

Engagement

In 1635, the one-room schoolhouse was born in Dedham, Massachusetts. It was a simpler life but still with challenges, including a persistent threat of attack from the displaced Native Americans, power imbalance toward white males, and no electricity. Barriers in our modern educational system, by contrast, include the lack of qualified teachers entering the profession, turnover, school violence, the debate over charter schools, the controversy around methodology, and an outcome-focused and evaluation-based curriculum.

Job satisfaction stretches across many of these issues, with reported lows in 2012, a drop of twenty-three percentage points since 2008 (Strauss, 2013). Principals also reported a nine percentage point drop during this time period. A small research sample conducted by this author of approximately 350 respondents in three states, however, found nearly 87 percent of educators reporting moderate to very high job satisfaction (Scherz, 2019). Thus, it may be helpful to drill down to determine what we are measuring: how demographics and work conditions factor in.

While job satisfaction concerns are not unique to the U.S., with more than a third of U.K. education professionals feeling stressed, compared to 18 percent of their workforce overall (Speck, 2018), there are some factors we can prioritize. Salaries might be low on this list, with nearly half the teachers in this country reporting satisfaction with their salaries (less so for rural educators).

Less tangible aspects of satisfaction, such as well-being, are more difficult to define and measure but may be a higher-priority investigation. The insidious nature of apathy, detachment, and diminished investment can strip a system of rigor like a processed-foods diet strips the body of nutrients. As we navigate dietary challenges within the context of the food industry, so, too, are we exploring engagement in the context of our educational system.

Engaged teachers like what they do, but we do not know that disengaged teachers dislike their work or perhaps what aspects of their work they are less satisfied with. Are disengaged teachers lacking investment due to the nature of teaching in this current climate or the circumstances surrounding their specific employment? It is less likely a person enters the profession if they do not want to work with students, although subject matter expertise, industry job availability, and scheduling may certainly account for some.

The appeal of shaping lives has likely been compromised by something within the educator or their environment. Job responsibilities or the receptivity of students may detract from enjoyment. For principals,

75 percent reported their job became too complex, reflecting the speed, quantity, and diversity of work tasks all educators are pressured by (Will, 2018).

Relationships are hampered when students are enabled by parents, within systems that emphasize grading over learning. The pressure families face to compete for college admissions or the lack of collaboration from parents who provide too much freedom to their children, lacking intrinsic motivation, create animosity where compassion would normally exist. Educators become angry at the system they didn't help to create, enervating them from fully vesting in their work. The danger, as we are increasingly aware, is the dilution of these relationships impacting student success. Protective factors such as self-esteem, determination, and grit in young people are fostered through relationships with caring adults, teachers, and mentors. And yet, teachers' well-being, the engine for this work, is often at best an afterthought to professional development (PD)—and more often dismissed entirely.

When teachers feel healthy and happy, bringing their whole selves to work, they can foster the kinds of relationships necessary for student development. To help students learn how to meet their own needs, becoming more self-sufficient, requires effective role models, not simply more skills. As we better appreciate this relationship and the implications for student success, we will devote more resources to this area.

While engagement may well be emerging as the single most important barrier in education, we can't change it unless we understand its meaning. Engagement is an often used but poorly understood term that is generally linked to motivation and attention as well as inferentially tied to learning and behavior. Without clear consensus on the use and definition of this concept, we are easily manipulated by those who capitalize on our uncertainty.

Engagement Defined

Professional engagement is often underappreciated as an aspect of professional learning. Other aspects of PD, including mastery of skills, application of theory, and refreshers on fundamental knowledge are all important but less effective if engagement is compromised.

Engagement, a measure of work investment, is a derivative of skill building but mostly proceeds it. It is analogous to a baseball player who isn't happy with the team he is playing for but is going for extra batting practice. Sometimes integrity alone will allow the player to maximize output, but more often maximum learning saturation is reached too early without absorbing the full benefit of the skills.

When we get engaged to be married, we make a formal commitment to our partner, symbolized through a ring or some other form of investment. We've announced our intent to share life forever with another person, giving up much of what we consider to be *our*

possessions, wishes, needs in favor of ours (as in mine and yours). Our money, material collections, time, and energy are all (prenuptial agreements notwithstanding) divided in half with this commitment. We agree to make decisions together; to live in the same house; and, for many, to start a family. The engagement is the process by which we prepare to be less self-focused.

