Conceptualizing Literacy Engagement: The Interconnectedness of Teacher Beliefs and Enacted Practices

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Abstract

This article presents the findings of a full-day professional learning workshop where K-3 educators explored student engagement during literacy learning. Drawing on a narrative approach, the authors discuss the conceptualizations of literacy engagement from initial to shifting to deepened. Data sources include literacy engagement artifacts shared by the educators as well as multimodal representations of engaged learners/engaged educators. Educators' (re)thinking highlighted the complex, and sometimes messy nature of literacy engagement and illuminated the importance of active educator engagement.

Introduction

> Listening to other teachers and their examples opened my eyes to how I can have students engaged in my own classroom. (End-of-day reflection)

The term "student engagement" has been a buzzword within educational settings for many years, both before, during, and following a global pandemic. Yet, interpretations about how to engage students are, at times, conflicting (Harris, 2010; Lee et al., 2021). The literature demonstrates that educators' conceptualizations of engagement are inherently messy and complex.

There are four often-cited categories of student engagement: behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic (Bobis, et al., 2016; Cremin, 2023; Fredricks et al., 2004; Harris, 2010, 2011; Harris et al, 2022; Van Uden et al., 2013; Reeve, & Tseng, 2011; VSGDE, 2023; Zyngier, 2007). Behavioral engagement refers to the extent to which students participate in academic activities and is often measured by the amount of time spent on task (Fredricks et al., 2004; Harris, 2010; Havik & Westergard, 2020; Lee et al., 2021). Emotional engagement points to students' affective responses toward teachers and learning. Cognitive engagement highlights the personal investment a student makes in the learning process (Cremin, 2023; Fredricks et al., 2004; Harris, 2010, 2011; Havik & Westergard, 2020; Lavrijsen & Verschueren, 2020; Tadich, 2007; VSGDE, 2023). Agentic engagement describes the ways in which students intentionally and constructively contribute "into the flow of the instruction they receive" to enrich their learning (Reeve & Tseng, 2011, p. 257). Despite these broad categorizations, as literacy practitioners and researchers, we are left with the following curiosities: What do we know about student engagement? How is it enacted? How can we observe or measure it? In essence, what does engagement look like within the classroom?

Harris (2010) notes an incongruence among teachers regarding how to foster student engagement, highlighting the need to develop clarity in "the concept of engagement … within academic research and government documents to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations" (p. 147). Harris (2011) further observes that "few researchers have examined how teachers understand this concept and what outcomes they expect from student engagement" (p. 377). A similar concern can be found in relation to specific curriculum areas. For example, Lee et al.'s (2021) systematic literature review highlights that only 42% of the research studies they examined explicitly defined the term "reading engagement." What appears to be missing is a closer look at the complex process of how teachers perceive and observe student engagement within their classrooms, and in relation to specific curriculum areas, and how their conceptualizations may influence their practices. While researchers have started to address these gaps, it is essential to further develop this body of scholarship, as teachers' conceptualizations and interpretations of engagement within their own classrooms "are valuable when shedding light on the concept of engagement" (Nyman, 2015, p. 14). This paper aims to respond to this need, specifically within the context of literacy learning in the primary grades (K–3).

Review of the Literature

Student engagement research demonstrates a positive effect on student achievement, sense of belonging within school, and school completion rates (Brandmiller et al., 2024; Harris, 2011; Pantaleo, 2016; Wang et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2018). The majority of this research seeks to understand engagement from the perspective of students and researchers, heavily emphasizing quantitative measures (e.g., questionnaires and observational checklists). Harris (2011) notes that teachers' understandings are rarely examined. In a subsequent article, Harris et al (2022) drew on the work of Fredricks et al. (2004) looking at student engagement as a "meta-construct" that encompasses "observable behaviors, internal cognitions, and emotions" (Harris et al, p. 850), noting these are seldom investigated simultaneously. The authors suggest a need for robust models of student engagement that apply to different learning contexts.

Conflicting Teacher Conceptualizations of Student Engagement

Harris' (2011) phenomenographic qualitative study highlights mixed conceptualizations of student engagement. Through semi-structured interviews with 20 high school English teachers, Harris (2011) documents a critically important distinction between engagement in *schooling* and engagement in *learning*, further emphasizing the messy nature of teachers' conceptualizations of student engagement.

