CHAPTER ONE

MYTH 1: It's Easy to Tell Who Is Engaged

What Is Engagement and How Can I Assess It in My Classroom?

One of the most challenging tasks a teacher faces is to identify student engagement in the classroom. Can a teacher or classroom observer really tell who is engaged by just glancing around the room? Is a student looking out the window disengaged? Are the students who complete all of their assignments but do not participate in class truly engaged? This chapter reviews the reasons why it is important and beneficial to assess student engagement and outlines some of the different methods to assess this engagement in the classroom.

The chapter begins with six hypothetical cases of engagement. Although no one student will be exactly like those in the six cases described here, the portraits of engagement will likely remind the readers of students they have either observed or taught in their classrooms. These cases will be woven throughout the remainder of the book to illustrate the causes and consequences of different profiles of engagement. The major purposes of each chapter are to begin a journey of deconstructing the

myths about engagement discussed in the introduction to this book and to take a stance to actively understand and evaluate the types of engagement in the classroom.

PORTRAITS OF ENGAGEMENT

Fully Engaged: Fiona and Franco

Fiona looks forward to going to school. She finds most academic subjects interesting and excels in math. She pays attention, enjoys challenging tasks, and tries hard to do her best work. She contributes her thoughts in discussions and asks good questions. She studies at home to make sure she understands the material even when she does not have a test. Her family is very involved in her education. They talk with her about how she is doing in school, monitor her homework, and attend school events. At home, she reads math and science books that her family has bought to supplement what she is doing in school. If she has trouble solving a problem, she goes over it until she understands it.

Franco likes school, likes being with his friends, and has a good relationship with his teacher. Most of the time, he is happy at school. He enjoys opportunities to be intellectually challenged and especially loves history. He works hard, listens attentively, and actively participates in class discussions. When he is studying for a test, he makes chapter outlines and tries to associate the material he is studying with what he already knows about the topic. His parents have high expectations for him and expose him to intellectually stimulating activities and experiences at home. He enjoys reading about history outside of school, going to museums, and discussing history with his family and peers.

Behaviorally Engaged Only: Beatrice and Benjamin

Beatrice is attentive, compliant, and participates in class activities. She follows the rules, does her work, and does not get in trouble. As a result, she does well in her classes and often goes unnoticed by the teacher. She has many friends and is socially active, but she finds her classes boring and is happier when she is with her friends outside of school. She believes school is important for her future, but few subjects retain her interest. She rarely reads anything that

is not required and takes the safe route in all of her assignments. She is anxious and avoids challenging tasks for fear of making a mistake. When problems are hard, she gives up easily.

Benjamin pays attention, exerts effort, and comes to class prepared. He does his work, but he does not like going to school and is not interested in or excited by learning. He is motivated primarily by grades. He perceives a B as a failure and something to be avoided at all costs. As a result, he avoids challenging courses. He will do whatever he has to do to get a good grade, but he never does more than is required. He uses surface-level techniques such as memorization and rote recall to learn the material. He often gets right answers and gives the impression that he understands a subject or problem more deeply than he does. His parents have high expectations for him, but they do little to monitor his homework and time use. They work long hours and rarely attend school events.

At Risk: Rachel and Ryan

Rachel finds many of her subjects difficult and boring. Her mind often wanders in class and she rarely participates in class discussions. She has a poor relationship with her teacher. Her attendance and participation in class have been inconsistent. As a result, she is one of the lowest-performing students in her class. Although she acknowledges that she does need to do better in school, she lacks a successful strategy for overcoming her confusion. She has begun to assume that poor performance is inevitable. She wishes she did not have to go to school and does not see how it will help her in the future. She lives with her mother, who did not complete high school. Her mother believes strongly in the value of education, but she lacks the skills or confidence to help her daughter with school. Rachel has fun in school when she has extra recess or gets to talk with her friends. She also loves to sing and dance.

Ryan can sometimes be aggressive and often gets in trouble at school. He gives the impression that he does not care about school or getting in trouble. Sometimes he gets in trouble for not paying attention; other times, it is for fighting. He finds school an alienating and unsupportive context. He has a poor and often conflictual relationship with his teacher, and many of his peers don't like him. He often feels that the other students and his teacher wrongly

accuse him of misbehaving. He often gets labeled as a disruptive and aggressive student, and he feels like he is given few opportunities to explain his behavior. He finds few subjects interesting and tries to get by doing as little as possible. He is having the most difficulty with math, which he finds boring and confusing. His parents have become increasingly frustrated with his poor behavior and academic performance, and they have tried a variety of forms of punishment. His favorite parts of the day are gym and recess. He likes playing sports, building things, and playing on the computer outside of school.

