New Jersey Public Middle School Grades 7-8 Non-Tenured Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Strategies that Impact Student Engagement

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NEW JERSEY PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADES 7-8 NON-TENURED TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT IMPACT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education
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2007
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ABSTRACT

NEW JERSEY PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADES 7-8 NON-TENURED TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT IMPACT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Mindful of the prospect that social inquiry is an avenue for change, the researcher conducted a qualitative study to determine what instructional strategies are perceived by middle school grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers as having the greatest positive impact on student engagement. Do teacher-student rapport and the connection to social-emotional learning have the greatest positive impact, or does effective classroom management, authentic learning experiences, or student-centered instruction have the greatest positive impact? The study also highlighted participant perceptions of classroom observation feedback regarding student engagement.

Twenty-seven grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers from one suburban New Jersey middle school participated in 3 focus group sessions and addressed 8 research questions embedded in the focus group interview guide. The academic teaming structure and the need to educate the whole child were threaded throughout National Middle School Association and Carnegie Task Force literature as well as the focus group research findings. Aside from this backdrop, the heightened emotionality and egocentrism of the pre-adolescent learner previously identified by field researchers accounted for the participant perceptions of student engagement linked mostly to affective and behavioral constructs rather than the cognitive, psychological, and sociocultural.

Although each instructional strategy was perceived to have a positive impact on student engagement, teacher-student rapport and its connection to social-emotional learning was considered to be the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on
student engagement with respect to participant response frequencies. Authentic learning experiences and student-centered instruction followed. As indicated in prior student engagement inquiries and investigations, teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction can have a positive impact on student engagement. True causality, however, did not solely emerge in this study or in the reviewed research. Slight cross-content variation surfaced as a possible complication in this regard. Further, one participant captured the interrelationship among the strategies when she collectively referred to them as a “stew.” Amidst the findings of the study and the work of experts such as Danielson, teacher evaluation was identified as effective and valuable when serving as a tool for growth and when consisting of ongoing dialogue between an administrator and a teacher.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The selection of my committee was a thoughtful decision. From the moment he introduced the concept of “replay the childhood tapes” in a summer leadership course to his more recent guidance, Dr. Colella has required me to consider more divergent options for my graduate work and professional endeavors. The most inviting and rewarding component of this guidance has been his scaffolding. It was very important to me that I be permitted to be as independent as possible during this experience, and Dr. Colella not only recognized this need but embraced it. That is why I now feel that this is truly mine.

Within this independence, I have come to realize how important continuous intellectual stimulation is. This came by way of Dr. Walker. I admire her impressive intellect relative to research methodology and design. She is also someone who always manages to stay focused on that which is most important, teaching and learning. It is Dr. Walker who I must thank for keeping me focused on these processes throughout the compilation of my dissertation. Dr. Walker has reminded me why I do what I do in terms of the field.

Supportive and insightful, I am grateful to Dr. Strobert for her contribution to my writer’s voice. To be mindful of the audience as purpose is articulated was an essential prompt offered by her. Consequently, the clarity of my dissertation greatly improved, particularly in the earlier chapters. Having discussed this experience and other opportunities for professional growth with Dr. Strobert, I found that she is genuinely interested in my pursuits.
I very much appreciate Dr. Hynes’s contributions as one of my committee members as well. Always accommodating and flexible, his role enhanced the seamlessness of this experience for me. It is no wonder he is so well-regarded at the University.

In the course of this experience, I have come to know that I am the best version of myself when my father’s drive and intellect merge with my mother’s kindness and understanding of the human spirit. I must acknowledge my mother for she still nurtures me while maintaining extremely high expectations. Her insights are extraordinary and are always in my best interest. I am listening to her more now, which is something I wished I did in my earlier years. I cannot thank her enough for all the “little extras” she has offered along the way. She has been the glue for this experience.
DEDICATION

I have known that I would dedicate my dissertation to Judy Lasher for nearly two years now. Judy is a master teacher who has inspired every thought, every word, and every revision of this personal journey without even realizing how much she has taught me in our time together. Neither word nor deed will ever adequately express my eternal gratitude to Judy for giving me the gift of understanding the importance of organizational processes. This gift has allowed me to go, what Carol Lesniewski describes, as beyond myself. During that process, I became more resilient, more compassionate, and better educated. I now have a better sense of self, an even greater capacity for leadership, and a renewed soul. Not since my early childhood years have I developed such an intense amount of wisdom in such a short period of time. They say that when the student is ready the teacher appears. Judy is that teacher for me, and as such, I will always hold her in the highest regard for she has taught me the value of situational awareness and its relationship to effective decision making. My only regret is not having more time with Judy, although I suspect that most children and adults feel that way about their favorite teacher.
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Chapter I
Introduction

Background

Goodlad (1998) believed, "Schools for all our children and all our seasons must await the arrival of narratives designed to provide—if not the favoring circumstances of birth—the favoring circumstances of richly textured educational environments governed by caring, competent, and professional teachers" (p. 679). This notion encapsulated the framework for this study. To define a richly textured educational environment designed by the non-tenured teacher for the pre-adolescent learner required the thoughtful review of instructional strategies that impact student engagement, a frequently misrepresented or misunderstood publicized, achievement variable.

Among instructional strategies that impact student engagement is the imprint of teacher-student rapport and social-emotional learning. At the middle school level, principals and non-tenured teachers are often challenged by the delicate relationship that exists between academic excellence and developmental responsiveness as a result of the inexperience of non-tenured teachers coupled with the many physical, cognitive, and emotional changes the pre-adolescent learner simultaneously faces. Goodlad (1998) posited the effects that the emotional well-being of a child has on his/her academic achievement. "The timeworn emphasis on teaching the whole child has depths of meaning that extend far beyond the platitudes so often attached to the concept" (p. 671).

While espousing the conviction that academic excellence and developmental responsiveness are entwined, implications for the evaluation of systematic programs and practices especially surface regarding middle school non-tenured teacher performance.
Dewey (1929) captured this essential understanding of means and ends of educational systems, which lead middle school principals to contemplate how to effectively inform and evaluate consistent, high-quality, engaging instruction for the pre-adolescent learner by supporting and supplementing the professional growth of non-tenured teachers.

In reality, ends that are incapable of realization are ends only in name. Ends must be framed in light of available means. It may even be asserted that ends are only means brought to full interaction and integration. The other side of this truth is that means are fractional parts of ends. When means and ends are viewed as if they were separate, and to be dealt with by different persons who are concerned with independent provinces, there is imminent danger of two bad results. (p. 59)

Successfully approaching student engagement begins with a collegial relationship between the middle school principal and the non-tenured teacher. In this regard, means and ends can be clearly defined and realized.

The means and ends to which Dewey referred anchored the pragmatic philosophy of education in 20th century America. Webb, Metha, and Jordan (2003) cited Garrison and specified, "Meaning is derived from experience, which is simply an interaction with one's environment (Garrison, 1994).... As with truths, values to the pragmatist are only tentative. They are constructed from experience and are subject to testing, questioning, and retesting" (p. 75). Mindful of the relevance of experiential learning, educators at the collegiate level, high school level, and middle school level struggle to design and implement instruction that augments the intrinsic motivation of students, a prerequisite to student engagement.

As a focal point, considering the classroom experience and developmental stage for students at each level corresponds to elements of Senge's (1994) systems thinking, "Living systems have integrity. Their character depends on the whole. The same is true for organizations; to understand the most challenging managerial issues requires seeing
the whole system that generates the issues” (p. 66). Teaching can frequently be an isolationist profession; it is imperative for school leaders to foster opportunities for the understanding of Senge’s concepts as much as teachers are to educate the whole child. An awareness of cause and effect is part and parcel for making sense of symptoms of systemic problems, such as pronounced student disengagement, that one could argue currently plagues school organizations. In the most promising processes of this collaborative probing, Senge’s (1994) tenet emerges, “…The root of our difficulties is neither recalcitrant problems nor evil adversaries – but ourselves” (p. 63). How do educators at each level collaborate to autopsy the system and to self-assess responsibility for that which contributes to fluctuating degrees of student engagement in an effort to employ corrective measures and engage every learner well, beyond the elementary years in lieu of one level assigning blame to another? “Blaming prevents us from taking constructive action toward resolution of a problem” (DiGiulio, 1995, p. 2). Specific to this study, how can the supervision of non-tenured teachers and the classroom observation process be utilized to strengthen the system?

Pertaining to academic excellence, national and state standards are at the forefront of renewal efforts for school leaders. Daggett (2000) stipulated, “What all students need to succeed in the twenty-first century is an education that is both academically rigorous and relevant to their personal and professional lives” (p. 69). Rigor and relevance perpetuated the development and refinement of standards. Within this context, Robert J. Marzano insisted in Scherer (2001), “Standards hold the greatest hope for significantly improving student achievement” (p. 14). At the national level, No Child Left Behind legislation (Educational Research Service, 2003, p. 1) mandated “(a) setting higher
educational standards, (b) annual testing of children to measure progress toward achieving the higher standards, (c) analysis of the test data annually to ensure that students are progressing, and (d) rewards (and penalties) aimed at schools where students make (or do not make) "adequate yearly progress (AYP)." Prior to the adoption of No Child Left Behind, the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards encompassed provisions that delineated skill sets and content knowledge students were to acquire at the grade four, grade eight, and grade 12 levels. Portions of the state standards incorporated the role of student engagement in the process of this acquisition; yet, measures outlined to sustain and enhance student engagement with authentic learning experiences were scant leaving educators to speculate how these benchmarks are to be facilitated. Amid the absence of clear curricular expectations, where does that leave the non-tenured teacher?

Strong, Silver, and Perini (2001) purported,

...Standards can serve teaching and learning—instead of the other way around—when educators develop a clear and manageable vision of what they want students to understand and be able to do. In short, schools need standards that keep educators focused on achievement but that leave them the time and flexibility they need to pay attention to the individuals in their classrooms. (p. 57)

The paradox presented by specific standards and nonspecific vision complicates the process of individualizing the learning experience for the pre-adolescent. How is it that a set of benchmarks does not inherently dictate what students are to understand and be able to do? When do middle school principals and non-tenured teachers intuitively endorse the infusion of the four instructional strategies, developmentally responsive teacher-student rapport and social-emotional learning, effectual classroom management skills, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, identified in the research as having the most positive impact on student engagement?
As a precursor to student engagement, Strong et al. (2001) conducted research on what motivates students in the classroom.

We discovered that four factors play a significant part in student motivation and that each of these factors tells us something important about curriculum design.

Success. Students want to feel competent and believe that their efforts pay off and are recognized, so standards should be clear. To achieve this clarity, educators can organize curriculum around a few powerful content ideas and teach to the hidden skills of academic literacy.

Curiosity. Students want to feel engaged by meaningful questions, enigmas, mysteries, and conundrums. Educators should provide students with thoughtful questions and interesting problems to explore.

Originality. Students want to create unique products. Educators should design assessments that allow students to enunciate their own visions and points of view on the subjects that they study.

Relationships. Students want to see the relationships between what they are studying and their own experiences and futures. Educators should connect standards to students’ lives, concerns, and futures as workers and citizens.

Thus, designing curriculum that engages students means addressing the factors that contribute to student motivation. (pp. 59-60)

Carr and Harris (2001) also highlighted the link among standards, curriculum, and student engagement referencing five key areas.

Acquiring Knowledge and Skills
Students need learning experiences that engage them in active learning, build on prior knowledge and experiences, and develop conceptual and procedural understanding, along with student independence.

Variety of Instructor Roles
Teachers use a variety of teaching roles (e.g., direct instruction, facilitating, modeling, coaching, reflecting, guiding, observing) and adapt these as appropriate for different purposes of instruction and student needs.

Multiple Student Roles
Students need opportunities to learn through a variety of roles (e.g., planner, questioner, artist, scientist, historian) and to learn alone and with others.
Application and Reflection
Projects and assignments require students to integrate and apply their learning in meaningful contexts and to reflect on what they have learned.

Adaptive Learning Environments
Learning environments are adapted so that all students achieve success. (pp. 45-47)

This body of research and additional studies seemingly evolved over the latter half of the 20th century providing direction for middle school principals and non-tenured teachers to establish and maintain optimal learning environments in which students are actively engaged in lesson content and meet delineated standards proposed by governing bodies. How is it then that many non-tenured teacher middle school classroom environments do not reflect that which is included in the research? At what point do student engagement theory and practice merge for the non-tenured teacher yielding consistently appropriate student engagement levels?

Alternatively, are middle school students conceivably disengaged as a result of being unmotivated to learn regardless of the instructional strategies implemented by the non-tenured teacher? Drive theory, attribution theory, self-worth theory, emotions, and self-system comprise much of the research affiliated with motivation. In concert with this research, Marzano (2003) recommended “providing students with (a) feedback on their knowledge gain..., (b) tasks and activities that are inherently engaging..., (c) opportunities to construct and work on long-term projects of their own design..., and (d) understandings of the dynamics of motivation and how those dynamics affect them to enhance individual student motivation” (pp. 149-153). Marzano described characteristics of engaging tasks and activities as challenges that were manageable, aroused curiosity, and involved fantasy arousal. A review of faltering student engagement levels alert
middle school principals to the extent to which non-tenured teachers are able to design, implement, and evaluate student engagement in the classroom environment. How do these teachers new to the field come to understand what student engagement is and how it is measured?

Motivation for the pre-adolescent learner is key in that this student has reached a turning point in his/her life. Lack of motivation, that results in sustained periods of disengagement for grade seven and grade eight students, leads to the at-risk label and to the potential exercising of the drop out option in high school. In an effort to prevent such detrimental effects, middle school philosophy focuses on the development of academic teams and interdisciplinary instruction to support social-emotional learning for the pre-adolescent. Bencivegna and Elias (2003) cited Blankstein and summarized,

...In model schools of sound character and academic excellence, principals see the roles of champion of vision and instructional leader as intertwined. They recognize the synergistic power of a vision of infusing social-emotional and character education concepts, principles, and strategies throughout the instructional program and helping everyone understand the relationship between social-emotional well being and academic success. They recognize that sound classroom structure and function are based on a foundation of caring relationships and that such relationships are nurtured among all school staff members, students, and parents. (Blankstein, 2003) The foundation is set amid a school culture that values and respects children. All decisions are guided by a fundamental question: How will decisions affect children and their social, emotional, and cognitive development? As a result, the social-emotional well being and academic success of children become the focus of the school’s vision, which is relentlessly pursued by all school staff members, students, and parents. (p. 62)

Sergiovanni (2000) further described school culture as such: “Students have to be connected to the school, to be academically engaged, to be part of a unique and enthusiastic learning community, to be personally motivated, and to want to do well” (p. 15). Sergiovanni (2000) extended this view by focusing on the social-emotional aspect of learning.
This idea equates teaching with caring and caring with teaching as one and the same activity. Both depend on the cultivation of special kinds of relationships among and between teachers and students that are characterized by a measure of reciprocal commitment. As James Comer often says, “In the real estate business it is location, location, location. In education, it is relationships, relationships, relationships.” (p. 35)

This perspective emerges as a simple recipe for meeting the needs of the pre-adolescent. Again, with this recipe and curricular prescriptions, how is it that student engagement levels are inconsistent? How does the pre-adolescent negotiate the search for social and academic capital before making the choice to engage or disengage in the non-tenured teacher’s classroom?

Sergiovanni (2000) explored social and academic capital and their connection to student engagement.

When students have access to social capital they find the support needed for learning. But when social capital is not available, students generate it for themselves by turning more and more to the student subculture for support. The result, too often, is the development of norms and codes of behavior that work against what schools are trying to do. This seeking of support elsewhere often takes its toll on both academic performance and social behavior....

Schools develop academic capital by becoming focused communities that cultivate a deep culture of teaching and learning.... Research on schools that promote achievement points to academic press and community as important factors. Academic press refers to strongly communicated expectations that students will work on intellectually challenging tasks, come to class prepared, and complete all assignments. (Sebring and Bryk, 1996) One measure of community is personalism. Personalism refers to the degree to which students feel personally known and cared for. The two contribute to the development and strengthening of the school’s organizational character. As Sebring and Bryk (1996) explain, achieving schools “are safe, orderly, and respectful; they demand that students do significant academic work; and the teachers and staff work hard to provide the students with moral and personal support.” (p. 5) (pp. 25-28)

The securing of social and academic capital substantiates the need for comprehensive and continuous non-tenured teacher observation at the middle school level. Smith and Piele (1997) articulated,
...In 1985, Tom Bird and Judith Warren Little offered several requirements for successful observations. It emphasizes the observation’s potential for reciprocity—that is, the possibility of mutual learning rather than simply one-way communicating. An observer, they hold, should promise to report accurately to the teacher a description of the lesson that will shed new light on the teacher’s practices. Praise should be as detailed and specific as criticisms. And observers themselves should attempt to learn something new, improving along with the teacher. (p. 271)

The postobservation dialogue that transpires between the middle school principal and non-tenured teacher is critical given that this experience serves as the foundation for future professional growth activities for the teacher, specifically the integration of instructional strategies that positively impact student engagement. For this domain, the Smith and Picle (1997) research focused on clear goals.

Clear goals go a long way toward improving performance.... School leaders must consider the evaluation targets, measures, and processes most likely to generate increased student learning. Goals, professional development, and evaluation work together to create a system of learning that pays dividends for staff and students. Each step informs the others and requires constant assessment and adjustment by the leader working together with the professional staff. (pp. 290-293)

Extending this context, Lambert (2003) noted,

...Although teachers are at the heart of leadership capacity, principals hold a special position in schools. They have access to the larger school system, a claim to organizational and historical authority, and the pressure to meet teacher, parent, and student expectations. They build trust, focus the school, convene and sustain the conversation, and insist on the implementation of policy and practice. As long as we have schools that need to be improved or improvements that need to be sustained, the role of the principal will be important. (p. 43)

In the wake of insisting on the implementation of policy and practice, the role of the middle school principal requires assisting non-tenured teachers with the execution thereof before evaluation of teacher performance is to occur. The middle school principal will simultaneously face the challenge of balancing change agent responsibilities in an era that demands academic excellence and developmental responsiveness for every
learner, not just for the student who is either immersed in or tolerant of the educational process.

Statement of the Problem

"As educators, we must realize that 'perfect' student behavior is unattainable—in fact, it is undefinable. We can, however, identify several components of good student behavior as it relates to the educational experience. These components include, among other things, staying on-task and exhibiting a desire to learn the material" (Backes, 1994, p. 9).

Petres (2001) added that there are certain ethical dimensions of student silence in the classroom that prohibit the development of the optimum learning environment.

Why is an individual's silence deemed undesirable or detrimental? There are multiple responses to this question. One answer is that undo student silence typically indicates any of the following symptoms: (1) apathy toward the topic at hand or to the learning process itself, (2) a student who is not comprehending, (3) a student who is self- or other isolated from the learning community, and/or (4) a student who has not learned the value of or strategies of engagement or who does not appreciate or believe in that value. (p. 104)

Since 1999, fluctuating levels of engagement have been reported by college students on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Kuh (2003) shared a viable concern about the emergence of disengagement.

The problem does not begin in college. Record numbers of high school seniors are disengaged from academic work, according to UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, yet more than ever (45 percent) are graduating from high school with an average, suggesting students are getting higher grades for less effort. The wider and deeper college-going pool then brings these habits and expectations, not to mention a lack of preparation, with them to college. Students typically don't exceed their own expectations, particularly with regard to academic work. But students will go beyond what they think they can do under certain conditions, one of which is that their teachers expect, challenge, and support them to do so....
And this brings us to the unseemly bargain, what I call the "disengagement compact": "I'll leave you alone if you leave me alone." That is, I won't make you work too hard (read a lot, write a lot) so that I won't have to grade as many papers or explain why you are not performing well. (pp. 27-28)

In his commentary, Kuh (2003) traced the work habits of college students to high school academic performance, thereby attributing disengagement to learned behavior in earlier years. Those educators who provide instruction for middle school students are often faulted for having perpetuated the same types of behaviors by teachers at the high school level. In lieu of one level blaming another for a lack of student motivation, examining the developmental stages of children provides a clearer picture of the very nature and root of the problem.

Ryan and Patrick (2001) synthesized several pieces of field research and stated,

...Although the social environment of the classroom is likely to be important to motivation and engagement for students of all ages, it may be particularly important for young adolescent students. Early adolescence has been identified as a particularly precarious stage regarding changes in achievement beliefs and behaviors. (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, 1995; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993) Certainly, for some young adolescent students, the increases in self-reflection, autonomy, and identity exploration lead to new academic interests, increased self-regulated learning, and a commitment to education. (Goodenow, 1993) However, for many children, early adolescence marks the beginning of a downward trend in academics. More so than at other ages, young adolescents doubt their abilities to succeed at their schoolwork, question the value of doing their schoolwork, and decrease their effort toward academics. (Anderman & Maehr, 1994, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; 1995; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993) (p. 438)

**Purpose of the Study**

A vital component of continuous school improvement is teacher and principal understanding of the school and its systemic context. With that in mind, the primary purpose of this qualitative study was to determine what instructional strategies are perceived by middle school grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers as having the greatest
positive impact on student engagement. The focus on non-tenured teacher perceptions was an integral aspect of the study given that these teachers typically draw upon pedagogy rather than experience when preparing and executing instruction. Therefore, their participation was likely to result in individualized professional growth during their formative years.

An ancillary component of the study was to provide a synthesis of the participant feedback to the principal should this site host wish to utilize these data for professional development purposes. From a global viewpoint, gaining insight into the attitudes and opinions of middle school grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers, whose personal experiences (Clarke, 1999) with pre-adolescent learners have resulted in varying levels of classroom engagement, was valuable in terms of teachers and the principal collaborating to design school and district initiatives to enhance the teaching and learning processes.

Research Questions

The non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers participating in the study addressed these research questions via the focus group interview guide and were afforded the opportunity to raise related issues that were important to them (Clarke, 1999).

1. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers understand what is meant by the terms middle school philosophy and student engagement?

2. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers measure student engagement in the classroom setting by observing student affect, time on task, and level of participation?
3. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive teacher-student rapport as being the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement?

4. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport?

5. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive clear expectations and goal setting, as part of effective classroom management, as having a positive impact on student engagement?

6. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning as having a positive impact on student engagement?

7. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive student-centered instruction, which is considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, as having a positive impact on student engagement?

8. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement as being related to classroom management skills?
Rationale and Theoretical Frameworks

Certain innate precepts existed relative to the research questions for this study. From a social science standpoint, Schwandt (2001) conceptualized this understanding.

The aim of social science is the development of empirical, explanatory theory. Particular cases are studied for the purpose of forming general theoretical knowledge; they are not interesting in their own right. Once we are in possession of theory, we can, over time, achieve intellectual and practical mastery of the social world (in much the same manner that possessing a body of empirical explanatory theory in the natural sciences facilitates mastery of the physical world). A particular relationship between theory and practice or action is assumed here: The way to change the social circumstances of education, health care, work life, and so forth is through the technical application of social scientific knowledge (especially knowledge of the probable consequences of different courses of action) to social problems. Hence, here the notion of the use of social inquiry is largely instrumental. (p. 265)

A social inquiry approach to research was conducive to this study in an attempt to unearth non-tenured teacher perceptions of instructional strategies that impact student engagement. Referred to in the purpose of the study section of Chapter I, non-tenured teachers draw upon pedagogy in lieu of experience when designing and delivering instruction. This lack of experience presented an opportunity for non-tenured teachers to recursively expand and refine future use of instructional strategies that positively impact student engagement having explored theoretical knowledge with similar, professional peers.

More specifically, Yuhas and Wilcox (1991) referenced Poole and McPhee and revealed,

...The method-theory link suggests that the focus group method provides a basis from which researchers can then develop theory. It is a "bottom-up" approach with researchers "developing concepts, hypotheses, and theoretical propositions from direct experiences with the data." (Poole & McPhee, 1985, p. 108) Conventional explanations "presume the independence of researcher and the subjects of research" (Poole & McPhee, 1985, p. 105), but a "template 6 approach" assumes the world is a "social product" where the subjects actively
regulate their behavior and seeks to explain why subjects react in a particular manner. When this type of exploration is sought, the focus group method is useful. (pp. 69-70)

From the building principal's perspective, obtaining the perceptions of non-tenured teachers in regard to student engagement will likely inform future professional development activities for this group of inexperienced educators in addition to providing insight into what is presently working and not working in the classroom environment.

Tangentially, Jackson and Davis (2000) established a perspective inclusive of the relationship between academic achievement and the social-emotional domain of middle school students. In doing so, Jackson and Davis referenced two resources.

An interesting paradox exists in American education. When educators and the public consider how to improve students' performance in schools, the focus is usually on changing the curriculum, teaching methods, or assessment strategies. Clearly, improvement in these key aspects of education is essential, and it is the central focus of several earlier chapters of this book. Yet when successful adults are asked what aspect of their education most influenced their later accomplishments, they often cite a special relationship with a teacher.

Middle school educators have long recognized an essential truth about children's learning: relationships matter. For young adolescents, relationships with adults form the critical pathways for their learning; education "happens" through relationships. Many middle grades teachers intuitively recognize the importance for students of being known well by at least one adult within the school, and ideally by many. Why, though, from the young person's perspective, are relationships critical to learning?...

For young adolescents, the need for attachment expands to a need for affiliation and belonging to a valued group. Building on early parent-child relationships, students' sense of belonging at school—or being known, liked, and respected by peers and adults—strengthens and expands their capacity for learning. Just as a nurturing parental relationship leads to confident children who identify with parents and are most likely to become contributing citizens, a nurturing school community leads children to identify with the community and commit to its values and goals. (Watson et al., 1997, pp. 571-572)

Belonging within a supportive web of relationships motivates young adolescents to make the effort and to take the intellectual risks that produce high-level learning. Young adolescents derive much of their academic motivation from their
sense of the supportiveness of others within the school environment. (Goodenow, 1993, p. 37) (pp. 121-122)

The layering of personalization strategies to ensure powerful relationships (Vander Ark, 2002) reinforced much of the message communicated by Jackson and Davis. The composite mindset proposed in the research and by the researcher was that teacher-student rapport has a profound impact on student engagement, which in turn, has a profound impact on student achievement. Two constructs of this rapport, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, were categorical links to the enhancement of student achievement in a Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) meta-analysis (Marzano, Fickerling, & Pollock, 2001). The meta-analysis confirmed that collectively these instructional strategies had one of the highest effect sizes on student achievement.

Non-tenured teachers who chose to explore aspects of student engagement and student achievement in this study partook in a microcosm of the professional community of the district and school, which is the very impetus for improved teaching and learning. Hedges and Schneider (2005) beg the question and articulate the answer having to do with the core of the professional community in schools, "What do we mean by 'professional community'?" A useful definition comes from Fred Newmann and Associates (1996), who view professional community as a group of educators who: exhibit shared values, focus collectively on student learning, collaborate, engage in reflective conversations about student learning, and share their practices with one another" (p. 112).

Moreover, the reflective dialogue of non-tenured teachers and principals in the professional community is to include a meaningful classroom observation process and an
ongoing forum, such as that of this study, to maximize teacher growth and to transfer that learning to the classroom environment and experience for students. Wallace, Engel, and Mooney (1997) attended to this very point.

It is important that a learning school should be constantly working toward the kind of community where experiences of meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of results are permanent. This entails engaging the talents and skills of all members in the learning organization in problem seeking and problem identification: developing strategies that use available skills in problem solving, and devising mechanisms for consultation about progress. Such behaviors can offset the numbing defensiveness often found in traditional bureaucratic structures. (p. 81)

Significance of the Study

A common part of bureaucratic structures is the reporting of global data. Listky and Grabelle (2004) shared some startling statistics with respect to pre-adolescents and adolescents. One out of every three U.S. students who enrolls in high school drops out. In 2002, suicide was the third leading cause of death among young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Children under the age of 18 accounted for 10% of violent crime arrests six years ago (p. 19). Statistics such as these countered Blankstein’s (2004) belief, which included a Springfield citation, “Many educators would intuitively agree: Failure is not an option for today’s students—at least not one we would conceivably choose. Although clearly students may fail, and indeed many do, the consequences are generally too dire to allow for such an option (Springfield, 1995)” (p. 2). With such alarming statistics having been published so recently, how can building principals support non-tenured teachers who lack the experience in attending to these pervasive student obstacles? Collectively, how do we educate non-tenured teachers in order to prevent losing more pre-adolescents to disengagement when they reach the turning point in their lives? These questions were in part the impetus for this study.
Moreover, value-added assessments have been utilized as predictors of student achievement across grade levels. The American Educational Research Association (2004) claimed,

"...A new approach to teacher performance research, called "value-added" assessment, focuses on gains in academic achievement over a given year that can be attributed to a district, a school, or an individual teacher. Those gains are the "value" that teachers, schools, and districts add. The improvement in student performance from year to year is what matters most, not the overall achievement score on a test. (p. 1)"

The American Educational Research Association (2004) also implied that this measure was at the heart of the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), an accountability initiative. Mindful of the impact regarding student transition from teacher to teacher, it was essential to involve and elicit feedback from non-tenured teachers for this study if for no other reason than to raise their awareness to various instructional strategies that have an impact on student engagement at the middle school level. In this vein, discussing teacher-student rapport and social emotional learning, classroom management, authentic learning, and student-centered instruction alerted the study participants to various approaches that foster engagement in the classroom environment.

Non-tenured teachers are to understand that their individual instructional practices can make a positive or negative difference in the lives of pre-adolescent learners. The metacognitive aspect of the study was designed to educate this very understanding, to move beyond concrete and obvious student and teacher actions to the more abstract and subtle interpretations needed to decipher how to effect a difference. Beacey (2004) reflected, "...Recent studies show clearly that a student can learn more from one teacher than from another and that teachers and schools matter. So the question now is not whether schools and teachers can make a difference, but how much..."

Another way to express teacher impact is in terms of extra months of student academic growth expected from a student's assignment to a highly effective teacher. One study concluded that having a highly effective teacher rather than a teacher of average effectiveness would result in two additional months of academic achievement for a student.

Several studies have found that students assigned to highly effective teachers several years in a row have much higher test scores than students assigned to particularly ineffective teachers for consecutive years.

A third study showed that conclusions about teacher effectiveness drawn from value-added measurement closely mirrored those reached by directly observing teachers, a method frequently used in school systems. Thus, it makes sense to use teacher observation and other data on teaching practices to help confirm value-added measures of teaching effectiveness. (p. 2)

As value-added assessments become more widely recognized in education, it will be beneficial to consult these assessments while concurrently reviewing student engagement studies. The marriage of the two has utility in terms of crafting and evaluating professional development programs, annual professional improvement plans, student interventions, student-teacher assignments, curricular initiatives, and criterion-referenced assessments in an effort to more closely monitor student transitions among grade levels particularly for the non-tenured teacher who provides instruction for the pre-adolescent learner. Given that the pre-adolescent learner simultaneously experiences a vast array of cognitive, emotional, physical, and social changes, the significance of the study was rooted in the chance for non-tenured teachers to begin to translate their knowledge of the whole child to understanding as they grappled with four instructional strategies (teacher-student rapport and social-emotional learning, classroom management,
authentic learning, and student-centered instruction) identified as having a positive impact on student engagement.

Limitations of the Study

Previously described, the value-added concept comprised the significance of the study as the middle school learner transitions from one grade level to another. In considering student engagement along this continuum, the sample, timeframe, and data collection methods posed the following limitations.

1. Non-tenured teacher perceptions from one grades 7-8 New Jersey public middle school were considered, even though most middle schools in the state provide services for grade six students as indicated within the New Jersey Department of Education School Directory Website link (2006).

2. Of the one district that participated in the study, the FG District Factor Group (DFG) was the only District Factor Group represented according to the New Jersey Department of Education District Factor Groups (DFG) for School Districts Website link (2006). Including an even greater cross-section of District Factor Groups, districts, and schools would allow for the collection of more diverse data from non-tenured teachers.

3. As per Gann Law Books (2005) New Jersey Statutes (18A: 27-3.1), "Every board of education in this State shall cause each non-tenure teaching staff member employed by it to be observed and evaluated in the performance of her or his duties at least three times during each school year but not less than once during each semester." With the requirement of three observations for non-tenured teachers coupled with content specialization at the middle school
level, common supervisory practice has been for content area supervisors, assistant principals, principals, and central office administrators to collectively observe non-tenured teachers. For this study, the building level principal was the only administrator whose classroom observation feedback was considered and whose request to receive participant feedback were honored by the researcher.

4. Including only non-tenured teacher perceptions suggested that the feedback was from inexperienced educators, despite the fact that participants had a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience. More than likely, the input of tenured teachers would yield more in-depth perceptions that focus on instructional strategies that have impacted student engagement levels in the classroom over a more extensive period of years. It is to be noted that while including experienced educators in the study would provide for more in-depth perceptions regarding the topic of student engagement this would likely hamper part of the purpose of the study, determining non-tenured teacher perceptions of instructional strategies that impact student engagement to inform professional development for this unique group of educators.

5. Equally as important was the need to continuously and carefully identify the purpose of research question 8 prior to and during the discussion of its corresponding focus group interview guide question. Non-tenured teachers had to be willing to offer responses that speak to improving teaching and learning without fixating on the evaluative undertones of the question.
6. Utilizing the early months of the school year for data collection could have potentially skewed participant responses, given that teachers had not had consistent contact with students since the preceding year. Students tend to be more eager at the onset of the school year, which may have inhibited findings as well.

7. Excluding the actual observation of classrooms presented a less robust study than multimethod research. Dunn (1994) cited,

...The use of multiple methods to observe policy processes and outcomes—for example, the concurrent use of organizational records, mailed questionnaires and ethnographic interviews—promotes the plausibility of knowledge claims by triangulating on the same object with data obtained from two or more instruments. Multimethod research moves beyond positivism, at least as this term is conventionally understood, by rejecting the ideal of quantification and, instead, systematically integrating quantitative and qualitative observations. (p. 8)

8. The selection and categorization of primary instructional strategies suggested as having an impact on student engagement represent that which was found in the literature. The four strategies presented in the study may not have been exhaustive in the sense that the teacher participants may implement additional strategies that have a greater impact on student engagement thus far in their experiences.

Definitions of Terms

Authentic learning. “The term ‘authentic’ refers to the genuine, real, and true. Authentic learning involves exploring the world, asking questions, identifying information resources, discovering connections, examining multiple perspectives, discussing ideas, and making informed decisions that have a real impact” (Callison & Lamb, 2004, p. 34).
Classroom management: Larrivee (1999) directed,

...To many, the term classroom management is synonymous with discipline, or a teacher’s ability to control their students’ behavior. Hence, the teacher’s role is to keep students “in line” and “on-task,” with very little attention paid to the interface with quality instruction or meaningful human relationships. For others, classroom management means instilling self-discipline and a set of values that are the foundation for a democratic society. In accordance with this goal, the teacher’s role is to help their students internalize the values of respect, honesty, tolerance and compassion to become responsible citizens. (p. 1)

In this study, the development of self-discipline and values via goal setting and clear expectations denoted classroom management.

Cooperative learning:

Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy that encourages students to learn together but holds each student accountable for his or her learning. Students are organized into small groups to solve problems and complete challenging assignments. This approach differs from group work because the assignment and the individual roles within the group are defined clearly. As students recognize the value of each team member's contribution, collective responsibility develops. (Tanner, Bottoms, Feagin, & Bearman, 2001. pp. 8-9)

Differentiated instruction: Much of Tomlinson’s research pertaining to the classroom environment and experience contested the one-size-fits-all approach to instruction.

Jackson and Davis (2000) cited Tomlinson’s frame for differentiated instruction that was referenced in this study.

Tomlinson offers an alternative for heterogeneous classes in the form of differentiated instruction, which provides students with many different avenues for learning, based on their diverse

Levels of readiness, their entry points to learning particular skills and ideas Interests, the things and ideas for which they have a built-in passion or curiosity Learning profiles, how they learn best, which may be shaped by their cultural background, past experiences, preferences for group or individual work, learning style, gender, and so on (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 11)....

Teachers can differentiate on three dimensions, given their diagnosis of what will work best for their students (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 11):
Content—what they expect students to know and be able to do and the materials students will use to support their learning.

Process—the activities that will help students make sense of what they are learning.

Product—the evidence students will provide of what they have learned (pp. 75-78).

District Factor Groups: The New Jersey Department of Education District Factor Groups (DFG) for School Districts Website link (2006) posted these parameters for District Factor Groups:

The DFGs represent an approximate measure of a community’s relative socioeconomic status (SES)....

In updating the DFGs using the data from the most recent Decennial Census, efforts were made to improve the methodology while preserving the underlying meaning of the DFG classification system. After discussing the measure with representatives from school districts and experimenting with various methods, the DFGs were calculated using the following six variables that are closely related to SES:

1. Percent of adults with no high school diploma
2. Percent of adults with some college education
3. Occupational status
4. Unemployment rate
5. Percent of individuals in poverty
6. Median family income

Goal: According to Kearns and Harvey (2006), “A goal is the end result of a learning experience. A goal is often not measurable in an immediate sense. It reflects a state of being rather than a state of action. A goal reflects a purpose for instruction but does not designate the specific abilities that the learner will possess” (p. 189).

Interdisciplinary instruction: A common approach at the middle school level, interdisciplinary instruction is “...instruction that integrates material from more than one discipline in a given project” (Bracey, 1996, p. 350).

As Martin Covington (1992) explains, "Simply put, motivation deals with the why of behavior. Why, for example, do individuals choose to work on certain tasks and not on others: why do they exhibit more or less energy in the pursuit of these tasks and why do some people persist until the task is completed, whereas others give up before they really start, or in some cases pursue more elegant solutions long after perfectly sensible answers have presented themselves?" (pp. 12-13, p. 144)

Multiple intelligence theory: Gardner (2000) is a proponent of this theory.

According to my analysis, all human beings possess at least eight quite separate forms of intelligence. Each intelligence reflects the potential to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings. Intelligences are identified by a set of criteria: these include representation in specific parts of the brain, susceptibility to encoding in a symbolic system, and the existence of special populations, such as prodigies and savants, that often exhibit intelligences in splendid isolation. (pp. 71-72)

Gardner proclaimed these eight intelligences exist and later added the existential: bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, naturalistic, and spatial.

Problem-based learning: Problem-based learning (PBL) is an instructional strategy characterized by the use of real world problems as a context for students to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills and to acquire knowledge of the essential concepts of a course. In PBL, students collaborate to study issues of a problem while striving to create viable solutions. Problem-based learning usually occurs within small discussion groups of students with the teacher acting as a facilitator (Aspy, Aspy, & Quinby, 1993).

Service learning: "Service-learning is a teaching strategy that combines classroom curriculum with community service, to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (National Middle School Association, 2002, p. 1).
Simulation: Gordon (1998) related simulations to scenario challenges:

These challenges cast students in real-life roles and ask them to perform these roles in the context of a reality-based or fictional scenario. The scenario challenge simulates many of the elements of the real world as a way of working with existing curricular material. Students begin to see themselves in real-life roles as they develop the knowledge and skills needed for success in school and beyond. (p. 4)


Social and emotional learning is the process through which we develop the skills and attitudes necessary to acquire social and emotional competencies.

Social and emotional competencies or modes of intelligence define our capacity to solve social and emotional problems and/or to make something useful that is valued in one or more cultures. To put this another way, these competencies allow us to modulate emotions, to solve social problems creatively, to be effective leaders or collaborators, to be assertive and responsible, or to be able to ask evocative emotional and/or social questions that lead to new learning.

I would suggest that self-reflective capacities on the one hand and the ability to recognize what others are thinking and feeling on the other provide the foundation for children to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of life. (pp. 11-12)

Student-centered instruction: "Student-centered instruction is a broad teaching approach that includes substituting active learning for lectures, holding students responsible for their learning, and using self-paced and/or cooperative (team-based) learning. Other ways to center our teaching on students include assigning open-ended problems and those requiring critical or creative thinking, reflective writing exercises, and involving students in simulations and role-plays" (Felder & Brent, 1996, p. 43).

Student engagement: Chapman (2003) noted a culmination of definitions for this term.

Student engagement has been used to depict students' willingness to participate in routine school activities, such as attending classes, submitting required work, and following teachers' directions in class....
Another definition focuses on more subtle cognitive, behavioral, and affective indicators of student engagement in specific learning tasks. This orientation is reflected well in the definition offered by Skinner & Belmont (1993):

Children who are engaged show sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by a positive emotional tone. They select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest. The opposite of engagement is disaffection. Disaffected children are passive, do not try hard, and give up easily in the face of challenges (they can be bored, depressed, anxious, or even angry about their presence in the classroom; they can be withdrawn from learning opportunities or even rebellious towards teachers and classmates. (p. 572) (as cited in Chapman, p. 2)

The Skinner and Belmont definition constituted the student engagement definition for this study.

Value-added assessment: Bracey (2004, p. 331) shored, “The inherent appeal of Value-Added Assessment (VAA) is obvious: instead of relying on a gross end-of-year test and the comparison of successive cohorts over time (the model currently in use for NCLB), VAA tracks the growth of individual students. Ideally, it permits a student’s growth in any one year to be compared to that student’s growth history in previous years.” In Keeses, Hungi, and Afrassa (2005),

...McPherson (1993, p. 1) used the term “value added” to refer to the extent to which schools performed above expectation after allowance had been made for both the prior achievement of the students and their background characteristics. He defined the term value added as “a school’s added value in the boost it gives to a child’s previous level of attainment,” with the term attainment employed where normally achievement would be used. The term value added is now quite widely adopted and involves the estimated residual term after the effects of home background characteristics and prior achievement have been removed. (p. 250)
Chapter II
Review of the Literature

*Middle School Philosophy*

As an extension of several terms defined in the previous chapter, "Interdisciplinary instruction, instructional strategies that emphasize student engagement, common planning time, advisory groups, and heterogeneous grouping have long been recognized as hallmarks of the middle school movement" (Petko, 2004, p. 76). Central to these descriptors, Alexander and George ('981) provided one of the earlier definitions of the middle school: "...We define a middle school as a school of some three to five years between the elementary and high school focused on the educational needs of students in these in-between years and designed to promote continuous educational progress for all concerned" (p. 3).

The middle school movement emerged at the behest of Charles W. Eliot, Harvard University President. In 1888, Eliot insisted upon the reorganization of schools. Eliot railed before a gathered body of the Department of Superintendence in February, 1888, that the average age of boys entering college had risen to an alarming 18 years and 10 months. By the time they graduated and received formal job preparation for a professional career, a young man entered the job market at the age of 27. Rather than suggest a change in the college curriculum, Eliot chose to criticize the prevailing eight-four plan. He recommended that the secondary program be "shortened and enriched" (Eliot, 1898, p. 151) in order for young men to be better prepared for college in a shorter amount of time. (as cited in Waring, 1995, p. 28)

Following Eliot's recommendations, schools were established with students attending elementary school from kindergarten through sixth grade; junior high school from seventh through ninth grade, and high school from 10th through 12th grade.
The Educational Research Service (1983) reported on the progression of middle schools occurring in the 1960s and 1970s while referencing Gatewood and Dils, Cuff, Brooks, and Soares. The criticism for too closely mimicking the high school model and the overcrowding from the post World War II baby boom contributed to the onset of the middle school movement as well.

The first middle school opened in Bay City, Michigan, in 1950. Gatewood and Dils [1975] described the growth of middle schools as "modest" during the 1950's and early 1960's, but "incredible" from the mid-1960's through the 1970's [157:1]. Cuff [1967] identified 499 middle schools in 446 school districts across 29 states during the 1965-66 school year [95:83]. Between 1963 and 1971, the number of middle schools quadrupled; approximately 2,000 were in operation by the end of the period [8:67; 237:20-25; 81:4]. During the next half dozen years, this number doubled. Brooks [1978] identified 4,068 middle schools across the nation in 1977 [54:6]. Soares and others [1973] described the rapid expansion of this new school organization as "one of the most notable educational movements of the past decade [368:381]." Gatewood and Dils [1975] went beyond this in their description, calling it "the most remarkable phenomena in the history of American education [157:1]." (p. 82)

As the middle school movement gained momentum, goals were established. According to the Educational Research Service (1983) Alexander citation,

...the goals of the middle school, as they were outlined by various authors, reflected the belief that the middle school could cure many of the ills facing education in the decade of the 1960's. Alexander and others [1968], for example, set out five major goals that they expected the middle school to achieve....The aims of the new school, as defined by Alexander and his co-authors, were:

To bridge the gap between the elementary and the high school;

To offer individualized instruction and curriculum to a student population varied in its physical and mental abilities;

To design a curriculum that included a planned sequence of new concepts, an effort to develop skills for continued learning, an opportunity for exploration of new experiences, and an emphasis on the development of values;

To foster continuous progress through the entire educational program, including adequate articulation from one school to the next; and
To improve the student's schooling through the optimum use of personnel and facilities [10:19]. (pp. 86-88)

Tantalizing to these goals, Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, and Petzko (2004) presented an expansive compilation of middle school characteristics, the ideology for developmental responsiveness, and the background of organizations developed to support and sustain the movement. Throughout, references were made to Alexander and George, Clark and Valentine, and Lipitz.

Alexander and George (1981) listed the essential features of middle level schools as guidance, transition and articulation, block time schedules and interdisciplinary teams, appropriate teaching strategies, exploratory curriculum, and appropriate core curriculum and learning skills. In addition, on the basis of the literature and research of the 1970s, Clark and Valentine (1981, 1992) defined and organized middle level schools into three major categories: program environment, program content, and program strategies.

Joan Lipitz (1984) was also working to define the purposes and functions of middle schools. Drawing from her comprehensive research on four successful middle level schools, she identified the following general characteristics of successful schools:

[Schools responsive to early adolescent development will reduce the size of the focus groups (interdisciplinary teams, schools-within-schools, house plans, teacher advisory groups), personalize the quality of adult-student relationships, give ample room for peer groups to flourish, acknowledge diverse areas of competence, involve students in participatory activities, emphasize self-exploration and physical activity, and encompass all of these in a clearly defined, structured environment. (p. 199)]

Lipitz (1984) also introduced the term developmental responsiveness to identify schools and programs that were aligned with the needs of their young adolescent students.

Despite the work of many scholars and researchers throughout the 1960s and 1970s, many middle level educators believed that the middle level concept still lacked a comprehensive focus that would define its purposes and practices. Although many individuals, organizations, and state departments of education contributed to build this comprehensive focus, three organizations worked during the 1980s to define middle level education: the National Middle School Association (NMSA), NASSP, and the Carnegie Task Force on Education of
Young Adolescents. These organizations have had-and continue to have-a significant effect on middle level education. (p. 5)

Of these organizations, the National Middle School Association (NMSA) exclusively focused on the education of young adolescents. Published in 1982 by the NMSA, This We Believe prescribed a set of traits for developmentally responsive schools. The set has since been revised twice with this list representing the most recent.

The National Middle School Association believes that successful schools for young adolescents are characterized by a culture that includes:

Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so
Courageous, collaborative leadership
A shared vision that guides decision
An inviting, supportive, and safe environment
High expectations for every member of the learning community
Students and teachers engaged in active learning
An adult advocate for every student
School-initiated family and community partnerships.

Therefore, successful schools for young adolescents provide:

Curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory
Multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to their diversity
Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning
Organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning
Schoolwide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety
Multifaceted guidance and support services. (as cited in Valentine et al., 2004, pp. 5-7)

Besieged by commentary regarding developmentally responsive practices, the middle school movement ensconced the literature in the 1980s.

Almost universally, middle level educators recognized the importance of schools that were developmentally appropriate to the needs of young adolescents. Although there was agreement on the general purpose of middle level schools, middle level educators, drawing from tradition, practice, rhetoric, and research, organized their schools in a variety of ways. The research of the 1990s yielded the following picture of middle level schools:
Grade-level configurations: By 1990, young adolescents were most likely to be enrolled in middle level schools with grades 6-8, and 7-8 was more prevalent than 7-9 (which had been the most common configuration in 1980).

School size: Although enrollment size varied, a majority of middle level students received their education in schools that had enrollments of 400-800.

Scheduling: The single-subject schedule (traditional high school schedule format) was still the predominant method for instructional time.

Interdisciplinary teaming: Approximately 40% of the schools had interdisciplinary teaming programs, but the presence of teams in a school did not necessarily mean that there was an effect on classroom instruction or young adolescents.

Guidance: Schools with teacher advisory programs ranged from 29% in the Cawelti study (1988) to 66% in the CREMS study (Maclver, 1990). Schools were slow to implement teacher advisory programs.

Core curriculum: In almost all cases, the required or core curriculum consisted of English and language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science. Concerns were expressed about the fact that the curriculum was influenced extensively by state mandates and requirements (Cawelti, 1988) and about its lack of relevance to young adolescent needs. (Lounsbury & Clark, 1990)

Exploratory curriculum: Although they were still an important part of the middle level curriculum, exploratory experiences were more narrowly defined as courses (e.g., practical arts, fine arts, technology) and were being reduced by the pressure to add more state-mandated requirements. (Becker, 1990)

Grouping practices: Ability/homogeneous grouping and tracking were practiced in a vast majority of middle level schools. Students were most likely to be grouped in mathematics, reading, and English and least likely to be grouped in social studies and science. (Braddock, 1990) (as cited in Valentine et al., 2004, pp. 9-10)

Valentine et al. (2004, p. 30) recognized teaming as a primary facet of the middle school movement: “Interdisciplinary teaming, a practice often described as the heart of the middle school philosophy, consists of a group of two or more teachers who share a group of students and a common schedule and who are responsible for designing and delivering their core curriculum (George & Alexander, 1993).” The National Middle
School Association (2004a) expanded upon the parameters of teaming and referenced the positive effects of teaming with respect to various studies.

Students and teachers in schools that have implemented teaming and its associated practices with some degree of integrity consistently report more positive and productive learning environments. (Arhar 1990, 1997; Dickinson & Erb, 1997; Lee & Smith, 1993) Several large-scale and comprehensive studies have been conducted that successfully demonstrate the positive effects of teaming on student outcomes. In one study, more highly implemented schools (e.g., teaming, common planning time, small teams, advisory) were found to have higher levels of student achievement and student self-esteem than less implemented schools. (Felner et al., 1997) Another study found that schools that are fully engaged in teaming with high levels of common planning time show improvement in student self-reported outcomes (e.g., depression, self-esteem, behavior problems, academic efficacy). In Turning Points 2000, Jackson and Davis say that teams should be no larger than five teachers and 125 students. (pp. 1-2)

Additionally, Turk, Wolff, Waterbury, and Zumalt (2002) synthesized research findings pertaining to interdisciplinary teams across nine categories.

Leadership Capacity
Teaming builds leadership capacity.

Trust and Relationships
Trust between team members is an essential characteristic of teaming.

Team Member Roles
The study team determined that effective team members understand and are willing to accept different roles.

Communication
Communication is a key component of teaming.

Collaboration
Collaboration among members is important in the development of effective teams.

Accountability
Members of successful teams are individually accountable.

Adaptability
The research team discovered that teaming enhances adaptability and risk taking.
Crossfunctional Teams
Crossfunctional teams enhance system effectiveness by providing an operational link among various functional areas.

Team Building
The research team concluded that (a) team building is an essential prerequisite for developing successful teams, (b) team building occurs during training activities and teaming activities, and (c) team-building skills are transferable from one team setting to another team setting. (pp. 16-20)

Manning and Saddlemire (2000) established 10 guidelines for effective interdisciplinary teaming as the process was initiated in schools:

1. Create a committee of concerned teachers...;
2. Seek administrative support...;
3. Engage in professional development...;
4. Involve all educators...;
5. Expect resistance, and plan experiences that lessen teachers’ concerns...;
6. Select an enthusiastic team leader...;
7. Develop an agenda for each team meeting and maintain a written account of accomplishments...;
8. Learn effective communication skills...;
9. Develop an evaluation system that assesses both individual and team performance...;
10. Celebrate both large and small successes. (pp. 84-88)

Parallel to interdisciplinary teaming guidelines, much of the middle school mantra was vested in the value of small schools and small learning communities. The National Middle School Association (2004b) posited the benefits of smallness with an eye toward personalization.

Creating small schools and small learning communities represents a giant step toward personalizing middle-grades education and establishing the right conditions for enhanced teaching and learning. Smallness also allows educators to design and implement individual learning plans that meet the full spectrum of student needs, smaller student/teacher ratios, and more opportunities for students to engage actively in both courses and extracurricular activities.

For these and other reasons, an extensive body of research suggests that small schools and small learning communities have the following significant advantages:

Increased student performance, along with a reduction in the achievement gap and dropout rate
A more positive school climate, including safer schools, more active student engagement, fewer disciplinary infractions, and less trusty.

A more personalized learning environment in which students have the opportunity to form meaningful relationships with both adults and peers.

More opportunities for teachers to gather together in professional learning communities that enhance teaching and learning.

Greater parent involvement and satisfaction.

Cost-efficiency.

Middle grades students in small schools have higher attendance, lower mobility in transferring to other schools, and higher graduation rates. One significant reason for these findings is the increased personalization at small schools and small learning communities teachers know students well.

Because of greater personalization, instruction in small learning environments tends to have a greater focus on active learning and problem solving, with students more engaged in project-based and community-based learning experiences. Additionally, students in small schools are usually grouped more in heterogeneous and flexible arrangements, with all students receiving the same challenging core academic curriculum.

Schools that are learning communities provide regular opportunities for teachers to engage in conversations about students, teaching and learning, and related issues. Through collaborative inquiry and reflection, teachers representing various subject matters and grade levels can decide what is really important for students to learn, determine whether students are indeed learning, and apply new ideas and information to better meet the needs of all their students. Numerous studies have found that professional learning communities are a major factor in promoting student achievement, especially in schools with large numbers of low-income and low-achieving students. (pp. 1-4)

Further, McNeely, Nunnemaker, and Blum (2002) highlighted connectedness within the realm of school size:

On average, students in smaller schools feel more attached to school than students in larger schools. This finding contributes to mounting evidence that very large schools are not good for students. Several researchers suggest that large school size negatively affects school connectedness because, in such settings, teachers cannot maintain warm, positive relations with all students. (p. 145)
The advent of the Carnegie Corporation’s, *Turning Points 2000*, framed the middle school movement in the 1990s. Middle schools were to be academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable as outlined in the vision statement by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform.

High-performing schools with middle grades are academically excellent. They challenge all students to use their minds well, providing them with the curriculum, instruction, assessment, support, and time they need to meet rigorous academic standards. They recognize that early adolescence is characterized by dramatic cognitive growth, which enables students to think in more abstract and complex ways. The curriculum and extracurricular programs in such schools are challenging and engaging, tapping young adolescents’ boundless energy, interests, and curiosity.

High-performing schools with middle grades are developmentally responsive. Such schools create small learning communities of adults and students in which stable, close, and mutually respectful relationships support all students’ intellectual, ethical, and social growth. They provide comprehensive services to foster healthy physical and emotional development. Students have opportunities for both independent inquiry and learning in cooperation with others. They have time to be reflective and numerous opportunities to make decisions about their learning.

High-performing schools with middle grades are socially equitable. They seek to keep their students’ future options open. They have high expectations for all their students and are committed to helping each child produce work of high quality. These schools make sure that all students are in academically rigorous classes staffed by experienced and expertly prepared teachers. These teachers acknowledge and honor their students’ histories and cultures. They work to educate every child well and to overcome systematic variation in resources and outcomes related to race, class, gender and ability. (as cited in Jackson & Davis, 2000, pp. 12-13)

To ensure success for every student, Jackson and Davis (2000) described seven recommendations for middle school educators.

Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best.

Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners.
Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities...

Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose....

Govera democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students best....

Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens....

Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development. (pp. 23-24)

Recently, Valentine et al. (2004, p. 11) reflected on the complexity of the middle school movement and indicated that although structural changes had been implemented instructional practices remained similar to that of the previous junior high model. This reflection included a focus on the work of Clark and Clark, Midgley and Edelin, and Lipsitz, Mizell, Jackson, and Austin.

Although evidence from research studies in the 1990s shows many benefits of middle level school improvement efforts, these efforts had a minimal effect on changing classrooms. (Clark & Clark, 1998, 2003a; Midgley & Edelin, 1998) In presenting the results from their study, Midgley and Edelin (1998) reported:

Structural changes in middle grades education—how students and teachers are organized for learning—have been fairly widespread and have produced good results. Research indicates that the adoption of middle grade structures has improved relationships within schools and that students are experiencing a greater sense of well-being. However, our observations suggest that relatively little has changed at the core of most students' school experience: curriculum, assessment, and instruction. (p. 195)

Lipsitz, Mizell, Jackson, and Austin (1997) also believed that many middle level schools were "warmer, happier, and more peaceful places for students and adults." (p. 535) They suggested that, in spite of this positive climate, most schools "have not yet moved off this plateau and taken the critical next step to develop students who perform well academically with the intellectual wherewithal to improve their life conditions." (p. 535)
It appeared that, in spite of the many structural and organizational changes, many middle level schools continued to use traditional classroom approaches to educate young adolescents. In most cases, programs and strategies that had been recognized as successful in engaging students and fostering learning had been implemented at low levels and had been underutilized. (Clark & Clark, 1998, 203a)

**The Pre-Adolescent Learner and Student Engagement**

A keen awareness of the pre-adolescent learner is a prerequisite for those who educate this population. Eichhorn originated the term *transcence* to describe the pre-adolescent learner as such:

Transcence: the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the same chronological age in human development, the transescant designation is based on the many physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes that appear prior to the pubertal cycle to the time in which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex pubescent changes. (as cited in Alexander & George, 1981, pp. 3-4)

Congruent with this term, "Thornburg's designation of seven developmental tasks is a useful one to note as we turn to a brief identification of some major characteristics of the age group:"

1. **Becoming aware of increased physical changes**
2. Organizing knowledge and concepts into problem-solving strategies
3. Learning new social/sex roles
4. Recognizing one's identification with stereotype
5. Developing friendships with others
6. Gaining a sense of independence
7. Developing a sense of morality and values (as cited in Alexander & George, 1981, p. 5)

Rubinstein (1994) acknowledged the implied relationship these developmental tasks have with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The most critical need for any person is to find meaning, purpose, and significance. In order to do this, that person must feel understood, accepted, and affirmed. According to Abraham Maslow, any person has basic needs that must be met before that person can progress in individual growth and ultimately reach
the goal of self-actualization (truth, goodness, and beauty). These basic needs are progressive—the person must obtain them in an orderly fashion. The most basic needs are physiological ones and ones that concern safety and security. The physiological needs are air, food, water, shelter, and sleep. The safety and security needs are personal, social, and global. These needs must be met before one can move up to the next level. There are other types of needs, however. Growth needs do not necessarily progress in this step-by-step direction and may be reached in many different ways and in random order. Growth needs include aliveness, individuality, perfection, necessity, justice, order, simplicity, richness, playfulness, effortlessness, self-sufficiency, and meaningfulness. (p. 26)

For supplementary consideration is the emotionality of the pre-adolescent learner.

Teens search for a way to be in control of their own lives, to choose their own paths, to feel valued by others.... Today the matter is much more complex, for the battles engaged in by modern adolescents are primarily internal and emotional rather than external and physical. Issues of identity, self-worth, developing a set of personal values and meaningful goals to strive toward; these are the skirmishes for which our contemporary heroes must be equipped. (Odfield 1991, 21) (as cited in Rubinstein, 1994, p. 23)

Established middle-level educator Atwell (1998), chided those teachers who provide instruction for the pre-adolescent learner.

First, teachers have to accept the reality of middle school students. Confusion, bravado, restlessness, a preoccupation with peers, and the questioning of authority aren't manifestations of poor attitude; they are hallmarks of a particular life. By nature young adolescents are volatile and social....

Next, we have to recognize that adolescence is as special and important a time in students' intellectual development as any other phase in a child's life. They might not be as charming in their attempts to learn as their little brothers and sisters, but adolescents, too, need to be seen as individuals and responded to as people who want to know.

Finally, middle school teaching should be organized so that it helps kids begin to understand and participate in adult reality. This means more independent activity, more say in what happens in the classroom, and more responsibility for their learning. It also means teachers who communicate the importance and usefulness in our own lives of the subjects we teach, who demonstrate our processes as learners and our personal knowledge of our fields, and who invite students inside academia by showing them that inside is a worthwhile, interesting place to be. (p. 54)
Testimony of the emotional variance of the pre-adolescent learner is associated with reported disparities in the application of instructional practices that support the recommendations of the NMSA and Carnegie Council for developmentally responsive middle level schools in terms of the inherent challenge this variance presupposes.

Their sense of themselves, the world, and the relationship between the two is challenged every day by their own needs and by the demands of new roles, and all of it is played out in public. Because they respond to these changes in such varied ways, all I can predict with any certainty about any group of kids is a crazy range of abilities, problems, attitudes, and levels of maturity. My kids are boys who play tag at recess, and boys who grow mistakes. They're girls who slip and call me mom in class, and girls who come to school with the strips of their black bras showing. Their looks constantly deceive me. (as cited in Atwell, 1998, pp. 55-56)

Intrapersonal and interpersonal communications can appear particularly confounding.

Sometimes the loving and hating can be brutal. Adolescents see themselves and others through new, critical eyes. They measure themselves against the way they think they should be, and they seldom measure up; suddenly the world doesn't measure up either. My students can be sharp-tongued, even cruel, in their judgments, but often their criticisms of others begin with their own insecurities. They don't want to be weird; therefore, they see weirdness everywhere. (Atwell, 1998, p. 58)

Not uncommon is the challenging of authority.

"This is boring." "This is stupid." "Why do we have to do this?" These are responses I've learned to take and respond to seriously. Adolescents question adult authority because they're trying to figure out adult reality. They're not trying to be obnoxious. They want answers. They expect the teacher to be a model—to make them work and be good and, most importantly, to make adult sense of the subject at hand. (Atwell, 1996, pp. 65-66)

Conflicting socialization patterns invite the apparent disequilibrium of the pre-adolescent learner as evidenced in Goodlad's cited research.

We have access to a sharply focused version of that picture, thanks to A Place Called School, John Goodlad's study of U.S. public schools and classrooms. (1984) We know that young adolescents value school friendships and social relationships far more than school subjects and teachers... Middle school students
look for in school what matters in life; they don’t look at school as a place to get ready for what matters in life. Social relationships matter in life, and in spite of our view of adolescents’ social needs as a distraction from our agendas as teachers, adolescents nonetheless figure out how to work out their needs in school. (Goodlad, 80) In large part they come to school in order to work out their social needs. (Atwell, 1998, p. 67)

“...Stage-environment fit theory suggests behavior, motivation, and mental health are influenced by the fit between the developmental stage of the adolescent and the characteristics of the social environment” (McNeely et al., 2002, p. 138). Still,

...Other authors believe that for transencents school emphasis should center on areas related to social-emotional areas. Havighurst succinctly points out, “The period from twelve to eighteen is primarily one of physical and emotional maturing....The principal lessons are emotional and social, not intellectual.”

Frank, et al., emphasize this connection by relating the following sentiments:

The schools often make demands for sustained study and academic achievement and expect students to be actively interested in various subject matters and intellectual skills at a time just before and after puberty when most girls are least capable of meeting these demands and sustaining such interest except by sacrifice of what is of crucial importance to their maturation and at a psychological cost which may be excessive....

In the life of the transencent, one discovers that not only the appearance of the body is of concern, but the efficiency of its use is important. Due to the nature of the American culture, physical efficiency is decidedly more important in the life of the boy than it is for the girl. The American boy is expected to be the rugged, manly stereotype. Toby states:

Although male infants cry just as much as female infants when they are hurt, American society teaches older boys to respond to pain differently from girls. The same level of physical suffering that causes American women to cry produces curse from American men or silent heroism.

The girl, on the other hand, gains greatest status from an attractive appearance. In transencence, while a boy gains prestige to the degree he can successfully participate in physical activities, the girl often experiences social problems if she is physically proficient. (as cited in Eichhorn, 1966, pp. 21-22)

Piaget’s body of research incorporated cognition into the development of the pre-adolescent learner.
The third and final stage of intellectual development, according to the Geneva group, is the formal operations stage. This level occurs after the attainment of concrete operations and usually comes into existence during the period of transcence. At this stage, most youngsters develop the ability to think logically, in the manner of the scientist....

