

Reimagining Student Engagement

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Reimagining Student Engagement

From Disrupting to Driving

Amy Berry

Foreword by John Hattie

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Foreword

by John Hattie

Every night, teachers ponder how to find, adapt, or devise activities to engage their students in the next day's learning. Thus, it is no surprise that engagement is a major topic of interest, research, and discussion. When you ask teachers how they know their students are learning, they often answer in terms of their engagement with the lesson: They are doing the work, completing it, and handing it in. For some teachers, being engaged is akin to how we use the term before marriage—a formal arrangement to do something. For some students, being engaged in lessons is akin to how the armed forces use the word engagement—a battle to be fought.

It seems ironic that there is so little evidence of the engagement power of lessons. Indeed, there is little evidence of the impact of lesson plans. Further, students engaged or “doing the work” correlates with but is not necessarily learning. In a lot of “doing” there may be little learning. Students can be turned off to learning, become bored or disruptive, or withdraw when asked to just “do” work that has little relevance or meaning.

There is, however, a rich literature that is usually based on the notion of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement. There are measures resplendent with factor analyses, structural models, and high alphas. Seductive indeed. But they predict so little. A new broom is sorely needed.

A few years back, a new student enrolled at The University of Melbourne to complete a PhD, which in the Australian system is a 3–4 year journey solely conducting a research study (or studies). Think of this model. Amy Berry, the student, pays to complete a four-year degree, delves deeply into a topic, designs and runs a series of studies, conducts the analyses, and writes her thesis. In this process, she allows me (her supervisor) to be a critic, listener, and prompter and to ensure that the project has big ideas that can make a contribution. She does the hard work, and I become the learner and thus a major beneficiary of this process. And I get paid to do this. Amy is number 204 of my thesis students, and this book is a testament to a dedicated, diligent, and driven student who discovered a “big idea” that is the focus of this book.

The work did not stop upon graduation but continued in Amy's subsequent roles. This book is the outcome of a sustained, deeply thoughtful, practical, and scientific process. It started in the field asking teachers about their concept of engagement, moved to the development and testing of a model, and morphed into experimenting with practical strategies to move students along the engagement continuum.

Engagement is not a “thing” but a process of moving from disrupting, avoiding, and withdrawing to participating, investing, and driving. It assumes students have rich and deep motivating resources, but the art is to have them invest these resources in valuable classwork rather than saving the resources for sports, social life, or media engagement. It involves, like an engagement to be married, a commitment, a pact, and a promise—that learning will occur, that there will be fun and hard work along the way, and that students and teachers can engage in the love of learning. It will entail battles, discovering that failure is a learner's best friend, struggling is desirable, and involves moving from participating through investing to driving. This book will change many ideas about the meaning of engagement and open many eyes to the exciting possibilities of engaging students in learning.

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the generous support of John Hattie. His guidance and encouragement during my research led to the continuum of engagement upon which this book is based. His belief in the continuum has meant that instead of being confined to the pages of a journal article, it continues to find its way into classrooms and into the hands of teachers and students. John has gone above and beyond in writing the foreword for the book and providing invaluable feedback and advice on the draft, for which I am very grateful.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey for their continued support. When John, Doug, and Nancy decided to include the continuum in *The Distance Learning Playbook*, I was excited but had no way of knowing that this would be the catalyst that finally had me writing the book on student engagement that I had long been contemplating. Like John, Doug and Nancy have been active supporters of the continuum and continue to share the success stories of how teachers and students are using it to improve engagement and learning in schools. To all of the teachers, parents, and students who have shared their experiences and insights, you have provided powerful motivation to write this book and take the ideas further.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family who have shown continued interest in the book and celebrated each milestone with me. To my husband, Craig, thank you for being my biggest supporter and most passionate cheerleader.

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About the Author



Dr. Amy Berry is the author of *Re-imagining Student Engagement: From Disrupting to Driving* to be published by Corwin in late 2022. She is a research fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research and an honorary fellow at the University of Melbourne. Amy began her career as a primary school teacher in Queensland before returning to university

to complete a Master's of Education (Research). Having developed a passion for research, she went on to complete her PhD looking at teacher perspectives on student engagement and their approaches to engaging students in classroom learning. Amy has extensive experience working with pre-service and practicing teachers to develop their skills in classroom-based assessment and evidence-based practice. She has designed numerous professional learning programs for teachers, including programs on formative assessment, student engagement, and learning through play. As well as working with teachers in Australia, Amy has worked with teachers, school leaders, and education officials from Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Ukraine.

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