

Chapter 13

Beyond Retreat and Rebellion: Building Teacher Capacity for Optimized Student Engagement and Agency

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the literature to build a representation of what needs to occur for educational transformation to occur to meet the student engagement needs of 21st century learners. Effective technology integration is one of the focuses of the chapter as is a need to design professional development to provide a framework to meet technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK) to truly affect student learning. It represents a full understanding of how to teach with technology- especially how to teach concepts in a way that enhances student learning experiences. The authors of this chapter introduce the rationale for a need to focus on instructional design of technology integration to enhance student engagement. The premise is to use technology to drive K-12 educator professional development which will build a capacity for instructional experiences to improve student dispositions.

INSTRUCTIONAL WELL-BEING

The achievement gap for marginalized students in American schools continues to be an epidemic. Students of low socioeconomic status, culturally diverse, and or linguistically diverse students often struggle to meet expectations of the high stakes - high rigor assessments they encounter. Technology has changed the learning model and the role that educators and students play within the interplay of knowledge, curriculum, teaching, and learning (Barth, 2001). However, educators have been slow to adapt new pedagogical practices that move away from compliance based, didactic, and explicit instruction. Studies have documented that this is even more true for underserved English language learners, poor students, and students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Oakes, 2005).

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As our world continues to change in the 21st century, expectations for education also continue to transform. The learning experiences educators provide for students must also undergo renovation (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). A review of scholarly writing and research over the past thirty years has indicated that the current compliance-based, factory model of schooling used by the vast majority of American high schools no longer adequately meets the needs of young people or of contemporary society (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Kohn, 2008). As 21st century educators and policymakers contemplate how to accomplish essential instructional changes, counterproductive educational thought established in the economic, educational, and cultural standards of the early 20th century remain (Willms et al., 2009).

Counter to the tradition and thought of the early 20th Century, Maria Montessori (1870-1952) and John Dewey (1859-1952) advocated for increased autonomy for students. These early progressive and constructivist thinkers theorized that instructional experiences allowing learners to in part self-direct their lessons (*agency*) and create their own understandings would lead to increased interest and greater success in learning. Current educational practitioners advancing these convictions have contended that teaching practices do exist that enable all students to achieve at their highest capabilities. By designing learning processes that engage students in deeper and more sustained learning, the achievement gap could be narrowed, if not eliminated. Barth (2001) suggested that 21st century educators could produce greater academic achievement by repositioning the constructs of knowledge, teacher and student to a more active and collaborative instructional design. In order to engage students in these types of meaningful learning experiences, educators should design lessons that appeal to each student's values, interests and needs. The resulting school environment could provide a vision of classrooms as platforms for learning, shifting away from viewing classrooms as platforms for teaching (Barth, 2001).

Educators have continually sought to find methods of increasing student achievement, producing graduates who are college and or career ready. Strategies widely known, researched, and discussed have included improving school leadership, driving instruction with data, and employing highly-qualified teachers. Although not as historically covered in empirical research, instructional strategies for increased student engagement has emerged as a critical factor in improving student success, well-being, and achievement (Akey, 2006; Heller, Calderon, & Medrich, 2003; Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005). Given the diverse populations present in public education, educators need instructional practices that will stimulate and provide support to students at risk for academic failure (Scigliano & Hipsky, 2010). November (2009) opined that as our society's dependence on mechanization, automation and technology has deepened, students' purposeful contributions to their communities have decreased. November conjectured that through utilizing the digital technologies now available, education professionals could provide students with rigorous and motivating assignments, learning tasks that would provide students with opportunities to purposely produce and add value to their communities. These types of learning activities would engage students and allow them the opportunity to collaborate with not only peers but also experts within their communities, their regions, and across the globe.

Student engagement has proved difficult to define. Newmann (1986) suggested students are engaged when they dedicate significant time and effort to a task, when they genuinely care about the quality of their work, and when they authentically commit to the work as possessing meaning beyond that of the strategic value of obtaining a grade or meeting a requirement. Because student engagement has been hard to define, it has been equally difficult to measure. Identifying the point when a student genuinely cares about the quality of his or her work has not been an easy task.

Several studies have included the construct of student engagement, but only in a partial and limited capacity in regard to academic dimensions (Willms, 2003; Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). The majority of research

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