

5

Leading

for

STUDENT

ENGAGEMENT



TALE Academy 

MODULE 7 - SESSION 5

"HOW TO SCHOOL AGAIN"

The *New York Times* published a series of reports about what “back to school” looked like for schools in [fall 2021](#) and [fall 2022](#). [Brooklyn Science and Engineering Academy](#) (BSEA), a middle school in the East Flatbush area of Brooklyn, was one of the schools profiled. In 2021, BSEA social studies teacher [Robert Aronowitz](#) set up a *Star Wars*-themed “chill zone” in his classroom.


The chill zone was meant to provide students experiencing sensory overload after a year of emergency remote teaching (ERT) with a quiet place to relax and re-center. Meanwhile, BSEA Principal [Angela DeFilippis](#) focused on addressing students' transition from a schoolwide perspective. She highlighted the need for social-emotional support: “There were a lot of kids who thrived in the home-school environment, but some kids struggled. So we have three guidance counselors on staff and have a lot of support waiting for them.”



One year later, the reporter visited science teacher [Michelle Jennings](#)'s classroom where students engaged in “circle” class. They throw a ball to one another that has prompts on it from which they can choose, such as “What’s the nicest thing someone’s ever done for you?” Then they each select a color representing their current feeling or a significant memory. Later, students write down five songs that have meaning to them. The “circle” part of the class is that they share their responses with one another as a way to help them better understand one another. This, in turn, helps students “make connections with one another,” explains Principal DeFilippis. [Raina Mapp](#), one of the counselors who helped students through their return the prior year, remarks on the progress they have made: “They know how to school again.”



The story of BSEA has been repeated thousands of times across New York State over the past two years. School leaders, teachers, guidance counselors, and staff have come together with the shared mission of helping students learn “how to school again.” Central to this work, as BSEA illustrates, is implementing **equity-centered, trauma-informed student engagement** practices.

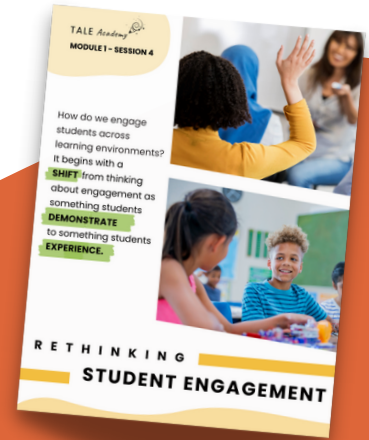


In this session, we will first explore a key shift required for such work: from student engagement approaches based on students *demonstrating* engagement to ones that focus on students *experiencing* engagement. This shift requires teachers to be empowered as designers of their learning environments, which school leaders can support in a number of ways.

THE TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

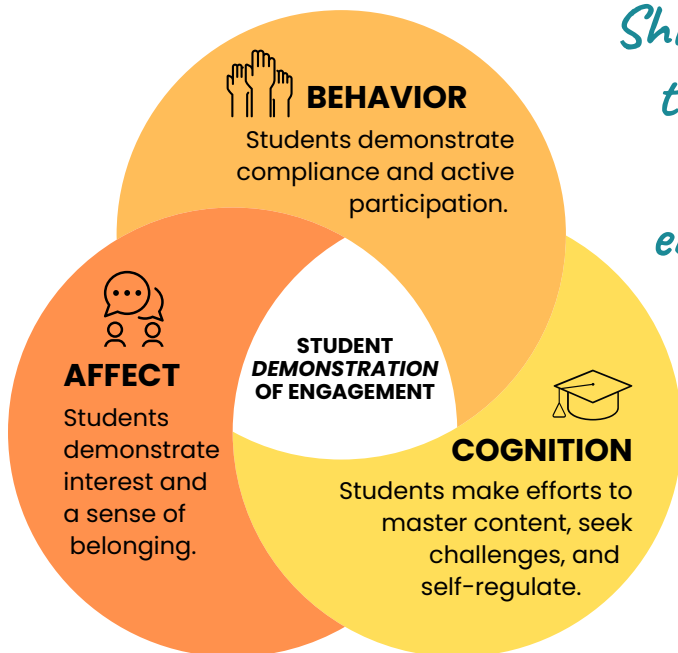
When the New York State Education Department (NYSED) surveyed teachers about the support they need for remote and hybrid teaching, the number one topic was **student engagement**. Specifically, teachers were focused on increasing student motivation and active participation. In Module 1, Session 4, we explored student engagement across learning environments by first redefining our understanding of student engagement itself.