WHAT IS ENGAGEMENT?

At a school-wide level, increasing student engagement is seen as a key to addressing problems of low achievement, student boredom and alienation, and high dropout rates. In the classroom, disengagement can be identified through lower student effort in areas such as work completion and quality, as well as in student disruptions, participation, or absences. However, teachers cannot know if they have successfully increased engagement unless they know what it is and how to assess it.

The assessment of engagement has been made challenging by the large variation in how this construct has been defined and measured by researchers. Some researchers have focused on the behavioral dimension and have equated engagement with on-task behavior (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley 2002). Others argue that engagement needs to include both an emotional and a behavioral dimension (Finn, 1989; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). In a more recent review of the literature, my colleagues and I present a multidimensional view of engagement that includes **behavioral, emotional**, and **cognitive** engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). We argue that including all three dimensions gives a richer picture of how students think, feel, and act in the classroom. However, even when researchers agree on the number and types of engagement dimensions, variation exists in how each specific dimension is defined. Table 1.1 outlines these different aspects of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004).

It is important to note that there has been some overlap in the indicators included in definitions of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. One example of this overlap is student

Table 1.1 Definitions of Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive Engagement

Behavioral Engagement	
Positive conduct	1. Follows classroom and school rules 2. Completes homework 3. Comes to class with books and materials
Absence of disruptive behaviors	1. Does not skip school 2. Does not get into trouble 3. Does not get into fights
Involvement in classroom learning	1. Effort directed at completing tasks 2. Participates 3. Concentrates 4. Pays attention
Participation in school-based extracurricular activities	1. Involvement in sports 2. Involvement in school clubs 3. Involvement in student government
Emotional Engagement	
Emotional reactions to classroom, school, or teacher	1. Enjoyment 2. Interest 3. Boredom 4. Anxiety 5. Happiness 6. Sadness
Belonging	1. Liked by others 2. Feels included 3. Feels respected in school
Value	1. Perceives that task/school is important 2. Perceives that task/school is useful for future 3. Perceives that task is interesting
Cognitive Engagement	
Psychological investment in learning	1. Goes beyond requirements 2. Prefers challenge 3. Effort directed at understanding and mastering content
Cognitive strategy use	1. Metacognitive self-regulation (i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating thinking) 2. Deep strategy use (elaborates, relates material to previous knowledge, integrates ideas, makes use of evidence)

effort. There is an important distinction between effort that is directed at doing the work versus effort that is directed at learning and understanding (Fredricks et al., 2004). In behavioral engagement definitions, student effort has been used to reflect compliance with the work required in school. In contrast, in cognitive engagement definitions, student effort has been used to describe the degree of psychological investment in learning.

STOP AND REFLECT

1. How do you currently define student engagement in your classroom?
2. What do you think of when you think of engaged and disengaged students? (What do they look like? Sound like?)
3. Which component of engagement do you think is most important: behavioral, emotional, or cognitive? Why?
4. How does your answer for question #3 impact your definition of engagement in question #1?

Why Engagement Is More Than On-Task Behavior

The reality is that in most classrooms, different configurations of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement occur, and engagement in one dimension does not necessarily translate to others. Having a quiet and orderly classroom is an important goal for many teachers. As a result, many teachers equate compliance and on-task behavior with engagement. However, just because a student participates and follows the rules, it does not necessarily mean he or she is deeply invested in learning. Benjamin, one of the six students profiled at the beginning of this chapter, is an example of this type of student. Although he does his work and is on-task, he is bored and only using **shallow-learning strategies** that may help him regurgitate material for a test but will not lead to deep learning. Prior research has

shown that the use of **deep-learning strategies**, such as relating new information to existing information and actively monitoring comprehension, leads to higher achievement than the use of shallow and surface strategies such as memorization and rote processing (Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Aley, 2004). Students who use rote strategies do not make as many mental connections, which in turn makes it more difficult for them to retrieve the information and apply it to new situations.

