How do we engage students across learning environments? It begins with a **SHIFT** from thinking about engagement as something students **DEMONSTRATE** to something students **EXPERIENCE.**

RETHINKING
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

How?

When the New York State Department of Education (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 student motivation and active participation. Here are some specific requests for help.

How to encourage engagement, participation, responsibility, and independence

How to motivate students who are at home and easily distractible

How to engage students and motivate them to do well in a hybrid/online environment

How to engage the students who are avoiding/ghosting

SHIFT our understanding of engagement as something students

DEMONSTRATE

TO

EXPERIENCE

Before we can consider HOW to engage students, we need to agree on how we understand and measure student engagement. We will discuss a shift in understanding that moves away from thinking about engagement as something that students demonstrate and toward something that students experience.

Making this shift will allow us to then look at design strategies that teachers can use to generate student engagement, both in traditional in-person classrooms and across remote and hybrid learning environments.

Engagement as something students
Demonstrate

Behavior

Behavioral engagement looks like student compliance (listening carefully, completing assignments, etc.) and active participation in class (working with others, actively engaging in class discussion, etc.).

Affect

Affective engagement looks like students demonstrating interest and exhibiting a sense of belonging (engaging in relationships, posing questions, persevering, exhibiting curiosity, etc.).

STUDENT DEMONSTRATION OF ENGAGEMENT

Cognition

Cognitive engagement looks like students putting forth effort to master content, seek challenges, and self-regulate (planning, setting goals, solving problems, etc.).

Researchers have traditionally identified three dimensions of student engagement: **behavioral, affective, and cognitive engagement.**

While these three dimensions describe what have become traditional norms of student engagement, research in the areas of equity-centered and trauma-informed teaching raises some questions. A traumatized student may be withdrawn, have a hard time completing work on a standard schedule, and be reluctant to seek help from teachers or peers. If we were looking for signs of engagement related to the three dimensions, these students would look as if they aren't engaged. And maybe that is the case, and our job as teachers is to engage them until they appear in class as "engaged." But we might consider that these students aren't necessarily dis-engaged. Rather, because of trauma responses, they cannot display engagement in the traditional ways described above.

Beyond students dealing with trauma, demonstrating engagement in standard ways doesn't always align with the abilities of English language learners and students with disabilities. And depending on a student's cultural and social background, demonstrating engagement in these traditional ways may run counter to their own values and experiences.

Consider, for example, a student whose culture asserts that "children should speak only when spoken to."

