

M7-S5: Leading for Student Engagement

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| CLH | <p>Hello, Gina and hello, listeners. Welcome to Session 5 in Module 7 of the TALE Academy, Leading for Student Engagement. Let’s jump in with a story.</p> <p><i>The New York Times</i> published a series of reports about what “back to school” looked like for schools in fall 2021 and fall 2022. Brooklyn Science and Engineering Academy, known as BSEA, a middle school in the East Flatbush area of Brooklyn, was one of the schools profiled. In 2021, BSEA social studies teacher Robert Aronowitz set up a <i>Star Wars</i>-themed “chill zone” in his classroom.</p> <p>The chill zone was meant to provide students experiencing sensory overload after a year of emergency remote teaching, or ERT, with a quiet place to relax and re-center.</p> |
| GK | <p>Meanwhile, BSEA Principal Angela DeFilippis focused on addressing students' transition from a schoolwide perspective. She highlighted the need for social-emotional support: “There were a lot of kids who thrived in the home-school environment, but some kids struggled. So we have three guidance counselors on staff and have a lot of support waiting for them.”</p> |
| CLH | <p>One year later, the reporter visited science teacher Michelle Jennings’s classroom where students engaged in a class “circle”. They throw a ball to one another that has prompts on it from which they can choose, such as “What’s the nicest thing someone’s ever done for you?” Then they each select a color representing their current feeling or a significant memory. Later, students write down five songs that have meaning to them. The “circle” part of the class is that they share their responses with one another as a way to help them better understand one another. This, in turn, helps students “make connections with one another,” explains Principal DeFilippis. Raina Mapp, one of the counselors who helped students through their return the prior year, remarks on the progress they have made: “They know how to school again.”</p> |
| GK | <p>That’s awesome. The story of BSEA has been repeated thousands of times across New York State over the past two years. School leaders, teachers, guidance counselors, and staff have come together with the shared mission of helping students learn “how to school again.” Central to this work, as BSEA illustrates, is implementing equity-centered, trauma-informed student engagement practices.</p> |
| CLH | <p>In this session, we will first explore a key shift required for such work: from student engagement approaches based on students demonstrating engagement to ones that focus on students experiencing engagement. This shift requires teachers to be empowered as designers of their learning environments, which school leaders can support in a number of ways.</p> |
| GK | <p>When the New York State Education Department surveyed teachers about the support they need for remote and hybrid teaching, the number one topic was student engagement. Specifically, teachers were focused on increasing student motivation</p> |

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| | and active participation. In Module 1, Session 4, we explored student engagement across learning environments by first shifting our understanding of student engagement from something students demonstrate to something students experience. |
| CLH | A traditional understanding of student engagement focuses on students demonstrating engagement across three domains: behavior, such as compliance and participation; affect, such as interest and belonging; and cognition, such as effort and self-regulation. A trauma-informed, equity-centered understanding of student engagement focuses on students experiencing engagement across three domains: attraction, including connection to the learning; persistence, including overcoming obstacles; and delight, including valuing the process of learning. |
| GK | This shift allows teachers to rethink their frustrations during emergency remote teaching. For example, rather than debating whether or not students should be required to turn on their cameras during synchronous video conferencing as a way of demonstrating engagement, teachers can offer students choices for live engagement that include turning on their camera, posting in the chat, responding to flash polls, or handing in daily reflections. Teachers can spend time being creative and encouraging student involvement in determining engagement. For example, perhaps the student who doodles can annotate their doodles with key takeaways from instruction, take a photo of the document, and upload the file to Google Classroom. |
| CLH | Check out Module 1, Session 4 to explore more about student engagement across learning environments. Throughout the TALE Academy, we have put forward engagement strategies. Rather than run through them, we're linking the reading option for this session. In it, you will find a chart that lays out where you can locate specific engagement strategies by topic area. |
| GK | Like English language learners, students with disabilities, and all that. |
| CLH | Exactly. Going back to Module 1, Session 4, we provided teachers with a list of 10 design strategies they can use to foster engagement to develop persistence, attraction, and delight among students. We drew the design strategies from Phil Schlechty's Working on the Work Framework, which builds on an experience-based understanding of student engagement. |
| GK | Schlechty called these the 10 design qualities. Let's run through these ten strategies. Your job is to listen as a school leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select appropriate content for your learners, such as standards-aligned and differentiated. 2. Organize teaching and learning with a clear approach, such as problem-solving, discovery, etc. |