Beatrice is like many students who are only behaviorally engaged. These students are on-task and follow the rules. To an outside observer they look engaged. In many ways they are ideal students, well-behaved and dependable. However, although students like Beatrice are working on a task, they are not necessarily engaged in the effort necessary for deeper understanding. They are not deeply invested in the content and use only shallow- and surface-level strategies to study the material. In contrast, Fiona seeks out challenge, does extra work, and uses deep-learning strategies that will help her to learn and master the content. Prior research shows that students like Fiona have higher achievement because they are connecting and integrating content with their existing knowledge, which helps them to form richer mental representations (Greene et al., 2004).

Ideally, students are high on behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Fiona and Franco are examples of these fully engaged students. These types of students are easy to teach; they actively participate, are interested in school, and use learning strategies to help them master and learn the content. In turn, these students tend to elicit more positive interaction and support from both their teachers and peers, which can serve to further increase their engagement over time. It is clear that students who can form strong relationships in the classroom are at an advantage that grows exponentially as the academic year progresses. In contrast, at-risk students like Rachel and Ryan, who are showing signs of disengagement, are more difficult to teach. These students often receive less support from their teachers and peers, which serves to further dampen their engagement over time. Unfortunately, this results in a self-amplifying cycle in which individual differences in engagement are magnified over time (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

STOP AND REFLECT

1. What types of engagement and disengagement profiles do you see in your classroom?
2. Do you have students who are examples of fully engaged, behaviorally engaged only, or at risk? Who are your Fionas, Francos, Beatrices, Benjamins, Rachels, or Ryans? How do you interact with each type of student?
3. Do you have students who you don't know if or how they are engaged? How do you interact with these students?

WHY ASSESS ENGAGEMENT?

There are several reasons why teachers may want to assess engagement in their classroom. The first is to identify students who are at risk for disengagement and academic failure in order to provide better support to these students. Dropping out of school is not an instantaneous event; for many students it is the last step in a long process of disengagement from school (Finn, 1989). Teachers can play a critical role in identifying those students who show signs of disengagement and intervene to potentially prevent them from dropping out of school. Rachel and Ryan are examples of two students who are showing some early warning signs and could benefit from positive support and intervention. Chapter 7 outlines practical strategies for working with disengaged youth like Rachel and Ryan.

The second reason to assess engagement is to monitor how students are responding to the academic and social experiences in the classroom in order to see what is working and what might need to be changed. It is important for teachers to monitor both the variation in engagement within the same individual and across different individuals. The reality is not all students are engaged all of the time. Any given student may show different patterns of behavior, emotion, and cognition depending on the type of task, and he or she may even show different patterns with the same task if tired or distracted by something inside or outside of the classroom. At both the individual and class level, teachers can

see how students respond to different classroom contexts (e.g., whole-class discussions, small-group work, and seatwork) and different subject areas.

Finally, a teacher or administrator may want to collect data on engagement as part of school improvement efforts. This might be accomplished through a teacher's classroom inquiry or as part of a professional learning community. Many school interventions focus on increasing engagement as a means to improving achievement and school completion rates. Collecting data on engagement can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of these school-wide reforms and can more effectively guide professional development efforts.

CONSISTENCY, DURATION, AND VARIATION IN ENGAGEMENT

There are a variety of questions that teachers might ask about the level of engagement in their classrooms, as the following three sections illustrate.

How consistent is student engagement in my classroom? An important question concerns the consistency of engagement across individual students. There are certain times of the day when students are more or less engaged in learning. For example, transitions between activities are a time when one often sees a drop in engagement. Furthermore, engagement varies across subject areas. Engagement tends to be higher in subject areas in which students think that they have high ability, find the content interesting, and/or see value in learning the content for their futures. Conversely, engagement tends to be lower in contexts where students are having academic difficulties, find the subject boring and unrelated to their lives, and/or do not see how learning more about the topic can help them in the future.

When and where are my students engaged? It is also important to consider the breadth, or variation, in engagement across different instructional settings. Prior research suggests that engagement varies across contextual factors (e.g., small-group work, large-group discussions, lecture, and seatwork) and characteristics of the task (e.g., complexity, challenge, time). For example,

engagement has been found to be lower in classrooms where students spend the majority of their time in teacher-directed and passive activities. In contrast, engagement has been found to be higher in classrooms where students perceive instruction as challenging and when they are in cooperative grouping activities as opposed to large-group discussions (Shernoff & Csikzentmihalyi, 2009). Teachers can use information on variations in engagement to make adjustments to instruction.