Since the majority of transscents enter this level during their stay in the middle school, it is important to analyze some of the basic intellectual characteristics of formal operations. The keystone of this stage is the reversal of mental operations. It has been emphasized that, prior to formal operations, the child always started with the real and moved toward the potential. As he progressed, the youngster began envisaging a whole host of possibilities and, through reasoning and experimentation, deduced answers.

A second characteristic of formal operations is cited by Flavell as propositional thinking. The youngster at this stage takes the results of concrete operations and formulates propositions which then are exploited further in an effort to make various kinds of logical connections between them. In effect, the youngster capitalizes on previously formed cognitive processes.

A third characteristic of this stage, reported by Flavell, is the capacity for combinatorial analysis. The formal operations thinker not only isolates all possible variables, but also sees them in their fullest range of combinations. (as cited in Eichhorn, 1966, pp. 28-29)

Expressly, Piaget conveyed the inheritance of a modus operandi. This "specific manner in which we transact business with the environment" is developmental in nature.

The significance of this development is contingent upon the generation of cognitive structures and the constancy of our biological birthright (as cited in Eichhorn, 1966, p. 30).

The effect of experience plays an important role in the Piagetian theory. Inhelder and Piaget comment on this role with regard to formal operations in this way....The age of 11-12 years may be, beyond neurological factors, a product of progressive acceleration of individual development under the influence of education, and perhaps nothing stands in the way of a further reduction of the average age in a more or less distant future....A particular social environment remains indispensable for the realization of these possibilities. It follows that their realization can be accelerated or retarded as a function of cultural and educational conditions. (as cited in Eichhorn, 1966, p. 32)
“In school children of eleven to twelve, the spontaneous concepts completely replace the spontaneous, and with this, according to Piaget, intellectual development reaches its port of arrival” (Shayer, 2003, p. 476).

What prompts the subject-infant, child, or adult-to engage in cognitive activities vis-à-vis the environment? Perhaps the most common answer among psychologists at large is that these actions are motivated by primary drives-hunger, thirst, sex, etc.-or by secondary needs derived from these. Piaget does not deny the role of bodily needs and their derivatives but maintains that the fundamental motive governing intellectual endeavor is of a different sort entirely. His position is simply that there is an intrinsic need for cognitive organs or structures once generated by functioning, to perpetuate themselves by more functioning.

Piaget’s learning theory emphasizes activity, curiosity, flexibility, exploration, and other related areas as substrates of the educational process.

Bayley concisely summarizes the effect of the variables discussed in preceding paragraphs with these remarks:

It becomes evident that the intellectual growth of any given child is a resultant of varied and complex factors. These will include his inherent capacities for growth, both in amount and in note of progress. They will include the emotional climate in which he grows; whether he is encouraged or discouraged, whether his drive (or ego involvement) is strong in intellectual thought processes or is directed to other aspects of his life field. And they will include the material environment in which he grows; the opportunities for experience and for learning, and the extent to which these opportunities are continuously geared to his capacity to respond and to make use of them. Evidently all of these things are influential in varying amounts for different individuals and for different stages in their growth. (as cited in Eichorn, 1966, p. 34)

Touted as compromising the development of cognitive structures, egocentrism fluctuates for the pre-adolescent learner. Piaget inferred higher level of egocentric behavior are exhibited during periods of new cognitive functioning and lower levels of egocentric behavior are exhibited upon mastery of the new domain.

The Geneva group’s theory provides evidence that the medium through which egocentrism recedes is the social interaction of the formal thinker with hit peers. Flavell explains: . . . Social interaction is the principal liberating factor, particularly social interaction with peers. In the course of his contacts (and especially, his
conflicts and arguments) with other children, the child increasingly finds himself forced to reexamining his own precepts and concepts in the light of those of others, and by so doing, gradually rid himself of cognitive egocentrism. (as cited in Eichorn, 1966, pp. 36-37)

The point at which constructivism and cognition, affect, and behavior converge expounds the environmental implications for the pre-adolescent learner. Wavering (1995) shared the cited work of Wadsworth, Roth, Valsiner, Elkind, George and Lawrence, Secord and Blackman, and Bean, Lipka, and Ludewig in this regard.

As Wadsworth (1978) reiterated Piaget's position, "Each and every child constructs the world from his or her actions on it. The child must act on the environment for development to occur. These actions are the raw materials for assimilation, and accommodation, and generate the development of mental structures or schemata" (p. 21, italics in original). . . . Constructivists maintain that students make meaning of the world around them by "constructing stories that fit this world." (Roth, 1992, p. 308) In other words, individuals weave the events, experiences, and observations of their lives into personalized narratives that make sense and provide meaning. Roth (1992) noted that researchers have found that "this weaving of stories is a function of the context in which it happens and that knowing and doing are inseparably tied together." (p. 308)

Thus, the social environment-er culture-providet a framework in which the person composes or constructs his or her life. "The developing child and the cultural environment of the child are intrinsically related," wrote Valsiner (1987) in his summary of Vygotsky's learning theory. "The cultural environment is organized by active members of the culture who belong to the generations older than the child. That environment itself guides the child toward the personal (but socially assisted) invention of culture." (p. 54) The reality of this cultural framework mandates the consideration of numerous factors that are salient in understanding adolescent social and emotional development, especially gender, multicultural, and other diversity factors . . . .

The early adolescent is moving toward a sociocentric view of the self-increasingly seeing himself or herself as a part of society as it is organized around roles, rules, requirements, responsibilities, and relationships. At the same time, the egocentricism characteristic of the middle level years means that young adolescents tend to perceive that they are constantly on "center stage." (Elkind, 1967) People around them may be viewed as either an admiring or a fault-finding audience that is as intrigued by what the young adolescent is wearing, saying, or doing as he himself or she herself is.
The tension between egocentricism and sociocentricism is only one of the tensions faced by young adolescents. George and Lawrence (1982) have cataloged numerous competing forces operating in the social and emotional development of early adolescents. For example, the young adolescent wants to conform to peer group standards but at the same time wants to be recognized as unique. He or she may feel a need to seek peer group acceptance, support, and companionship (experiencing the outer world), but at the same time may be introspective and engrossed in experiencing the inner world of “a new emotionality-strong subjective moods, feelings, and sensations.” (p. 79) Reaching out to peers as a primary reference group may also compete with “a reluctance to break the long-standing, supporting family relationship.” (p. 77) Similarly, the desire to think for oneself and form one’s own belief and value system competes with lifelong beliefs handed down from parents.

Secord and Backman (1974) listed three aspects of a person’s attitude toward himself or herself—the cognitive, the affective, and the behavioral. “The cognitive component represents the content of the self, illustrated by such thoughts as, I am intelligent, honest, sincere, ambitious, tall, strong, overweight, etc., they wrote. (p. 224, italics added) How one feels about oneself comprises the affective component, and how one acts toward oneself comprises the third, or behavioral, component.”

In a similar vein, Besse, Lajka, and Ludesig (1980) pointed out three dimensions of self-perception: self-concept (“the description we hold of ourselves based on the roles we play and personal attributes we believe we possess”), self-esteem (“the level of satisfaction we attach to that description or parts of it”), and values (“what is important to us”) (p. 84) . . . (pp. 80-83)

To understand the pre-adolescent learner, Vygotsky reiterated much of Piaget’s research in the sense of impressing upon others the importance of examining social interactions of the teaching and learning processes. Born from his efforts, Vygotsky (as cited in Waverling, 1995) linked the zone of proximal development to the needs of the individual.

In this view of development, the individual learns when more capable others, who have developed cognition at a higher level or socially valued skills, assist the individual to perform a task that the individual could not perform without assistance. Assistance is provided in continually decreasing increments as the individual becomes able to perform various aspects of the activity, until all assistance is withdrawn when the individual is able to perform the activity on her or his own. Vygotsky (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988) referred to this area of development as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In the ZPD, capable
others provide a scaffold that supports performance and gradually is removed as the individual demonstrates more capable performance. (pp. 118-119)

With transfer and retention as desired outcomes of the learning process, memory is an integral factor for the cognitive development of the pre-adolescent.

Regardless of the definitional tangles of whether affect and emotion in some sense are or involve cognitions, it seems certainly to be the case that affect or emotional state influences cognitive processes, particularly memory processes. The dominant theoretical approach which brings together research in this area is that of Bower (1981). In a sense it does involve treating different affects and emotions as quasi-cognitions: for example, Bower states that "each specific emotion has a specific node or unit in memory...linked with propositions describing events from one's life during which that emotion was aroused." Affect nodes are connected with all other nodes in a semantic network through which activation can spread. The theory can be seen as consistent with and elaborating on Tomkins' view of emotion as having an automatic and non-motivated amplifying effect on responding (see Tomkins, 1982), if by responding we include cognitive activity such as selective retrieval of memories which are congruent with the emotion elicited and therefore occupying nearby nodes in semantic memory. (as cited in Evans, 1989, p. 147)

Rubinstein (1994) subscribed to the connections among the pre-adolescent developmental constructs pertaining to memory.

We have two main types of memory: working memory and long-term memory. The functioning of our working memories depends on our ages. Students fourteen years of age and younger have a working memory with an attention span of five to ten minutes....

The Caines also found that emotion and learning cannot be separated. The brain responds much more positively to challenges when the learner is not threatened or put under stress. Classrooms that have positive, relaxed atmospheres promote much more successful learning experiences than do rigidly controlled classrooms with students consistently suppressed, regimented, and tested. We need to remind ourselves that students remember

10 percent of what they read,
20 percent of what they hear,
30 percent of what they see,
50 percent of what they see and hear,
70 percent of what they discuss with others,
80 percent of what they experience by doing,
95 percent of what they teach to others. (pp. 31-33)
The connections among developmental constructs are unique to each pre-adolescent, and the spectrum of pre-adolescent learners includes those who are at-risk of not maximizing said connections.

Today, almost all students are "at-risk." Only about 20 percent to 30 percent of students in our schools do not receive some type of special service. Approximately 70 percent of the students in a classroom come from divorced families, stepfamilies, or single-parent situations. All of these situations have dramatic effects on students' self-confidence, sense of security, belief in adult support, ability to concentrate, and attitude toward life and learning. (Rubinstein, 1994, p. 34)

Prolonged periods of disengagement in school often result in adolescence exercising the school dropout option once they reach high school. Indicators of withdrawal such as poor attendance, academic stress, and behavioral difficulties tend to surface at the elementary and middle school levels. Feelings of alienation, a poor sense of belonging, and a general dislike for school compound the issue. Lehr, Sinclair, and Christenson (2004) summarized the findings of many researchers.

Student engagement in school and learning has been conceptualized as students' personal investment in learning. (Maehr & Midgley, 1996) Finn (1989, 1993) suggested that for students to remain in school and graduate, students must actively participate in school and have a simultaneous feeling of identification with school. Similarly, Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) proposed that educational engagement and social bonding were necessary ingredients for successful school completion. Several goals in working with students who are placed at risk for early school withdrawal include ensuring regular school attendance, supporting the acquisition of academic and social skills, and fostering a personal investment in learning. 

Check & Connect was originally developed as part of an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs to address dropout prevention and intervention for middle school students with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities. Using an experimental design, two cohorts of seventh graders with the target disabilities were randomly assigned to either the treatment or contrast group. At the end of ninth grade, significantly more students who were in the treatment group were enrolled in school (91% vs. 70%), persisted in school (85% vs. 64%), and were on track to graduate (58% vs. 29% ; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998).
Key features of the model include:

Relationship Building—fostering mutual trust and open communication, nurtured through a long-term commitment that is focused on students’ educational success.

Routine Monitoring of Alterable Indicators—systemically checking warning signs of withdrawal (attendance, academic performance, behavior) that are readily available to school personnel and that can be altered through intervention.

Individualized and Timely Intervention—providing support that is tailored to individual student needs, based on level of engagement with school, associated influences of home and school, and the leveraging of local resources.

Long-Term Commitment—committing to stay with students and families for at least 2 years, including the ability to follow students during transitions across school levels and follow highly mobile youth from school to school and program to program.

Persistence Plus—maintaining a persistent source of academic motivation, a continuity of familiarity with the youth and family, and a consistency in the message that “education is important for your future.”

Problem Solving—promoting the acquisition of skills to resolve conflict constructively and to look for solutions rather than a source of blame.

Affiliation with School and Learning—facilitating students’ access to and active participation in school-related activities and events…

The incidence of tardiness to school has declined…About 86% of students were engaged and arriving to school on time (the equivalent of 0-1 day tardy per month) during the spring of 2001. This reflects an improvement of 104% over baseline behavior. Prior to referral, 58% of Check & Connect students were in the disengaged categories for tardiness, compared to 14% after at least 2 years with the program. This change in tardiness to school—a difference of 44 percentage points—reflects a 76% reduction in the incidence of students across the disengaged categories.

Absences from school have declined…Prior to referral, 83% of Check & Connect students were in the disengaged categories for absences, compared to 60% after at least 2 years with the program. This change in absences—a difference of 23 percentage points—reflects a 28% reduction in the incidence of students across the disengaged categories.

About 40% of Check & Connect students were engaged and regularly attending school (the equivalent of 0-1 day absent per month) during the spring of 2001. This reflects an improvement of 135% over baseline behavior. Absences differed
between school levels. Nearly half of the students who remained in an elementary school setting (48%) were successfully engaged as a function of absences, compared to 34% of these students who had transitioned to a secondary or alternative setting in the spring of 2001....

Over 90% of the staff indicated that students were showing improvement in engagement as indicated by increased attendance, more attention to homework completion, and increased interest in school..., (pp. 280-295)

The Check & Connect study defined academic engagement as work completion and accuracy, class preparation, eagerness to learn, and persistence. Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, and Lehr (2004) specified, "...Other studies have demonstrated a link between student engagement, achievement, and school completion (e.g., Fint & Cox, 1992; Finn et al., 1991; Finn & Rock, 1957; Skinner et al., 1990), and students who improved in attendance were rated by their teachers as exhibiting better academic and social engagement with school" (pp. 108-109).

Relevant to these additional studies, teacher-student relationships accounted for positive engagement effects for students regardless of the student risk level. "Research clearly indicates that the relationships students develop with teachers and peers are an important aspect of their motivation, achievement, and school behavior..." (Anderson et al., 2004, pp. 108-109).

Evaluating and addressing the at-risk pre-adolescent learner events to measuring environmental factors that impact engagement. "(For practical purposes, there is an increasingly convergent belief that...subgroups of learning problems represent a continuum of cognitive and adaptive inefficiency and ineffectiveness in classroom learning situations, rather than discretely different disabilities (Gerber, 1987, p. 171)" (as cited in Wang & Reynolds, 1995, p. 11). A related study derived,
...Comparisons of the engagement of students with mild disabilities and average achieving peers were significant, but small in terms of the effect sizes, and indicated that students with disabilities reported less desirable engagement than average-achieving peers....

These two specific research questions were addressed in the study:

1. *How does the engagement of students with mild disabilities compare to that of their average achieving peers?*

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to answer this question. It was expected that students with disabilities would have significantly lower, or less desirable behavioral, psychological/interpersonal, and cognitive engagement than their average-achieving peers.

2. *How well do SES, achievement test scores, grade retention, and student engagement variables measured in the 8th grade predict dropout among students with Learning Disabilities, Emotional Disturbance, and those without disabilities?*

A logistic regression of student dropout and those still enrolled in the spring of the 4th year of high school was run for each of the above groups of students (students with Learning Disabilities, students with Emotional Disturbance, and Non-Disabled students). It was hypothesized that the engagement variables would significantly add to the prediction of which students dropped out and those who stayed in school. (Anderson, 2004, pp. iii-iv)

Negative, extraneous influences impact student engagement and, consequently, heighten levels of risk for pre-adolescent learners.

The dynamics of "growing up" compounded by the influences of the media and peers provide a genuine basis for potential dysfunctional behavior for middle/junior high school students. Despite efforts to establish and reinforce positive school norms and provide a curriculum that specifically addresses a wide variety of socio-emotional issues, it is still highly likely that a portion of the school population will be unable to take full advantage of the academic, social and athletic opportunities available in the school....

The following list provides an overview of those student characteristics most closely associated with high-risk behavior and early use of drugs (Roberts, 1986):

The child does poorly in school.
The child is unable to get along with others.
The child's peers, or older children they play with, use drugs.
Someone in the child's home has a drug problem.
The child does not like school, and feels as if he/she doesn’t belong there. Rules and discipline in the home are unclear and inconsistent. The child continually resists authority. (as cited in Ogden & Germinario, 1988, pp. 49-50)

Wang and Reynolds (1995) further explored the impact of these influences.

Students at the margins, many of whom start with only poor readiness for academic learning, come to school for breakfast and stay for lunch, but learn little to nothing in the remainder of the school day. The academic achievement of many inner-city students is appallingly, disastrously low....

In a recent study, a meta review of the research literature was combined with the judgments of researchers and practicing educators to identify the variables or practices that are well confirmed as a valid basis for instruction (Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1992; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1990)....

...Direct psychological influences have, by far, the greatest effects. These direct influences include (a) students’ cognitive abilities, motivation, and behavior; (b) classroom management, climate, and student/teacher interactions; (c) amount and quality of instruction; and (d) parental encouragement and support of learning at home. Variables one step removed from learning have a relatively moderate influence. These include (a) school culture, (b) teacher/administrator decision making, (c) community influences, and (d) the peer group outside school. The variables that are far removed from the learning setting, which include school and district demographics, state-level policies, and school policies, have the least influence, even though many policy makers are currently preoccupied with educational restructuring at remote organizational levels.

Topping the list is time on task or student time engaged actively in learning. Time is the most ubiquitous factor observed in research on learning. To learn well, students must spend time actively seeking to learn. This means that parents and teachers must somehow cause children to commit time to learning. It helps enormously, of course, if other conditions favorable to learning are also applied consistently.... (pp. 16-18)

Strategies to enhance engagement have been designed, implemented, and evaluated for the at-risk pre-adolescent learner. Snow (2005) communicated,

...Cognitively oriented strategies have been defined by us as any approach that guides teachers in teaching students how best to learn. Such an approach is designed to help students improve the quality of their thinking and, therefore, support them in all curricular areas. This category includes analyses of both cognitive (‘how-to’ strategies and procedures) and metacognitive (planning, preparation, idea generation, as well as monitoring, self-checking, and revising
strategies) instruction. Fifteen studies were included in the cognitively oriented strategies synthesis. The evidence reviewed in this chapter for the effectiveness of cognitively oriented instruction should encourage both the use of this approach for low-achieving students and further research of these cognitive interventions.

Eighteen studies were included in the small-group synthesis. The most recent research suggests that some grouping strategies can have a positive impact on low-achieving students. Cooperative learning, when implemented in a rigorous manner, can provide students with enriched instruction through peer interaction.

Seventeen studies were included in the computer-assisted instruction synthesis. The number and quality of the studies in this category made a meta-analysis possible. Based on this analysis and the resulting effect size (ES = 0.37, or an approximate 14 percentile gain), we see that computer-assisted instruction can have a significantly positive effect on the achievement of at-risk students. (pp. 82-92)

A case study of at-risk pre-adolescent learners in eighth grade examined perceptions of learning in a nonstandard classroom that employed cognitively oriented strategies, group work, and computer-assisted instruction. Day (2002) noted the research of several authors when stating,

...At-risk students are typically in need of caring and committed peer relationships, social support, and positive self-images, as well as motivation for higher achievement; cooperative learning experiences supply these specific benefits. (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) In this study, students worked cooperatively in randomly chosen pairs and were assigned to a new team of two for each 7-day module. In this way, students are required to work with different people for limited periods, practicing the cooperation skills they may need in their future workplaces.

It is possible to include at-risk students in problem-solving activities with their peers, even if they have not yet mastered basic skills, so that "pull-out" does not translate into "left out" of more challenging work and opportunities for success. Rather than treating the absence of essential skills as a roadblock for at-risk students, instructors can emphasize opportunities for learning and practicing basic skills through the use of authentic tasks (Means, Chelevar, & Knapp, 1991). Such higher-order thinking is the first of five segments in Newmann and Wehlage's (1993) model, which requires students to "manipulate information in ways that transform their meaning and implications, such as when students combine facts and ideas in order to synthesize, generalize, explain, hypothesize, or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation." (p. 9)
Motivation to learn is crucial for at-risk students, who can be discouraged by constant lower-level drills and practice sessions that seem to focus on their shortcomings and repeated failures. In fact, Meens and Knapp (1991) showed that by not challenging at-risk students or not encouraging them to use complex thinking skills, teachers underestimated students’ capabilities and, as a result, discouraged their exploration of interests and meaningful work they could accomplish. DiCintio and Gee (1999) echoed earlier findings that “at-risk adolescents are unmotivated to learn because the tasks they are asked to complete are not motivating them.” (p. 231) This practice disheartens students and makes it unlikely that they will transfer learned skills to real-world tasks. (Resnick, 1987)

Meens and Olson (1995) described an optimal situation where “classroom activities are structured around long-term projects with an authentic purpose, the value of the project task is apparent, students are challenged by more complex content, and the so-called basic skills are dealt with in context, providing a motivation for mastering skills.” (p. 3) These concepts of higher-order thinking, authentic assessment, and purposeful activity are the foundation of a bridge between classroom performance and real-world success. (pp. 21-23)

Within the model, students were given the ability to decide when and in what order to complete multiple tasks within a seven-session limit and when they would take time for exploration in an area of interest. They held fully responsibility for their own performance and behavior. The following student comments describe why they were motivated by this arrangement and why they appeared responsive to the model:

“I like the tech lab because I am responsible for myself...I can do it on my own.”

“I know what I am going to do each day I come in the lab.”

“If I accomplish it my own way, I feel good.”

“If you have a question, you don’t have to sit and wait on the teacher. You turn on your call light and get help from the student lab manager first.”

“In other classes we have to listen to one person and do what they say. I here it’s different. We are responsible for the work we do in the module...”

Connections between authentic tasks and learning by at-risk students were apparent when the students described what they enjoyed most. Specifically, many students took pleasure in using a variety of information types to explore a subject, solving problems to answer questions, and associating their activities and testing with real-world tasks and life ahead, ...

In essence, this combined-subject method of working through topics served as a major motivator for students. They could discover for themselves an answer to that eternal question, “Why do I have to know this?” (pp. 26-27)
In order to utilize strategies that motivate the at-risk pre-adolescent learner, interest and personality type are considered by middle level educators.

Our experience has shown that in schools that have incorporated personality type concepts into the classroom, nearly 80% of the students who are identified as either academically or behaviorally "at risk" had preferences for extraversion and perceiving. This suggests that perhaps it is the school structures rather than the students that are often the source of the problem for at-risk students. The overarching goal in using type theory is to help students and teachers understand themselves and each other. After a common vocabulary about psychological preferences had been established in her classroom, one teacher observed that students seemed more tolerant of one another. (Kise & Russell, 2004, p. 33)

For learning to occur despite ill-conceived school structures, the pre-adolescent learner must cull knowledge from experiences. Simply, this means the pre-adolescent must participate in the process of learning through collaboration with others, receipt of instruction by others, engagement in the environment in isolation, and direct observation. Previously alluded to, the context of learning is guided by the relationship that exists between the teacher and the learner.

Studies of teacher-learner interactions have focused primarily on the transmission of information from teacher to learner as the criteria for judging their effectiveness. However, according to Cazden (2001), teaching involves more than just the transmission of information; it involves the management of interpersonal relations and roles. From our findings of the collaborative construction of knowledge and ways of knowing (Bearison & Dorval, 2001), we view teaching and learning as a reciprocally negotiated activity. Negotiations between teachers and learners require that the goal of teaching and learning be explicitly defined, the procedure for achieving the goal made clear, and the roles of teacher and learner in achieving the goal be understood. ....

According to Ellis and Gauvan (1992), "relationships between people, in terms of affection and duration, may play a critical role in the process and outcome of cognitive interaction." (p. 160) They noted, that consistent patterns of interaction between partners were not achieved by participants in their study until several dyadic interactions had taken place. (as cited in Le Blanc & Bearison, 2004, pp. 499-512)
"When adolescents feel cared for by people at their school and feel like a part of their schools, they are less likely to use substances, engage in violence, or initiate sexual activity at an early age" (McNeely et al., 2002, p. 138). Specific to Wentzel, Dovey articulated (2004),

...Students who are labeled “at-risk” are often both disruptive to and alienated from the educational process. Yet, interpersonal relationships formed at school are increasingly important for teens struggling with personal and social issues. Kathryn Wentzel (1997) explored student perceptions of teacher caring as they relate to motivation to achieve positive social and academic outcomes at school. The present study examines perceived teacher caring and self-reported behavior for at-risk students. Thirty-one students who had attended alternative school completed a questionnaire about their behavior in the class of their “most caring” teacher. Students and parents then answered questions about teachers who care and teachers who do not care....

...Statistical analysis shows that agreement between student and teacher views on teacher caring is correlated with school performance. Finally, the findings with the strongest implications for research and instruction are those related to students’ characterizations of teachers who care and teachers who do not care. Contrary to a common view of at-risk students, participants most often described teachers who care in terms of academic expectations. This finding is consistent with Wentzel’s results in her 1997 study. In the present study, the focus on academic expectations was most pronounced for students in ethnic minority groups. (p. ii)

Determined by Bryan (2005),

...Student engagement is an important precursor to student learning. During the presentation of his paper Engaging pedagogies and pedagogues: What does student engagement look like in action? at the 2004 Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference, David Zungler challenged participants to ponder the questions, “What are we doing that turns them off?” and “Can we improve outcomes for all through pedagogical change centered on student engagement and student connectedness?”...Governments and schools have developed many programs to improve outcomes in the areas of student engagement and disengagement with learning. (pp. 22-23)

The most common way that student engagement is measured is through information reported by the students themselves. Other methods include checklists and rating scales completed by teachers, observers, work sample analyses, and case studies. Each of these methods is described briefly below.

"Self-Reports." Students may be asked to complete surveys or questionnaires regarding their level of task engagement. Items relating to the cognitive aspects of engagement often ask students to report on factors such as their attention versus distraction during class, the mental effort they expend on these tasks (e.g., to integrate new concepts with previous knowledge), and task persistence (e.g., their reaction to perceived failure to comprehend the course material). Students can also be asked to report on their response levels during class time (e.g., making verbal responses within group discussions, looking for distractions, and engaging in non-academic social interaction) as an index of behavioral task engagement. Affective engagement questions typically ask students to rate their interest in and emotional reactions to learning tasks on indices such as choice of activities (e.g., selection of more versus less challenging tasks), the desire to know more about particular topics, and feelings of stimulation or excitement in beginning new projects.

In addition to asking the question of whether students are engaged in learning tasks, self-report measures can provide some indication of why this is the case. Research into achievement goal orientations, for example, has indicated positive relationships between task or mastery goals, which reflect a desire for knowledge or skill acquisition, and students’ use of effective learning strategies. (e.g., Covington, 2000) Studies have also demonstrated positive relationships between students’ perceived learning control and adaptive learning processes. (e.g., Strickland, 1989; Thompson et al., 1998)

"Checklists and Rating Scales." In addition to student self-report measures, a few studies have used summative rating scales to measure student engagement levels. For example, the teacher report scales used by Skinner & Belmont (1993) asked teachers to assess their students’ willingness to participate in school tasks (i.e., effort, attention, and persistence during the initiation and execution of learning activities, such as "When faced with a difficult problem, this student doesn’t try"), as well as their emotional reactions to these tasks (i.e., interest versus boredom, happiness versus sadness, anxiety and anger, such as "When in class, this student seems happy"). The Teacher Questionnaire on Student Motivation to Read developed by Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng (1996) asks teachers to report on factors relating to student engagement rates, such as activities (e.g., enjoys reading about favorite activities), autonomy (e.g., knows how to choose a book he or she would want to read), and individual factors (e.g., is easily distracted while reading).

"Direct Observations." Although self-report scales are widely used, the validity of the data yielded by these measures will vary considerably with students’ abilities to accurately assess their own cognitions, behaviors, and affective responses.
(Assor & Connell, 1992) Direct observations are often used to confirm students’ reported levels of engagement in learning tasks. A number of established protocols are available in this area, (e.g., Ellett & Chaavain, 1991) Most of these observational studies have used some form of momentary time sampling system. In these methods, the observer records whether a behavior was present or absent at the moment that the time interval ends or else during a specific time period. . .

"Work Sample Analyses." Evidence of higher-order problem-solving and metacognitive learning strategies can be gathered from sources such as student projects, portfolios, performances, exhibitions, and learning journals or logs. (e.g., Royer, Cisero, & Carlo, 1993; Wolf, et al., 1990) The efficacy of these methods hinges on the use of suitably structured tasks and scoring rubrics. For example, a rubric to assess the application of higher-order thinking skills in a student portfolio might include criteria for evidence of problem-solving, planning, and self-evaluation in the work. A number of formal and informal protocols for assessing students’ self-regulated learning strategies also incorporate components that focus on metacognitive skills. (e.g., Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Ward & Traveck, 1993) The Metacognitive Knowledge Monitoring Assessment and the Assessment of Cognitive Monitoring Effectiveness are more targeted measures suitable for use in classroom situations and with demonstrated sound psychometric properties in empirical evaluations. (Osborne, 2001)

"Focused Case Studies." When the focus of an investigation is restricted to a small group of target students, it is often more useful to collect detailed descriptive accounts of engagement rates. Case studies allow researchers to address questions of student engagement inductively by recording details about students in interaction with other people and objects within classrooms. These accounts should describe both students’ behaviors and the classroom contexts in which they occur. This might include, for example, the behavior of peers, direct antecedents to the target student’s behaviors (e.g., teacher directions), as well as the student’s response and the observed consequences of that response (e.g., reactions from teachers or peers). Case studies generally attempt to place observations of engagement within the total context of the classroom and/or school, and are concerned as much with the processes associated with engagement as they are in depicting engagement levels.

Teachers interested in assessing student engagement in the classroom should consider using separate measures to get at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of task engagement. Within each of these domain areas, using a range of methods can also strengthen the validity of findings and provide alternative perspectives on the results. Teachers may wish to include measures that address the question of why students do, or do not, engage with particular types of tasks. Clearly, however, final decisions on protocol components must also take into account any practical constraints within the given context. (pp. 3-5)
In turn, Bishop and Pflaum (2005b) referred to Duckworth, Beane, the NMSA, Csikszentmihalyi, Scherer, Vygotsky, and Tomlinson in portraying the importance of eliciting student input pertaining to engagement.

What facilitates middle school student engagement, from the student perspective? And, how might we find out? To answer these central questions, we invited students from four middle schools in Vermont to talk and draw about their academic experiences. While the participants represented this New England state’s relative ethnic homogeneity, the student bodies of the four schools typify the broad stratification of socioeconomic status of the state and its suburban and rural contexts....

Duckworth (1996) posited that learners come to understand by being placed in a situation where they develop that understanding, as opposed to being told what they ought to understand. The students in our study would agree. The absence of the teacher in each of the above drawings of engagement does not convey the irrelevance of the teacher; rather, it supports the current conversation in middle level schooling around student-centered learning as central to engagement. As with others in the study, Samantha, Anthony, and Jacob described with excitement the learning opportunities created by their teachers in which they actively constructed meaning, used technology, and worked with others. Perhaps because of these favorable experiences, they were able to contrast the others more starkly. These instances of engagement, characterized by active learning, and the examples of detachment, characterized more by teacher-directed activity, are clear indications of the students’ awareness of peak learning moments that develop understanding....

Such peak learning moments were perceived by students to be relevant to them. Beane (1993) asserted that the best middle school curriculum is based upon addressing the personal and social concerns of young adolescents. NMSA advised, “Making curriculum relevant does not mean limiting content solely to students” pre-existing interests. Challenging curriculum creates new interests; it opens doors to new knowledge and opportunities; it “stretches” students’. (1995, p. 21) Few would argue with the premise that students become more invested in their learning when it is grounded in meaningful wondering and is relevant to their lives....

While Casey’s new technology project required intricate web page graphics and design, he did not perceive himself to be an artist, nor did he feel engaged by the limitation of a predetermined focus for the artwork. Casey was deeply engaged by clear, “real world” application.

For Amelia, relevance came in the form of knowing what to do with the knowledge and skills she was gaining. For Casey, relevance was linked to the
world outside of school. Csikszentmihalyi recently offered to teachers, "The more they can show the relevance of what they're doing to the life of the student, the better." (Schener, 2002) We suspect Amelia and Casey would concur....

In addition to the active, relevant, often collaborative, and technologically based examples, the vast majority of depictions of engagement represented times in which students were not bound by others' needs. The instances of engagement were not whole group activities relying on all students' mastery prior to moving forward. Rather, they were opportunities for learners to work at their own pace. Whether perceived as too fast or too slow, the pace of the classroom environment, the instruction, and the learning opportunities held real implications for students' levels of engagement. Often, pace was connected to meeting students at the appropriate level of challenge, what some might consider teaching within their zones of proximal development, or difference between what a child can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance (Vygotsky, 1978)....

These students' desire to work at their own pace and at an appropriate level of challenge resonates strongly with the recent, growing attention to differentiated instruction. In differentiated classrooms, learner differences are examined to form the basis for lesson planning. Student readiness and interest shape instruction, and students establish individual learning goals (Tomlinson, 2001) These students presented clear evidence that, for them, a differentiated classroom would indeed enhance their engagement....

Further, in what ways might we "listen"? If we as teachers and researchers always rely on the traditional interview or other verbal forms of self-report data, do we limit what we might learn from less verbal students-students for whom most of schooling already does not cater? And to what extent is the formal, external observation of time-on-task limiting, or even misleading, in its contribution? The use of drawing to access participant perception provides different interpretations than does the use of formal observations. For instance, in Samantha's time of detachment, an observer might infer that she is listening, reading, and engaged in the material when, in fact, she reports she is not. Likewise, having students seated in a horsehoe position watching an overhead projector could lead an observer to think the students are engaged, when Anthony conveys his detachment instead. In contrast, Nad's time of silent sustained reading could look like detachment to an observer, but instead, he identifies it as engagement. To the observer, Samantha's detachment could appear as Nad's engagement, and only through self-reports could the difference be identified. Student drawings provide different interpretations than formal observations....

We too posit that middle school students have much to communicate about the quality of their school experiences, both through their voices and through alternative means. Students are indeed valuable critics of schooling. They provide rich insight into what works for them and, perhaps even more clearly, what does not. (pp. 4-12)
Feedback garnered from the pre-adolescent participants in this study is suggestive of the affiliation between engagement and motivation. A synopsis of this affiliation, the various components of engagement, and the validity of self-report scales are asserted in the literature with respect to many of the theoretical tenets from the field of psychology. Appleton, Christenson, Kim, and Reschly (2006) offered this thorough synopsis, citing researchers such as Klem and Connell in the process.

Although interest in engagement has increased exponentially in recent years, its distinction from motivation remains subject to debate. As one conceptualization, motivation has been thought of in terms of the direction, intensity, and quality of one’s energies (Maehr & Meyer, 1997), answering the question of “why” for a given behavior. In this regard, motivation is related to underlying psychological processes, including autonomy (e.g., Grohnick & Ryan, 1987; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990), belonging (e.g., Goodnow, 1993a, 1993b; Goodnow & Grady, 1993), and competence (e.g., Schunk, 1991). In contrast, engagement is described as “energy in action, the connection between person and activity.” (Russell, Ainley, & Frydenberg, 2005, p. 1) Engagement thus reflects a person’s active involvement in a task or activity (Reeve, Jang, Cerrell, Jon, & Barch, 2004). This conceptualization suggests that motivation and engagement are separate but not orthogonal. (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Skinner & Belmont, 1993) That is, one can be motivated but not actively engage in a task. Motivation is thus necessary, but not sufficient for engagement.

Although motivation is central to understanding engagement, the latter is a construct worthy of study in its own right. Klem and Connell (2004) argued that there is a strong empirical support for the connection between engagement, achievement and school behavior across levels of economic and social advantage and disadvantage. Furrer, Skinner, Marchand, and Kindermann (2006) also noted that engagement may be vital within a motivational framework as it interacts cyclically with contextual variables; resultant academic, behavioral, and social outcomes, then, are the products of these context-influenced changes in engagement. In addition, the construct of engagement captures the gradual process by which students disconnect from school. (Finn, 1989) Consistent with the understanding that dropping out of school is not an instantaneous event, but rather a process that occurs over time, engagement provides a means both for understanding and intervening when early signs of students’ disconnection with school and learning are noted....

Engagement is typically described as having multiple components. In Finn’s (1989) model, engagement is comprised of behavioral (participation in class and school) and affective components (school identification, belonging, valuing
learning). Similar definitions have also been offered by Newmann, Webb, and Lamborn (1992) and Marks (2000). Two recent reviews of this literature, however, concluded that engagement was comprised of three subtypes: behavioral (e.g., positive conduct, effort, participation), cognitive (e.g., self-regulation, learning goals, investment in learning), and emotional or affective (e.g., interest, belonging, positive attitude about learning). (Fredericks et al., 2004; Jemerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003)

Based on the theoretical work of Finn (1989), Connell (Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991) and McPartland (1994) as well as implementation of the Check & Connect intervention model over 13 years in varied school settings, we have proposed and refined a taxonomy, or organizing heuristic, not only for understanding student levels of engagement, but for recognizing the goodness-of-fit between the student, the learning environment and factors that influence the fit (Christensson & Anderson, 2012; Reschly & Christenson, 2006, in press). In our taxonomy, engagement is viewed as a multi-dimensional construct comprised of four subtypes: academic, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological. There are multiple indicators for each subtype. For example, academic engagement consists of variables such as time on task, credits earned toward graduation, and homework completion, while attendance, suspensions, voluntary classroom participation, and extra-curricular participation are indicators of behavioral engagement. Cognitive and psychological engagement includes less observable, more internal indicators, such as self-regulation, relevance of schoolwork to future endeavors, value of learning, and personal goals and autonomy (for cognitive engagement), and feelings of identification or belonging, and relationships with teachers and peers (for psychological engagement).

The majority of research has focused on the more observable indicators that are related to academic and behavioral engagement. Although less research has focused on cognitive and psychological indicators of engagement (in comparison to academic and behavioral indicators), there is evidence to suggest their importance to school performance. For example, a robust relationship has been found between cognitive engagement and both personal goal orientation and investment in learning (Greene & Miller, 1996; Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Akey, 2004; Pokay & Blumenfeld, 1990), which in turn has been associated with academic achievement (Miller, Greene, Montalvo, Ravindran, & Nichols, 1996). Similarly, psychological engagement has been associated with adaptive school behaviors, including task persistence, participation, and attendance. (Goodenow, 1993a) In general, students who feel connected to and cared for by their teachers report autonomous reasons for engaging in positive school-related behaviors. (Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994) Given these findings, it is necessary to move beyond indicators of academic and behavioral engagement to understanding the underlying cognitive and psychological needs of students (see National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004, p. 212 as further support).
Measuring of student cognitive and psychological engagement is central to improving the learning outcomes of students, especially for those at high risk of educational failure. Accurate measurement informs intervention that can be targeted to improve student levels of these subtypes, and in doing so improve deep processing of schoolwork, commitment to education, persistence in the face of challenge, and fulfillment of the fundamental needs of autonomy, belonging, and competence. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000; Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000) Effort devoted to these outcomes will help to ensure that students leave secondary schools as competent and committed learners rather than disenchanted casualties.

This study examined the psychometric properties of the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI), which was designed to measure the less overt subtypes of student engagement: cognitive and psychological engagement. Factors conceptualized as underlying cognitive and psychological engagement (e.g., family support for learning, teacher-student relationships) were supported by exploratory methods using one half of the sample, and confirmed using the second half of the sample....

Our model extends the engagement literature by providing empirical support for a self-report scale, based on previous theory (e.g., Finn, 1989; Connell & Wellborn, 1991) as well as our own ongoing work with youth (e.g., Sinclair et al., 2005) that assesses multiple components of cognitive and psychological engagement. (pp. 2-13)

Part of this continuum, “Motivation is more spirit than thought. It is the stuff of will, determination, and endurance” (Wlodkowski & Jaynes, 1990, p. 19). Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) highlighted Bandura, and Pintrich and Schunk, adding,

...Motivation is not a stable trait of an individual, but is more situated, contextual, and domain-specific. In other words, not only are students motivated in multiple ways, but their motivation can vary depending on the situation or context in the classroom or school. Although this assumption makes it more difficult for research and assessment efforts, it means that student motivation is conceived as being inherently changeable and sensitive to the context....

...Both experimental and correlational research in schools suggests that self-efficacy is positively related to a host of positive outcomes of schooling such as choice, persistence, cognitive engagement, use of self-regulatory strategies, and actual achievement. This generalization seems to apply to all students, as it is relatively stable across different ages and grades as well as different gender and ethnic groups (Bandura, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002)....In particular, self-efficacy has been associated with increased persistence relating it to engagement. Evidence has also been reviewed suggesting that self-efficacy promotes adaptive
strategy use such as self-regulation suggesting that students with high self-efficacy beliefs will also be likely to use adaptive and appropriate study skills. (pp. 314-315)

In this regard, the calibration of learning tasks can be traced to two concepts, the zone of proximal development and the differentiation of instruction.

It is important that educators calibrate tasks and assessments so that success is attainable. By having a variety of tasks in the classroom and multiple forms of assessments such as portfolios, essays, and project-based assessments, classroom teachers may be able to provide all students with opportunities to be successful, thus fostering self-efficacy among all students. (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002, p. 316)

Attribution theory, which focuses on attempts to understand why events occur, is another important line of research on achievement motivation (Graham & Weiner, 1996)....

Attribution theory suggests that when a failure or success occurs, such as failing a math exam or doing particularly well on an assignment, individuals will analyze the situation to determine the perceived causes for the failure or success. (Weiner, 1986) These causes may be environmental factors, such as a distracting testing environment or bias on the part of the teacher, or personal factors, such as lack of knowledge, ability, or failure to prepare adequately for the exam. These perceived causes can be categorized into three causal dimensions: stability (how stable the perceived cause is), locus (whether the cause is internal or external), and controllability (whether or not the perceived cause can be controlled)....

In particular, teachers’ reactions following success or failure can influence students’ attributions suggesting that the teacher plays an important role in the types of attributions students make. (Graham, 1984) (as cited in Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002, pp. 316-317)

The attributions of the pre-adolescent learner segue to goal theory. When students engage in a task, there are two possible goal orientations for electing to engage.

Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) considered Ames and posed,

...Mastery goals orient learners to "developing new skills, trying to understand their work, improving their level of competence, or achieving a sense of mastery based on self-referenced standards." (Ames, 1992, p. 262). In contrast, performance goals orient learners to focus on their ability and self-worth, to determine their ability by outperforming others in competencies, surpassing others
in achievements or grades, and receiving public recognition for their superior performance. (Ames, 1992) (p. 321)

Elements of attribution and goal theory are not mutually exclusive relative to engagement levels for the pre-adolescent learner. "...It is clear from what is known that the context shapes students' motivation, engagement, strategy use, and achievement" (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002, pp. 324-325).

In our own empirical research at Michigan, we have found similar patterns in our data for mastery goals. That is, mastery goals have been positively related to cognitive strategy use and self-regulation as well as performance. These studies have shown that junior high students who report higher levels of mastery goals are more likely to use elaboration and organizational strategies as well as to be more metacognitive and regulating (Pintrich, 2000b; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990)....

In summary, empirical evidence suggests that the adoption of mastery goals relates positively to school learning as well as other academic enablers such as study skills and engagement. For performance goals, the picture is less clear. There seems to be increasing evidence that performance-approach goals are linked to academic achievement, although there is less evidence to suggest that this link is due to an increase in study skills or engagement, at least when performance goals are adopted in isolation from mastery goals. (as cited in Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002, pp. 321-322)

Self-efficacy is a variable that presents an impact to student engagement. Self-efficacy and achievement levels are concomitant. The more engaged the pre-adolescent learner is the higher the achievement and the higher the self-efficacy. Behavioral and cognitive engagement is the foundation for this concomitance.

Simple behavioral engagement may not be enough in many cases. It may be that students are behaviorally engaged but not cognitively engaged. They may be paying attention to the teacher in terms of their gaze being focused on the teacher (a behavioral perspective), but they can always be thinking of something else. Simple attention in terms of the students having their eyes on the teacher and not talking to other peers may not be enough for learning. In science education literature, there is an expression that science learning should not just be "hands-on" but also "minds-on." In the same manner, all teachers want their students to be cognitively engaged, not just behaviorally engaged. That is, they want their students to think deeply about the content to be learned, to think about what they
know and do not know, to use different strategies for learning that increase their understanding of the material, and to think critically and creatively about the material to be learned.

These elaboration and organizational cognitive strategies reflect an active learner who tries to do something cognitively with the content to be learned. As they become engaged with the material at a deeper level, they are more likely to come to understand it better, which most teachers take as a better indicator of learning than just simple memory of the material. In this way, the quality of cognitive engagement reflects the quality of students' effort in the task, while simple quantity of effort reflects behavioral engagement.

Teachers also want students to be engaged in the content or tasks in terms of their interest, value, and affect. As noted above, teachers usually want their students to show some personal interest in the material and to think it is important and worthwhile to learn. Finally, teachers want their students to have positive emotional or affective experiences while they are learning. Generally, they want students to have positive emotions during learning, and avoid creating negative emotions such as anxiety. (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003, pp. 123-125)

One study that employed path analysis specifically captured the effect of self-efficacy on student engagement. Akey (2006) reported the quantitative findings.

Both prior student engagement and perceived academic competence had a significant positive influence on subsequent levels of match achievement, but the influence of perceived academic competence was three times larger than that of engagement.

Several aspects of school context-teacher support, clear and consistent expectations of behavior, and student-to-student interactions in the classroom-were significantly and positively related to engagement. Teacher support and expectations of conduct had an immediate influence on student engagement that was stronger than the longer-term influence, although both influences were statistically significant.

Active learning and making connections and extensions did not appear to be related to either engagement or perceived academic competence. Academic expectations also were not related to engagement.

The data suggest that perceived academic competence is more likely to precede engagement in school than vice versa.

Students who were more confident academically and more engaged in learning tended to report more supportive relationships with teachers. There was also a weaker but nonetheless statistically significant influence in the opposite direction.
(that is, students who had more supportive relationships with teachers were more confident academically and were more engaged in learning).

Students who believed that the rules of conduct in their school were clear and fairly administered were more likely to feel engaged and academically successful next year.

Students who said that they participated in learning activities that involved working with their classmates were more engaged in school a year later...

The process, it seems, hinges on students developing a sense of efficacy and confidence about their ability to do well in school. Once students are confident of their ability to succeed, they become more engaged and learn more. On the other hand, students are not likely to attempt educational tasks when they feel they cannot succeed. And they are not likely to feel that they can succeed unless they have previously experienced success, along with the support needed to achieve that success. (pp. 16-31)

Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) linked self-efficacy to learned helplessness, citing Pintrich and Schunk.

Besides the formal research on self-efficacy, there has been work on a related construct called learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is related to self-efficacy because both concern individuals' perceptions of their capabilities. However, learned helplessness refers to students' beliefs that they cannot control their own behavior and that there is no relationship between their behavior and an outcome. (In self-efficacy theory, this is called a low outcome expectation; see Pintrich & Schunk, 1996)

Self-defeated, the pre-adolescent learner who embraces this label believes that no matter what he/she does, no matter how hard he/she studies, or no matter how hard he/she tries, success in school is improbable. Pre-adolescent learners in special education programs habitually display this mindset. As a result, self-efficacy, task persistence, and academic achievement plummet (p. 128).

The pre-adolescent learner clearly defines reasons for participation and nonparticipation. Interpreting these verbal and nonverbal indicators provides insight for the middle school level educator. Again, context is a key factor in evaluating the extent to
which levels of participation are consequential or inconsequential. Field researchers, especially for at-risk pre-adolescents. This view included references to several researchers such as Wenger and Eckert.

Regardless of perspective, motivational practices are ultimately about getting and keeping students engaged in learning. A sociocultural view of learning supports a characterization of engagement as meaningful participation in a context where to-be-learned knowledge is valued and used. (Wenger, 1998) This participation involves the maintenance of interpersonal relations and identities in that community as well as satisfying interactions with the environments in which the individual has a significant personal investment. (see Greeno et al., 1996, p. 26)

Put differently, from a sociocultural perspective, engagement is a function the degree to which participants in knowledgeable activities are attuned to the constraints and affordances of social practices and identity. This differs in important ways from the empiricist view of engagement as a function of contingencies in the environment, as well as the rationalist view of engagement as a function of learners’ goals, expectancies, and values: “Regarding motivational issues, the situative perspective emphasizes ways that social practices are organized to encourage and support engaged participation by members of communities and that are understood by individuals to support the continuing development of their personal identities” (Greeno et al., 1998, p. 11).

The critical point is that the knowledge practices that learners are participating in (and therefore learning) may be unrelated or antagonistic to the intended practices. Put differently, one can argue that the standards and values that motivate engagement are a function of the same negotiations between the social and material worlds that gave rise to other knowledge. Engaged participation is about negotiating one’s identity with different and potentially conflicting and competing communities of practice. This necessarily involves both conformity to and alienation from prevailing standards and values.

Successfully negotiating absent-minded doodling during study hall supports a very different identity than during biology; doodling during an achievement test is different still. Likewise, a child’s mindless banging of a tree with a stick means something quite different on the playground than on a field trip. In a useful elaboration, Wenger (1998) distinguishes between peripheral and marginal nonparticipation. The former is associated with an inbound trajectory toward a community of practice. Peripheral nonparticipation is enabling because it conveys both opportunity and expectation for fuller participation. In contrast, marginal nonparticipation is associated with an outbound trajectory relative to the particular community of practice. Marginal nonparticipation conveys neither opportunity nor expectation for fuller participation. This forces us to acknowledge that many
learning environments offer trajectories that are not remotely in-bounded toward the knowledge practices that they intend. Just as the notion of legitimate peripheral participation has become widespread among sociocultural instructional theorists, the notion of marginal nonparticipation seems a valuable notion for sociocultural motivation theorists. 

Marginal nonparticipation seems particularly useful because it illuminates the complex motivational reality of the disadvantaged students who are so profoundly at risk of school failure. (e.g., Bempechat, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Combs & Pope, 1994) By the time students are labeled “at-risk,” their mutually constituted trajectory may be so misaligned with the knowledge practices of formal schooling that it is impossible for most individuals to redirect it. Eckert (1989) showed how nonparticipation by “jocks” and “burnouts” plays a central role in identifying the practices that define the boundaries of both communities. In the case of antisocial practices among students such as defiance, bullying, drug use, delinquency, truancy, and so on, the communities that form around these practices are defined by their opposition to the intended prosocial practices of the school community—and vice versa. (pp. 410-414)

As cited in Wavering (1995),

... “Middle school teachers frequently cite the lack of motivation as a primary cause of students’ failure to learn.” (Johnston and Markle 1992, p. 22) This lack of motivation often stems from students viewing school as disconnected from their lives, bearing little resemblance to the real world. They [learn many things, but they do not learn how the information and skills fit together. Their knowledge is disconnected, disorganized, and jumbled.... Much of the criticism of school-based learning refers to students who lack understanding and are unable to apply their knowledge to solve real-world problems.... Meaningful instruction relates content to students’ lives and assures its utility in the real world.... (pp. 307-308)

Atwell (1998) countered this notion.

Adolescents are ripe to be hooked. With good teaching, this is the age when kids who are going to become interested and excited become interested and excited. When teachers demonstrate passion for our fields, we invite students to believe that learning is worthwhile. We answer the question, “Why do we have to do this?” with our own conviction and excitement, modeling the power we derive from knowledge and experience. (p. 83)

To this end,

. . Wiggins and McTighe suggest a few generic “hooking” strategies that set up important questions and ideas for a unit as a whole. The following list reflects
Wiggins and McTighe's summary (1998, pp. 121-122) of what they have learned about engaging students:

Subject students to "instant immersion" in questions, problems, paradoxes, and stories that require them to use their wits, not just formal school knowledge. This reflects a central tenet of "problem-based learning" and the notion of education as an itch, not a scratch.

Introduce "anomalies, weird facts, counterintuitive events or ideas, and mysteries," which appeal to natural human curiosity.

Challenge students to tackle problems, feelings, or obstacles to complete a task, sort of an "intellectual Outward Bound."

Expose students to differing points of view on a single issue—for instance, the controversy over whether Shakespeare actually wrote the plays attributed to him. (as cited in Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 72)

Caine, Caine, and McClintic (2002) stressed the observance of educating the whole child by ensuring that presented content is of substance to the pre-adolescent learner. Approaching instruction in this manner is understood to lead to the natural demonstration of student engagement.

Creating compelling classroom events that spark students' curiosity and questions is a powerful way to guide students to explore a subject. These guided experiences (Caine & Caine, 2001) combine intellectual information on a specific subject with powerful emotional content to elicit students' questions and their innate drive to understand their personal experiences. Because students tend to make sense of experience by focusing on what they care about, embedding our standards in these guided experiences naturally motivates students to ask questions that are personally important to them and that meet standards at the same time.

As soon as students are looking for answers that matter to them, they can work with others and, with teacher guidance, use good questioning and critical thinking skills to identify and integrate the standards through their personal inquiries....

The design of guided experiences requires a sense of artistry. The prevalence of multimedia resources and block scheduling often tempts teachers to simply play more of a movie or video. The key to effective guided experiences, however, is to use just enough of the chosen source to engage students and give them a sense of context. The guided experience is not a time to present all the relevant facts or to
tell students everything that they will be covering. Rather, the objective is to stimulate questions and a desire to learn more....

The art of engaging students' emotions and of using questions to spark their curiosity is subtle and takes time to master. Teachers who focus their questions carefully can avoid diluting students' interests and not go beyond what students can handle. Introduced appropriately, questions can differentiate instruction and help students across a wide range of individual differences. For instance, advanced students can deal with more challenging information and complex issues at the same time than other students who cover more basic information and less complex issues....

When done well, however, the approach engages students in authentic learning and offers teachers invigorating opportunities to be creative. Discipline problems diminish when students' concerns and questions lead the learning and their intrinsic interest drives participation. And although the approach is nonlinear, our own experience over many years shows that students who have experienced the exhilaration of this kind of learning also tend to do better on standardized tests. Clearly, when we engage students' innate interests through these guided experiences, students do learn. (pp. 70-73)

Consistent substance translates to the potential experience of flow for the pre-adolescent learner, which is starkly observed by middle school level educators at times.

Flow describes the spontaneous, effortless experience you achieve when you have a close match between a high level of challenge and the skills you need to meet the challenge. Flow happens when a person is completely involved in the task, is concentrating very deeply, and knows moment by moment what the next steps should be. If you're playing music, you know what note will come next, and you know how to play that note. You have a goal and you are getting feedback. The experience is almost addictive and very rewarding.

Small children are in flow most of the time as they learn to walk and talk and other new things. They choose what to do and they match their skills with challenges. Unfortunately, they begin to lose this feeling once they go to school because they can't choose their goals and they can't choose the level at which they operate. They become increasingly passive. We find that in Europe and the United States, about 15 percent of adults really can't remember any experience that seems like flow. A similar proportion, about 15 percent, claim that they have the flow experience several times a day....

Typically, students rate history the worst subject for engagement, whereas, they rate anything having to do with computers high. And vocational subjects seem to be better than academic subjects for encouraging engagement.
Students get flow from group work, from individual tasks, and from quizzes much more often than they do from listening to the teacher or from watching audiovisuals....

The more they can show the relevance of what they're doing to the life of the student, the better. That's the first and most obvious requirement. You also have to make clear the goal of every lesson. The student must know what he or she is supposed to achieve at the end. And teachers need a way to find out how well the students are learning. Computer-assisted teaching can be quite useful because there you can see your progress and you can change and correct your work as you move along. The fact that students feel positive about group activities suggests the need for more group work....There are many things that adults could do to make learning more engaging to students. On the other hand, sometimes it seems to me that the best thing would be to forbid children to go to school until they can demonstrate that they have a real interest in something. Of course, such a system would be fair only if we had preschools for all children, where they could be exposed to a stimulating environment in a playful setting.

Education should be available to everyone, obviously. But education should not be an obligation, but rather a privilege that you earn by showing that you're curious about some part of the world. You get your education through that curiosity. The role of the teacher would then be to find the material that would allow the student to explore his or her curiosity. Because no matter what you're curious about, if you are really curious, you will have to learn everything else.

Whether the topic is bugs or stars or singing, there are connections. There is mathematics behind the music and chemistry behind the animals. Once the students are hooked on their interest, the teacher should be the gatekeeper to the enormous richness of information in the world. The role of the teacher is not to convey the same content to a captive audience, which becomes almost immediately aversive to most children. (Scherer, 2002, pp. 14-15)

Research conducted to assess student engagement, or the experience of flow, defined this variable as concentration, enjoyment, and interest in a given task. The correlation of four factors to engagement was inclusive of the study. Autonomy, relevance, the conditions for flow (balanced levels of challenge and skill), and belongingness were those four factors for two varying school environments.

Quantitative and qualitative results revealed that students in the nontraditional school spend a greater amount of time in student-centered activities and reported higher levels of engagement both in school overall and specifically during lecture and independent study. Associations between autonomy, belongingness, and
student engagement were positive and strong. These findings reveal the differences in the two schools in terms of time use, autonomy, relevance, belongingness, and engagement and suggest that the methods used in the nontraditional school are associated with higher levels of academic engagement. (Johnson, 2004, pp. Abstract-4)

In addition to environment, curricular resources contribute to levels of engagement for the pre-adolescent learner. Accurately identifying those with a positive effect is essential to the learning process for students. Le Floch-Carlson and Bacevich (2004) reported responses to related questions.

What curricular tools will enable principals to ensure that their students—all students—can achieve at the levels that are so clearly desired?

One important step in enabling all students to achieve at high levels is to get them engaged in the learning process: focusing on academic work, making connections among topics, pushing the limits of their understanding, and expressing their points of view. Two instructional programs recently piloted by the College Board show promising potential for engaging students in class, in school, and in their homework....

Textual Power and Mathematics with Meaning consist of instructional units that teachers may use on a supplementary basis or, on occasion, as their entire instructional program. The programs are grounded in a student-centered approach to instruction, in which students engage in exploratory learning and problem solving....

A consistent and intriguing finding emerged from all levels of data collection: The classes that incorporated the College Board pilot programs exhibited high levels of student engagement....

Results of the classroom observation analysis were striking. First, the research team defined high engagement as more than 80% of students on-task and focused. Using this definition, 74% of the total class time in observed treatment classes included high levels of student engagement. In contrast, only 46% of the control class time matched these levels of student engagement. Although the effects were noticeable for English, they were even more pronounced in mathematics. These levels of student engagement apparently enable teachers to spend more time focused on instruction and less time redirecting student behavior. In fact, during 81% of the time spent observing treatment classes, the teachers were focused exclusively on instructional tasks whereas the instructional time on task dropped to 57% in the control classes. Teachers who responded to the AIR survey confirmed the classroom observation findings. Eighty-six percent of the
mathematics teachers reported that students were actively engaged in the instructional units, and 80% of English teachers reported similar levels.

Although quantitative findings are informative, interview data are often more compelling, and the principals and teachers who talked with AIR researchers confirmed these high levels of engagement. As one principal explained, “Because [the pilot program] empowers students, they are more actively engaged. I just wish you could see the difference between the classes! My other classes are very poorly attended, and they have class-size reduction. When you go into [the College Board pilot] classes, they are large classes, and those kids are engaged.”

What other features contributed to high levels of student engagement? In the English classes, students commented that they appreciated the opportunity to express themselves through diverse formats—they were not restricted to essays or short-answer worksheets. The pace of classroom activities also appeared to facilitate student engagement. (pp. 20-23)

Intrinsic motivation supersedes the examination of curricular resources in many studies. In a 53-item questionnaire completed by adolescents, “perceived educational aspirations, perceived career aspirations, perceived support from teachers, perceived equal treatment of ethnic groups, self-appraisals of academic efficacy, and self-perceptions of intrinsic motivation” were the focus. Hudley, Daoud, Hershberg, Wright-Castro, and Polanco (2002) shared the results of the research.

Academic intrinsic motivation is best understood as the product of an optimal match between the individual, the task, and the learning environment. (Ryan & Deci, 2000b) Any intrinsically motivated student, similar to the young child, will engage in learning for its own sake rather than an external prod (e.g., a fast food coupon), and will perceive the learning task to be a source of enjoyment. Learning that is intrinsically motivated has been linked to higher levels of conceptual learning, better memory (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987), and cognitive flexibility (McGraw & McCullers, 1979) in students from elementary school to college. Given these findings, it should be unsurprising that the intrinsically motivated person is also much more likely to experience feelings of emotional well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1987).

Recent work has examined a variety of student perceptions as indicators of school engagement among middle school students (Murdock, 1999), including perceived teacher support, perceived peer attitudes, and beliefs about the importance of education. Other research in educational psychology has identified student beliefs
and attitudes that predict or co-occur with intrinsic motivation, including perceptions of competence (Chapman, Skinner, & Baltes, 1990; Harter, 1992), and aspirations (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Murdoch, Anderran, & Hodge, 2000). Self-perceptions of both academic and behavioral competence have also been linked to intrinsic motivation in programs tailored specifically for students at-risk for school failure. (Hadley, 1995; 1997) Harter (1992) has postulated a developmental cycle in which intrinsic motivation, perceptions of competence, and behavioral engagement are reciprocally related....

Our most robust predictor of engagement variables was students’ own perceptions of their school abilities. Self-appraisal remained a significant predictor in the regression equations of 4 of the 6 engagement variables that we analyzed. Apparently, one important element of remaining engaged in schooling is a belief in one’s efficacy to perform learning tasks....

Of the school climate variables, perceived teacher support is another variable that differs in ways that are potentially informative for schools interested in the success of all children. For the full sample, perceived teacher support was related specifically to behavioral engagement only (detention, suspension, attendance)....

In summary, these data converge with other findings in the motivation literature to indicate that schools must sustain a climate that promotes a positive attitude in students of all ethnicities and thus encourages all students’ engagement in learning. As predicted, more positive attitudes toward self and school were significantly related to several indicators of engagement. However, several attitudinal predictors of school engagement functioned differently as a function of adolescents’ grade level, gender, or ethnic identification. (pp. 2-12)

Albeit intrinsic motivation yields a positive impact on student engagement, the pre-adolescent learner may become distracted by the enticement of extrinsic measures. Rewards are condemned in motivation research due to the control gained over behavior that is already occurring in their absence. Bower (1988) postulated reinforcement as a measure to be wary of in terms of instruction.

It may be that what is critical about the motivational shift induced by contingent reinforcement is not so much that once reinforced, a target activity will no longer occur without reinforcement, but that the form that an activity takes will itself depend upon the motivation that supports the activity. Reinforcement encourages the repetition of what has worked in the past, in part because the aim of the activity is not to produce something like a general principle or a rule, but to produce another reinforcer. Generally, such a tendency to repeat what has worked in the past is a sensible adaptation to environmental contingencies. (p. 129)
Evans (1989) expanded the concept of incentive as it relates to expectancy-value theory and the pre-adolescent learner. The work of Atkinson and Hull were threaded throughout the Evans reference.

Atkinson therefore suggests that the actual strength of a tendency to approach a situation with a view to succeeding depends not only on our need to achieve (the value that we place on success) but also on the cooler more dispassionate assessment of our likelihood of succeeding (the expectation of success). For this reason Atkinson’s approach, still a very influential one, is known as expectancy-value theory.

In fact the theory is strikingly reminiscent of Clark Hull’s motivational theory, but tailored to a more circumscribed area of enquiry. Like Hull’s drive concept, born cut of biological need, we have here nAch, a driving force born out of psychological need. Like Hull’s notion of habit strength, born out of prior experience in the learning situation, we have in Atkinson’s theory the person’s assessment of their probability of success, often born out of memories of previous similar experiences of challenge. Hull however recognized a third important variable in goal-directed behaviour: incentive. Atkinson likewise suggests the importance of incentive and moreover relates incentive directly to the person’s expectation of success. ....