Expecting that student to raise their hand, speak up in class discussions, or approach the teacher to ask questions may be an unrealistic expectation or way to measure engagement. (See Session 3 about building classroom community for tips on co-creating classroom norms with students so that they all — including a student like the one described here — understand the norms of the classroom, which may be different than the norms at home.)
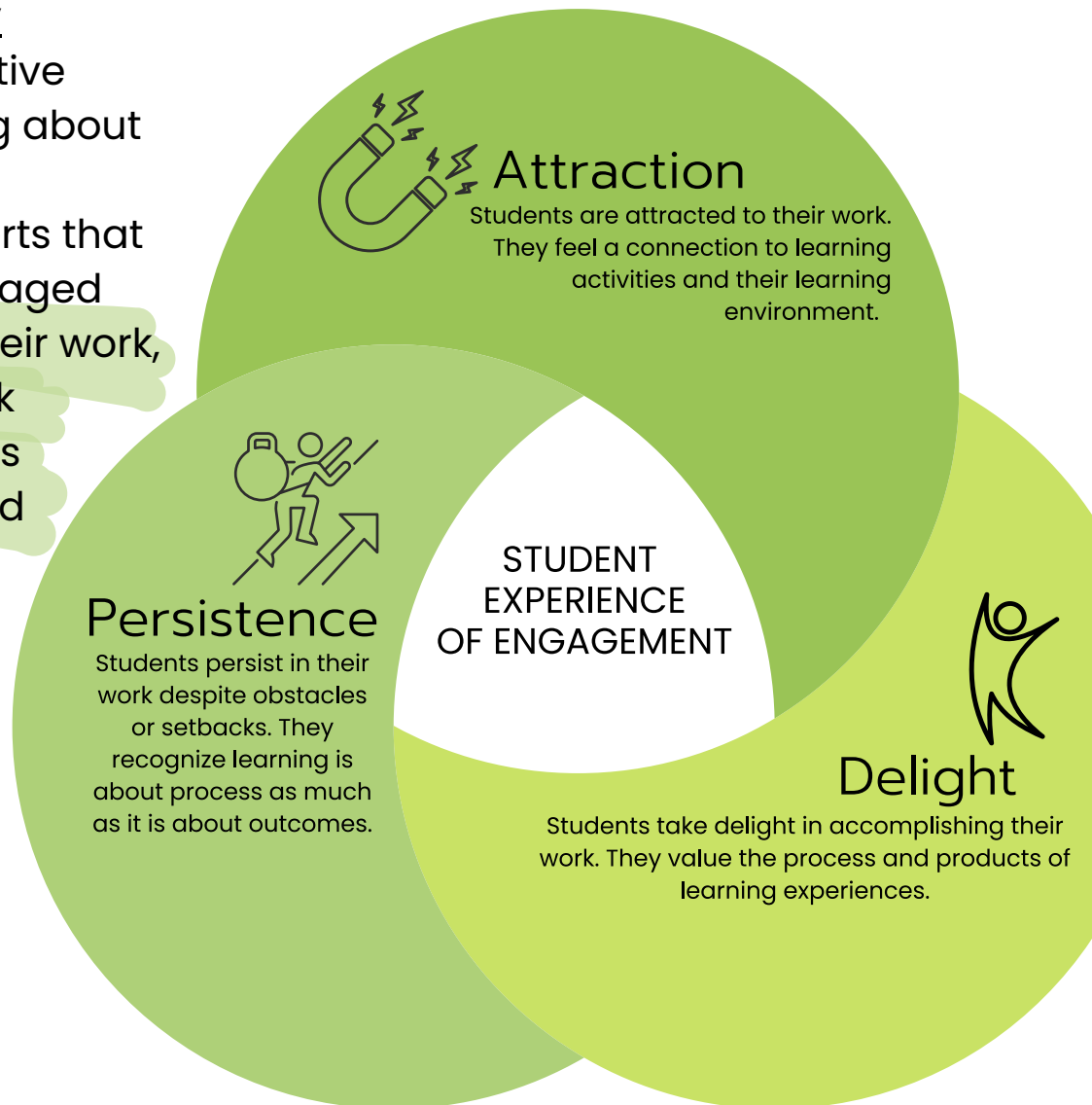
The traditional ways of understanding and measuring student engagement are all based on students displaying, demonstrating, exhibiting, or appearing to be engaged. The focus on activity or outcome doesn't always account for differences in cognitive, behavioral, academic, and cultural backgrounds, experiences, and capacities.

To authentically engage all students, let's turn to <u>culturally responsive and sustaining educational (CRSE) practices</u>.

<u>Educator Phil Schlecty</u> developed an alternative framework for thinking about and fostering student engagement. He asserts that students who are engaged

- are attracted to their work,
- persist in their work despite challenges and obstacles, and
- take delight in accomplishing their work.

Attraction
Students are attracted to their work. They feel a connection to learning activities and their learning environment.

Persistence
Students persist in their work despite obstacles or setbacks. They recognize learning is about process as much as it is about outcomes.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE OF ENGAGEMENT

Delight
Students take delight in accomplishing their work. They value the process and products of learning experiences.

What any of these three components looks like from the perspective of the teacher may be vastly different. For example, an English language learner may be deeply interested in a topic but be focused on taking notes rather than making eye contact or participating in a class discussion. A student with motor-skills issues may struggle to complete an art assignment during a class period but persist with a few modifications. A shy student may not demonstrate visible joy when they get an "A" on a class project but eagerly race home to share the news with family and friends.

Case Study from Emergency Remote Teaching

To be on camera or not to be on camera...
is that the RIGHT question?

Video conferencing (Google Meets, Zoom, etc.) took the world by storm during the pandemic. It seemed at first to be a panacea for the situation: if we all meet on Zoom, isn't that the same as if we meet in the office, around the dinner table, or (in this case) in the classroom? But the novelty wore off quickly as we learned such things as you can't hear simultaneous speakers, you have to mute and unmute to engage in conversations, and looking into one another's "worlds" could feel, at best, like we were learning new things about one another or, at worse, like a violation of privacy. By fall 2020, teaching via video conference too often felt like running a séance: "Can you hear me? If you can hear me, type 'yes' in the chat box."