How extensively are my students engaged? Finally, the duration or length of engagement is important to assess. Some students show high engagement throughout a whole lesson, while other students' engagement varies over time as a result of situational factors. For example, some students like Rachel and Ryan who are showing signs of disengagement may show an increase in engagement when they are working with their friends or working on a more creative project. For these students, teachers should try to identify the triggers that can either help to increase or decrease their engagement.

STOP AND REFLECT

1. What is your engagement goal for your classroom? Do you want to increase the percentage of students engaged, the time students are engaged, or the contexts in which students are engaged?
2. In what activities are students typically most engaged in your classroom? Why do you think these activities are engaging? When does students' attention waver? What do you believe triggers the disengagement?
3. At what times of the day are students most engaged? Least engaged? How do you explain the differences in engagement throughout the school day?
4. Do you have students like Ryan and Rachel who are behaviorally disengaged in your classroom?
   a. When, where, and with whom does their problem behavior occur?
   b. How do you react to the problem behavior? How do others react?

METHODS FOR ASSESSING ENGAGEMENT

Self-report measures. There are a variety of ways to assess engagement in the classroom. The most common way is to ask students to fill out self-report surveys that contain a series of questions about their behavior, emotion, and cognition. Some of these questions assess general engagement at the school level, while others measure engagement in a specific class. In these surveys, students circle their responses to **Likert-response items.** This is a fixed-response format to measure the level of agreement/disagreement with a particular statement. These items are usually measured on a 1-to-4, 1-to-5, or a 1-to-7 response scale, with responses that range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" or "very true of me" to "not true of me." For younger students, scales can be a series of facial icons, such as ☺. If your students have easy access to technology, there are a variety of free resources for quickly and effectively surveying their perceptions (see Table 1.2). Scores can be either summed or averaged across items to form a scale or total score to describe the student on each dimension. **Scale scores** will more accurately represent behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement than any individual item.

Self-report methods are widely used because they are the most practical and easy to administer in classrooms. They can be given to large and diverse groups of students at a low cost, making it

Table 1.2 Common Survey Tools for Teachers

Product	**Web Address**	**Company**
Blackboard	www.blackboard.com	1997–2011 Blackboard, Inc.
Google Docs	www.google.com	Google
ProfilerPro	www.profilerpro.com	2003–2006 ALTEC
Quia	www.quia.com	2011 IXL Learning
Moodle	www.moodle.org	Moodle Trust
Survey Gizmo	www.surveygizmo.com	2005–2011 Widgix
Survey Monkey	www.surveymonkey.com	2009–2011 Survey Monkey
Zoomerang	www.zoomerang.com	2011 MarketTools, Inc.

possible to compare results across settings. Self-report methods are particularly useful for assessing students' perceptions of their emotional and cognitive engagement. These two dimensions of engagement are not directly observable (i.e., they are indirect measures of engagement) and need to be inferred from behavior or need to be reported by the student. One concern with self-report measures is that students may not answer honestly under some conditions, and, as a result, the self-report may not reflect actual behaviors, emotions, and cognitions. Another concern is that these measures often contain items that are worded too broadly (e.g., "I work hard in school") rather than worded to reflect engagement in particular tasks and situations.

Behavioral engagement can be measured with questions that ask students about their attention, effort, persistence, attendance, time spent on homework, preparation for class, participation in school-based activities, and risky behaviors (e.g., skipping school). **Emotional engagement** is measured with questions about emotions experienced in school, such as being happy or anxious. In addition, questions about students' level of interest, enjoyment, boredom, and perception of value of school, or how important school is, are also indicative of emotional engagement. Finally, **cognitive engagement** is measured with items that ask students about the use of deep-learning strategies, whether they like doing hard or challenging work, and whether they do more than is required either at school or at home (Fredricks et al., 2012). Table 1.3 includes some sample self-report items for behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. These items may be on a 1-to-4, 1-to-5, or 1-to-7 Likert scale (1 = "never"; 4, 5, or 7 = "all of the time"; 1 = "not at all true"; 4, 5, or 7 = "very true").

Teacher ratings scales. Another method for assessing engagement is to have teachers rate individual students on a series of items about their behavior, emotion, and cognition. This technique can be particularly useful with younger children who have limited literacy skills and more difficulty completing self-report measures. It is also very useful when data needs to be collected on specific students. Teachers tend to be especially good reporters of student behaviors. However, accurately assessing emotional and cognitive engagement can be more difficult, especially if students mask their negative emotions and demonstrate compliant behavior, as in the cases of Beatrice and Benjamin.