Atkinson acknowledges however in his more recent work that external concrete rewards such as money and possessions exist for achievement and these provide an additional source of “extrinsic” motivation, which complements the “intrinsic” motivation concerned with pride in success and shame in failure ....Suffice it to say here that it is by no means certain that extrinsic sources of motivation can simply be added to intrinsic ones. There is evidence that in some circumstances at least intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation interact detrimentally with each other. (pp. 116-118)

Pintrich and Maehr (2004) cited Zuckerman, Donohew, and Vøelkl and continued,

...Interest relative to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has permeated the literature with a recent focus on sensation value. ....Researchers in the field of health communication have argued that individuals’ needs for novelty and sensation are related strongly to the processing of information, and to students’ motivation to attend to a message or a task. More specifically, sensation-seeking is a personality variable typified by the seeking of sensation, novelty, complexity, or physical stimulation. (Zuckerman, 1979, 1988) Research on sensation-seeking has been conducted both in terms of the media (i.e., the effects of media messages such as public service announcements on attitudes and behaviors), and in terms of
school-based interventions that have focused on changing health-related attitudes and behaviors in adolescent populations. (pp. 6–7)

Thus, Donohew et al. argue that an individual’s attention to a message or a task is a function of: (a) the individual’s need for sensation (stimulation), and (b) the level of stimulation that is provided by a message or a task. Nevertheless, in most cases, individuals are unaware of these needs (i.e., they for the most part act at unconscious levels). Donohew notes that “if individuals do not achieve or maintain this state of exposure to a message, it is very likely that they will turn away and seek another source of stimulation—which might be another message—that helps them achieve the desired state. If activation remains within some acceptable range, however, individuals are most likely to continue to expose themselves to the information.” (Donohew et al., 1998, p. 458) Thus, one potential explanation for an individual’s need for sensation, and the perceived sensation-value of the task; similarly, a potential explanation for an individual’s continuing motivation to attend to a task again involves the fit between the individual’s need for sensation, and the perceived sensation-value of the task. (pp. 8–9)

If the perceived sensation-value of the task is within the preferred range for an individual, then that student will be more likely to: (a) initially engage with the task, and (b) continue to engage with the task. Indeed, there is research that clearly supports the effect of need for sensation and perceived sensation value on cognitive engagement. In an experiment by Lorca et al. (1994), it was observed that messages moderately high in sensation value attracted both high and low sensation seekers, whereas messages offering only a moderate level of sensation attracted only low sensation seekers. This suggests that in order to maximize attention, all messages (or, in the instance considered in this chapter, all tasks) should be relatively high in sensation value. (Donohew et al., 1998) (p. 12)

Students who have a high need for sensation, and are confronted with academic tasks that are perceived as being low sensation-value, may not attend to academic tasks as well as students with lower needs for sensation. (p. 19)

Curricula can be adapted to meet the needs of adolescents with high need for sensation. Nevertheless, it often may be impractical and cost-prohibitive to adapt curricula for high sensation seekers. Indeed, few would argue that all curricula should be aimed at high sensation-seeking youth. However, many students simply do not identify with school, and are unmotivated to achieve in academic situations. (Veelki, 1997) The inclusion of at least some of Donohew’s suggestions for tailoring tasks and messages for high sensation-seeking adolescents may improve the motivation of at least some of these students for many academic tasks. (p. 20)
Findings and instructional implications from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) included those noted by Pintrich, Brown, and Weinstein (1994). McKeachie and others were mentioned with respect to the MSLQ.

Significant main effects surfaced for all 4 motivational variables (intrinsic motivation, task value, self-efficacy, and expectancy for success) on self-report critical thinking, suggesting a strong link between motivation and critical thinking. That is, subjects who reported high motivation tended to report high critical thinking, whether or not they received didactical instruction. These findings support a growing body of literature which suggests important interactions between motivational and cognitive spheres of learning. (McKeachie et al., 1990; Pintrich, 1988, Resnick, 1987) Specifically, these data suggest that four aspects of motivation tend to be consistent with high student self-ratings of critical thinking: (a) a strong desire for mastery of course concepts (intrinsic motivation); (b) viewing course tasks as highly important, useful, and interesting (task value); (c) a high certainty that one can learn and understand course material (self-efficacy); and (d) a high expectation for course success (expectancy). (pp. 299-301)

Pintrich and Maehr (2004) paused to summarize the multifaceted world of the pre-adolescent learner.

During early adolescence students have the cognitive capacity for high level thinking but also have social opportunities and constraints unique to that time of life. Placing high level demands on an increasingly complex and competitive environment may be beneficial under certain circumstances. For early adolescents, those needs may be strong positive personal relationship and guidance for learning strategy support. (p. 228)

Instructional Strategies

Teacher-student rapport and social-emotional learning. Upon nurturing strong, positive, personal relationships and guidance for learning strategy support,

...Our students want to know that we are human beings as well as teachers and that we recognize their humanity as well as their position as students. Staying within our assigned institutional roles can provide safety, distance, and predictability but not a lot of humanity in our classrooms. Leaving these roles can be very risky, but it is perhaps one of the most important risks that we can take. (Scorczewski, 2005, p. 142)
Lounsbury and Clark (1990) investigated the impact of teacher-student relationships on learning.

During the first week in March, 1989, 162 observers shadowed eighth graders in 161 schools (two students were shadowed in the same school). Observers were primarily administrators and teachers. University professors, parents, retired educators, college students, counselors, and central office personnel also were included among the observers. (p. 9)

The results of these observations espoused the significance of teacher-student rapport as an instructional strategy.

The fundamental importance of the teacher and the resulting student-teacher relationship must not be overlooked. When all is said and done, the quality and character of the individual teacher personality is of more importance in facilitating learning than the content, the materials, or the organizational arrangement. In this shadow study, as in the previous ones, this fundamental truth was readily apparent—the teacher makes the difference. (Lounsbury & Clark, 1990, p. 139)

Simply put, “Schools that are organized to foster positive relationships between teachers and students will realize higher student achievement” (Lounsbury, 2002, p. 31).

Having cited Chang-Wells and Wells, Valenzuela, Hartup, Tizard, Goldstein, and Noddings, Monzo and Rueda (2001) captured a summary of similar findings.

Studies have shown that the ways teachers interact with students, their strategies for encouraging participation, and the ways they do or do not attempt to respect students’ needs, interests, concerns, and preferences have an important impact on motivation, task engagement, and, ultimately, learning. (Chang-Wells and Wells 1993; Valenzuela 1999)

Interactions between teachers and students take place within the context of relationships...Hartup suggests that the knowledge of and commitment to the other that exists in close relationships facilitates collaboration in which participation is negotiated so as to provide assistance that is responsive to the learner. He further contends that the dialogue that takes place between people who know each other well and have an interest in joint participation is likely to mediate more effectively the process by which regulation of cognitive function becomes internalized by the learner. Others have come to similar conclusions based on empirical studies. (Tizard 1985)
That the quality of the relationship between teachers and students can have an important impact on movement through the zone of proximal development is the argument that Goldstein (1999) makes. Drawing upon Nel Noddings' (1984) conception of the caring encounter, Goldstein argues that the combination of affective and cognitive interactions required for movement within the zone of proximal development is similar to Noddings' description of a caring encounter. According to Noddings, caring is not a term that describes a feeling but rather something that one engages in, a moral imperative requiring action. A caring encounter involves the "one-caring" meeting the "cared-for" with engrossment and receptivity, leading to emotional displacement and action on the cared-for's behalf. Engrossment involves putting aside all other interests and concerns and listening to and watching intently for the other's needs and concerns. Receptivity, according to Noddings' use of the term, involves feeling as much as possible what the other feels. Goldstein (1999) has convincingly argued that the act of engrossment and receptivity by the one-caring in a caring encounter seems significantly similar to discussions of the continual and close assessment and intersubjectivity required in providing responsive assistance in the zone of proximal development....

...The trust fostered between teachers and students while playing and talking outside of typical classroom contexts is key to student adjustment to school, affect toward the teacher, and engagement in academic tasks.... (pp. 441-443)

Student engagement presupposes a democratic classroom environment.

In democratic classrooms, teachers win their students' hearts while they are getting inside their students' heads. How they teach and what they teach play integral roles in developing their relationships with students....

...Classroom management and student discipline work together, not in a traditional paradigm of control and punishment, but as central to the curriculum and classroom experience. Student-centered teachers educate the whole child, helping to mold students' moral identities and fostering democratic behaviors and values. In this sense, discipline does not mean "to punish," but rather "to educate." (Brazelton, 1992)

Strong teacher-student relationships not only reduce discipline problems, but they also connect behavior and decision making-both in and out of the classroom-to the curriculum. (Wolk, 2002) As one teacher put it, "The best discipline is a good curriculum." (Dawson, 2002) The best discipline and curriculum are, in turn, built on caring and trusting relationships. These elements-teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and how and what we teach-are as interwoven and interdependent as a double-helix strand of DNA. Together they create caring classrooms with a shared intellectual purpose....
Teachers need to allow students to see them as complete people with emotions, opinions, and lives outside of school. A good way for a teacher to get students to treat him or her like a human being is to act like one. We all have successes and failures, dreams, and hopes, and we need to share these with others to cultivate relationships, empathy, and understanding. Of course, life also has its lighter moments. Humor is one of the best ways for teachers and students to connect. (as cited in Wolk, 2003, pp. 14-18)

Emphasized by Robinson and Kakela (2006),

...Educators who are able to connect with their students are often enthusiastic, dramatic in their presentation, and passionate not only about their subject, but about their students' learning the subject. This awareness is empowering and facilitates a dialogue of learning and knowledge better than almost any technique. It humanizes the educational process and makes students feel like they have something of value to bring to the table. (p. 203)

One educational researcher, Intrator (2004), gauged this process by examining the various ways in which students experience time in the classroom and by referring to Denise Pope.

As I sat side by side with young people in classrooms and later debriefed them about their experiences, I focused on two central questions: What is happening in students' heads and hearts as they experience school? What characterizes classroom episodes during which students become wholly engaged and energized, finding genuine meaning in academic experiences?...

Slow time. Students often described class time as monotonous and classroom activities as predictable, mechanically routine, and dull. As one student put it, “Sitting in class is like being in the car with your parents on a long road trip without your CD player.” When students experience slow time you can watch them trying to invent ways to occupy themselves. They read magazines, listen surreptitiously to headphones, or drift off into daydreams.

Lost time. A more intense form of disengagement I observed possessed strange, almost eerie properties. During lost time, time unfolds without students being able to describe or articulate any form of experience. They do not describe themselves as daydreaming but as passively waiting for class to end. As one student said, “I enter a zone where time bends, but does not move.”

Fake time. Aware that teachers monitor their engagement and attention, teenagers tactically position themselves to appear attentive. They devote energy to what Denise Pope (2001) calls “doing school,” by which she means going through the right motions to appear as though they are learning and focused. One student told
me that I set up my books, position my calculator, and sit forward in my seat not because I’m interested, but because I know my teachers like to see me looking like I’m paying attention.

This charade of attention often masks students’ crafty and surreptitious efforts to undertake projects unrelated to the class unfolding before them. Students do homework, pass notes, generate to do lists, and study for quizzes—all the while monitoring the teacher and classroom activities.

*Worry time.* High schoolers spend vast stretches of time worrying and strategizing about nonacademic matters. Students describe a host of distractions to their attention that drain their capacity to emotionally and intellectually connect with what happens in class—from romantic spats to impending athletic events or drama performances.

*Play time.* I’ve observed students as they watched movies, listened to wonderful musical recordings, and sat through interesting lectures. Students in this state of experience are genuinely attentive but passive. They watch with the vigor of a pop-corn-scarfing sitcom viewer. I’ve also sat with students who were purportedly engaged in collaborative group work, but who were actually deep in off-topic social conversation that would tactically shift upon arrival of the teacher....

The final category of student experience I identified, *engaged time,* represents students deeply immersed in learning. From my vantage point as the shadow, I witnessed students becoming roused to life, animated with feelings and ideas. Episodes of intense concentration occurred. High schoolers experienced these moments as provocative, enchanting, memorable, and enjoyable. They described feeling immersed and involved and said things like “I can’t believe how fast class went!” or “That was intense!”....

The teachers who successfully held the attention of students used a variety of approaches and techniques. Generally, they practiced anti-boredom pedagogy and were relentlessly attuned to the attention-scape of their classroom. When attention waned, they intervened. Here is a sampling of approaches: manipulate classroom pace..., feed the need to create..., share your personal presence..., know students as people..., and connect content to teen questionings. (pp. 29-23)

In the pursuit of connectivity, students must be invited to learn. Tomlinson (2002) embraced an active inquiry with respect to this invitation.

What invites students to learn? Because students vary, what is inviting will vary as well. In general, however, students have at least five needs that teachers can address to make learning irresistible: affirmation, contribution, purpose, power, and challenge. Sometimes, teachers find that the learning environment is key to meeting student needs. Sometimes the mode of instruction is key. Generally,
environment and instruction work in tandem to invite, inspire, and sustain student learning. Together, they make the content important....

Whatever the reason, students come to school needing to know that:

I am accepted and acceptable here just as I am.
I am safe here—physically, emotionally, and intellectually.
People here care about me.
People here listen to me.
People know how I’m doing, and it matters to them that I do well.
People acknowledge my interests and perspectives and act upon them....

Many students come to school looking for a way to contribute to their world.
They need to feel that:

I make a difference in this place.
I bring unique and valuable perspectives and abilities to this place.
I help other students and the entire class to succeed.
I am connected to others through mutual work on common goals....

Students come to school in search of purpose. They need to know that:

I understand what we do here.
I see significance in what we do.
What we do reflects me and my world.
The work we do makes a difference in the world.
The work absorbs me....

To feel powerful in the classroom, students need to believe that:

What I learn here is useful to me now.
I make choices that contribute to my success.
I know what quality looks like and how to create quality work here.
Dependable support for my journey exists in this classroom....

Students feel challenged in the classroom when they perceive that:

The work here complements my ability.
The work stretches me.
I work hard in this classroom.
When I work hard, I generally succeed.
I am accountable for my own growth, and I contribute to the growth of others.
I accomplish things here that I didn’t believe were possible....

Teachers extend learning invitations in many ways. Such invitations exist in the way that a teacher addresses students, in the learning environment, in classroom
procedures, and in student work that provokes both engagement and understanding. Do students care about learning? One of the most satisfying discoveries in the teacher’s life is that when teaching is genuinely invitational, there exists no “off switch” to student engagement in learning. (pp. 8-10)

Along this continuum,

...Fifty-eight adolescents from two middle schools with contrasting socioeconomic and ethnic neighborhood characteristics illustrated responses to four topics: self-perception, personal achievement, inspiring teachers, and ideal future environments. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the medium of drawings as a methodological technique for visual data analysis. The design of the study was focused on interpreting the perceptions of adolescents’ worlds as expressed by the visual narratives in their drawings....

Three major characteristics (themes) of teachers were represented as motivational or inspirational to these adolescents’ intellectual and emotional growth: (a) teachers who gave clear expectations; (b) teachers who were understanding, helpful, caring, and empathetic; and (c) teachers who made learning fun and interesting....In many of the responses to the drawing tasks, description and interpretation of the visual narratives revealed a positive relationship between adolescents’ perceptions of their personal achievement and self confidence and their close associations with caring, inspirational teachers and parents....

Another aspect of this study that has received the attention of other researchers (Greene; Wubbels et al., 1997) was teachers’ interpersonal skills “crucial to creating and maintaining a positive working climate.” (Wubbels et al., 1997, p. 82) This was made apparent in this study from interviews which focused on students’ drawings of inspirational teachers. “Essentially, effective teachers have to be excellent communicators as well as fine technicians.” (Ibid, p. 82) Perceptions of inspirational teachers from this study corroborated other research. (Greene, 1986; Noblit, Rogers & McFaden, 1995; Noddings, 1992) Specifically, the data shed light on the responsibility of the teacher role. (as cited in Chula, 1998, pp. 2-72)

In lieu of personal teacher characteristics, Strong, Silver, Perini, and Tucalescu (2003) argued that the teacher’s role is to design and implement lessons based on human interests.

Sessions have taught us that a teacher’s personality, voice, or style of instruction are not key factors in producing boredom. Instead, boredom is primarily an effect of curriculum. Curriculum design based on four natural human interests—the drive toward mastery, the drive to understand, the drive toward self-expression, and the
need to relate—will not only reduce student boredom, but will yield boredom’s opposite: abiding interest in the content that students need to learn…. 

...We should ask ourselves certain questions when confronted with boredom:

Have we clearly defined the goal of the lesson or unit in terms of a performance or product?

Have students had opportunities to examine the competencies required to produce that performance or product?

What skills have we modeled clearly? What skills have we undertaught?

Have we built on-the-spot feedback and revision into the instructional design?...

What role does choice play in my classroom?

Do I regularly model the strategies that students need to shape their projects to their own interests and concerns?

Do I make a rich set of samples available for students to study?

How much time and guidance do students have to explore their work and their problems with it? (pp. 25-28)

While teachers are mindful of these curricular questions, time again is a crucial factor for student engagement.

Carroll’s model for school learning offers an alternative to the fixed entity view of academic ability. For Carroll, “time on task,” a term widely used in schools today, was not a matter of exposure or elapsed time, but rather a product of the child’s learning rate and the quality of instruction. Implicit in his model is the assumption that given sufficient time to learn, quality instruction, and the willingness to persevere, almost all students have the capacity to master the school’s curriculum. This view flies in the face of the fixed entity view of academic ability, which implicitly at least holds that those with high ability can deal with analysis, synthesis, and problem solving, while those with low ability can only be expected to memorize rudimentary elements rather than master higher-level thinking skills. (as cited in Raffini, 1993, p. 45)

For those students who require more time to learn,

...Teachers can structure and guide a variety of student-teacher dialogues to help students realize the connection between success and effort....Our studies indicated changes in how students attributed causes to success or failure.
Gradually, throughout the school year, students attributed fewer successes or failures to ability and more to effort. Students also promoted their personal strategies for advancing academic and social goals, such as how to be attentive in class, how to prepare for a test, how to get to class on time, or how to approach a friend for help. (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003, pp. 52-53)

High-achieving students want a teacher to offer academic assistance; students who are lower achievers value more person-to-person teacher help, and attention that may go beyond just the academic. Such a student values a teacher with patience, a sense of humor, the ability to listen, and the willingness to help. When these students sense that a teacher doesn’t really care about them personally, they lack the incentive to do their work or to participate. (Rubinstein, 1994, p. 37)

Sensitivity to varying learning rates is an integral part of teacher-student rapport as is creating opportunities for students to demonstrate their competencies. Cohen (1999) cited Brooks and Werner in describing these opportunities.

Students need to have areas in their lives in which they feel competent and accomplished, areas that generate a sense of pride. We must remember that feelings of incompetence prompt students to retreat from challenges and to engage in avoidant behaviors that often exacerbate their problems. Students require positive feedback and encouragement from their teachers. A focus on encouragement should not be confused with false praise or inflated grades since students are very perceptive in knowing when they are receiving undeserved positive evaluations. Positive feedback about a child’s competencies must be predicated on actual accomplishment, which requires that teachers provide ample opportunities for children to succeed in areas that are judged to be important. It is also important to emphasize that a focus on competencies is not incompatible with offering feedback to correct a student’s performance or behavior as long as this feedback is done in a nonaccusatory, nonjudgmental manner that does not humiliate the child.

There is a metaphor I use to capture a child’s areas of strength. Many at-risk students seem to feel that they are swimming or drowning in what I call an “ocean of inadequacy.” To counteract this image of despair we must remember that every child possesses “islands of competence,” that is, areas that are (or have the potential to be) sources of pride and accomplishment. If we are to serve as the “charismatic adults” in the lives of students, we have the responsibility of identifying, reinforcing, and displaying these “islands of competence”; in so doing, a ripple effect may be triggered that provides students with the courage, strength, and motivation to venture forth and confront learning tasks that have been problematic for them in the past....
If students are to develop a feeling of ownership and accomplishment, educators must provide them with many opportunities for assuming responsibilities, especially responsibilities in which they are helping others. I find that enlisting students to use their "islands of competence" in such activities as tutoring or writing stories for younger children, painting murals on the walls of the school, watering plants, assisting the custodian or secretary, and taking messages to the office reinforces their motivation and self-esteem as they witness concrete examples of their achievements. (Brooks, 1991; Werner, 1993) They also develop a more positive attachment to school. (pp. 67-69)

"Physical and mental changes in middle-schoolers are clearly reflected and even accentuated in the social and emotional domain. They are becoming increasingly aware of their own selves and of relationships with other individuals" (Alexander & George, 1981, p. 7). To form an attachment to school, middle school students seek out caring adults.

Effective middle level schools create environments of "pervasive caring." (George and Oldaker, 1985; Johnston and Markle, 1986) Joan Lipsitz's (1984) study of four exemplary middle schools concluded that "[S]uccessful schools insist on the schools as community-and the students assert...Most striking is the level of caring in the schools." (p. 181) These teachers are committed to young adolescents. They work hard to build a climate of mutual respect, trust, open communication, and acceptance of differences. (George et al., 1992) A study of the "very best teams" in the "very best schools" reinforces the importance of caring teachers. It found that "[T]he most consistent characterization of teachers on the exemplary teams referred to the respect, understanding, and commitment teachers manifest in their relationships with their students." (George and Stevenson, 1989, p. 11) (as cited in Waverling, 1995, p. 156)

As cited in Jackson and Davis (2000), the establishment of effective relationships is paramount to student success.

The relationships established within the middle school affect both the quality of student learning and the quality of teaching. When teachers have the opportunity to know students well, they are more likely to make the kind of intense investment in their students, the tailoring and targeting of teaching strategies to students' interests and learning needs, that fosters greater student achievement. (George & Alexander, 1993, p. 335) In turn, as teachers become more effective in helping a broader range of students learn, student motivation increases, creating a "win-win" upward spiral toward improved student performance. ( Eccles & Wigfield, 1997, p. 22; Uzg & Stevenson, 1999b, p. 65)
Not all of adolescents’ motivation to learn can be attributed to their sense of belonging to a middle grades community. Yet research has shown that the degree to which students are engaged and motivated at school depends to a great extent on the quality of the relationships they experience there. (Eccles & Midgley, 1989, p. 140; Lee & Smith, 1993, pp. 164, 180) Supportive relationships are necessary, although not sufficient without high-quality curriculum and teaching, to foster high performance among young adolescents. (pp. 122-123)

Daniels (2005) addressed caring and cited Lumsden with regard to middle level education.

In fact, interacting with this age group can be exhilarating. Adolescents are ready to work and achieve when they know that people care about them, that what they’re learning matters, and that they possess the skills necessary to meet a given challenge. Effective middle school teachers are passionate about the learning of these young adolescents, and they recognize that if they do not meet their students’ social and emotional needs, they will waste their content-area expertise. Students simply will not achieve academically when their affective needs go unaddressed....

We cannot ignore the affective needs of middle school students if we want to help them achieve academically. According to Lumsden, if students experience the classroom as a caring, supportive place where there is a sense of belonging and everyone is valued and respected, they will tend to participate more fully in the process of learning. (1994, p. 3) (pp. 52-54)

The need for teachers to internalize environmental classroom factors was apparent in the Scorzewski (2005) points.

If a teacher can listen carefully to what is happening in the classroom and respond to what is occurring there from moment to moment, she might well be able to attend to and continue to shape what is going on even as she invites the class to have a say in what that is. A class is something that students and teachers create together. (p. 57)

Moreover, Scorzewski (2005) interpreted the elegant tension of the classroom environment in conjunction with anthropology.

Human social interactions, which include those between students and teachers, are never either conflict-ridden or entirely safe and nurturing. Instead, they are always both. If our students testify to their solidarity with others even as they struggle to position themselves against what seems unfamiliar or frightening, then our comments must address these contradictions without foreclosing the possibility of...
transformation. Unni Wikan, an anthropologist who records her study of the Balinese in Managing Turbulent Hearts, gives us a richer perspective on this issue when she states that "everyone's sitting room is feared by someone": "This space which is protected and private to me is another's threatening and exciting public": the guest fearing for her life is vulnerable and must exercise as much caution as anybody "on display" in public.... [The] sitting room has multiple connotations: of safety and danger, protected space and exposed arena, intimacy and warmth but also of caution and restraint. Which ones will be foremost depends on situational and biographical factors. (55) (p. 100)

Citing multiple researchers, Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) provided examples of situational and biographical factors with a crossover to social-emotional learning.

It is estimated that between 15 and 22 percent of U.S. youth have social-emotional difficulties warranting intervention. (Cohen, 2001; Mogno & Rosenhirt, 2001) Students at risk for school failure are particularly vulnerable for social-emotional problems. For example, 75 percent of students with learning disabilities (LD) exhibit social skills deficits (Kavale & Forness, 1996), and the U.S. Department of Education (1996) reported that 29 percent of adolescents with disabilities required social skills instruction beyond high school....

Social-emotional learning (or social-emotional education) involves using procedures and methods to promote EQ. Within two years after publication of Goleman's book, more than 700 school districts implemented social-emotional learning (SEL) programs designed to teach students social-emotional skills. (Ratnesar, 1997) SEL programs focus on emotional awareness, social skills, and interpersonal problem solving (Cohen, 2001)....

Understanding one's own emotions is prerequisite to self control and anger management. (Bodine & Crawford, 1999) Understanding the emotions of others is essential if learners are to read social situations accurately and respond to them appropriately. Without emotional understanding, students will misread the behaviors of others. Teachers can help learning increase their emotional understanding by teaching nonverbal communication skills and by becoming emotion coaches....

Most (i.e., 93%) of emotional meaning is conveyed without words: fifty-five percent through facial expressions, body posture, and gestures, and thirty-eight percent through tone of voice. (Mehrabian, 1968) In order to understand one's emotions and the emotions of others, learners must have adequate nonverbal communication skills. Nowicki and Duke (1992) and Duke, Nowicki, and Martin (1996) identified six areas of nonverbal communication: paralanguage, facial expressions, postures and gestures, interpersonal distance (space) and touch, rhythm and time, and objective. Instructional goals are for learners to recognize
nonverbal messages of others and to effectively express themselves nonverbally. ...

Once learners acquire adequate nonverbal communication skills, emotional understanding can be further improved through use of emotion coaching, a technique developed by John Gottman (1997). Teachers and parents acting as emotion coaches can use a five-step process to provide guidance about emotions. Parents and teachers first need to be aware of the learner's emotion. Gottman recommends that adults put the child's situation into an adult context. For example, how we feel when our boss dresses us down during a staff meeting is similar to how a child feels when a teacher reprimands the child in front of the class. Step Two involves recognizing uncomfortable emotions as teaching opportunities and discussing feelings rather than punishing or criticizing. Emotions are validated rather than evaluated during Step Three. Step Four involves helping the learner label his emotion. The skills learned during nonverbal communication lessons will help learners use words to label how they feel. The final step involves helping the learner solve the problem that led to the feeling. ...

Adequate interpersonal skills are an important component of emotional intelligence. Types of social skills include interpersonal behaviors needed to make and keep friends, such as joining in and giving compliments; peer-related social skills valued by classmates, such as sharing and working cooperatively; teacher-pleasing social skills related to academic success, such as listening and following directions; self-related behaviors, such as following through and dealing with stress; communication skills such as attending to the speaker and conversational turn taking; and assertiveness skills. (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998) (pp. 63-73)


When schools implement high-quality social-emotional learning programmes effectively, the academic achievement of children increases, incidences of problem behaviours decrease, and the relationships that surround each child are improved. Social-emotional learning is sometimes called "the missing piece," because it represents a part of education that links academic knowledge with a specific set of skills important to success in schools, families, communities, workplaces and life in general....Effective, lasting academic and social-emotional learning is built upon caring relationships and warm but challenging classroom and school environments....

Life skills that promote academic and social-emotional learning must be taught explicitly in every grade level. ...The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (www.CASEL.org) has identified a set of social-emotional skills that underlie effective performance of a wide range of social roles and life
tasks. To do this, CASEL drew from extensive research in a wide range of areas, including brain functioning, and methods of learning and instruction. These are the skills that provide young people with broad guidance and direction for their actions in all aspects of their lives, in and out of school. The skills are included below.

CASEL’s essential skills for academic and social-emotional learning

**(Know yourself and others):**

- Identify feelings-recognize and label one’s feelings;
- Be responsible-understand one’s obligation to engage in ethical, safe and legal behaviours;
- Recognize strengths-identify and cultivate one’s positive qualities.

**(Make responsible decisions):**

- Manage emotions-regulate feelings so that they aid rather than impede the handling of situations;
- Understand situations-accurately understand the circumstances one is in,
- Set goals and plans-establish and work toward the achievement of specific short- and long-term outcomes;
- Solve problems creatively-engage in a creative, disciplined process of exploring alternative possibilities that leads to responsible, goal-directed action, including overcoming obstacles to plans.

**(Care for others):**

- Show empathy-identifying and understanding the thoughts and feelings of others;
- Respect others-believing that others deserve to be treated with kindness and compassion as part of our shared humanity;
- Appreciate diversity-understanding that individual and group differences complement one another and add strength and adaptability to the world around us.

**(Know how to act):**

- Communicate effectively-using verbal and non-verbal skills to express oneself and promote effective exchanges with others;
Build relationships—establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding connections with individuals and groups;

Negotiate fairly-achieving mutually satisfactory resolutions to conflict by addressing the needs of all concerned;

Refuse provocations—conveying and following through effectively with one’s decision not to engage in unwanted, unsafe, unethical behavior;

Seek help—identifying the need for and accessing appropriate assistance and support in pursuit of needs and goals;

Act ethically—guide decisions and actions by a set of principles or standards derived from recognized legal/professional codes or moral or faith-based systems of conduct…. (pp. 7-17)

CASEL member, James Comer,

...Is a pioneer in such programming in urban schools. (Comer, 1988; Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes, & Jeyner, 1999) In New Haven Connecticut, the New Haven Social Development project set a precedent for district-wide programming designed to increase basic skills, values, and work habits through education and self-esteem enhancement. (as cited in Romez, Kantor, & Elias, 2004, p. 93)

Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving and Open Circle are other social-emotional learning programs that have met with success.

The SDM/SPS program (Elias and Clabby 1989) is a comprehensive, research-validated prevention program that provides teachers and school personnel with training and curricula to equip students with social and decision making skills. It has been designated as a Model Program by the National Education Goals Panel; as a Promising Program by the Department of Education Expert Panel on Safe, Disciplined, and Drug Free Schools; and as a Select Program by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Focal skills are in the domains of students' self-control, social awareness, and group participation, and in strategies for making decisions and solving problems, especially when under stress. An application phase emphasizes the transfer of skills to everyday life choices and academic situations. This research-validated program is used as a framework to help school districts develop comprehensive prevention programming in order to reduce such behaviors as aggression and substance abuse.

The SDM/SPS curriculum is designed to satisfy a school's existing curriculum mandates, most often in the health or guidance areas. Implementation occurs through district classroom instruction of SDM/SPS skills, as well as ongoing efforts on the part of school personnel to reinforce and facilitate students' use of
these skills throughout the school day. The resulting SEL school environment fosters carryover of SEL skills beyond the classroom. The SEL skills covered by SDM/SPS are similar to those of other SEL-enhancing programs that have been noted as exemplary because they link to key SEL areas, have at least one well-designed evaluation study demonstrating their effectiveness in terms of their impact on the acquisition and use of SEL skills, and offer high-quality professional development.

Open Circle has been designated as a Promising Program by the U.S. Department of Education Expert Panel on Safe, Disciplined, and Drug Free Schools, and as a Select Program by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Quantitative evaluations have provided evidence of Open Circle's effectiveness in promoting SEL skills.

Researchers found positive effects on middle school adjustment for both girls and boys. For example, the study found that girls who had participated in the program for at least 2 years in elementary school showed, among other benefits, a significant increase in self-assertiveness as compared to girls who had not participated. Boys with at least 2 years of program participation in elementary school reported higher levels of social skills and self-control, and fewer problems with physical fighting when compared to nonparticipants. These findings lend support to the hypothesis that having two or more years of the program in elementary school has an impact on social adjustment even after children are no longer exposed to the program in middle school. (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, & Seigle, 2004, pp. 75-80)

As for the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), it is

...one of the largest and longest running models of social and emotional learning (SEL) in the United States. It demonstrates strategies for incorporating a comprehensive and systematic approach for integrating SEL through the lens of conflict resolution and intergroup relations into the daily life of middle school classrooms and schools across the United States....وان توم رودريك،##### executive director of ESR Metro, and Linda Lantieri began the program in New York City schools some 13 years ago, their vision was guided by a shared commitment to educating children in the ways of peace.

While the national global perspectives surrounding peace were paramount, Rodrck and Lantieri agreed that to attain peace in the world it would be essential to address young people's SEL by teaching conflict resolution and intergroup relation skills at the interpersonal level. And so, the work of RCCP is rooted in teaching concepts and skills that build classrooms and school communities that model democratic principles. The young adults in these schools recognize the role they play in becoming socially responsible citizens of a pluralistic, participatory society.
RCCP classrooms incorporate six themes into the curriculum: cooperation, caring communication, expression of feelings, appreciation of diversity, responsible decision making, and conflict resolution. Classroom teachers teach direct skill-based lessons in each of these areas. They also design lessons that infuse the newly acquired skills and strategies into their academic teachings. "The goal of the classroom teacher is to establish a peaceable classroom, one in which these themes are apparent. Peace is regarded as a dynamic process that everyone works toward and believes in" (Kreidler, 1994)

An early independent evaluation of the RCCP-New York City site, released in May 1990 by Metis Associates, found that more than 87% of the teachers said that RCCP was having a positive impact on their students. Teachers and administrators reported the following changes among the students: less violence in the classroom, increased spontaneous use of conflict-resolution skills among children, increased self-esteem and sense of empowerment, increased awareness of feelings and verbalizing of those feelings, more caring behavior, and more acceptance of differences.

RCCP was highlighted in a National Institute of Justice report. (De Jong, 1994) The U.S. General Accounting Office also lauded RCCP's work in its report School Safety (1995), which found that RCCP is "widely regarded as one of the most promising violence-prevention programs among public health experts." (as cited in Cohen, 1999, pp. 127-133)

Additionally,

...Research has demonstrated that emotions drive attention, learning, and memory. (LeDoux 2000) Students distracted, or even overcome, by emotions that interfere with learning may find it difficult to accomplish simple academic tasks, such as following directions. (Zima et al. 1998) Thus, understanding the context in which students learn entails recognizing that students of all ages bring their social and emotional competencies with them to class. By equipping children with the social and emotional competencies they need to successfully negotiate their way through these challenging times, SEL helps pave the way for effective academic instruction and the attainment of core curriculum standards....

In a metaanalysis of educational research over the last 50 years, Wang and colleagues (1993) revealed that social and emotional variables have the greatest influence on learning, including students' metacognitive processes (e.g., planning), prosocial behaviors, effort and perseverance, and classroom management and climate....

Social and emotional learning program outcomes include improvement related to the development of positive relationships between students and teachers, attachment to school, student attitudes and motivation, and decreased nonattendance/dropouts. (Elias et al. 1991; Felner et al. 2001; Hawkins et al.
1999; Hawkins et al. 2001) These factors are important determinants of school success and the achievement of state standards....

In a content analysis of literature reviews, government reports, and summaries of educational trends, Day and Koorland (1997) found that the competencies most frequently projected to be important to today’s students as they progress into adulthood are those associated with SEL. In order of frequency, the five most frequently mentioned competencies were higher-level thinking/problem solving, interpersonal communication, decision making, communicating effectively, and self-management....

...Many sections of the revised New Jersey standards include social and emotional competencies. The Comprehensive Health and Physical Education revisions, for example, explicitly require skills for “social and emotional health,” “character development,” “leadership, advocacy, and service,” and “critical thinking, decision making, and communication.” (N.J. Department of Education 2004) The world languages, social studies, and career education sections also contain revisions to incorporate SEL skills.

Iowa, Wisconsin, New York, and South Carolina are also among the states where there is evidence of social and emotional competencies emerging in the curriculum standards. (as cited in Kress et al., 2004, pp. 71-74)

Within the context of special education, Elias (2004) referred to Jawary and stressed the emerging need for social-emotional skill sets at the middle school level.

Many nuanced abilities are necessary for successful social interaction, particularly in the complex environment of schools. SEL, as the missing piece, helps bridge a gap in both theory and practice with regard to improving outcomes for students with learning disabilities. SEL also addresses the confluence of individual skills and the way in which the environment promotes the development of those skills and supports their use....

Children with LD share a difficulty with students in special education in general, as well as a growing number of both nonclassified and gifted students; they have an inadequate feelings vocabulary and thus have trouble recognizing feelings in themselves and others. This is a more significant issue than it may appear at first. Feelings vocabulary represents the way we process the world around us....

Students with LD inevitably sit in classes, especially in inclusion contexts, beset with strong emotions. These emotions often interfere with the learning process. Traditionally, it might be expected that students would learn anger management or some other kinds of self-control skills, and these are highly valuable....
Jawary (2000) adds that successful inclusion depends on students having the social and emotional skills necessary to manage a range of social interactions between students with disabilities and their diverse peers. She also points out that successful, inclusive settings are characterized by a strong supportive climate, a clear value structure, and the necessary resources, especially staff. (pp. 56-59)

Gewertz (2003) indicated programs such as PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) and social-emotional research have been linked to cognitive development.

For eight years, University of Denver senior research scientist Barbara L. McCombs has been studying 30,000 primary and secondary school students and their teachers nationwide. She has seen that students whose teachers adopt “learner-centered practices,” such as tuning in to their needs, making them feel it’s safe to ask questions, and giving them a voice in their learning, are “dramatically more motivated” and do better on standardized tests....

Examining the PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) curriculum in four studies of regular and special education students, Mark T. Greenberg, the director of Pennsylvania State University’s Prevention Research Center, found that students in the program behaved better in class and performed better on tests of the brain’s planning and problem-solving. PATHS, began by Greenberg and colleague Carol A. Kusche in 1980, focuses on developing emotional and problem-solving skills and good peer relations.

Research is still sketching a picture of the precise mechanisms by which social and emotional functioning interact with the cognitive. But scientists know now that the neocortex, which is responsible for rational thought, and the limbic system, where emotion is seated, are interconnected and function synergistically, giving the emotional wiring the power to influence the rational.

In addition, some researchers reason that because emotional development precedes most forms of cognitive development, emotional skill-building might be a necessary precursor to cognitive skill-building....

Schools that consider their mission exclusively academic are “very wrong-headed,” says Daniel Goleman, who popularized the notion of emotional intelligence in a series of books. “Social-emotional learning is a win-win, because it is the active ingredient in most preventive programs, and may help educators fulfill their mandate as well because you’re teaching children crucial skills they need in order to learn.” (pp. 38-41)

Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory (1983) provides one way of thinking about the social/emotional domain and its possible relevance to schools. In describing
what he called the personal intelligences (including intrapersonal and interpersonal). Gardner posited these areas as being critically relevant to healthy human functioning. "In the day-to-day world no intelligence is more important than the interpersonal... We need to train children in the personal intelligences in school" (quoted by Goleman, 1995, p. 42).

Goleman's recommendations for schools' social/emotional curricula in the interpersonal area included nurturing relationships and keeping friends; accurately analyzing social situations; having empathy, taking others' perspectives; listening, resolving conflicts, and cooperating; reading social and emotional cues; being able to resist negative influences; and developing leadership abilities. Intrapersonal issues included self-awareness, both of moods and of thoughts about those moods; identifying, expressing, and managing feelings; self-control, impulse-control, and the ability to tolerate the delay of gratification; the regulation of emotion to keep distress from swamping thought; the ability to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustration; optimism, hope, and the capacity to engage in flow (the harnessing of emotions in the service of performing and learning near the summit of ability, where the challenge is sufficient for anxiety and performance to be optimal).

Another way to organize learning in a human development course has been suggested by Salovey and Mayer (1990), who subsumed Gardner's two personal intelligences into one social/emotional domain and described five areas within this domain.

1. self-awareness (e.g., recognizing a feeling as it happens);
2. managing emotions (e.g., self-soothing, shaking off anxiety, gloom, irritability);
3. motivating oneself (e.g., marshalling emotions in the service of a goal, delaying gratification, sifting impulsivity, being able to move into flow);
4. recognizing emotions in others (e.g., empathy, altruism); and
5. handling relationships (e.g., skill in managing emotions in others, popularity, leadership, interpersonal effectiveness). (as cited in Matthews, 1998/1999, pp. 59-63)

McCann and Turner (2004) captured the overall impact positive and negative emotions have on the learning process congruent with Gardner's personal intelligences. During this review, Pekrun, Turner and Patrick, Blumenfeld, Meece, Paris and Turner, and Turner and Schallert were quoted and/or paraphrased.

Part of successful student self-regulation is the ability to manage emotional states during learning tasks... Pekrun (1992, 2000) has been researching the interconnections among students' emotions and motivational processes that occur
during learning. His studies demonstrate that students experience a wide range of emotions as they strive to complete academic tasks. These emotions are most often related to the extent to which students believe they have control over their learning and the value they attach to their learning. (Pekrun, 2000) Pekrun’s research is particularly interesting because it shows that students experience emotions about their learning tasks, and, in a reciprocal fashion, these emotions influence how they approach subsequent learning tasks. For example, he has demonstrated that “activating positive emotions like enjoyment of learning and hope for success may exert positive effects on motivation to learn, the use of flexible learning strategies, task-focused attention, and resulting achievement.” (p. 146)

Most teachers want their students to experience positive and pleasant emotions with the hope that these emotions will foster motivation, engagement, and learning. Toward this end, research has enhanced our understanding about the types of goals and classroom-structures that are most likely to facilitate students’ enjoyment, interest, and learning. For example, Turner and Patrick (this volume) point out that teachers’ emphasis on mastery goals has been associated with higher levels of students’ intrinsic interest and positive attitudes about learning tasks. Other teaching strategies that have been shown to generate student interest include incorporation of variety, meaningfulness, and student collaboration (Blumenfeld, 1992; Meece, 1991; Paris & Turner, 1994)....

Pekrun (1992, 2000) asserted that, in contrast to the effects of positive emotions, the impact of negative emotions on students’ motivation and learning have less straightforward effects. Although students may disengage with learning activities when they encounter difficulties and negative emotions, negative emotions also have the potential to bring into play complex thinking and problem solving when students value high achievement. (Turner & Schallert, 2001) Pekrun suggested that the motivational consequences triggered by negative emotions could lead to either strengthened motivated behavior or to the withdrawal of effortful behavior, depending on a variety of influences such as students’ future goals or a desire to please their teachers and parents. The current emphasis on disentangling the impact of negative emotion on learning can potentially broaden teachers’ ability to help students more effectively approach and complete their academic tasks.

Students may use a number of strategies for learning academic material. A major stumbling block to task engagement and completion is students’ lack of ability to support their motivation when confronted with obstacles. Internal and external distractions can arise without warning, leaving students to wrestle with the effects of negative emotion or competing goals. Students frequently need a collection of volitional strategies to strengthen their resolve to stay task-focused when obstacles to their motivation for learning occur. Even if students have a repertoire of strategies to help them direct their learning activities, they may not have a repertoire of strategies to help them manage their motivation. (pp. 1698-1699)
Of these volitional strategies, Cohen (1999) introduced self-reflection.

The key to making responsibility a living reality for young adolescent students is to provide them with the opportunity to reflect on their learning and behavior throughout the school day. Reflection is not something that happens automatically. Time for reflection needs to be provided, and teachers need their own strong social skills to utilize this time well. Without reflection, social and emotional learning (SEL) remains fragmented and temporary at best. (p. 99)

Kessler (2000) supplemented this portion of the research.

Many students, especially in adolescence, have not learned how to manage their feelings. “Why do I become so immensely filled with thought and feeling that it seems uncontrollable?” a student writes. “Why don’t I ever take time to think?” Structured opportunities of silence give them this chance to check in, to discover feelings and thoughts that might otherwise be buried under the commotion of activity and constant interaction with others and with technology. (p. 40)

The gateway of silence and solitude challenges our assumptions about the concept of participation. Many teachers grade students as if participation equals talking. During activities that invite heart and soul into the classroom, we must examine and redefine “participation” to emphasize engagement and attentiveness rather than talking and doing. If we pressure students to address any theme we raise or engage in every activity we suggest, we risk trampling on the fragile boundaries of the child’s growing sense of self. (pp. 40-52)

Both student perception of competency levels and social classmates pose threats to student engagement. Akey (2006) presented these threats.

Students’ beliefs about their competence and their expectations for success in school have been directly linked to their levels of engagement, as well as to emotional states that promote or interfere with their ability to be academically successful. For example, students who believe they are academically incompetent tend to be more anxious in the classroom and more fearful of revealing their ignorance. They fear that educational interactions will result in embarrassment and humiliation, and this, in turn, inhibits them from behaving in ways that might help them, such as asking questions when they are confused or engaging in trial-and-error problem-solving. In addition, such students are more likely to avoid putting much effort into a task so that they can offer a plausible alternative to low ability or lack of knowledge as an explanation for failure—for example, “I could have done it if I tried, but I didn’t feel like doing it.” (p. 4)
In another study, Ryan and Paterek (2001) cited several researchers to support related environmental findings. Among these researchers were Goodenow, Midgley, and Skinner and Belmont.

The authors investigated how students' (N=233) perceptions of the social environment of their eighth-grade classroom related to changes in motivation and engagement when they moved from seventh to eighth grade. In general, prior motivation and engagement were strong predictors of subsequent motivation and engagement, whereas gender, race, and prior achievement were not related to changes in motivation or engagement. A higher-order classroom social environment factor accounted for significant changes in all motivation and engagement outcomes. Four distinct dimensions of the social environment were differentially important in explaining changes in various indices of motivation and engagement. In general, however, students' perceptions of teacher support, and the teacher as promoting interaction and mutual respect were related to positive changes in their motivation and engagement. Students' perceptions of the teacher as promoting performance goals were related to negative changes in student motivation and engagement.

Previous research has investigated one dimension of the classroom social environment: teacher support. Teacher support has been defined slightly differently by various researchers (e.g., Goodenow, 1993; Fraser & Fisher, 1982; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), but it generally involves characteristics such as caring, friendliness, understanding, dedication, and dependability. Thus, teacher support refers to the extent to which students believe teachers value and establish personal relationships with them. Perceived teacher support has been linked to students' achievement motivation. When students perceive their teacher as supportive they report higher levels of interest and enjoyment in their schoolwork (Goodenow, 1992; Fraser & Fisher, 1982; Midgley et al., 1989; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), a more positive academic self-concept (Felner, Aber, Primavera, & Cauce, 1985), and greater expectancies for success in the classroom (Goodenow, 1993). Nonparental adults are especially important as role models and sources of support during adolescence. (Midgley et al., 1989) Longitudinal research has shown that perceived teacher support has a stronger effect on students' motivational beliefs during junior high school compared to elementary school. (Midgley et al., 1989) In line with this research we expect that teacher support will be related positively to students' academic efficacy. Perceptions of teacher supportiveness, and confidence that help will be available if needed, would be expected to decrease students' anxiety about task engagement. Such anxiety undermines self-regulated learning (Pintich & De Groot, 1990).

The findings of the current study highlight the important role of the classroom social environment in supporting or undermining changes in young adolescents'
motivation and engagement. This study indicated that the classroom social environment is an overarching construct that is comprised of different, but related, dimensions. The classroom social environment explained changes in students’ efficacy relating to their teacher, efficacy accomplishing their schoolwork, self-regulated learning, and disruptive behavior, even after previous motivation, engagement, achievement, and demographics were entered into the equations. These findings are in line with a growing body of research documenting that young adolescent adjustment is related to the nature of the context that youth experience. (e.g., Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Eccles et al., 1993; Goodenow, 1992) The current study also supported our conceptualization of several discrete dimensions of the social environment of the classroom: teacher support, the promotion of interaction with peers around academic tasks, the promotion of mutual respect among classmates, and the promotion of performance goals among classmates. Furthermore, the results indicated that students’ perceptions of the distinct dimensions within that environment were differentially important with respect to accounting for the changes in the various indicators of motivation and engagement.

The first dimension of the social environment involved a belief that their teacher cared about and supported them. Perceiving their teacher as supportive was especially important for students’ confidence relating to the teacher, self-regulated learning, and disruptive behavior. When students moved into a middle school classroom with a teacher they perceived as supportive, their efficacy for communicating and getting along with their teacher increased and they engaged in more self-regulated learning. Furthermore, when students believed their teacher tried to understand them and was available to help, they engaged in less off-task and disruptive behavior in the classroom....

We found that students did not typically become more disruptive when they were encouraged to talk with one another during lessons. This is an important finding, given that teachers may be reluctant to allow students to talk with each other during academic work because of management concerns....

...Students’ perception of being in a classroom where the teacher encouraged classmates to respect their ideas and not to laugh or make fun of them was the most important dimension of the social environment in predicting changes in academic efficacy and self-regulation of school work. This indicates that being in an environment where students’ ideas and efforts are respected, with minimal threat of being embarrassed or teased, boosts students’ confidence in their ability to learn, and suggests they devote more cognitive resources to engaging with the tasks in hand....

...When students felt that their actions would be compared directly with others in the class, they expressed less confidence in their ability to relate well to their teacher and also reported engaging in more disruptive behavior. This indicates that students may be less willing to engage in the task and may become more
disruptive when they believe their performance will be viewed as an indicator of their relative ability. These results are consistent with Butler's (1995) suggestion that student relationships may be affected adversely by a class performance focus and that evidence that an emphasis on competition has drawbacks for students. (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) (pp. 437-447)

Classroom management. "In a study reviewing 11,900 pieces of research that spanned 50 years, Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993/1994) identified 28 factors that influence student learning. The most important one was classroom management" (as cited in Boynton & Boynton, 2005, p. 3).

For this reason, classroom management is an instructional strategy that is implicitly related to student engagement. Much of classroom management hinges on teacher-student rapport, specifically the types of techniques utilized by teachers to elicit desired academic and social behaviors. Boynton and Boynton (2005) peppered their work with references to Thompson, Canter and Canter, Kohn, Marzano, and Zehm and Cotler. Boynton and Boynton claimed that French and Raven identified,

...Five bases of social power teachers use to influence students: referent power, coercive power, legitimate power, expert power, and reward power....French and Raven (1960) state that these five bases are used by educators to wield power over students, just as they are used in other social relationships....Based on our belief in the importance of relationships with students, we call for 40 percent referent power (relationships), followed by 25 percent legitimate power (clear parameters for acceptable behaviors), 25 percent expert power (monitoring skills), and, finally, 10 percent reward and coercive power together (consequences)....

The trick is to build a classroom discipline system around the first three components-positive teacher-student relationships, clear parameters, and monitoring skills-and to artfully and naturally integrate them into your classroom instruction so that they are just part of the way you do business and interact with students. When they are implemented effectively, it will be difficult for an untrained observer to separate them from your classroom instruction. Even more important, they become a powerful pre-emptive approach to classroom discipline that greatly diminishes the need to use consequences or punishments....

When students feel that you value and care for them as individuals, they are more willing to comply with your wishes....So, it makes sense that developing positive
teacher-student relations is one of the most effective steps you can take to establish a positive discipline climate in the classroom. It's critical to remember that when you treat students with respect, they tend to appreciate and like you. When they appreciate and like you, they are more willing to want to please you—which causes them to be more likely to behave appropriately.

A review of the research shows that authors have a lot to say about positive relationships with students. Thompson (1998) says, "The most powerful weapon available to secondary teachers who want to foster a favorable learning climate is a positive relationship with our students." (p. 6) Canter and Canter (1997) make the statement that we all can recall classes in which we did not try very hard because we didn't like our teachers. This should remind us how important it is to have strong, positive relationships with our students. Kohn (1996) goes a step further, saying, "Children are more likely to be respectful when important adults in their lives respect them. They are more likely to care about others if they know they are cared about." (p. 111) Marzano (2003) states that students will resist rules and procedures along with the consequent disciplinary actions if the foundation of a good relationship is lacking. He goes on to assert that relationships are perhaps more important at the elementary and junior high levels than at the high school level. And according to Zehr and Kottler (1993), students will never trust us or open themselves up to hear what we have to say unless they sense that we value and respect them. (pp. 3-7)

Self-discipline and acceptance of established norms is featured in much of the empirical research pertaining to the point at which teacher-student rapport and classroom management intersect. As cited in Marzano and Marzano (2003),

...In a recent meta-analysis of more than 100 studies (Marzano, 2003b), we found that the quality of teacher-student relationships is the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management. In fact, our meta-analysis indicates that on average, teachers who had high-quality relationships with their students had 31 percent fewer discipline problems, rule violations, and related problems over a year's time than did teachers who did not have high-quality relationships with their students...

...The most effective teacher-student relationships are characterized by specific teacher behaviors: exhibiting appropriate levels of dominance, exhibiting appropriate levels of cooperation, and being aware of high-needs students. ...

...In a study that involved interviews with more than 700 students in grades 4-7, students articulated a clear preference for strong teacher guidance and control rather than more permissive types of teacher behavior. (Chiu & Tulley, 1997) Teachers can exhibit appropriate dominance by establishing clear behavior expectations and learning goals and by exhibiting assertive behavior....
The seminal research of the 1980s (Emmer, 1984; Emmer, Sanford, Everton, Clements, & Martin, 1981; Everton & Emmer, 1982) points to the importance of establishing rules and procedures for general classroom behavior, group work, seat work, transitions and interruptions, use of materials and equipment, and beginning and ending the period or the day. Ideally, the class should establish these rules and procedures through discussion and mutual consent by teacher and students. (Glasser, 1969, 1990)

Along with well-designed and clearly communicated rules and procedures, the teacher must acknowledge students’ behavior, reinforcing acceptable behavior and providing negative consequences for unacceptable behavior. Stage and Quiroz’s research (1997) is instructive. They found that teachers build effective relationships through such strategies as the following:

Using a wide variety of verbal and physical reactions to students’ misbehavior, such as moving closer to offending students and using a physical cue, such as a finger to the lips, to point out inappropriate behavior.

Cuing the class about expected behaviors through prearranged signals, such as raising a hand to indicate that all students should take their seats.

Providing tangible recognition of appropriate behavior—with tokens or chits, for example.

Employing group contingency policies that hold the entire group responsible for behavioral expectations.

Employing home contingency techniques that involve rewards and sanctions at home....

Teachers can also exhibit appropriate levels of dominance by providing clarity about the content and expectations of an upcoming instructional unit. Important teacher actions to achieve this end include:

Establishing and communicating learning goals at the beginning of a unit of instruction.

Providing feedback on those goals.

Continually and systematically revisiting the goals.

Providing summative feedback regarding the goals....

Assertive behavior differs significantly from both passive behavior and aggressive behavior. These researchers explain that teachers display assertive behavior in the classroom when they:
Use assertive body language by maintaining an erect posture, facing the offending student but keeping enough distance so as not to appear threatening and matching the facial expression with the content of the message being presented to students.

Use an appropriate tone of voice, speaking clearly and deliberately in a pitch that is slightly but not greatly elevated from normal classroom speech, avoiding any display of emotions in the voice.

 Persist until students respond with the appropriate behavior. Do not ignore an inappropriate behavior; do not be diverted by a student denying, arguing, or blaming, but listen to legitimate explanations....

Probably the most obvious way to communicate appropriate levels of cooperation is to take a personal interest in each student in the class. As McCombs and Whisler (1997) note, all students appreciate personal attention from the teacher....

Teachers should, for example,

Make eye contact with each student. Teachers can make eye contact by scanning the entire room as they speak and by freely moving about all sections of the room.

Deliberately move toward and stand close to each student during the class period.

Make sure that the seating arrangement allows the teacher and students clear and easy ways to move around the room.

Attribute the ownership of ideas to the students who initiated them. For instance, in a discussion a teacher might say, “Cecilia just added to Aida’s idea by saying that....”

Allow and encourage all students to participate in class discussions and interactions. Make sure to call on students who do not commonly participate, not just those who respond most frequently.

Provide appropriate wait time for all students to respond to questions, regardless of their past performance or your perception of their abilities.... (pp. 6-12)

Despite the preference for strong teacher guidance and control, students yearn for autonomy in classrooms as well. Seemingly, student engagement is affected by the degree to which the teacher scaffolds control to meet the motivational needs of students.

The literature in this regard draws comparisons between teacher style and student engagement levels.
The motivating style of one person influences the motivation, emotion, learning, and performance of others. (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1987; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Reeve, 2002; Ryan & La Guardia, 1999) In school settings, for instance, students with autonomy-supportive teachers, compared to students with relatively controlling teachers, show greater mastery motivation, perceived competence, and intrinsic motivation (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981), more positive emotionality (Patrick et al., 1993), greater conceptual understanding (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986), higher academic performance (Boggiano, Flink, Shields, Seelbach, & Barrett, 1993), and greater persistence in school (vs. dropping out; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). Autonomy-supportive teachers are able to facilitate these positive educational and developmental outcomes in their students because they find ways to involve and satisfy their students' psychological needs (for autonomy, competence, and relatedness) during instruction (Hedbre & Reeve, 2003; Reeve, 2002).

We scored two aspects of students' engagement: students' active task involvement during instruction (engagement measure #1: task involvement) and students' voice and initiative in trying to take personal responsibility for their learning (engagement measure #2: influence attempts). For engagement measure #1 (task involvement), we assessed attention, effort, verbal participation, persistence, and positive emotion (following Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Wellborn, 1991; Wellborn, Connell, & Skinner, 1989). For engagement measure #2 (influence attempts), we assessed students' active attempts to influence the flow of classroom events (Fiedler, 1975; Koenigs, Fiedler, & deCharmes, 1977).

We also found that the more teachers used autonomy-supportive instructional behaviors, the more engagement their students showed. This positive effect of autonomy support on students' engagement was found in four separate tests of Hypothesis 2 (for two groups of teachers and for two different measures of engagement). From this finding, we conclude that students' engagement is sensitive to changes in their teacher's motivating style. (as cited in Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004, pp. 149-165)

Raffini (1993) purported,

...Clearly, when teachers believe that one of their primary responsibilities is to support the advancement of autonomy and self-determination in their students, they behave in ways that contribute to a motivating classroom personality. When they believe that students should learn to assume responsibility for their own behavior, they convey faith and trust in the ability of students to act in constructive ways. Most students rise to meet this level of expectation, and the classroom atmosphere becomes friendly, supportive, and productive. (p. 111)
However, the altruistic calling patterns of teachers often result in a classroom environment devoid of critical and appropriate student feedback that detracts from student engagement and learning.

Most teachers tend to call on those students that can be consistently depended upon to provide a correct answer. This is primarily done so that: (1) a student not expected to know the answer does not get embarrassed, (2) to ensure that the students in the class hear a correct and thoughtful reply, and (3) to provide a certain degree of teacher reward associated with high quality student performances. (Kerman, 1980) This phenomenon produces an interesting paradox. Students will soon realize that they are less likely to be called on; consequently, because they are not actually engaged in classroom interaction they become less able. Knowing that they probably will not be called upon, many students are likely to seek attention and success through dysfunctional means or unresponsively drift through school.

Taking time to listen to a student who wished to contribute to the class or offer a personal experience clearly establishes a climate where a student feels he/she is important. A variety of studies link this notion of personal regard (Kerman, 1980) to a student's willingness to engage in learning and, thus increase the likelihood of achievement.

All too often, the majority of feedback students receive in a classroom is short praise or correction. The ongoing stream of one-liners such as “good,” “okay,” “no,” “wrong,” etc., add little to a student's feeling of well-being in the classroom. Feedback has proved to be a powerful tool in motivating students and ensuring the correctness of original learning. (Hunter, 1986) Praise can and should be used to extend pupil-teacher contact and to encourage and reinforce desired behaviors. Yet, there is significant evidence to support the idea that less able students actually receive less praise than higher achieving students. (Good, Biddle, Brophy, 1975) This was true even when less able students provided correct answers. (as cited in Ogden & Germinario, 1988, p. 6)

Providing students with meaningful feedback during class can be time consuming, and the misuse of class time can clearly complicate the achievement of lesson objectives.

Alexander and George (1981) commented on the appropriate use of class time. Teachers who are able to produce increased amounts of on-task behavior without increasing the amount of time devoted to discipline or the level of negative teacher affect are teachers who help students score higher on tests or basic skills than the students would be likely to do with some other type of teacher behavior....
Time spent on task is of the essence in increasing academic achievement while classroom discipline efforts detract from this time. Teachers who find themselves taking significant amounts of time dealing with deviant and disruptive behavior are likely to have less time to devote to the skills to be tested.

Since learning is a process that takes place in time, and what a student does is essential to his learning, influencing how pupils use their time becomes a critical variable. (p. 223)

Helping students control their disruptive but self-gratifying impulses and fostering an appreciation for the value of working hard to master academic content are formidable tasks. They require understanding, patience, and a knowledge of student needs and perceptions. Punishments, threats, bribes, and verbal hammering have all been used by teachers to control student behavior. While these techniques may provide teachers a temporary respite from classroom chaos, they do little to help students develop, identify, and internalize the reasoning necessary for self-control and internal motivation. Controlling students' impulses for immediate self-gratification and pleasure always requires that teachers set limits on the behavior of students in the classroom. But how teachers set these limits and how students perceive the nature and context of the limit setting will determine whether students learn to assume responsibility for their own behavior or whether they will simply learn to obey. ...When limits are needed to control student behavior, it is important that teachers explain the reasoning behind them. (Raffini, 1995, pp. 87-90)

Relative to limits,

...It is important that teachers take three steps if their nonconforming students are to behave responsibly: (a) explain the importance of what they are asking students to do, (b) speak collegially (rather than autocratically), and (c) allow students to choose how to demonstrate that they have done what their teacher wants them to do. When teachers exhibit these behaviors, three of every four nonconformists will behave as requested. (Duns, White, and Zentstern 1982) (as cited in Dunn, 2001, p. 71)

These points are difficult to accept but are worth remembering:

1. You cannot control each student in your room. You cannot control students' behaviors, their desires to learn, or their successes in learning. All you can do is control yourself-model with your own behavior, desire to learn, and demonstrated willingness to help students learn.

2. It's futile to try to defend yourself and your value judgments through logical arguments with students, especially if either of you is angry.
3. The trick is to bring the students into the process, to offer choices within established boundaries rather than saying, “Yes, you can” or “No, you can’t.” It’s better to say, “You have the choice of doing this or that.”

4. Take a moment to think of what you were like as a teenager. Certainly you responded best when there was understanding, empathy, and gentle humor from another. (Rabinstein, 1994, p. 49)

In Torlina and Doubet (2005),

...Prather says that connecting with his students is even more important than his sustained work to connect his students with the curriculum. "I had the idea early on," he says, "that if I were assertive and hard-core with the rules, then the students would work hard for me." That’s not proven to be the case. What does work is connecting with students. Not only does it more successfully get them to work, but it also encourages them to accept living within the classroom rules.

“The curriculum that I write has to come from a place that the kids are comfortable with,” says Prather. “And that obviously starts with the teacher-student relationship.” (p. 15)

Not to be underestimated is the pervasive context of goal setting in the classroom management research. “Motivation and positive affect for learning derive from many components and interact with and result from many factors. These factors include things such as goal setting, goal analysis and goal using, efficacy expectations, outcome attributions, interest, valuing, perceptions of self-worth and instrumentality, and utility value (Ames & Archer, 1988; Locke & Latham, 1990; McCombs, 1989; McCombs & Marzano, 1990; Pintrich & De Groof, 1990; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Schunk, 1989; Zimmerman, 1990; Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989)” (as cited in Pintrich et al., 1994, p. 259).