A traditional understanding of student engagement focuses on students demonstrating engagement across three domains: behavior (e.g., compliance and participation), affect (e.g., interest and belonging), and cognition (e.g., effort and self-regulation). A trauma-informed, equity-centered understanding of student engagement focuses on students experiencing engagement across three domains: attraction (e.g., connection to learning activities and environment), persistence (e.g., overcoming obstacles), and delight (e.g., valuing both the processes and products of learning).



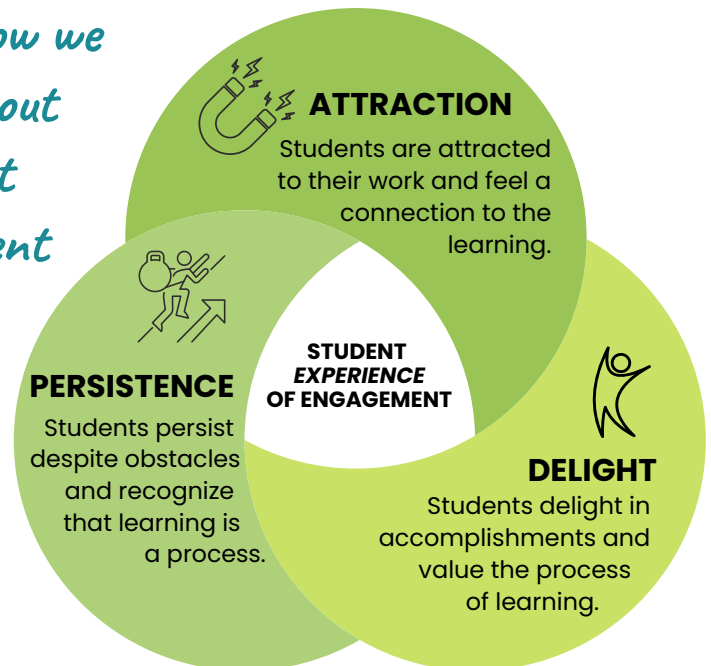
Check out [Module 1, Session 4](#) for the full infographics and to explore more about student engagement across learning environments

Traditional Understanding of Student Engagement



Shifting how we think about student engagement

Trauma-Informed, Equity-Centered Understanding of Student Engagement



This shift allows teachers to rethink their frustrations during emergency remote teaching. For example, rather than debating whether or not students should be required to turn on their cameras during synchronous video conferencing (“demonstrating engagement”), teachers can offer students choices for live engagement that include turning on their camera, posting in the chat, responding to flash polls, or handing in daily reflections. Teachers can spend time being creative and encouraging student involvement in determining engagement. For example, perhaps the student who doodles can annotate their doodles with key takeaways from instruction, take a photo of the document, and upload the file to Google Classroom.

DEEPER DIVES

In Modules 1–6, we dug deeper into student engagement and TALE. Below is a crosswalk that you can follow to return to prior modules/sessions and examine the topics from a leader's perspective.

MODULE 1, SESSION 4

10 Teaching Design Strategies to Boost Student Engagement

We adapted Phil Schlechty's work on fostering student engagement to propose 10 teacher design strategies that focus on student experience rather than demonstration of engagement.

MODULE 1, SESSION 9 MODULE 2, SESSION 6

Authentic Assessments

Authentic assessments test students' skills and knowledge in realistic situations. Authentic assessment can be created by the teacher or in collaboration with the student to engage student voice. In Module 2, Session 6, we shared dozens of tools, apps, and strategies for authentic assessment, regardless of where the learning and assessing are taking place.

MODULE 2, SESSION 1

Building on Students' Intersectional Identities as Assets

In this session, we recognized that students' intersectional identities inform the ways that they think, learn, respond, and engage with their learning. Understanding and integrating their identities in learning harnesses these strengths.

Strategies for Nurturing the Whole Student

We also considered strategies for nurturing the whole student across learning environments. For example, teachers can model creative ways to share aspects of their lives and identities, as appropriate. This can help foster connections with students and encourage students to recognize and honor their own experiences in the academic setting.

MODULE 2, SESSION 4

Connecting Cultural Competency and Student Engagement

Truly knowing our students gives us a greater understanding of the community culture, youth culture, and all the other forms of home culture that they bring to school. We explored how teachers can leverage this deep cultural knowledge to offer multiple means of engagement, expression, and representation in ways that excite students and motivate active participation, regardless of the environment.