Table 1.3 Sample Engagement Self-Report Items

Behavioral Engagement
1. I pay attention in class.
2. I work hard to do my best in class.
3. When I am in class, I listen very carefully.
4. When I am in class, I just act like I am working. (reverse coded)
5. I complete my homework on time.
6. I get in trouble at school. (reverse coded)
7. If I can't understand my schoolwork, I just keep doing it until I do.
Emotional Engagement
1. I feel happy to be part of school.
2. I enjoy learning new things.
3. When we work on something in class, I feel discouraged. (reverse coded)
4. I am bored at school. (reverse coded)
5. Most of things we learn in school are useless. (reverse coded)
6. School is one of my favorite places to be.
7. Sometimes I get so interested in school, I don't want to stop.
Cognitive Engagement
1. When I read a book, I ask myself questions to make sure I understand.
2. I classify problems into categories before I begin to work on them.
3. I check my schoolwork for mistakes.
4. Before I begin studying, I think about what I need to learn.
5. I work several examples of the same problem so I can understand problems better.
6. When I finish working a problem, I check my answers to see if they are reasonable.

Table 1.4 presents the Engagement versus Disaffection with Learning teacher ratings scale that was designed to measure behavioral and emotional engagement in the classroom (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer 2009). This survey has separate scales for engagement and disaffection (i.e., disengagement) in the classroom. This measure was initially developed for upper elementary

Table 1.4 Engagement Versus Disaffection Learning Survey—Teacher Report

Behavioral Engagement
1. In my class, this student works as hard as he/she can.
2. When working on classwork in my class, this student appears involved.
3. When I explain new material, this student listens carefully.
4. In my class, this student does more than is required.
5. When my student doesn't do well, he/she works harder.
Emotional Engagement.
1. In my class, this student is enthusiastic.
2. In my class, this student appears happy.
3. When we start something new in class, this student is interested.
4. When working on classwork, this student seems to enjoy it.
5. For this student, learning seems to be fun.
Behavioral Disaffection (i.e., Behavioral Disengagement)
1. When we start something new in class, this student thinks about other things.
2. In my class, this student comes unprepared.
3. When faced with a difficult assignment, this student doesn't even try.
4. In my class, this student does just enough to get by.
5. When we start something new in class, this student doesn't pay attention.
Emotional Disaffection (i.e., Emotional Disengagement)
1. When we work on something in class, this student appears to be bored.
2. When working on classwork, this student seems worried.
3. In my class, this student seems unhappy.
4. In my class, this student is anxious.
5. In my class, this student appears to be depressed.
6. In my class, this student is angry.
7. When working on classwork, this student appears frustrated.
8. When I explain new material, this student doesn't seem to care.
9. When working on classwork in my class, this student seems uninterested.

Source: Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer (2009). Used with permission.

school classrooms but has since been used with older students. These questions can be applied to any subject area. All items are a 1-to-4 scale (1 = "not at all true"; 4 = "very true").

Few measures have been designed to measure engagement in specific subject areas. One exception is the Reading Engagement Index (REI; see Table 1.5), developed by Allan Wigfield and his colleagues at the University of Maryland (Wigfield et al., 2008). This teacher self-report measure was developed to assess behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement in reading in the elementary school years. All items are on a 4-point response scale from 1 ("not true") to 4 ("very true").

Observation measures. Another way to assess engagement is to directly observe individuals, targeted students, or the whole classroom. The majority of these observations measure aspects of behavioral engagement in terms of on-task behavior and participation. Table 1.6 presents some of these sample observational indicators. It is much more difficult to assess cognitive engagement with observational procedures because students may appear to be deeply thinking when in reality they are not. Peterson, Swing, Stark, and Swass (1984) found that some students that were judged to be on-task by observers reported in subsequent interviews that they were not thinking about the material while being observed. In contrast, many of the students who appeared to be off-task reported being very highly cognitively engaged. For example, a student who is looking out of the

Table 1.5 Reading Engagement Index

Item
1. This student often reads independently.
2. This student reads favorite topics and authors.
3. This student is easily distracted in self-selected readings. (reverse scored)
4. This student works hard in reading.
5. This student is a confident reader.
6. This student uses comprehensive strategies well.
7. This student enjoys thinking deeply about the content of texts.
8. This student enjoys discussing books with peers.

