Student Engagement: A Study of the Intersections Between Perspectives and Practices

What brought you to this work?

Thompkins: The shift to virtual learning spaces has brought into question previously held understandings about engagement. As an educator, I find that many of my students don't seem to be engaged. I would like all students to be intrinsically motivated and engaged in all lessons and learning, and when I think of our black and brown students there currently seems to be no "buy in" from many. It is my desire that all students achieve at high levels and focusing on building their engagement will be the first step in increasing their achievement.

Dias: Expertise (as it is usually operationalized) can very easily lead to power imbalances and the marginalization of knowledge that is born outside of academic spaces. Claiming any body of research work as my own or solely the product of a research team has never felt authentic to me. The research we do is inherently tied to the communities and contexts we operate from and with, and therefore, knowledge gained cannot be claimed by a few. The Shifting Power initiative offers a unique opportunity to pursue collaborative inquiry and build our collective wisdom.

Research questions

What does student engagement look like in a virtual learning environment? How do you transition to a form of student engagement based on cognitive participation, and not purely on behavioral measures of engagement?

Research plan

During this inquiry process, we will try out different approaches to engaging students more in their learning, within a virtual school environment. This will be inside the context of two 4th grade science classes (approximately 50 students) in a public elementary school. Our goal is to develop several approaches to increasing students' cognitive engagement, while also creating novel methods for gauging levels of engagement that include student input. Alongside this practical learning, we will build our theoretical understanding of engagement practices and issues through researching scholarly texts.

Working together

We (Ginger and Bea) have developed a strong working relationship through this process because we move at the pace of trust, and build on the assets we each bring to our collaborative efforts.

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