“When students write down their goals, they are forced to examine themselves and see their own dreams. This is important because, ultimately, reflecting on why they hope to achieve their goals, rather than simply knowing what their goals are, is what motivates them to pursue their life ambitions” (Rader, 2005, p. 123).
Radet (2005) augmented this view with six steps to success: (a) "Choose a specific goal and write it down;"; (b) "Decide a time when your goal will be achieved;"; (c) "Develop a plan to achieve your goal;"; (d) "Visualize yourself accomplishing your goal;"; (e) "Work hard and never give up;"; (f) "Self-evaluate" (pp. 124-125). With respect to developing a plan to achieve your goal, Radet (2005) stated,

... Students should make a list of things that may threaten the successful achievement of their goals and what they can do to remove those threats. This is an integral part of the goal-setting process, because it takes the daunting obstacles and reduces them to a manageable size. Once the obstacles are clearly defined, they often are more easily solved. This step is particularly important for special education students because it helps them break tasks into more manageable parts. This also helps students feel a greater sense of ownership for their goals, increasing their motivation and chances of success. (p. 124)

Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) emphasized the applicability of goal setting and evaluation to the classroom environment and student motivation. Multiple researchers were cited in this process.

Goals, which can be acquired through modeling, are integral components of academic motivation and learning. Goals motivate students to exert extra effort and persistence, focus on relevant task features, and use strategies that will help them learn. (Locke & Latham, 1990) At the start of learning activities, students have goals such as acquiring skills and knowledge, finishing work, and making good grades. When learners make a commitment to attain a goal—such as improving the clarity of their writing—they are likely to compare their performance with the goal as they work on the task. Positive self-evaluations of progress increase self-efficacy and sustain motivation. (Schunk, 1990) A perceived discrepancy between performance and the goal may create dissatisfaction, which can enhance effort. (Bandura, 1988, Locke & Latham, 1990)

Goal-setting theory has been applied to various domains including academic, motor, work, and social. (Locke & Latham, 1990) Here we focus on the academic domain in which achievement research shows that goals do not automatically enhance learning and motivation (Schunk, 1990); rather, the goal properties of specificity, proximity, and difficulty are important. Although students often have broad, general goals (for example, to become a better writer), goals that incorporate specific performance standards are more likely to enhance learning and activate self-evaluation than are general goals. (Locke & Latham, 1990) Specific goals also promote efficacy because it is easier to evaluate progress.
toward an explicit goal than to a general goal. Thus, it is helpful to divide a general goal into a set of specific subgoals that focus attention and effort and enhance performance. (Locky & Latham, 1990)

Goals can be distinguished by how far they extend into the future. Compared with temporally distant goals, proximal short-term goals are achieved more quickly and result in greater motivation and higher efficacy. Proximal goals are especially influential with young children who are not fully capable of conceptualizing distant outcomes. (Graham & Harris, 1984) Research shows that broader, longer range goals (such as writing a term paper) are best accomplished by subdividing the task into a series of short-term, manageable subtasks. (Schunk, 1990) This approach is apparent in the opening vignette, in which the 16-week unit is divided into components to be accomplished on a short-term basis.

The difficulty of a goal is an important property for motivation because people expend greater effort to attain a difficult goal than an easier one. (Schunk, 1998) However, people do not attempt to attain what they believe is impossible. Goals that are perceived as moderately difficult increase motivation and convey a clear sense of progress, which increases efficacy.

Goal effects also may depend on whether the goal denotes a learning or performance outcome. (Meece, 1991) A learning goal refers to what knowledge and skills students seek to acquire (for example, to learn how to write active-voice sentences); a performance goal (such as to write 10 passive-voice sentences) denotes what task students are to complete. (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) The questions that Robert and Kantu ask in the vignette in this book’s introduction represent learning goals. Goal-setting research typically has focused on such goals as rate or quantity of performance, but educators increasingly are advocating greater emphasis on learning processes and strategies. (Weinstein, Goetz, & Alexander, 1988)

To evaluate progress it is essential that learners receive goal progress feedback, especially when they cannot derive reliable information on their own. For example, students may have trouble determining whether their writing style is improving or whether they are comprehending text better. Goal progress feedback increases self-efficacy and motivation when it conveys that students are competent and can continue to improve by working diligently. It is probable that the students in the opening vignette received goal progress feedback from their teacher and from peers because there is much class sharing.

As mentioned earlier, the goal principles described in this section are applicable to domains other than academic skill learning. Because of this, it is common to have multiple goals operating at the same time, which may conflict. (Wintzel, 1992) For example, students might believe that academic progress can be gained only at some social cost (such as peer disapproval). Nonetheless, the generality of
goal principles and those involving self-efficacy, modeling, and self-evaluation has been established in diverse contexts. (pp. 39-40)

Mastery and performance goals have a role in student motivation. Meece, Herman, and McCombs (2003) explained that role, referring to researchers such as Midgley, Anderman, Hicks, Roeser, Kaplan, Ames, and Ryan.

Given the important influence of achievement goals on the direction and quality of students’ learning, researchers have studied how classrooms may help shape students’ goal orientations. Much of this research has focused on the early adolescent years, when young people experience significant declines in motivation as they enter new school environments. Considerable evidence indicates a shift in the motivational orientation during the middle school transition. For example, Midgley, Anderman, and Hicks (1995) compared elementary and middle school teachers’ use of teaching practices emphasizing mastery goals (e.g., emphasizing understanding rather than rote memorization, recognizing students for trying hard, accepting mistakes as part of the learning process, etc.). When compared with elementary teachers, middle school teachers reported using fewer of these teaching strategies. Similarly, longitudinal studies have shown that students perceive their classroom environment as less focused on mastery goals and more focused on performance goals, as they make the transition into middle school. (Anderman & Midgley, 1997) As school or classroom goals change, students also adopt performance goals for their own academic work. (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Roeser et al., 1996). As discussed earlier, changes in the saliency of different achievement goals can have significant implications for students’ cognitive and behavioral engagement in learning activities. Consistent with this view, Kaplan and Midgley (1999) linked negative changes in the perceived saliency of mastery goals to how students responded to difficulty, challenge, and failure in the classroom.

The present study provides additional support for the utility of a goal framework for examining individual and classroom differences in students’ achievement goal orientations. Consistent with prior research, significant relations were found among students’ achievement goals and measures of adaptive learning. Specifically, mastery and performance goals were positively correlated with students’ self-reports of academic efficacy and active learning strategies. These findings are consistent with other correlational studies that examined relations among goal, efficacy, and strategy use measures (e.g., Ames & Archer, 1988; Meece et al., 1988; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Nolen, 1988).

Students reported a stronger mastery focus when they perceived their teachers as using learner-centered practices that involved promoting high-order thinking, honoring student voices, creating supportive relations, and adapting instruction to
individual and developmental needs. A similar pattern was found for performance goals. . .

In general, the results of this study add support to student mediation models of classroom influences. (Ames, 1992; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986; Weinstein, 1989) This research has suggested that (a) students are active interpreters of their classroom experiences; (b) students' perceptions of teaching may not resemble the teachers' self-reported or observed practices; (c) individual differences in motivation and achievement can influence how students perceive and interpret their classroom experiences; and (d) students' interpretations of classroom experiences are critical mediators of achievement and motivation outcomes. (McCombs, 2003; Weinstein, 1989) Research focusing on the “functional significance” of classroom experiences (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986) is also consistent with the learner-centered model, which emphasizes the importance of viewing the classroom from the learner’s perspective. (McCombs, 1997, 2003; McCombs & Lauer, 1997) (pp. 459-471)

Raffini (1993) implied there is a value in conducting goal setting conferences in the classroom while citing Borba.

In a review of research dealing with the influence of goal-setting on academic performance, Raffini (1988) reported that many studies were designed to measure the achievement effects of individual goal-setting conferences between teachers and students. A number of studies indicated that goal-setting conferences were especially effective in increasing student academic achievement in the classroom (Raffini, 1988) . . .

In regard to goal setting, Borba (1989), quoting McCollum, reports that 87 percent of individuals have no specific goals or plans for their lives, and only 3 percent of the population have specific written goals. It is this group, according to Borba, “who accomplish 50 to 100 times more than those who have goals but do not write them down.” (1989, p. 231)

Since many students have difficulty with the process of goal setting, the following five goal characteristics, adapted from Borba (1989), can be useful for teaching students the skill of goal setting:

Conceptualized. After explaining to students that goals are something we try to achieve in life, it is helpful to encourage students to picture in their minds what it is they would like to accomplish. The process of mental imagery...can be useful here. Students can focus on long-range goals, like career choices, or they can conceptualize weekly or monthly goals.
Measurable. It is important that students be able to measure progress toward attaining their goals. This requires some type of evaluation procedure that will provide students with feedback regarding goal achievement.

Achievable. Goals need to be challenging but attainable. Teachers need to help students examine this aspect of their goals and, if necessary, have them estimate their probability of reaching the goal they have selected. According to Borba, "the most successful goals are usually set slightly higher than the last goal." (1989, p. 231)

Sequential. It is important that students learn that there are incremental steps in the process of goal attainment. Helping them define these steps is a valuable component of goal setting.

Personal. Autonomy is fostered when students are encouraged to select goals based on their own interests, rather than being pressured by the expectations and performances of others. Students should be encouraged to avoid comparison and focus on their own commitment and progress. (pp. 165-167)

Parkay and Hass (2000) indicated,

...Obstacles will almost certainly get in the way of completing strategies and reaching goals, and that's why it's important to use benchmark stops to revisit and revise strategies and goals. Setting benchmarks helps the children stay on target instead of becoming frustrated when they don't reach their goals. Sometimes students find their goals unreachable. When this happens, they reconsider and revise their strategies. (p. 37)

"In addition to supporting autonomy, however, goal-setting strategies allow students to establish individual performance standards based on their own current skill and achievement levels. These personal standards make it possible for concentrated effort to lead to genuine feelings of success" (Raffini, 1993, p. 172).

Expectations for student performance generally precede autonomy and support in the learning process. Pintrich and Maehr (2004) revisited the association between expectations and student motivation.

In any achievement situation, words and actions are used to communicate "expectations." These expectations are intended to motivate us to attain certain goals. Press refers to those demands that define and guide students toward "success" in these situations. Press can be either a positive or negative force. As a
negative force, press greater expectations for performance but offers little support for meeting goals or fulfilling expectations. In situations with negative press, there is only the demand for performance. Individuals who are unable to reach expected levels of performance by themselves become unmotivated, disinterested, and eventually give up trying to achieve the goal. Demand without support creates a press that has negative motivational and achievement consequences. As a positive force, press may create expectations for understanding, and offers a variety of motivational and cognitive supports to help reach desired goals. If individuals are unable to immediately reach a goal, supports help bolster their efforts. Individuals who are pressed for understanding and supported in their efforts are likely to remain motivated, interested, and continue to work toward the goal. . . . The concept of positive press is based on the belief that personal and academic support and rigorous expectations for learning and instruction are complimentary demands. (p. 226)

Classroom management studies frequently encompass multiple measures.

In order to document the extent of students' engagement in learning, a staff survey regarding student engagement in learning was completed by teachers at each of the four targeted schools. . . . Documentation was also obtained through data collected from behavior observation checklists. . . . teacher journal entries completed during the first three weeks of the school year. . . . (Goss, Goss, Newicki, & Ross, 1997, p. 17)

The findings from this comprehensive study included these response percentages.

Students appear to be most motivated by a variety of activities and incentives. These categories are the most significant factors affecting student motivation, totaling approximately 60% of the responses. . . .

When completing the same survey, teachers responded that not listening was the most common non-engaged behavior displayed by the students in the classroom. Not listening accounted for 40% of the responses. The teachers also cited that not staying on task and not following classroom rules were also significant problems. These account for 25 and 30% of the responses, respectively. . . .

In response to question 3, teachers gave suggestions for increasing engaged behaviors. Almost half of the responses recommended good classroom management techniques, while about one-fourth of the responses suggested a variety of activities and student involvement to increase engaged behaviors. (Goss et al., 1997, pp. 18-19)

In an attempt to compartmentalize the findings, the scholar who conducted this study cited several tenets held by leaders of the field.
Wong and Wong (1991) define classroom management as a learning environment in which the teacher has well organized her space, materials, time, and students in order for instruction and learning to take place. In a well-managed classroom, misbehavior is unusual because students are on-task and involved in their school work. The teacher's goal is to create a productive working environment to establish student involvement and cooperation. According to Sanford, Emmer, and Clements (as cited in Wong & Wong, 1991) the characteristics of a well-managed classroom are:

1. Students are deeply involved with their work, especially with academic, teacher-led instruction.
2. Students know what is expected of them and are generally successful.
3. There is relatively little wasted time, confusion, or disruption.
4. The climate of the classroom is work-oriented, not relaxed and pleasant.

Teachers who have positive attitudes and behaviors are effective classroom managers. These teachers understand the characteristics of the students with whom they work, and they carefully plan learning experiences. A well-organized classroom sets the stage for orderly conduct. Effective classroom managers are skilled in a variety of discipline strategies. (Reed, 1991) According to Petry (1988) a school does not need many rules. Petry states that:

In our school we have one rule: "You will be a lady/gentleman at all times." We find this rule effective because it fits all circumstances. In a room with 10 rules posted, the manipulative student will always find an 11th to break. One rule is more effective because the teacher is the judge of compliance. (p. 34).

Fuhr (1993) asserts that an effective teacher has the following professional attributes: has effective discipline (consistent and fair), is always prepared, cares for students, is a motivating role model, is enthusiastic, believes all students can be taught, has the respect of students, and knows what to do, how to do it, and why.

Stefanick and Beli (1985) maintain that a classroom management system should not be overly restrictive. They recommend a cascade model for classroom discipline with steps in this order: preventive measures, supportive measures, corrective measures, and adaptive measures.

The diagnostic approach to classroom management focuses on preventing behavior problems. The essential elements to make this approach successful require that the teacher feel comfortable with oneself, the students, and the discipline style being used. Teachers must believe in their students' ability to display appropriate behavior. Lessons and activities must engage the students in learning and must be pertinent to their lives. Activities must be developmentally appropriate. Student involvement is necessary in creating classroom rules.
Students should be aware of the classroom routine and therefore follow it. Educators must recognize the intervals in which discipline problems occur. Respect and appropriate expectations for students' behavior must be modeled by the classroom teacher. The diagnostic approach allows for several methods of preventing and allocating behavior problems. Several suggestions are given for intervention. Teachers should use nonverbal methods, proximity control, setting consequences, behavior modification, and removal of disturbing cause of misbehavior to manage the classroom (Palardy, 1993).... (as cited in Foster et al., 1997, pp. 36-39)

The combined intervention of cooperative learning, social skill instruction, and classroom management produced positive outcomes based on the initial findings.

Basic social skill instruction promoted active listening, participation/staying on task, and group problem solving. Students interrupted less, took turns, restated ideas and feelings of others, and were more comfortable in maintaining eye contact. As the intervention progressed, students were more able to participate in discussions by asking and answering questions and volunteering information. More time was spent on-task due to students staying in their assigned area. Class collaboration increased through group problem solving activities. Students appeared to be flexible and calm, open to the opinions of others, able to compromise, and reach consensus. (Foster et al., 1997, pp. 58)

As an extension of the research mentioned in this study, having high expectations for students is a crucial aspect of classroom management in terms of student engagement.

"Students tend to learn as little or as much as their teachers expect. Teachers who set and communicate high expectations to all their students obtain greater academic performance from these students than do teachers who set low expectations" (Wong & Wong, 1998, p. 40).

Research on teacher expectations and student achievement has shown that expectations have a dramatic impact on student academic performance. (Kerzner, King, & Martin, 1980) Student behavioral performance is also dependent to a large degree on the expectations of significant adults in students' lives. Numerous studies indicate that the expectations teachers have for students tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies. It is therefore critically important for educators to monitor their interactions with the goal of communicating appropriately high behavioral and academic expectations to all students, not just to high achievers....
Increasing latency (Kerman et al., 1980) is another technique you can use to communicate that you have positive expectations for a student. Latency is the amount of time the elapses between the moment you give a student a response opportunity and the moment you terminate the response opportunity. Kerman and colleagues (1980) explain that the amount of time we give to students to answer questions is directly related to the level of expectation we have for them. We give more time to students when we have confidence in their ability to answer a question. Conversely, we give less time to students in whom we have little confidence. When you quickly give up on a student who is struggling with a response, it is clear to everyone in the classroom that you don’t expect him or her to come up with the right answer. In addition, when you give up on a student who initially struggles with a response, the student realizes that all he or she needs to do is “get off the hook” and respond to your question with a confused expression or blank stare. What you will find when you make a conscious effort to extend the length of latency you allow for low-achieving students is that these students will begin to pay more attention, become more actively involved in discussions, and minimize their behavior issues....

You also communicate positive expectations by giving hints and clues to your students. In their work on teacher expectations, Kerman and colleagues (1980) point out that teachers usually do more “deliberating and rephrasing” for students for whom they have high expectations and less for students for whom they have low expectations. It is important that we communicate to all our students that we have high expectations for their success, and one way to do this is by giving more hints and clues to all students, especially the low-performing students....

Another way to communicate positive expectations to students is by directly telling them they have the ability to do well. When you tell your students you have confidence that they can handle a difficult assignment or improve their behavior, you impart a very powerful message. Students often will work hard and behave appropriately to prove that your confidence in them is justified. Every child needs to have at least one significant adult in his or her life who believes that he or she can do well....

You can also let students know that you have positive expectations for them by referring to past successes (Kerman et al., 1980), ..., correcting students in a constructive way, ..., developing positive classroom pride, ..., demonstrating caring, ..., and preventing and reducing frustration and stress. (as cited in Boynton & Boynton, 2005, pp. 7-20)

Harmon (1994) summed:

...As all coaches know, sometimes saying the right thing at the right time can move people to surpass their own expectations, reach deep down and make those extra efforts. Inspiration has to do with bringing out the spirit, the vital
force, within us. Once that inner power, or self-motivation, is ignited, people push themselves to do their best.

If you are unpracticed in cheering students on, know that the most effective inspiring statements are rooted in genuine, respectful care. Sometimes, especially with older students, these statements are best made privately. Inspiring statements stir the best in others. They reach deep and say, in effect, "I'm with you. I want this for you. Working together, we can do the job."... The care of one person for another ignites the deep inner power that leads to the most inspired efforts. And if the care is mutual, if the students also care for the teacher, the inspiration flows along a highly-charged path: "We are in this together. Yet I can't do the learning for you. You must do it. By now you know how much I care for you. If for no other reason, learn this for me. I want you to master this material perfectly. I want to be proud for you. Let's show the world we can do it. Here we go." (pp. 81-82)

Authentic learning. Inspiring students is predicated on the quest for meaning.

Without meaning in their lives, students' motivation to learn is imperiled. Many students today cannot focus, listen, or even feel the will to learn. Helping these students find their own motivation is increasingly important. Young people who have the opportunity to discover what has meaning for them and who feel they are going somewhere in life can be more easily engaged in learning and persisting through obstacles and setbacks. "Deep meanings are the source of most intrinsic motivation," write Renata and Geoffrey Cain (1997) in Education on the Edge of Possibilities. "They are the source of our reasons to keep going even when we do not understand." (p. 112)

Not only motivation but the learning process itself relies on the student's ability to make meaningful connections, to discover and create patterns of meaning. Though many educators understand the importance of meaning at this level, they still find it difficult to make a place in school for "meaning" in its more mysterious, ultimate levels. (as cited in Kessler, 2000, p. 60)

Akey (2006) stated,

...Research indicates that over the long term, students are more likely to be engaged in the classroom when they are asked to conduct experiments, participate in debates and role-playing, create models, and complete projects. Evidence also suggests that when classroom instruction draws on students' preexisting knowledge, culture, and real-world experiences, it becomes more meaningful. Students enjoy learning more and learn better when what they are studying is of personal interest and relates to their lives. (p. 6)
Jackson and Davis (2000) identified three criteria for authentic student achievement.

Construction of knowledge: Students should construct or produce knowledge, instead of just reproducing or identifying understandings that others have created.

Disciplined inquiry: Students should engage in cognitive work that requires them to rely on a field of knowledge, search for understanding, and communicate, in "elaborate forms," their ideas and findings.

Value beyond school: Students' accomplishments should have value—either aesthetic, utilitarian, or personal—beyond just documenting their competence. (p. 69)

Essentially,

...Teachers who practice authentic pedagogy have respect for students' prior knowledge and establish a means to assess it. They emphasize opportunities for higher-order thinking and in-depth understanding. They offer multiple opportunities for students to express what they know in various forms—writing, speaking, building things, painting, and so forth. They serve as coaches, mentors, facilitators, and guides in a relationship similar to that of a cognitive apprenticeship. Teachers stress collaboration among students and high expectations for intellectual accomplishments. Teachers create learning opportunities to help students develop proficiency in constructing knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and addressing problems that have meaning beyond mere success in school. (Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran 1995) (as cited in Jenkins & Keeffe, 2001, pp. 78-79)

"Newmann's recent research generally confirms the value of authentic learning.

In a study of 24 public schools, when teaching was consistent with the standards for authentic instruction, assessment, and performance, students achieved at high levels, regardless of social background (Newmann & Associates, 1996, p. 14)" (as cited in Jackson & Davis, 2006, p. 71).

Waivering (1995) further conceptualized constructing knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and addressing problems that have meaning. Waivering acknowledged the work of Brophy, Erickson, Markle, Woolfolk, and others in so doing.
Relevant instruction means connecting content to students' lives and the world around them and providing opportunities for making choices. Such connections and input intrinsically motivate by making learning meaningful. When lessons are meaningful, students seek to stay actively involved. (Brophy, 1987; Ericsson, 1974)

Cognitive views of learning further explain the importance of connecting learning to students' frames of reference. They view learning as the processes of elaborating on concepts stored in long-term memory and actively seeking links between ideas. Teachers activate students' prior knowledge when they connect mental links between prior knowledge and new information. Building these links is the foundation for developing understanding. (Marks et al., 1990; Woofolk, 1993) Furthermore, relating lessons to students' interests and experiences makes abstract content more familiar and concrete, thus, more developmentally appropriate. (Brophy, 1987)

Current brain research supports the importance of relating content to students and the real world. The brain functions as a pattern detector. Through immersion in multiple complex and concrete experiences, the learner finds meaning by actively focusing on interconnections. More realistic settings provide the natural complexity that stimulates brain growth. In addition, life-like experiences integrate emotion and thinking, thereby optimizing learning. Thus, teaching that capitalizes on students' prior knowledge and actively involves them in seeking meaning from life-like experiences accesses the brain's potential. (Caine and Caine, 1994; Pealy, 1987) (pp. 310-311)

The establishment of curricular connections, links, and patterns perpetuates the integrated and interdisciplinary philosophies of education relative to student engagement.

Beane (1997) argues that the most powerful sources for concepts and questions are "the concerns of young people and social issues." He points out that personal and social concerns are likely to frame the way young people already organize their knowledge and experiences, making "integration all the more probable and meaningful." (p. 15) The connection between student concerns and learning also makes it all more essential to develop a curriculum that is accessible and culturally relevant to today's diverse student populations, regardless of their socio-economic or language background. If students can discover the connections between disciplines and themselves, the current world, and the future that awaits them, the curriculum we have been trying so hard to "cover" may at last be uncovered as meaningful, relevant to their own lives, and motivating. (as cited in Jackson & Davis, 2000, pp. 46-47)

"In a typical secondary school, students trek from one subject to another, with no continuity between classes. But when schools organize the curricula around essential..."
moral and existential questions, students can make powerful connections between the subject areas, while learning key content in each” (Simon, 2002, p. 26).

Siu-Runyan and Fairclough (1995) posited a polar opposite to the subject-centered approach.

Curriculum integration involves a particular meaning for curriculum organization, learning, and uses of knowledge. Multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and intradisciplinary correlations are not examples of curriculum integration…

While curriculum integration is likely to engage the attention of more young people than subject-centered approaches, some young people, for reasons quite apart from curriculum design theory, will find this no more engaging than other approaches. (p. 36)

However,

...Teachers who integrate instruction confirm the importance of intrinsic motivation to literacy learning. (Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1996) These teachers describe highly motivated learners as intrinsically involved, engrossed in learning, and sharply focused on lesson content. They expect their students to use higher order strategies, to interact socially with peers, and to persist despite difficulties. In contrast, students who are less intrinsically motivated are not expected to exhibit this level of engagement. (as cited in Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, p. 89)

Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) also summarized the work of several researchers contending,

...Because the engaged learner is continuously integrating diverse cognitive, motivational, and social attributes, designing an integrated context that will support these multiple aspects of the learner seems sensible. Our principles for integrated instruction contain three vital connections:

1. connections between disciplines, such as science and language arts, taught through conceptual themes;
2. connections between strategies for learning, such as searching, comprehending, interpreting, composing, and the teaching of content knowledge; and
3. connections among classroom activities that support motivations and social and cognitive development....

Well-formed interdisciplinary teaching often is tied to the presence of a rich conceptual theme that links the disciplines. A question usually focuses the
learning of students who are pursuing knowledge and understanding of an interdisciplinary topic. (Plumefield et al., 1991) To be effective, a theme must have enough breadth to embrace the disciplines that are being combined, and it must have the depth to support increasing growth in students' cognitive skills. An encompassing theme provides a place for skill instruction within the framework of interesting content. (Lipson et al., 1993) When a theme is launched successfully with an abundance of time and supportive materials, ideas from the original theme can lead to new discoveries in related fields. Themes that enable students to make new discoveries have been described by Bruner (1969) as "fuzzy, beautiful, and immensely generative." (cited in Brown, 1992, p. 171)

One comprehensive proposal for integration is the "coherent curriculum" (Pate, McGimis, & Homestead, 1995), which contains the following factors:

- goals of learning how to learn, problem solving, student responsibility, collaboration, deep context understanding, and risk taking;
- content integrations of science, social studies, math, language arts, and fine arts;
- multiple forms of assessment that exhibit student achievement;
- personalized learning in which student interests and skills determine learning activities;
- school scheduling to allow blocks of time for projects;
- communication to parents; and
- teacher reflection on instruction.

The reasons for introducing a coherent instructional agenda in the classroom are compelling and intuitively sensible. Connections in the curriculum have been promoted as an improvement for students and teachers over traditional, separate-subject instructional techniques. Proposed rationales for integrating instruction include the idea that students will understand "why they are doing what they are doing--coherence across areas will keep students from thinking...that the work on grammar in English has nothing to do with what is done in writing or spelling." (Lipson et al., 1993, p. 253) The implication is that if students perceive these connections, they will transfer problem-solving tactics and metacognitive skills across subject areas. Other proponents claim that if students learn abstract ideas in the context of a conceptual theme, they will apply their learning outside of school more readily. (Beane, 1995)

It is widely assumed that students will be motivated to learn new strategies if the strategies fit into a framework that children understand. Researchers surmise that learners will feel more of an investment in their studies if they pursue meaningful
content through student-directed inquiry in small groups or individually. (Lapp & Flood, 1994) Developing autonomy in students also is cited as a reason to integrate the school day. In an integrated unit, students can research questions of personal interest, acquiring transferrable skills in the process. Students’ assuming greater responsibility for their own learning is thought to be a valuable aspect of integrated curriculum programs because students have more opportunities to construct connections across content areas.

The benefits of an integrated curriculum are believed to permeate the organizational structure of schools. If teachers of different grade levels share their ideas with one another in a comprehensive plan for integrating the instruction, the coherence of the school-wide curriculum can be enhanced. A school-level infrastructure for integration maximizes the strengths of the faculty, promotes investment in the necessary materials, and preserves instructional time efficiently. From a teacher’s perspective, integrating across disciplines allows for more coverage of material in less time and for investigations of topics that do not fall clearly into a single subject area (Brandt, 1991)....

Most rationales for integration are based on anecdotal reports of student interest and increased motivation for learning while participating in a thematic unit. (For example, Peters, Schubeck, & Hopkins, 1995) Proponents of integration suggest that teachers should step back from the arbitrary boundaries that define separate subject areas in school. For example, Beane (1995) contends that if children were schooled in fewer, broader, disciplines, a merger of abstract and concrete thinking would be characteristic of the learning environment. ...

Vars (1991) cites 62 studies that claim to show positive effects of curriculum integration. He reports that students who were enrolled in interdisciplinary programs performed as well as or better than students in traditional curricula on standardized tests. However, the original studies were unpublished dissertations or reports in nonempirical journals, leaving doubts as to the quality of the evidence. Support for interdisciplinary integration also emerged from evaluations of the Mid-California Science Improvement Program after it had been operating in elementary schools for two years. However, although science achievement tests were administered to students in an integrated program and 78 percent of the participants improved their scores (Greene, 1991), suitable control groups were not included. Thus, the hopes and claims of the author were not supported by data.

Positive evidence for integration does appear in two studies. In an investigation of student engagement, the coherence of a language arts curriculum was measured by recording the ratings for connectedness teachers gave their English lessons every week. Higher levels of achievement were found on a specially tailored literature exam for the students who were members of classes with higher levels of coherence in their studies. (Gamoran & Nystrand, 1992) In a separate investigation, students involved in Brown’s (1992) “community of learners”
appears to improve knowledge acquisition. Students learning environmental science within a rich conceptual theme outperformed students in less integrated classroom settings. Learning about principles of animal adaptation in a guided discovery context yielded accurate information as well as more innovative, appropriate ideas. (pp. 128-132)

Even though integration comprises the recommendations for curricular design, the interdisciplinary approach is meritorious and practical.

Tchudi (1991) offers "some principles of interdisciplinary learning" that reflect important principles of teaching and learning:...

Learning must be linked to students' concerns, values, and questions; it cannot be simply centered around the structures of disciplines.

Disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge is not random or unstructured; at best, it meshes with young people's interests by helping them understand the world.

Learning through questioning, firsthand experiences, and experimentation creates more complete mastery than does passive reception of information through texts, lectures, or even audiovisual presentations.

Linking learning across disciplines and subject areas leads to greater learning than teaching the disciplines in isolation.

Interdisciplinary learning can be pursued in subject-centered classes (for example, math, science, history) at virtually any time.

Interdisciplinary inquiry is open-ended and intellectually engaging for learners of all ages. (p. 20) (as cited in Sin-Runnyan & Fair-loth, 1995, p. 114)

Simulations are another venue to maximize authenticity and student engagement.

Kessler (2006) explored the roots of role-play in this regard.

Role-play about serious subjects, a strategy at the heart of social and emotional learning, invites the spirit of playfulness into a classroom by allowing students to step out of ordinary reality, to pretend, to risk new behavior while protected by the mask of illusion. The word "illusion," which refers us to practice new skills in role play, comes from the words "in play." (p. 87)

By contrast, problem-based learning is an approach that substitutes illusion with reality.
Engagement coupled with understanding is key to student learning. Problem-based learning (Gordon, 1998) is now part of education settings in elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and professional schools, such as those for medicine and law. The teacher presents a problem that becomes the motivation and context for learning, and whose solution requires students to synthesize ideas and develop conceptual and technical skills. (as cited in Brooks, 2004, pp. 10-11)

All learning exists on a continuum that ranges from deductive and prescriptive learning on one end to inductive, self-selected, and investigative learning on the other. The essence of inductive or high-end learning is applying relevant knowledge and skills to solving real problems. Such learning involves finding and focusing on a problem, identifying relevant information, categorizing, critically analyzing, and synthesizing that information, and effectively communicating the results.

Real-life problems share four criteria. First, a real-life problem has a personal frame of reference. In other words, the problem must involve an emotional or internal commitment on the part of those involved in addition to a cognitive interest. Second, no agreed-on solutions or prescribed strategies for solving the problem exist. If they do, the process would more appropriately be classified as a training exercise because its main purpose would be to teach predetermined content or thinking skills. Third, real-life problems motivate people to find solutions that change actions, attitudes, or beliefs. A group of students might gather, analyze, and report on data about the community's television-watching habits, causing people in that community to think critically about the television-viewing habits of young people. Last, real-life problems target a real audience. (Renzulli, Gentry, & Reis, 2004, p. 74)

Gordon (1998) provided a cyclical view of problem-based learning as it relates to authenticity.

Real-world problems, by their nature, are messy—involving uncertainty, complexity, and nuanced judgment...

What is it about real-life problems that make them powerful and engaging, and how can this be re-created in an environment, such as the classroom, that often has relatively loose ties to the "real world?" Here is what we have found... Authentic learning demands that students actively solve problems...; people work together...; situations simultaneously involve one's knowledge, skills, and attitudes...; activities are connected...; students publicly exhibit their learning...; and there are often real-life standards of quality...

How do we make learning authentic? The framework that guides the creation of authentic learning in all settings is the experiential learning cycle (ELC), which
offers an approach to make "smaller" learning activities more authentic and "messier" real-life problems more focused.

At the heart of the ELC are what we call challenges or problems to solve, which are driven by desired outcomes—what we want students to know, do, and be like (knowledge, skills, and attitudes). The ELC includes both student and teacher dimensions. The student phases of the cycle are engagement, exhibition, and reflection.

First, students are engaged in a problem that has been crafted by the teacher to target specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This challenge, as do many real-life problems, usually requires some concrete product as evidence of student learning. During the engagement phase, students and teachers spend time articulating standards based on real-world models, for the quality of the product. In the course of engagement, and in the exhibition of this product, students demonstrate their learning.

After completion and exhibition of their products comes the reflection phase, in which students examine their work and reflect on what they have learned (reinforcing and constructing knowledge and considering their personal and interpersonal behaviors). Students may then join the teacher in assessment of their work based on their pre-established standards of quality.

The teacher-led phases of the ELC are design, coaching, and feedback. Once students have begun work on the problem that has been carefully designed by the teacher to target specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the teacher assumes the role of coach, helping students develop their skills and knowledge, shape their strategies, and find appropriate resources. Like a coach, the teacher remains on the sidelines at times, allowing students to own their successes and failures. Here, the students are truly the workers, and the quality of their work reflects their efforts. In the feedback phase, teachers create structures within which students can reflect on and assess their products, processes, and level of understanding...

Finally, the learning experience is connected to subsequent experiences as students move into the housekeeping phase, considering what they learned and what they need to proceed. They articulate what they might do better next time and address skills and knowledge they need to develop further as they move on to other challenges. Notably, they also give consideration to the status and needs of their learning community. They address issues that arose during their work and develop strategies for future work to improve the learning of their community.

In short, the classroom is structured so students are given a meaningful context for interdependent work throughout the learning cycle. Purposes and processes are made explicit, and students understand what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how it relates to work in school and outside. Experiences are organized to build on one another, so that, as we do in the real world, students can learn from...
their successes and failures and carry these lessons with them to their future work. Most important, classroom work consistently demands that students authentically exhibit their knowledge, skills, and attitudes throughout the learning cycle instead of only during a scheduled performance.

Authentic learning is a laudable goal that should be promoted and pursued vigorously. Students not only should see their work in school related to the real world but must see it that way, to be able to apply their learning in real-life contexts. As we pursue this goal, however, experience warns us to remain grounded in the realities of teachers' and students' school lives. Working with real-life problems is a sophisticated process that demands refined skills and a tolerance for ambiguity and complexity. (pp. 4-7)

Problem-based learning is a crossover to service learning; whereby, the latter factors more of the learning environment into curricular design.

...Service learning emphasizes educational opportunities that are interdisciplinary, student-centered, collaborative, and integrated with real-world issues and practices. Teachers have found that environments which foster academic achievement through hands-on, authentic learning can motivate students by engaging them in their own learning. (Brophy 1986; Lundsden 1994) Students apply and integrate the content of different subject areas at authentic moments in the production process, instead of in isolation or in an artificial setting. Thus, learning becomes relevant and useful as students establish connections to life outside of school. Authentic projects also help to address real-world concerns and develop real-world skills. (as cited in Bradford, 2005, p. 1)

"Service learning has emerged as distinct from community service, grounded in clear and intentional links to curriculum and offering opportunities for student reflection (Andrus, 1996; Schie, 1997). When students are engaged in service in situations with real learning, the impact on these and others is significant (Cozad & Hedin, 1994)" (as cited in Bishop & Pfau, 2005a, p. 10).

Siu-Runyan and Faircloth (1995) highlighted the connection between service learning and authenticity. Edelman, Lean and Serve America, and Boyer are cited by these two authors.

Marwin Wright Edelman (1992) states in her book The Measure of Our Success-A Letter to My Children and Yours:
“Diverse opportunities for young people to serve their communities can play a major role in restoring hope and moral example to our nation. Young people need to believe they are needed, and adults need to be reminded that our children and youth all have something to contribute and are precious resources to be nurtured and cherished.” (p. 67)

Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy which recognizes the demonstrated positive and altruistic qualities of our youth, providing opportunities for young people to exert their leadership skills and to apply what is learned in the classroom to a real-life setting. Through service learning opportunities, society will view young people as “producers and givers” rather than the stereotype of “receivers or takers.” This is an important step in unleashing the potential of youth as well as making learning relevant.

The advent of service learning as a teaching and learning strategy promotes curriculum integration, is an authentic assessment process, and is the “intersection of personal concerns and social issues” for early adolescents. . . . (pp. 167-168)

Recent legislation and subsequent research have supported service learning. The National and Community Service Act of 1990 (Learn and Serve America, 1994) states that service learning is a method:

under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community;

that is integrated into students’ academic curriculum and provides structured time for students to think, talk, or write about what they did and said during the actual service activity;

that provides students with the opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities;

that enhances what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps foster the development of a sense of caring for others.

In other words, service learning as a teaching and learning strategy goes beyond doing community service. Community service projects are doing isolated “acts of kindness,” such as supporting canned food drives, hosting a school recycling day, or having the school choir sing at a senior citizen community center. Service learning is more than “acts of kindness.” Service learning enables young people to use what is learned in classrooms and apply that knowledge and generalized learning to real-life situations and problems, followed by a formal reflection component . . .
Through this collaborative venture between schools and the community, many positive outcomes are achieved for educators, schools, and communities in the following ways.

**Students learn:**
leadership skills—empowerment of others and self

growth of self-esteem and a positive self-concept, a sense that they can and do make a difference

citizenship skills through actual experience—responsibility to self, school, family, community, country, and world

improved academic skills—critical thinking and creative problem-solving applications of learning to real-life

career awareness and exploration

opportunities to become connected with people of all ages, diversities, backgrounds, and needs

**Educators gain:**
students motivated to learn

opportunities for professional development

positive connections to community and parents

an important teaching strategy which integrates curriculum and provides experiential, hands-on learning for students

an effective method for authentic assessment

empowerment

**Schools develop:**
engaged, motivated learners who are responsible for their learning

better student attendance rates and less discipline problems

higher academic achievement

connections with community, parents, higher education, and business

integrated curriculum, authentic assessment, a climate of caring
positive public opinion and recognition

Communities receive:
valuable service to meet needs

engaged, responsible citizens

an infusion of creativity and enthusiasm from participating youth

collaborative partnerships to focus on building community

Enest L. Boyer (1983) states:

"During our study of the nation’s schools, I became convinced that the problems of our schools are inextricably tied to this larger problem—the feeling on the part of many of our youth that they are isolated, unconnected to the larger world outside their classrooms. Again and again during our study, we met young people who saw little, if any, connection between what they were doing and learning in school and communities in which they lived...To encourage young people to become more fully involved in their communities, we proposed in High School that every student complete a service requirement—a new Carnegie unit that would involve them in volunteer work in the community or at school...I believe such a service program taps an enormous source of talent, lets young people know that they are needed, and helps students see a connection between what they learn and how they live." (p. 7)

In other words, the key to transforming student apathy into student engagement is to allow students to make decisions about their learning. To be sure, there is nothing new about the idea that students should be able to participate, individually and collectively, in making decisions. This conviction has long played a role in schools designated as progressive, democratic, open, free, experimental, or alternative. In educational philosophies, this kind of student involvement is called developmental, constructivist, holistic, or learner-centered. In specific innovations, they are referred to as whole language, discovery-based science, cooperative learning, or authentic assessment. So, service learning can be defined as a teaching and learning strategy which empowers adolescents not only to develop intellectually, but also to learn to become responsible, caring persons who can make good choices and solve problems effectively. (Boyer 1987) (pp. 170-172)

Those students who typically do not present themselves as caring and responsible seemingly meet teacher expectations with regard to service learning activities.
As students interact with others during service learning activities, they become engaged and develop a sense of what they can contribute to the world around them. These interactions contribute to motivation for school, for learning, and for participating in community life. Teachers who participated in a service learning program directed by the Social Science Education Consortium reported that one of the most positive aspects of the projects in which their students participated was the enthusiasm of the “troubleshooters” who “did especially well in the service learning portion of the unit.” (Schulz, 1997, p. 182) (as cited in Parkay & Hass, 2000, p. 390)

Aside from the more challenging students, Hunt (2002) indicated,

...Getting students engaged in learning is not easy, and we have had only modest success. A decade ago, a major study led by Laurence Steinberg of 20,000 high school students in nine American communities found that half of them described their classes as “boring” and four out of five rejected the idea that it is important to get good grades in school. I don’t know if you think that is fairly typical or not.

And yet, young people in America are volunteering and participating in community activities at unprecedented high volumes. A 1998 national survey by Peter Hart Research Associates found that nearly 70% of young Americans are involved in acts such as volunteering, belonging to an organization, or helping to solve a community problem. Hart concluded that young Americans are actively looking for new and distinctive ways of committing to the people and issues surrounding them. I think service-learning is a natural.

Service-learning stands at the intersection of civic and academic engagement. It has attracted growing support over the last decade, not only as an end in itself, but also as a powerful vehicle for addressing some of the burning educational issues of the day. I will summarize a little of what we’ve learned about service-learning over the past year under John Glenn’s leadership and with the support of Kellogg:

It reverses student disengagement from schooling by giving students responsibility for their own learning and increasing their motivation to participate in school activities.

It reinforces and extends the standards-based reform movement by providing a real-life context for learning and giving students a sense of the practical importance of what they are learning in school.

It promotes the public purposes of education by preparing students for citizenship through involvement in civic action.

It builds on the growing willingness of students to become involved in service to their communities while adding an academic component to such service.
It contributes to young people's personal and career development by reducing violence and sexual activity and increasing their sense of responsibility and workplace skills. (p. 13)

In order to realize these outcomes,

...Ruggenber (1993) suggests the following guidelines for planning successful service learning activities.

Allow the students to do work of a significant nature;

Connect the students directly with the people who benefit from their work;

Present challenges that require students to test and expand their abilities;

Require students to use decision-making skills; putting them in a position to "do" and not merely to observe;

Reflect on and discuss the consequences of their work with staff and supervisors (p. 16). ... The ideal format for service learning is to encourage students to initiate them. They can create their own service projects by examining their communities and looking for needs and then thinking of ways to meet them. (as cited in Parkay & Hass, 2000, p. 291)

Quantitative studies have yielded that thoughtful place-based education or service learning has had a positive impact on student engagement.

A recent study of 40 U.S. schools that have adopted the social, cultural, and natural features of local environments as the context for learning reported that students act more independently and responsibly, display pride in and ownership of their accomplishments, exhibit improved discipline and self-control, and academically outperform their traditionally instructed peers. (Lieberman & Hoody, 1998) In schools where comparative quantitative data were available, students who experienced place-based education earned higher grade point averages, demonstrated better behavior, and scored higher on standardized tests in language arts, math, and social studies.

Although Newmann and Wehlage's (1995) five-year study of mathematics and social studies education in successfully restructured schools did not explicitly investigate place-based education, the researchers found that student involvement in authentic and meaningful work—such as the projects typical of place-based education-enhanced student engagement and performance. Newmann and Wehlage argue that these findings are the result of how teachers bold students to
the same intellectual standards to which society holds adults: the construction rather than consumption of knowledge, in-depth understanding and communication associated with disciplined inquiry, and the creation of reports, products, or performances valued beyond the school.

In addition to authenticity, place-based education offers cognitively demanding tasks that stimulate student engagement and achievement. When students can directly experience what they learn in contexts familiar to them, their capacity to understand and communicate its meaning increases (Cummins, 1996)...

Place-based education holds out to students the promise that they can become valued members of a community. Schools often neglect the universal desire to join with others in meaningful work. Our attention to individual learning and testing often overshadows an appreciation of this fundamental drive to be connected to others and the world. (as cited in Smith, 2002, p. 33)

**Student-centered instruction.** Student-centered instruction is relevant to the universal desire to join with others in meaningful work and student engagement. This instructional strategy has been captured in educational literature as including these elements: cooperative learning and group work, lecture and discussion, technology, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and multiple intelligence theory. Tanner et al. (2001) described this instructional strategy.

Student-centered learning is based on the belief that active involvement by students increases learning and motivation. Good student-centered learning values the student’s role in acquiring knowledge and understanding. Within the context of course standards, this approach empowers students to ask questions, seek answers and attempt to understand the world’s complexities. The teacher and students share the responsibility for instruction and assessment. The levels of student involvement may vary. The low end may consist of the teacher’s incorporation of student needs, interests, learning styles and abilities. High level of student involvement may consist of students’ playing a role in planning instruction. Regardless of the level of involvement, the basic expectation is that the teacher and students are partners in instruction and learning. While student-centered instruction focuses on the student rather than the teacher, it always is driven by the content standards. (p. 8)

Pertaining to cognitive engagement and student-centered instruction, Akey (2006) added these insights.
Research on learning shows that students become cognitively engaged when teachers ask them to wrestle with new concepts, explain their reasoning, defend their conclusions, or explore alternative strategies and solutions. Students enjoy learning more and are more likely to participate in school tasks when their teachers employ active pedagogical strategies. Collaboration among peers—students working together in pairs or small groups to help one another—also has been associated with increased engagement and learning. When students can put their heads together rather than work in isolation, they are more receptive to challenging assignments. (p. 5)

With collaboration at the forefront of student-centered instruction,

...Once teachers begin implementing cooperative interactions, the evidence of student motivation becomes so overwhelmingly visible that teachers are encouraged to try more. The momentum builds for both teachers and students...

...The challenge becomes choosing the most appropriate interactive designs for the target lesson; it is choosing a design in which the final focus rests on the learners, not on the “lecturer.” (p. 84) As students become more adept in their social skills, the models are selected strictly for appropriateness... (as cited in Panitz, 1999, p. 7)

Jenkins and Keefe (2001) detailed the common elements and strategies of cooperative learning.

Four elements are essential for a small group to be cooperative: positive interdependence among learners, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, and interpersonal/small-group skills. David Johnson and Roger Johnson at the University of Minnesota, and Robert Slavin at Johns Hopkins University have developed the most frequently used cooperative learning strategies. The strategies include:

Student Teams-Achievement Division (STAD) in which students are heterogeneously grouped in four-or-five-member teams. The teacher introduces new material by lecture or discussion. Students use worksheets and help one another in pairs. Individual tests contribute to team scores.

Teams, games, and tournaments, which use the same teams, instructional format, and worksheets as STAD. Students participate in weekly academic tournaments to show their mastery of subject matter. Competition is organized among equally achieving individuals from different teams with scores contributing to team totals.

Jigsaw strategy assigns students to six-member teams to work on subject matter divided into five sections (two students share one section). Each student studies his or her actions, meets with members of other teams in “expert groups” focused
on the section, and teaches the team about the section. Individual tests are administered covering the material.

Group investigation involves two-to six-member groups who use inquiry methods and group discussion to develop cooperative projects. Teams choose subtopics from a unit being studied by the entire class, break their subtopics into individual tasks, and prepare a group report for presentation to the class. (p. 80-81)

Further, the work of Johnson, Johnson, and Slavin substantiated cooperative learning as having a positive impact on student engagement.

Cooperative, student-centered learning techniques engage and empower students, and they provide a clear and convincing example of changes within the control of individual teachers. Johnson and Johnson (1989) offered the reminder that "Students often feel helpless and discouraged. Giving them cooperative learning partners provides hope and opportunity. Cooperative learning groups empower their members to act by making them feel strong, capable, and committed." (p. 1) When students become responsible for their own learning, they become more successful at acquiring knowledge and solving problems creatively. Cooperative learning methods are consistently effective in increasing student achievement. (Slavin & Madden, 1989) (as cited in Day, 2002, p. 21)

From a quantitative standpoint, Peterson and Miller (2004) shared the results from two studies involving cooperative learning.

Two studies illustrate the value of comparing students' experiences during cooperative learning and large-group instruction. Mulyan (1995) observed fifth and sixth graders as they were engaged in small-group and large-group mathematics lessons. Overall, she found that students were more fully engaged in small-group activities than in large-group activities; however, levels of on-task behavior differed depending on achievement level. High achievers showed statistically significantly higher attendance behaviors in small groups than in large groups, whereas low achievers' quality attendance behaviors did not differ across small-group and large-group settings.

Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) used Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory as a theoretical framework to examine the quality of high school students' experiences during various learning activities in their classes, including lecture, TV/videos, small-group work, individual work, and tests/quizzes.

To study optimal experiences, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) developed the experienced sampling method (ESM), which solicits responses to a questionnaire when participants are randomly interrupted during various activities. The ESM "operationalizes" quality of experience by measuring cognitive, emotional, and
motivational aspects of consciousness as they are situated contextually in any given activity.

Using the ESM, Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) interrupted students during their classroom activities to rate their perceptions of challenge, importance to future goals, concentration, and enjoyment. Results showed significant differences in the way that students experienced the various activities for each of those variables. Mean levels of challenge, concentration, and enjoyment were higher for small-group work than for lecture, whereas perceptions to importance of future goals were higher for lecture than for small-group work. However, the statistical significance for those specific comparisons was not reported. Using a composite measure of the quality of their experience, Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) determined that small-group work, tests and quizzes, and individual work result in a higher quality of experience than does listening to lectures and watching videos.

Students were more likely to be thinking about something on task or related to task during cooperative learning (87%) than during large-group instruction (73%), and more likely to be thinking about something off task during large-group instruction (27%) than during cooperative learning (13%).

Participants reported higher levels of cognitive efficiency during large-group instruction than during cooperative learning. Students reported higher levels of activation/potency during cooperative learning than during large group instruction. Participants reported higher levels of degree of engagement..., perceived importance of the task..., and challenge... during cooperative learning than during large-group instruction.

Results indicated statistical significance... differences appeared in flow and apathy; more students were in flow during cooperative learning (61%) than during large-group instruction (48%), and more students were apathetic during large group instruction (20%) than during cooperative learning (13%).

The most consistent results of this study related to student motivation, all aspects of which were more positive during cooperative learning. First, students were more engaged during cooperative learning. That result was expected because small groups offer students more opportunity to become involved by contributing ideas...

... An important aspect of motivation is related to the students' perceived levels of challenge in relation to skill, a cornerstone of quality of experience in flow. In this study, students were significantly more likely to perceive relatively high levels of challenge and skill (i.e., flow) during cooperative learning and relatively low levels of challenge and skill (i.e., apathy) during large-group instruction. That finding is similar to the results of Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000), who also found that group work resulted in higher levels of flow than did lectures. In
our study, cooperative learning provided a context that made flow possible because students rated the challenge of the cooperative learning activity significantly higher. The greater opportunity to experience flow during cooperative learning is important because flow has been associated with higher levels of concentration, enjoyment, happiness, strength, motivation, self-esteem, and perceived task importance among teenagers. (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000) (pp. 124-132)

Panitz (1999), citing several authors inclusive of Webb, Yulick, and Vygotsky, articulated the cognitive and behavioral effects of cooperative learning.

CL develops higher level thinking skills. (Webb 1982) Students working together are engaged in the learning process instead of passively listening to the teacher present information or reading information off a computer screen. Pairs of students working together represent the most effective form of interaction, followed by triosomes and larger groups (Schwartz, Black, Strange 1991)....

Nelson-Lecall (1992) comments on the value of debate in enhancing critical thinking skills in students. She states, “An awareness of conflicting viewpoints appears to be necessary in collaborative groups to engender the type of peer transactions (e.g., arguments, justifications, explanations, counterarguments) that foster cognitive growth (Brown & Palinscar 1989)” (p. 53)....

CL approaches learning from a student centered philosophy by encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning by involving students throughout the class and encouraging their collaboration in group efforts outside of class. The teacher serves as a resource and facilitator rather than as an expert. It is not a passive role for the teacher. CL requires a great deal of planning and preparation on the part of the teacher to develop activities which will help guide students through the curriculum....

Collaborative techniques create a constructivist approach when students become actively involved in defining questions in their own language and working out answers together instead of reproducing material presented by the teacher or the textbook (Wooley et al. 1990)....

Collaborative learning fosters a higher level of performance by students. (Biggs 1972) Their critical thinking skills increase and their retention of information and interest in the subject matter improves. (Kulick & Kulick 1979) When students are successful they view the subject matter with a very positive attitude because their self esteem is enhanced. This creates a positive cycle of good performance building higher self esteem which in turn leads to more interest in the subject and higher performance yet....
From a psychological view, CI fosters self-efficacy among students. Student self-direction is generated in part by the high expectations by the teacher and the high degree of responsibility placed upon the students for their learning.

Group norms create a powerful dynamic within cooperative behavior. (Deutsch 1949) Having norms established by a group instead of being imposed by an outside agent, such as a teacher, increases the likelihood that the norms will be adhered to. (Marzano 1992) This in turn leads to a more positive mental climate within the class and increased student persistence in task completion. When students work together to establish group norms they develop feelings of responsibility for their peers and a sense of camaraderie. Students who might be reluctant to work on a difficult problem alone devote much more energy and time when they do it with others. (Costa & O’Leary 1992)

An enormous hidden benefit of CI is one most attractive to teachers; it negates many forms of student disruptive behavior. As any teacher knows, it is extremely easy for only one (or more) member(s) of an entire class to disrupt class proceedings when the lecture method is employed. In contrast, when students are working in groups, the stage is removed from those who try to act out. (Stahl & VanSickle 1992) It is very difficult for an individual to gain the entire class’s attention when the class is working in many smaller groups. Within groups intense working is being carried on because more students are involved actively in the process. The CI activities are very focused and often create a high degree of concentration by group members. Thus they will not be distracted by an individual acting out in another group or trying to gain the class’s attention.

Hertz-Lazarowitz (1992 p. 89) studied student behaviors in traditional teacher-centered classrooms. She found that the second most frequent behavior after on-task, noninteractive behavior was off-task, interactive behavior and that this increased with the age of the student. She concluded that “it appears that students engage in such behavior because they need peer interaction in the learning process for their own cognitive and social development. If the content is highly noninteractive, students will look for legitimated and nonlegitimated avenues for interactions. This off-task interaction is perceived by teachers as an indication of growing discipline problems. For the students, however, it helps fulfill their need for interaction. If interaction is not channeled into legitimate processes, it emerges as social events.” (p. 89-90) Small group cooperative learning structures are mechanisms which provide academic student interactions within social contexts.

Vygotsky (1978) found that students were able to solve certain problems, when working cooperatively, prior to being able to solve those problems individually. He hypothesized that the social interaction extended the student’s zone of proximal development, the difference between a student’s understanding and potential to understand more difficult concepts. The opportunity of students to work with experts increases their ability to solve problems. Thus, when students
work cooperatively in groups the more knowledgeable students may lead the less knowledgeable students in the appropriate direction required to understand new concepts....

The level of involvement of all the participants in a collaborative system is very intense and personal. Students get to know teachers personally. Teachers learn about student behaviors because students have many opportunities to explain themselves to the teacher. Lines of communication are opened and actively encouraged. Teachers have more opportunities to explain why policies are established and the system allows students to have more input into establishing policies and class procedures. The empowerment created by the many interpersonal interactions leads to a very positive attitude by all parties involved....

Being made responsible for one’s learning and for one’s peers presumes that each student has that capability. Inherently high expectations are established for students. By setting obtainable goals for groups and by facilitating group interaction teachers establish high expectations which become self fulfilling as the students master the collaborative approach, learn how to work well together in teams and demonstrate their abilities through individual tests and a variety of other methods. Higher self esteem and higher expectations are the outcomes, (pp. 8-24)

At times, lecture and discussion can also be considered student-centered instructional strategies.

One traditional teaching style is the lecture. A canned or prepared lecture is an efficient way for an instructor to quickly deliver lots of information to students. However, is that the information the audience wants or needs to know? Does this approach inspire student engagement? This teaching style may suit some students but may leave others feeling alienated, isolated, or disinterested in learning. And students who continually feel alienated, isolated, or disinterested in learning may eventually burn out, disengage, or drop out of school. (Robinson & Kakela, 2006, p. 294)

In terms of teaching style, Tanner et al. (2001) asserted.

...Teachers structure the classroom environment and learning activities to teach students specific facts or procedures. Teachers model expected behaviors and provide detailed feedback on student progress. Teachers check for understanding by asking questions and encouraging students to think about and react to the information presented. This approach sets clear expectations for student performance and makes the teacher responsible for directing the learning....
Direct instruction is the best way to teach skills, procedures and processes that are essential components of the curriculum. However, the teacher-directed approach is not just for teaching content-specific information. It also can be used to teach critical-thinking strategies and to evaluate the information students have been given... (pp. 6-7)

Perhaps the oldest method of teacher-directed and student-centered learning is the Socratic method. Derived from Plato's *Socratic Dialogues*, the Socratic method is a time-honored technique in which the teacher asks questions that lead students to examine the validity of a statement. This powerful teaching method engages the learners, stimulates critical thinking and triggers classroom discussions. The method works well when students explore current topics, ethics, social studies, history or literature...

The Socratic method is built on a reciprocal relationship between the teacher and the students. Modeling the behavior of Socrates, the teacher asks the students questions that require them to think about their reasoning and their responses. Students who are unaccustomed to this instructional method need to know that the questions are not judgmental but are designed to help them examine their attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and logic.

The great challenge is to design thought-provoking questions that will engage students in productive discussions. The teacher portrays himself or herself as a seeker, exploring knowledge with the students. The teacher listens carefully to each response and asks follow-up questions that encourage students to examine and explain their thinking.

When teachers use questions to probe student thinking, they help students process information into meaningful terms and reach a deeper awareness of the issues. The Socratic method values the student's role in determining the meaning of the material studied...

Teachers develop open-ended questions that encourage students to examine the text, express their views and cite textual evidence to support their thinking. Teachers no longer dispense knowledge as they see fit; instead, knowledge is transferred to the students as they examine issues and ideas.

The seminar is not an open-ended discussion time during which students can say whatever they want. The teacher directs the discussion by beginning with carefully planned questions that address specific goals...

The teacher introduces a question and keeps the discussion moving. Students need to know how to summarize their thoughts, listen to others and offer thoughtful responses rather than emotional reactions. Ball and Bresser offer suggestions for teachers to consider when planning lessons, establishing students' roles and responsibilities and preparing the class for the seminar approach. (pp. 14-16)
Recent gains in student achievement and consistent high levels of student engagement have in part been attributed to the incorporation of technology, particularly for at-risk students.

Evidence from earlier research shows that technology, properly applied in its growing number of forms, has a positive influence on students at risk of failure. (Chavez, 1990; Dunkel, 1990; Means, 1997; Merino, Legarreta, Coughran, & Hoskins, 1990) “Technology-when used effectively-can enable ways of teaching that are much better matched to how children learn.” (Rochelle, Pea, Hoadley, Gordin, & Means, 2000, p. 73) At-risk students can be engaged in challenging, authentic learning when their “teachers can draw on technology applications to simulate real-world environments and create actual environments for experimentation, so that students can carry out authentic tasks as real workers would, explore new terrains, meet people of different cultures, and use a variety of tools to gather information and solve problems.” (Means et al., 1993, p. 43) Schools that capitalize on this relationship, using technology to teach “real world applications that support research, design, analysis and communication” (Means, 1997, p. 2), will help at-risk students function successfully beyond the classroom.

At the same time, schools that intend to make the best use of technology as a teaching tool are developing and implementing learning activities where students work in small groups or whole-class laboratory activities....Classroom technologies offer instructors an alternative opportunity to seek the positive effects of cooperative learning, which have been consistently found on such diverse outcomes as self-esteem, intergroup relations, acceptance of academically handicapped students, attitudes toward school, and ability to work cooperatively. (Slavin, 1991, p. 71) Also, one of the most basic functions of technology, the ability to repeat tasks or instructions on demand, will be shown to be a simple but essential advantage within the student discussions of this study. In short, using technology for authentic learning in a cooperative setting provides at-risk students the combined challenges and benefits of all these concepts. (as cited in Day, 2002, p. 23)

Referenced in Hedman and Sharafi (2004),

... The term engagement mode, which is also used by Heidegger (1927/1962), refers to how people use different ways to involve themselves with a task or activity (e.g., any type of work and communication) by using an object (tool) such as the computer. The EM-model aims to reflect how the user’s (subject’s) thinking, feeling, and interaction are intertwined with the characteristics of objects such as IT. Consistent with recent research in human computer interaction like activity theory (Cole and Engeström 1993, Nardi 1996), situated action (Suchman 1987), and distributed cognition (Salomon 1993), the EM-model proposes that
interaction is a dynamic process that evolves out of the confluence of the environmental factors and the person's psychological characteristics.

The EM-model describes different ways of engaging with IT by proposing three fundamental dimensions: (a) perceiving objects as positive or negative (Evaluation dimension) (see Osgood 1969, Russell 1980, Zajone 1998, Eagly and Chaiken 1998); (b) the person's goals and desires in terms of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation (Focus of motivation dimension) (see Kruglanski 1975, Pittman et al. 1983 and Pittman 1988); and (c) the extent to which the subject or object controls the interaction (Locus of control dimension) (see Rotter 1966, Bandura 1977, 1997, Deci and Ryan 1985).

The EM-model assumes that the congruity or incongruity of the experienced motivation and control leads the subject to perceive the object or activity as positive or negative....

Using computers has often been found to be challenging and, in many cases, troublesome. (Norman 1998) This is because computer-related activities often require considerable skill, patience, and practice. Yet when an individual accomplishes a difficult task by becoming involved with the requirements of the task at hand and uses the appropriate skills to manage these requirements, he or she experiences positive effects. These positive effects have been related to human computer interaction in terms of flow experience. (Webster et al. 1993, Ghani and Deshpande 1994) The EM-model describes (Montgomery et al. in press) the conditions that influence flow experience by highlighting the role of evaluative judgment, perceived control, and the focus of motivation as people interact with objects....

It has been suggested that flow is a useful construct in describing a positive human computer interaction. (Csikszentmihalyi 1993) Flow experience facilitates learning, encourages people to carry on difficult tasks, promotes the pace of productivity, increases the joy and satisfaction during different activities, and creates meaning for involvement in a different course of action (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990, Webster et al. 1993, Ghani and Deshpande 1994)....

A commonly assumed aspect of using computers in day-to-day life is that a user's satisfaction and pleasure comes from performing the task with greater efficiency and productivity (Doursoun 2001, Olson and Olson 2003)....

The theoretical discussions in Human Computer Interaction (HCI) (Kaptelinin 1996, Naadi 1996) have emphasized the need for unifying theoretical perspectives, which bring together the motivational, emotional, cognitive, and contextual factors. In this respect, the EM-model and flow theory (Montgomery et al. in press) seem to be useful theoretical and empirical approaches in describing experiences associated with the use of computer systems. (pp. 138-145)
Overall, "Teachers have a multitude of technological resources, but technology alone does not guarantee improved student learning. Technology is a powerful tool only if it is used effectively" (Tanner et al., 2001, p. 33).

In a similar vein, identifying learning goals and outcomes for students with diverse readiness levels is paramount. Differentiated instruction takes these steps into account relative to the development of a student-centered learning environment.

Before we even walk into the classroom to teach, we must seriously take stock of what exactly we want students to know, understand, and be able to do as a result of a particular learning journey. Next, we seek to find out if the students for whom we are designing the journey vary in significant ways in terms of readiness, interests, and/or learning profile. If there are students who are more or less ready, more or less interested, more or less comfortable with a particular learning modality, we strive to identify these students' needs and then come up with one or more ways to approach content, process, and product assignments that respond to these differences and are equally respectful to the students for whom they are designed in terms of challenge and engagement. (Strickland, 2005, pp. 1-2)

"To ensure the success of every student, instructional practice must address learners with diverse levels of readiness, rate of learning, preferred means of learning (learning styles), experiences, interests, and cultural backgrounds. To work effectively with such diversity, teachers must also become 'students of their students'" (Tomlinson, 1999, p.2), adding a new dimension to the idea of a learning community" (as cited in Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 65).

Tomlinson outlines the characteristics of differentiated classrooms, though she acknowledges that no single formula works for all situations:

The teacher focuses on the essentials.