Gallup defines *engaged* teachers as involved with, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work. They know the scope of their jobs and constantly look for new and better ways to achieve outcomes. *Not engaged* teachers may be satisfied with their jobs, but they are not emotionally connected to their workplaces and are unlikely to devote much discretionary effort to their work. *Actively disengaged* teachers are not only unhappy but also act out their unhappiness in ways that undermine what their coworkers accomplish.

These terms may be overly simplistic, not considering the stages of development for intellectual and social emotional learning (SEL). With fluid stages, we increase our depth of understanding and investment based on our intellectual and psychological capacities. A more enhanced view on engagement may be borrowed from a branch of psychology called Gestalt.

In Gestalt therapy, we use the term *contact* to signify how awareness is used to take actions around meeting our needs. Contact is a process where two distinct entities come together to form something new, like the ocean and sand, forming a changing shoreline. Contact or contact boundary is where entities exchange information, define themselves, and form their process for negotiation and intimacy. Engagement can be thought of as the way in which we make contact. Engagement is the early action(s) we take to explore newness or the ongoing method by which we navigate ourselves in relation to others or the world.

Stages of Relational Engagement

Reaction: My attention is aroused through sensory awareness prior to figure formation. My senses elicit feelings, and feelings trigger needs. My alarm sounds at the potential threat to needs being compromised and excitement around other needs being met.

Resistance: My forces for sameness and change are activated, triggering my protective mechanisms. I notice my hesitation and begin looking inward at motivation and/or intent.

Reflection: I form images, associations, and memories. Instinctive reactions give way to more deliberate recognition of self in relation to others. As I own my “stuff,” I can more easily navigate the challenges of taking in the other while maintaining my sense of self.

Receptivity: My protective mechanisms dissipate as I identify how to meet my wants and needs, aware of my style of manipulation. Fear is leaned into helping to grow excitement.

Reworking: As I recognize my needs, I more closely consider the other. We begin to explore and negotiate differences, considering where change or acceptance is needed to make better contact.

Stages of Academic Engagement

Curiosity: My attention has been sparked, the degree to which is based on my innate level of intellectual hunger, how the content resonates, my current state of mind, and the delivery method.

Consideration: I continue to think after the stimulus is removed. I want to learn more. I'm influenced by rigidity, mood, and external conditions (relationship, context, investment). I wonder how this stimulus generates information that applies to my world. Discernment is key.

Capacity: My ability and willingness to apply this information leads to acceptance, rejection, or ambivalence. Success with applying this information will also determine my attitude.

Commitment: I begin planning and/or implementing how to use this new information. The strength of the data or delivery is mixed with my receptivity and cemented by my experience.

Confluence: I'm incorporating this new belief, thought, method, or perspective into my existing identity. I have determined how this new learning fits in my schema. Obstacles to success do not derail but enhance my new learning.

Engagement and Leadership

Leaders engage with their faculty through consistency of follow-through—adhering to the mission or vision, providing support in times of distress, holding faculty accountable, and creating a culture of cohesion. The full investment of oneself into the modeling, motivating, and orchestrating for the purpose of bringing out the best in each person is the job of the leader.

Leaders also engage as ordinary people, removed of title and role, leaving only organic care and concern. In these moments of contact, a leader remembers that everybody is on the same team with the shared interest of nurturing student growth. Beyond affirmation, engagement can also be accomplished through meaningful differencing and intense curiosity. Dr. Michael Salvatore, New Jersey Superintendent of the Year (2019), shared the following:

Connectedness has become a living essential for educators and school leaders as they navigate the changing landscape of remote teaching, leading, and learning. Some may envision personal digital tools, which allow access to information, shopping, and work; whether it be a laptop, wireless router, or tablet. These engineered devices provide a basic network connection, but the opportunities to deeply affect others go far beyond the virtual *Brady Bunch* images flooding social media. Connectedness

begins by exploring the experiences and circumstances of those we encounter. Further, seeking to understand how life events shape individual perspective heightens this connection. Great teachers and leaders leverage these processes, identified as social emotional leadership, to build healthy relationships aimed at elevating thought and inspiring action.