From a *schooling* lens, teachers use somewhat simplistic indicators, such as behavior and obedience, enjoyment, and motivation to assess student engagement. To increase engagement, they focus on delivering and modifying school activities (Harris, 2011). Within this surface-level approach to student engagement, learning is situated within the background, treating students passively (Harris, 2011). This approach misses a deeper understanding of the relationship between engagement and learning. While teachers may assume that students are engaged because they follow classroom rules and stay on task, does this necessarily mean that students are in fact learning?

From a *learning* lens, educators understand student engagement beyond mere completion of school activities, adopting more complex indicators, including students' level of thinking, sense of purpose, and ownership in their learning (Harris, 2011). From this perspective, deep learning is the focus of student engagement and collaboration is an essential tool to enhance learning (Harris, 2011).

Harris et al.'s (2022) study documents additional teacher considerations to foster student engagement given the context of the pandemic, with a focus on Kindergarten to Grade 12. While teachers' definitions of student engagement continue to emphasize behavioral dimensions, elements of emotional, cognitive, and agentic engagement also emerged (Harris et al., 2022). This study considers engagement in the unique context of virtual distance education, but two things remain consistent with the previous study: the prevailing focus on observable behaviors to assess engagement and the lack of consensus on what student engagement truly means.

Deficit-Oriented Conceptualizations of Engagement

In addition to the lack of consensus on how to understand, measure, and foster student engagement, some educators apply a deficit lens. Zyngier's (2007) research, for example, demonstrates how some teachers unproblematically conceptualize student engagement through a deficit lens reflecting "an attitude that students … are simply not competent or capable because of their background" (p. 333). During an interview, one teacher commented, "Their skills are weak, they are frighteningly weak, that these children can't read … we have really got to work on their basic skills. How can they go off and research independently when they can't read?" (Zyngier, 2007, p. 335). Teachers who ascribe to this mentality tend to support an instrumentalist or rational technical conceptualization of student engagement, equating engagement with time spent on task. Within this context, engagement is located within the individual student with little regard for the sociopolitical, sociohistorical, or cultural context influencing their willingness to engage. Ravet (2007) indicates similar results wherein teachers perceived student (dis)engagement as a result of personal student deficits and familial background, relationships with teachers, classroom management practices, and a lack of student ability.

Teachers' perceptions of engagement have significant implications for their students. Wang et al. (2018), for example, point to the interconnectedness of teachers' perceptions of student engagement and the ways in which teachers differentially engage with students based on their interpretation of student behavior as either engaged or disengaged. Similarly, Zhu et al. (2018) indicate that teachers' perceptions of student engagement are directly related to students' future achievement, expectancy for success, and level of aspiration, meaning teacher judgments can act as a self-fulfilling prophecy for their students. Students perceived as engaged are more likely to succeed than their seemingly disengaged counterparts (Zhu et al., 2018).

Collectively, these findings support Zyngier's (2007) assertion that teachers who lower their expectations for students perceived as incapable of achieving academic standards are, in fact, nurturing student disengagement. If this holds true, it is unsurprising that teachers perceive widespread disengagement among their students (Tadich, 2007). This issue is exacerbated when teachers conceptualize engagement

merely through observable behavior, rather than the meaning students derive from participation (Zyngier, 2007). Deficit approaches reduce all acts of resistance (i.e., disengagement) as a function of the individual. There is a need for a more nuanced and holistic understanding of student engagement that incorporates individual, social, and cultural understandings into one unified concept. These findings also highlight the need to further understand how teachers conceptualize engagement within their classroom and the implications for student learning more broadly.

Moving Beyond Observable Student Behaviors

Teacher conceptions that reduce student engagement to behavioral engagement ignore the individualized and context-specific factors that may impact how engaged a student becomes. Barkaoui et al. (2015), following focus groups with 16 teachers in Toronto, note that although teachers identified behavioral components as important factors, they also agree that "definitions of student engagement vary greatly … because engagement is highly individualized and context-dependent and is more than a function of the individual student" (p. 88). The teachers in this study recognize the degree to which the curriculum reflects and honors student diversity, and the ways in which social issues, such as violence within the community, impact students' daily lives. In an effort to improve student engagement, teachers identify five strategies related to building 1) trusting relationships, 2) relevance within the curriculum, 3) enthusiasm through learning pedagogies, 4) trust and collaboration through school–home connections, and 5) connections between community and school life (Barkaoui et al., 2015). These teachers inadvertently highlight the ways in which critical literacy might be an effective approach to improving student engagement, a worthwhile investigation for future research.