Source: Wigfield et al. (2008).

Table 1.6 Sample Observational Indicators of Engagement

Engagement
• On-task
• Listens attentively
• Asks and answers questions
• Focuses on learning with minimum distractions
• Persists with a task, even when difficult or long
• Expresses interest and enthusiasm
Disengagement
• Inattention
• Aggressive behavior
• Inappropriate movement
• Inappropriate vocalization

window and tapping his or her pencil while deeply thinking about the content would be incorrectly rated as lower in engagement using these observational techniques than would a student who is diligently taking notes but not deeply engaged in understanding the ideas.

Although it is more difficult to directly assess emotional and cognitive engagement through observational methods, some indicators of these dimensions can be inferred from behavioral indicators. For example, a teacher could measure student preferences for challenge by their choice of task and their level of persistence. Emotional engagement can be observed when a student expresses enthusiasm and excitement or makes positive comments about an activity to either the teacher or a peer.

There are several ways to record observational data. The most common is to use a **time-sampling procedure** in which the observer records whether a certain behavior occurs for an individual during a specific time interval, which usually ranges from fifteen to thirty seconds. Table 1.7 presents a sample recording form for a time-sampling observation that measures on-task/off-task behavior for an individual student. For each time interval, the observer records whether the target student is on- or off-task. It is also important to record the time, subject, and setting to see if

there are certain contexts or times of the day when the student tends to be more or less engaged.

Time-sampling procedures can also be used to assess the level of engagement at the classroom level. During each interval, the observer scans the classroom to count the number of students who are engaged and disengaged. This information can be used to create a percentage of students engaged during each interval and an average percentage of students who look disengaged. Another way to record observational data is to do an **event count** in which the observer records the number of times a predetermined behavior, such as inappropriate behavior, happens in a particular context. This data can be collected at either the individual or class level.

Teachers can also use a checklist or an inventory of behaviors to collect data on behavioral engagement. For each indicator, the observer checks whether the behavior occurred. Finally, observers can use a predetermined rating scale to record the level of engagement. The observer assesses the quality of a student's engagement either on individual indicators or on an overall measure of student engagement (1 = "not at all engaged";

Table 1.7 Sample Observational Form

Child Observed ____________________ Time of Observation ____________________

Date ______________________________ Academic Subject ______________________

Observer ___________________________ Setting ________________________________

Moment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
On-Task										
Off-Task										

Moment	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
On-Task										
Off-Task										

Total Intervals Observed ____________________ % On-Task ____________________

% Off-Task ____________________

Notes: ____

5 = "deeply engaged"). The observer assigns a value to each indicator along the continuum based on either direct observations or past documented observations.

Observations can either be conducted by a teacher or an outside observer such as an administrator, school psychologist, or a well-trained aide. However, observing your own students may be the most effective. Because teachers see students on a daily basis, they are better able to assess whether a behavior is typical or atypical for that particular individual. In addition, students may change their behavior if they know they are being observed by an outsider. It is also more efficient for a teacher to collect observational data for behaviors that occur at low rates or for behaviors that are unpredictable. On the other hand, conducting observations at the individual level can be difficult to do while teaching a lesson to a larger group of students.

Arrangements to support teachers who are asked to administer observational measures should be considered. Learning to reliably record data requires investments in training time, especially with more detailed observational measures. These trade-offs have to be weighed when deciding on the most appropriate observer. It is also important for the observer to collect enough data and to collect data across various academic settings (e.g., small groups, larger groups, individual seatwork) in order to get an accurate picture of engagement. For indicators of low behavioral frequency, the observer should try to identify the antecedents and consequences that can either prompt or reinforce behavior. This information can be used to determine both patterns and triggers of engagement and disengagement.

In the following **Engagement in Practice** section, Melissa discusses teachers' use of peer observations at her school.

ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE: PEER OBSERVATIONS

Melissa: For several years, teachers at our school have conducted peer visitations. Twice a year each teacher is visited and observed and also visits and observes a colleague. The two colleagues discuss specific goals they have and how they would like the observation

to be followed. The focus may be on student behavior or teacher responsiveness. The educators conduct a follow-up discussion to share what they observed. These visits are nonevaluative. This is an informal way for colleagues to learn from one another and another means of data collection. Intentionally planning for visitation time and the follow-up discourse allows teachers to tap the resources of their peers. In turn, this may build the strength and capacity of the overall faculty.