Assessment and instruction are inseparable.

The teacher modifies content, process, and products based on what the assessment data say about students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles.
All students participate in respectful work, work that respects their level of readiness, challenges them to grow in their mastery of essential concepts and skills, supports their growth by consistently escalating the degree of difficulty, and offers "equally interesting, equally important, and equally engaging" tasks.

The teacher and students collaborate in learning.

The teacher balances group and individual norms.

The teacher and students work together flexibly, moving fluidly back and forth, for example, from whole group to small groups and individual work, single sources of information to multiple sources, one time frame to varying time frames, teacher-directed activities to student-directed activities. (as cited in Jackson & Davós, 2000, pp. 78-80)

Building on these descriptors, Worneli (2006) commented that "teachers who differentiate instruction simply do what's fair and developmentally appropriate for students when the 'regular' instruction doesn't meet their needs." Additionally, Worneli recommended five strategies to differentiate instruction: "Strategy 1: Teach to Developmental Needs; Strategy 2: Treat Academic Struggle as Strength; Strategy 3: Provide Multiple Pathways to Standards; Strategy 4: Give Formative Feedback; and Strategy 5: Dare to Be Unconventional" (pp. 14-18).

A noteworthy student-centered instructional strategy, project-based learning affords teachers opportunities to apply Worneli's strategies.

A project-based approach to instruction presents students with problem-focused assignments that are meaningful, interesting and valuable. Planning is key to this instructional method. Projects not only reflect student interest but also meet one or more course standards. Unless they are linked to course standards, projects may be interesting and enjoyable but will have little or no effect on academic or technical achievement.

Effective instructional projects have these characteristics:

They require a question or problem upon which the activities are based. The question may be created by the teacher or by the students.

Academic objectives are clear.
The results of the problem cannot be predetermined or solved easily.

Students have the opportunity to explore the problem.

Students have sufficient resources and materials for the project.

Students are involved in the process and know the evaluation criteria from the beginning.

Adequate supervision ensures maximum progress but does not intrude and deprive students of the learning experiences associated with the project method.

When students work to solve real-world problems, they must rely on existing and new academic knowledge as well as their ability to apply information, understanding and procedures. Project-based instruction promotes the idea of students as workers by requiring them to focus on a problem and work persistently to solve it. Instead of being passive recipients of academic content, students actively develop and refine questions, debate ideas, make and test predictions, design plans and/or experiments, collect and analyze data, draw conclusions and communicate feelings. (Tanner et al., 2001, pp. 10-12)

Reflective of Chard, the George Lucas Educational Foundation, the Buck Institute for Education, Katz and Chard, and Thomas, Curtis (2002) presented a comprehensive perspective of project-based learning.

University of Alberta Professor Sylvia Chard, a noted project expert, defines a project as "an in-depth investigation of a real-world topic worthy of children's attention and effort." (2001) Chard presents a flexible framework for project-based instruction:

First, the teacher selects a topic of study for the project on the basis of students' interests, curriculum standards, and the availability of local resources. The teacher discusses the topic with the students to find out what they already know about it and helps them develop questions that their investigation will answer.

Next, the teacher arranges opportunities for the students to do field work and speak to experts. The teacher provides resources to help the students with their investigations and suggests ways for students to carry out a variety of investigations.

In the concluding phase, the teacher arranges a culminating event through which the students share with others (for example, other classes, their parents, or the principal) what they have learned. The teacher helps the students decide how to
display their results and, in so doing, involves them purposefully in reviewing and evaluating the whole project. (Chard, 2001)

Chard stresses the need for students to work from their strengths, and she is not alone in viewing the display portion of the process as particularly important for students. "In project work, they invest a lot of their own energy and interest. And they appreciate being able to share with others what they've done" (cited in George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2002;)

Many teachers, administrators, parents, and students agree that project-based, hands-on learning engages all students—from special education to gifted—in a way that the traditional lecture/workshop/textbook/written test cannot. Research has shown that when students are given the latitude to pursue topics that interest them by doing what real scientists, special-interest groups, or business people do to solve problems, they go far beyond the minimum effort. (Buck Institute for Education, 1999; Chard, 1998; Katz & Chard, 1999; Thomas, 2000) They make connections among math, social studies, literature, and science to find answers to open-ended questions. They also retain what they have learned, are able to apply their learning to real-world problems, are absent less often, and have fewer discipline problems. In short, students get excited about learning.

...the JASON Project (www.jasonproject.org), Journey North (www.learner.org/north), ThinkQuest (www.thinkquest.org), and Classroom Connect's Quests (http://quest.classroom.com) offer full curriculums on the Internet, complete with professional development, assignments, resources, and experts whom the students may question.

Computers and other 21st century technology play a huge role in project-based learning. Students can ask scientists and other experts questions through e-mail, chat rooms, and video-conferencing. They have access to sophisticated, inexpensive, electronic telescopes and to scientific probes connected to portable, wallet-sized personal digital assistants. Students can acquire data and put that information in perspective by immediately graphing the data on a laptop or personal digital assistant. ...

Doing projects teaches you more because you get to experiment and understand how things work. If you can experiment and see how things work, it will be stored in your brain longer. (pp. 56-52)

A final element of student-centered instruction is Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, or MI. "MI identifies and dignifies many uses of the mind and, in so doing, suggests enriched educational opportunities for all students" (Campbell & Campbell, 1998, pp. 7-8).
The fundamental principles of successful MI programs are:

1. Teachers believe students are intellectually competent in multifaceted ways.

2. The school’s mission, culture, and curriculum promote intellectual diversity.

3. Teachers become astute observers of students and adjust their instruction accordingly.

4. Student learning is active, hands-on, and multidimensional.

5. Student strengths are used to improve academic weaknesses.

6. Students have opportunities to personalize their educational experiences while also acquiring basic skills.

7. Students develop autonomous learning skills through initiating and completing independent projects.

8. Students are mentored in their intelligence strengths by school or community experts.

9. Students study core disciplinary concepts in multiage groupings or through inter-disciplinary perspectives for in-depth understanding.

10. Students apply classroom learning in real-world contexts.

11. Assessment is as varied as instruction and includes performance-based measures, traditional tests, feedback from numerous sources, and active student self-assessment. (Campbell & Campbell, 1999, p. 92)

Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory has surfaced in the MI research.

From the standpoint of learning styles and multiple intelligences, encouraging this optimal learning state means finding the right balance of comfort and challenge. Students will accept a challenge if they feel that teachers respect and value their dominant styles and intelligences. If not, students may be unwilling to challenge themselves by working in those styles and intelligences that need developing. . .

When faced with constant repetition, we become bored and we become unmotivated. Similarly, students who are forced to learn in the same way day after day can become bored and lose their motivation for learning.

As we all know, repetition is a poor motivator. Studies on the roles of teacher control and student choice in learning show that self-motivation on the part of students can be expected only if students have opportunities to focus on topics
and activities that interest them. (Glasser, 1985; Vygotsky & McCann, 1963) By putting diversity to work with learning styles and multiple intelligences, teachers create a classroom environment in which students are engaged in finding their own talents and interests. Through personal exploration and the ability to choose, students remain interested, participate actively, build self-confidence, and develop the self-motivation needed to become good learners. (as cited in Silver, Strong, & Perini, 2000, pp. 44-45)

Teachers need to create a classroom environment that allows students to process information the way they do in the world outside of school. Outside school, children tend to rely on their natural ways of learning. In school, however, we often ask students to process in only one or two ways. This significantly inhibits their ability to grasp the concepts and skills they need to learn to construct a substantial and permanent base of knowledge. Moreover, the preponderance of one or two styles and one or two intelligences in our schools prevents students from developing what Goodlad (1984) refers to as the “full range of intellectual abilities” (p. 93) demanded and valued in the worlds of work and citizenship that await them after school. (as cited in Silver et al., 2005, p. 47)

Through the fusion of learning styles, multiple intelligences, and effective lesson planning and implementation, teachers can promote the highest levels of active, in-depth learning in the classroom, while also making success a reality for every student. The first step in creating this fusion is auditing and realigning curriculum. (Silver et al., 2000, p. 49)

Several MI schools do exist. Prior to their inceptions, this fusion of auditing and realigning curriculum did occur.

By contrast, all students at the MI sites are immersed in challenging academic content and methodologies. Their teachers are philosophically opposed to remedial education and favor enrichment instead. The traditional model of education that requires students to work alone and listen to an instructor has been replaced with dynamic, multimodal learning, and flexible groupings of students and adult experts. Students are also intrinsically motivated by personally relevant curriculum and self-directed, investigative projects. Further, they understand that just as everyone is talented in one or more intelligences, most are challenged in one or more ways. This knowledge helps to eliminate the fear of failure and promotes the notion of working hard to overcome challenges. (Campbell & Campbell, 1999, p. 97)

In regard to student engagement, Gardner (2000) acknowledged.

... The theory of multiple intelligences suggests another factor: people may be most motivated to learn when they undertake activities for which they have some talent. In pursuing such activities they are likely to make progress and avoid
undue frustration. It therefore behooves educators not simply to attempt to motivate students en masse but rather to identify activities that will rapidly become rewarding for a certain group of predisposed students. (pp. 76-77)

Consequently,

...The theory of multiple intelligences can become a powerful partner in effective teaching. I contend that a "multiple intelligences perspective" can enhance understanding...

...The pedagogical decision about how best to introduce a topic is important. Students can be engaged or turned off in quick order. Also, because of what psychologists call the primacy effect, students are likely to remember the opening illustration or attention-grabber. The theory of multiple intelligences yields an abudance of ways in which to broach a topic. (Gardner, 2000, pp. 186-187)

Prior to the introduction of a topic, student understanding of the models is encouraged. Student awareness of MI is directly related to volitional strategies for engagement.

Many teachers who use learning styles and multiple intelligences in their classrooms wonder how important it is for students to know about these models. Experience has taught us that students who understand the models are better able to understand their own learning profiles, to develop flexibility and adaptability in their thinking, and to set realistic goals about minimizing learning weaknesses and maximizing strengths. In fact, research on the importance of metacognitive thinking supports the notion that instructional approaches that help students reflect on their own learning processes are highly beneficial to their overall learning and tend to stimulate motivation to improve as learners. (Brown, 1989; Marzano et al., 1988) (as cited in Silver et al., 2000, p. 85)

in summation,

...The integration of learning styles and multiple intelligences gives all students the chance to express themselves, find their hidden talents and callings, and experience the joys of success. This integration should never feel like drudgery or some mechanical process imposed on students. If it does, then we can be certain it is not doing what it is intended or able to do: inspire and empower students to reach their full potentials. (Silver et al., 2000, p. 190)
Teacher Supervision and the Classroom Observation Process

"Recent research (Darling Hammond, 1998; Rowe & Hill, 1998; Rowe, 2003) confirms commonsense perceptions that the quality of teachers’ knowledge and skill is the most important controllable factor in successful student learning" (as cited in Kleinhenz & Jargovarson, 2004, p. 32).

Despite the fact that

... Teachers have been portrayed in a variety of ways in the media, ranging from detrimental images to beloved masters of their craft who inspire students to excel... effective teachers can be seen, heard, and sensed. The effective teacher engages in dialogue with students, colleagues, parents, and administrators and consistently demonstrates respect, accessibility, and expertise. Effective teachers are easily identified through their adept use of questioning and instruction given in the classroom. Finally, an observer who knows from all sources that this person truly makes a difference in the classroom can sense the presence of an effective teacher. The true teacher is a master of teaching. (Stronge, 2002, p. 86)

Stronge also indicated several positive qualities of teachers of which “practices honest two-way communication between teacher and administrators” topped the list.

More to the point, masters of teaching frequently become Board Certified. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the organization that determines which teachers will be distinguished with this honor, developed five core propositions pertaining to supervision and evaluation to guide its assessment process.

Proposition 1: Supervision and evaluation procedures are committed to teacher growth....

Proposition 2: Supervision and evaluation supports teachers to learn content and employ a wide variety of pedagogical techniques....

Proposition 3: Supervision and evaluation procedures are responsible for managing and monitoring teacher growth....

Proposition 4: Supervision and evaluation procedures are designed to support teachers to think systematically about their practice and learn from experience....
Proposition 5: Supervisors are members of learning communities. (Bernstein, 2004, pp. 85-87)

Wanzer and da Costa (2000) extended these propositions with an even more specific description of effective supervision practices while noting the work of Little, Nolan and Francis, Krey and Burke, da Costa and Riordan, Griffin, Haeferle, and Arredondo.

Supervision for teacher growth and development is grounded in a number of principles and beliefs that emerge from the literature. First, the primary purpose of supervision is for teachers and supervisors to engage in focused study groups, teacher collaboratives, and other long-term professional partnerships (Little 1993) to generate knowledge and increase their understanding of the teaching-learning process (Nolan and Francis 1992) given their organizational contexts. This is best accomplished by collecting and analyzing data over extended periods of time. (Nolan and Francis 1992)

Second, supervision is a fundamental part of the total service provided by school systems. It must have an identity within the organizational hierarchy and it must be administratively supported if its purposes are to be achieved. Supervision cannot take place in isolation if it is expected to be effective and to occur over time. (Krey and Burke 1989)

Third, the development of trust in the supervisory relationship is critical. (da Costa and Riordan 1997) Shared authority, expertise, and expectations as a consequence of supervision opportunities are preferable to conventional “top-down” strategies designed to realize “top-down” expectations. (Griffin 1997)

Fourth, supervision and teachers must be involved in and committed to rigorous educational and training programs to improve the validity, reliability, and acceptability of data collected and the inferences made during the supervisory process. (Haeferle 1993) Supervision is about learning, reflecting, and teaching. (Arredondo et al. 1995)

Fifth, supervision requires the active use of linguistic skills. (Arredondo et al. 1995) Supervision is heavily dependent on the exchange of ideas among individuals working in conjunction with each other. Participants in the supervisory process must be able to communicate their intended meanings clearly and coherently.

Finally, the self-governance of professional development by educators ensures bureaucratic restraint and a balance between individual and institutional interests. (Arredondo et al. 1995) (pp. 49-50)
In terms of site-based leadership,

...The principal’s ability to evaluate and reinforce effective instructional strategies and provide feedback to enhance the improvement of instruction is a crucial component of instructional leadership. Frequent classroom observations are an important requirement, but they are often not sufficient to improve instruction in isolation. The ability to use formal and informal observations to provide meaningful feedback to teachers is a characteristic and a skill important to instructional leadership. (Valentine et al., 2004, p. 102)

Unfortunately,

...Of all the tasks that principals perform, teacher evaluation is often done the least well. Seidman do we hear teachers talk about the positive role a principal has played in their professional growth, and seldom do principals talk about the satisfaction they get from helping teachers grow. Principals rarely play the role of gatekeepers in determining who is fit to teach. During the 1997-1998 school year, for example, just 10 of Boston’s 46,000 teachers were dismissed. From 1998 to 2000, only 3 of 79,156 teachers working for the New York City Board of Education were fired for poor teaching. (Ouchi, 2003) Now, it’s possible that the teachers working in Boston and New York are so good that only an infinitesimal number of them are unsatisfactory and warrant dismissal. I doubt it.

Despite the inherent value of teacher evaluation, there are two main reasons for the relative lack of attention that principals give to it. The first obstacle, experienced by everyone who leads a school, is that there is simply too much to do and not enough time in which to do it. The second barrier is that teacher evaluation is defined too narrowly. As a result, the relationship between teacher evaluation and teacher growth is often ignored. (as cited in Hoerr, 2005, pp. 87-88)

Additionally, Marshall (2005, pp. 728-731) listed

...10 reasons why the conventional supervision and evaluation process is not an effective strategy for improving teaching and learning:

1. Principals evaluate only a tiny amount of teaching....
2. Microevaluations of individual lessons don’t carry much weight....
3. The lessons that principals evaluate are often atypical....
4. Isolated lessons give an incomplete picture of instruction....
5. Evaluation almost never focuses on student learning....
6. High-stakes evaluation tends to slow down adult learning....
7. Supervision and evaluation reinforce teacher isolation....
8. Evaluation instruments often get in the way....
9. Evaluations often fail to give teachers “judgmental” feedback....
10. Most principals are too busy to do a good job on supervision and evaluation.
Firestone (1999) concurred with Marshall and identified several shortcomings of the process.

With few exceptions, the observation and evaluation process doesn’t come close to fulfilling its potential as a positive force for instructional change. While the process has greater influence on non-tenured than tenured teachers, too often it is not making a significant difference in how teachers teach and how students learn. Immeasurable conversations with teachers, administrators, board of education members, and parents in over one hundred diverse school districts—suburban, urban, and rural—regarding the observation and evaluation process reveal a widespread lack of confidence, even cynicism, regarding the effectiveness of current practices in promoting the professional growth of teachers and improving student achievement. While some of the reasons given for this dissatisfaction are unique to a given district, there are a surprising number of complaints that cut across districts and job responsibilities. Key among the many and more universal issues that undermine the confidence of the school community in the process are:....

...a less than challenging level of expectations for teachers, defined more often than not simply as “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory,” contributing to a culture of acceptable mediocrity....

...poor administrative communications and consultation skills often causing teachers to leave supervisory discussions or conferences feeling some combination of confusion, anger, humiliation, fear, insignificance, disrespect, or general lack of confidence in the administrative feedback and support system.

...administrators who are less than knowledgeable about educational research. Their criticisms and suggestions for improvement are often ambiguous or general and lack specific strategies for implementation and improvement. Many teachers lack the confidence that specific supervisors recognize effective teaching or that the supervisors themselves ever possessed the competencies that they expect from teachers.

...poor administrative writing skills that often lead to a lack of clear understanding on the part of teachers....

...an absence of direct and consistent ongoing supervisory assistance and/or follow-up on suggestions.

...extended time-frames in some districts of up to 10 days between a formal observation and a discussion between the observer and teacher diminishing, if not extinguishing, the impact of observations.
...little connection for teachers between their professional development experiences and the feedback they receive from administrators.

...administrators who are frequently overwhelmed by the number of observations that are required of them. They often experience pressure by their supervisors for quantity rather than quality.

...building administrators and district supervisors who lack specific and constructive feedback or assistance from their own supervisors as they seek to improve the quality of their work with teachers.

...a lack of administrative training in the observation and evaluation process. In most districts, structured opportunities to discuss the assessment of teaching with colleagues are low and far between. (pp. 10-12)

As an example,

...Expert and beginning principals viewed a classroom teaching episode of a seventh grade mathematics classroom for teacher supervision purposes. After the first viewing participants were asked questions about classroom management and instruction, about the skills of the teacher, and about recommendations they would make for improvement. After a second viewing, similar questions were asked. Differences between groups were found in their understanding of classroom teaching and their abilities to evaluate and make recommendations for the improvement of teaching. This study indicates that important differences will occur in the supervision experience for teachers depending on whether an expert or novice principal supervises them. Findings from this study have implications for the development of preservice and inservice training programs and induction experiences for new principals....

Overall, it seems that when experts view classrooms and teachers for supervision purposes, they see the events of the classroom and both teacher and student behavior differently than do novices. Experts view the big picture and provide interpretative comments regarding teacher behavior. They are concerned about the coherence of the lesson and wonder about the teacher's ability to self-evaluate and be reflective about the lesson and her own needs and growth potential. They make recommendations about what might improve the lesson, but qualify their comments with respect to both their interpretation of the evidence and the limitations of the videotape format. Novices, on the other hand, tend to be descriptive rather than interpretative about what they see during the classroom observation. They often provide a series of statements about what they see happening, a list of sorts, without questioning either the sequencing or coherence of the lesson as a whole. Their responses are more varied, and sometimes contradictory, about what they see happening. On average, they make about half as many evaluative comments as the experts, but qualify their comments less than a third as often. They, too, are interested in the teacher's self-evaluation....
When experts observe a lesson, they are looking for coherence and meaning; they are interested in the purpose of the lesson and how all the parts fit together and make sense to students. They ask about student involvement and interaction, methodology, meaning, and relevance. They tie all their questions to student learning—how is what’s happening in the classroom likely to further student engagement and learning of the discipline? This focus on student learning by these experts appears to be quite unique; two national reviews of teacher evaluation instruments and procedures around the country documented a focus on teacher behaviors and performances rather than on student learning. (Ellet & Garland, 1987, Loup, Garland, & Ellet, 1996) Yet these experts were consistent in their student-centered focus on learning. Further, in observing experts, their observations, comments, and responses to questions demonstrated the autonomicity that Blozis (1986) writes about and the intuitive grasp and nondeliberative sense of the appropriate response that Berliner (1989) explains defines expertise.

Novices, on the other hand, appear to be busy trying to understand each of the parts of the lesson and never get to the issue of connectedness and coherence. In many instances they focus, see, and comment on similar teaching events as experts. However, their comments tend to be descriptive rather than interpretative—they see what is happening, but they do not look at the broader issue of what is needed to connect the lesson together and how this correction will make sense to students. Nor do they appear able to evaluate what they see or make recommendations for improvement. (as cited in Kerney & Cushing, 2000, pp. 5-21)

Amid the varying levels of principal expertise,

... Research and the experience of hundreds of school districts support the fact that, when properly conducted, observations, including pre- and postconferences, can yield valuable and valid information about teacher performance. This model is based on the assumption that teachers will reflect on and analyze the feedback to improve instruction and student learning. (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006, p. 73)

Of particular importance in this regard is the ability of principals to shape the craft of novice teachers. “... ‘Helping beginning teachers succeed is a critical responsibility for all principals as every new teacher represents a potential investment of a million dollars or more over the duration of a lifetime career. All beginners deserve the best possible nurturing and development principals can provide’” (Brock & Grady, 2001, p. 43).
For novice and experienced teachers, the facilitation of the classroom observation process by the principal is a fundamental component of professional growth. Firestone (1999) reviewed the appropriate principal actions for conducting observations.

The critical element here is simply to be fully present and to maximize the possibility of an accurate and meaningful observation. This means that your mind and attentions are totally focused on the classroom experience. It means that you are considering the experience from the student’s point of view and the teacher’s point of view as well as your own point of view. It means that you come in early enough not to call attention to yourself in a manner that disrupts the class. It means that the teacher is aware of your presence. It means that you sit in an unobtrusive place so that your presence has a minimal effect on the lesson. It means that you are not interrupted for anything short of a life-threatening emergency. It means that you stay for the entire lesson unless you have prearranged for a shorter observation. It means that you thank the teacher on the way out and take the time to comment on at least one positive aspect of the lesson. It means that you inform the teacher of the projected timeline for the remainder of the process. (p. 47)

With respect to teachers and the process, Danielson and McGreal (2000) conveyed,

…Recent findings (initially based on teachers’ reports of the certification process for the NRPTS, and more recently based on their experiences in newly developed district evaluation systems) have suggested that schools and districts enhance professional learning when teachers themselves play a larger and more active role in the evaluation process. For example, they can conduct a self-assessment, collect documents from a lesson (plans, instructional artifacts, student work), and then describe the practice to the evaluator. Although the administrator and the teacher may disagree about a particular aspect of teaching (and it is the evaluator’s judgment that, in the end, must prevail), the professional conversation is likely to be rich, and the teacher may indeed convince the administrator of her point of view...

In many schools and districts, teacher evaluation is synonymous with classroom observation. Indeed, a classroom observation is the best, and the only, setting in which to witness essential aspects of teaching—for example, the interaction between teacher and students and among students. An astute observer can note how the teacher structures the physical environment, how the teacher engages students in learning, how he establishes and maintains standards of conduct. (pp. 46-47)
As a shift to devise more teacher-centered evaluation systems emerges, research on the impact of such systems has occurred. Cobly, Bradsaw, and Joyner (2002) reported on one related study.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether educators in districts using state-mandated (traditional) teacher evaluation systems or educators in districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems perceived teacher evaluation as having a stronger positive impact on school improvement, professional development, and student learning.

Four conclusions were drawn regarding the results of this study:

- Locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems were perceived as having a stronger impact on school improvement than the state-mandated teacher evaluation system in this study.

- Locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems were perceived as having a stronger impact on professional development than the state-mandated teacher evaluation system in this study.

- Locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems were perceived as having a stronger impact on student learning than the state-mandated teacher evaluation system in this study.

The teacher evaluation policies and practices developed and implemented in the districts using a locally developed teacher evaluation system were better able to support district school reform initiatives, guide professional development for teachers, and use student learning as a focus for teacher evaluation.

Two implications for practice were identified based on this research study:

- Teacher evaluation policies and practices can serve as a catalyst for creating connections in practice between school improvement, professional development, and student learning.

- Developing teacher evaluation systems at the local level is a viable strategy for strengthening teacher evaluation and its connections to school improvement, professional development, and student learning. (pp. 2-8)

In another study, Ponticelli and Zepeda (2004) presented evaluation systems as compliance driven.
Over 2 years, 100 elementary and secondary school teachers enrolled in administrator preparation programs in two public universities in two southwestern states and their principals participated in this study.

Teachers were asked to write narrative responses to writing prompts used in the first week of instructional supervision courses in both universities. The essays were required for partial fulfillment of course requirements. Essays were graded on a submitted or not-submitted basis to enhance the potential for teachers' openness and candor in their responses. The essays were written prior to participants' exposure to course content, experiences, and discussions. Four questions guided writing: (a) What is supervision? (b) How is supervision conducted? (c) What are the teachers' role and principals' role in supervision? (d) What does supervision mean to you? Essays ranged from 9 to 20 pages in length. Themes and examples from the essays were used in focus group discussions in class to further explore teachers' experiences and understandings of supervision. Instructors made detailed notes of focus group discussions.

Principals of the participating teachers were interviewed. In one state, teachers interviewed their own principals, and in the other state, teachers interviewed another class member's principal. A semistructured interview format was used; all teachers asked the principals the same questions in the same order, but teachers could probe for clarification or examples during the interviews. The interview questions were the same as the writing prompts. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed; transcriptions ranged from 5 to 11 pages in length.

For all teachers and for the vast majority of principals, supervision was, quite simply, evaluation.

There were some principals—although fewer in number (approximately 11%)—who explained that supervisors should focus more on regular discussions about teaching practice, aimed at helping teachers to address their concerns and assisting teachers to improve teaching. Principals who held this perspective, however, also indicated that doing this kind of supervision was constrained by time and often by principals' own confusion over the differences between supervision and evaluation.

Principals generally described the conduct of supervision as fulfilling "steps" required by law—that is, observation of a single class using a required observation instrument for the required number of times per year, some type of preobservation conference and/or postobservation conference, rating a teacher's performance and directing the teacher to change teaching behavior when performance was less than satisfactory, and signing and filing an official report.

Principals understood their role to be judge of teacher performance and presenter or teller of information and suggestions for improvement. Principals saw teachers as listeners and implementers.
Teachers understood these roles similarly....

For principals, supervision meant evaluation with evaluation narrowly defined as fulfilling the steps required by law. When the term supervision was used, it meant the monitoring that occurred to be sure that teachers complied....

For teachers, supervision meant delivering the required show to fulfill district requirements....

Both principals and teachers wrote or spoke about doing supervision and evaluation right but for different reasons. For principals, "right" was following what was required by law....

For teachers, "right" meant one of two things. First, it was delivering the required show to fulfill district requirements....

Second, for more than 75% of the teachers, "right" meant conforming to the often unspoken requirements of the principal, based on her or his perceptions of teacher behaviors that demonstrate obedience, loyalty, or unquestioning support. (pp. 46-51)

The antithesis of compliance driven experiences, meaningful observations do have drawbacks with respect to the use of time.

By definition, teacher observations capture interactions between and among a teacher and her students. Meaningful observations of teachers include looking at what takes place during the lesson and the context of the lesson. That is, meaningful observations focus on pedagogy as well as instructional design, curriculum, and assessment. Even the best observations have their limitations, however.

If teachers are formally observed at all, it is probably between one and three times per year (and / is the relevant word). From scores of conversations that I have had with teachers and principals, it is clear that teachers who have more than a few years of experience, those with tenure, receive few formal observations. Many teachers report that they haven’t been formally observed in years.

Formal teacher observations are often like Polaroid photos because they capture only a moment in time (even though the moment might be 20 or 55 minutes long). At best, the observation covers a slice of a teacher’s performance.

Understandably, teachers prepare with more intensity for a formal observation, and, as a result, the lesson can be somewhat artificial. Almost all teachers say that they prefer unscheduled drop-in visits, and they make a good point. A drop-in visit is more likely to reflect something to be gained from formally observing a teacher, seeing a lesson that was planned with an observation in mind.

Consequently, a combination of formal observations and drop-in visits is the best approach. (From my personal experience, good intentions aside, it is difficult to do unscheduled visits. Unless a specific time and location are etched in my calendar and someone is planning on my presence, it is all too easy not to be there.) ... (Hockett, 2005, pp. 92-93)

Essentially,

...Adult learners have a psychological need to be self-directing. Learning is heavily influenced by adults' education, experience, and judgment and by their need to solve real-life problems. Adults are performance-centered, wanting feedback and opportunity for immediate application of new learning. Ultimately, adult learning is intrinsically motivated and socially influenced. Adults make their own decisions based on what is important to them in response to challenge and change and what is considered appropriate or intelligent behavior in their culture or environment. (Pozzicelli & Zepeda, 2004, pp. 43-44)

"The best leaders recognize the need for evaluations and make a plan to schedule them throughout the year avoiding the last minute syndrome. They also, however, realize that evaluations need to be a positive and growing experience with time for reflection and self-assessment." (Connors, 2000, p. 31).

Danielson and McGreal (2000) communicated time factors for consideration relative to the evaluation process.

The evaluation process should allow for certain internal and external deadlines and demands on educators' time, such as the following:

State or other contractual deadlines. If teachers must be notified of their employment status before a certain date, the district process must enable evaluators to meet those deadlines.

School and district events. Evaluation activities should not coincide with other time-consuming school or district events, such as back-to-school night, parent conferences, or final exams and grade reporting.

Administrative burden. All evaluation systems make demands on administrators' time, but the evaluation committee can ensure that the activities for the different phases of the process do not occur at the same time. For example, the schedule for required formal observations for probationary teachers should not coincide with conferences with nonprobationary teachers for goal setting. (p. 57)
Rubinstein (1994) expressed the need for teachers to be evaluated on a continuous basis.

Preferably, the administration evaluates each teacher several times a year. Teachers should insist on this. I don’t like being evaluated only once per year, because I am under pressure to perform the one time the administrator comes into my class. I can only hope the students cooperate. Being evaluated in this way is just as bad with all the pressure, stress, and import as taking a final exam. A visit like this has little to do with helping teachers improve.

I would much prefer the administrator drop in for informal visits to my class several times during the year, even if it’s for only part of a period. After each visit, we can compare notes in a scheduled meeting. In such a meeting the teacher has the opportunity to chat about feelings and thoughts-in a nondefensive manner—concerning the class and to ask for the administrator’s observations. Ask for suggestions on how you can improve, be more effective, or better relate to and help students. You impress the administrator with your concern for your students, your teaching, and your professionalism in soliciting positive, constructive feedback. (p. 127)

Brock and Grady (2001) highlighted the importance of ongoing feedback and support for novices.

Efforts to keep a new teacher growing need to begin as soon as the teacher is hired and should continue throughout the early years of teaching. Too often, new teachers have conversations with their principal only when problems or when it is time for formal evaluations. In addition, new teachers are largely ignored by their experienced peers and seldom have the opportunity to observe any of them teaching. For growth to occur, new teachers must have a psychologically safe environment that is conducive to nonevaluative problem solving, analysis, and reflection. The new teachers must be exposed to frequent sharing with their experienced colleagues. (Zumwalt, 1984) Induction programs must be geared to fit individual needs as perceived by the beginning teachers. (p. 15)

Clear expectations and effective communication are to be established by the principal for novices.

Beginning teachers are confronted with complicated handbooks, policies, written rules, formal procedures, and informal rules and customs. Unclear expectations of administrators, colleagues, parents, and students add to the confusion. (Gordon, 1991)
Beginning teachers view the administrator as the most significant person in the school. This administrator is the person who likely made the final choice in hiring them and is viewed as their immediate supervisor. The many roles that the principal plays might be confusing. Viewed initially as a friend and supporter, the principal then becomes the person who supervises their classes and ultimately is the one who decides on their continuing employment. Beginning teachers desperately want to know the principal's expectations for the school and for their teaching. According to one new teacher we talked to,

"The most difficult part of [my new job] was the expectations of the principal. I didn't know what to expect... and how I was to relate. At the beginning, all I saw the principal do was act as a welcomer. Here's the school. Good luck! I didn't know what his role would be with me, his expectations for me, and how I could expect him to react. I was left on my own to develop a style of teaching and classroom management. I hoped that it was the one that he approved of."

These remarks and the following comments reveal the uncertainty of a group of beginning teachers who were interviewed at the end of their first semester of teaching. One teacher said, "I would like affirmation from my principal that I am doing things OK. If not, I would like to know about it so I can address and correct the situation."

Another said, "I would like to meet monthly with my principal to discuss things like "hidden agendas," culture and traditions of the school, expectations, regular events, and what to expect, as well as an opportunity to bitch and gripe a bit."

Another responded, "I would like to meet one-on-one with my principal during the first weeks of school so I can ask questions."

Also, a grade school teacher reported,

"I like the high visibility of my principal. He pops into my room often. I like that because if he sees a problem, he can let me know right away. I like having feedback available like that. One thing that I wish he would have done is introduce me to the staff, so that I knew who everyone was and what they did. I would have liked a tour of the building, introductions to the people, and an explanation of procedures for the main school events before they happen. Waft me through the hurdles, tell me what to expect at conferences, open house, meet with the first-year teachers throughout the year to see how we're doing and tell us about events before they happen, what to expect. Preserving us about parents who are known to have agendas and who can be difficult to deal with would be good. That way, we can anticipate and have strategies in place to prevent problems..."
Eighty-six educators from five northwest Florida counties were surveyed to examine their perceptions of their principals as effective evaluators. The results suggest that teachers’ perceptions of an effective evaluation process involve a focus on their principals’ knowledge, skills, and abilities as both experienced educator and educational leader. From the respondents’ comments, four key domains emerged as pivotal components to a successful professional evaluation process: interactions between principal and educator; consistent evaluations; principal commitment to effective professional evaluation; and a principal knowledgeable in pedagogy, content, and evaluation....

The northwest Florida educators consistently expressed both a desire to have a reciprocal, communicative relationship with their evaluators and a need for the evaluation process to contain constructive feedback about their professional strengths and weaknesses. Eighty-nine percent of respondents expressed some form of the idea that a bidirectional process of professional improvement with their principals was vitally important to their continued growth as educators. They explained that effective evaluative interactions with their principals include constructive general feedback, encouragement, pedagogically appropriate feedback, and adequate time for the feedback process. A respondent noted that this interactive communication and feedback process helped her to “address areas of weaknesses, as well as strengths.” Another respondent noted that she viewed professional evaluation and feedback as a process that helps her acquire and meet new goals. Several respondents acknowledged that just knowing they were being evaluated and would be involved in follow-up interactions with their principals helped keep them sharp and “on my toes.” One educator noted that feedback after an evaluation is very useful “if it is honest and helpful.” Many teachers explained that any combination of these components of an evaluation were welcome and essential elements of their evaluations. One teacher explained that feedback was most effective when combined with “specific statements about areas of need or examples/suggestions for improvement.”

As noted, when questioned about evaluation-generated feedback, a majority of the answers reflected some aspect of the teachers’ desire to be engaged in a bidirectional process of constructive feedback with their principals. It was evident, however, not everyone receives the same amount or quality of principal-generated feedback. Some respondents complained about the unidirectional nature of the teacher evaluation process. A small number of educators (11%) noted that they had few, if any, opportunities for sustained bidirectional communication between themselves and the evaluator, and lamented this lack of feedback, as characterized by one teacher’s remark that “I would love to hear any suggestions at all from my evaluator.” Thirty-eight percent of these teachers noted that their
principals conducted their evaluations in an inconsistent manner; many teachers explained that they are rated subjectively on a form, and then asked to sign on the dotted line to complete the evaluation. Another educator suggested that her principal never observes her teach or plan lessons; thus, “I don’t feel my administration can give me any constructive feedback.” A respondent remarked that “I don’t get any constructive feedback, just always hear that it was great.” Overall, the teachers conveyed a deep desire for a constructive and collaborative relationship with their principals regarding their professional evaluation. Even those teachers who noted they did not receive constructive feedback from their evaluators expressed the need to have those types of interactions during their professional evaluations. (Zimmerman & Decker-Petton, 2003, pp. 32-33)

As cited in Brock and Grady (2001),

...The relationship between teacher and principal is of major importance in a teacher’s work life. For beginning teachers, the climate created by the principal will be a factor in their success or failure. The principal has the power to create a workplace that is pleasant or unbearable. Principals have the power to praise or criticize teaching, offer or withhold resources, determine schedules and assignments, provide or refuse support, and recommend or not recommend continuing employment. Their comments and body language speak loudly about their pleasure or displeasure. (Lieberman and Miter, 1984)

A principal who treats teachers as competent professionals and is supportive of new ideas provides a pleasant workplace in which teachers feel free to be innovative. In a supportive climate, beginning teachers will be encouraged to take risks and engage in self-discovery. A principal who is critical or punishing creates an unhappy climate in which teachers are afraid to try new ideas. In an unsupportive climate, the chances of success for a beginning teacher are slim. (Lieberman and Miller, 1984) (p. 41)


The best known, oldest, and most widely used structure for working directly with classroom teachers is clinical supervision. (see Cogan, 1973; Costa & Garmston, 1994; Goldhammer, 1969; Pajak, 2000) It most often is used in some type of line relationship, such as supervisor to supervisee, principal to assistant principal, department head to teacher, mentor teacher to mentee, cooperating teacher to student teacher, master teacher to intern, and so on. The following explanation is derived mainly from Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon. (2001, pp. 316-320) The structure of clinical supervision can be simplified into five sequential steps.
Step 1: Pre-conference with teacher. At the pre-conference, the supervisor sits with the teacher and determines (1) the reason for and the purpose of the observation, (2) the focus of the observation, (3) the method and form of observation to be used, (4) the time of the observation, and (5) the time of the postconference. These determinations are made before the actual observation, so that both supervisor and teacher are clear about what will transpire. The purpose of the observation provides the criteria for the remaining decisions on focus, method, and time of observation.

Step 2: Observation of classroom instruction. The next step, observation, is the time to follow through with the understandings of the pre-conference. The observer might use any one observation or combination of observations. The observer should keep in mind the difference between descriptions of events and interpretations. Descriptions are the actual events that occurred and are recorded. Interpretations are the meanings inferred from these events.

Step 3: Analyzing and interpreting the observation and determining conference approach. The analysis and interpretations of the observation and the determination of approach are now possible. The supervisor leaves the classroom with the recorded observations and seeks solitude in an office or a corner to study the information. Regardless of the instrument, questionnaire, or open-ended form used, the supervisor makes sense out of a large mass of information....

The last determination for the supervisor to make Step 3 of the clinical supervision structure is to select an interpersonal approach to use with the teacher in the postconference. Should the supervisor use a directive approach by presenting observations and interpretations, asking for teacher input, setting a goal, and either telling the teacher what actions to take (directive-control) or providing the teacher with alternative actions to choose from (directive-informational)? Should the supervisor be collaborative by sharing the observations and encouraging the teacher to analyze, interpret, and make his or her own plan? Some supervisors provide teachers with the observation data before the postconference. This allows teachers to review the data in advance and bring their own preliminary interpretations to the postconference.

Step 4: Postconference with teacher. With the completed observation form, the completed analysis and interpretation form, and the chosen interpersonal approach, the supervisor is ready to meet with the teacher in a postconference. The postconference is held to discuss the analysis of the observation and the data, if needed, to produce a plan for instructional improvement.

The first order of business is to let the teacher in on the recorded notes and impressions from the observation-to reflect back to the teacher what was seen. Then, the supervisor can follow the chosen approach (directive-control, directive-informational, collaborative, or nondirective). The responsibility for developing a
future plan may reside with the supervisor, be equally shared, or belong to the teacher. The conference ends with a plan for further improvement.

Step 5: Critique of previous four steps. The critique of the previous four steps is a time for reviewing whether the format and procedures from pre-conference through postconference were satisfactory and whether revisions might be needed before repeating the sequence. The critique might be held at the end of the postconference or in a separate conference a few days later. It need not be a formal session but can be a brief discussion, consisting of questions such as the following: What was valuable in what we have been doing? What was of little value? What changes could be suggested? The critique has both symbolic and functional value. It indicates that the supervisor is involved in an improvement effort in the same way as the supervisee. Furthermore, the feedback from the teacher gives the supervisor a chance to decide on what practices to continue, revise, or change when working with the teacher in the future. (pp. 10-14)

Danielson and McGreal (2000) noted the distinction between the observation process and teacher evaluation.

The clinical supervision model, as it was originally conceived, was a formative evaluation experience that asked the observer to be a collector of descriptive data on predetermined aspects of the teacher’s performance. This view has been compromised over the years by the use of clinical supervision as a summative evaluation activity. The requirements for documented teacher evaluation make summative judgments based on observation necessary. In that respect, the recommended observational activity is an adaptation of clinical supervision. Remember that the observation is not the evaluation. Unfortunately, many districts and their staffs equate observation and evaluation. Observation is a source of data for use in collecting evidence and for use as a focus for professional discussion and reflection on teaching and learning. It is one of the information-gathering activities available to the supervisor that, when taken together, help inform professional judgment. To make the observation as reliable as possible, districts should train supervisors or other observers in observation and conferencing skills. Wherever possible, the district should link this training to the standards for teaching the district adopted. (p. 84)

In preparing a classroom observation report, principals are encouraged to provide balance and feedback that does not overwhelm beginning teachers. Firestone (1999) mentioned,

It is important, in the overall scheme of the written observation document, to highlight the positive aspects of a teacher’s performance, and to use it, wherever
appropriate, as a foundation for recommendations that will correct deficiencies and extend the teacher’s insight and repertoire.

You also need to strive to be accurate, extensive, specific, thorough, and, where appropriate, literal. Be sure your judgments are supported by documentation and give appropriate weight to different teacher behaviors and practices. Some are more and some are less significant as causes of student success.

Finally, it is much more effective to select and focus on two, three, or four teacher competencies that have the potential for significant impact on student learning, rather than commenting on so many competencies that it undermines the focus for growth. (p. 60)

“Formal observations can be a powerful stimulus for teacher reflection. If they are to grow, teachers need to construct meaning from their efforts both before and after an observation. That is, teachers need to actively engage in anticipating, hypothesis testing, reflecting, and analyzing” (Hoerr, 2005, p. 93).

Reflection can and should happen even if no observation takes place, but teacher observation can facilitate the process. Indeed, the most important aspect of an observation can be the thought and dialogue that come before and after. How a lesson becomes an opportunity for teacher growth is far less important than the fact that the thought and reflection take place....

One possible approach is to agree on which particular issue will be the focus of the observation. Will the principal be looking to see how the teacher responds to “During the lesson, how will I know that we are all succeeding? If things are not going well, what adjustments might I make?” Or will the principal be focusing on “Which students grasped the skills or concepts and which struggled?” or “Were all racial groups and both genders equally involved in the lesson?” Agreement on the focus of the observation can be addressed in a pre-observation conference or, even, through a note or e-mail that asks the teacher which issues she wants to focus on. However the agreement is reached, the questions can help frame a rich post-observation conference between the teacher and principal. Beyond this, teachers can use the questions for their own analysis, regardless of whether a formal observation occurs.

Face-to-face meetings and discussions between a teacher and principal are usually best, but a teacher’s thought and reflection can be supported in other ways, too. There are a number of creative ways in which reflection and constructivist analysis can take place, some of which do not include meetings with the principal. Depending upon the principal’s time and skills, the expertise and interest of the
teacher, and the school’s culture, one or a combination of the following strategies may be appropriate:

Teachers engage in pre-observation and postobservation conferences with the principal or another administrator.

Teachers complete pre-observation and postobservation forms that elicit their thoughts and rationale and submit them to the principal.

Teachers from a similar grade level or subject area, engage in peer observation to offer feedback and suggestions.

Teachers from a different grade level or subject area (or perhaps from a different school) engage in peer observation.

Lessons are videotaped, and teachers review them with peers or administrator.

Teachers keep a portfolio that includes pre-observation and postobservation forms and videotapes of lessons. (Hoerr, 2005, pp. 94-96)

Brock and Grady (2001) contended,

...The first official observation fills the new teacher with uncertainty and trepidation. Much rests on how the principal handles this important event. Making a hasty judgment based on the performance of a fearful teacher might be damaging. A pre-observation conference minimizes the uncertainty and demonstrates the principal’s interest in fairness and accuracy. Beginning teachers profit from a clinical model of supervision. They benefit from frequent and specific feedback and opportunities to collaborate on ideas and strategies. They need to know what they are doing well in addition to hearing about their shortcomings. (p. 114)

Firesstone (1999) indicated that administrators need to weave thoughtful and challenging questions into the preobservation discussion and pose a sequence of questions for principal consideration. In addition, consultations and conferences are opportunities for principals to structure and strategize the professional growth of teachers by being mindful of their responsibilities for effective communication.

What are your objectives for the lesson? How do they relate to the state content standards? Where do they fit into the curriculum and the preceding and succeeding sequence of lessons?
How does the lesson integrate with other subjects or courses, current events, other topics in this course/class, or life outside of school?

What is your design for the lesson? What will you be doing to produce the desired student outcomes?

What will the students be doing?

What is the sequence of activities?

How will you introduce the lesson?

What will you be doing to “hook” student curiosity and interest?

How will you be meeting the individual needs of your students in regard to learning styles, readiness and foundation preparation, interests, special needs, etc.?

What questions will you be asking that will provide higher order thinking?

Will the students be formulating their own questions?

How will you know during the lesson that it is succeeding? What will you see the students doing or saying?

What will tell you that the lesson is not succeeding?

What are your options if the lesson is not succeeding? How will you decide on which option to select?

How will you assess what each student has learned from the lesson?

How will you be promoting student reflection?

How will the students summarize the “key” points of the lesson?

What homework will you be assigning? How will the homework support and/or extend what the students have learned during the lesson?

How will the room be set up? How does this relate to and support your instructional design and the meeting of your objectives?

Are there any special circumstances that I should be aware of?

Based on this discussion, what, if anything, are you going to change in your instructional design for the lesson?
What would you like me to look for and give you feedback on? Which competencies are you working on? What are your specific professional growth goals that you will be focusing on in this lesson? What would be helpful to you? What data would you like me to collect?

Is there anything else that you would like to discuss regarding the lesson?

How can I help you to feel more relaxed and positive about the observation?

All the preparation and effort that you have put into the observation process so far has led to the post-observation conference. It is here that, with the district’s instructional model as the basis, the teacher and administrator reflect upon the teacher’s performance, discuss significant aspects of it in detail, and create a “pathway” for continuous improvement. It is here that, depending on the administrator’s communication skills, the teacher will become an enthusiastic participant in his/her own professional growth, a minimally compliant “game player,” or a resistant adversary.

It will also be useful for you to keep in mind a paraphrase of the old training adage that for change to occur the teacher must want to change. Know how to change, and be given the opportunity to change. All three of these must be true if your supervisory efforts are going to be a catalyst for observable and/or measurable performance improvement on the part of the teacher. Your communication and consultation behaviors during the post-observation conference establish the foundation for each of the three requirements for change.

The secrets to effective communication are neither complex nor difficult, but they do take thought, practice, and feedback. The first consideration has to do with physical and psychological arrangements. Although these suggestions may seem obvious to many administrators, remember to:

...Recognize that any teacher is to some degree apprehensive. Do what you can to create a relaxed, yet professional, atmosphere.

...Unless you have reached a point where more formality is appropriate, leave your desk. Sitting with the teacher helps to create a climate of constructive collaboration.

...Arrange not to be interrupted. An interruption would undermine the sense of importance that you need to attach to this very critical part of the observation cycle.

...Approach the discussion with a constructive and friendly demeanor. Recognize that you are a mentor for every teacher you supervise. Your goal is to engage the teacher in a significant and purposeful professional dialogue that leads to improved instructional practices, not to drive the teacher into a defensive corner.
... Work to establish rapport before you lead the discussion into any performance area needing improvement.

... While you will be leading the discussion, do not dominate it. The teacher must have adequate opportunity to participate. Be careful, also, not to “lecture” the teacher....

While how you approach the conference is very important, the content of your observation should drive the substance of the discussion. It is a good idea to have a plan of action for facilitating the discussion and follow through activities.

You should certainly:

... Refer frequently to the specific competencies and indicators in the district’s new “Instructional model.”

... Review your description of the learning activity and verify accuracy.

... Have a well thought out set of questions that will help the teacher reflect clearly and accurately on the lesson he/she taught and to draw out what can be learned from the experience....

... Incorporate your significant positive observations and present supportive data that you collected, using each as an opportunity to acknowledge and reinforce teacher strengths. Mutually explore ideas as to how the teacher might build on these to enhance his/her teaching skills and repertoire.

... Weave in teacher choices and behaviors that were ineffective in promoting student learning or inconsistent with good teaching practices and/or the goals for the lesson. Mutually analyze and seek shared understanding of areas needing improvement. Though your own supportive attitude and behaviors, work to achieve positive teacher cooperation.

... Collaboratively develop a written “Action Plan” to address ways for the teacher to grow professionally, meet expectations in areas needing improvement, and develop the new and/or enhanced knowledge, skills, and behaviors that will make him/her more effective. This “Action Plan” should be an outcome of every post observation conference. The plan should include goals/objectives, activities to meet them, resources that will be needed, and a timeline. A few possible activities to mutually consider are: ongoing discussions between you and the teacher, focused “informal” observations, videotaping, audio taping, soliciting student feedback, peer coaching, in-district workshops, outside conferences or workshops, books, articles, videos, observing and conferring with outstanding colleagues (including supervisors), focused group discussions, book talks, college courses, focused research projects, and joint planning of specific lessons.
...Check in with the teacher on a regular basis to encourage, support, and monitor progress on the goals. "Champion" his/her successes.

...During the next observation, look for and, if evident, "celebrate" growth.

...Solicit feedback and suggestions from the teacher as to your own effectiveness in the observation process. "Mold openness." (pp. 63-65)

Glickman (2002) described instructional leadership approaches and behaviors pertaining to conferences with teachers.

Listening. The instructional leader sits quietly and looks at the speaker and nods his or her head to show understanding. Nodding and guttural utterances ("uh-huh," "ummm," and so on) also indicate listening.

Clarifying. The instructional leader asks questions and statements to clarify the speaker's point of view: "Do you mean that?" "Would you explain this further?" "I'm confused about this," "I lost you on...", "You lost me...

Encouraging. The instructional leader provides acknowledgment responses that help the speaker continue to explain his or her positions: "Yes, I'm following you," "Continue on," "Ah, I see what you're saying—tell me more."

Reflecting. The instructional leader summarizes and paraphrases the speaker's message for verification of accuracy: "I understand that you mean...," "So, the issue is...", "I hear you saying..."

Presenting. The instructional leader gives his or her own ideas about the issue being discussed: "This is how I see it...", "What can we do...", "I'd like us to consider...", "I believe that..."

Problem Solving. The instructional leader takes the initiative, usually after a preliminary discussion of the issue or problem, in pressing all those involved to generate a list of possible solutions. This is usually done through statements such as "Let's stop and each write down what can be done," "What ideas do we have to solve this problem?" "Let's think of all possible actions we can take."

Negotiating. The instructional leader moves the discussion from possible to probable solutions by discussing the consequences of each proposed action, exploring conflict or priorities, and narrowing down choices with questions such as these: "Where do we agree?" "How can we change that action to be acceptable to all?" "Can we find a compromise that will give each of us part of what we want?"
Directing. The instructional leader tells the participant(s) either what the choices are or what is to be done. To explain the choices, the leader can say such things as this: "As I see it, these are the alternatives: You could do A, B, or C. Which of these makes the most sense to you and which will you use?" If the leader tells the participants what is to be done, he or she may say: "I've decided that we will do..., "I want you to do..." "The policy will be..., "This is how it is going to be..., "We will then proceed as follows."

Standardizing. The instructional leader sets the expected criteria and the timeline or time frame for the decision to be implemented. Target objectives are set. Expectations are conveyed with statements such as these: "By next Monday, we want to see..." "Report back to me on this change by..." "I want the first two activities carried out by..." "I want an improvement of 25 percent involvement by the next meeting, "We have agreed that all tasks will be done before the next observation."

Reinforcing. The instructional leader strengthens the directive and the criteria to be met by telling of possible consequences. Possible consequences can be positive, in the form of praise: "I know you can do it!" "I have confidence in your ability!" "I want to show others what you've done!" Consequences also can be negative: "If it's not done on time, we'll lose the support of..., " or "It must be understood that failure to get this done on time will result in...."

These behaviors of conferencing can be put together in different combinations that form different approaches and outcomes for working with teachers. Some behaviors place more responsibility on the teacher(s) to make the decisions, others place more responsibility on the instructional leader to make the decision, and still others indicate a shared responsibility for decision making....

When as instructional leader listens to the teacher, clarifies what the teacher says, encourages the teacher to speak more about the concern, and reflects by verifying the teacher's perceptions, then clearly the teacher participates in making the decisions about professional practice. The instructional leader's role is that of an active probe or a sounding board for the teacher to make his or her own decisions. The teacher has high control, and the leader low control, over the actual decision (fig 3 for teacher, small I for leader). This is seen as a nondirective interpersonal approach.

When a leader uses nondirect behaviors to understand the teacher's point of view but then participates in the discussion by presenting his or her own ideas, problem solving by asking all parties to propose possible actions, and then negotiating to find a common course of action satisfactory to teacher and leader, then the control over the decision is shared by all. This is viewed as a collaborative interpersonal approach.
When an instructional leader directs the teacher on the alternatives the teacher may choose from, and, after the teacher selects, the leader standardizes the timeline and criteria of expected results, then the leader is the major source of information, providing the teacher with restricted choice (small r, big I). This is viewed as a directive-informational interpersonal approach.

Finally, when a leader directs the teacher in what will be done, standardizes the timeline of and criteria for expected results, and reinforces the consequences of action or inaction, then the leader has taken responsibility for the decision (small r, big I). The leader is clearly determining the actions for the teacher to follow. These behaviors are called a directive-control interpersonal approach....

Another way to clarify the distinctions among approaches is to look at the outcomes of the conference and determine who controls the final decision for instructional improvement. Using the nondirective approach, the leader facilitates the teacher's thinking in developing a self-plan. In the collaborative approach, both leader and teacher share information and possible practices as equals in arriving at a mutual plan. In the directive-informational approach, the leader provides the focus and the parameters of possible actions, and the teacher is asked to choose from among the leader's suggestions. In the directive-control approach, the leader tells the teacher what to do. Nondirective provides maximum teacher choice, collaborative, mutual choice, directive-informational, selected choice; and directive-control, no choice is the outcome of the conference....

In determining the approach to use, the teacher should take into account the commitment, expertise, and needs of individual teachers. The goal is always to use approaches that strengthen a teacher's capacity for greater reflection and self-reliance in making improvements in classroom teaching and learning. However, all leaders should first understand themselves, their predominant ways of interacting, and their core beliefs about working with others. Every leader-like every human being-has a preferred style for communicating with others, whether it be assertive and bold, calm and conversational, or quiet and reassuring. This does not mean that leaders are static and fixed in their interpersonal approaches, but when they digress to a different approach, others may note that they are "acting out of character." So it is with ways leaders work with teachers....

A leader with a rudimentary understanding of these four approaches to working with individual teachers-nondirective, collaborative, directive-informational, and directive-control-can now put this understanding into practice. The idea is that a leader needs to understand the teacher (his or her needs, experiences, identity, and development), the instructional focus under consideration and the related student learning, and the context of the classroom in determining which approach might both meet the immediate learning need and facilitate over time the teacher's own progress toward reflective, more autonomous, action research. (pp. 39-44)
At the core of quality teaching are principals who demonstrate an ability to master these interpersonal approaches and motivate teachers to continuously improve their craft.

A number of years ago, I was involved in a project identifying and shadowing outstanding teachers throughout the country. My main goal was to ascertain the common attributes of great teachers.

The most fulfilling aspect of the project was meeting and working with so many phenomenal educators. The most difficult part was narrowing the characteristics. The one commodity that was evident in every discussion, however, was the importance of leadership. When teachers were asked, “What is it that makes you so outstanding?” they readily remarked that they had an administrator who encouraged and supported them, trusted their professionalism, and made them feel like a significant member of a very important team. The testimony of these outstanding teachers re-emphasized the key role of administrative leadership. (Connors, 2000, p. 21)

People-oriented principals have an open door policy while taking time to speak to as many people as possible daily. The way to make people shine is to let them be the gems that they are, and just provide a good setting and a little polish. Consequently, they treat others, as THEY want to be treated. Meaning, the best leaders ask the adults:

What is the most effective means of communication for you?
What do you need from me to be successful?
What are your professional interests/talents?
What are your strengths?
What do you believe can make our school more successful?
How are we successfully meeting the needs of all students?
What resources/training do you need to improve?
How can I be a more effective leader?

Continual assessment, involving all parties, is essential. Through motivation, communication, and delegation, extraordinary leaders build a team of successful players. (Connors, 2000, p. 68)

Hoerr (2005) furthered this notion.

If principals want their teachers to be constructivist learners, they need to be clear that they don’t want to see perfection in a lesson... The principal sets the tone for this to happen. Before a formal observation, I will often tell a teacher, “Remember to make new mistakes. Let me see you trying something new or taking a risk.” During our postobservation conference, I may begin by asking, “What new mistake did you make, and what did you learn from it?” (p. 100)
As cited in Heller (2004) and not to be overlooked,

...This matter of supervision and evaluation is a delicate one, exacerbated in our profession by the fact that the two roles are often played by the same person. Ideally, one should receive supervision from one person and evaluation from another. This scenario, however, is neither practical nor absolutely necessary if conditions are right. The three crucial factors that can make or break the supervision and evaluation process are trust, knowledge, and control.

The supervisor and supervisee must develop a strong sense of trust. The supervisor must have a deep knowledge of teaching and learning as well as adult development and adult education. The process should be, as much as possible, in the control of the supervisee; this approach removes much of the fear often associated with being observed. A principal can approach this control issue by having each teacher combine school-defined goals with personally defined goals, and by having teachers help define the process and evidence that will be used in the evaluation. The teacher's personal growth goals should fit into the school's overall professional development program. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) refer to this idea when they say, "This shift does not negate the value of teachers' perceptions regarding their needs, but rather places those needs within a larger context" (p. 14)....

The issue of control leads to the question of power. Too often, people conceive of power as the ability to define the action of others. However, I would suggest, and have suggested, otherwise:

So what is a useful definition of power? I propose that school personnel begin to see power as the ability to control oneself, not others. As teachers, we should empower students to take control of their lives. Similarly, schools must empower teachers to make decisions in their classrooms about what is best for their students. (Heller, 1994, p. 288)

Some form of teacher evaluation is a political given. Therefore, why not make it beneficial to the teacher and not just an exercise to provide information for employment status decisions? The more we can turn this process over to teachers, the more teaching will become a true profession. Within the larger context of institutional needs, teachers should have a substantial say in their own professional development and evaluation. One marker of a profession is the right of its members to police themselves....

Allowing teachers more control over their own professional lives has a ripple effect on the school. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1971) believe that teachers will withhold from students what is withheld from them. Therefore, oppressed teachers will be oppressive teachers. Glickman (1985) continues this thought with the observation that "teachers accept common goals for students and therefore complement each other's teaching, and when supervisors work with teachers in a
manner consistent with the way teachers are expected to work with students, then-and only then-does the school reach its goals." (p.4)

Glickman goes on to explain that when individual teacher goals are linked with institutional goals, the entire system works in harmony. He sees the supervision process as the glue that holds all such goals together, much as Sparks and Hirsh do. Goal setting with teachers, then, is at the heart of the supervisory process, and it is the first step in teachers exercising control over their individual professional development. (pp. 71-73)

Firestone (1999) referred to five essential elements that contribute to continuous teacher growth.

The development of rapport and trust between teachers and administrators creates an inviting climate, making it safe for administrators to provide honest and thoughtful feedback to teachers and for teachers to take risks necessary for learning.

Two-way communication that is forthright, clear, and specific, yet caring and supportive at the same time, promotes mutual understanding and the formulation of specific goals....

Ongoing dialogues in the context of mentoring and consultative relationships between teachers and administrators and among teachers themselves help teachers see and successfully navigate the learning pathways that lead toward improved performance. (pp. 37-38)

For the first element,

...It is important and productive to establish and sustain rapport with someone whom you are attempting to influence. This is especially true if your goal is to be collegial, but you are faced with a situation that is potentially tense, hostile, defensive, and/or adversarial, as is the case in at least some post-observation conferences. Rapport means that, at least for the moment, you are in touch with the other person; you are listening to each other with open minds, you care about what the other person is communicating. Rapport is different from "trust" in that trust is a longer-term and more deeply felt aspect of the ongoing relationship. Trust certainly creates and enhances rapport, but it is possible to establish rapport without first developing an abiding trust in each other.

There are a number of overt ways to establish rapport, including managing the environment so as to create a comfortable setting for the discussion, putting out coffee/tea, behaving in an inviting and friendly manner, and actively listening in order to understand the other person before making any judgments or disagreeing with what they are presenting.
Other strategies work at a more subconscious level. Neuro-Linguistic Programming suggests that the other participant in a dialogue unconsciously demonstrates how they want you to sit. That is, if they are sitting back in a relaxed fashion, you should do the same. If they are leaning in toward you, or if their legs or hands are crossed, follow suit. By carefully observing and approximately matching the other person’s position you put them at ease. If they change the way they are sitting, wait a moment then shift your own position. This is called “pacing.” (Obviously, it is important to be subtle with your mirroring.) After about five minutes, you independently change your own position. This is called “leading.” If the other person shifts his/her position in some way that mirrors yours, you can feel comfortable that rapport has been established. Once rapport is established through pacing and leading, you can let the practice drop.

A second strategy involves the understanding that virtually all of us have a preferred manner of learning, either visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. People who have a strong preference for one of the three modalities make extensive use of words that reflect that mode. If you listen carefully, you may find that the person with whom you are interacting will be employing a vocabulary that reveals his/her preference. If you find this is happening, you will want to match the modality with your own choice of words. (Firesome, 1999, pp. 67-68)

Almost every educator who has attained a position of leadership has received at least some training in effective communication. Nevertheless, teachers tell me that in the midst of the overwhelmingly busy and fragmented days, leaders often forget or neglect even the most basic rules of good communication. For example, when sending a message it is important to be:

...goal oriented.
...clear and understandable.
...respectful of listener(s).
...open to response(s) and to changing one’s mind.
...consistent with emotions.
...up front and forthright, avoiding “games” or “hidden agendas.”
...sensitive to the potential feelings and responses of the listener.
...a seeker of mutual understanding.
...fully responsible for your own statements.
...free of assumptions and presuppositions.

If communicating your own ideas effectively is important, listening actively is even more critical. People consistently report that being listened to is one of the highest forms of respect. Teachers also report that one of the behaviors that they find most demeaning is when their supervisors don’t really listen. In order to actively listen you need to:

...stop talking.
...put the talker at ease.
...show that you want to listen; look and act interested.
...minimize distractions.
...put yourself in the speaker’s place.
...be patient.
...listen to understand rather than judge.
...ask clarifying questions.
...rephrase what has been said in your own words to check the accuracy of your understanding.
...hold your responses.
...organize and visualize what the other person is saying.
..."hear" the speaker’s feelings and emotions.
...understand from the other person’s point of view.
...refrain from interrupting, arguing, or criticizing.
...avoid making assumptions or jumping to conclusions.

Another way to think about communication is through the process of giving and receiving “feedback”—information that communicates specific information about one person’s experience with the other person. When giving feedback to someone:

...focus on the behavior of the person, not on the personality or character.
...make it specific (what, when, why).
...describe the person’s behavior; don’t judge it.
...direct it at behavior that can be changed, not at permanent characteristics of an individual.
...make it timely, as soon as practical following the behavior.
...remember that young people are uncomfortable receiving feedback, even if you are handling it the best way possible.
...express your appreciation to the other person for listening to your concern.

