3RD

ARC ThoughtMeet

A FOCUS ON WELL-BEING AND BROAD EXCELLENCE

DENNIS SHIRLEY, PHD

"What does engagement mean to you?"

1. Historically, engagement has had two meanings: promise of marriage as well as a battle (military). Therefore, engagement has more than one facet.
2. Dennis's new book (with Andy Hargreaves) outlines 7 different pathways to engagement, such as learning, empowerment, and participation.
3. Engagement entails much more than relevance, technology and fun in educational contexts.
4. To attain broad excellence for student well-being, system leaders must figure out how to engage students.
5. Engagement can be difficult to ascertain. However, psychological research indicates that engagement can be examined via three different dimensions: behaviour, emotions and cognition.
6. Education does not need to be fun to be engaging.
7. Technology does not need to be used at all times for learning to be engaging.
8. Education can be engaging through relevance, technology, outdoor adventure trips, dance and movement, negative emotions, and beyond.
9. It is important to give professionals a structured way of sharing their voice.
10. We should not rely on archaic systems of labelling students.
11. Educators are implicated in initiatives that do not contribute to students' well-being and broad excellence.

What does engagement mean to you?

48 responses so far

Mastery investment
fully occupied Enthusiasm Fun Involvment
Communicating Dialogue Connecting
Hooked Active listening co operation Involvement
Energy interest connection Collaboration
curiousity Activity Flow
Motivation participation
Shared focus
Interested active learning Active Attention From beginning
Traction Commitment Trust brain activity involved
Relationships Excitement Focus Happiness
Intellectually involved Real involvement
present-in-the-moment

ARC delegate comments

What struck you from this presentation and what issues does it raise for your system?

- Engagement not only means teacher engagement within the system, but also student engagement.

- Defining what system leaders mean by engagement is necessary to surpass a superficial understanding/practice.

- It is imperative to recognize that there are multiple ways of engaging students and leaders alike.

- While digital learning is interesting, it cannot replace the student-teacher relationship and benefits of in-class learning.

PASI SAHLBERG, PHD

Well-being and Broad Excellence: Insights from Australia

1. There is a lot of data collecting happening in education, especially during Covid-19.
2. Young people are worried about equity and discrimination, as well as Covid-19 and Mental health.
3. In Australia, data was collected among 2000 teachers and school principals about the changes they have seen in education just before Covid-19.

Some of the changes they see are as follows:

- 90% of respondents indicate that the number of students coming to school with various emotional, social, behaviour and cognitive challenges has increased. For example, there is an increasing number of students suffering from anxiety.
- 84% of respondents believe that digital technology is a growing distraction in schools.
- 78% of school principals and teachers indicate that students have more difficulty focusing on educational tasks than before.
- The ongoing study's conclusion so far: Student readiness to learn has declined. Therefore, school leaders need to examine the underlying factors contributing to this.
- These results are not specific to Australia; in fact, Alberta (CA) has had almost the same results. The Growing up Digital Australia project is actually based on the Growing up Digital Alberta project.
- Banning technology is not the solution because evidence shows that it does not work. Teachers and learners should be co-designing technology use with an aim toward engagement.

ARC delegate comments

How have the students changed in your primary and secondary schools and classrooms during the past 5 years?

- Students are more stressed and anxious than ever.

- Students use their voice more and more to express their questions, comments, concerns or suggestions.

- Students are using more technology for learning. Students are more engaged in global issues.

Given these changes shown in research in Australia and Canada reflect a more global situation, what do you think we should do?

- Not only should system leaders ensure student engagement, but they should also focus on parent and community engagement.

- Co-designing schools as well as curriculum with students is a way of increasing engagement.

- Focusing on mental health, well-being and equity is a requirement in order to end negative discrimination.

- Reframing education in order to meet student needs rather than system standards is to be seriously considered.
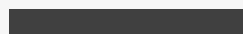
PAK TEE NG. PHD

"Is it not a joy to learn?" (Confucius)

1. Excellence and well-being are often discussed as two separate entities, yet they should actually go hand in hand if we truly wish to find joy and significance in what we do.
2. We should not limit the evaluation of excellence to quantitative data nor should we only be examining the well-being of disadvantaged students by reducing stress.
3. Good education systems include different pathways to learning for students with an aim to instill motivation from within. In such systems, students can therefore find their own abilities, meaning, purpose and successes.
4. Like wall-climbing, learning should be difficult, yet enjoyable and it should also offer the hope of achievement through hard work.
5. Better pedagogy entails less teaching and more learning. This is achieved through teachers, students and educational leaders finding significance in doing better.
6. Joy is a deeper sentiment than fun: While we can have a lot of fun, we may not necessarily experience joy. Learners climb, teachers and system leaders must climb their own walls in order to lead better. Consider how we can instil joy not just fun.

ARC delegate comments

When people are climbing, they are tired. They are sweaty. But they are happy. They have well-being. Their being is well. Why?

- People who are working towards achieving a goal are happy and well since they will be proud of accomplishing it.

- People who are in a mental state in which they are fully immersed in performing an activity (flow state) feel energized, focused, full of involvement and enjoyment, even if it is hard work.

What struck you about this presentation and what issues does it raise for your system?

- System leaders need to examine whether teachers are climbing when students should be, rather than mentoring them. In other words, who is doing the bulk of the work?

- We need to remember that there are many paths to success as well as many paths to joy ,which begs the question as to whether or not our school systems are flexible enough to allow for these multiple paths.

