being in grade eight, a time of looking ahead to preparing for high school. It also strikes me that the two concepts, attention and achievement, are linked for Jasper. In grade two, he sought to show achievement, though perhaps did not understand its importance beyond

grade two. Now, he is seeking to not only show achievement but work towards it in order to do well in future. For me, the question that remains is: Is he engaged in the learning itself, or the process of doing well to achieve grades?

Avery. In grade two, Avery sought to be at the same level academically as her classmates but often felt limited by her participation because she did not know the answer. For Avery, “the learning process was a struggle, not through lack of desire, but because her position along the learning process continuum placed her at the bottom of grade 2” (Scheffel, 2012, p. 14). Visual indicators mattered little to Avery as a result. Instead, her path to engagement focused on internal indicators related to achievement, challenge, and ownership. Despite this, engagement seemed elusive. Moments that helped her to achieve these internal indicators were often related to a sense of belonging, such as being able to work with a supportive peer where her ideas were valued.

Six years later, Avery’s selection of indicators has changed significantly, though her top choices remain focused on internal indicators, with the addition of one visual indicator, that of concentration. While achievement played a key role in grade two, Avery did not select this indicator within her top 5. Instead, active participation, purpose and responsibility appeared to take on greater importance.

When asked to define engagement, Avery focused on effort: “...being in the classroom and listening. You always give the answers, or try to, and if you don’t understand something you always ask questions saying, ‘What does this mean?’” Notably, when in grade two, Avery did not always feel she had an answer to share. Her contributions were also devalued at times, though often unintentionally. Sharing the importance of her ideas and questions, there is a distinct difference in Avery’s understanding and valuing of her thoughts now that she is in grade eight.

Sharing what made her want to learn, collaboration was at the forefront of Avery’s answer: “...having partners...it doesn’t all depend on you. So if you have a bad idea, your friends could tell you and then you would actually know it was a bad idea...” Here we see that Avery does not feel alone in her learning journey. Just as she did in grade two, she recognizes the importance of collaborating with supportive peers.

When it came to key moments of engagement in Language Arts, Avery focused on strategies and tools, such as the use of computer programs and the importance of proofreading as contributing to her learning. Discussing her literacy goals, Avery shared, “I think I’m getting better.” Her specific goals for improvement focused on “writing, better faster proofreading, getting more right. Reading better.” A similar goal of learning “to read and write better” was shared by her mom when in grade two, speaking to Avery’s ongoing desire to learn. Like in grade two, Avery was aware of her academic struggles, but as a grade eight student, she felt supported by her peers and teachers. Moreover, in comparison to Spike and Jasper, Avery had a clear future goal to become a chef.

Questions Arising. While I was concerned for Avery in grade two, I found myself excited to hear her greater confidence for learning. Having switched schools, she was in a smaller classroom setting, something she attributed as an easier place to learn. Without greater details, it is difficult to say if this switch in schools contributed to Avery’s greater confidence. What matters most is how she feels about her learning. Despite her initial struggles in grade two, and regardless of the type of classroom she had moved to, it was evident that Avery’s path to learning was no longer the closed door I had feared. While Jasper had equated attention with achievement, Avery’s story suggests achievement, or

perhaps success, is more than academics. So, what made the difference? How was Avery able to find her way through the open door of learning? How do we define success? These are the questions that remain.

What Have I Learned?

Without knowing more about the years between grades two and eight, I am not able to answer these questions specifically. Instead, I focus on what I have learned in returning to speak with these grade eight students. In doing so, I remain cognizant that the findings discussed are situated within one school through a one-time workshop, followed by individual interviews with original participants. My goal is not to generalize but to highlight the voices of the participants involved and the insights shared in relation to what engagement means to them.

First, the grade eight's responses, both on the rating scale and through the interviews, confirm that there are individual paths towards engagement that include both visual and internal factors, but with the added understanding that individual paths may vary across time and context. For educators looking to engage their students, it is important that they recognize engagement is more than what we see at first glance. Moreover, as the grade eight students in this study, emphasized, teaching should encourage and support all learners through offering choice and opportunities for success.