If you expect other people to listen to and even appreciate your feedback to them, you need to model your own openness to their feedback to you. Specifically, you should:

...actively listen to the person’s description of your behavior and recommendations for changes that would be helpful.
...take a deep breath and try not to be defensive; trust that the intent is to be helpful.
...paraphrase, summarize, ask questions, and seek examples to be sure you understand.
...give the feedback serious and open-minded consideration.
...communicate what the other person (people) can do to help you make changes.
...acknowledge the other person’s concern and point of view and express your appreciation whether or not you use the feedback. (Firestone, 1999, pp. 71-73)
Aside from conference practices, teacher experience generally dictates that which principals observe in classrooms and in terms of student achievement. Stronge (2002) stated,

...Teaching experience matters in teacher effectiveness and student achievement, at least to a certain point. Experienced teachers differ from rookie teachers in that they have attained expertise through real-life experiences, classroom practice, and time. These teachers typically have a greater repertoire from which to incorporate and organize routines for monitoring students and creating flowing, meaningful lessons. Teachers who are both experienced and effective are experts who know the content and students they teach, use efficient planning strategies, practice interactive decision-making, and embody effective classroom management skills. These experienced and effective teachers are efficient—they can do more in less time than novice educators.

Researchers indicate that teachers develop from novices to masters at different intervals over time, taking from five to eight years to master the art, science, and craft of teaching. Therefore, the number of years in front of a classroom of students may not necessarily indicate that a teacher is expert. One study suggests that in order for a teacher to be considered experienced, the ability to apply the "book knowledge" from preservice training to both common and exceptional classroom situations should be observable. Through experience and awareness, teachers are able to improvise. Flexibility and adaptability are sometimes better than a well-written lesson plan because classrooms are dynamic. Novice teachers often hesitate to deviate from a plan, but the effective teacher can do it with ease and therefore capitalize on a teachable moment and accommodate a schedule change. The ability to improvise is a characteristic more common to experienced educators than to beginners.

Research supports the following findings related to teacher experience:

Teachers with more experience tend to show better planning skills, including a more hierarchical and organized structure in the presentation of their material.

Effective experienced teachers are better able to apply a range of teaching strategies, and they demonstrate more depth and differentiation in learning activities.

Experienced teachers tend to know and understand their students' learning needs, learning styles, prerequisite skills, and interests better than beginners.

The classrooms of more experienced teachers are better organized around routines and plans for handling problems than those of novices.
Teaching experience has up to a 30 percent beneficial effect on student academic performance.

Teachers with more than three years of experience are more effective than those with three years or fewer, but these differences seem to level off after five to eight years. Teacher expertise as defined by experience (as well as education and scores on licensing exams) accounts for as much as 40 percent of the variation in students’ achievement. (pp. 9-10)

Other differences in teacher skill sets are frequently observed with classroom management and discipline.

The problems of beginning teachers are real and do exist. (Dollase, 1992; Gordon, 1991; Yeeman, 1984) The recurring problems include classroom management and discipline, motivating students, dealing with students’ problems, insufficient supplies and materials, dealing with special needs students, insufficient time to prepare, and working with parents, administrators, and community.

In 1996 I surveyed 150 beginning teachers who were completing their first or second years in the classroom to assess their problems, stress, and intention to remain in the teaching profession. These teachers were all graduates of one regional midwestern university and included preschool through high school teachers. ... The highest rated problems from this group included motivating students, dealing with students’ social and emotional needs, classroom management and discipline, and dealing with the large numbers of students in classes. (as cited in Clement, 2000, p. 69)

Brock and Grady (2001) echoed a segment of Clement’s findings.

Classroom discipline has been a recurring struggle for novice teachers. Studies spanning the decades (Clark, 1986) report the difficulties of novice teachers as they struggle to develop a style of discipline that is responsive to student needs and that is consistent with the discipline policy of the school. (p. 22)

The principal’s role is to assist beginning teachers in identifying whether or not their behaviors provide the basis for their classroom management problems. When teachers plan their lessons carefully, involve students actively in learning, and use effective classroom management techniques, the incidence of discipline problems diminishes. Each teacher should clearly communicate classroom rules, apply them consistently and fairly, and model appropriate behavior.

When observing a beginning teacher’s classroom, principals should look for teacher behaviors that promote appropriate student behavior. (p. 91)
Again,

...The clearest message we heard from first-year teachers is that they do not have adequate classroom management skills. In surveys completed at the end of the first year of teaching and during seminars held throughout the first year, we consistently heard that discipline is a major concern for the beginning professional.

Classroom discipline problems have a negative effect on teacher effectiveness, satisfaction, and longevity. When the enthusiasm and efforts of the first-year teacher are met with disruptive student behaviors, enthusiasm wanes. The time and energy devoted to disruptions lead to emotional exhaustion, feelings of failure, and a major reason for apprentice teachers to leave the profession. (Levine and Nolan, 2000)

First-year teachers reported that some university preparation programs included courses in classroom management, while other programs provided only limited attention to the topic. Practicum experiences and student teaching were often the only opportunities for dealing with authentic classroom situations. First-year teachers might have a limited repertoire of classroom management techniques derived from their field experiences.

One of the often-heard comments was, “I had no idea I’d have to deal with this type of issue.” Clearly, it would be depressing and dysfunctional to discourage individuals from entering the teaching profession by foreshadowing an entire encyclopedia of the disciplinary transgressions that might transpire in a teaching career. There appears to be an incredible chasm between the first-year teacher’s expectations for student behavior and the realities of the students’ behavior, however.

Because of the limited attention given to discipline in preparation programs, the task of preparing first-year teachers devolves to the principal. In most cases, principals expect teachers to be capable of managing classroom discipline. This perception is more ideal than real. Principals need to embrace their role in assisting first-year teachers to create classroom environments that do not contribute to classroom disruptions....

An important role of the principal is to assist all teachers, but especially beginning teachers, in developing classroom management strategies conducive to an orderly learning environment. Principals and teachers must remember that 80 percent of all children will behave well and will respond with improved behavior to either good or bad methods of discipline, and 5 percent of all students chronically misbehave and generally respond very poorly to most known conventional forms of discipline. About 15 percent of the student population fence-sits. These students need a clear set of expectations and consequences. If they are not given
enough structure, they can disrupt learning for all the other students. (Meyers and Pawlas, 1989, p. 28)

Administrators should serve two primary functions when supporting teachers and students. First, they should be available to deal with seriously disruptive behaviors that interfere with the teaching-learning process. Violence toward others or toward property, as well as verbal attacks, are examples. Second, when a teacher refers a student to the office for "minor" infractions, that teacher is feeling extremely frustrated and angry with the student.

From her perspective, the choice is between sending the child to the office or opening up the window and pushing him out. You must recognize this level of frustration and support that teacher by not sending the student back to class until a time when the teacher and student may be able to work out their differences or agree to a truce. (Mendler, 1992, p. 64)

Rather than handling all students discipline problems, the principal’s role is to help develop teachers' professional responses to discipline issues. When teachers do more of the disciplining, this can free up the administrators to be more visible throughout the school and present in so-called high discipline activity areas. Assistant principals can move beyond the assembly line discipline mentality. Administrators also need a range of choices to move beyond the “warning-detention-suspension” triangle. (Mendler, 1992) (as cited in Brock & Grady, 2001, pp. 87-89)

Webster (1994) maintained,

... All of the theory related to child development, learning, effective teaching, and school effectiveness that exists is meaningless unless it is applied in classrooms. The best place to start is lesson planning based on developmental readiness; teaching should be based on what children are capable of learning at given stages of readiness. Lessons beyond what children can learn at given stages of development are absurd and destructive to their self-concepts; and lessons below their capabilities are limiting and insulting to human intelligence. Teaching experience is the best basis of understanding that match. This suggests, that, in many instances, inexperienced teachers must be taught that matchup by principals.

The most appropriate and effective lessons planned and delivered by teachers at any level are those lessons which capitalize on the natural tendency of the human brain to construct meaning out of what it confronts—called constructivism in teaching. (Brooks and Brooks 1993, 3-14) Good teachers always attempt to use this tendency of the brains of learners. Thus, principals should look, first and foremost, for evidence of such teaching and learning when looking in classrooms and evaluating teacher effectiveness.... (p. 191)
Repeating in the literature with regard to principal expertise and teacher evaluation,

...Several landmark studies in teacher evaluation point out that an apparently thorough checklist of behaviors, competencies, or duties is of little use in inexpert hands. For example, Medley and Coker (1987) found that it is not the appearance or counting of manifest behaviors (e.g., "solicits views of students," "makes contact when student off task," etc.) that is related to student academic and affective gains, but the appropriate use and degree of these behaviors which requires expert, subjective judgment that the use (or even withholding) was the best move in the unique situation. (as cited in Peterson, 2004, p. 61)

Danielson and McGreal (2000) conveyed the importance of a narrative format for summative evaluations.

To be most effective, feedback on summative judgments should also include a narrative component. The narrative format allows for more extended and more fully described explanations of judgments that have been made and provides an opportunity for a more focused approach on those areas that are most relevant for each individual. A narrative provides a clearer and "lighter" approach to evaluation while still providing the opportunity for descriptive problem identification and remedial recommendations.

Borrowing from work originally done in dealing with written critiques in art (Meux, 1974), we recommended that all written summative feedback operate from a simple model of valuing. The model states that no value statement or value term should be used unless it is accompanied by example, anecdote, illustration, or description. These become the facts to support the value. This concept allows administrators to use the descriptive data collected during the required activities within the system as the facts to support the judgments which must accompany the required summative portion of the Track 1 system.

We think that the use of a validated BARS instrument that contains descriptive anchors for each possible rating, accompanied by a required narrative that provides supporting commentary for the judgments presented, would offer the best chance to promote a successful closure to the Track 1 evaluation process. (pp 97-98)

As a general rule, an evaluation system must be based on clear and agreed-upon expectations for teaching while allowing teachers to play an active role in self-fair, evidence-driven evaluation process that includes substantive and timely feedback. Such a system will lead to significant professional learning for teachers as well as to the quality assurance that every school must have. (p. 35)
Summary of Chapter II

The emergence of organizations such as the NMSA, NASPP, and Carnegie led to the structural and cultural characteristics of the 20th century middle school. Primarily, academic teaming was to be a vehicle by which to originate, articulate, and evaluate interdisciplinary instruction. While doing so, personalized relationships with pre-adolescent learners were to constitute the shared goal of middle school philosophy in which a balance among academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity existed in grades 6-8 schools across the United States.

In order to achieve the goal of personalized relationships, the ever-changing cognitive, emotional, physical, and social needs of the pre-adolescent learner were to be considered. Essentially, the middle school years, a time of heightened egocentric behavior, present challenges for educators with a desire to maximize student engagement and motivation in the classroom environment. Further complicating this desire is the multiple constructs of student engagement (academic, behavioral, cognitive, psychological, and socio-cultural) and measurement tools (self-reports, observations, checklists, case studies, and student work samples).

Four instructional strategies impacting student engagement surfaced in Chapter II, teacher-student rapport and social-emotional learning, classroom management, authentic learning, and student-centered instruction. The concept of establishing connections with pre-adolescent learners accounted for the interdependent relationship among the four strategies. Connections to student needs, school, and the social environment were identified throughout the teacher-student rapport and social-emotional learning qualitative and quantitative research; connections with teacher style, goal-setting, and
teacher expectations were identified throughout the classroom management qualitative and quantitative research; connections to real-life, multiple content areas, and the community were identified throughout the authentic learning qualitative and quantitative research; and connections with flow theory, active learning, and volitional strategies were identified throughout the student-centered instruction qualitative and quantitative research.

Lastly, teacher supervision and the classroom observation process were addressed. The need for two-way, ongoing communication between the principal and the non-tenured teacher repeated itself in this section of Chapter II. More specifically, this communication was to foster growth with respect to the clinical supervision model and to dissuade non-tenured teacher trepidation. As a tool for growth, the classroom observation process was identified as a means for building principals to provide non-tenured teachers who struggle with classroom management with valuable insight and support.

Collectively, the Chapter II sections frame the delicate relationship that exists between academic excellence and developmental responsiveness as a result of the many cognitive, emotional, physical, and social changes the pre-adolescent learner simultaneously experiences as highlighted in Chapter I. In addition, the need for middle school staff members inclusive of the less experienced non-tenured teacher to address the whole child was both explicit and implicit.

The Chapter III overview of the qualitative research design explores the relationship between social science and social inquiry as the researcher delineates how to address this overarching question of the study: Do teacher-student rapport and the
connection to social-emotional learning have the greatest positive impact according to the focus group participants?
Chapter III
Methodology

Overview

Patton (1987) reminded, "The human relations specialists tell us that we can never fully understand the experience of another person" (p. 49). However, Morgan (1993) recognized,

...physicians, professors, teachers, architects, business executives, attorneys, and others have all developed ways of thinking about reality that may be substantially different from the people they are trying to reach. Because the interactions in focus groups provide a clear view of how others think and talk, they are a powerful means of exposing professionals to the reality of the customer, student, or client. (p. 16)

In fact, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argued, "The singularity of focus groups is that they allow social scientists to observe the most important sociological process-collective human interaction" (p. 816).

Utilizing three focus groups for this study was a qualitative instrument conducive to exploring grades 7-8 non-tenured middle school teacher perceptions of instructional strategies that impact student engagement. The appropriateness of this method rested within the permissible, comparative analysis within and between teacher participant groups that followed the application of the open-ended, structured focus group interview guide questions (see Appendix A). Further, the provision that the middle school principal had the opportunity to craft professional development activities based on the findings, should the principal have requested to be part of the debriefing segment on an individual basis, was of value to the improvement of teaching and learning. Probing discussions for this study were an effective and thorough manner to elicit a descriptive synthesis of data regarding student engagement that provided a communicative means to further enhance
teacher and principal understanding of collaborative systemic practices without compromising the anonymity of participants and the sensitive nature of the teacher evaluation process.

Yuhas and Wilcox (1991) cited Lederman and identified certain assumptions pertaining to this interaction.

Lederman (1989) suggests five fundamental assumptions upon which the method rests: (1) that people are a valuable source of information; (2) that people can report on and about themselves, and that they are articulate enough to verbalize their thoughts, feelings, and behavior; (3) that the facilitator who "focuses" the interview can help people retrieve forgotten information; (4) that the dynamics in the group can be used to generate genuine information, rather than the "group think" phenomenon; and (5) that interviewing a group is better than interviewing an individual. (p. 63)

For further review and indicative of this study are the 10 essential ingredients for a successful focus group that Yuhas and Wilcox (1991) referenced Morgan and credited Axelrod for:

1. A Clearly Understood Objective. Is the focus group part of an on-going research project or is it self-contained? Does the research team have a clearly defined subject of study?
2. Homogeneity Within the Group. The participants should be homogeneous in relation to the topic under discussion (i.e., all should either have or have not been exposed to the topic of study).
3. Good Recruiting. Recruiting should be done to insure homogeneity and a sufficient number of qualified participants.
4. A Relaxed Atmosphere. The moderator should insure confidentiality and promote openess.
5. A Moderator Who Listens. The moderator must insure that the discussion does not stray too far from the point of interest, yet must not rule out things that may seem unrelated.
6. A Well Prepared Moderator. The moderator typically follows an unstructured interview guide.
7. Free-Flowing Dialogue. The moderator should begin the discussion by inviting honest and open dialogue and guiding the discussion only when necessary.
8. Restained Group Influence. The moderator should refrain from contributing to the discussion unless necessary.
9. Skilled Analysis. The data can be analyzed by either a qualitative, or ethnographic summary; or a quantitative systematic coding via content analysis. (Morgan, 1988, p. 64)

10. Competent Researchers. The research team should be sure that all necessary details are controlled. (pp. 65-66)

In order to maintain the assumption of homogeneity and to employ an ethical sampling means, the principal was not part of the three focus groups. Morgan (1993) indicated, "...Conducting research in the presence of a power imbalance often involves an ethical dimension..." (p. 15). Specifically, Morgan (1997) referred to the work of Morgan and Krueger and stated, "There are strong arguments (Morgan & Krueger, 1993) against mixing categories of participants across authority or status lines, either due to ethical issues or because of the high probability that the discussion will be uncomfortable at best and conflict-ridden at worst" (p. 37). Of importance, Morgan (1993) also stipulated,

...Composing groups that make some participants unwilling to express themselves defeats the purpose of the research. This is most likely to occur when the group is not homogeneous in regard to the research topic, as when both employees and supervisors are interviewed about work-group issues. (p. 12)

Morgan (1997) continued,

...As a self-contained method, focus groups can either explore new research areas or examine well-known research questions from the research participants' own perspective....The basic argument in favor of self-contained focus groups is that they reveal aspects of experiences and perspectives that would be not as accessible without group interaction. (pp. 17-20)

For this study, the group interaction that transpired in a setting germane to the teacher participants in response to the structured focus group interview guide comprised the instrument for data collection. Simply, the point of the focus groups was to elicit the experiences, behaviors, opinions, feelings, and knowledge of the participants, that may have otherwise not been shared, through discussion about middle school philosophy,
student engagement, instructional strategies that impact student engagement, and the classroom observation process. As such, the intended goal was saturation, which Morgan (1997) defined as "...the point at which additional data collection no longer generates new understanding" (p. 43). The general guideline for saturation requires 3-5 groups per study (Morgan, 1997), and the researcher anticipated distinguishing data elements from one another in an effort to determine if teacher-student rapport coupled with social-emotional learning was the instructional strategy perceived by non-tenured teachers as having the most positive impact on student engagement at the grades 7-8 middle school level.

This study observed the characteristics of focus groups as described by Clarke (1999).

A typical focus group involves around six to twelve people who are brought together by the researcher for the purpose of answering a number of questions. A group moderator or facilitator encourages participants to respond in their own terms, while simultaneously ensuring that the focus of the group is maintained. The group setting allows participants to qualify their original responses in the light of comments made by other group members. (p. 77)

During each focus group session, field notes were recorded by an assistant moderator. The sessions were audiotaped, and transcripts were prepared following the moderator and the assistant moderator session debriefings to allow for qualitative data analysis. As cited in Brotherson (1994), Krueger (1988) highlighted a systematic and verifiable process was utilized to organize and distinguish the data permitting other researchers utilizing similar data to arrive at similar conclusions (p. 107). Once the analysis was complete, requests to communicate results were honored. Debriefing only occurred on an individual basis for the principal. Participants made no requests for
debrieuling. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained relative to the focus group participants and their responses.

Qualitative Research Design

This qualitative study included three focus groups, each containing between 8-10 grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers from one New Jersey suburban public school district within the FG District Factor Group. It is to be noted that the grade level configuration for the participating middle school was grades 7-8 and that there was only one middle school in the district. One district from Middlesex County was selected to participate in the study, despite the researcher's multiple and persistent attempts to seek participation from other school districts with qualifying characteristics.

This additional profile information for the district was represented on the New Jersey Department of Education School Report Card 2004-2005 Website link (2006): (a) six schools in district with one grades 9-12, one grades 7-8, one grades 4-6, one grades 3-6, one grades K-3, and one grades K-2; (b) a total district enrollment of 4,302; and (c) a total middle school enrollment of 616.

In concordance with appropriate research protocols for human subjects, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Seton Hall University preceded focus group research for the participating school in the study. As IRB approval was obtained, the superintendent of schools for the participating district was contacted by the researcher to explain the purpose and nature of the study and to receive written permission to host focus groups at the district middle school. As soon as this step was accomplished, the middle school principal was contacted by the researcher to explain the purpose and nature of the study, to receive verbal permission to host focus groups at the middle school, to
schedule the focus group sessions and the reporting of results to the group in aggregate form and to the principal on a separate basis, to arrange to distribute letters of solicitation for potential participants, and to communicate an incentive school officials would receive for participation in the study. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) reinforced the need for incentives.

Focus groups are a time-consuming activity for participants...There are a variety of incentives that may be used to encourage participation, and most focus group participants are provided monetary and other incentives....Incentives should be selected that have universal value to the participants; what may be valuable to one person may have little value to another. This is one reason money is employed most often. (pp. 55-56)

The middle school principal was apprised that refreshments would be made available by the researcher. Serving snacks or a light meal was recommended if the group was conducted close to a mealtime. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) clarified, “The presence of food tends to relax participants and it encourages participation by eliminating concerns about meals” (p. 55).

A letter of intent (see Appendix D) was mailed to the superintendent of schools and middle school principal after the preliminary contact occurred. Written permission to host focus groups was received from the superintendent. Next, grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers received a letter of solicitation (see Appendix E) indicating the purpose and nature of the study, the date, times, and location for the focus group session, the measures for maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, the release for use of audiotapes and audiotape transcripts, and the provisions for incentives and refreshments. Additionally, a copy of the focus group interview guide accompanied the letter of solicitation to teachers.

Procedures detailing measures for maintaining confidentiality and anonymity were explained in the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E) enclosed with the letter
of solicitation to teachers. Specifically, teacher volunteers were assigned and referred to as a number during the focus group discussion and in the subsequent dissertation transcripts and analysis. In adhering to confidentiality and anonymity measures, no names or personal identification information were reported or shared in any way other than the participants' number of years teaching, traditional or alternate route status, grade level assignment(s), content area assignment(s), and gender. The first 10 teachers to return the signed Informed Consent Form served as the participants for the respective focus group.

Focus group participants responded to the focus group interview guide series of 12 open-ended questions over one period of 2 hours. Serving as the moderator, the researcher facilitated group interaction venturing to elicit the experiences, behaviors, opinions, feelings, and knowledge of the participants to insight understanding of the research questions that encompass the study. The focus group interview guide questions were the culmination of the researcher's initial draft thereof and the jury of experts recommended revisions. To evoke trust and rapport with and among participants, the researcher was mindful of posing the prescribed format of questions in a conversational manner. Patton (1987) included Payne and emphasized this need.

An interview question is a stimulus that is aimed at creating or generating a response from the person being interviewed. The way a question is worded is one of the most important elements in determining how the interviewee will respond. As Stanley L. Payne (1951) put it, asking questions is an art. For purposes of qualitative evaluation, good questions should, at a minimum, be open-ended, neutral, sensitive, and clear. (p. 122)

Even though the moderator (the researcher) was the individual posing the focus group interview guide questions, an assistant moderator was present to record session notes, to ensure that environmental factors did not impede upon the focus group
discussion, to monitor the functionality of the tape recorder, and to set up the refreshments. With arrival time designated as one-half hour prior to the commencement of the focus group session, the moderator and assistant moderator welcomed the participants, checked participants in by assigning each a participant number, and invited participants to enjoy the complimentary refreshments. "The initial job of the interviewer is to create a nonthreatening and nonevaluative environment in which group members feel free to express themselves openly and without concern for whether others in the group agree with the opinions offered" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 87).

Recognizing this aim, the moderator and assistant moderator exchanged pleasantries with the participants during check-in to develop a sense of the seating arrangements that were most conducive to the establishment of this type of environment. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) captured this notion inclusive of the Wells citation. Because the object of a focus group is discussion, the group should be seated in a manner that provides maximum opportunity for eye contact with both the moderator and other group members. When a circular arrangement, or reasonable approximation thereof is not possible, Wells (1974) suggests placing the least talkative individuals directly across from the moderator, and the most talkative off to either side. This tends to increase the frequency of comments of the least talkative individuals and reduce the frequency of comments by the most talkative, thereby providing greater balance for the discussion. (p. 88)

"...Large groups typically require a higher level of moderator involvement..." (Morgan, 1997, p. 42). With this understanding to serve as the approach for the focus group discussions in this study, Morgan (1993) substantiated, "The skillful focus group moderator must be able to project sincerity, have a sense of humor, be flexible, and have a keen memory. Perhaps most critical is the ability to listen" (p. 73). This delicate balance between higher level involvement and listening began with the moderator's introduction of the topic in an honest but fairly general fashion (Morgan, 1997). As Morgan (1997)
mentioned, "The introduction of the topic is typically accompanied by a few ground rules: only one person speaking at a time, no side conversations among neighbors, everyone participating with no one dominating, and so on" (p. 49). Morgan (1997) articulated the deterrence of groupthink, "...the tendency for dissenters to suppress their disagreements in favor of maintaining consensus in the group," (p. 50), as one of the moderator's central responsibilities as well.

The moderator for this study implemented these practices while considering specificity and transition issues. Albeit the focus group discussions commenced with a general introduction, the moderator maintained specificity by directing the discussion toward concrete, detailed accounts of the participants' experiences. Depth was stressed in order to reveal a number of different perspectives that would be difficult to obtain with other research methods (Morgan, 1997, p. 46). Effective transitions at various times during the focus group discussion provided clarity for participants particularly at the conclusion of the session. A useful technique, a summary statement was elicited from each participant by the moderator (Morgan, 1997, p. 51). Depending upon the group dynamics, other moderator responsibilities included (with varying frequencies) "...getting irrelevant discussions back on the track..." and "restarting discussion when the group runs dry..." (Morgan, 1997, p. 52).

Focus Group Participant Selection

Brotherson (1994) referenced Morgan pertaining to participant selection, "It is important to seek out and maintain diversity in selection of participants, but at the same time, participants must be chosen so that they share selected commonalities (Morgan, 1988). In purposive sampling, participants are included based upon specific criteria
identified by the researchers as most relevant to the research questions" (pp. 104-105)

For this study, non-tenured teaching status constituted the principal control characteristic
(Morgan, 1993) for participants for several reasons. Non-tenured teachers in their 1st, 2nd,
or 3rd year in the profession generally are not as knowledgeable about and experienced
with the application of instructional strategies as tenured teachers are, making the focus
group discussion a potentially valuable professional experience for participants. The
researcher further believes that, at the middle school level, non-tenured teachers often
struggle with understanding middle school philosophy, measuring student engagement,
and utilizing the classroom observation process as a communicative gateway for
professional growth and development. Coming to terms with balancing academic
excellence and developmental responsiveness can be a daunting and overwhelming goal
for newer teachers, and collegial dialogue with similar professionals can be insightful and
comforting.

In addition to the non-tenured teaching status, participants for each of the three
focus groups were grades 7-8 teachers. Totaling 27 participants, the focus group
demographic composites for each group of participants were as listed.

Group 1 (nine participants):

P1: 1st year teaching; traditional route; grades 7-8; speech/language therapist; female

P2: 3rd year teaching; traditional route; grade eight; mathematics, science, social
studies; female

P3: 15th year teaching; traditional route; grades 7-8; mathematics, science,
Spanish; female

P4: 2nd year teaching; traditional route; grade seven; social studies; female
P5: 9th year teaching; traditional route; grade seven; language arts literacy, mathematics, science, social studies; female

P6: 9th year teaching; traditional route; grades 7-8; counseling; female

P7: 4th year teaching; alternate route; grade seven; language arts literacy; female

P8: 2nd year teaching; traditional route; grades 7-8; physical education/health; female

P9: 13th year teaching; traditional route; grade eight; mathematics; male

Group 2 (eight participants):

P1: 1st year teaching; traditional route; grades 7-8; language arts literacy, science, Spanish; female

P2: 2nd year teaching; traditional route; grades 7-8; chorus, general music; female

P3: 6th year teaching; traditional route; grades 7-8; French; female

P4: 1st year teaching; traditional route; grade eight; Spanish; female

P5: 1st year teaching; traditional route; grades 7-8; mathematics, science, social studies; female

P6: 13th year teaching; alternate route; grades 7-8; counseling; female

P7: 10th year teaching; traditional route; grade seven; language arts literacy; female

P11: 7th year teaching; traditional route; grades 7-8; language arts literacy, science; female

Group 3 (10 participants):

P1: 1st year teaching; traditional route; grade seven; Spanish; female

P2: 2nd year teaching; traditional route; grade eight; language arts literacy; female

P3: 2nd year teaching; traditional route; grade seven; mathematics; female

P4: 2nd year teaching; traditional route; grade seven; language arts literacy; female

P5: 1st year teaching; uncertain teaching route; grades 7-8; physical education/health; male
P6: 5th year teaching; traditional route; grade eight; language arts literacy, science, social studies; female

P7: 2nd year teaching; traditional route; grade eight; social studies; male

P8: 1st year teaching; traditional route; grade seven; social studies; female

P9: 2nd year teaching; traditional route; grade seven; mathematics; female

P10: 1st year teaching; traditional route; grade eight; social studies; female

Morgan (1993) affirmed, "Control characteristics may be uniform characteristics or may specify a common composition for each group" (p. 39). For this study, each control characteristic function was evident with homogeneity thereby remaining intact, even though a diverse number of years teaching had been shared by non-tenured participants. The varying content area assignments of participants did pose a potential break characteristic (Morgan, 1993) for the study in that certain content areas are affiliated with instructional strategies that impact student engagement. As an example, social studies lessons often include the authentic learning experience of (mock) trial simulation.

Weighing this prospect challenged the selection of what Patton (1987) viewed as "...information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the evaluation, thus the term 'purposeful sampling'" (p. 52). In determining non-tenured teacher perceptions of instructional strategies that impact student engagement, the central importance was cutting across participant variation, which in this study was varying content area assignments, to identify the one instructional strategy that had the most positive impact on student engagement according to grades 7-8 non-tenured teacher
attitudes and opinions (Patton, 1987). This sampling approach was embraced with the intention of reaching saturation as the researcher conducted the three focus groups.

**Instrument With Question Overview**

With respect to group interaction, Patton (1987) depicted the focus group interview guide as

...A list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview. An interview guide is prepared to make sure that essentially the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material. The interview guide provides topics of or subject areas about which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject. (p. 111)

The moderator was mindful of the purpose of the interview when developing the focus group interview guide. Morgan (1993) specified, "The purpose of the interview will dictate the question format. In exploratory and phenomenological groups, unstructured, open-ended questions are normally implemented. This permits greater flexibility in response patterns and probe tactics" (p. 27). The focus groups for this exploratory study were each 2 hours in length in accordance with the guideline Brotherson (1994) noted, and the focus group interview guide consisted of 12 open-ended questions spanning four topics (p. 105). Morgan (1993) recommended 10-12 well-developed questions for one 2-hour focus group (p. 76).

The wording and types of questions were fundamental to the focus group interview guide. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) stated, "Respondents can give meaningful responses only to questions they comprehend. This means that questions should be phrased simply in language that respondents understand. Long, complex, multipart questions are not only difficult to understand; response is also difficult" (p. 65). Additionally, Patton (1987) categorized focus group interview guide questions as (a)
experience/behavior questions, (b) opinion/belief questions, (c) feeling questions, (d) knowledge questions, (e) sensory questions, and (f) background/demographic questions (pp. 115-119).

Three background or demographic questions initiated the focus group interview guide for the focus group discussions. The background or demographic questions were designed to elicit input from every participant at the onset of the session. Following these questions, participants responded to two knowledge questions. A subset sensory and experience/behavior question then lead to the moderator's attempt to facilitate free-flowing interaction among participants as participants described practices implemented in the individual classroom environment.

Once these experiences and behaviors were shared with respect to the measurement of student engagement, the next four questions were opinion/belief questions that drove the study. Each of these questions required a response to student engagement impact noted via the implementation or inclusion of a particular instructional strategy. Much of the focus group discussion spotlighted participant responses to these questions.

The 10th question shifted to a combination opinion/belief feeling question for which the moderator needed to apply probing to elicit participant feedback with respect to the sensitive and personal nature of the classroom observation process. The intention of this question was to have participants react to a traditional systemic practice that was connected to one of the other questions that drove the study. Patton (1987) highlighted the importance of probes for such questions, “Probes are used to deepen the response to a question, to increase the richness of the data being obtained, and to give cues to the
interviewee about the level of response that is desired” (p. 125). Krueger’s questioning strategies peppered the focus group literature. Brotherson (1994) posited the Krueger concepts and elements of general phrasing.

Effective questioning strategies are vital. Two essential techniques of questioning include the 5-second pause and probe questions. (Krueger, 1988) Pausing is needed to stimulate group interaction effectively. The use of open-ended probe questions that begin with words such as what, how, could, and please describe also encourage participants to engage in interaction. These questions are phrased in ways that do not presuppose or structure the responses. (p. 106)

One sentence completion was part of the focus group interview guide after the classroom observation question. According to Greenbaum (1993), “The best way a moderator can help the participants say what they really think and feel rather than be influenced by each other is to have them write down their opinions before they share them with the group” (p. 129). In doing so, participants identified the instructional strategy that had the most positive impact on student engagement based on their classroom experiences and provided a reason for identifying the said strategy. The focus group interview guide concluded with affording the participants the opportunity to introduce or revisit topics for discussion and with prompting participants to mail additional feedback to the researcher in the self-addressed stamped envelope after the focus group discussion.

Jury of Experts

Stewart and Shaandasani (1990) articulated,

...There is no substitute for trying out an interview guide prior to its use. No matter how experienced the researcher and the moderator or how thorough and conscientious the designers, it is impossible to predict in advance the way respondents will interpret and respond to questions... Pretesting of the interview provides an opportunity to determine whether the wording of questions is appropriate, to determine whether the questions elicit discussion, and to identify questions that are not understood easily. (p. 66)
Pretesting of the focus group interview guide took place in advance of the focus group research. Grades 7-8 teachers from New Jersey suburban public school districts volunteered to serve as a jury of experts in the presence of the moderator. At the commencement of the jury’s review, the focus group interview guide was distributed to the volunteers. Input from jury volunteers was elicited by the moderator over the course of nearly 2 hours.

As a result of the jury’s feedback, the focus group interview guide was amended accordingly.

1. For focus group interview guide question 1, the researcher was reminded to encourage teachers with a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience to participate in the study in order to sustain the applicability of focus group interview guide question 10 pertaining to classroom observation feedback. The point was made that some of the participants may not have been observed by the building principal prior to the focus group discussion without having the minimum as a sample prerequisite.

2. Also relative to the demographic composite, it was suggested that a question be added to ascertain the certification program status of the participants. More specifically, the jury believed it would be valuable to learn the traditional or alternate route status of the participants to serve as part of the analysis component of the study. Taking the nuances of teacher preparation programs into consideration, focus group interview guide question 2 was replaced. The replacement included this question: Are you a traditional or alternate route teacher?
3. The jury recognized the importance of obtaining the participants’ grade level and content area assignments. With this in mind, focus group interview guide question 3 became a combination of the initial question 2 and the initial question 3 to read with this phrasing: What grade level(s) and content area(s) do you presently teach?

4. At one point in the discussion, the researcher inquired about the potential nebulous context of the word _concept_ for focus group interview guide question 4. The jury’s recommendation was to change _concept_ to _philosophy_. The researcher complied with this recommendation and adjusted the terminology throughout the dissertation as well.

5. Although focus group interview guide question 7 was not identified as being in need of revision, the jury advised the researcher to probe during this segment of the focus group discussions to elicit participant perceptions of the appropriate level of teacher friendliness and its subsequent effect on classroom management.

6. Particularly insightful on the part of one jury member, it was indicated that the language of focus group interview guide question 10 needed to be altered to reflect the fact that the researcher cannot presume that the participants have received the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback as suggested by the verb _is_. Additionally, the researcher commented that the evaluator needed to be clearly delineated as the building principal. This being the case, question 10 became worded this way: What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your
building principal with respect to student engagement? The evaluator
clarification was included in the respective research question too.

7. Final thoughts from the jury yielded the restructuring of focus group interview
guide question 11. The jury mentioned a rank order of the content from
questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 would be better suited to the study while maintaining
an open-ended approach. As a compromise, the list of instructional strategies
was inserted with question 11 to read as follows: Please complete the
statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your
response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school
students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective
classroom management skills, authentic learning experiences, and student-
centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive
impact on student engagement is _______ because _______.)

8. Other courses of action proposed by the jury included the researcher attending
a faculty meeting before mailing the letters of solicitation to potential
participants and utilizing ice-breakers to orient the participants to the focus
group discussion. The ice-breakers consisted of three Do Now activity
centers: pictures of middle school students which participants compared and
contrasted the level of engagement each student was displaying, poems on the
topic of education which participants classified by the thematic instructional
strategy, and movie clips of teacher-principal exchanges which participants
categorized as effective or ineffective supervisory models.
Nearly every one of the jury's advisements was factored into the development of the focus group interview guide and corresponding sections of the dissertation itself with the exception of these four.

1. The researcher decided to refrain from establishing focus group interview guide questions 1, 2, and 3 as one question. It was considered to be too much information to share at the onset of the focus group discussion, a time when the participants might be nervous and when the goal is to generate responses from every participant, unless the dynamic of the respective group supported this approach.

2. Moreover, the researcher concluded that it was imperative not to delete focus group interview guide question 1. The assumption could not be made that the participants had between 1-3 years of teaching experience for some of the non-tenured participants may have teaching experience from other school districts prior to present assignments.

3. While reviewing focus group interview guide questions 4, 5, 6, 6A, 7, 8, and 9, the jury indicated that providing a set of definitions via a handout would be helpful to participants. The researcher shared that doing so would negate the essence of the research questions posed in Chapter 1 and the purpose of the study. Even offering a limited handout may lead responses and thwart the validity of the study. A further point articulated by the researcher to the jury was that the participants would have an opportunity to review the focus group interview guide in advance of the focus group discussion, thereby preliminarily exposing participants to the content.
4. The researcher did, however, give pause to the jury's desire to shift the order of the questions by positioning focus group interview guide question 4 between questions 10 and 11. Having the participants respond to this question toward the conclusion of the focus group discussion was thought to be a better summation and a method by which to assist participants in answering based on the fact that much of middle school philosophy would more than likely be highlighted in earlier portions of the discussion with other questions. After revisiting the purpose of the study, the researcher deemed the original sequence that mirrors the research questions as the more appropriate approach.

Focus Group Setting

Morgan (1992) considered the environment for focus groups as a potential threat to quality.

The appropriate environment includes the physical location where participants meet as well as the sociopolitical ambiance of the research project. A proper physical environment must be provided. The location should be neutral and easy to find, a place where participants feel comfortable and relaxed. The group should be arranged so that each participant can see others in the group, often around a table. (p. 68)

The school library was the location for this fall focus group research. Greenbaum (1993) offered the "ten commandments" as additional facility demands of which four apply to this study.

Thou shalt be sensitive to the need for absolute quiet in the facility while a session is in progress, by soundproofing and by directing employees to be quiet.

Thou shalt have focus group and observation rooms that are sufficiently large, comfortable, and well lighted to provide a conducive environment for the research and the observers.
Thou shalt control the temperature of the rooms so they are comfortable throughout the sessions....

Thou shalt pay attention to small but important details like proper preparation of name tags, cleanliness of the rooms, and having easels, sharp pencils, and paper in the rooms during sessions. (pp. 208-209)

_data collection_

"The focus group is a collectivist rather than an individualistic research method that focuses on the multivocality of participants' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 836). Despite the fact that this premise embodies the intention of the focus group approach, Kuper and Kuper (2004) surmised, "It is a common misconception that the moderator somehow produces the data in a focus group when in fact it is the participants who provide the data. Of course, the moderator is an important factor in this process, but other factors such as group composition, the interview questions, and the overall context of the research may be just as important" (p. 374).

In this study, three 2-hour focus group sessions were conducted on 2 separate days in one middle school. Teacher participants were provided with the focus group interview guide in advance of the focus group session and at check-in. Submitting a signed Informed Consent Form was a prerequisite for participation, and the moderator reaffirmed confidentiality and anonymity prior to initiating the focus group discussion. Brotherson (1994) highlighted confidentiality and ethics as central issues, "Participants need to believe that their confidences will be kept without question; this is particularly an issue if participants know each other" (p. 106). For data collection to have effectively ensued once the ground rules were reviewed, the moderator assured participants that aside from the assigned participant number, number of years teaching, traditional or
alternate route status, grade level assignment(s), content area assignment(s), and gender, no personal information would be shared throughout the focus group session and thereafter in terms of the analysis and body of the dissertation. The sentence completion question from the focus group interview guide was referenced in this reminder as was the non-threatening use of probing techniques. Participants were to respond to the focus group interview guide questions without prompts with the exception of the verbal cues for question 11, the sentence completion. The moderator identified that the goal was to have the participants be “...responsible for generating and sustaining their own discussion” and that the moderator, as a researcher, was “...there to learn from them...” (Morgan, 1997, p. 49).

In order to collect the data with the focus group instrument, a tape recorder was placed on a table and activated to record the focus group discussions. “The principal means of capturing observations in a focus group is through audio taping, and any choices about physical facilities must be made with tape recording clearly in mind. When tapes are the basic means of capturing the observations, ensuring the quality of the recorded data is crucial” (Morgan, 1997, p. 55). For this study, the assistant moderator attended to the sound quality of the taping by positioning the tape recorder in the most optimal spot and by pretesting the tape recorder.

“The quality of electronic recording affects the quality of the focus group. Tape recordings of focus groups directly influence quality. When playing back the tape or reviewing the transcript of the focus group, the analyst may detect ideas or comments that have been overlooked during the discussion...Background ventilation, taping on tables, multiple voices, difference in voice volume all affect the quality of the audio tape”
(Morgan, 1993, p. 79). The ventilation and recorder location factors were addressed by the assistant moderator, and the voice concerns were addressed by the moderator when the ground rules were explained.

"Quality of transcripts affects the quality of the study. Quality transcripts are those that identify the speakers or at a minimum identify the moderator and then leave space between the different speakers. Transcript quality is often affected by the number of distractions or interruptions encountered by the typist or by the kind of playback equipment" (Morgan, 1993, p. 79). To ensure a minimal amount of distractions and interruptions, a sign was placed on the door of the focus group location asking potential visitors to the school library to refrain from entering. Also, the index cards and writing implements needed for the responses to the sentence completion for question 11 were dispersed during check-in to avoid a disturbance or muffled quality with the distribution of materials at that point in the discussion.

Of particular importance for data collection was the recording of field notes by the assistant moderator. The field notes for this study enveloped that which is described in the Patton and Morgan focus group research literature.

The field notes of the observer should include the exact language used by participants to describe their experiences...Using the precise language of participants is an important way to record participants' own understanding of their experiences. Observers must learn the language of participants in the program they are observing and record that language and its patterns in order to represent participants in their own terms and be true to the world view of participants.... (Patton, 1987, pp. 87-88)

While recording the language of participants it is important that the evaluator also observe nonverbal forms of communication. ...By watching for patterns of behavior and describing what people are doing in different situations, the observer will be able to isolate those nonverbal behaviors that have special significance in a particular program setting. (Patton, 1987, pp. 87-88)
First and foremost, field notes are descriptive. They should be dated and record such basic information as where the observation took place, who was present, what the physical setting was like, what social interactions occurred, what activities took place, and other descriptive information that will permit the observer to return mentally to that setting later through the field notes. Second, field notes contain what people said. Direct quotations, or as near as possible recall of direct quotations, should be included in the field notes. These quotations will come from what people said during activities as well as what they said during interviews, both informal and formal. Third, field notes contain the evaluator’s own feelings, reactions to the experience, and reflections about the meaning and significance of what has occurred. (Patton, 1987, pp. 92-95)

...Note-taking should serve the goal of making emerging interpretations apparent so that the moderator can use this self-awareness either to limit unconscious attempts to confirm expectations or to make such efforts explicit. (Morgan, 1997, p. 58)

Further, cautious deliberation was applied prior to the moderator’s use of verbal and nonverbal cues in order to negate bias as indicated in the Morgan reminder.

Quality is threatened when the moderator telegraphs the wrong verbal and nonverbal cues to participants....Verbal cues that present threats are those that might be interpreted as expressing approval or value.....The underlying purpose of the study must guide the use of verbal and nonverbal cues. Quality erodes if these cues are used to amplify topics that are irrelevant or meaningless to the purpose of the study. Quality is enhanced when cues are tactfully used to elicit greater understanding on critical and central features of the study. (Morgan, 1993, pp. 75-76)

Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) asserted, “...it is a good idea to use multiple observers to assure reliability of the observations” (p. 99). For this reason, the assistant moderator and moderator were well-prepared for the interpretation of participant communication and the appropriate means by which to record and respond to this communication.

Data Analysis

Communication issues are important concerns for preserving the internal validity of focus group data. Morgan (1993) framed these issues.
The human communication behaviors occurring in focus groups are imbued with patterns that cannot be divorced from the specific content of the messages responses given by participants. We caution researchers to consider the entire episode of the group interview when interpreting focus group data and to recognize that group responses are subject to social influence (e.g., compliance, identification, and internalization) and fantasy spinning as a means of developing shared meaning and rendering the experience sensible and accessible to all participants. (pp. 61-62)

"The most common purpose of a focus group interview is for an in-depth exploration of a topic about which little is known. For such exploratory research a simple descriptive narrative is quite appropriate" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 102). The data analysis format for this exploratory study integrated these Merton criteria in a descriptive report as cited in Morgan (1997).

Merton, et al. (1990) present four broad criteria for the effective focus group interview: It should cover a maximum range of relevant topics; provide data that are as specific as possible, foster interaction that explores the participants’ feelings in some depth, and take into account the personal context that participants use in generating their responses to the topic. They summarize these criteria as range, specificity, depth, and personal context. (p. 45)

Particularly critical to this qualitative analysis was the researcher’s ability to design a study that (a) ensures no personal bias (on the researcher’s part) for the theory to be extrapolated from the focus group discussions, (b) allows for the similar collection of data for similar studies, and (c) measures what is intended to be measured with respect to the research questions. In Yuhas and Wilcox (1991),

...Goldman (1962) suggests requirements of good group interviews such as objectivity, reliability, and validity. He suggests that to promote objectivity, or "avoidance of the bias of the interviewer and client [or research team]" (p. 66), the moderator should refrain from contributing to the discussion as much as possible and monitor his or her actions carefully. As the goal of focus group research is to ask "why," rather than "how many," to generate hypotheses rather than assert their representativeness, the question of reliability becomes less important. (p. 69)

Additionally, Morgan (1993) explained,
...Because the focus group approach inherently involves conducting a number of sessions, it is possible to assess the reliability of the data (in contrast to the analysis) by comparing statements within and, more important, across sessions. This advantage in assessing reliability is an important difference between the focus group approach and other qualitative research strategies. (p. 50)

This being the case, the comparative analysis within each individual focus group and across every focus group was developed. Referenced in Yuhas and Wilcox (1991),

...Goldman states that “a source of continual concern to the researcher is the validity problem.” (italic his) (p. 67) Focus groups tend to suffer from inhibiting factors just as do other methods of qualitative research. Goldman, through his experiences with focus groups, concludes that discrepancies between attitude expression and actual behavior are relatively small in a well conducted focus group, implying reasonable validity of the method. (p. 69)

Given that the internal validity hinged on the connectivity between the research questions and the focus group interview guide, the role of the jury of experts was essential in culling out those focus group interview guide segments that were not intertwined with the research questions.

For further reflection was Krueger’s analytical venue as cited in Yuhas and Wilcox (1991).

Krueger (1988) suggests that the focus group researcher consider five factors:

1. Consider the words. The researcher should consider both the actual words used by participants and the meanings of those words.

2. Consider the context. The researcher should examine the context by identifying the “triggering stimulus” for a comment and then interpreting the comment in light of the context or stimulus.

3. Consider the internal consistency. Participants often change or reverse their positions. The researcher should note when there is a shift in opinion which is relevant to the purpose of study.

4. Consider the specificity of responses. Researchers should give more weight to responses that are specific and concrete rather than those that are vague and ambiguous.
5. Find the big ideas. Big ideas emerge from "an accumulation of evidence—the words used, the body language, the intensity of comments—other than from isolated comments." (Krueger, 1988, p. 116) In other words, the researcher should not get caught up in counting the number of times something is said; rather, look for patterns. (p. 75)

Recognizing the significance of a systematic and verifiable approach to data analysis for focus group discussions, the researcher applied the techniques Morgan (1993) named.

Several systematic procedures have proven to be particularly beneficial in the analysis process. One of these is to seek final statements from participants to clarify where they’ve ended up. Another systematic procedure that improves the analysis is to seek verification from the participants of the key points of the study. One way of doing this is to ask the assistant moderator to offer a 1- or 2-minute summary at the end of the focus group interview. Still another systematic procedure is for the moderator team (the moderator and assistant moderator) to meet as soon as possible after the participants have left the focus group site. (p. 80)

Member checks accounted for credibility and dependability measures in this study as well. Brotherson (1994) captured the specifics for data collection and data analysis while referring to Tesch and Krueger.

Member checks are conducted based on emerging themes, categories, patterns, and discoveries. Data collection and analysis go hand in hand, so that new insights, patterns, or themes are checked out continuously with subsequent focus groups.

Qualitative analysis

...Involves a process to reduce text from intensive interviews or observations in such a way that it becomes distilled to essentials (Tesch, 1990)....

No two researchers will produce exactly the same analysis in exactly the same way. Differences in values, philosophies, and training will lead each to present the phenomenon in his or her own way. These researchers will, however, use a systematic and verifiable process that would permit another researcher using similar data to arrive at similar conclusions. (Krueger, 1984)
In data analysis, the researcher develops an organizing scheme or a systematic framework to distinguish meaningful units, isolate them, and place them together again with conceptual connections or categories (Tesch, 1990)...

There is a general sequence of events for developing an organizing scheme and analyzing data. (Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992b; Johnson & Montague, 1992; Patton, 1990; Tesch, 1990) This sequence begins with the researchers familiarizing themselves with the data-reading and rereading transcripts. As this process progresses, topics, themes, and patterns are identified....

Throughout the focus group interviewing process, data collection and analysis are occurring recursively and simultaneously. The organizing system continues to emerge and be refined until a point of data saturation (i.e., no new ideas, themes, or patterns are emerging) is reached. Throughout this process, the researchers engage in reflective activity and record their perceptions, interpretations, and expectations. (as cited in Brotherson, pp. 106-107)

While doing so, the description of these perceptions, interpretations, and expectations were balanced by the analysis and successive interpretation. “Endless description becomes its own muddle. The purpose of analysis is to organize the description in a way that makes it manageable. Description is balanced by analysis and leads into interpretation” (Patton, 1987, p. 163).

In essence, there are two basic parts to the analysis of focus group data: a mechanical one and an interpretive one. (Seidel & Clark, 1984) The mechanical part involves physically organizing and subdividing the data into meaningful segments. The interpretive part involves determining criteria for organizing the textual data into analytically useful subdivisions (in essence coding the data) and the subsequent search for patterns within and between these subdivisions to draw substantively meaningful conclusions. A major aspect of the mechanics of qualitative data analysis is equivalent in essence to coding and pasting: cutting the material apart and pasting the pieces into categorical and conceptual collections. (as cited in Morgan, 1993, pp. 44-45)

The cutting and pasting of transcripts transpired for the compilation of verbal data. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990),

...Transcription not only facilitates further analysis, it establishes a permanent written record of the interview that can be shared with other interested parties. Once the transcription is finished it can serve as the basis for further analysis. It should be noted, however, that the transcript does not reflect the entire
character of the discussion. Nonverbal communication, gestures, and behavioral responses are not reflected in a transcript. Thus, the interviewer or observer may wish to supplement the transcript with some additional observational data that were obtained during the interview. (pp. 103-104)

For the data analysis pertaining to this study, nonverbal points exhibited by focus group participants were embedded in the descriptive narrative to provide for greater understanding of personal context.

Morgan (1997) substantiated a cue for prioritizing during data collection to preclude presumptuous analysis.

Interpreting the data from focus groups requires distinguishing between what participants find interesting and what they find important. Many interview guides thus anticipate the ultimate analysis and interpretation of the data by asking a final question that has the participants state what they think is the most important elements of the discussion have been. In projects which the central goal is to determine the importance of different topics, these topics may be sorted into a list that the participants rate or rank. Regardless of the specific technique, the fundamental message here is that learning what the participants think is important should be built into the data collection itself—not left to the analyst’s post hoc speculation. (p. 62)

Question 11 of the focus group interview guide functioned in this capacity by eliciting a written response from participants in which the instructional strategy that has the most positive impact on student engagement was to be identified and the response justified based on classroom experiences.

While the process of data collection ensued, it was imperative for the researcher to engage participants in free-flowing discussion refraining from leading participants to the belief that teacher-student rapport is the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement.

The biggest analytical mistake people make is to enter the research with a preconceived bias and to listen for inputs from group participants that seem to confirm their belief. ... The people observing a group discussion often place too much importance on the comments made by a minority segment of the group
because it agrees with their personal feelings about the topic. This is not to suggest that minority inputs are not important or should not be used in the analysis. Rather, the analysis should focus on the “big picture” rather than on individual comments. (Greenbaum, 1993, pp. 67-69)

"The cardinal principle of qualitative analysis is that causal and theoretical statements be clearly emergent from and grounded in field observations. The theory emerges from the data; it is not imposed on the data" (Patton, 1987, p. 158). “Thus, as in all other aspects of qualitative methods, the person conducting the inquiry is the critical element in determining validity, meaningfulness of the findings, and credibility” (Patton, 1987, p. 164).

As a theory emerged from the focus group discussions, the frequency with which each contributory theme was communicated by participants was a factor for the analysis. “One unique consideration in focus groups is that the data are provided by groups of individuals. Consequently, if the analysis labels something an ‘important theme’, then that theme should not only occur in almost every group but also provoke a response from almost everyone in each of those groups” (Kuper & Kuper, 2004, p. 374). Morgan (1997) related this thought to group-to-group validation that the analysis for this study considered.

Quite often, interpreting focus group data comes down to a question of which topics should receive the most emphasis in the eventual report. There are three basic factors that influence how much emphasis a given topic should receive: how many groups mentioned the topics, how many people within each of these groups mentioned the topic, and how much energy and enthusiasm the topic generated among the participants. The best evidence that a topic is worth emphasizing comes from a combination of all three of these factors that is known as “group-to-group validation.” For any specific topic, group-to-group validation means that whenever a topic comes up, it generates a consistent level of energy among a consistent proportion of the participants across nearly all the groups…The concept of group-to-group validation calls attention to the fact that nearly all analyses of focus groups concentrate on the manifest content of the group discussions. (p. 63)
A final point for reflection was the limitations that pertain to the sample. The absence of grade six teachers, singular District Factor Group, one participating district middle school, and non-tenured status of participants raised concerns for the generalizing of findings. Amid the possible misconceptions for those who read the study is the likelihood that provisions to preserve reliability and validity within the design become null and void. Patton (1987) indicated,

...The findings may be distorted because of selectivity in the people who were sampled either for observations or interviews. In considering how sampling strategies may have affected evaluation findings, the analyst returns to consideration of the reasons for having made initial design decisions (see Chapter 3). To the extent that those design decisions were based directly on the kinds of evaluation questions that were being asked, apparent distortions produced by sampling decisions may have been purposeful and deliberate given a calculated desire to study intensively only certain situations, certain time periods, or certain people. Under these conditions the problem is no longer one of distortion of the data actually collected, but is a question of the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other situations, other time periods, and other people. (p. 162)

To avoid issues of reliability, it is essential to stress the fact that the rationale and theoretical frameworks for this study assumed a narrower focus once it became apparent that only one of the solicited school districts had enough participants to satisfy an 8-10 member focus group. More to the point, the sampling decision to include three focus groups from the one middle school did not prompt a change in the research questions or focus group interview guide. However, the data analysis was, in part, the framework for the evaluation of a daily professional development period embedded within the school day of the participating school. Ultimately, for consideration is the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalized to other middle schools having such a unique systemic practice in place.
In examining the internal validity for the study, each focus group interview guide question dovetailed with a minimum of two research questions (see Tables 1-8) aside from the three initial questions, not represented in the tables, that elicited background or demographic information from participants to assess the sample composite. The previously suggested need for this crossover was this distinctive:

1. Focus group interview guide questions 4, 5, 5A, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 corresponded to research question 1.

2. Focus group interview guide questions 5 and 5A corresponded to research question 2.

3. Focus group interview guide questions 5, 6, 6A, and 11 corresponded to research question 3.

4. Focus group interview guide questions 4, 6, and 6A corresponded to research question 4.

5. Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7, 10, and 11 corresponded to research question 5.

6. Focus group interview guide questions 5, 8, and 11 corresponded to research question 6.

7. Focus group interview guide questions 5, 9, and 11 corresponded to research question 7.

8. Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7, and 10 corresponded to research question 8.
### Table 1

**Research Question 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is middle school philosophy?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I was observing one of your lessons, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work,</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities, and multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this approach to instruction impacts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your building principal with respect to student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management skills, authentic learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive impact on student engagement is ________ because _________. )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Research question 1 = To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers understand what is meant by the terms middle school philosophy and student engagement?*
Table 2

Research Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is middle school philosophy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I was observing one of your lessons, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impacts student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this approach to instruction impacts student engagement?

What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement?

Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management skills, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is because _______.)

*Note: Research question 2 - To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers measure student engagement in the classroom setting by observing student affect, time on task, and level of participation?*
Table 3

Research Question 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Correlates to research question 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is middle school philosophy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I was observing one of your lessons, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued)

Focus group interview guide question | Corresponds to research question 3
--- | ---

With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this approach to instruction impacts student engagement?

What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement?

Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management skills, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is _______ because _______.)

Note: Research question 3 = To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive teacher-student rapport as being the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement?
Table 4

Research Question 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is middle school philosophy?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I was observing one of your lessons, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impacts student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 (continued)

Focus group interview guide question

Corresponds to research question 4

With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this approach to instruction impacts student engagement?

What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement?

Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management skills, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is ________ because ________.)

Note. Research question 4 = To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is middle school philosophy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I was observing one of your lessons, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impacts student engagement?</td>
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Table 5 (continued)

<table>
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<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this approach to instruction impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management skills, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is ________ because ________)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Research question 5 = To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive clear expectations and goal setting, as part of effective classroom management, as having a positive impact on student engagement?
Table 6

Research Question 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question 6</th>
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<td>What is student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I was observing one of your lessons, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (continued)

Focus group interview guide question | Corresponds to research question 6

With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this approach to instruction impacts student engagement?

What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement?

Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management skills, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is ________ because ________).

Note. Research question 6 = To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning as having a positive impact on student engagement?
Table 7

Research Question 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is middle school philosophy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I was observing one of your lessons, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impacts student engagement?</td>
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</table>
Table 7 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this approach to instruction impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management skills, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is __________ because __________.)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Research question 7 = To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive student-centered instruction, which is considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, as having a positive impact on student engagement?*
### Research Question 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group interview guide question</th>
<th>Corresponds to research question 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is middle school philosophy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I was observing one of your lessons, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?</td>
<td>X</td>
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| How do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impacts student engagement? | }
Table 8 (continued)

Focus group interview guide question

Corresponds to research question 8

With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of
cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the
application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based
activities, and multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this
approach to instruction impacts student engagement?

What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of

classroom observation feedback from your building principal with
respect to student engagement?

Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in
front of you by writing down your response. (Based on my
classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I
believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective
classroom management skills, authentic learning experiences, and
student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the
greatest positive impact on student engagement is _______ because
_______.)

Note: Research question 8 = To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive
the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for
the topic of student engagement as being related to classroom management skills?
Chapter IV

Research Findings

Summary of Chapters I and III

Indicated in Chapter I, fluctuating student engagement levels present an ethical dimension for the teaching and learning processes, particularly given that the pre-adolescent learner is at a uniquely critical stage of academic and social-emotional development. With social inquiry as an avenue for change, the purpose of this qualitative study was to determine what instructional strategies are perceived by middle school grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers as having the greatest positive impact on student engagement. Do teacher-student rapport and the connection to social-emotional learning have the greatest positive impact according to the focus group participants? An ancillary component of the study was to provide a synthesis of the participant feedback to the principal school that this site host wish to utilize these data for professional development purposes. The marriage of these data and site-specific value-added assessments holds promise for systemic renewal.

Relative to the qualitative research design delineated in Chapter III, 27 out of a possible site sample of 31 grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers participated in the focus group sessions addressing these research questions via the focus group interview guide.

1. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers understand what is meant by the terms middle school philosophy and student engagement?

2. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers measure student engagement in the classroom setting by observing student affect, time on task, and level of participation?
3. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive teacher-student rapport as being the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement?

4. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport?

5. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive clear expectations and goal setting, as part of effective classroom management, as having a positive impact on student engagement?

6. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary unis, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning as having a positive impact on student engagement?

7. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive student-centered instruction, which is considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, as having a positive impact on student engagement?

8. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement as being related to classroom management skills?

*Focus Group Discussion Analysis*

Relative to the three background or demographic questions posed at the onset of the focus group sessions, the number of years teaching and content area assignments
referred throughout the focus group discussion analysis accounted for a more diverse sample than expected. Specific to this point, Group 1 included three teachers having 1-3 years teaching experience, one teacher having 4-8 years teaching experience, and five teachers having 9 or more years teaching experience. The combined experience of these teachers encompassed counseling, language arts literacy, mathematics, physical education/health, science, social studies, Spanish, and speech/language therapy. Group 2 included four teachers having 1-3 years teaching experience, two teachers having 4-8 years teaching experience, and two teachers having 9 or more years teaching experience. The combined experience of these teachers encompassed chorus, counseling, French, general music, language arts literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and Spanish. Group 3 included nine teachers having 1-3 years teaching experience, one teacher having 4-8 years teaching experience, and no teachers having 9 or more years teaching experience. The combined experience of these teachers encompassed language arts literacy, mathematics, physical education/health, science, social studies, and Spanish. In the aggregate, 16 of 27 participants had 1-3 years teaching experience, 4 had 4-8 years teaching experience, and 7 had 9 or more years teaching experience. Pertaining to certification, 24 of the 27 participants received certification through the traditional route. Two participants received certification through the alternate route, and one participant was unclear about his certification status. Of the 27 participating teachers, 9 provided instruction for grade seven only, 7 provided instruction for grade eight only, and 11 provided instruction for grades 7-8. Additionally, 24 were females, and three were males.

Research question 1 – within groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers understand what is meant by the terms middle school philosophy and
student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 4, 5, 5A, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 corresponded to research question 1.)

In response to focus group interview guide question 4 regarding middle school philosophy, Group 1 participants described middle school philosophy as a bridge between the elementary and high school levels, a student-centered environment, and a whole child focus. P4 emphatically stated, "...You need to focus on the middle school age and the adolescence as a different stage of learning from little kids and high school kids.” Further, with a sensible manner, P9 specified, "...Middle school is like a bridge between the elementary and the high school.” During the discussion, P2, P9, and P8 respectively mentioned, "...The middle school philosophy is very student-centered;” “I think one of the main things that we often do is make it student-centered and, and let them discover things and explore things on their own with our facilitation;” and “I see such a vast difference between seventh graders and eighth graders, and keeping things student-centered more than on the lecture that you see more so when you get to the high school, is such a huge importance at the middle school level.” P5 highlighted middle school philosophy accordingly, "...I feel that teaching the whole child, socialization and academically.” This perceptive and professional response was echoed by P6 after being cues by the researcher to respond to focus group interview guide question 4 from the counseling perspective.

Um, the majority of, of the participants have already mentioned it, but you know again to reiterate if, if like you know what P5 said that the, um, it’s the whole child like, the focus is the whole child, not just academics and, um, my experience with that is very similar to what a lot of people have said that they’re, they’re somewhat, um, elementary, and they’re almost high school, and but they’re not quite either one. And there’s such a, a conflict that they experience internally that, um, is quite often reflected in their academics. And, um, so to, to not address the whole student would, would actually be detrimental academically, I think to the
student, and my, also my experience, um, in working in both elementary and high school myself, is that there is a perhaps, I guess you might call it like a judgment on, on the part of other age group teaching staff that might happen because there might be, um, it's locked upon as too much cuddling. Um, that it's a bit, a bit of a judgment you know, and it's, it's an unfair judgment because it really is, is essential at this particular age group. I mean the things that they're doing are so elementary and so high school like at the same, like in the same day, you know. I'm not going to get into the things, but you know like that.