Unrau et al. (2015) note similar results in a study of 23 teachers who engaged in focus groups about their personal conceptualizations of student engagement. Emerging themes include sparking a student's interest, providing choice, role modeling, promoting positive student-teacher relationships, and collaborating with students. Teachers also agree that "mandated testing undermined their students' motivation for reading rather than contributing to it" (Unrau et al., 2015, p. 122). Given the prevalence of standardized testing, such as those administered by Ontario's Education Quality Assurance Office (EQAO), it is worthwhile conversing with teachers to better understand how standardized tests may (dis)encourage student engagement. As such, including teachers' voices—within the student engagement literature in particular, and educational discourse more broadly—is paramount to fully understand the scope of this concept. These conversations must also be situated within an extended sociopolitical and sociohistorical context.

Cummings (2012) took a sociocultural lens to understanding student engagement. Over six weeks, Cummings (2012) met with two high school art teachers to discuss the challenges they face. Through reflective practice and collaborative research, these teachers changed their teaching practices in an effort to increase student engagement. For instance, they began to develop curriculum content based on students' interests and personal choice. Other changes included encouraging student autonomy, genuinely caring about each individual student's needs, making an effort to get to know their students personally, and encouraging personal growth. As the year progressed, these teachers found students were

more engaged in their lessons. Cummings' (2012) research supports Tadich (2007) who writes that teachers believe it is their responsibility to motivate and engage students.

Nolen and Nicholls (1994) designed a teacher questionnaire to better understand elementary school teachers' conceptualizations of engagement and how they influence interactions with students. Strong predictors of student engagement from the responses of 178 teachers include promoting cooperation and choice, stimulating student interest, and attributing thoughtfulness as opposed to evaluative praise. Van Uden et al. (2013) indicate similar results in their survey. Based on 195 teachers' responses, interpersonal teacher behavior, perceived self-efficacy, and perceptions of pedagogical competence were strong predictors of perceived student engagement. For Bobis et al. (2016), professional learning can improve teacher self-efficacy and broaden teachers' conceptions about student engagement beyond simple observable behaviors. This broadening contributes to a re-definition of student engagement and indicators within the classroom. These studies suggest the need to understand the connection between student engagement, teacher self-efficacy, and professional learning.

McKee and Heydon (2020) highlight the possibilities for student engagement when teachers adopt nuanced and holistic understandings of student engagement. In this study, a teacher prioritizes sharing tools and responsibilities with their students and purposefully plans spaces where the "children's explorations would inform the way pedagogy unfolded" (p. 789). This example highlights a need for more fluid approaches to engagement that empower literacy learners to use their strengths.

Understanding the Complexities

Teachers' beliefs and conceptions about student engagement reflect personal attitudes and experiences, which may at least partially explain why the concept of student engagement is so diverse and complex. This literature review highlights the need for a greater presence of teachers' voices within the dominant educational discourse about student engagement. While strides have been made to reposition teachers within the conversation, deficit approaches that reduce student engagement to a function of the individual seem to dominate, creating serious implications for how teachers view their students and how students view themselves (Ravet, 2007; Ready & Chu, 2015; Wang et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2018; Zyngier, 2007).

Research highlights the ways in which exploring holistic and inclusive teaching practices, as well as opportunities for personal reflection, can reframe and transform teachers' attitudes about student engagement (McKee & Heydon, 2020; Zyngier, 2007). We recognize a need for more opportunities for teachers to engage in professional learning workshops in an effort to broaden their lens regarding what constitutes student engagement and the interconnectedness of how their assumptions both inform and impact their teaching practices. Zyngier (2007) suggests implementing pedagogy that connects to and engages with students' cultural knowledge, allows students to own the learning process by seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum, responds to students' lived experiences, and empowers students to make a difference. What is important, though, is that rather than telling teachers what they need to or should know about student engagement, "researchers need to begin again by studying what teachers

already know—and want to know" (Nolen & Nicholls, 1994, p. 67) about engagement. Researchers must collaborate with teachers to develop a greater understanding of student engagement within the classroom, rather than simply offering prescriptive frameworks.