Technology and Engagement

If you ask a technology company, engagement may be used to describe the focus and sustained attention of the end user. “Eyeballs,” commonly used to measure the effect of an advertisement, determines the growth of that marketing effort to convert and retain customers. These branding specialists know that engagement represents an emerging need in education, which they are capitalizing on.

With the increased use of technology in this country, it seems evident that the nature of engagement is inextricably tied to the mediums by which we relate and learn. We are essentially helping the marketing companies through use of these products and services, becoming their sales conduit to students. Without considering efficacy of impact, we are complicit in escalating unintended consequences.

The ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) Conference is one of the largest in the country, attracting all the major brands, including IBM, Apple, AT&T and more. If you attend this conference, you may be struck by the number of taglines promoting *engagement* as a selling tool. These companies research student engagement, which according to Gallup decreases every year after fifth grade.

Office Depot has one of the larger signs that reads Engaging Students, Inspiring Success, a powerful message and a huge promise. Success is a catchy word, but it does not clearly articulate what this looks like or how their product or service contributes to the outcome. Is success academic achievement accomplished through student engagement promoting critical thinking or other social emotional skills?

Using the term *engagement* in one’s brand signals to the parent or educator that this service or product is going to be well received and even adopted as part of the overall learning campaign. For the millions of parents and educators who struggle to get and keep the attention of this younger generation, this sounds highly appealing.

Engagement has been used to describe the phenomenon of linking students in the classroom through interactive media, teachers with other teachers through resource sharing, and even schools with the community through parent-teacher software. There is no shortage of apps, software, and devices that bridge connections through technological innovation.

We aren’t questioning, however, the quality and depth of these connections. Are we truly linking people with each other, and if so, how? Are we connecting people to the device, software, or app as a medium,

and what impact does that have on the interaction? We don't know whether the results of this engagement will impact the classroom culture, the student's ability to make meaningful contact with others, or even improve the way we negotiate.

Tristan Harris, a former Google project manager, wrote a manifesto that warned the public of large tech companies attempting to capture and sustain attention without regard to misleading advertising and potentially harmful consequences. In spite of the attention he received from the general public and even the founder of Google, nothing evident came as a result of his warning.

Engagement, according to the large tech companies, and apparently a growing number of smaller tech companies wanting in on the action, is about leveraging the interest of the end user. If a tech company cites student engagement via their cool math app that kids love, we must read that as generating interest and recidivism with their product or service.

By this definition of engagement, we could also include crack, heroin, and sugar as effective engagement tools because they, too, stimulate interest and long-term use. People are motivated to use these substances, but perhaps more accurately, they are extrinsically motivated. That means the reward is coming from the outside and not from within. This is an important distinction because externally driven reinforcers create dependencies and not sustainability.

If every time little Johnny is given a piece of candy for cooperating, he will learn to look for the reward. He does not necessarily feel good about his action but rather the brain stimulation derived from the sugary substance. This temporary euphoria can also trigger tantrums when the reward is not quick enough, frequent, or proportional in his mind to the action.

In essence, we are creating a child who may lack empathy, self-regulation, and internally generated motivation if we rely too heavily on external stimuli. Children who seem spoiled, entitled, and impulsive are ones who are used to getting something, never fully appreciating themselves in relation to others, the foundation for relational engagement.

This same child who is fed candy and sugary desserts every night ultimately loses appreciation for the natural sweetness of fruits, requiring higher levels of stimulation to keep interest. If we replace sugar with computer math games to learn arithmetic, consider what happens when we remove the game.

We want to feed the mind the same way we do the body, with organic material that promotes long-acting nourishment, the fuel for intellectual and emotional health. Learning environments are rich in nutrients grown from a collaborative team of parents and educators.

Technology isn't a threat until we make innovation the driving force absent of measuring consequences. If we lose sight of the harmful impact of technological advances, we diminish the incredible progress of access and equity. Without considering these limitations, they can easily blossom into full-fledged dangers, both for the students and educators.

Examples of this unfettered technological progress can be found in other industries, but the lessons have not translated into the present. Consider how opium led to the production and use of morphine during the Civil War (1861–1865). Army surgeons desperately needed to treat field wounds of soldiers, making the substance highly effective. Now, opioids are the leading cause of death for people under fifty.