As for focus group interview guide question 5 concerning student engagement, Group 1 participants fervently reflected upon observed student behavior and teacher approach as needed to effectively elicit student engagement. Both P3 and P4 referred to student engagement as "enthusiasm." Comments inclusive of observed student behavior were: "Well engagement I think can take on a number of forms from active eye contact, to enthusiastic responses, to cooperative discussions, to engagement on a project individually, or in the group" (P3);

For some of my students, engagement is something as simple as sitting up and watching what's going on because some of them might not have the capability at certain points to participate in, in all of the activities that are going on, but to at least be taking some of it in. 'Um, and for other students, it's the excitement in asking questions, the making comparisons, the participating, and answering questions, and helping other students when they don't get it (P2); and

When I think of student engagement, I think of enthusiasm. I mean it's sort of like what they say. You know it when you see it. You see these kids. You walk into a classroom, and you know. I actually sometimes on, on a prep I'll be in a room that another teacher is teaching in, and I love watchin' some of these teachers teach cause the kids are just so signed up to some of the lessons. And they know, when you see is, the kids are like, they're paying attention. Their hands are up. They're on task, whatever it is that they're doing, whether cooperative learning or you know whatever, you, you just can tell. I mean you can tell when they're, when they're there, and they're psyched. (P4)

Particularly curious to the researcher was P4's statement, "You know it when you see it."

This response was one of several intimating that even though there is an elusive nature to student engagement, a teacher can recognize both cognitive and behavioral aspects of
student engagement. P6 cautioned, "...My experience has been that sometimes they're not looking engaged, and they're actually getting it. And that's not always like the majority of the time, but my experience has been that you know looks can be deceiving. They are totally getting everything that's coming..." In a similar vein, P2 added, "It takes different forms for different kids depending on the activity that we happen to be doing at the time." Extending this response relative to the teacher's approach to instruction, P7 claimed, "So differentiation plays a big role in having students engaged because if you're, you're not differentiating for their needs, then you're going to have some students in the classroom who are not going to find what you're doing meaningful." P1 captured this same thought having brought to the forefront that students have to "buy in" to what you are doing as a teacher. At one point in this discussion segment for Group 1, the researcher interjected this probing question for P8: "Does student engagement look the same in a language arts literacy course as it does in gym?" P8 recognized the differences between student engagement in physical education classes and in health classes and demonstrated self-confidence and security in admitting uncertainty of how to approach the cross-content variation. For debate is how much collaboration exists within the physical education and health department.

Well, one of the things that, um, I was going to comment on was one of the, that I, I look to is as a benefit but in the same token just as a 2nd year teacher, I am still kind of getting the grasp of, cf, um, getting is that I may have a student who excels in physical education aspect, but when I get the student in the health classroom, it's a completely different ball game. Um, as far as learning goes, I may have a student who in physical education is you know this tremendous athlete and has abilities and, and, um, is coordinated and, and everything that goes along with doing well in physical education. But once I get them into the health classroom, it's a completely different you know, um, whether their, um, participation lowers, um, they tend to sit towards like the back of the classroom, where in physical education they're the first volunteer. So I'm still trying to get a grasp of how to coordinate the two engagements. I'm there to, to involve student
engagement in the two subject areas is different but how to involve the student in the same way between physical education and health is something that I am still trying to learn, and you know using my peers that I, that I work with, to get that down pat for the students. But in the same token, students who are very quiet in physical education and don't like it and don't enjoy coming, when I go to the health classroom, I see a completely different end to them. And I say to myself, my goodness, how you know different they are in the classroom, and, and it is, it is one of the things I look forward to when I have a class in physical education, taking them to the health classroom because I learn so much more about them. So I have an advantage where, where I see children in two different classroom atmospheres. But at the same token, I am having, ah, I'm still trying to grasp how to connect the two.

Group 2 participants understood middle school philosophy to be preparation for the transition to high school, involvement with academic teaming, and a whole child focus. The transition to high school was reflected in these discussion points: "...It's preparing you for high school...It's a jumping stone, um, for a lot of kids, you know from immaturity to maturity" (Discussion point made matter-of-factly by P11); "...It's preparation for high school. Um, but it's you know maturity; it's changing; it's hormones; it's a lot of different things. So it kind of is like both the middle child doesn't really know what, you know where it stands, I think at times" (P6); and "But it also, I feel that it's our job to really get them to be a little more independent as young adults, and transition them from child to young adult, cause that's also happening physiologically and emotionally, to prepare them to go into high school and then beyond, be productive young adults in society" (Discussion point made enthusiastically and articulately by P2). Several participants also mentioned academic teaming. P2 introduced this topic, "...I think the teaming aspect is something that is different that you don't see at the high school level..." Another participant, P3, drew astute conclusions when explaining the relevance of middle school teaming to the whole child focus.
In my previous teaching experience, I was on a team. And that’s actually one aspect of the middle school experience that I personally miss because of the things that everybody else has said, being able to kind of get a better picture of the whole child. I think that the teaming aspect is actually really, ah, a huge part of the middle school philosophy, um, in terms of teaching the whole child. I think for me at this point I do tend to look at the middle school age as that you know we use our content, um, to get at, at the kid, and who they really are, and who they are going to become...

Supplementary descriptions of transitions, academic teaming, and the whole child were passionately conveyed by two participants.

Okay, um, I just wanted to go off of what P2 said about transitions. I think, ah, being a special education teacher, I feel as if in the middle school environment that is a huge thing for my students, being able to help them make that transition and knowing that it’s not going to be the same transition for everyone. In my classes and what I’ve observed even in my in-class support classes, that, it’s the support, the teachers are looking for support from the teacher, while they’re, they’re looking for feedback. They’re looking for direction to go on because in elementary school they’re given this track of what they need to do. Now they come to [name of school], and some students are on teams. All students are on teams, but some of them are pulled out from their team classes, and it’s hard for them to find a direction. So I think it’s important to set up a path and help students and just be that. I think it’s important for just to help support the transitions, ah, you know, vary your instructional strategies, you know just be able to be flexible, is, if you’re flexible, then your students will be flexible, and they’ll be flexible and will be able to think to be flexible in order to get to the next step because high school is completely different, a completely different environment it is, and then in middle school. So they need to be confident in themselves before they go out.

Yeah. I saw this. Yeah, I was, I was thinking about something. I was originally hired to work at the high school, and, ah, I had to make decision. I came to [name of school]. I, ah, walked around, saw the school, talked with the principals about you know what are the pros and cons of coming to [name of school]. And one of the things that they said to me that really convinced me to become a middle school teacher was that we still have an effect on who this child becomes. Um, they mentioned the word, and I had never heard it before, of teaching the whole child, not just teaching them your content area, but teaching them how to transition into the high school. It is part of our job, ah, you know, part of the middle school philosophy is that it is part of our job to teach that student now to be successful as a student and how to be successful as a person. And that is essentially the reason why I decided that I wanted to be a middle school teacher because I want to have that effect. I want to be involved in making a whole child. I don’t want to get them and have this child already made. I wanna, I wanna be,
there. So it was a hard decision to make, and one of the things that convinced me was the middle school philosophy. Ah, ah, at least as it was presented to me. Sc. ah, yeah, I just wanted to add that the transition, the idea of the transition, being a part of the transition, the even the idea of being part of a team because that is part of making them successful in the transition. Ah, be, be being with a team every day to discuss what we’re going to do for these students, discuss you know interdisciplinary units, or whatever is a part of the middle school philosophy. Ah, you know I wanted to be a part of it, and that’s why I’m here. (P4)

Rounding out this part of the Group 2 discussion, participants utilized a practical tone sharing insightful words such as “quirky, goofy, humorous, self-conscious, pliable” to depict the middle school student as one in need of both academic and emotional support.

Immediately following discussion of middle school philosophy, Group 2 participants reported on observed student behavior and teacher approaches needed to effectively elicit student engagement.

...Student engagement is really their active participation I believe. It’s their active participation. Now not everyone is going to be waving their hands in the air and smiling brightly. ‘Um, but, they will attend to what’s going on. You see that with different body postures. You see that they’re sitting upright, and they’re paying attention. Their books are open, um, if they all are participating in some way. They may not all be waving the flag, but certainly a contrast to the child who is slumped across the desk. (P7 mentioned as if this was obvious to participants)

In a review of passive versus active listening, P2 perceptively identified the need to accurately read student body language.

...I might think that they are not engaged based on their body language, but in reality, they were right along with me. They were doing exactly what we were doing, and, but I may not have known it just by looking at them. And I, I agree with P6 in the fact that each child may not look like they’re actively engaged, but it’s a teacher’s job to kind of figure out with the children who are in your room... Each student is different, in the way you have to read them.

When prompted by the researcher to respond to focus group interview guide question 5, P6 reinforced the variations in observed student behavior in regard to student engagement.
Um, I don't necessarily feel that for a student to be engaged that they have to participate. Um, I think it's engage, as an individual, and that means different things to different kids. Um, you know even when I'm doing like a guidance lesson in the classroom, um, sometimes just you know, a, a, a look or, um, I don't know you'll see like a, a smirk on the face that they're getting it, but they may not be the ones you know raising their hands or verbally saying something. So, um, you know, and I know even some kids don't necessarily even make eye contact when they're attending. Some kids are doodling, but they're listening, um, and are still engaged. So you kind of, I think it's individual thing you know.

During this portion of the discussion, the researcher made this probing inquiry, "...Does the engagement look different in different content areas?" Although signs of a recent increase in self-confidence and professional growth were communicated, P5 misinterpreted the intent of the question when answering with the cross-content variation member check not being addressed.

Um, well, in my resource, um, classes my students if I'm doing social studies, I have found is my social studies resource room classes, the majority of the students seem looking attentive. They, they give off that persona that they're there, they're listening to me, and I don't even have... There's one student who I thought was right on, thought was just doing great. And it came time where I gave um, first formal assessment. He didn't know anything. When I got that grade back, well not just the grade, but when I got the answers back, I was reading his answers, and I was just like wow he seemed so there, but he was in a totally different place. And I had to change my whole format of how I was teaching the class, but also how I could reach him, for him to be able to understand and make the right connections, of where the content was going, and it just changed my whole perspective of what engagement is. That if the student is there nodding and giving me eye contact, he's doing it to please me thinking that that's what he needs to do in class, and he's you know a great kid. Um, so that's one perspective. But then when I go into my ICS class, I have two math classes. A lot of students, I gave them my own survey in the beginning, and I wanted to know how they felt about math. Math for me was a scary subject when I was in middle school. I actually used the word hate when I talked about it, and I got, I was, I will admit I was intimidated walking into an in-class support math class cause I was like can I help these kids? And it was important for me to know if the students felt that way cause I wanted to you know to eliminate that for them. And some students expressed their uncertainty, so I looked for their facial expressions. Sometimes you see there's literally a, you know a gleam of hope, in their eyes. You kind of see the light bulb going off, and it helps. But other students, I actually found, the ones who are doodling on their papers are the ones who have it. They are not the ones who you know, they, they can't keep going over you
know to them my attention. I have one student who's actually doodling a cartoon
to go along with the math lesson, and that's the way he connects it, and he makes
it. Doodlers are not people we need to be worrying about. Actually, the ones who
are saying yeah, so I actually see a connection between the resource with the
nodding, and okay yes doesn't mean I'm there. The doodlers are the ones usually
asking to help other students.

Further, P2 emphasized the teacher need to attend to learning styles.

I think some of it... Um, I think part of it is also based on the child's learning
style, um, having some, a special ed. population in all of my classes and dealing
with I would say 80% of the school population over the course of the year. I teach
about 650 kids over the course of the year. Um, I, all without ICS, um, it's based
on the way the child learns best. Some kids, if they are artistic, will doodle and
draw because that's how they start to put things together. Other kids, with the
example that you used with science, may be more engaged in science in hands-on
activities based on, um, the Bernice McCarthy Format. Um, if they're a type
there, they're gonna be more hands-on, and they're gonna excel with that, where
in a language arts class if they're reading and discussing that's a lot more left
brain activity, um, that's more of a type two, depending on the class, direct
instruction, and I think they based on the child's learning style they could engage
differently in different classes, and their appearance, they may, they may be less
engaged in one than in the next because of the way they learn whether or not the
teacher is, is, is changing their, is teaching to their learning style enough or at all.
Um, ideally we would hope that all teachers are teaching to the different learning
styles and being able to connect to the, every student that's in the room. But
matter of fact, not every day, um, it, it doesn't happen every day. Some days,
whether emotionally or mentally some students aren't able to enter the classroom,
physically they're there, but mentally and emotionally, some days they aren't
depending on, on personal reasons, or on learning styles, or what the activity is,
and interest level. That's something we're dealing with in our professional
development this year is, are you know for me learning too, how to engage the
students not only, um, tiering assignments, and differentiating, but also getting
interest activities in there to engage the students who would seemingly be unengaged,
who would otherwise be unengaged. So I think regardless of special ed. or regular
ed. classroom, I think the interest level and learning style has a lot to do with it
too.

Time of day and outside influences were noted by participants too. P5 sensitively
conveyed, "If a student is engaged, is engaged one day and not engaged the next day, it's
important to take into account what that student is going through, a test they might had to
study for the night before. I have some students who have, not even special ed. students,
who have extreme anxiety levels, and these are things you need to take into account." P7

provided an example for this point.

...I was commenting when we were looking at those pictures that I have, ah, first
and fourth period class, and the first period class I have someone who's lying
across her desk cause she's tired. By fourth period, she's not hands up in the air
waving, but she is alert and attentive. So I think, um, when we consider student
engagement, we do have to look at the time of day, what their outside activities
are, what their personal lives may impact them as far as their energy level, in the
morning, and things that are going on. So student engagement, to me, to sum up,
really having the students interested in what's going on and participating in
what's going on to the extent that they're capable, at that time.

For focus group interview guide question 4 regarding middle school philosophy,

Group 3 participants formulated responses based on involvement with a whole child
focus, relevant learning, and academic teaming. P5 opened the discussion with a
comment related to the whole child, "...I mean I know everyone sort of you know teach
to the whole child. I, I, I personally like to teach toward like toward the life, not toward
the day." P8 continued the discussion, "I think it's important to teach to their life, and
why is this relevant. What skills are you gonna learn?" At a later point, P5 announced,

...I think it's important for kids that age, students that age, to realize the relevance
of the other subjects in, within, within a subject area that they're taking at that
time...I think that at this age they, they're always questioning why they have to learn
this. In this class, what's it going to do for this class and how, how do they relate.
That's real important.

Nearly in succession, each of these responses was provided in terms of academic
team ing. It is to be noted the researcher inserted a probing question in between the two
dialogue segments involving P4 to elicit specific information about the teaming structure.

In addition, difficulty communicating with parents may have prompted the comment
from P9.

Um, I think the other really important thing with teaching in the middle school is
team ing. I think it's really important. You know so those students aren't, um, lost
in the system. You know they’re like more than one person, just looking out for them. (P8)

To add onto, um, P8, I agree with the teaming concept in that, um, when teachers discuss the same students that they have, they find, um, common interests among students and how a student might learn the best way. So I think that’s definitely part of middle philosophy, um, finding what type of learner your student is and catering to that. (P3)

And to add onto that actually, um, in addition for the students, teaming is great for the teachers as well. The students gain a sense of belonging, and as teachers, you gain colleagues that you can go to, and I think that, that translates to the students. They see how you work with somebody else, and you know they’re learning by example I guess… (P4)

Well, we all have a common team planning time, and, um, I guess it’s for core content teachers as well as, um, special ed, education liaison. And as, um, P3 was saying, um, you’re able to talk about the students and any issues that you might feel are concerns, and, um, it’s just really great to have that kind of soundboard to bounce ideas off of. (P4)

Um, it’s also good when dealing with the parents that you have the team behind you because of most times they’ll be saying the same thing across the board, and then you can approach the parents as a team and try to come up with a solution or how to best help the child. (P9)

P2 concluded with a reference to other academic team aspects.

Well, I think one of the things that might have come up that, um, was said over there on the other side, um, when teaching in a team, um, the students are able to travel around together. And it creates this positive learning environment. They’re comfortable in the classroom because they’re with the same group of students throughout the day as opposed to a junior high middle school setting where they’re just moving around on their own. And I think that really helps students learn because, again, they are comfortable in your classroom because they’re with the same students all day. Um, and again, um, I don’t want to use names. P4 mentioned that, um, they see us working together as a team, and that is a benefit. That thinking, they remember seeing how the teachers work together. And they can model that.

In conjunction with student engagement, Group 3 participants focused on observed student behavior and teacher approaches needed to effectively elicit student engagement. When the researcher encouraged participants to define student engagement
midway through the related discussion, three participants responded with obvious specifics. P2 utilized the words "excitement, energy, interest." P3 added, "I would throw out curiosity with that. It can help to leave some things mysterious, and they're oh I wonder why that is or something like that. It can help engagement." P7 chose "enthusiasm." Aside from this exchange, the remaining parts of the discussion centered on teacher approaches. For relevant instruction, three participants responded.

Um, I teach social studies, and the same thing as P8 was saying. If you don't make it relevant for the kids, they're not gonna be interested. And so I think also with student engagement, you have to make the kids active learners. You have to have you know student-centered. They have to be doing things. They can't just be sitting in the desk, reading the book, taking notes. They're not gonna be excited about it. But to get them engaged, I think that really helps the content. If your content is gonna be more exciting, then they're gonna maybe want to go to your class every day. (Discussion point made timidly by P10)

I think it's also important that they see how it relates to their life. I mean if you're doing a project or an activity that they see a, a purpose to it, that they're eventually gonna use it again like they're not just multiplying decimals just because, like there's a reason behind it. And once they see that, I think that they're more involved in it and more interested in it. (P9)

I think it goes back to cross-curricular activities too. I think if every subject area decides if they're gonna have cross-curricular activities and use math, use different, different subject areas, then the kids will feel relevance for, for each subject. That's really important. (P5)

A crossover to relevancy, two participants remarked about teacher passion: "And also as a teacher to be excited about what you're teaching, so the kids see that. They're like oh wow they're real excited about math. I should be excited too, and hopefully that'll catch on" (Discussion point made quickly and flatly by P3); and "I would agree with that. As a language arts teacher, I love talking about a book to a student, a group of students, the whole class, and, um, you know it's really important that I'm enjoying the book. If I didn't really care for it, then that's gonna show. And, um, when they get excited, that
then is what you want. So, it's really is then a nice give and take" (P4). Learning styles and options were addressed by participants as well, with the elusive nature of student engagement insinuated in the responses.

...Helping them learn what kind of learner they are, you know by doing different things in the beginning of the year, and helping them figure out what is the easiest way for them to get new concepts and then really tapping into that I think helps student engagement, teaching them how to think and how their mind works, and giving them tools I think automatically increases student engagement. And when they meet success, and when they're having choices in their learning and directing their own learning, I think that's the time when I see the most engaged, and most interested in what's going on personally in the resource room. (P6)

That's almost exactly what I was going to say as far as giving options. I think I found that when they have options and they can choose where they want to go with the topic area, they seem to be into it or engaged more. (P7)

...I think option is important too. He, he mentioned options....I might give four different options on the homework assignment, four different homework assignments. They pick which one they want to do. Ever since that, I really haven't had, haven't had an issue because I feel like they take, I feel like they've taken responsibility. They're engaging in their activity, and they're, they feel responsible for picking what they, what they chose. So they kind of feel the need to get it in. (P5)

As the researcher probed to elicit participant responses as to whether or not student engagement presents itself in different forms in different content areas, the participants deflected the cross-content variation member check with only P5 having indicated, “it might be a little tougher for other content areas.” Potentially, the participants did not understand the nature of the question.

Three themes common to Group 1 emerged for middle school philosophy, transition to high school, a student-centered environment, and a whole child focus. Two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified transition to high school; three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching
experience) representing multiple content areas identified a student-centered environment; and two participants (both with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified a whole child focus. Taking the well-balanced composite and well-balanced discussion into consideration for Group 1, it is reasonable to assume that many of the Group 1 participants have collaborated with one another prior to the session resulting in a shared understanding of middle school philosophy and the collegial and professional tone present in the discussion.

Group 1's fluid discussion of student engagement revealed subthemes related to observed student behavior and teacher approach to elicit student engagement. As with the middle school philosophy segment, balanced discussion points were presented. With respect to observed student behavior, general behaviors, specific behaviors, and inconsistent behavior constituted the responses. Two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified general behaviors indicative of enthusiasm and excitement; four participants (three with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified specific behaviors such as paying attention, participating, asking and answering questions, making eye contact, raising hands, being on task, and utilizing certain body language; and one participant with 9 or more years teaching experience identified inconsistent behavior meaning that the behaviors students exhibit may not be true indicators of engagement or disengagement. Teacher approach to elicit student engagement included two participants (one with 4-8 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing
multiple content areas identifying the need to individualize instruction as a prerequisite for meaningful learning.

For Group 2, three themes surfaced for middle school philosophy, transition to high school, academic teaming, and a whole child focus. The discussion of these themes was intense and time-consuming, thereby suggesting that the Group 2 participants deemed middle school philosophy to be of great importance to their practice. Five participants (three with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified transition to high school; five participants (four with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified academic teaming; and four participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience, two with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified a whole child focus.

Amidst the lengthy Group 2 discussion of student engagement, subthemes for observed student behavior and teacher approach to elicit student engagement developed. No general student behaviors were identified. Collectively, maybe this group considered the general behaviors to be implicit to the specific behaviors communicated. Four participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, two with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified specific behaviors such as paying attention, participating, asking and answering questions, making eye contact, raising hands, being on task, and utilizing certain body language, and three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified inconsistent behavior meaning that the
behaviors students exhibit may not be true indicators of engagement or disengagement. Teacher approach to elicit student engagement included one participant with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identifying the need to individualize instruction by accommodating varying learning styles.

In the Group 3 discussion of middle school philosophy, three themes appeared in a direct and terse way, a whole child focus, relevant learning, and academic teaming. One participant with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified a whole child focus; two participants (one with 4-8 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified relevant learning; and five participants (three with 1-3 years teaching experience, two with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified academic teaming. The group size may have led participants to initially hedge participation in an effort to allow for every participant to comment.

Group 3 participants offered several responses regarding student engagement. Sub-themes for observed student behavior and teacher approach to elicit student engagement came to light. In regard to observed student behavior, general behaviors were briefly listed. Three participants, each with 1-3 years teaching experience, representing multiple content areas identified general behaviors indicative of curiosity, energy, excitement, interest, and mystery. Specific behaviors and inconsistent behavior were not identified. It is plausible that the nine Group 3 teachers with 1-3 years teaching experience have not prioritized the observation of student engagement behavioral indicators and, consequently, have no frame of reference for the related focus group interview guide question. Teacher approach to elicit student engagement included: three
participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identifying the need to individualize instruction by accommodating varying learning styles; two participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identifying teacher passion; and three participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identifying the importance of relevant learning.

Research question 1 – between groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers understand what is meant by the terms middle school philosophy and student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 4, 5, 5A, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 corresponded to research question 1.)

Five themes were recorded for middle school philosophy across three groups of participants, a whole child focus, academic teaching, transition to high school, relevant learning, and a student-centered environment. Each of the three groups identified a whole child focus; two of the three groups (groups 2 and 3) identified academic teaching; two of the three groups (groups 1 and 2) identified transition to high school; one of the groups (Group 3) identified relevant learning; and one of the groups (Group 1) identified a student-centered environment. With multiple content areas represented for each theme, it is interesting to note that 7 out of 16 responses offered by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience contained a reference to academic teaching. Transition to high school accounted for 4 of the 16 responses for participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. A whole child focus and student-centered environment totaled two responses for each, and relevant learning equated to one response. Maybe the professional development for participants with 1-3 years teaching experience has recently focused on academic
teaming. Responses for participants with 4-8 years teaching experience summed to one for a whole child focus, one for academic teaming, and one for transition to high school. Four participants with 9 or more years teaching experience responded in accordance with a whole child focus; two participants with 9 or more years teaching experience responded in accordance with academic teaming and transition to high school; and one participant with 9 or more years teaching experience responded in accordance with relevant learning and student-centered environment. Leaning toward a whole child focus, participants with 9 or more years teaching experience conceivably reflect upon and factor in more life experience in generating these responses as opposed to participants with fewer years of teaching experience.

Six subthemes were noted for student engagement across three groups of participants for observed student behavior and teacher approach to elicit student engagement. Among those themes were general behaviors, specific behaviors, and inconsistent behavior for observed student behavior. Two of the three groups identified general behaviors (groups 1 and 3); two of the three groups identified specific behaviors (groups 1 and 2); and two of the three groups identified inconsistent behavior (groups 1 and 2). For teacher approach, individualizing learning to accommodate varying learning styles, including relevancy, and incorporating teacher passion emerged. Each of the three groups identified individualizing learning to accommodate varying learning styles; two of the three groups (groups 1 and 3) identified including relevancy; and one of the three groups (Group 3) identified incorporating teacher passion. Multiple content areas were represented for each sub theme. The 5 of 11 responses for participants with 1-3 years teaching experience that coincide with specific observed student behaviors seems to
suggest that the participants with fewer years of teaching experience place more emphasis on that which is directly displayed by students rather than the observation of overall, or general, student behavior. It is feasible that the participants with 1-3 years teaching experience struggle with interpreting inconsistent behavior as well. Only 2 of 11 responses reflected this mindset. Relating the 4 of 9 responses (of participants with 1-3 years teaching experience) for individualizing learning to accommodate varying learning styles to the responses for a whole child focus, consistency was present. Individualizing learning is closely connected to a whole child focus in the literature and in the role of response for the three focus groups.

Throughout the middle school philosophy and student engagement discussions, the participants' listening skills, collegiality, and preparation were evident. Discussion points built off of one another as participants reacted to what had been previously expressed. Frequently, "I just wanted to add to," "I wanted to go off of," "I agree with," and "I disagree with" were introductory statements made by participants as they formulated responses. To this end, groupthink and reversals were not apparent in any of the discussions. A sense of comfort permeated the discussions with immediate free-flowing dialogue. Perchance, either the participants reviewed the focus group interview guide in advance and/or are knowledgeable of the topics discussed.

The researcher anticipated that participants would be more knowledgeable of middle school philosophy than student engagement. For the former, it was expected that nearly every participant would identify academic teaming and a whole child focus. In actuality, this was not solely the case. Transition to high school was presented by many participants instead. In the event a fourth or fifth group convened to address research
question 1, it is not unreasonable to presume that saturation would occur relative to academic teaming and a whole child focus. One aspect for the student engagement findings was congruent with the researcher's expectations. Motivation was not discussed, and synonyms and definitions for student engagement were limited in scope. However, the participants surprised the researcher with responses denoting a balance of cognitive and behavioral student engagement indicators. It was expected that only behavioral indicators would surface.

**Research question 2 – within groups comparisons.** To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers measure student engagement in the classroom setting by observing student affect, time on task, and level of participation? (Focus group interview guide questions 5 and 5A corresponded to research question 2.)

Group 1 participants highlighted observation, interaction, and self-assessment/self-evaluation when discussing focus group interview guide question 5A. Even though no tone, manner, or approach appeared to stand out in this portion of the discussion, there was a sense of building momentum and an increased participant comfort level as the responses grew longer and discussion points were expanded. P1 fielded the question first, “I take notes also, and we compare to see if we’re basically taking the same kind of notes you know, so that we can keep track of what’s going on in the class.” Another participant, P4, recognized the value of note taking as an observation method, “One thing, um, I wish I could do more of is watch, is kind of keep notes if you will on each individual student.” P7 confirmed her recent incorporation of note taking too, “...But one of the things I started, um, actually just this week was keeping notes on their like spelling mistakes, sentence structure, ah, mistakes, paragraphing in a book...” In
terms of teacher-student interaction, these responses were communicated: "I spend time with them, visiting them, to see where they're having difficulty if they're. If I have their attention, if they're interested in what they're doing and how much their participation...." (P7);

You present information in whatever format, but you do survey as you go through the lesson. You ask questions looking for feedback, and I look for you know I will call someone's name who just to make sure that they're participating you know or listening so they may not have their hand up, but it sometimes it's surprising that just because they don't have their hand up when you do call them and give them a survey question they have the answer, and sometimes that's surprising I think even to an observer (P3):

and "...I write down at the end of class, I'll write down the questions that the students will have for me when I'm teaching social studies. I'll know they're engaged by the questions that they want to ask me to take it a step further" (P5). Toward the conclusion of this discussion segment, P3 shared a self-assessment/self-evaluation tool she implements with her students.

Well one of the things that I introduce to the group is I actually use a participation rubric, and I explain to them that participation isn't just raising your hand. Participation, um, because that's how I see engagement, I see engagement as participation, and part of that is on my rubric is being on time, being prepared, ah, coming in and getting your things out, and being ready to work because all of those things are key to at least being ready to participate, that without that or being late, um, can hinder their participation as well as whatever is going on in the class when they arrive late. And the children are often, and then I give them that at the end of the week, and I ask them to fill the rubric out themselves, and it really does help them remind themselves that they don't.

Elements of observation, interaction, and self-assessment/self-evaluation came via P9 as the final response for focus group interview guide question 5A.

...Besides visually observing whether your students are engaged or not, and also sometimes having them write up a critique of themselves and maybe other group members, and also I like to go around, ah, when they're interacting with others or working on their own, and, ah, interview them, question them. Sometimes the, the best feedback of whether or not they're engaged or not is what you get from the
students by talking with them, see what they've accomplished see where they plan on taking it from there, um, that's pretty much it.

The Group 2 discussion of focus group interview guide question 5A entailed observation, interaction, and self-assessment/self-evaluation. Responses grew longer, and discussion points expanded. However, in the field notes, the assistant moderator recorded several distractions, entering and exiting of participants, and a somewhat unsettled atmosphere during this part of the discussion. Mindful of this observation, it cannot be construed that a greater comfort level prompted the shift in response content. P4 opened by identifying body language as a method of observation and by seeking topical assistance from peers.

Alright, um, first of all, I like to say that as a 1st year teacher, and while cause I was with the photo prompt group, one of the things that I said was as a 1st year teacher, um, I think one of the skills that I am developing is, ah, measuring student engagement. And I said one of the things that is most difficult for me is that, um, I say to myself it is difficult for me to go on anything else besides body language because I don’t know what else there is to go by as of right now, for me as a 1st year teacher, like, it, that’s the most difficult thing for me to do, um, because I know that I can look at a student, and he looks like he’s engaged. And we even talked about the nodding of the head, ah, you know the nodding of the head to me means nothing. It doesn’t mean that they’re engaged. Yeah, exactly, exactly. It’s just something to please me. And, you know so I’m sitting here while everybody’s talking, trying to think well what else can’t go on, and I’m a little bit stumped. So that helps the conversation go-long. I even wrote it here. It is difficult for me. What else do I have to go on? So that inspired conversation cause I would love to hear what you guys have to say.

From a physical perspective, P3 tapped into the use of proximity as a means by which to measure student engagement. P3 provided a seasoned view in doing so.

...I guess on a daily basis, um, it’s more of the monitoring, what’s happening as I’m teaching the lesson. I’m walking around all the time and kind of keeping an ear on that conversation over there even while I’m working with this group over here. Um, and keeping in balance like they’re in middle school, and so you know there are times when they’re gonna talk about something that happened yesterday, or you know something that’s happening at lunch, or whatever, and knowing when it’s okay to let them do that as long as they’re doing the task, ura, and then
and knowing when to kind of bring them back, and call them back into focus. And so, for me I think it's more of actually doing that kind of monitoring, and then it really depends a lot on getting to know the students individually, um, which is why for P2... 

Having validated P4 by mentioning body language as one form of observation, P2 agreed with P3 and verified the significance of teacher-student interaction, "I agree with P3. I think the student rapport, um, getting to know your students as individuals, as, as people is, is one of the most important ways to, um, that we can use to gauge engagement." P2 further announced, 

...I find that I use my closure as a really, not only walking around and talking to students throughout the period, but to kind of get a feeling for where the class was. How effective was the activity? How effective, you know, did they get as much out of it as I had hoped they would?...If they were engaged, they would be able to walk away with something even if it's just this big, and you know a centimeter.

In closing, P3 spoke to self-assessment/self-evaluation.

I think that another thing I do kind of along the same lines is, um, sometimes I'll do in the middle of a class, like right after we've done an activity, something that I'm trying for the 1st time, and I'll just ask them you know what did you guys think of that activity? Was that helpful to you? And, I'll just ask then for feedback right then, and then sometimes if it's like a bigger, like a unit or an activity that takes a couple days, afterwards, I'll say you know I'll put up a few questions, and I'll say you know take a piece of paper and write out the answers to these questions and really think about your learning. And that's been really helpful for me, actually to kind of evaluate whether the activities that I'm doing are, are engaging them and are allowing them to process the information, and I'll just ask them questions like you know what was helpful about this activity, what would you change about doing this activity, um, and then just anything else you want to tell me.

Observation and interaction were discussed by Group 3 participants pertaining to focus group interview guide question 5A. Two participants indicated observation was a worthwhile method.

You can tell a lot by facial expressions and body language. (P3)
I think the product that your students give you can tell you a lot about how engaged they are. You know, for example, in my language class, we’re doing, um, *The Outsiders*, and I have a whole layered project for them to do where they choose three from this category, two from this category, one from this category. And I find, you know I can tell a lot by how engaged they are by the stuff they’re giving me. You know oh I’m done might seem well, and they give it to me, and you know it’s not well thought out. It’s not, I know it’s not, they’re not meeting you know their, ah, you know how high they could go, I can, you can tell a lot from what they give you, um, how much thought they’re putting into it, and now into it they are. You know that’s what I found. (P6)

Immediately following P6’s remark, the researcher probed with this inquiry, “During your PDP, your professional development period, do you have any kind of critical friends group or any, do you meet as a group of teachers? Do you ever, in those opportunities, bring student work, student work there and show each other, kind of talk about it?”

This inquiry elicited feedback from two additional participants in support of examining student work.

We do that in team though. Like sometimes some of the teachers will bring in a student’s work, and they say this is what I saw, you know with this child. Are you seeing the same thing in other classes? Even like the language arts teacher, you know was doing the writing. In math, we do journal entries. So we still see the writing, just not as much, but we might still be able to pick up on the same thing. So we do that within our team because we’re looking at each child. (P9)

Well, I think that’s easy to do in team when you have teachers with the same kids. But I know during our professional development like I usually don’t have it with someone with the same kids. So we really don’t have things to compare, really. I’m lucky I have the benefit of having a language arts partner that I’m both professionally and personally, um, you know we’re friends, and we also work very well together, and we do that all the time. And it helps us assess our lessons, if the student are, students aren’t giving us the quality work, um, then maybe they didn’t like the lesson. They weren’t engaged. And you know we’ll change it up for next time. So I have that one person that I, I do have the benefit of working with like that, but not as a team so much because I don’t think necessarily we’re all looking at the same thing. (P2)

With respect to teacher-student interaction as a measure for student engagement, one participant provided an example.
Um, I think it’s important too, ah, you know your students. And if you have a student who, I was also in that ice breaker group, um, whose head is on their desk, and they don’t seem engaged, I think it’s important that you know that that student plays basketball, for instance. Then, how you know, how can off-the-cuff can you relate your topic to something that they’re interested in? Maybe it’s just like a short mention of playing basketball, then all of the sudden you know their head is up, and they’re interested, even if you never mention basketball again. I like that one instance, where you mentioned it, if you know that student, then all the sudden they’re engaged. I think it’s a good way to get them excited about what you’re talking about. (P8)

What could be deduced from these more expansive responses is greater participant acclimation to the time restrictions for the focus group session.

Three themes developed from the Group 1 discussion of methods for measuring student engagement, observation, interaction, and self-assessment/self-evaluation. Four participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience, two with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified observation; four participants (one with 4-8 years teaching experience, three with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified interaction; and two participants each with 9 or more years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified self-assessment/self-evaluation. It is again to be noted that Group 1 provided well-balanced responses.

For Group 2, observation, interaction, and self-assessment/self-evaluation were discussed as themes. Three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified observation; two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified interaction; and one participant with 4-8 years teaching experience representing one content area identified self-assessment/self-evaluation.
Group 3 participants imparted responses reflecting two themes for measuring student engagement, observation and interaction. Four participants (three with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified observation, and one participant with 1-3 years teaching experience representing one content area identified interaction. In response to focus group interview guide question 5, no specific behaviors were identified by Group 3 participants leading the researcher to possibly question what exactly is being observed by the participants who review student work as a means to measure student engagement. Inconsistency is apparent in these findings, or Group 3 participants were less than forthcoming in responding to focus group interview guide question 5.

Research question 2 – between groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers measure student engagement in the classroom setting by observing student affect, time on task, and level of participation? (Focus group interview guide questions 5 and 5A corresponded to research question 2.)

Three themes for methods utilized to measure student engagement were recorded across three groups of participants, observation, interaction, and self-assessment/self-evaluation. Groupthink and reversals were not apparent in any of the discussions. Each of the three groups identified observation and interaction, and two of the three groups (groups 1 and 2) identified self-assessment/self-evaluation. In most instances, multiple content areas were represented for each theme. Of the eight responses provided by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience, it is probable that 6 of the 8 were affiliated with the method of observation given that participants with little or no experience may not have developed the intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness needed.
to measure student behavior through interaction and self-assessment/self-evaluation.

Eight a total number of responses for participants with 1-3 years teaching experience could be considered low in that 16 teachers with 1-3 years teaching experience participated in the study. This implies these participants do not know how to measure student engagement as qualified by Group 2’s P4. However, observation of student behavior as a participant response is common to focus group interview guide questions 5 and 5A indicating consistency.

Put simply, it was not expected that participants with 1-3 years teaching experience would be able to reflect upon many experiences in which they utilized student affect, time on task, and level of participation to measure student engagement.

Observation and interaction were predictable measures provided by participants. Self-assessment/self-evaluation was not anticipated to surface as a theme for the related focus group interview guide question. It is sensible that participants with 4-8 years teaching experience and participants with 9 or more years teaching experience offered this method. Quite unexpected was the examination of student work as a means to observe student engagement. To reiterate, however, the researcher is unsure of what is being examined. Taking the findings from these discussion segments into consideration, it is viable the researcher experience saturation conducting additional focus groups with respect to observation and interaction as two methods for measuring student engagement.

Research question 3 - within groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive teacher-student rapport as being the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 6, 6A, and 11 corresponded to research question 3.)
Group 1 participants explored the general effect, teacher-student connections, and safety when discussing the impact teacher-student rapport has on student engagement. P2 commenced the discussion with this response.

I think it's huge, student engagement. I think that, um, and we had actually started discussing this in our icebreaker a little bit, you get back a lot of what you give to the kids. So if you come in, and maybe you're not having a good day, or something happened, or a student does something that sets you off, and you're not in the best of moods, or you're not approaching them the way you normally do, or you know the kids, the kids read it very quickly, and they respond in turn. If you're having a bad day, and you are being snappy with the kids, they shut down, so they're, they're not learning what they need to be learning cause they're not with you at all. They're not, they're not participating the way they need to be participating in order to make, um, the learning meaningful and important to them.

In so doing, P2 established consistency with the rank order response to focus group interview guide question 11 posed toward the conclusion of the session. For focus group interview guide question 11, P2 indicated teacher-student rapport had the greatest positive impact on student engagement. Responses shared by P1, P5, and P8 were similarly consistent with focus group interview guide question 11 as evidenced in this discussion segment. P1 emphasized the need for students to buy in, and P5 expressed,

...For me and my small class size, um, I have to somehow make the connection with the student, or they are not going to want to learn for me, it especially, in like I said in my small group size, and, um, I've seen it in the past, that if I can make that connection with that child, either something that they're interested outside of school, something that they're interested inside of school, they will work for me. I have seen it, and, ah, um, it works, making that connection with the child cause they can, they can just take it, and they can fly with that so, so...

P5 had a hopeful and cheerful tone when making this discussion point. P8 distinguished between teacher-student rapport in classes with 22 students and in classes with 80 students following a probe from the researcher. With conviction, P8 answered, "As a female in the locker room, um, you know you have certain female issues that go on with
girls in the locker room that they have to right away you know kind of open themselves up to you, and it's so important from the female phys. ed. perspective to set a rapport with the girls in the locker room from that perspective." Despite having identified teacher-student rapport as the instructional strategy having the most positive impact on student engagement in response to focus group interview guide question 11, P6 engaged in an independent dialogue with P8 during this portion of the discussion inquiring as to the differences between strategies for engaging males and females in lieu of providing the framework for the question 11 response. The researcher could infer that P6 is the type of person who gathers and processes information before stating her initial opinion. Additionally, the Group 1 camaraderie peppered the responses to the P3 truism, "Boys will be boys," and P9 brought levity to the exchange by stating, "Look what they grow up to...." At one point in the discussion, two participants made these points:

"I see it as a trust issue. If they feel that you're fair and they can trust you, then you're going to get a better response from them... And I think if they feel safe and they feel they can trust you, you're gonna get more benefit from, from them." (P7)

"I think one of the key words was safe cause that's how I feel with, um, student rapport, that if they feel safe and, um, that they will be willing to take risks in the classroom. Um, and one of the most important things to reach a goal is to take some risks. A lot of times students are you know they shut down because they're scared, and they don't want to embarrass themselves in front of the classroom, and they don't want to look bad in front of the teacher. But if they feel comfortable in the room and have that rapport, they're more willing to take those steps and not feel embarrassed, even if they make a mistake. So I think it helps them come closer and closer to the goal because they're willing to take steps to do it." (P9)

Participants in the Group 2 discussion cited general effect and teacher-student connections in responses to focus group interview guide question 6. P11 initiated the exchange, "...Well certainly if you have a good rapport with your students, you're gonna engage them better." Next, P6 disagreed stating, "...Making them a part of it is so..."
important...Sometimes I think engagement has more to do with, and looking further in the questions, the social-emotional part of things...." P2 added these comments as part of a monologue.

I think there's also a balance between not liking someone and not liking their style and respect... And, I think that even when you don't like someone, there is a, in a matter of respect, and if you treat that child with respect for who they are regardless of whether or not you like them, whether regardless of whether or not they like you, they in turn, will give you respect.... There needs to be a matter of what that child is bringing into the classroom positive or negative, is there, and you need to take it for what it is and then see what you can do with it.

Establishing connections with students served as the framework for the remaining discussion. To this end, three participants fixated on students' feelings about teachers.

I agree with P2, and I can look at the opposite end of the spectrum. There are occasions when you, you butt heads with a student, and per, personality-wise you just, are, are very rarely going to see eye-to-eye. But on the other ends of the spectrum, you have sometimes that rapport that has gotten too friendly. And you've got the buddy system going on and, and, and too much of the you know crossing the line, crossing the line, and that student is no more engaged sometimes than the one who you know perhaps doesn't like you. So it is that fine line, and it's that finding that respect for each other. You respect me for the job that I'm doing, and I'll respect you for the job that you're doing, and hopefully that helps, that the rapport will help engagement because when you do have a, it's like a fulcrum. You have to get in that middle, that middle spot of the seesaw in order to get the motivation from the students. (P7)

Yeah. They, they weigh a lot on liking the teacher. That's... Do you know what I mean? That's what their lives are about right now, social, being liked, who likes me and who doesn't. (P6)

By encouraging them to move beyond that, and, and to establish a respect with the fact that regardless of whether or not they like the teacher, the teacher has an expertise in the area that they're in that class for, and to respect the expertise. And the two, and if not respect the expertise, respect the fact that they have some years of experience in life that, that child doesn't have then, that you can kind of draw from the, that experience the, the life experiences of someone to learn from, um, so, um, just to reinforce what you said, I, I really agree with that. (P2)

Consistency with the rank order response to focus group interview guide question 11 posed toward the conclusion of the session was apparent for comments shared by P6 and
P11. Although teacher-student rapport was identified as the instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact on student engagement by P3 and P5, these participants did not speak during this part of the discussion. It is probable that P3 and P5 had not formed an opinion by this point.

Group 3 described general effect, teacher-student connections, and safety in conjunction with the impact teacher-student rapport has on student engagement. In the following exchange, it is to be noted that the researcher interjected but once only to hint that P5 had articulated a profound analogy. P4, P5, and P10 responses were consistent with the respective rank order responses to focus group interview guide question 11 posed at the conclusion of the session in which these three participants identified teacher-student rapport as the instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact on student engagement.

I think it's primary. I think it's the number one thing that determines whether or not a student wants to be involved in class, um, and it's just no different that if you had a conversation on the street with someone. If you feel like you have rapport with that person, you want to hear what they have to say. If you were turned off by that person, then you'd completely zone out even though you're kind of nodding your head like you're listening. So it's you know if you like the teacher, not to say that you're best friends, but if you feel like they're looking out for you, in the sense of educationally, you're gonna listen in that class and, and try to participate. (Discussion point made without hesitation by P7)

Um, I... sorry. (P2)

No, go ahead P2. (P7)

I was going to say, um, I definitely agree with what the last participant said. I can't see his number. Um, I think it did, it has a direct impact on student engagement. I look at where I was last year at this time in my 1st year teaching and how nervous I was, how standoffish I was, how I didn't have that rapport with students until later in the year, and how little they seemed to care about the lessons that I was teaching; whereas, this year, being much more comfortable, having a good teacher-student rapport, I feel with most of my classes, um, they're
so much more engaged. And I feel it’s a direct correlation. And it’s def, definitely there. (Discussion point made by a relieved and pleased P2)

Actually I had an experience with a student this year. In the 1st like few weeks of school, he would do bad and say inappropriate things in class and wasn’t the most engaged student, and then somehow we were talking about football in class, and he likes the Jets, and I like the Eagles, so that was our connection instantly. And now, the Eagles are losing a lot, and he’ll come into class you know, Senorita, the Eagles lost, ah, so like we have that connection now. We’ll always just talk about football, and ever since then, he’s been one of the people in class that participate the most. If the class is talking during the warm-up, he’s the one guys come on be quiet, be quiet, so there’s, it definitely helped, you know, he’s done a total 360 in class so... (Discussion point made by a smiling P1 who brought levity to the discussion)

I was gonna agree, sorry... (P4)

No go ahead. (P7)

Um, with P2 briefly. Um, last year was my 1st year teaching, and it felt like until after Christmas, I didn’t get that connection with the kids. And this year, you know it was pretty intentional that I wanted to rectify that, to change that. And, um, it’s just little things. It’s giving pieces of yourself just casually sometimes. Um, and, and not being so businesslike all the time. I mean I, I run a structured classroom, and you, and you have to be structured, but you have to pull back sometimes, and be able to joke here and there, and a lot of them see that reality I guess. (Discussion point made by P4, an active listener)

I think it goes back to what we were talking about with the middle school philosophy, about how we want to teach the whole child. And that, you know, we try and make our learning environment as comfortable, and a place where they can take chances and not feel like they’ll be ridiculed or singled out. And I think that goes right along with when you provide that environment of safety and comfort, um, through giving you know, how pieces of your life, or you know, just having that rapport, I think that’s when most of the engagement, student engagement happens is when they feel they’re in a safe place. And especially, and I’m a special ed. teacher, so I tend to be more, you know, making my students feel happy with being in school and making it a positive place where they find success. And I think they’re tied in very closely. (P6)

When I think about student-teacher rapport, um, I just think the closest correlation to like a sport. I mean if you work with the best coaches in the world motivate, motivate their players. They engage their players. The good players love their coach. They’re put out 100% on the line. When their players don’t love their coach, you can see it. You can see it in their eyes. You can see it in their actions and everything. So I, I mean basically, if I had to put it in one sentence, I would
say that people perform for people they care about. That, that's the whole definition for that. (P5)

You're getting a lot of people shaking their heads in agreement I'm assuming, on what you just captured. (Researcher)

Um, just to go off on that too, I think that P, P5, next to me, that if they're engaged, it's gonna enhance the class so much more too, and also like they feel comfortable cause if you're hearing like a debate or something in class, you divide the class up, in half, and these kids aren't comfortable with saying things out and, in front of their other classmates, they're not gonna say anything. It's gonna be very quiet, very dry. But if they like the class, you know they're really into it, and they have a good rapport with the teacher as well as the other students in the classroom. I think it'll be really effective. (P10)

I also think it's really important we talked about you know how you show that you care about them and care about their success. Um, last year, I was in a different district, but, um, this one student never ever did his homework. For like the 1st whole month of school, never ever, there was not one homework assignment. And then one day he did it, and I made such a big deal like when I was checking homework I said oh my gosh you did your homework! I'm so happy! I feel so proud of you. And ever since that, he was a different kid. He handed in every single homework assignment in every day, and I'd make a big deal of it. And if I didn't, he would be like I did my homework today. Oh, I'm so proud of you. You know, and he was like a different kid once he thought like I cared, I wanted him to do his homework. (Discussion point made by P9, added levity and comfort)

I just wanted to, um, add onto what a lot of people were saying about student rapport, and I do think it's definitely very important, and, um, I just wanted to add that I think each class kind of has its own personality, and, and as a 1st year teacher, it was kind of hard for me to see that, like in the 1st few weeks. And I try to act the same way with all my classes, but I've had like, have little types of my personality for each of my classes, which is kind of interesting. But, um, like some of them would, would talk more and act out more in a certain way while I was still trying to make a good rapport with them. So I kind of changed my techniques a little bit. So it can definitely be a little tricky, I think to find like your right comfort level with the classes. (P3)

I think, ah, as teachers too we have to realize that sometimes we take for granted, we think that these kids go home, and they have good rapport with their parents, they have good rapport with friends, they have good rapport with family. A lot of kids that we teach might not have any rapport with anyone. So when they, when you, when you show like teacher, student-teacher rapport, and they really have that with you, I mean they might feel even closer connected than you would even
imagine because they might not have that when they go home. So they might only feel that between eight o'clock and three o'clock. (P5)

Three themes originated from Group 1’s well-balanced review of teacher-student rapport and its impact to student engagement, general effect, teacher-student connections, and safety. Two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified general effect; two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified teacher-student connections; and two participants (one with 4-8 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified safety.

Group 2 associated two themes, general effect and teacher-student connections, with the impact teacher-student rapport has on student engagement. One participant with 4-8 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified general effect, and five participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience, two with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified teacher-student connections. Noted by the researcher and assistant moderator, the focus on less than positive student behaviors in this dialogue may have led to the somewhat less than positive tenor of the collective interaction.

Extremely fluid and self-sustaining, the Group 3 discussion of the impact teacher-student rapport has on student engagement produced three themes, general effect, teacher-student connections, and safety. Three participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified general effect; five participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified teacher-student connections; and two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching
experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified safety.

Research question 3 - between groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive teacher-student rapport as being the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 6, 6A, and 11 corresponded to research question 3.)

Three themes surfaced across three groups of participants in the discussions regarding teacher-student rapport and the impact to student engagement, general effect, teacher-student connections, and safety. Participant comments did not imply groupthink and reversals were present. Each of the three groups identified general effect and teacher-student connections, and two of the three groups (groups 1 and 3) identified safety. It is to be noted multiple content areas were represented for each theme. Thirteen responses were articulated by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. With 16 of 27 total participants having 1-3 years teaching experience, this high rate of response may be attributed to these teachers prioritizing teacher-student relationships rather than other instructional strategies. The eight responses provided by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience for teacher-student connections further supports this likelihood. Factoring in responses from participants with 4-8 years teaching experience and 9 or more years teaching experience, 22 responses were noted for focus group interview guide question 6. The researcher inferred the significance of this topic to the participants based on this aggregate and the free-flowing nature of the exchanges.

For teacher-student rapport, the researcher's expectations matched the actual participant responses. The findings from focus group interview guide question 11
included 13 of 26 responses identifying teacher-student rapport as being the discussed instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement. Further, 6 of these responses were provided by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. Of the four instructional strategies discussed, teacher-student rapport, classroom management, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, teacher-student rapport accounted for the most total responses and the most responses shared by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience relative to having the most positive impact on student engagement. Based on the discussion point frequencies and content for each theme, general effect, teacher-student connections, and safety, would likely arise if the researcher were to conduct additional focus group sessions.

Research question 4 - within groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tutored grades 7-8 teachers perceive that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport? (Focus group interview guide questions 4, 6, and 6A corresponded to research question 4.)

Group 1 participants addressed focus group interview guide question 6A describing teacher-student connections and safety and an interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport. The easy and relaxed exchange started with continued discussion of themes discovered through focus group interview guide question 6 responses.

Well if I could jump in, I would tell you...I, in my class again, I'm a resource room teacher, and my classes don't get much bigger than 10 or 11, um, but if the children in my class think that you care, if they feel like you care, they generally will jump through hoops for you. They will do just about you know whatever you want them to do, they'll take a shot at doing because they really want to make you happy. They want your praise. They want you, they want to see that satisfaction on your face that they got it, that they did it, and that they're coming, because in my class a lot of the children have you know they're not always the most
successful students in other academic areas, so when they come to resource rooms it's almost like if we can't get them to succeed there, then we're in the wrong business. So our job is to, I think that's where the social-emotional learning comes in. It's, it's you have to have that connection with them, and then they'll reach for you, and, and that comes back to the trust, to the feeling safe, and that's how you can get them to try themselves, to, to go for it, to try and build some self-confidence in themselves. (P3)

Like I say it's, it's not just the small classrooms though because even you know with a class size of like 26, 27, last year 20, um, you still see the same thing. You still see they, they really do wanna do it for ya. They really do you know. They feel like you believe in them. They're right there trying to prove that you're believing in them for a good reason, um, you know and, and not every child, not every day, not every time, but on the whole, I do see that. (P4)

Coinciding with the previous use of the word “pliable,” an instructive remark followed when 27 referenced,

...I'm not sure that I understand the question, but, um, I think children are more likely to allow, allow you to mold them socially or emotionally if they trust you, and if that's what the question means, then if you're, they'll adapt your value system, and be more likely to change in their behavior and grow in their behavior if they value you. So if you have a good rapport with them, then they're going to allow you to mold them and allow them to grow.

Two other participants reinforced a similar mindset. It appeared unusual that P6, school counselor, did not provide a response during this part of the discussion in that school counselors generally focus on social-emotional learning while supporting students.

Again, perhaps P6 preferred to be an active listener prior to sharing in discussion.

I think that your rapport, the student-teacher rapport, um, is directly related to how much of themselves the kids will show to you. If they don't feel safe in your room, if they don't feel like they can take a risk and not be made fun of, or have comments made, or, you know or if they don't feel that you understand them, they're not going to show you who they are truly you know outside of you know little Johnny sitting in the desk. And I don't think that, um, unless that rapport is there, I don't think you can even begin to teach the social-emotional learning of a student because you're not seeing that side of them at all...so... (P2)

I completely agree with, I think of what I was going to say before she said it, was classroom environment, I think goes along with teacher rapport, and if you are the type of teacher where the student feels comfortable from the minute they walk
into the door to the minute that they walk out of your classroom, and they feel comfortable, and you know they don’t have this quote unquote fear while they’re in your classroom, then no matter what kind of rapport as far as teacher student goes, I don’t think that you’re gonna get the social-emotional learning from them. But if you have the two of them in combination with each other, then I think you know social-emotional learning will definitely take place in the classroom. But I think when it comes to social-emotional learning, I think the two coincide and go, go together. (P8)

With regard to the perception that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport, Group 2 participants mentioned an interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport. Specific to the more positive group interaction, three participants commented.

I think it the student feels like they have support, and I don’t even mean like you know, like positive feedback, in the sense of grades. I just mean like social and emotional support, like hey how’s it going, or you know even just a hand on the shoulder, like you know just any kind of reinforcement to let them know even though maybe you’re not doing well academically, like there’s you know I’m here for you, can sometimes turn things around for, for, I’ve seen it happen with a student especially special ed. students. When there’s, you have less kids to look after and that student relies on that CAS teacher to get them through, and sometimes it makes such a big difference. (Discussion point made by P6, a concerned and passionate advocate for students)

...Right, fictitiously, let’s, I said that’s a good answer. When I say for question I who would like to answer, why don’t you give me that answer, so you bring it back to what you want to do, but you say hey you know that teacher really wants, you know, to know about me and really wants me to get into it, and you do it with other students too, and it really, that emotional, and then it just ties right into the teacher rapport because that student feels comfortable with you. They can go to you, and you know like in return, respect will develop. (P5)

Sure. Yup. Um, just the one thing that she mentioned was the interest in a student outside of the academic content area, and, um, I think it’s, it’s obvious to a, to a student when you are interested in more than just how they’re doing in your class. And, ah, you know I think of it as I said going back to middle school philosophy, um, I feel at the middle school, at least this middle school, is designed to involve a teacher in more than just a content area. That is what we have teams for, so that we know what is going on in all of the content areas. And I think that is essential to you, you know our own involvement. I would, I would, never in a million years would I know much about a student if I was not on a team. I wouldn’t have the time to find out the information, and I wouldn’t have, ah, the resources
really, in nearby, to find out that kind of information. Now I have 40 minutes in a
day when information is presented to me; I'm given that time and the resources to
know about a student. Um, I, I just think that it's obvious, when I mean like she
said, she knew about that, she asked him in class the next day. It's the same thing.
If I know about these things and I continue to show an interest, and show them
how their, their life is involved with learning, then that engagement can be
involved. So I'm not exactly sure that's the way I wanted to say it, but that's
okay. Alright, question 7, um, recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting
are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of
each impacts student engagement? (Discussion point made by a grateful P4)

Group 3 maintained fluid and independent discussion for focus group interview
guide question 6A. Responses reflected the sensitive, nurturing, caring, and introspective
nature of the participants throughout the dialogue. As participants reviewed an
interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport and
teacher awareness techniques, it became apparent to the researcher and assistant
moderator that these teachers are advocates for middle school students in their charge. At
one point in the following exchange, the researcher interjected one probing question to
ascertain the perception participants had of the school counselors' viewpoints on this
topic and a few prompts to extend the discussion of teacher-student rapport.

With kids in general, I just don't, they don't really, I don't, they usually don't
have the ability to leave their baggage at the door. I mean that as, as a teacher, you
have to. I mean you, you could have the worst day in the world, but you have to
leave it at the door, and your emotions and everything else. Like ki, kids don't do
that. So I think very important to that, be aware, be able to read people. I mean I, I
can usually look at it, look at people, and I'll look at students and have a pretty
decent idea of what mood they're in, of what, of why, like you know if they're, if
they're feel like they want to talk, if they feel like they've had a bad day, usually
can tell that, and I mean if you're aware of this, you, you see the differences in
them as they walk in day-to-day. (P5)

How do you adjust your practice? (Researcher)

Um, if I feel like a kid had a bad day, I, I mean if he walks in, and, I mean I can
see he's down, I usually I try to throw in a couple things that maybe I know he's
interested in. I pretty much know what my kids are like, what, what they're
interested in. So I might start off with a, anticipatory set that engages them, that
something that might take their mind off of what happened during the day, even if it's for 3 minutes. It's gonna help them. It might snap them out of it for a little bit, depending how severe, I mean how severe the case is. (P5)

I think you have to keep in mind and you said baggage, that these kids come to school with, sometimes it's just amazing that a student is actually sitting in your room and they are there, and they have a backpack with books in it, based on all the things that are going on at home, and you know, I'm not saying I would, um, necessarily, um, accept no homework from the student if it's a constant thing, but sometimes you have to know when to pull back and say you know what he's sitting here and he's reading the book. And maybe he didn't do his study guide questions; whereas, a student who, you know, you know maybe they came from a good environment and, and they maybe don't have as much baggage, you might need that kid a little bit more. You know, you need to put in more effort, or something like that. In addition, you also have to keep in mind these kids are 13 years old and think back to when you were 13 years old, um, and the things that you did, and the way you approached school so all of that, really, um, you have to keep that in mind when you're trying to develop relationships with students. I might not find that successful when students don't do their homework. But maybe when they go home, Mom isn't home. Dad doesn't live with them. You know, Grandma is in and out. There's so many different types of things. (F2)

I think aside from, ah, just the home life of a student, I think you have to be aware of also kids that don't fit in. ah, emotionally, socially, also. I know I always try to look out for that because some of those kids get lost in the shuffle a lot of times. Um, yes, know just this last quarter I had much duty, and you can really see it in the cafeteria, you know who doesn't fit in, who has trouble socializing with their peers. And I think that if you reach out to those kids, um, sometimes they get too attached, and I have to you know put 'em in their place so to speak, but you know, at least they don't so much as care as someone else is looking out for them. And you can kind of hopefully guide their process in fitting in with, with the rest of the crew so to speak. (P7)

And I think it's for those students it's important to highlight their strengths, something positive. There is a student that I have now who, he does not fit in, in school. He's, um, but he's a great artist, and so you know, if there's ever an opportunity to highlight that I try to do my best to do that. And the students actually, you know they get really excited when they saw his work. Wow, he did that. So just highlighting the positive... (P4)

Also, if you're a well-liked teacher, if, if the students in general, I mean the whole, most of them, if they like you, and they respect you, and then you stow like, um, P7 said. When you show that maybe a kid that generally does not fit in, if you show them the respect, if you, if you make just sly comments like I, that's awesome. You know it's cool. Well, I think just, just little things like I think sometimes rubs off on other students. It doesn't mean that they're gonna call them
at home and say come hang out on, on Friday with me, but a lot of times it takes, it takes attention away, and the, the tension that they’re all feeling in the morning. I think is eliminates that sometimes. I can see that in class. (P5)

Yeah. I totally agree. If maybe not highlighting them, that’s not what I meant, but those side…. (P4)

Yeah. Uh-huh. (P5)

Kind of just casually, and like you said, it really does rub off in the classroom atmosphere changes I think. I think if they hear that, from you. (P4)

To what extent, and we don’t have, unless I’m incorrect on this, your backgrounds, we don’t have any counselors here. To what extent do the two school counselors work in this area, social and emotional learning? Do you think they see it from a different, through a different lens than you all do as teachers? How would they, predict how they would respond to these questions, this question in particular, teacher-student rapport and social and emotional learning.