Theoretical Framework

Within this study, literacy is viewed more broadly than a specific subject area (e.g., language arts). Literacy involves the communication of meaning-making across multiple modes (e.g., image, sound, gesture, etc.) (Walsh, 2011), crossing various dimensions (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, representing). Theorists such as Cambourne (1988) and Guthrie (2004) set the foundation for exploring what is meant by literacy engagement and how it is conceptualized and demonstrated by educators within the social context of the classroom. Cambourne, for example, defines literacy engagement by three statements in which learners believe: "I am a potential 'doer.' This will further the purposes of my life. I can do this without fear" (p. 33). At the same time, broader theories and definitions of student engagement were considered, weaving together the foundational and interconnected categories of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of student engagement (see Bobis et al., 2016; Fredricks et al., 2004; Harris, 2010, 2011; Shernoff, 2013; Van Uden et al., 2013; Zyngier, 2007). Agentic engagement suggested by Reeve and Tseng (2011) was not considered as it did not have sufficient traction when the research was conducted.

Research Design

We took a qualitative approach to sharing stories of what it is like to be an educator who engages students during literacy learning. This approach has been established as a relevant way to forefront educators' voices (see Hollingsworth, 1994; Prus, 1996).

A small group of ten K–3 educators joined a full-day Exploring Engagement professional learning workshop with the goal of highlighting their experiences. The workshop included opportunities for (1) whole-group brainstorming, and (2) small-group/partner discussions to expand upon teachers' understandings of engagement in their classrooms. Drawing upon Clandinin's (1986) proposal that the construct of image is central to understanding the knowledge and story of a teacher, the workshop included opportunities for educators to consider the image they hold of engaged learners and educators who engage learners. Educators were also invited to share artifacts of literacy engagement, serving both as a way to get to know each other and to establish initial conceptualizations. The research design served to expand on earlier findings (Scheffel, 2016; Scheffel, 2017), but with a focus on K–3 educators' understandings, to further discussions about engagement in both professional and academic fields. The main question asked was, "How do K–3 classroom educators conceptualize engagement within literacy learning?"

The workshop took place outside of regular teaching hours and was held at the university local to the educators. To respect educators' time and knowledge, they were provided with a resource package of children's books. As per our ethics protocol, and due to the small participant size for this in-depth workshop, no quotes are attributed directly to participants but are generalized to say "an educator" or "educators" where ideas were collectively agreed upon. All participants signed confidentiality forms pertaining to information shared by other participants during the workshop.

Specific data sources included workshop transcription (62 pages) and approximately 15 literacy engagement artifacts shared by educators (e.g., an image of a specific learning opportunity that stood out for the way it engaged a learner(s); an image of a key book/response activity used to engage a learner(s); etc.). Analysis was thematic and focused initially on individual subsets of data collected during the workshop (e.g., keywords, artifacts, visuals of engaged learner/engaged teacher). Tara-Lynn and Sarah independently reviewed each subset of data, highlighting categories and patterns for discussion (Creswell, 2007; Kim, 2016). We then looked across data subsets to determine overarching themes.

