

From Disengaged to Engaged: a new lens on behaviour management

In Education, Engagement is the cornerstone of good practice. Engagement is fundamental to high quality teaching; it is the life-force for effective learning. **Professor Barry Carpenter CBE**

ENGAGEMENT is inclusive of all learners of all ages and abilities. When you think about it Engagement for Learning is blindingly obvious and perfectly logical. If the 'A' Level student is not fully engaged in their key subjects, then they will not achieve the grades they need to be accepted at the university of their choice.

If the GCSE student does not engage and attain a higher grade in say, French, they may not be accepted on to the 'A' level course for this subject. The Year 6 child who falls below the age-expected level in literacy because they did not engage deeply may struggle to access the secondary curriculum when they transfer into Year 7.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage the child who has not been authentically engaged in the listening, speaking and understanding aspects of Communication & Language, may find themselves on the periphery of classroom dynamics when they join the faster paced Key Stage 1 classroom.

For children with Special Educational Needs, Engagement is the platform for their participation in learning. At times that Engagement may be fleeting; it may be sustained only in short bursts, but this will enable some acquisition of skills, knowledge and concepts, which, over time, will be integrated into effective daily living, and success and achievement will follow.

For all children of all ages, Engagement is the liberation of



intrinsic motivation. To keep them engaged as active participants in learning is the task of all teachers, not least so that they enjoy learning and appreciate the intrinsic rewards the process itself can bring. Only then will success, achievement, attainment and progress flow.

Obviously, some children are disengaged. This may be for a variety of reasons; they see no relevance in the curriculum offered; they find the social dynamics of school incomprehensible; they struggle to 'fit in' and find rewarding friendships.

Our goal as teachers for these children remains Engagement. Our quest is the process of re-engagement. In the past, disengaged children were those described as having behaviours of concern. Our response was to pull out the repertoire of Behaviour Management strategies.

Increasingly in recent years, a plethora of Behaviour Management programmes have emerged, which appear to have little to do with the process of learning or ensuring that the child is an active learner. Many such programmes advocate self-regulation which is helpful, but others have a focus on control

and, maybe, restraint. They in themselves reinforce the child as a disengaged learner.

We need to draw up approaches to Behaviour Management and Support, which are rooted in Engagement, with a constant focus on improving, little by little, the quality of the child's engagement in learning; a process I described earlier as 're-engagement'. Every child is a learner; every child can achieve. We have to believe this as a profession of Educators. But then, so does the child. They have to believe that they can learn, and value themselves in that role by their own measures, not the externally imposed indicators

How might this learning model of Behaviour Management look in practice?

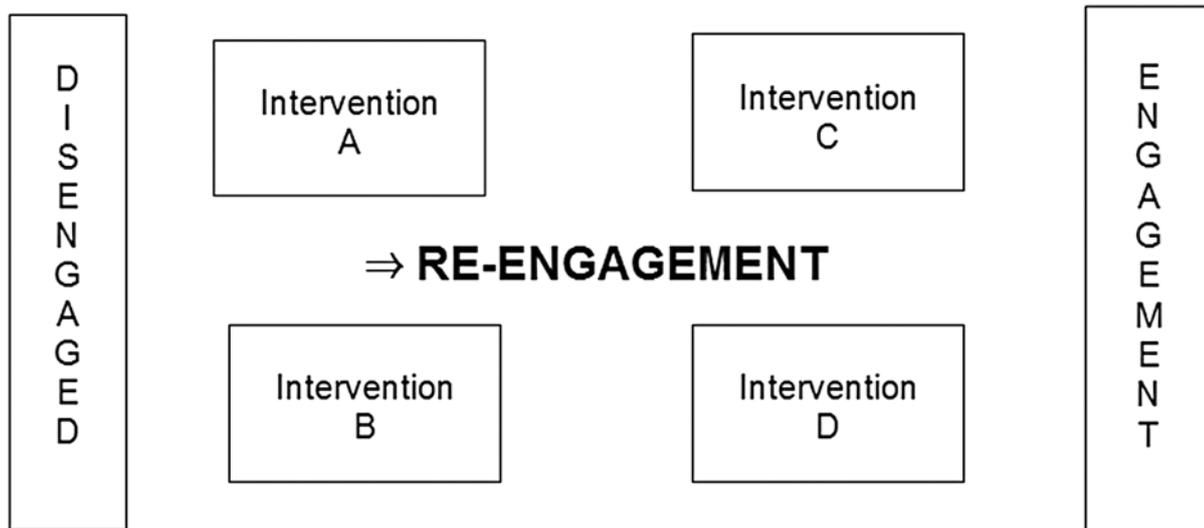


Figure 1. The journey toward authentic Engagement

alone. We have to constantly strive to liberate that ‘intrinsic motivation’ I spoke of earlier, that enables the child to thrive as a learner.

How might this learning model of Behaviour Management look in practice?

Figure 1 above lays out three positions – the goal of full, authentic Engagement against its antithesis – Disengaged. The linking process is the dynamic of Re-engagement. This process is activated by a series of interventions (in reality there are likely to be more than 4 which I have used for this illustration).

Whereas traditionally these interventions would have focussed on behaviour and its management, in this model the lens with which the child is viewed is that of learning. Our quest is to take the child from being disengaged as a learner to being engaged as a learner. This is achieved by asking ‘What motivates the child?’ and planning interventions that maximise the motivational intent, using it as a force to re-engage the child on a journey towards being a fully engaged learner.

The interventions suggested in this model (Figure 1), are therefore not just about Behaviour per se. For example, Intervention A may be

about Communication, Intervention B may be an Emotional Well-Being activity focussed on self-esteem, Intervention C may be a group task encouraging social interaction with peers, and Intervention D may have a Behaviour focus around self-regulation using visual strategies.

At the heart of this model the entitlement of the child as a learner, and to be dignified by the learning process, remains central.

The more enlightened approach to assessment advocated by the Rochford Review (2016) enables teachers to use Engagement as a key principle in practice across a range of learning domains. Understanding how the child engages can illuminate so many pathways to learning that may previously have been closed to them.

Engagement is the key to effective learning; it is the liberation of intrinsic motivation in all domains of learning and behaviour for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

(This article is based on a blog originally posted on www.engagement4learning.com)

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