Walkthroughs

Another method to collect data on student engagement is to do a **walkthrough**, which is defined as a brief, unscheduled, structured nonevaluative classroom observation. A walkthrough is often called a **learning walk**. These walkthroughs are usually done by an administrator or an outside evaluator and are sometimes collected as part of school improvement efforts. During a walkthrough, the observer writes a short narrative or fills out a short checklist that contains a variety of indicators of instruction and student engagement. A walkthrough is usually coupled with a process in which the observed teacher is given feedback about what was observed and how he or she can improve instruction.

A few observational systems have been developed to assist observers in collecting, managing, and recording data from walkthroughs. These include iObservation (www.iobservation.com), iWalkthrough (www.iwalkthrough.org), and Power Walkthrough (www.mcrel.org/products-and-services/featured-products-and-services/power-walkthrough). Table 1.8 provides some sample indicators of engagement that have been included in walkthroughs. These indicators include aspects of student behavior, emotion, and cognition; the quality of instruction; and the rigor of curriculum.

Early Warning Indicators

Finally, it is possible to use data already collected in school records to identify students who are showing signs of disengagement and are at risk of dropping out of school. A case study can be compiled using this data. Previous research has identified early

Table 1.8 Sample Indicators of Walkthroughs of Student Engagement

• Student is consistently on-task.
• Student is paying attention to the teacher and other students.
• Transitions between lessons are quick and efficient with minimum "downtime."
• Students exhibit interest and excitement.
• Teacher uses a variety of strategies to keep students engaged in lesson.
• Students are engaged in higher-order learning.
• Students are engaged in active conversations that construct learning.

warning indicators that signal higher odds that the student will get in trouble, struggle academically, and ultimately drop out of school (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver 2007). The predictive power of these early warning indicators is being used by many schools, districts, and organizations to guide prevention efforts. Examples of early warning indicators include:

- Tardiness
- Skipping school
- Absenteeism
- Behavioral referrals
- Detention
- Suspensions
- Failing classes
- Being behind in credits

In the following Engagement in Practice section, Ellen describes how early warning signs are being used to identify students at risk for disengagement at her school.

ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE: DATA WALL

Ellen: In the ninth grade at Norwich Free Academy, students are assigned a multidisciplinary team, consisting of four teachers, a guidance counselor, a special education teacher, and a school

counselor, that is responsible for ensuring students have a successful ninth-grade experience. Members of the multidisciplinary team create a "data wall" or Google Doc spreadsheet to improve communication and to track data on students' behavioral engagement and achievement. This document is used to identify early warning indicators, to document interventions, and to track student improvement. Examples of early warning indicators on the "data wall" include achievement test scores, absenteeism, disciplinary referrals, and lost credits. This information is used to design intervention plans and to advocate for additional services in planning and placement team meetings.

Once information is collected on student behavior, it is important to have a mechanism to discuss this information and develop an intervention plan. In the next section, Melissa describes the importance of having a common meeting time to discuss students' academics and behavior.

ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE: COMMON TEAM MEETING TIME

Melissa: One way we support collaboration and discuss student engagement and performance at my school is to have common team meeting times. When schedules are created each year, we assure that grade-level teams and cross-grade levels have time to meet each week. While some of this is for planning, it is also used to discuss students' academics and behavior. Sometimes the student's previous teacher can offer insight, or my colleagues may offer ideas that have worked with students in their classrooms. Specialists such as the school social worker, instructional coaches, or special education teachers are invited to offer input. The routine frequency of these meetings is invaluable. Interventions can be collaboratively planned, implemented, and discussed as soon as seven days later. Common meeting times may seem like a simple strategy, yet intentionally scheduling time for colleagues to draw upon one another's expertise is empowering for teachers and beneficial for other students.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter began with the argument that engagement needs to be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that includes behavior, emotion, and cognition. In addition to knowing how students act, it is critical to know how students feel about school and how they think. Six hypothetical cases were presented to illustrate how students vary on these different dimensions. The goal of this chapter was to counter the assumption that engagement is the same as compliance or on-task behavior. Students who are behaviorally engaged may look to the outside observer like they are fully engaged. However, these students may not be emotionally invested or using the cognitive strategies that are necessary for deep learning.