The same example is found in our food industry, revolutionizing longer shelf life for foods during wartime rationing. Now we use artificial ingredients and processed foods that require less frequent visits to the supermarket, producing food deserts that keep low-income families unhealthy and unable to elevate their quality of living. This disparity became more obvious during the early phase of the pandemic, with so many immune compromised people becoming ill and not recuperating.

While there needs to be further research to consider all the extraneous variables, the United States with 4.25 percent of the population accounted for 29 percent of the world's confirmed deaths by mid-May. Health and Human Services secretary Alex Azar suggested that underlying health conditions, including among minorities, were one reason for the high American death toll (Collinson, 2020).

As we recover, we might also consider what the next major health crisis will encompass. If we don't pay close attention to the consequences of innovation, if we don't examine and even measure the impact of technology, we are inviting both known and unknown dangers into our classrooms. Already, we see research informing us that up to half our children are addicted to their cell phones (Felt, Robb, & Gardner, 2016). Cortisol levels rise when we put our phones down; children and adults alike are glued to our social media, altering our neuro pathways.

As additional research may reflect addictions, anxiety, attention deficits, behavioral problems, and declining student success is related to technology, we may have a dilemma. If we continue to introduce new technologies that promote engagement but rather stimulates dependency with declines in attention and tolerance for distress, then we could be heading toward a crisis that dwarfs the pharmaceutical and food industries combined.

Socially responsible technology, the type that promotes interdependence and not reliance on constant stimulation, is the responsibility of every educator to monitor. Through dedicated teams, we can assess the inherent limitations of our tech use before it causes irreparable harm.

Engagement and Professional Development

Optimal learning through PD is a dynamic process that takes many factors into consideration, such as the level of resistance (natural by-product of forces for sameness and change), the way the information is presented,

relevance or timeliness, and how much volition the educator has about this new material.

To maximize learning, educators also need to address the natural barriers that manifest over time, interfering with autonomy, creativity, and enjoyment of one's work. Forces for sameness and change are acting on people all the time, so we may confuse opposition or defiance with something more organic. If we treat reluctance as a threat, however, or fail to recognize the pull for familiarity, we may increase resistance.

Engagement as a by-product of intrinsic motivation or commitment to one's work is influenced on different planes of resistance. Personal, systemic, and societal influences must all be explored to appreciate why that educator may not seem cooperative. For the district leader who feels frustrated or discouraged by resistance, looking through these lenses may help. The same holds true for classroom leaders working with students.

The personal influences may be hidden, so we never want to assume we know what a person is going through. Taking an interest in people's experiences, even asking specifically about their personal and professional barriers to fully investing, would be novel. While some may treat this inquiry guardedly, sharing your intentions would likely encourage disclosure.

Systemic influences may also be barriers, such as the polarization between unions and school leadership. The sensitivity of these conflicts may not be addressed openly, causing mistrust and division. Even subgroups of support staff, aides or paras, and classroom teachers will harbor irritations that are seldom dealt with through group process and are instead left to fester.

Societal influences represent the third set of barriers, including county, state, and federal mandates. This plane also represents the support from businesses, parents, and the media. Some districts are fortunate to have a range of financial and political support while others have constant power struggles between the superintendent and the board. These issues trickle down to the frontline educator who is expected to implement policy, endure the pressure, or manage the environment that's already been established.

To help educators successfully navigate these planes of resistance, we want to embed this new lens into every aspect of mission and operations. When solving a problem or facing a challenge, appreciating the forces for sameness and change will improve empathy for those holding different viewpoints. This may be a parent who seems to be enabling his or her child or a teacher who seems reluctant to implement directives.

We can extend the same orientation for students who dilute contact. When such a student seems reticent to fully invest emotionally or academically, consider the forces for sameness taking the form of fear, despondency, or resentment. Consider how students feel inside their community and how they may be struggling to find their place.

If students are poorly motivated to attend school or turn in work, they may be misdiagnosed as lazy or apathetic.

If we consider motivation as a tool, we can better equip students with the skills to get their wants and needs met, feeling more hopeful and therefore more encouraged. Instead of responding to their indifference with encouragement or punishment, we can assess where the blocks are to their own self-propulsion and whether they lack the ability or conditions necessary to thrive. Conditions such as unrelenting stress from health concerns or family chaos can erode skills for meeting one's needs if they persist for long periods of time.

The same holds true for adults. Just as a student's engagement is impacted by stress, so, too, is an educator's investment. Our responsibility is to include these areas in professional learning so that teaching and learning pathways are optimized for low stress and high motivation.