- It is important to remember that one can feel joy while living through a challenge. As such, student well-being includes struggle and overcoming challenges their own way.
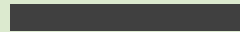
Panel Discussion

- What are the issues in education in your country at the moment?
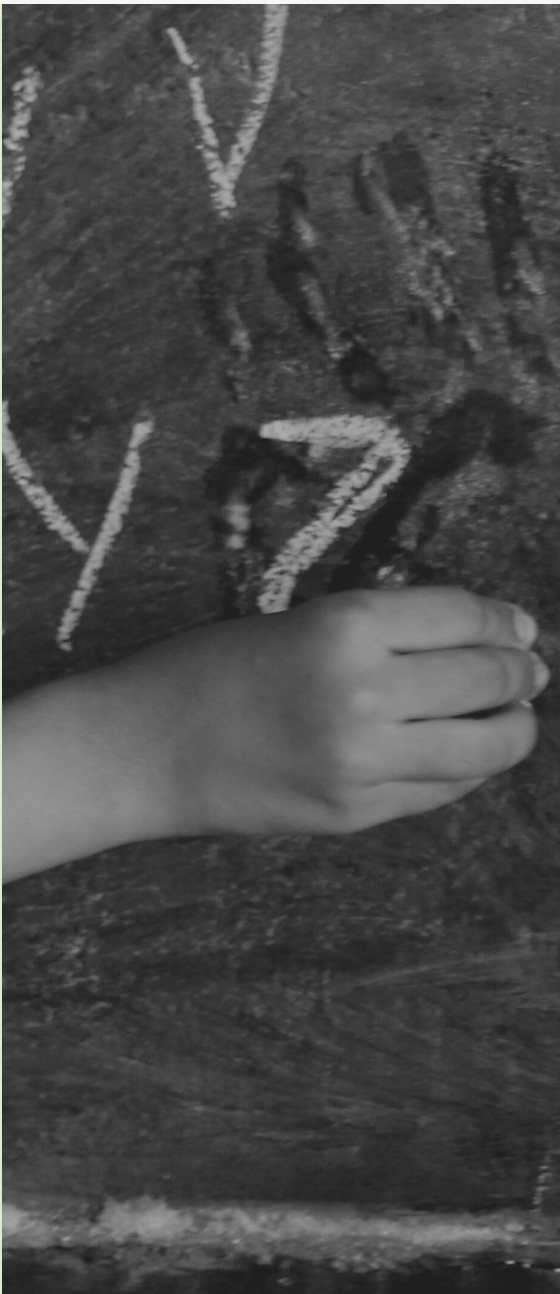
Dennis Shirley:

Recent changes in the US are providing more hope and positivity. It is important to encourage these sentiments.

Pasi Sahlberg:

Teachers and school principals in Australia are more than tired, they are exhausted. System leaders cannot ask them to do more unless something is taken away.

Pak Tee Ng:

There is balance to be found. In Singapore, system leaders must emphasize creativity while also promoting the concept of working together for the greater good. This has become clearer as a result of COVID-19.

Panel Discussion

- How do we keep positive leaders in schools during the post-pandemic when there's so much stress and pressure on them?

Dennis Shirley:

It is important to have a national initiative around physical health and wellbeing above all. In the USA, this should be the focus instead of increasing the number of psychologists in schools.

There needs to be some critical thinking about what full engagement represents. The opposite of engagement is not necessarily disengagement. In fact, there are various forms of engagement. Students, teachers and school leaders need to explore what forms engagement takes for them personally.

Pasi Sahlberg:

It is important to reduce administrative bureaucracy to an absolute minimum so that effective leaders stay in schools. Teachers are energized by working with students and each other and this should be their focus.

There is an equity issue at hand. More students are being left behind due to the effects of COVID-19. For example, there is a major technology gap. As such, different government responses are required. However, currently we have seen traditional responses: funding, human resources, extra math and reading, tutoring, etc. These will not address some of the underlying issues. Also, there has been little consideration for rural and remote school contexts, which needs to be a priority.
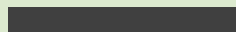
Pak Tee Ng:

It's important to focus on showing our appreciation to teachers and school principals alongside health professionals such as nurses and doctors at a national level. This helps to counteract the negative messages on social media, for example.

Panel Discussion

- How can we convince people that schools with less testing is driving excellence?

Dennis Shirley:

There needs to be a greater emphasis on formative assessment through the use of technology. For example, film, writing commentaries, managing an after school activity.

Pasi Sahlberg:
We need to shift to smarter ways of assessing students rather than less standardized testing.

Pak Tee Ng:
There is a difference between knowing and finding a number to know. When we know something do we always need to find quantifiable ways of measuring it? In other words, If I do love you, and you do love me, do we need to keep measuring to know that ?

Final Thoughts

ARC President, Andy Hargreaves

Many systems are in the midst of curriculum reform. Over the last five years, there has been a large shift in education: we have gone from literacy, numeracy, work skills and STEM to mental health, anti-discrimination and equity.

Covid-19 has made it more obvious that Canada's economy is not diversified enough. For example, we do not have a developed pharmaceutical industry which may in turn have an effect on how quickly we have access to a vaccine.

As such, systems need to be stronger on vision, support and on passion. Some systems do this, but not all. Therefore, it is important to engage with politicians that can help pursue such goals in education.

Such a vision entails decentralizing resource allocation rather than inventing special projects.