Next, the chapter outlined different reasons to assess engagement in the classroom, which include identifying students at risk for academic failure, monitoring how students are responding to the classroom environment, and evaluating school improvement efforts. Finally, different methods for assessing engagement in the classroom were reviewed, including student self-reports, teacher ratings, observational measures, walkthroughs, and collecting data on early warning signs. For each of these techniques, sample items that have been used in prior research were shared. The chapter concludes with *Text-to-Practice Exercises* to help educators apply these ideas to real classroom situations, a review of key terms and concepts, and a list of books and Web sites educators can consult for additional information.

TEXT-TO-PRACTICE EXERCISES

TPE 1.1: **Observe engagement:** Choose two students to observe across different contexts and subject areas. Note commonalities and differences in engagement. Document any patterns both within and across the students. Be sure to consider how individual and contextual factors impact engagement.

TPE 1.2: **Ask students about their engagement:** Ask a student about their engagement by using items from the self-report surveys listed in Table 1.2. Ask the child to explain his or her responses. Note that student feedback can be gathered over the course of several weeks.

TPE 1.3: **Identify disengagement in the classroom:** Identify students who are showing signs of disengagement in the classroom either by using observational techniques or by collecting data on early warning signs. How are these students' behaviors, emotions, and cognitions similar and different? What classroom practices and social experiences may be contributing to their disengagement?

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Behavioral engagement: Level of participation, task involvement, and prosocial conduct in school activities.

Cognitive engagement: Refers to the investment, thoughtfulness, and the willingness to exert the mental effort necessary in an activity.

Deep-learning strategies: Strategies that help students to deeply understand material. These strategies include finding connections, linking information to prior knowledge, and actively monitoring comprehension.

Emotional engagement: Includes positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school. It reflects an individual's sense of belonging and sense of identification with school.

Early warning indicators: Behavioral and academic indicators that have been identified that put individuals at higher risk for academic failure and dropping out of school.

Event count: An observer records the number of times a predetermined behavior occurs.

Likert-response items: Specified response formats (such as "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" or "very true of me" to "not very true of me").

Observations: A method of collecting data in which the behavior of individuals, targeted students, or classrooms is directly observed.

Scale scores: A set of items or questions intended to measure the same construct. A scale score is created by averaging or summing the individual items.

Shallow-learning strategies: Strategies that help students to memorize or reproduce knowledge with little attempt at deeper analysis or understanding.

Student self-report: Method for collecting data in which students respond to a series of Likert-response items.

Teacher ratings: Scores assigned to students based on teacher responses to a set of items using a specified response format (e.g., "very true of student" to "not very true of student").

Time-sampling procedures: Predetermined units of time (time sample) are used to guide an observer's attention throughout the observation period.

Walkthroughs/learning walks: Frequent, short, and unscheduled observations of student behavior and instruction. An important dimension of walkthroughs is providing teachers feedback and opportunities for reflection.

RESEARCH-BASED RESOURCES

Books and Reports to Read

Fredricks, J., & McColskey, W., with Meli, J., Mordica, J., Montrosse, B., & Mooney, K. (2010). *Measuring student engagement in upper elementary through high school: A description of 21 instruments.* Issues & Answers Report, REL 2010–No. 098. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=268.

Shapiro, E. S. (2004). *Academic skills problems: Direct assessment and intervention* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Web Sites to Visit

1. **Direct Behavioral Ratings** (www.directbehaviorratings.org). This site provides resources for doing observations of behaviors in the classroom. Sample observations forms and information on how to plot data graphically and evaluate student behavior are presented.

2. **High School Survey of Student Engagement** (www.Indiana.edu/~ceep/hssse). This site provides information on the High School Survey of Student Engagement, a comprehensive national survey of student engagement and school climate taken by more than 400,000 secondary students. Information for schools interested in participating in the survey is available.
3. **Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)** (www.teachstone.org). This site provides information on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a classroom observation tool developed by Robert Pianta at the University of Virginia.
4. **iObservation** (www.iobservation.com). iObservation is a data collection and management system for collecting data from classroom walkthroughs, teacher observations, and self-assessments. Sample observational forms are available on the site.
5. **iWalkthrough.org** (www.iwalkthrough.org). This site provides a set of resources developed by the Great School Partnership for conducting classroom observations and walkthroughs.
6. **Power Walkthrough** (www.mcrel.org/products-and-services/featured-products-and-services/power-walkthrough). This site provides information on the Power Walkthrough software, a tool for collecting data on instructional practices and the level of school engagement.