The love of teaching versus the act of teaching is an important distinction to consider when appreciating ways to heighten engagement. The love of teaching is the intrinsic satisfaction educators gain from developing young minds. The act of teaching is the facilitation of learning activities through lesson plans and impromptu engagement measures.

Professional engagement, further broken down into awareness, enrichment, and experimentation, encompass a triad of investment pillars. Awareness is the ability to see oneself clearly in relation to others. Enrichment is the skills, theory, and practice that puts new ideas into place. Experimentation is the iterative process of examining what we have done and what we can do differently next time to achieve more desirable results.

Awareness is the foundation of engagement. If we don't know what our strengths and limitations are, how a child perceives us, or what our resistance is to change, we can't grow. Personal growth hinges on awareness derived from self-reflection and feedback. The Johari window provides a helpful illustration of this concept, showing how we use data from scanning within and input from others to grow. This paradigm helps us reduce our blind spots to better recognize how to make contact. If, for instance, we fail to identify a student seeming standoffish with us because they fear racial discrimination, we may invest less energy into them.

Enrichment is where most professional learning currently takes place, but it is seldom based on self-reflection, which would enhance the skill, theory, and practice being taught. Grounding new approaches in engagement theory might stimulate greater interest in experimentation.

Experimentation is the aspect of engagement that would make professional learning more sustainable. Rather than disseminating information and expecting educators to apply it in their work, have multiple sessions where designs were created and trials implemented. Too much

learning from students or adults is not internalized because the proper application or extrapolation didn't occur, leaving the mind of the trainee soon after the training concluded.

The keys to all three aspects of engagement is determining an educator's level of readiness and resistance to new learning. We can't force people to be self-reflective; it happens when feeling safe and excited. While considering those elements, we will naturally look to the environment to determine whether any systemic or societal barriers need addressing.

If we look, however, to two large, recent studies done on PD, one by the Gates Foundation and the other by TNTP (previously known as The New Teacher Project), we find limitations in our current approaches. In the past decade, two federally funded experimental studies of sustained, content-focused, and job-embedded PD have found these interventions did not result in long-lasting, significant changes in teacher practice or student outcomes. Only 40 percent reported that most of their activities were a good use of their time (Jacob & McGovern, 2015; K-12 Education Team, 2015).

Furthermore, no set of specific development strategies resulted in widespread teacher improvement on its own. The studies did say, however, that there are still clear next steps that school systems can take to more effectively help their teachers. Much of this work involves creating the conditions that foster growth, not finding quick-fix PD solutions. This supports the premise that professional engagement may not be receiving the attention it deserves.

An important consideration being missed, likely responsible for the study results, is that for any professional engagement training to be effective, meaning impactful and sustainable, it needs to be based in part on the paradoxical theory of change. This is a psychological theory from Gestalt therapy that helps us appreciate a basic premise, that awareness of what is, is necessary before trying to make something different.

For example, if a student is misbehaving, our intervention may not lead to a desirable long-term result without knowing where the behavior emanates from. If a child isn't listening due to being upset about something going on at home and we simply employ a disciplinary tactic, we could see short-term change while exacerbating the problem.

Awareness is key for individuals but also for organizations. According to the Cleveland Institute of Gestalt Organizational Development, the most successful organizations are ones that can scan their environment, make meaning of data, and then successfully execute changes; in addition, they will look toward their employees as a consistent barometer for organizational health.

Schools as institutions lag behind for-profit companies when it comes to valuing their faculty, appreciating how their individual needs must be balanced against the organizational ones. Professional investment balanced with personal enrichment is the optimal integration of growth/development needed to keep systems running smoothly.

In the past this type of training related to individual health, relationships, and management was referred to as soft skills—perhaps because it's the lubricant for the main objective of academic learning. Moving forward, we want to remember engagement is not immediate and it doesn't fit into solution-focused models. Out of the box skills are attractive on many levels but seldom do they lead to deeper engagement.

Engagement and Social Emotional Learning

Engagement is the method by which we constructively differ or use conflict to explore differences while maintaining contact. Engagement measures the strength of our connection with others to navigate unlike opinions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings that vary according to familiarity or the degree of receptivity we help generate. Engagement is about the process, not the outcome of active exchange, from the earliest introduction through our efforts to sustain.