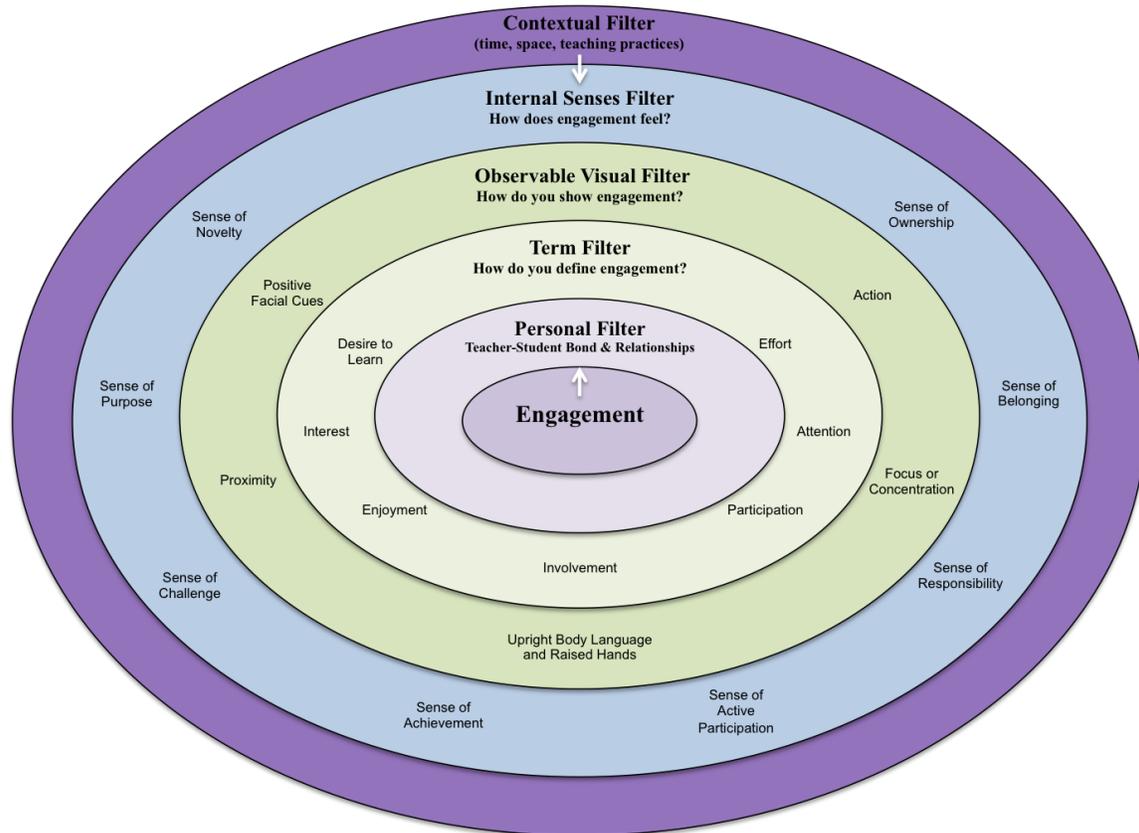
Second, interest is a key factor towards engagement. Playing to student interests involves greater responsibility and involvement of students in their learning. In fact, the key words used by the grade eights to define engagement at the beginning of the workshop were "participation," "involved," and "interested." While many of the indicators within the original *Framework for Literacy Engagement* were reinforced, the insights of these grade eight students suggest the need for some changes. First, the term filter has been expanded to include additional keywords used by the grade eight students to define engagement. The term "work ethic" was removed in place of their use of the terms "effort," and "desire to learn." Second, the personal filter now encompasses a greater focus on relationships. Originally, this filter considered the lens through which educators perceive engagement (e.g. Who am I? What are my life experiences?).