Centering Students as Authors of Their Own Learning

We looked at how teachers can create remote and/or in-person learning routines that de-emphasize the teacher's role of telling and explaining and encourage students to step up and ask questions, develop and use digital tools to explore meaning, and think critically about their learning journey.

DEEPER DIVES (CONT)

MODULE 2, SESSION 5

Youth Participatory Action Research

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) empowers students to apply research techniques across learning environments to create real-world solutions to challenges in their communities. We looked at how YPAR can be an excellent way not only to elicit student engagement but also to reaffirm students' cultural identities and develop students' sociopolitical consciousness.

MODULE 2, SESSION 7

Curriculum as Catalyst

We explored how to create an engaging and culturally responsive curriculum by incorporating current events into instruction, bringing students into the curriculum design process (student voice and choice), and curating resources with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse perspectives across learning environments.

MODULE 3, SESSION 2

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Using a UDL approach requires that teachers provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression for students. This inherently boosts student engagement by increasing students' attraction to the work through choice.

MODULE 3, SESSION 3

Accessible Education

We looked at how teachers can make their educational materials accessible as well as use accessible and/or assistive technologies to help students engage, regardless of ability or disability.

MODULE 4, SESSION 3

Translanguaging

We looked at how teachers can utilize the practice of translanguaging, which is when bilingual people utilize both their home and second languages as assets for communicating and learning.

MODULE 6, SESSION 4

Self-Awareness and Self-Direction

We examined three students' stories in developing the social emotional competencies of self-awareness and self-direction in ways that increased the students' investment and engagement in their own learning.

THE SCHOOL LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE

In Module 1, Session 4, we provided teachers with a list of 10 design strategies they can use to foster engagement to develop persistence, attraction, and delight among students. We drew the design strategies from [Phil Schlechty's Working on the Work Framework](#), which builds on an experience-based understanding of student engagement (Schlechty called these the 10 design qualities).

10 Teacher Design Strategies to Foster Student Engagement

SELECT	Select appropriate content for your learners (e.g., standards-aligned and differentiated).
ORGANIZE	Organize teaching and learning with a clear approach (e.g., problem-solving, discovery, etc.).
CLARIFY AND BUILD CONSENSUS	Clarify and build consensus around expectations for student performance, covering the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the process and products of learning.
PROTECT	Protect students from adverse consequences for initial failures (e.g., allowing for revisions).
FOCUS ON PRODUCT	Structure tasks and activities so that what students learn is linked to a product, performance, or exhibition to which the student attaches personal value.
AFFIRM PERFORMANCE	Design tasks and activities so that the performance of students is made visible to people who are significant in their lives.
FOSTER AFFILIATION	Design tasks so that students are provided the opportunity to work with peers as well as parents, outside experts, and other adults, including the teacher.
ENCOURAGE NOVELTY AND VARIETY	Provide students the opportunity to employ a wide range of media and approaches when engaged in learning activities.
OFFER CHOICE	Design tasks and activities so that students can exercise choice in terms of what or how they learn.
MAKE LEARNING AUTHENTIC	Link learning tasks to things that are of real interest or importance to the student.

THE SCHOOL LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE (CONT)

In order for teachers to do this work, school leaders must support them as *designers of learning environments*. This does not mean that teachers have free rein over every aspect of curriculum and instruction. Instead, they are empowered to use and build their expert knowledge and skills related to pedagogies.

According to Merriam-Webster, pedagogy is the “art, science, or profession of teaching.” Alejandro Paniagua and David Istance, authors of Teachers as Designers of Learning Environments, put it this way:

Focusing on pedagogies shifts the perception of teachers from technicians who strive to attain the education goals set by the curriculum to experts in the art and science of teaching.

In the post-pandemic era where teacher burnout is at an all-time high and respect for the profession has declined among the public, treating teachers as the professionals and experts that they are is critical for successful school leadership.

So how can school leaders establish, develop, and sustain such a culture of teachers-as-designers?

Schlechty suggests that leaders create two "design teams" at the school level:

1 A work design team that focuses on creating engaging work for students and conducting action research on carrying out this work and

2 A building-level design team that focuses on an established shared vision of student engagement among staff and faculty, as well as systems that can support that vision. Schlechty emphasized the role of school leaders in creating the conditions for teachers to design engaging work. (He also suggests a district-level design team.)