Findings

Initial Conceptualizations

Figure 1 visually depicts the keywords initially generated by educators to describe what engagement looks like, sounds like, and feels like in the classroom (with a focus on literacy-related learning opportunities). This brainstorming took place early in the workshop after a time of sharing the engagement artifacts they brought with them (e.g., an image, learning story, key book or other visual that stood out to them for the way it engaged learners). No research or definitions had been shared with participants at this point in the day.
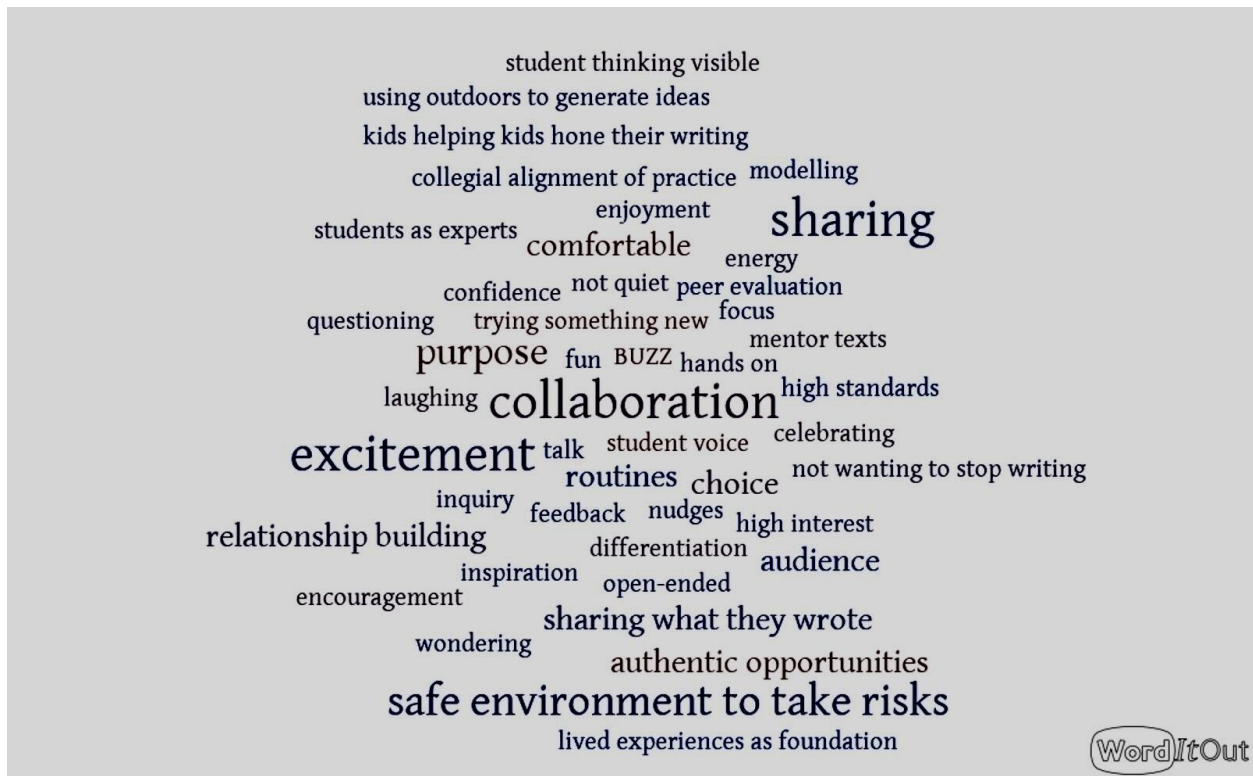
Fig. 1: Keywords describing engagement
Image: https://worditout.com/word-cloud/4167528/private/24b05586d228fbe8f588702edab0820e

In Figure 1, the words repeated most often are larger in size. Key repeating words included *collaboration*, *sharing*, *excitement*, and *safe environment to take risks*, followed by *purpose*, and then *comfortable*, *choice*, *routines*, and *authentic opportunities*. In a previous study with Grade 8 students (Scheffel, 2017), students used different words such as *teamwork*, *participation*, and *involvement* that held similar notions of collaboration and sharing. Perhaps not surprising, students in the previous study also placed emphasis on thinking and listening, while educators were focused on environment and routines.

Shifting Conceptualizations

> I feel like educators' ideas or thoughts on engagement have really shifted to a more meaningful spot… as a group we are growing… it's been a huge shift. (Whole-group discussion)

After hearing about Tara-Lynn's previous (2016) study, discussion quickly focused on what was different now versus when the research took place. It was suggested that engagement is more than a "hook" on a lesson plan or goal to "do something fantastic right now … that's not engaging" (a difference from the teacher in the original study; see Scheffel, 2016). Instead, educators felt they had moved to "a more meaningful spot … as a group, we are growing." Educators acknowledged that "usually you look for the overt things. The kids that clearly look like they're engaged but again it's just a look of it." At the same time, one educator questioned, "But, what does it mean?" They recalled examples of learners who did not appear to be focused (e.g., playing with their hands or lying upside down on carpet), yet were in fact attending to the information and could respond to questions.