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| | <p>3. Clarify and build consensus around expectations for student performance, covering the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the process and products of learning.</p> <p>4. Protect students from adverse consequences for initial failures, such as allowing for revisions.</p> <p>5. Focus on the product by structuring tasks and activities so that what students learn is linked to a product, performance, or exhibition to which the student attaches personal value.</p> <p>6. Affirm performance by designing tasks and activities so that the performance of students is made visible to people who are significant in their lives.</p> <p>7. Foster affiliation by designing tasks so that students are provided the opportunity to work with peers as well as parents, outside experts, and other adults, including the teacher.</p> <p>8. Encourage novelty and variety by providing students the opportunity to employ a wide range of media and approaches when engaged in learning activities.</p> <p>9. Offer choice by designing tasks and activities so that students can exercise choice in terms of what or how they learn.</p> <p>10. Make learning authentic by linking learning tasks to things that are of real interest or importance to the student.</p> |
| CLH | <p>In order for teachers to do this work, school leaders must support them as designers of learning environments. This does not mean that teachers have free rein over every aspect of curriculum and instruction. Instead, they are empowered to use and build their expert knowledge and skills related to pedagogies.</p> |
| GK | <p>By definition, pedagogy is the “art, science, or profession of teaching.” Alejandro Paniagua and David Istance, authors of <i>Teachers as Designers of Learning Environments</i>, put it this way:</p> <p>“Focusing on pedagogies shifts the perception of teachers from technicians who strive to attain the education goals set by the curriculum to experts in the art and science of teaching.”</p> |
| CLH | <p>In the post-pandemic era where teacher burnout is at an all-time high and respect for the profession has declined among the public, treating teachers as the professionals and experts that they are is critical for successful school leadership.</p> <p>So how can school leaders establish, develop, and sustain such a culture of teachers-as-designers?</p> |
| GK | <p>Schlechty suggests that leaders create two “design teams” at the school level:</p> |

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| | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A work design team that focuses on creating engaging work for students and conducting action research on carrying out this work and2. A building-level design team that focuses on an established shared vision of student engagement among staff and faculty, as well as systems that can support that vision. Schlechty emphasized the role of school leaders in creating the conditions for teachers to design engaging work. (He also suggests a district-level design team.) |
| CLH | Whether you use Schlechty’s approach or another strategic planning and implementation approach, supporting teachers-as-designers is critical for making the shift to trauma-informed, equity-centered (and experience-based) models of student engagement. |
| GK | The period of ERT put a blazing spotlight on how out-of-date our understanding and measures of student engagement were prior to the pandemic. In this session, we explore ways of understanding, measuring, and building student engagement that are trauma-informed and equity-centered. We encourage you to reflect on how strategies for teaching across learning environments can actually make this shift to more aligned forms of engagement easier. Educational apps provide a unique and nimble opportunity to engage students in culturally responsive and sustaining ways. |
| CLH | While we could say that it’s never been easier to engage students, the reality is that the shifts we have identified here and in the earlier modules take time, training, planning, and policy, as well as resource support. That’s where you come in, school leader! |
| GK | Now it’s your turn! After exploring resources on student engagement that pique your interest via the choice board, you will consider how you might approach implementing Schlechty’s design team framework to support teachers as “designers of learning environments” toward greater student engagement. The goal of the TALE Academy is to help teachers rethink education so that everyone—students, families, educators, school leaders, and communities—all have the opportunity to succeed. You’ve just added another tool to your toolbox when you foster student engagement across learning environments. Thanks for listening! |