

Session A Key Input: Lecture 1

What is Engagement

Lecture Transcript Presented by Dr Sal Consoli

Hello, I'm Dr. Sal Consoli from the University of Edinburgh, and I'm delighted to be able to talk to you about one of my core areas of research, the concept of learner engagement in language education. In this short presentation I'm going to focus on the theoretical dimensions and aspects of learner engagement, and hopefully this would be able to resonate with your own experiences in English language education in your own contexts.

Some people in language education wonder if learner engagement is actually a new topic, and that is because for many years we focused more directly on the concept of motivation. We have thought for many years that motivation was the essential factor without which learning would be impossible. But it has become much clearer over the past few decades that motivation is no longer the only essential ingredient for learning to happen. In fact, with the 21st century unfolding, with so many more complexities in our societies, it has become clear that students grapple with a number of challenges and distractions, new global problems that detract from their attention in the classroom. And therefore the concept of language learner engagement is now becoming much more prominent in circles.

Learner engagement can be defined through different dimensions, and one of these is cognitive engagement. This refers to the mental processes that we or learners engage in as they allocate their attention to a specific task. And that also refers to the intellectual effort that they make to resolve a task successfully. In language education research, cognitive engagement has usually been understood through the evidence of verbal communication, verbal manifestations of behavior, such as students' interactions with each other and the teacher, or noticing how and when students ask questions, or whether they volunteer answers to teachers whole classroom questions and the way they interact with one another by exchanging ideas about a particular task. There has also been research that has looked at nonverbal communications, for example, exploring student self talk, the way they engage in private discourse to be able to resolve a task or make sense of learning new information the teacher is passing on.

And then we have emotional engagement, which refers to the effective character of learning. It is to do with questions of how happy do students feel in a classroom or how emotionally satisfying a task is, how pleasant or unpleasant do students perceive certain tasks? And therefore the notions of interest and enjoyment and enthusiasm become so important when we are thinking about emotional engagement because we need to make sure that students aren't only doing the tasks that we assign them to do, but that they also enjoy becoming engaged, becoming involved with that sort of activity. Therefore, it's important to make sure that we understand who our students are, to be able to tap into their emotional intelligence and to match their emotional needs and preferences.

One last component of learner engagement refers to social engagement. In particular, this concerns the social forms of practice that are involved in the language classroom and therefore the kind of social relationships that are forged and fostered between and among learners and teachers and particularly the quality of these relationships, because this relational perspective of engagement, this social perspective on engagement is so important in nurturing

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the support that teachers and learners can offer one another in the process of engaging in learning and particularly successful learning experiences.

And this is a list of references in case you wish to follow upon any of the theoretical points that I've made. In the next two presentations, I'm going to focus more closely on practical aspects of creating and sustaining engagement in the language classroom. Thank you ever so much.

References

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