For this group of educators, what jumped out in relation to their current practice was having a growth mindset: "It's okay to make mistakes. Before, I think the idea of making mistakes was, 'No, it's wrong.' It's a huge paradigm shift for us." Greater choice was also mentioned as educators reflected on how "we've gone towards giving the kids more choices" such as during writing where "they can come in at any point on the continuum of ability and they are still doing the same activity, but at their interest level." Also discussed was the need to create a space to know and understand students. One educator connected this to the co-teaching model in Ontario Kindergarten classrooms where there is both a teacher and a Registered Early Childhood Educator: "In the ELK [Early Learning Kindergarten] environment, that's your whole realm in there with your partner, and it's a beautiful thing when it comes together."

Educators emphasized the need to align practices across the primary grades, and they expressed excitement for "a professional and pedagogical stance that spans the day that takes into account these pieces of engagement." We are reminded here of Harris' (2010, 2011) distinct approaches to facilitating student engagement, all of which were evident in our discussions with educators as they spoke to ways they were delivering the curriculum, modifying the curriculum, and aligning curriculum with student goals through collaboration. However, participants also raised the question of how educators are similarly engaged in learning. Educator engagement became a key point of discussion, in terms of both "[giving] myself permission to be a learner" and finding what engages educators in the course of their practice.

Deepening Conceptualizations

> Engagement is much more complex than the visual characteristics. (End-of-day reflection)

Examples of this complexity stood out as educators acted upon the invitation to create an image of an engaged student and an engaged educator (Clandinin, 1986). Working in small groups, they used a combination of role-play, photography, and written brainstorming to create multimodal representations. Educators pondered how engagement "is different for all learners." Each group (separate from one another) emphasized that it was difficult to distinguish between learner and educator in their viewpoint. We share three examples below.

Example One: On the Same Level

In this first example, educators created a series of photographs titled, "Who is the teacher and who is the student?" The first photograph depicted the educator at the board in a traditional teacher-presenting-information stance. The group explained, "As a teacher, you don't want to be just talking, talking, talking. You want the kids to be talking, otherwise, it's so much more difficult for them to engage." The second photograph depicted the educator sitting on the ground reading a book to learners. In the third photograph, the educator was sitting beside a learner reading a book together. The group emphasized how this third depiction "shows that we're on the same level—equal."

Example Two: Beyond Appearance

Another group of educators lingered with the notion that engagement can look differently for different learners. They also sought to distinguish between student engagement and teacher engagement through mind mapping (Figure 2). While some words can be found in Figure 1, others arose from the day's collaborative conversations. The only word that crosses both maps is "growth mindset," though elements of Cambourne's (1988) condition of approximation, and taking risks, are found in both (e.g., safe, challenged, risk taker, trial and error). The teacher being present and also taking a learner stance suggest that engagement is not passive for learner or teacher.
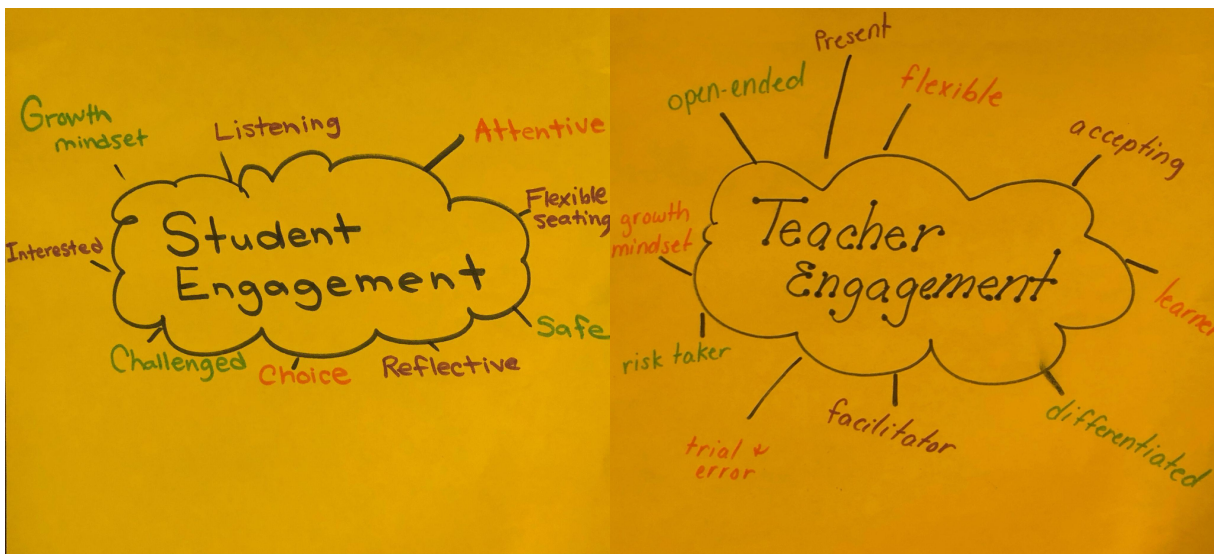

