

Meaningful, Engaged Learning

In recent years, researchers have formed a strong consensus on the importance of engaged learning in schools and classrooms. This consensus, together with a recognition of the changing needs of the 21st century, has stimulated the development of specific indicators of engaged learning. Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, and Rasmussen (1994) developed the indicators described below. These indicators of engaged learning can act as a “compass” for reform instruction, helping educators chart an instructional course and maintain an orientation based on a vision of engaged learning and what it looks like in the classroom and community.

1. Indicator: *Vision of Engaged Learning*

What does engaged learning look like? Successful, engaged learners are responsible for their own learning. These students are self-regulated and able to define their own learning goals and evaluate their own achievement. They are also energized by their learning; their joy of learning leads to a lifelong passion for solving problems, understanding, and taking the next step in their thinking. These learners are strategic in that they know how to learn and are able to transfer knowledge to solve problems creatively. Engaged learning also involves being collaborative—that is, valuing and having the skills to work with others.

2. Indicator: *Tasks for Engaged Learning*

In order to have engaged learning, tasks need to be challenging, authentic, and multidisciplinary. Such tasks are typically complex and involve sustained amounts of time. They are authentic in that they correspond to the tasks in the home and workplaces of today and tomorrow. Collaboration around authentic tasks often takes place with peers and mentors within school as well as with family members and others in the real world outside of school. These tasks often require integrated instruction that incorporates problem-based learning and curriculum by project.

3. Indicator: *Assessment of Engaged Learning*

Assessment of engaged learning involves presenting students with an authentic task, project, or investigation, and then observing, interviewing, and examining their presentations and artifacts to assess what they actually know and can do. This assessment, often called performance-based assessment, is generative in that it involves students in generating their own performance criteria and playing a key role in the overall design, evaluation, and reporting of their assessment. The best performance-based assessment has a seamless connection to curriculum and instruction so that it is ongoing. Assessment should represent all meaningful aspects of performance and should have equitable standards that apply to all students.

4. Indicator: *Instructional Models & Strategies for Engaged Learning*

The most powerful models of instruction are interactive. Instruction actively engages the learner, and is generative. Instruction encourages the learner to construct and produce knowledge in meaningful ways. Students teach others interactively and interact generatively with their teacher and peers. This allows for co-construction of knowledge, which promotes engaged learning that is problem-, project-, and goal-based. Some common strategies included in engaged learning models of instruction are individual and group summarizing, means of exploring multiple perspectives, techniques for building upon prior knowledge, brainstorming, Socratic dialogue, problem-solving processes, and team teaching.

5. Indicator: *Learning Context of Engaged Learning*

For engaged learning to happen, the classroom must be conceived of as a knowledge-building learning community. Such communities not only develop shared understandings collaboratively but also create empathetic learning environments that value diversity and multiple perspectives. These communities search for strategies to build on the strengths of all of its members. Truly collaborative classrooms, schools, and communities encourage students to ask hard questions, define problems, lead conversations, set goals, have work-related conversations with family members and other adults in and out of school, and engage in entrepreneurial activities.

6. Indicator: *Grouping for Engaged Learning*

Collaborative work that is learning-centered often involves small groups or teams of two or more students within a classroom or across classroom boundaries. Heterogeneous groups (including different sexes, cultures, abilities, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds) offer a wealth of background knowledge and perspectives to different tasks. Flexible grouping, which allows teachers to reconfigure small groups according to the purposes of instruction and incorporates frequent heterogeneous groups, is one of the most equitable means of grouping and ensuring increased learning opportunities.

7. Indicator: *Teacher Roles for Engaged Learning*

The role of the teacher in the classroom has shifted from the primary role of information giver to that of facilitator, guide, and learner. As a facilitator, the teacher provides the rich environments and learning experiences needed for collaborative study. The teacher also is required to act as a guide—a role that incorporates mediation, modeling, and coaching. Often the teacher also is a co-learner and co-investigator with the students.

8. Indicator: *Student Roles for Engaged Learning*

One important student role is that of explorer. Interaction with the physical world and with other people allows students to discover concepts and apply skills. Students are then encouraged to reflect upon their discoveries, which is essential for the student as a cognitive apprentice. Apprenticeship takes place when students observe and apply the thinking processes used by practitioners. Students also become teachers themselves by integrating what they've learned. Hence, they become producers of knowledge, capable of making significant contributions to the world's knowledge.

Reference:

Jones, B., Valdez, G., Nowakowski, J., & Rasmussen, C. (1994). *Designing Learning and Technology for Educational Reform*. Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

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