

The Engagement Learning Walk

A one-page observation for senior leaders · 5–10 minute drop-in · tells engagement apart from compliance

CLASS / YEAR	SUBJECT	DATE	OBSERVER
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Learning task observed:

 Staying Engaged One of the eight learning behaviours in the Structural Learning Framework. Learners earn the badge in the app.	How many learners are actually thinking? A few ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ All	Watch these four learners, not the room ☐ One who never volunteers ☐ One who always does ☐ One working quietly ☐ One you would worry about
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STRAND: WHAT TO LOOK FOR	NOT SEEN	EMERGING	EMBEDDED	EVIDENCE SEEN
Participation <i>who is accountable for an answer</i> - The teacher says how learners will answer before asking - More than the volunteers are held to account - A learner who has not spoken is still visibly working	☐	☐	☐	
Thinking time <i>is the silence protected</i> - Three seconds or more pass after a question is asked - A second pause follows the answer, before anyone responds - Learners rehearse a thought, in writing or in pairs, before the class talk	☐	☐	☐	
Effort on the idea <i>not effort on finishing</i> - Talk is about the subject, not about the instructions - A learner returns to a stuck point rather than moving past it - Errors are opened up and examined, not quietly corrected	☐	☐	☐	
Initiation <i>does anything start with the learner</i> - A learner asks a question nobody prompted - A learner offers an idea, a link or an example unasked - A learner chooses a strategy without being told which to use	☐	☐	☐	

The compliance trap: these look like engagement and are not

☐ Quiet ☐ Busy ☐ Fast hands from the same few ☐ Neat work, finished early ☐ Enjoying the activity, not the idea

Ask a learner, not the teacher

☐ "What are you working out?" ☐ "What made you choose that?" ☐ "What is the hard bit?"

One thing to celebrate

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One coaching question to leave

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Follow-up / re-visit

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Engagement or Compliance?

A quick self-check for teachers · six dimensions · score out of 24

A compliant class is quiet, busy and finishing on time. An engaged class is doing something harder: thinking about the idea itself. The two look almost identical from the doorway. Score each dimension **0–4** against your own practice, add the six for a total out of 24, then read your band. Honest beats generous: this is a compass, not a grade.

1 I name the means of participation first

Learners know how they will answer, by writing it, telling a partner or all showing me, before I ask the question.

0 1 2 3 4

2 I leave the pause, twice

Three seconds after the question, and again after the answer, before I or anyone else fills it.

0 1 2 3 4

3 Everyone rehearses before anyone speaks

Every learner has committed to a thought, on paper or to a partner, before the class discussion starts.

0 1 2 3 4

4 I know who has not thought, not just who has not spoken

I can name the learners whose thinking I have not seen today, and I go and look.

0 1 2 3 4

5 Errors get examined in the open

A wrong answer is worked on in front of the class, rather than tidied away and replaced with a right one.

0 1 2 3 4

6 Something starts with the learners

In most lessons, someone asks, chooses or returns to something without me prompting it.

0 1 2 3 4

Your total

/ 24

0–8 Compliant

The room behaves, and a few learners carry the thinking. Next step: name how learners will answer before you ask, for one lesson.

9–16 Participating

Most learners are in it. Next step: add the second pause, after the answer. It is the one almost nobody leaves.

17–24 Engaged

Learners are working on the idea, not the task. Next step: hand over the questions, and see what they start.

Why this sheet asks you to talk to a learner

Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) found that **procedural** engagement, a learner following the classroom's rules and routines, has only a weak link to achievement. **Substantive** engagement, sustained commitment to the content itself, has a strong positive effect. Peterson and colleagues (1984) found that what learners said they were attending to predicted their learning better than an observer's judgement of time on task. Compliance is the easier thing to see, and the wrong thing to count.