Fig. 2: Mind map of engaged learner/engaged educator

Example Three: Blurred Roles

The final group strategically took photographs outside in the hopes that others would not be able to tell who was intended to be the learner or educator (Figure 3). They used Pic-Collage to share back a series of photos saying, "We were hoping … you would just see deep engagement." Unlike the first two groups, they did not specify who was role-playing each role. Instead, they explored, observed what one another was doing, asked questions, and documented their noticings. Though they did not name pedagogical documentation, their visual and explanation was reminiscent of a tool used to assess learning in Kindergarten in Ontario.

> "She was just so into what she was doing, I started taking pictures of it. I wasn't wanting her to be finished. I just wanted to capture her engagement in what she was doing...she was both educator and learner. She was creating a grayscale of rocks on the tarmac and she was teaching me about grayscale."
>
> "Deep engagement on both sides...and to be truthful, we never discussed who is the learner and who the educator is because we didn't really think there was a need for distinction."
>
> "A SENSE OF WONDERMENT AND EXPLORATION, CREATIVITY, DISCOVERY ...THE WONDERS OF LEARNING."

Fig. 3: Visual of engaged learner/engaged educator

Looking Across Examples

> It's neat to finish the day looking at the lens of teacher/student because you quickly realize the roles are interchangeable, but so valued. (End-of-day reflection)

Each of the representations challenged the observable nature of engagement found in the literature (Turner et al., 2009). In this way, participants were deepening the question of not only what educators need to do to engage individual learners but how our curricular approaches (e.g., inquiry-based learning in Kindergarten) can foster a shared sense of engagement in literacy learning.

At the same time, Sarah noticed a tension as educators took up this multimodal invitation when overhearing one group speaking to not feeling comfortable acting it out. Interestingly, it seemed there remain areas educators are uncomfortable venturing into, despite their admonition that it is important not only to create a safe risk-taking environment where their learners just try, but also for their learners to step outside of their comfort zones (Vygotsky, 1978). How, then, do we push educators to do this as well within their own engagement?

Thinking about why this matters, we turn to a quote by hooks (1994) that reminds us that engaged pedagogy seeks to empower both students and teachers where "teachers grow and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks" (p. 21). As educators, we can recognize the need for teacher engagement but must also be willing to see ourselves as learners, which Example Two's mind map emphasized. When we do, we meet learners, and ourselves, in the here and now and gently nudge each other into the discomfort of not knowing, of suspending judgment, of leaning in while learning alongside each other. In doing so,

we begin to name and unravel the complexities of not only literacy or student engagement, but also the human and non-human interactions embedded in teaching and learning. This brings us back to the theme of messiness as we try to disentangle the interconnected relationships between educators' perceptions and enactment of literacy engagement. Adding to the messiness, looking across the data supports a multi-dimensional aspect of engagement with a focus on how both educators and students need to be engaged. Figure 4 presents a graphic visual of the key themes arising from the workshop discussion about the ways in which educators saw or sought to build engagement during literacy learning in a primary classroom.
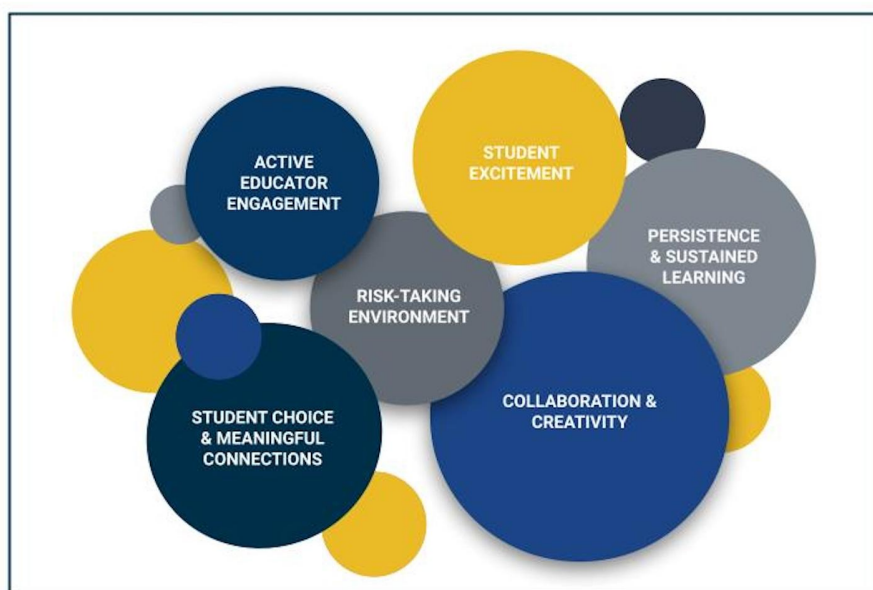