Through psychosocial emotional learning (PSEL), we appreciate that differences are a vehicle to deepening intimacy by learning more about ourselves. When we contrast our views, beliefs, values, or experiences, we become more thoughtful about the anchors that ground us. Why do we think or feel the way we do? Engagement is catalyzed by knowing ourselves so we can more intentionally deepen contact with others.

Engagement is helped by and helps with our self-awareness. The better we understand how others perceive us and the more we are cognizant of our own strengths and limitations, the more likely we will engage meaningfully with others. Bonding over similarities is most common; however, depth of contact occurs when we appreciate differences.

Pseudo-intimacy, or relatedness based on sameness, is short lived. It lacks the strength forged from knowing we can be at odds with somebody and still remain close. Through the course of a school year, we will have many disagreements with colleagues, but like a bone that heals stronger following a fracture, so, too, can conflict embolden relatedness.

A lack of social emotional skills will help us avoid conflict and stay on the surface with our relationships, making it difficult to invest ourselves fully in our work. Relationships give us fuel through support, sharing of resources, and catharsis. Relationships seem less fragile with the skills of empathy, differencing, and negotiation, balancing our needs with others.

The better we are able to identify, express, and negotiate our needs, the more likely we will have those needs met in a way that helps us more fully invest in others. An educator who is achieving higher-order needs, such as peace, fulfillment, and purpose, will be more creative and persistent in engaging with others, not discouraged by a lack of immediate reward.

Tim is a high school teacher feeling enervated early in his career, uninspired, and just “going through the motions.” He was cordial with his coworkers and seldom the target of any quidnunc because he gave them little to inquire about. Arising from his personal growth work came a willingness to take risks, to disagree and firmly supplant himself in risky exchanges. As his skills for negotiating differences grew, so did the depth of relationships, growing enthusiasm clearly evident in his bounding energy with students.

Thus, the relationship between individual needs, SEL, and school climate ought to be clearer, as personal wellness promotes organizational health and vice versa. In schools where emotional safety and physical security is constant, members may look to grow their higher-order needs through social and emotional risk-taking. In school cultures lacking in physical security or emotional safety, such as the freedom to challenge authority, individuals will invest less in their community. Faculty will remain entrenched in self-protection and forgo risks needed to grow the spirit of the institution. This is the difference between surviving and thriving (see Figure 2.1).

With approximately 9 percent of teachers in the U.S. reporting they have been threatened with injury by a student and 5 percent reporting physical attack by a student, the absence of physical security is a real concern (de Brey, 2018). If faculty work under the constant threat of harm, self-protection trumps investing in their community.