Carolyn Tyner, who teaches at Sunset Park Prep in Brooklyn, shared her thoughts on the topic of webcam use in a February 2021 piece for the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) blog "Teacher to Teacher."

"Some teachers will argue that keeping cameras off allows students to be complacent...Yet, many schools — including mine — have opted not to require students to turn their cameras on. We are attempting to be trauma-informed and respect their privacy, especially in low-income districts where students may be self-conscious about their living situations. At my own school, the heated debate continues among teachers as we struggle with attendance and engagement.

Perhaps the bigger question is: How do we really measure engagement? Attendance and turning in assignments is one thing, but in regular years, these two factors do not prove a student is truly, actively engaging during class time...I wonder: Are students really less engaged during remote learning? Or has remote learning just revealed a lack of engagement that was always there, masked by physical attendance?"

"Perhaps the bigger question is: How do we really measure engagement?"

Interestingly, early research coming out of emergency remote teaching during the pandemic both reaffirms Tyner's questions and points to the fallacy of the idea that appearing on screen during virtual instruction is a demonstration of engagement in the first place. One survey of students attending a college-level biology course confirmed that some students were concerned about their personal appearance and their physical location being seen in the background. Other students cited social norms as playing a role in camera use.

Significantly, the survey results showed that these concerns were disproportionately held by underrepresented minority students.

As with so many other aspects of teaching and learning, emergency remote teaching put a spotlight on pre-existing challenges that require us, as educators, to rethink how we teach. When it comes to student engagement, one way to rethink our work is to focus less on what student engagement looks like and more on what teaching practices are most effective at generating a student's sense of engagement.

Q: How? A: Design

Back to the question that started this journey: How do we engage students? While there is no sure-fire way to engage all students all of the time, Schlecty describes 10 design elements that teachers can use in order to foster student-centered engagement. **We've adapted those elements into teacher action statements:**

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 caregivers, 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.

Most likely, none of these design elements are new to experienced teachers who have long been using these approaches to create engaging classroom learning experiences. But what happens when the modality for the learning experience shifts? What happens when we go remote or hybrid?

Design
for engaging students across learning environments

Let's take one of the questions posed by the NYS teachers at the beginning of this session and see how we can use Schlecty's 10 design elements to generate some possible responses.

> **How** to motivate students to do their work, ask questions, be proactive, and seek help when they are not in school

Since remote and hybrid formats vary and those variances impact learning design work, let's set the stage for addressing this question. We will assume that this teacher is working in a hybrid learning environment where students are broken up into smaller groups and are remote some days within a cycle and in-person other days. An example might be a 6-day cycle where half of the students attend in person on days 1, 2, and 3 while the other half attend in remote formats, and then they reverse for days 4, 5, and 6. This model is depicted in the table below.

HYBRID INSTRUCTION COHORT MODEL | FOR A 6-DAY CYCLE

CLASS TOTAL (30 students)	DAYS 1, 2, 3	DAYS 4, 5, 6
Group A (15 students)	In-Person	Remote
Group B (15 students)	Remote	In-Person

In this hybrid instructional model, the teacher's question seems to be mostly focused on those students who are working remotely. Now let's take each part of the teacher's question and consider how to address it using Schlecty's ten design elements.

How to motivate students to...

"DO THEIR WORK"

First, the teacher is concerned about students "doing their work." Nobody wants (or has the time!) to conduct surveillance on our students. One option would be to pair students to complete a product that they start in the classroom and then complete together during the remote days (Foster Affiliation). Obviously, this won't work for our younger students, so another option may be to use gamification apps that reward students when they complete a learning task (Affirm Performance). (Whether or not to have "leaderboards" in these kinds of activities is a question teachers need to answer as part of their community-building work – see Session 3.)

"ASK QUESTIONS"

The next piece is "asking questions" (again, while in the remote form of hybrid learning). One way to help motivate students to ask questions is to design prompts that lead them into inquiry. But let's assume the teacher is thinking about more basic questions, such as the time-tested and enduring student question, "I don't understand what I'm supposed to do next." This is where routines and structures really come into play (Organize; Clarify and Build Consensus). For remote students, teachers can schedule live check-ins by video conferencing, but this can be time consuming and difficult if you are teaching solo. Instead, you might use apps such as Along or the private message functionality in Zoom to allow students to pose questions directly to you (Protect). Provide structured phrasing for questions to help them get to the root (e.g., I can't find ____; I'm finding ____ difficult to understand ____; Where can I find ____, etc.).