Fig. 4: Ways in which educators sought to build engagement

Table 1 offers a description of each theme that both captures and is grounded in the educators' reciprocal conversations throughout the day. The themes are not mutually exclusive nor intended to be linear.

Table 1

Overview of Themes Arising from the Day's Discussion

Theme	Description
Student Choice & Meaningful Connections	Opportunities for students to choose what they love and what interests them, write about personal lived experiences, and read informational texts with real-world value and authenticity.
Student Excitement	Opportunities for students to demonstrate excitement about taking ownership, learning outside, reading recipes, and shifting the energy in the classroom.
Risk-Taking Environment	Opportunities to learn in a safe, judgment-free environment with multiple entry points for students to jump in where they are, be challenged and supported, and feel successful.
Collaboration & Creativity	Opportunities for a collaborative space where students write for multiple audiences and purposes; share their writing, thoughts, and ideas; and experience authentic creative moments.
Persistence & Sustained Learning	Opportunities for sustained writing that inspire and catalyze further learning; seeing children as capable.
Active Educator Engagement	Opportunities for educators to be fully present learning alongside their students, creating shared experiences, teaching with authenticity and intention, and providing continuous feedback through conferencing.

Over the course of this professional learning workshop, the teachers unpacked their initial conceptualizations of student engagement. Through insightful conversations and reflections, their conceptualizations shifted and deepened beyond observable indicators. The teachers identified the complex, interchangeable nature of the teacher/learner roles, highlighting that literacy learning engagement is a shared, vulnerable, and human experience.

Conclusion

I loved today and I am very fortunate and grateful to be here. (End-of-day reflection)

The complexities of human interactions emerge when educators attempt to conceptualize student engagement in literacy learning contexts. Like Bobis et al. (2016), thinking through the topic of engagement as part of a collaborative professional learning workshop led educators to broaden conceptions about student engagement beyond simple observable behaviors. This re-thinking highlighted the complex, and sometimes messy nature of literacy engagement. It also led educators to redefine what engagement looks like and what teachers look for within the classroom. Initially, educators focused on reading and writing as they spoke about engagement artifacts and ways they saw or sought to build engagement. However, by day's end, participants deepened their thinking around literacy engagement and embodied hooks' (1994) belief that engaged pedagogy is a "place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process" (p. 21). For example, "Engagement allows the learner to share in the planning and delivery of content. To be able to sit back as a teacher and watch students become the driver of their learning is amazing" (End-of-day reflection). Another participant echoed the importance of empowering learners to "take responsibility for their own learning and choose what is best for them" (End-of-day reflection). Discussion around Tara-Lynn's research, with voices of the students included, prompted greater discussion around engagement across the language arts dimensions as educators were reminded of how multimodal opportunities were also infused in their conceptions of engagement, such as when exploring the visual of an engaged learner/engaged educator.

As we debriefed the day's events, what became important was, rather than telling teachers what they needed to or should know about student engagement, we took the stance suggested by Nolen & Nicholls (1994) to better understand "what teachers already know—and want to know" (p. 67) about engagement within school. In this way, our research adds to the need for a greater presence of teachers' voices within the student engagement literature. This approach helps to illuminate the practical application of a theoretical concept, along with the ways in which educators make sense of and implement practices to foster higher levels of student engagement. We continue to see the need for researchers to collaborate with teachers to develop a greater understanding of student engagement within the classroom, rather than simply offering prescriptive frameworks.

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