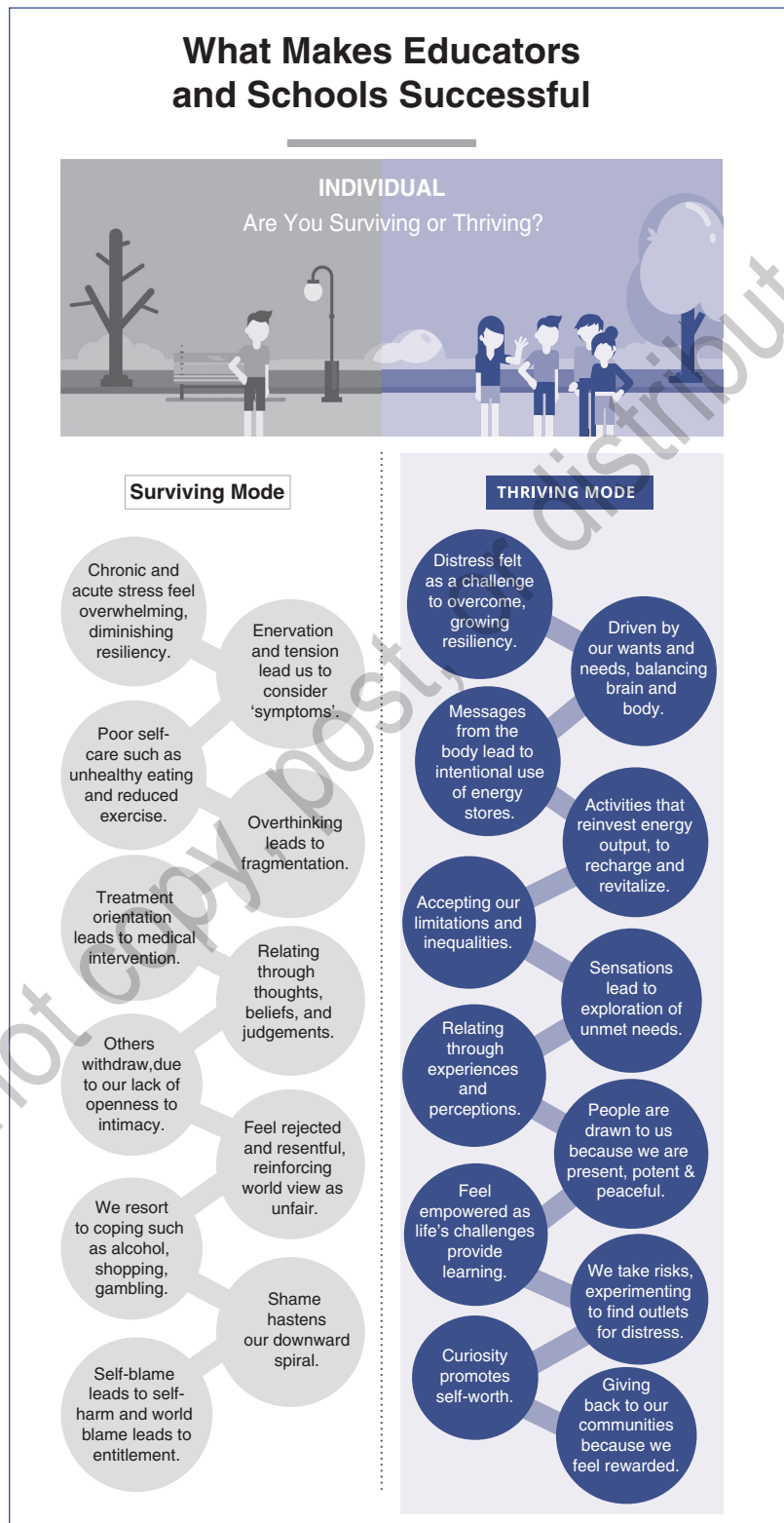
Even without the threat of bullying, domestic violence, or gangs, the ever-present fear of catastrophic violence is on the minds of many. Since 2000, there have been more than 188 shootings at schools and universities, with more than two hundred students killed and at least two hundred more injured (de Brey, 2018). Unlike any other country, the U.S. has developed a contagion of dramatic violence, which has direct correlation with engagement and culture (Bump, 2018).

Violence, the manifestation of exclusive aggression, which is addressed in Chapter 15, is the complete breakdown of SEL. When children believe there is no hope of getting their needs met and lack the skills to do so, they may resort to destruction. Children who lack empathy believe that there is nothing to lose and nothing to gain, projecting blame onto the students who ostracized them and adults who failed to protect them.

Teacher engagement with all students is the best prevention method for school violence and requires no expensive program to purchase. Deep, meaningful contact with students is the bridge that quickly identifies at-risk kids and gives hope to those who feel alone. Engagement is the anchor spurring student effort even when hope is low or resources are limited; it is the model that helps kids aspire to get their wants and needs met.

Teachers have the potential to engage with students when they introduce new material, set realistic but challenging expectations,

Figure 2.1 Individual Portion of Flow Chart Only



navigate conflicts among classmates, deal with parent complaints openly and honestly, and have even the briefest dialogue in the hallway.

When we are intentional in how we make contact with other human beings—aware of our own contributions and active in negotiating differences—we create an environment where people can be themselves, which is an important condition for students living in self-doubt. Such environments benefit all community members young and old, creating a sense of peace and reducing the insidious effects of stress.

Key Points

- ▶ Job satisfaction among teachers and principals was already low prior to the pandemic. This needs to be the focal point for all school improvement.
- ▶ Engagement is a process of developing depth of awareness in the service of self-sustained learning. The Gestalt contact is a well-researched construct to help us appreciate the steps of the process.
- ▶ Relational and academic engagement occur in stages that can be used to assess issues ranging from student behavior to teacher apathy.
- ▶ SEL can improve engagement, which then creates a more conducive learning environment: more physically secure and emotionally safer.