You can also set up these prompts as threads within a discussion board on your learning management system (LMS) and allow group-level access for peers to respond (Foster Affiliation) and then take time at the end of the day to thank those students who helped answer their peer's question (Affirm Performance). If you aren't on an LMS, you can use apps such as Padlet to foster threaded discussions. You can also move away from text-based discussions and encourage students to post video questions and responses within the thread.

If the teacher uses a resilient design for learning (RDL) approach, they could also think about this issue as they design a unit/lesson/activities. For example, sending lessons home in full with resources ahead of time (via email or the school's LMS) may eliminate having to troubleshoot later. If the teacher creates a syllabus for a course or unit, students and families of younger students can review materials and reach out ahead of time if they have questions. As many students studying remotely may not have a parent home during instructional hours to provide a "guide-on-the-side" support, then providing them with the instructional materials well in advance will allow parents to plan with their children.

Again, for our younger students, these kinds of written activities won't work. Instead, your remote students (and in-person, for that matter) can use a "hand raise" app such as classroomq. You will be able to recognize in real time that a student needs help but respond when the flow of your in-person class allows. If you set up norms for asking questions in this way, you can establish student expectations in terms of the usual time it takes for them to get a response, and you can encourage them to continue working on other learning activities until you are able to respond (Clarify and Build Consensus). And if you are able to provide more than one way for students to ask questions (Offer Choice), you provide them with a safe and supportive learning environment no matter whether they are in-person or remote (see Session 2).

"BE PROACTIVE"

On to the really tough one: "be proactive." Since we don't know exactly what our teacher had in mind when they expressed concern about their remote students being proactive, we will narrow this down to focus on student progress. The "I'm bored" scenario fits well here. What do we do with students who move through the remote learning activities quickly? One option is redundancy with variation or having students complete learning activities in multiple formats (e.g., write a response, create a cartoon with Pixton or a similar app, or record a TikTok video). Students who complete a task quickly can be encouraged to repeat the task in the other formats. This also builds in choice for all students.

Alternatively, if by proactive the teacher means something more like self-directed, then shaping activities so that students make authentic learning choices at the opening of the assignment (Offer Choice) will motivate them to be self-directed (Make Learning Authentic). For the hybrid scenario we are working with (students are remote three days and in-person three days, in rotation), it might be useful if students make those initial choices during in-person instruction so that the teacher can help guide them and then have the students complete the activity during remote instruction. You can also build in a component in which the student has to engage the expertise of another adult to further foster affiliation beyond relationships with the teacher (Foster Affiliation).

Alternatively, teachers might consider using peer teaching approaches, which work well across platforms and modalities. Students can evaluate what they have learned from their peer(s) and turnkey that forward to another student who may still be struggling. In this way, students are doing what Dr. Paula Bevan describes as the "brain sweat" of the lesson, which frees up the teacher to be a facilitator.

"SEEK HELP"

When our teacher asks how to motivate students to "seek help" when in remote learning, this can be anything from asking questions (see above) to needing social-emotional support. While we will address social-emotional learning across learning environments in a different module, consider using tools such as a Bitmoji classroom to build resource libraries for students, including apps that support emotional well-being and mental health.

This teacher's question about how a student can seek help when not in the physical classroom reminds us that while we are focusing on teacher strategies and practices in TALE Academy modules and sessions, some questions require systemic answers. While virtual schools are opening across New York State to provide sustainable, long-term approaches to remote and hybrid teaching and learning, all levels of the education system need to rethink structures, resources, policies, and practices. A different module of the TALE Academy will focus on strategies that school leaders can use to support their teachers in this important work, as well. Rethinking schedules/blocks, team teaching, teacher rotation, work-based learning, and performance-based learning and assessment are just a few of the many practices that school leaders can work with their faculty to consider and integrate as we all rethink and reimagine education in New York State.

Now it's your turn!

Later in this session, you will have the opportunity to consider what student engagement looks and feels like for your students across different learning environments.

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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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