In light of Spike, Jasper, and Avery's journeys, teachers were reminded to get to know their students and what contributes to their success in learning. However, in this follow-up study, students' perceptions suggested the personal was also important to them, in particular through the teacher-student bond (Cambourne, 1988). For example, four out of eight open-ended responses indicated engagement was more likely to occur with a teacher who was "understanding", "reasonable", "kind", and "nice". Initially, I considered teacher-student bond as influencing the *internal senses* filter and students' willingness to engage. Upon reflection, I see that teacher-student bond, and relationships as a whole, are at the heart of this personal filter. In fact, Washor and Mojkowski (2014) include relationships as one of 10 expectations young people have when it comes to engagement. The revised model now clarifies this goal through the keywords: teacher-student bond and relationships. In doing so, students and teachers are encouraged to reflect on the ways in which the remaining filters are supported through the relationships created within the classroom, school, and larger community.

Third, a new *Contextual Filter* has been added to the outer edge, intended to reflect back upon the other filters. This filter encompasses the question of change posed earlier. Perceptions of engagement may change from year to year depending on the classroom, school, teaching practices, etc. As a result, each new context is likely to support or limit student's individual journeys in different ways. Though focused on intervention, Fredricks and McColskey (2012) remind us that student's engagement "...in something (i.e., task, activity, and relationship)...cannot be separated from their environment. This means that engagement is malleable and is responsive to variations in the context..." (p. 765). Choice, initially placed within ownership, finds its home here in the contextual filter as a teaching practice used by teachers to influence engagement. Parsons et al. (2015) suggested, "Engaging tasks were also those that encouraged student choice of either the topic or the manner of presentation in activities..." (p. 229). Vitale-Reilly (2015) presented choice as a key principle of engagement in the way it motivates students and leads to critical thinking. Washor and Mojkowski (2014) also highlighted choice as another of the 10 expectations young people have for school. Whether a principle, expectation or tool, choice becomes an action by teachers that contributes to other internal senses, such as feelings of ownership, collaboration, responsibility, etc.

Finally, though the topic of literacy was central to the context of my initial observations, this was not the case in the follow-up study. While students were prompted to consider literacy activities that fostered engagement, they often focused on engagement in learning as a whole. It may be that the integrated nature of literacy contributed to this focus for the students. It may also be a result of beginning the workshop with broader discussions of engagement to uncover initial understandings. Upon reflection of the ideas shared by students, I have come to recognize the broader applicability of the framework. As such, the revised framework in Figure 1 suggests a *Framework for Engagement in Learning* that can be applied to various learning contexts.

Figure 1. A framework for engagement in learning.



Looking Ahead

The framework presented offers a fluid understanding of the ways in which engagement is demonstrated and experienced by students. Rather than categorize engagement as behavioural, cognitive or emotional, the framework recognizes the ways in which “interest, enjoyment and enthusiasm,” “effortful participation,” and “strategic behavior, persistence, and metacognition” (Parsons et al., 2015, p. 224) cross both visual and internal indicators of engagement for students. Questions of how engagement both looks and feels as a learner are at the forefront. Yet, many questions remain to be explored as we consider the narratives of Spike, Jasper, and Avery and ponder the changes contributing to seemingly greater and lesser engagement over time.

Future research might revisit the statements with grade eight students to further distinguish why some statements stood out over others. Multiple statements for each indicator can then be created with the goal of asking students to rate them on a scale of 1-7 in terms of importance. This will allow for more in-depth quantitative analysis to compare to the ranked data in this study. The addition of a statement related to *Sense of Belonging* will also expand future discussions related to this concept. Important to note, Fredricks and McColskey (2012) caution that due to variations in the construct of engagement, a closer

look at measurements of engagement is needed, including self-report measures, such as the rating scale used here. The value of this study, however, lies not in an attempt to measure but to notice patterns and raise questions about individual paths to engagement. The voice of teachers in response to students' perceptions is also important. How do teachers view the usefulness of such a framework for supporting their learners? Is the framework applicable across learning contexts? The complexity of engagement requires that we continue to pursue greater understanding through the voices of students and educators.

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