Whether you use Schlechty's approach or another strategic planning and implementation approach, supporting teachers-as-designers is critical for making the shift to trauma-informed, equity-centered (and experience-based) models of student engagement.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

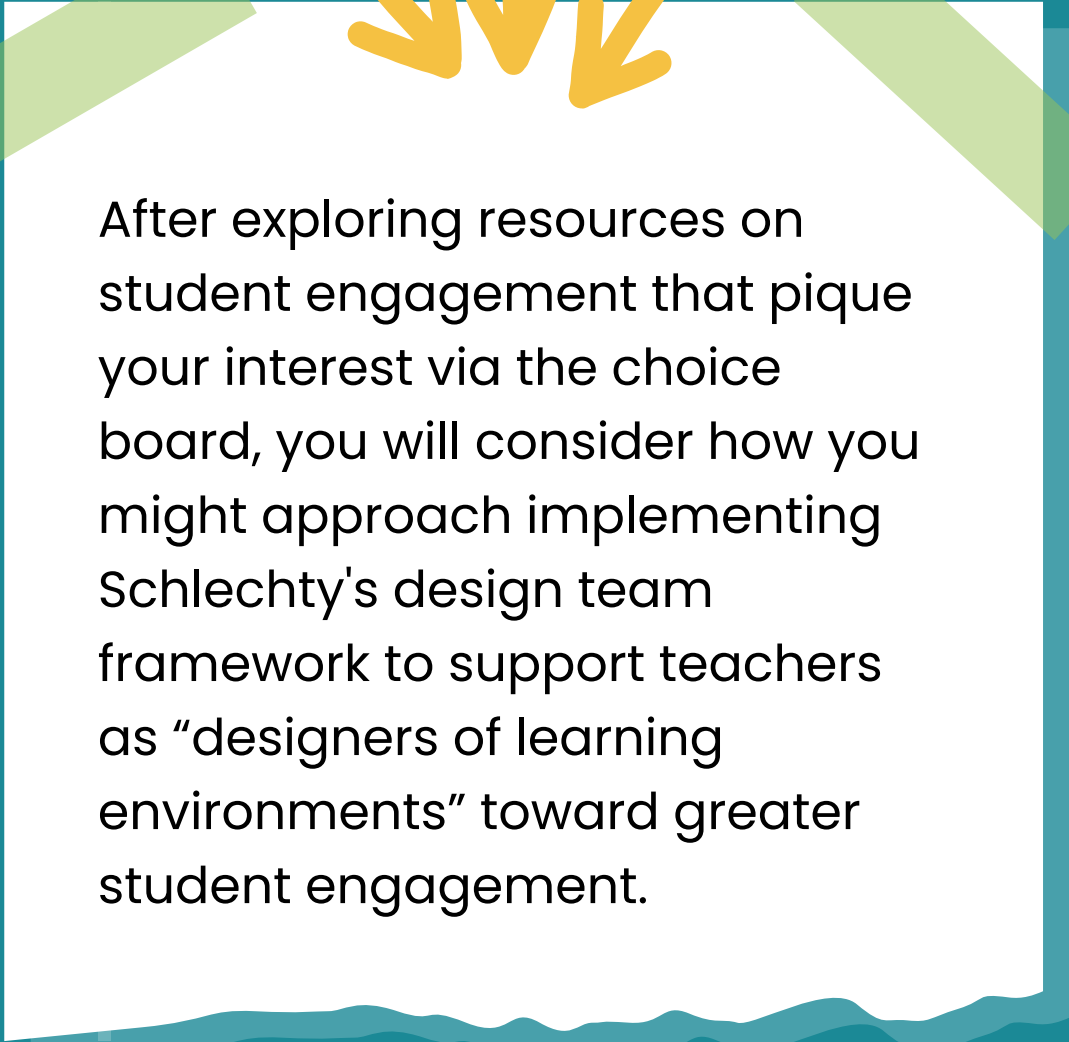
The period of emergency remote teaching (ERT) put a blazing spotlight on how out-of-date our understanding and measures of student engagement were prior to the pandemic. In this session, we explore ways of understanding, measuring, and building student engagement that are trauma-informed and equity-centered. We encourage you to reflect on how strategies for teaching across learning environments (TALE) can actually make this shift to more aligned forms of engagement easier. Educational apps provide a unique and nimble opportunity to engage students in culturally responsive and sustaining ways.

While we could say that it's never been easier to engage students, the reality is that the shifts we have identified here and in the earlier modules take time, training, planning, and policy, as well as resource support.

*That's where you come in,
school leader!*



Your Turn!



After exploring resources on student engagement that pique your interest via the choice board, you will consider how you might approach implementing Schlechty's design team framework to support teachers as “designers of learning environments” toward greater student engagement.

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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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