(Researcher)

I think that they, that, um, if I was a counselor, I, then my number one priority would be their emotional well-being. And as a teacher, we also have to take into account the productivity and what they, what they have to do in our classroom. As a counselor, I mean I’ve been in a few different schools, um, from student teaching, my parents were both teachers growing up, I’ve seen a ton of different counselors. Some use both where they care about the purpose, they care about their emotional status. Others don’t really care if they do your work. They don’t care if they do your homework. If that kid is where they want them emotionally, then that’s their job, that they’re in school, that they’re, that they’re at least showing up, they’re, they’re here all day. And I mean that’s really the number one major concern, and some counselors will get upset if you push one of those kids that does have a problem. You really shouldn’t, im, I’m a little sensitive to this. But they will get upset if you affect that emotional well-being. They will get very upset. (P5)

I know that we’re lucky enough in our school that on some teams, I think all teams, meet with the guidance counselor once a week, so that we can discuss how, um, different problems or things that are going on with students, whether academically or emotionally. So we might say like, um, oh this student is, the grades are dropping. Is there anything going on at home? Do you know anything that they might have talked to you about, or even like also emotional things? So, I really like how we have that connection so we can all be on the same page and offer our expertise whether academically or emotionally and socially. (P5)

I think our counselors here are great too, and along with the Child Study Team, being a special ed. teacher, because, ah, my kids you know besides having
academic issues, are very socially immature. Um, a lot of them have emotional problems at home. Um, and I am constantly with our guidance counselor. And you know, she and the psychologist comes in once in awhile and they'll have a social skills group with my kids. And we all do it together. Um, and I think that social-emotional piece is so important, um, especially for my kids who are the outsiders and do get picked on when they're in gym because they have resource room classes all day long, and they are the special ed. kids, and people look at them differently. Um, so as a special ed. teacher, I feel like I am so connected to the guidance counselors and our Child Study Team, um, because of the social issues that come along a lot with special ed. students. That's why I think it's a really important piece. (P6)

What else, having to do with teacher-student rapport, anything? (Researcher)

Well I think we talked about the positive. But I mean if there's an issue where you're not gonna develop a rapport with every student, if it's, you can't, and there are issues, then it will impact the student in a class and the student engagement. Sometimes you just, it doesn't happen. So we have to keep that in mind too. (P2)

Did you all have that experience before? (Researcher)

I've seen negative before with, with someone, not teachers in this school, you know, um, I know a couple teachers my Dad, my Dad taught with his school, which is, we won't mention, ah, they had a lot of negative rapport, ah, like, um, it's fine to be sarcastic and be wry. But they were sarcastic in a devious way, where they would basically pick on kids, and they would instead of having a positive rapport, they would have like kind of like, like side arguments with a lot of animosity, the students would have a lot of animosity toward those teachers. And I mean, you, you could see that from a mile away. And that, that destroys the whole classroom. I mean obviously. (P5)

I think you have that here too. I, I was going to add something. I definitely have seen...definitely...yeah you do, I, it's really unsettling, to be you know, teachers who are out to get kids, or single someone out. Yeah. (P2, P4, P5)

And for the record, none of them are participants here. (Researcher)

But I think it goes on everywhere, sadly. (P6)

Of course it does. I'm just trying to... (P5)

It certainly goes on. We can all think back to our early school careers in high school, and you can remember the teachers who were a little too sarcastic with certain students. And I think that stays with you. I definitely... (P6)
What do you think contributes to that, the erosion of positive rapport, if you had to speculate? (Researcher)

Um, I think it's in some of the cases I've seen. I guess it's just a personality conflict, maybe the kid is you know acts too many questions or is a little nudge, kind of you know antsy, or your, you know a behavior problem, or someone who talks back, I think that erodes, you know maybe the teacher's feelings towards that student. And then in turn, the teacher is at battle with that student, almost like a power struggle. Um, and I've seen it, I've, I've taught emotionally disturbed kids, in a, in my previous district. And when they would go out to the mainstream, it would be a constant power struggle because, um, they would challenge. You know they weren't your typical student that would follow in line. They, they would challenge teachers, and a lot of teachers take that as a threat to their authority. And, ah, I think that can cause tension between the teacher and the student, definitely. (P6)

It only takes 'time. I mean, ah, yeah, I think handling situations that you escalate or deescalate a situation in your classroom can definitely affect the rapport. I mean the kid 13 years old can love you for 6 months, and then 1 time, once instance, it might not be that big of a deal, but you handled it the wrong way, you can become their number one, most hated person in the world. And I mean that would kill any rapport that they have with you, and they'll try to make your classroom a chaotic situation. (P5)

Two themes developed as a result of the Group 1 discussion of focus group interview guide question 6A, teacher-student connections and safety and an interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport. Three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified teacher-student connections and safety, and three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified an interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport.

In the Group 2 discussion of focus group interview guide question 6A, one theme, an interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport, appeared. Three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more
years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified an
interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport.

The Group 3 discussion included two themes for focus group interview guide
question 6A, an interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student
rappor and teacher awareness techniques. Three responses from two participants each
with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified an
interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport, and 11
responses from six participants (five with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8
years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified teacher
awareness techniques.

Research question 4 - between groups comparisons. To what extent do non-
tesured grades 7-8 teachers perceive that a connection exists between social-emotional
learning and teacher-student rapport? (Focus group interview guide questions 4, 6, and
6A corresponded to research question 4.)

Three themes arose across three discussion groups for focus group interview
guide question 6A, teacher-student connections and safety, an interrelationship between
social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport, and teacher awareness techniques.
Extensive and absent support for discussion points negated groupthink. Reversals were
not found. One group (Group 1) identified teacher-student connections and safety; each
of the three groups identified an interrelationship between social-emotional learning and
teacher-student rapport; and one group (Group 3) identified teacher awareness
techniques. Multiple content areas were represented for each theme. Similar response
rates were recorded for focus group interview guide questions 6 and 6A, with 18
responses to question 6A articulated by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. The consistent response rates and responsible tenor of the discussions implied these participants have an understanding that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport and have a sense of urgency in terms of applying that understanding to the middle school learning environment. The combined five responses provided by participants with 4-8 years teaching experience and 9 or more years teaching experience were balanced across the three themes as was the case for focus group interview guide question 6.

For the connection between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport, the researcher’s expectations echoed the actual participant responses. Previously stated, the findings from focus group interview guide questions 6 and 6A were consistent. Mindful of these findings, saturation for an interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport and teacher awareness techniques would potentially occur if the researcher were to conduct more focus group sessions.

*Research question 5 - within groups comparisons.* To what extent do non-teured grades 7-8 teachers perceive clear expectations and goal setting, as part of effective classroom management, as having a positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7, 10, and 11 corresponded to research question 5.)

With respect to focus group interview guide question 7, Group 1 participants revealed both clear expectations and goal setting have a positive impact on student engagement. In an emphatic voice, P4 started the dialogue.

...I was going to say that, um, that’s how you build trust, that’s how you sort of you, you create an atmosphere in your classroom that says this is, this is what’s expected, and if you, you know live up to these expectations these, these
morays, these norms, if you will, then you’re gonna be treated fairly, and the
room is gonna function the way it’s supposed to.

Next, P1 complimented a colleague and agreed with P4. P7 then framed the cognitive and
behavioral aspects of student engagement within the context of question 7.

On a more specific level, um, for like what your expectations are for a particular
day, I think if kids know what you expect them to learn or what you’re hoping
they’re going to learn by the end of the period, I think that they feel like they have
a handle on where they’re, where they need to go. And some kids are afraid they
may not be able to meet your learning expectations, but once they know that this
is the piece you’re working with today, I think that they, they are able to calm
down and feel capable, and if you, they know they’re going to be working on the
same piece for a couple of days in different ways, then they know well if I didn’t
do it today then tomorrow I’ll get to look at differently, and so I think they try
harder. So if they know where you’re going like if this is the unit and this is where
we’re headed, today we’re going to look at it this way, tomorrow we might look
at it this way, I think that they, um, they try harder. They don’t get as scared, and I
think you get more out of them, and I think they learn more because they know
ultimately what you want them to know by the end of whatever you’re discussing.
Um, so on a more specific level, I think that they learn more if you, from a
learning perspective, they know where you’re headed and what you want them to
get out of the lessons.

Sharing her special education perspective, P2 commented.

...I think for students that are very concrete, um, which a lot of the teachers deal
with through dealing with a lot of the special ed. kids, when you set a clear
expectation, the kids are more likely to try and do something; whereas, if you’re
not very clear about what you’re expecting, you’re not clear about the level of
work you’re expecting, what product you’re expecting, the kids tend to not even
try to start anything because they don’t even know where to go.

A shift to goal setting followed with P7’s focus on competition.

As they look at their learning as not competing with someone else across the room
and their learning as what they’re improving themselves then I think they learn
more because they’re more concerned with how can I get better at the rate that I
can get better. Um, if they’re worried about what the other person across the room
is doing who’s maybe 10 times above where they are, then they’re gonna shut
down because there’s no way they can do the same thing that person is doing. But
if they’re setting a personal goal, and it may not be the same goal as someone
else, um, then and they see that goal as attainable, and they set that goal with a
teacher, then they’re going to learn more during the course of the lesson or the
year.
Without probing, cross-content variation presented itself for focus group interview guide question 7.

...We have a hard time getting students to participate. And one of the things that we have to do is have personal goal setting and make it competitive amongst the students, like we have on you know on the walls as far as how many pushups I mean with the teams that we have here, the six teams, you know the the highest thing we did today was, ah, the bleep test. The highest the highest score for the, ah, um, period two was you know 11/7, so period three came in, knew what the, what the record was and used their determination and set goals for themselves individually and as a team to try and beat that 11/7, um, and we, we reward them based upon you know performance and, the, the goals that they set for themselves. So we kind of use it in, ah, ah, little opposite. We use personal goal setting and competitiveness to motivate the kids and get them to participate, um, in our grade subject. (P8)

The researcher did cue a previously noncommittal P6 to respond to the question. "...The question is how it relates to student engagement. Um I, I don’t know,” P6 announced.

Toward the conclusion of this discussion segment, P6 added,

...I just wanted to say something else about what I was saying before and about cause, cause I was trying to you know like work with the question which really talks about how it, it would impact student engagement. And one of the things that, that my experience is, is working with a student from a counseling perspective would be that, um, they’d be much more engaged like we’d have much more student-teacher rapport if, if the goal setting was there and, and established.

Just prior to this response, P2 recognized the importance of utilizing goals to ensure student success.

I taught, um, for the last 2 years a study skills class, and I did a unit with my kids on setting goals as a way to mark how they’re doing in the classes and to really look at specific skills that they need to work on, where setting a long-term goal for a marking period and then setting short, a couple of more short-term goals that we could revisit on a weekly or biweekly basis. If a student I know, a student has trouble focusing in class, you know some of their goals might be related to that, or if a student has trouble with their note taking, some of their goals might be related to that. So when they’re slipping in some of their other classes, when we go back and look at their goals, they are very much able to say you know what, this week I really wasn’t thinking about fact, which is what I teach them about active listening, and you know things like that, and they can use those to really measure
how because the skills I teach, a lot of the skills I teach are related to how to be engaged in the classroom as opposed to just paying attention. How do we pay attention? How do we take notes? How do we listen—those types of things? So those, those goals are very much related to how they’re doing in the classroom.

Um, I don’t know that I do enough of that outside of the study skills class, but, um, I’m probably at fault when I tell them you can’t just do it in the class, in this classroom, it’s got to be in other classrooms too. But, um, in that particular very concrete setting, I was able to see that direct relationship.

In the Group 2 discussion of classroom management, participants highlighted that both clear expectations and goal setting have a positive impact on student engagement.

P5 supported the use of clear expectations.

I, no, I, um, I’m hoping that this goes along with it. I think a good part of any classroom is for the students to know the expectations and the goals for the classroom, is to each day write them on the board. You know not maybe your exact objective, but what the goal, what we would like to cover, the steps we’re going to do, the Do Now, the, the, this page; I mean not a whole detail, just a brief overview. The homework should be on, on the board already when they come in. Just get the students involved and on, a, a path of what they need to follow. You know okay we did this, okay now we’re going to do this. Some students like the structure. It helps build structure in their life, and structure is important in the classroom. If you say okay I think we’re gonna do this today, and just go off, the students are gonna read and see that, if you’re not, you know organized, and if you’re not organized, they’re not gonna be organized.

Once the researcher asked about goal setting, P4 described her implementation of goal setting absent the impact to student engagement. The first of several researcher interjections to reasonably clarify the question ensued. P4 then expanded upon her initial response.

How does it impact student engagement? Got it, okay. Um, definitely there is a positive relationship, and the reason for that is that the student knows what they’re gonna leave the class with. Yes you could teach them a lesson on food, but what does that mean to them? That doesn’t mean anything unless you give it a real-life scenario, real-life situation. If they have what their goals, then they know how to approach every single activity that you ever do, and they also know what positive product they’re gonna get out of it, especially if it’s related to their own goals, which, you, I mean, it’s hard to change the curriculum, but there are always ways that you can find in order to bring their goals back into the, the curriculum. So, when I was looking at them again, some of them are silly, but some of them are
fantastic, and yes maybe food is not in our curriculum, but going to the
supermarket is. So you find a way to positively reinforce their own goals through
your instructional strategies. And when they have the goal, they know the end
results, and it’s easy for them to relate, to engage, to take an interest.

A heartfelt and humble reflection was provided by P5 at the conclusion of the exchange.

This required three or four intermittent prompts from the researcher.

You know well I can talk about but never go to Paris, but for them that’s like way
out there. And, um, and so for me the experience that I’ve had so far with setting
personal goals has been more specific, and generally, it’s either a, like, as a
student, like a learner type of goal, or it’s a specific behavioral goal, or it’s a
specific, um, language point in the unit, and I’ve worked with kids on setting
those specific goals. And it’s been really neat for me to see, um, I have one
student who just like the first half of the first marking period was lost. It’s his 2nd
year of French, but he got lost last year. And so coming into the 2nd year, he’s
more lost, and just was kind of flailing around. And, uh, he broke down into tears
1 day after class, and that was hard for me, but, um, we sat down, and I kind of
broke down for him, you know what are really the important things in this unit,
you know like is it really important that you sit down and like memorize this
vocabulary. Well yeah for the unit, but I can’t do that for you. So, um, I broke
down the concepts that I thought were most important, and I showed him that he
was able to do those specific concepts. And so once he saw that you know okay
I’m not, I don’t need to be overwhelmed by this, I can focus on this one part, um,
he had something to work towards, and that actually now in class there’s a
dramatic difference in his just, his overall like demeanor in class. He doesn’t have
that throw my hands up in the air I’m gonna give up because I can’t do it attitude.
He’ll say I have a question, can you help me on this, you know I need to get this
concept....So, um, for me that personal goal setting I’ve had, yeah, it’s shown a
lot of though that particular student, anyway, positive impact on student
engagement.

For the Group 3 discussion of focus group interview guide question 7, participants
articulated both clear expectations and goal setting have a positive impact on student
engagement. Particularly noteworthy, P7 captured the global view in terms of clear
expectations and established consistency with his response to focus group interview
guide question 11 relative to the discussed instructional strategy with the greatest positive
impact on student engagement.
I, personally, this is my opinion. I like to be, ah, I feel like people like to be, not told what to do, but they like to have structure. I think. And that doesn't mean they're constantly being controlled. It just means that they want some form of organization. And I think that goes from adults down to kids. Um, you know if we went into a faculty room, and there was really no rhyme or reason to what was gonna on, we would be like, what are we doing here? You know we want an agenda. We want to know when things are gonna happen. So, my approach is, have what we're gonna do for the day up every day, and have the objective up every day. And I think that helps because when they sit down and they come in, they know what we're gonna do and what they need to do by the end, by the time they leave. So, that's my opinion on it as far as that goes, but, that reduces I think discipline problems and helps with management.

Four other participants mentioned clear expectations: "Basically, what, um, P7 just said I agree with, um, every day, I have the objective, and I have a list of what the students should do....And it was kind of good to transition then from task to task, and more than just oh we have 30 minutes, let's just sit and talk about our hair and you know what we say on TV, so it's just like..." (P1);

I do the same thing. Like I have a list of everything we're gonna do for the day. I write the objective, and I even for more structure, I even have like the title for each task, so like they know exactly what we're doing. And that helps like keep me on task but also keep them on task because like if we're gonna take notes or do some sample problems, then they know that's not gonna be a half an hour long. So if they're like a little bored, or maybe a little off task, they know it's gonna be over soon, and we're gonna be switching to something else. So it's not always the same thing. So I think it helps them stay interested and fairly on task cause they know we're gonna eventually move to something else, and they know what we're moving to (Discussion point made by P9 similar to Group 1's P3 wheel activity comment),

"I like to include the students like, um, I like to include them in making the expectations and the goals....If, um, as long as, it holds their interest if, if done in a structured way" (Discussion point made by P5 with prompting from the Researcher);

As a teacher, we do a norming process, we do norming procedures, and each class takes at the end of class or what to do when you walk into the room. And we kind of set up the procedures so they know what to do when they get in every classroom. So each teacher would take a different, um, aspect like what to do when, when there's a substitute, what to do when you're absent. And we make them set, um, the procedures that they follow throughout the school, school year.
As far as my own classroom goals, I also have certain expectations and, and the way I want to run my class you know, which I focus on, on the beginning of the year, day in and day out. And it’s just a matter of follow through. Because I started to do that last year, and then I got lax. You just have to stay on top of it. (Discussion point with a positive connotation, made by P2)

Only P6 provided a response pertaining to goal setting.

I did the, um, before any unit that I began, we do the essential questions. Um, and I leave them posted up throughout the whole unit, so we might have five essential questions or whatever, um, unit we’re beginning, and we talk about them, and we, you know I tell them this is, this is what, you should, you should be able to answer these thoroughly by the time we’re done you know. And we visit them every day and see if we can build upon our answers and if we’ve gotten to that yet. And then by the end, they are successful usually but in answering whatever essential questions that I’ve set up for my unit. I find that works pretty well.

Two themes arose from Group 1’s discussion of focus group interview guide question 7. Clear expectations have a positive impact on student engagement; goal setting has a positive impact on student engagement. Four participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified the positive impact clear expectations have on student engagement, and four participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified the positive impact goal setting has on student engagement. The discussion remained well-balanced and was self-sustaining.

Group 2 participants identified two themes in the classroom management discussion. Clear expectations have a positive impact on student engagement; goal setting has a positive impact on student engagement. During this discussion, the researcher interjected 10 times attempting to clarify information and to prompt responses. Even after multiple attempts, few responses were elicited. Those that were provided were fairly
hesitant. However, the sensitive and caring side of those who contributed was evident specific to goal setting. One participant with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified the positive impact clear expectations have on student engagement, and two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified the positive impact goal setting has on student engagement.

For focus group interview guide question 7, two themes were embedded in the less enthusiastic Group 3 discussion. Clear expectations have a positive impact on student engagement; goal setting has a positive impact on student engagement. Five participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified the positive impact clear expectations have on student engagement, and one participant with 4-8 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified the positive impact goal setting has on student engagement.

Research question 5 — between groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive clear expectations and goal setting, as part of effective classroom management, as having a positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7, 10, and 11 corresponded to research question 5.)

Two themes developed across three groups in terms of the participant responses to focus group interview guide question 7. Clear expectations have a positive impact on student engagement; goal setting has a positive impact on student engagement. Unplanned on the researcher's part, the wording of question 7 seemingly structured the participant responses resulting in the categorization of the two themes. Each of the three
groups identified clear expectations and goal setting as having a positive impact on student engagement, and multiple content areas were represented throughout the participant responses. Many of the participants reflected upon experience when making discussion points, thereby negating groupthink. No reversals occurred either, and only Group 3’s P7 identified classroom management, inclusive of clear expectations and goal setting, as the discussed instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact to student engagement for focus group interview guide question 11 denoting classroom management as having a less positive impact to student engagement than the other instructional strategies discussed. Piquing the researcher’s curiosity was the fact that eight participants with 1-3 years teaching experience expressed the positive impact clear expectations have on student engagement as opposed to three participants with 1-3 years teaching experience who expressed the positive impact goal setting has on student engagement. Do these frequencies and the hesitant, less enthusiastic nature of the comments indicate that these participants have a greater understanding of clear expectations than goal setting? Is goal setting an area these participants need assistance from the building principal in? A level of uncertainty exists for this finding with no apparent connection to research question 8 that pertains to classroom observation feedback. The six composite responses from participants with 4-8 years teaching experience and 9 or more years teaching experience equated to a relatively balanced distribution across both themes. If anything, a greater concentration could be found within goal setting.

Actual participant responses to focus group interview guide question 7 were predictable in that the researcher expected a positive impact to student engagement to be
described for both clear expectations and goal setting though the researcher expected a
greater frequency to arise for clear expectations. The literature suggests goal setting is a
strategy utilized by more experienced teachers. Worth mentioning are the patterns
promoting consistency within individual participant responses. As an example, Group 1’s
P7 has now several times related responses to both cognitive and behavioral aspects of
the middle school student. If other focus group sessions were conducted by the
researcher, saturation would probably occur in regard to the positive impact clear
expectations and goal setting have on student engagement. What is difficult to determine
is the frequency for these future findings.

Research question 6—within groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured
grades 7-8 teachers perceive the implementation of authentic learning experiences such
as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning as
having a positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions
5, 8, and 11 corresponded to research question 6.)

The Group 1 participants perceived real-life connections and interdisciplinary
units as having a positive impact on student engagement with respect to authentic
learning experiences. At the onset of the discussion, P9 utilized a practical tone to convey
the value of real-life connections.

...I guess you know making connections to either prior knowledge or to other
things that they’re actively participating in within a week or a reasonable amount
of time, ah, is, um, it impacts so much on student engagement. If you can make
those connections, it draws out that interest, and it makes you want to seek out the
goal even more, so, um and then when it’s being related between all the different
subject areas, they really start to make connections and see their learning as a
whole, as a part of life rather in just the particular subject itself. So it gets them
more engaged because they see how it can actually relate to their way of living.
The researcher then attempted a member check for cross-content variation to which P2 responded with a sensitive and concerned eye toward the inclusion of special education students.

So while we want to include the kids so as not to make them feel like they’re a separate entity within the building, we bring these resource kids in to these... interdisciplinary units where don’t necessarily fit that well, you know during the moment, and I think it sometime for them, it’s so out of place that is has very little effect on their learning and their engagement in the room. I don’t know if you guys would agree with that.

Equally as troubled by the structuring of interdisciplinary units, P3 put the social-emotional well-being of the pre-adolescent learner at the forefront of her response.

I just would like to piggyback on that because I have the same, um, concern. Um, this is the 1st year I’m teaching science, and I wanted so desperately where I was so interested in, um, trying to stay on pace with the other, you know my, my general ed. content teacher. We were doing great, but then we fell behind, and one of the things that troubled me was that some of my kids were taken out to go to a team unit, but I was never told that they had to have completed a certain assignment before they got there. So the kids left, and then they were asked to leave because they hadn’t finished the page or the exercises that they needed to finish in order to get there. So it was very disheartening for both of us because you know in our team environment, when you go back to middle school philosophy, we’re very much into houses and teams and trying to make everybody feel included, that they’re not just stuck in this big school with you know 600 students, and they’re just you know fragmented. Yet when you get a special ed. class or you have a team activity that’s tied to an activity that they haven’t done simply because well, I whether, I should’ve known could’ve known, whether it was my responsibility or not, they left without the right information, and they were asked to leave. They really felt horrible. It really undermined the team effort that the school thinks they’re putting forward, and I’m not sure, I mean there are times that I guess that I think it works, but I think the special ed. kids don’t really feel like they’re part of the team. They want to, but I’m not sure that they really do. And these are the little things that happen that trip them up that make them feel disincluded, and so when we talk about authentic and interdisciplinary units, I try to bring those things in on our own because I don’t want to bring them in and have them feel like, like, ah out like, the fish out of water, because I think it really, I don’t know, I think bringing them in only makes them stick out more than doing it in a classroom and having their own interaction. Ah, so I have mixed feelings about that inter, you know the general ed. population mixes with, with my kids. I’m not clear that I like that.
From a positive standpoint, P5 relayed an experience she recently had in this vein.

Well the same thing recently just happened to me, ah, where I brought my kids into, um, another classroom, and we were not up to what they were learning. But I took it as turning it into something positive that they're going to now go into that classroom, and they're going to learn from the other kids, and then when we come back into my classroom, and when I start that unit on, ah, Athens and Sparta, they will have they'll have a prior knowledge from the other students. So I turned it into a more positive spin because that does happen. So you just have to look at it from the other side when you know it's going to happen, but it's...

Despite P4's admirable and complimentary description of P5's willingness to effectively communicate with her as an in-class support teacher and the inference that interdisciplinary units have a positive impact on student engagement, P4 did not provide enough support in this response to establish consistency with her response to focus group interview guide question 11; whereby, she identified authentic learning experiences as the discussed instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact on student engagement. Maybe P4 placed more importance on the sensitive nature of the dialogue rather than sharing her individual perceptions. Having refocused the participants, the researcher asked the group to be more definitive in terms of the impact authentic learning experiences have on student engagement. Consistent with the response to focus group interview guide question 11, P3 immediately announced, "In, in the ideal world, it would rank at the top." P2 and P5 made these discussion points relative to real-life connections at the conclusion of this part of the discussion, respectively.

I don't, just to, um, I mean revisited a little bit. I kind of approached it from a negative standpoint. I don't think it's always negative. I think it has the potential to be negative, and when it's bad, it's bad. When it's bad, they get sent out of the room, and they feel awful. But when it's good, it's really good, and they feel like they've learned something, and they've gotten to know people. And I think that when it's good, and they can make those connections, and they get to see it in a more real light, or see how this one math concept really goes across the curriculum, and it goes into other areas, I think it's really great for them to make
those ties, and I think they really latch onto the knowledge in that way, um, when they’re given that opportunity.

It’s, it’s like I look at it as a giant force when they can make those connections across the curriculum, especially in special education. I mean they just go. They go far with it. They really, they really attribute it to the everyday world, you know, in their real life, so it’s, it’s great. It’s a great thing.

Group 2’s discussion of focus group interview guide question 8 revealed real-life connections and interdisciplinary units as having a positive impact on student engagement. With vigor, P7 began the discussion. Although P7 did not respond to focus group interview question 11, it is reasonable to assume that P7 may have identified authentic learning experiences as the discussed instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact on student engagement based on this response.

Um, I think the a, there’s a positive relationship between interdisciplinary units and student engagement, cause again when you go back to the concept of working with the whole child, we also have to realize that we’re not learning our content, students aren’t learning in isolation, or, in theory, they shouldn’t be but should be seeing, or, or being coached, coaxed to see that there is a connection among all of the content areas. And some, sometimes we have to point it out to them, and eventually they’ll recognize hey I was talking about this in science class. My son is doing that now. He’s making connections through what’s going on at home and different things, and what he’s learning in school, and it’s, it’s wonderful. I love it. So, and but he’s you know high school level. So at the middle school level, I think that the, the, um, IDUs are, um, important to try to get the child seeing a bigger picture. And from the teaching standpoint, it’s, I feel it’s my responsibility to help push that, and, and encourage that development that seeing the big picture, because they are very self-centered at this age, and very concerned about their own everything. It’s all about me. And, and it’s their age. Do we have to get them to go outside themselves, and see grander pictures of content, and grander pictures of their role in society, and the whole, seeing the whole picture? So I think, um, that implementing IDUs definitely impacts student engagement in a positive way, and then thereby their success in a positive way.

Following P7’s response, P2 offered one of several monologues. This particularly eloquent response established consistency with P2’s response to focus group interview guide question 11 in which she co-identified teacher-student rapport and authentic
learning experiences as the discussed instructional strategies with the greatest positive impact on student engagement.

Um, I'll, I'll have to talk to P3 after the session. Um, but connecting it to outside of school cause school to them I think is very isolated. They, they don't see school as connecting to their life yet. They see it as something they have to go to every day, and they look forward to when they get to leave that building, and then they go, and they continue on with real life, which I think teachers kind of feel that same way too, where it's you know I work to live, I don't live to work, if you've ever heard that expression before. Um, sometimes it's a matter of is this, in this building our life, or is our life what's outside of this building? And how do they connect? Um, being more specific with my subject area, my curriculum is to teach the kids about the mid-18th century, the Renaissance composers, classical composers, so on and so forth, and what I tell, we you know, when I have discussion with the kids about what they're gonna learn, they are are, well are we gonna learn about Bach and Beethoven, all those old guys? And I say no. Those old guys, do they, are they significant in music history? Yes. Are they significant in history, um, and a part of cultural development? Yes. But as far as these kids who are in my classroom are concerned, those old men, they're dead, and they have very little connection to them. But what I show them is that what those old, dead men created, there is, we would not have the music we have today if it wasn't for the music of the past. And what aspects that each one of those composers, what aspect of music they developed in their own time do we still see in music today? The development of the verse chorus format out of the classical period, almost every single song you hear on the radio starts with an introduction. You hear a verse, which tells a story. You hear the chorus. You hear another verse maybe, a bridge, an instrumental break, the chorus, and then some form of ending sequence, or coda. That was developed by Mozart, by Schubert, is the classical time period. You show them a song from that time, and they, they can identifyurally, with their ear, where the chorus is. They don't have to understand the language. They don't have to understand that you know what, what voice part is singing it, but they know this is a part that is repeated the most, without any prompting. They know what the chorus is. Where do we see that in music today? And making that connection to music that they listen to, they all listen to music every day, and making the connection between the music of the past and the things that parallel in music of today, and taking it not just in the classroom of we're learning about Mozart today, and he was born in such and such, and he died on such and such, and this was his life then, but what did he create musically, and how can you see that today still. And learning to appreciate, um, what went into creating that music, not only do they like it or not, but can you appreciate the amount of effort that went into it, which is part of the creating, of developing the whole child, and expanding their musical horizons. I always work to expand their musical horizons, but I want them to be able to see the connection with the stuff that they, you know they put their headphones in some of them the moment they walk out the building, and they get on the bus. And when they listen to their
music, do they listen to it a little more acutely? Do they go oh that's the chorus. Hmm, that part's, that's there for a reason. It has a purpose. What is the purpose of the chorus? And then you know other things with lyric analysis, and the development of lyrics, and lyrics of the music, and all of that is stuff that they listen to and can connect to their outside world, to their life outside of school. And I think it's really important in a positive way to have what you do in the classroom connect to what you do, to what they do outside the classroom.

Unlike the forward approach of P2, P4 remained silent throughout this portion of the discussion, although she had indicated authentic learning experiences to be the discussed instructional strategy having the greatest positive impact on student engagement in her response to focus group interview guide question 11.

In the Group 3 discussion of authentic learning experiences, participants indicated that real-life connections, interdisciplinary units, simulations, and service learning have a positive impact on student engagement. P8 opened the rich dialogue with a description of a social studies activity.

I started having the kids walk around the room as people that were climbing over mountains, and I had one student who, who was the cart and like they had to be bouncing up over like all along these rocks, and you know it was totally spur of the moment thing but just the fact that they're up and being this sort of like nonentity idea out there just really engaged students...I think simulations are things that they can really, um, grasp upon and then they can always reference back and say they have a stake in it almost and really participate then.

This account brought levity to the discussion, and P8 was excited to share. Real-life connections were broached by P2 next.

...When you invite Holocaust victims in to speak about their experiences, it takes on a life of its own....I mean the kids were crying and hugging. They didn't want the survivors to leave, and we didn't want them to leave. And it was such a buzz in the building that day, and it really took it to another level. They really understand how, what it is to be a victim, um, what happens when you're a bystander and things like that. And it really drives the point home.

Part of the self-sustaining discussion, P4 interjected, "...When we get them to actually experience it, and listen, and hear real people telling real stories, I think that was the most
powerful thing, and for the teachers too.” Profound with this remark, P7 captured the importance of extended simulations.

Any time you learn something I think you need to experience it. It’s just like if all you did was practice, and you never competed. It’s like you have to live whatever it is you, you’ve been reading about or taking notes about. So, authentic learning has to be incorporated somehow, or otherwise the student is just gonna black out, you know black out basically.

After seeking clarification from the researcher regarding the use of role play, P5 indicated, “...I do a lot of role playing in health....Role playing is great....I think role playing is definitely important.” The researcher inserted a probing member check to gauge cross-content variation. P5 answered the question shifting his approach from the health classroom to physical education.

Um, basically when I teach gym class, I, I do more of a sports model instead of...it’s not like everyone plays basketball and that person who is not athletic or doesn’t excel as much as the athletic person, what I do with a unit, ah, for people like that, um, that may not excel in the sports side, I’ll have on the side when they’re sitting down they’re actually like journalists. They have to write like a journal entry, on, on like the game that is going on at that point for like 5 minutes. Everyone in the class has to do that. Some kids will act as referees. I have, some kids act as coaches. When we play flag football, there’s one coach that I, it changes. I mean they have different roles, different, um, completely different responsibilities every day. And so I, ah, I mean that’s, that’s the way I teach phys. phys. ed. (P5)

You include options. (Researcher)

A ton of options, I mean I even have a girl that loves cheerleading. We’re doing flag football. I let her be a cheerleader for 10 minutes. I mean anything that engages them. I mean, ah, it is part of the game I mean, you know, you know it’s not like an athletic perk, but, um, I mean they’re there. You watch a football game on TV, there are, there are cheerleaders. And that’s what she wants to be, she, you know it’s definitely oral participation. (P5)

Consistent with the response to focus group interview question 11, P1 made the first of two comments pertaining to the positive impact authentic learning experiences have on student engagement.
...I had to create stations. For one station, I created my own little Mexican bakery, and I had the students, they had to come up to me, and if they wanted to have bread, they needed to speak with me and have a conversation totally in Spanish beforehand, and if they weren't good, you know go back to your seat and work on it. So, they were like this is really hard. Well this is what you're gonna have to do. And then it finally clicked, like oh this is why I was learning Spanish. Now you can tell them that I got it from a bakery in New Jersey, so I didn't have to travel too far. But that's just for Spanish though. I thought it was a good experience for them.

In response to two brief prompts from the researcher, the discussion unfolded as follows with levity and a positive connotation in regard to real-life connections, interdisciplinary units, simulations, and service learning.

Anyone else on the authentic learning? (Researcher)

Even just like something as simple as like a class field trip, somewhere like, I remember when I was in eighth grade we went to Gettysburg. And like I ne, I never remember being like so into history from just like seeing it. You know you have to see, you have to experience it. And I think that basically just goes on with the whole authentic learning when the kids are seeing it, when they're experiencing it, when they're walking around you know visually, and hearing it, that they're gonna become a lot more engaged. And to take them on like a field trip, we live so close to you know either Washington DC, or Philadelphia, or something. If we're talking about the Constitution, then everything about you know 1776 and such, take them to Philadelphia where it all happened. That would be like an eye opening experience for them, for them to be like really into it. (P10)

I think that's really, that's a good point like, ah, if you experience like I mean field trips, things like that, I would love to take like, ed., I would love to organize a class trip far like, um, a tour of the Special Olympics, or like, um, or like Junior Special Olympics, and have the kids actually see that hands-on, like first-hand. I mean I know they'll have a completely different opinion of, of, of those like events. I, I would love to do that. (P5)

We do that with a simple community visit. We, we study community as the first unit, and we talk about what makes up the community [name of community], and they all say well there's a lot of older people here. There are so many 55 and older communities. And we talk about the my, myths and misconceptions they have, of those people. Then we take them out to Assisted Living, the 55 and older communities, and the nursing home at [name] Care Center. And they go, and they ask them all these questions about their lives. And they go in, and they're really hesitant, and they come out, and they're like that was the greatest experience. So
you can do something simple like that, and it really shows you the value of each member of the community and what you can learn from them. (P2)

And as I’m listening to everybody, I’m just thinking all authentic learning does create community within your classroom too, from, um, what P8 was saying in the very beginning. They still say remember when he was the cart you know, and all of the students will have a role in it and might have that name for a few weeks, but if you know, fine, and it makes them remember that knowledge, and it cement[s] is kind of a thing. (P1)

I just wanted to add on about, um, interdisciplinary units, which that really wasn’t brought up a whole lot. Um, I know a team that I’m on, we are kind of in the middle of our, our IDUs, and, um, our kickoff date like every single class is doing something with wreaths, and even though you hear some comments oh wreaths again, like, it, you can see that it’s in every single class, and you can do like, like, um, brief literature or mathematician wreaths, or I can do that in Spanish or, um, like it was just tied in, and I think it made them important. It was important for them to see that like you can tie almost any subject to any other subject. And that’s why we do, like IDUs, and things like that. (F3)

What about service learning? In addition to what one of the other participants mentioned, about the trips, maybe it’s a combination, viewed as a combination of some of these, is there any other service learning experience that you work on with the kids too? (Researcher)

What does your team do? (P2)

We’re just taking a field trip to the Old... (P7)

No, the one that’s coming up in December, kind of could be service learning. (P2)

I wish I knew what that was. Oh, I’m sorry, Well... (P7)

I don’t know if it was service learning, but it was still helping the community I guess. (P2)

Yes. Well it’s, ah, the one you’re talking about is the coat drive, the coat drive we’re doing. It’s like, ah, you can get extra credit for bringing in coats for the, well I think it’s the homeless. I should know all about this coat drive we’re doing, but I’m not really giving out the extra credit. Yeah. (P7)

Well, I, I, I do the Builder’s Club, which is a service learning organization. Um, and I mean it’s not my class. It’s just an after school activity, but, um you know definitely we go to the Care Centers. And we, um, collected cans for, um, for Thanksgiving. And we collected toiletries for abused women and children to drop off at a shelter. Um, and you definitely see the students, um, into it, and feeling
like they're making a difference. And that, you know, especially we talk about kids that are 13 and 14 who believe they are the center of the universe, when they realize there's a world around you, and you know not everybody gives the way you do. And you know we see a community, we help each other, and, um, I think the Builder's Club is, um, it's, and it's a great bunch of kids. And I think they really, um, enjoy it and really feel like they're making a difference in their community. And I think that's really important. (P6)

For Group 1, two themes arose with respect to responses to focus group interview guide question 8, real-life connections and interdisciplinary units have a positive impact on student engagement. The exchange included participants prompting one another, and the collective interaction was well-balanced and professional. Three participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, two with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified real-life connections as having a positive impact on student engagement, and three participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, two with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified interdisciplinary units as having a positive impact on student engagement.

Relative to the limited responses provided by Group 2 participants, two themes were revealed for focus group interview guide question 8, real-life connections and interdisciplinary units have a positive impact on student engagement. Over a period of 7 minutes, one participant with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified real-life connections as having a positive impact on student engagement, and one participant with 9 or more years teaching experience identified interdisciplinary units as having a positive impact on student engagement. Only one content area was represented in this participant's response. The researcher and assistant moderator, to some extent, understood P2's monologue to deter other participants from responding. P2
was on the verge of officially dominating the discussion, although her comments were insightful and topical.

Four themes generated from Group 3’s discussion of authentic learning experiences, real-life connections, simulations, service learning, and interdisciplinary units have a positive impact on student engagement. As participants eagerly cued one another in this lengthy dialogue, every participant responded with the exception of P9. The researcher considered this to be unusual, given that P9 identified authentic learning experiences as the discussed instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact on student engagement in conjunction with focus group interview guide question 11. Again, participant compassion and sensitivity to the pre-adolescent learner was evident in the responses. Two participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified real-life connections as having a positive impact on student engagement; six participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified simulations as having a positive impact on student engagement; three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified service learning as having a positive impact on student engagement; and one participant with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified interdisciplinary units as having a positive impact on student engagement.

Research question 6 – between groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning as having a positive impact on student engagement?
Four themes were mentioned across three groups for authentic learning experiences, real-life connections, simulations, service learning, and interdisciplinary units have a positive impact on student engagement. Each of the three groups identified real-life connections and interdisciplinary units as having a positive impact on student engagement; one group (Group 3) identified simulations as having a positive impact on student engagement; and one group (Group 3) identified service learning as having a positive impact on student engagement. Multiple content areas were represented in practically every theme for every group. The researcher did not detect groupthink or reversals. Of interest to the researcher, each group discussed focus group interview guide question 8 for a respectable 7-10 minutes even though the total number of responses varied significantly from group to group with six responses for Group 1, two responses for Group 2, and 13 responses for Group 3. This finding confirmed the researcher’s initial interpretation of each group’s collective interaction. Further, based on the passionate and sensitive tenor of each group, it is sensible that authentic learning experiences had the second highest response rate for focus group interview guide question 11 with six participants indicating authentic learning experiences was the discussed instructional strategy having the greatest positive impact on student engagement. Five of those 6 responses were from participants with 1-3 years teaching experience, a narrow second to the six responses from participants with 1-3 years teaching experience identifying teacher-student rapport as the instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact to student engagement. The margin becomes even closer when considering the total number
of discussion points for participants with 1-3 years teaching experience, 13 for teacher-student rapport and 14 for authentic learning experiences.

For focus group interview guide questions 8, patterns, expectancies, and saturation were informative. Across the groups, participants revisited the concept of educating the whole child, the purposeful nature of academic learning, the delicate developmental stage of the pre-adolescent learner, and the value of connections. Moreover, participants in each group continued to reference curricula more specifically and frequently in addressing the impact of authentic learning experiences on student engagement. Perplexing to the researcher, problem-based learning was not mentioned by any participant, and simulations accounted for the most responses from participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. With academic teaming embedded in participant responses, the researcher anticipated participants with 1-3 years teaching experience would focus responses on interdisciplinary units in that the team structure lends itself to the development of interdisciplinary units. Perhaps participants with fewer years of experience take an individual approach to establishing their craft prior to branching out to the academic team to create interdisciplinary units. In the event the researcher were to conduct additional focus groups, a positive impact to student engagement would potentially be discovered for authentic learning experiences, more so for real-life connections and interdisciplinary units unless it holds true that teachers with fewer years of experience designate more time for individual development than group development.

In the latter instance, simulations would reach saturation.

*Research question 7 – within groups comparisons.* To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive student-centered instruction, which is considered to be a
balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, as having a positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 9, and 11 corresponded to research question 7.)

Group 1 participants mentioned differentiated instruction and readiness levels in addition to an interdependent relationship among multiple instructional strategies in response to focus group interview question 9. For each, a positive impact on student engagement was noted. Losing momentum, P8 described an approach to meeting varying student readiness levels. Following P8's opening statements, the researcher cued this participant to identify the type of impact this approach has on student engagement.

"...I tend to do more of the group work rather than, ah um group work and, um, project work, project-based activities to involve these students with, um, some of the higher students in the classroom, so that they can kind of, may you know help along the students. And, and, um, ah, ah, I guess, I don't know, that I don't know what the right word to use is, um, ah, I guess to kind of ease them into the topic that we're, that we're talking about because a lot of times it's, it's difficult for them to understand the whole concept, and like in the class that I have now, I have 9 special ed. students in my one classroom out of 22 kids. So for me to, to spend special, you know with nine kids during the activity, it's rather difficult for me to do cause I lose time getting to the classroom from, from the locker room after I'm done on duty from the period before, so I'm already down to like 35 minutes rather than 40. So I tend to do group work and put them with, I group them myself. I don't allow them to, sometimes I do, but depending on the activity, I tend to group them myself and put them with the higher students in the classroom, and have them kind of work with each other. And it's been so far for the most part pretty much effective cause I don't want them to feel as if they're never raising their hand, and they're never getting involved in the classroom because they're not understanding, or they don't want to you know answer something incorrectly, and, and be you know shadowed away from being involved in the classroom. (P8)

So what you're saying is the student-centered approach, primarily with group work, is having a positive impact on student engagement in the overall class? (Researcher)

Yes. (P8)
Okay, I'm, I'm just clearing it. (Researcher)

Yes, I'm just having a hard time explaining it, but.... (P8)

Yes, well you know I'm just clearing it for myself. That's all. P4, were you going to add something? (Researcher)

P4 proceeded to explore the interdependent relationship among teacher-student rapport, classroom management, and student-centered instruction.

Yeah. I was going to say that, um, the, the student-centered approach keeps the students engaged. But I think that, um, some of the other things we talked about are, are kind of like first, that base one has to be established first. There has to be the rapport. There has to be the trust. There has to be an understanding of what's expected, and then you, you, you build on that with all your student-centered, um, activities, be it cooperative learning or even lecture, cause some students really love that believe it or not. And, um, that's how you keep momentum. It's not, you can't not, you can't be missing trust. You can't be missing goals. You can't be missing clear expectations and think you're gonna throw a couple good group projects at them, and they're gonna be signed up. You know what I'm saying? I mean, you guys, know what I'm saying?... You can't just give 'em a, a killer IDU, is not going to keep 'em engaged every day.

In response, P3 acknowledged the interdependent relationship and stated the approach was to begin with student-centered instruction and lead to teacher-student rapport and classroom management.

Ah, I'm actually going to say, I guess, the opposite of what P4 said because I think that you can use, if you use the balance of the cooperative learning, and the group work, and the discussion, etc., you can give them I think, I think, that tells them that you're interested in reaching them, and I think it helps you to set the expectation, and helps them understand that they can trust you, and you can get your classroom management in line because the teach, the children are engaged. When they're engaged, you have fewer disciplinary problems because they don't have time. They're busy doing what they want to do, and they're having a great time. So I would kind of say that while I, I don't agree, I don't disagree with P4, but I, I just see it as when you, ah, I see these components as, as almost being the center of the well, somehow or other, I see the relationship being that when you give them these activities, you get to set the expectation level because they understand that this activity isn't the regular lecture that they just have to sit there and listen to, and that this is the reason for the increased expectation. So it's sort of like if you want to have fun and do good things, the classroom management piece has to be there. They have to take that responsibility on themselves, and
then you find out that they tend to keep everybody in line because if any one person or group acts out or is in some way uncooperative, then they know that there’s the likelihood that they won’t get to do that again. So I think that all of those components make a stew of son that play off each other at different times and different manners.

Neither P2 nor P9 commented during this segment of the discussion, even though both of these participants referred to a student-centered environment in responses to focus group interview guide question 4. In addition, P7 and P9 identified student-centered instruction as the discussed instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact on student engagement in focus group interview guide question 11 and were silent for this portion of the discussion. Perchance this was a time issue given the extensive and keen discussion points made by P8, P3, and P4.

In the Group 2 discussion of student-centered instruction, participants reviewed an interdependent relationship among multiple instructional strategies and the importance for teachers to vary instruction. A positive impact on student engagement was communicated for each. Aware of the limited time remaining, participant responses were thorough and insightful yet limited in number. The researcher prompted responses as needed for this worthwhile exchange.

Alright, um, ah, just, there’s one thing that P3 said before about personal goals, how her student had a personal goal, and she set it for him. And I think that ties in with, ah, with differentiated instruction. When each student has their own personal goal, and they know what that personal goal is, I think it’s easier for them to engage because there’s not just this one overarching, overwhelming class goal. You have your own personal goal. And along with that, combined with multiple intelligence theory, um, I’m just thinking of an activity that I’ll be doing next week where the students will have stations, and each group, which we’ll, I’ll put them heterogeneously together, um, will have their own, um, their own goal so they establish what areas of the content they need to, they have to work on, even before they know what the stations are, they will establish okay I need help in this area. I cannot, this, not to get too specific, but I cannot, um, tell people where things are in a room. I need help doing that. Okay? Or, I cannot, am, it, you know describe what my mother’s like for the life of me. I need help doing that.
Um, so when each student has a personal goal and they have different ways of attaining that goal, you know visually, ah, auditory, whatever, by whatever means, I think it’s easier for them to engage because they know that you’ve provided them with multiple ways of getting to that goal. And therefore, when you enable them, provide them with scaffolding, provide them with the tools to attain their goals, they will appreciate that and be able, have that interest instead of shutting down when a goal is overwhelming, so… (P4)

P5? (Researcher)

Yeah, um, in, when I was in college, I was inundated with all these different instructional strategies and what you need to do in your classroom, and I found the best thing that works in my classroom to increase student engagement is discussion. I might prompt a question, a student answers, and then the other one says well how about the, how about this, or, and actually you see the students going back and forth, maybe a debate thing, no you’re wrong, and I think this cause of why, and that really, you know gets the gears moving and moves onto a plaza, and it might totally be off of what I wanted to do for that lesson, but I’m seeing understanding, and that understanding is leading to more engage, engagement, and more confidence in a student to want to be involved in the class, and have a voice in it. And that’s really important to me. And so that’s what the discussion, but also differentiated instruction is something that’s very big here at [name of school]. Using it in the resource room and the ICS classes has shown, um, let other students shine and opportunities for student engagement giving them an opportunity to, for me to differentiate a certain context essential question that they want us to answer, but having different activities and different ways to approach it really, am, you know bring student, brings students alive. So I think discussion and, and differentiated instruction seem to work best for, in my situation. (P5)

P6, maybe just to round this out, you mentioned before you’d had, what I think it was at the time when we were talking about teacher-student rapport, kids will tell you lots of things about teachers in classrooms, so you have a pulse of the building…. (Researcher)

Uh-huh. I think, um…. (P6)

What do kids like about these? What do they like? What do they complain about or? (Researcher)

It varies, which is what makes this so hard to answer. It’s such an individual thing. Um, you know I have kids who say there’s way too much writing, too much you know essay writing, focus on writing, and too much projects, too many projects, too many different, like you know things have gone so far beyond just basic learning, or basic memorizing, basic skills, um, that I think it’s hard for, I think they’re pulled in so many different directions, and obviously we’re
differentiating, in all those different methods that we use, finding each and every kid, so it’s like years ago when it was like lecturing and memorization, and that didn’t apply to everybody, but neither does this. It’s sort of like, I don’t know, like a big, I don’t know, enigma. I think kids don’t know, like in some ways, what’s goin’ on, and it’s made, the, it’s made learning I think better in some ways but more difficult for them today. I think they’re under tremendous amount of stress and pressure, um, you know just trying to keep up, you know, and now factor in the transition, and all the stuff that’s going on, especially in seventh grade, and then you factor in all of this, it’s just, it’s, it’s a lot. It’s a lot for them, not necessarily bad, but just, it’s different, and it’s going to take time for them to get used to it. So I don’t know I, I think, um, how it impacts student engagement, and, um, I think in some ways, um, you know kids will benefit from it. I think it’s very important, like a lot of what P5 said and P4, um, making it real and doing classroom discussion, and involving them in it. I think is better than maybe some of the other things. I don’t know. (Discussion point made by a frustrated and concerned P6, an advocate for pre-adolescent learners)

For focus group interview guide question 9, Group 3 participants recognized the importance for teachers to vary instruction, a need for teachers to address learning styles, and differentiated instruction and readiness levels. The disjointed responses for each indicated a positive impact on student engagement. Common to most responses, the novice status of the participants permeated the discussion. Eight of 10 participants with 1-3 years teaching experience engaged in the discussion providing quite a few direct references to college coursework and implied references to school-based professional development initiatives. It was clear to the assistant moderator and researcher that the majority of responses was theoretical and had not been applied to the classroom as intended. Amidst these pieces, the group momentum waned. To that end, three successive remarks related to the importance for teachers to vary instruction served as the starting point for the discussion of student-centered instruction.

Um, I think being a 1st year teacher, especially and just coming fresh out of school learning about all these techniques, I really try even though it can be, um, like a struggle some time, to bring in like a lot of different, um, learning strategies and like every single week, like 1 day I’ll do like partner share, 1 day they’ll do group work, 1 day I’ll have to lecture cause, cause they learn a new topic. And I think
that really helps the kids because they'll come in the classroom and be like what are we doing today, and are we going to be in groups, are, are we doing this, like they come in without like oh, I'm gonna take out my homework and do notes every single day, so that they kind of, it's spontaneous. And they kind of definitely do, they want to see what we're doing different than we did the other day. (P3)

And I think as teachers, sometimes you can get caught up in negativity that, ah, they're just throwing another theory at us, which in a lot of ways is true, but all it is, is just change it up. No one wants the same thing every day. You know, if, if you kind of look through the I don't know educational terminology that, that's always put at you, all it is, is just something different every day, not necessarily every day, but within your instruction, than that's, you know in human nature. People want to see things in different ways, so you know you just have to be conscious of that. That's all. (Discussion point made by P7 with a practical inflection)

I think it's also important, like everyone was just saying, like vary your instruction, and, um, like meet the needs of your different students. You know everyone like learns in a different way. And maybe like if we lecture 1 day and you know teach a really new concept, one student might not get it, but maybe the next day, if we do like cooperative learning or we do some like hands-on manipulatives. Maybe they'll get it then. So it's also important to like change it up, not just to keep them interested, but also to try to help them learn it in a different way. (P9)

The researcher attempted to narrow the focus of the discussion by inquiring as to which technique, cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, the participants had the most familiarity with. P5 answered "discussion" and proceeded to review this technique as a tool to assess teaching in the health and physical education classrooms. P8 and P10 conferred having attended the same college.

We went to the same college. It was very, everything was Howard Gardner....Howard Gardner. Howard Gardner. Yeah. Um, so it's very focused on that, so I actually took time out of the beginning of the year to you know give my students tests based on how there are different multiple intelligences and how they can utilize them in the classroom, and, um, I, I do a lot of group work and changing things up, and, ah, a lot of times in the group work I'm like alright if you remember back to when you took the MI test and if you were more of a visual person, you might be the go to person for this part of the project. If you're a
verbal person, you’re gonna be the go to person for this part of the project. To really bring it back and make them focus on okay you know I can use this to you know help myself learn, to help the other students in the class learn... I know in college we got a lot of MT theory. (Discussion point made by P8, brought levity)

And what’s the impact to student engagement? Does it make a difference?
(Researcher)

I think it does because I think when, um, they realize that they have a stake in their learning, that okay if you know this, if there’s a lecture going on, I might not get it because I’m more of a visual learner, so I can use this to help me understand it better. Or I might ask a question that’ll you know if I see a picture, that will, that might help me. So I think if they understand how they learn, I think they’ll be more engaged and in tune with the subject matter. (P8)

Once P8 shared these responses, P6 clarified multiple intelligence theory for a curious P7 focusing on learning style strengths. An unknowingly confused P10 transitioned the discussion to differentiated instruction. A medley of misunderstandings, topical coverage, and an unanswered researcher question ensued.

And I think that’s so import, or so important why the teacher needs to do differentiated instruction. If the teacher is not differentiating instruction, the kids aren’t gonna learn. You know cause if you’re teaching one way the entire time, and you’re just speaking it, you’re not writing notes on the board, you’re not showing pictures, or you’re not you know doing anything out of the seat, all those learners aren’t going to be able to learn the content as well except for the auditory, the only ones that are gonna understand the content you know. The kinesthetic learners, they’re out. The visual learners, they’re out. And so, you differentiate it a lot more students will be able to learn it, and therefore, be engaged in it. (P10)

With so many students, I mean I know I teach that way anyway. We have a visual; it’s not a movie. Maybe I’m just gonna pop it on the projector and sit there. I mean you, you might have it up there, you might if they have a sheet, you’re, you’re gonna talk about it while, while they’re reading the sheet, while they’re looking at the, the visual at the same time. So I mean I think even naturally I, I think as teachers that we would teach that way even if we didn’t think of it as, as a theory. (P5)

It’s also important to know, I think we’ve all touched on it, but what type of learners you have in your classroom and what type of learner you are because you have to step out of your comfort zone and remember that you know, and, I focused a lot on Formatt results, and you know I’m a two, I’m proud to say it, but, um, you know, and I know that I have creative kids in the class, and I have, I
know I have the hands-on kids in the class, so it’s important that you know most of my things focus on all those different learners. And grouping them so that the ones, twos, threes, and fours are all together, so that everyone can have you know a certain, especially with the projects, that focus on everyone’s strength, but really step out of your own comfort zone. You know, and that’s important. (P2)

P9, you said maybe a word maybe we can come back to in response...levels...levels, and looking at different levels of, of learners. Has there been anything as far as your exposure to differentiated instruction that has an impact on student engagement based on how you adjust your activities, your instruction, according to different levels of learners you have in your class? (Researcher)

Well, I, I, I am very fortunate. I know I’m the only one here. I have three students in my class, so a lot of times I’ll have three different lesson plans because their levels are so varied, um, and I think another thing to think about is not just their levels but you know their readiness for certain topics. Um, cause I do a pretest for everything I do in language arts because I feel like if they have it there’s no reason for me to reteach it. You know if they have a complete understanding of what is a verb, then I don’t have to teach that to that student. They can move on; whereas, another student struggles with verbs. Therefore, I focus on them. So I think it’s, um, not just their levels but their readiness for the topic at hand. I think that’s really important when you’re looking at differentiation, personally. (P6)

I think something real important too is for teachers, um, when we’re talking about differentiated learning, we’re always worried about how the students that may not get, get the topic that we’re talking about they may not get it as much as the person that, that understands it completely, but I think what we do a lot of times with that is that we’ll end up not challenging that student that’s here at, as much as we can. And this student obviously will get, will get a little bored with the topic. I mean what, what I’ve found in my, my health classes is that I even with the seventh grade I teach a nutrition unit that’s extremely complex, like it’s not out of the book, it’s actually probably at a high school level. And I did it on purpose cause I wanted to see how the students would react. And the kids that were, that I know were lower level, lower level learners even though they don’t, they don’t ace, they don’t go through the test and fly through it, they definitely struggle, but by me pushing them to that extent, they learned so much more than, than I would have, than I would have imagined that they even could. I mean even, and, ah, like I said cross-curricular math. I mean a lot of different situations they actually get it. They get, they get, they get a lot. They’re gonna mess up half of it because I push them, and I, um, I, I wasn’t tentative to teach to the lo, to the lower part. I just taught to, to a higher part and differentiated my learning toward them during the class. (P5)
Two themes emerged from the Group 1 discussion of student-centered instruction, differentiated instruction and readiness levels and an interdependent relationship among multiple instructional strategies each having a positive impact on student engagement. One participant with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified differentiated instruction and readiness levels as having a positive impact on student engagement, and two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified an interdependent relationship among multiple instructional strategies as having a positive impact on student engagement.

For Group 2, two themes developed from the discussion of focus group interview guide question 9, an interdependent relationship among multiple instructional strategies and the importance for teachers to vary instruction with each having a positive impact on student engagement. One participant with 1-3 years teaching experience representing one content area identified an interdependent relationship among multiple instructional strategies as having a positive impact on student engagement, and two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified the importance for teachers to vary instruction as having a positive impact on student engagement.

In the Group 3 discussion of student-centered instruction, three themes surfaced, the importance for teachers to vary instruction, a need for teachers to address learning styles, and differentiated instruction and readiness levels each having a positive impact on student engagement. Three participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified the importance for teachers to vary
instruction as having a positive impact on student engagement; three participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified a need for teachers to address learning styles as having a positive impact on student engagement; and three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified differentiated instruction and readiness levels as having a positive impact on student engagement.

*Research question 7 – between groups comparisons.* To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive student-centered instruction, which is considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, as having a positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 9, and 11 corresponded to research question 7.)

Four themes were discovered across three groups pertaining to focus group interview guide question 9, an interdependent relationship among multiple instructional strategies, differentiated instruction and readiness levels, the importance for teachers to vary instruction, and a need for teachers to address learning styles. Participants stated that each theme had a positive impact on student engagement. Two groups (groups 1 and 2) identified an interdependent relationship among multiple instructional strategies as having a positive impact on student engagement; two groups (groups 1 and 3) identified differentiated instruction and readiness levels as having a positive impact on student engagement; two groups (groups 2 and 3) identified the importance for teachers to vary instruction as having a positive impact on student engagement; and one group (Group 3) identified a need for teachers to address learning styles as having a positive impact on
student engagement. Multiple content areas were represented for nearly every response for every theme. Groupthink and reversals were not apparent. In fact, the collective interaction from each group seemed less forthcoming, comfortable, and fluid than the earlier discussion segments. The researcher and assistant moderator presumed the reason for this to be the participants' anticipation of question 10 as many eyes anxiously wandered ahead to this section on the focus group interview guide. This aside, 12 of 16 participants with 1-3 years teaching experience responded to focus group interview guide question 9 with a balanced distribution across the four themes. Despite this moderate to high response rate and the Group 2 P5 remark about a school-wide focus on differentiated instruction, the researcher inferred from the tentative nature and composition of the responses that the participants with 1-3 years teaching experience did not have an understanding of how to implement differentiated instruction. Either the term differentiation was misused, or a theoretical explanation was offered. Only one participant with 4-8 years teaching experience appeared to have a grasp of differentiated instruction, and only three participants with more than 3 years of teaching experience provided responses for question 9. Essentially, focus group interview guide question 9 was probably overwhelming in scope for the participants making it difficult for the researcher to develop a response to research question 7. Oddly enough, student-centered instruction had the second highest response rate for focus group interview guide question 11 with six participants indicating student-centered instruction was the discussed instructional strategy having the greatest positive impact on student engagement. Three of those 6 responses were from participants with 1-3 years teaching experience.
As with other focus group interview guide questions, question 9 pertaining to student-centered instruction offered valuable insight into the perceptions of participants. What initially appeared to be thoughtful responses by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience for earlier focus group interview guide questions now raises a flag for the researcher. To what extent are participants with 1-3 years teaching experience promoting what teachers should do in accordance with dictums arising from recent professional development experiences, such as the school’s daily professional development period and college coursework, without having a true understanding of what they are perceiving as best practices? Along this continuum, the researcher expected group work, cooperative learning, and the application of technology to be mentioned by at least one participant during the discussions. This was not the case. Again, the expansiveness of focus group interview guide question 9 may have contributed to the absence of such responses. For the same reason, the researcher cannot determine if saturation would occur for additional focus groups other than to assume the overall impact of student-centered instruction on student engagement would be deemed a positive one by future participants.

Research question 8 — within groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement as being related to classroom management skills? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7, and 10 corresponded to research question 8.)

Group 1 participants discussed a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written), the classroom observation process as a tool for growth, nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process, and the
benefits of announced/unannounced classroom observations for focus group interview guide question 10. It is clear from the discussion highlights that the participants who offered responses did not directly answer focus group interview guide question 10 though researcher cues and humor were interspersed throughout the exchange.

Um, I think that we had discussed much earlier on in the questions what is student engagement, and I think that a lot of times because not just the building principal, but anyone who comes in to observe you, only sees 1 snapshot in 180 frames, doesn’t know that the kid who’s sitting up and paying attention is actually engaged because the day before he had his head down on the desk, and while he wasn’t necessarily raising his hand and participating in that manner, every now and then you go in, and the principal or whoever, will say well so and so wasn’t, wasn’t engaged, wasn’t participating, and they don’t it’s not always taken into consideration that they don’t know what that student is like, or on the whole. Do you understand?... (P2)

Right, because we know our students, because we spend so much time with them. I might know that that student is engaged because they are not doodling, and they are watching, and their head is up; whereas, someone who comes in just for a, a brief moment doesn’t know that that is what engagement looks like for that student, and can misread it as well because they weren’t answering questions or asking questions, that they weren’t engaged. (P2)

What would you, based on your point having to do with it just being a snapshot in time, what would, what would be helpful as far as student engagement and just feedback you get?... (Researcher)

I think at the post saying so and so was acting unengaged or didn’t seem interested in the lesson or didn’t seem to be participatory in the lesson, asking about that student on a regular basis is, and how they were that day as compared to other days, as opposed to just saying they weren’t engaged, what for that student that was engagement. (P2)

Maybe the observation should be more of a question and answer. Maybe it should be more of a dialogue rather than a one-sided snapshot like P2 suggested. Ah, perhaps it should be, um, a dialogue between the administrator and the teacher, or the person being evaluated, as to so how would you rate student engagement today, why would you rate it that way, what did you see today that you may or may not see on a regular basis. If that’s what they’re looking for, then it’s not that that information is unavailable. They just have to solicit it. Now granted that’s more time consuming, and I’m not quite sure how that would, or where that would, appear on, on a, on a observation report, or even how it would be included.
But at some point, if they want to know about student engagement, the person who would be best able to judge that should be the teacher. (P3)

Can I add to what she said? Um, it’s almost like after you’re observed, cause I think that you have a great idea, that you should sit down for 5 or 10 minutes with the administrator who is observing you, where it’s like a, a quick rap up on the observation. How did it go today? Was the typical? You know, um...I noticed this kid in the back sleeping. Oh yeah, well you know...Oh really? That’s what that kid is all about.... (P4)

I think that’s a really good idea. Um, what P4 was, ah, saying about, um, I think that if there’s, and we can’t do a dialogue, maybe some sort of write-up. We’ll know if they could give us a form if they’re leaving the room, or put a form in our box. Do you think the lesson went well...yes, ne, yes, no...really quick write it up, and then give it to your supervisor, just, um, to and, and so before they do the write-up. (P5)

Actually they did this in the district I was in. Ah, they would sit in your class and then they wouldn’t necessarily be able to see you right after your class, but you had an almost, or as an immediate follow-up as possible, post conference, I mean, post observation conference. And it was just meant to be this little informal, how did it go. Did you like it? What would you change? Talk to me about...whatever their talking points were. And it was just a conversation. Then they would write their comments, and then we were brought, brought back in to get the written evaluation where he would discuss what he saw, what we had to say, because he, the, the assessment program there recognized that on any given day it may or may not be a routine day. And I think that it did give us a certain respect for the administration because it wasn’t like I said, that it, it said to us, we’re aware that this is only 1 shot out of 180. Tell us what you see. Tell me what you see. Tell me what you liked. Tell me what you didn’t like. Did you try something new? What do I need to know in order to look at this and think of this in a...in a critical manner...and not necessarily critical meaning bad, but to do critical thinking about this. How do I think about this? And I think that it was very well-received by the teachers in the district. I mean we liked our building principal a great deal because he really seemed interested in our own personal growth, and the observations weren’t meant necessarily to be critical. They were meant to be growth tools. (P3)

I think I had the perfect person coming in....He did ask me what I thought of it, and you know whatever, and, um, it was very worthwhile. But it was immediate, and he had written down all these notes, and he gave those to me. This is, um, a less formal interview or observation then I, I would now be getting, I guess from our principal. But it was great, and I, I wasn’t as fearful as I thought I would be because he said to me, it’s about helping you to become a better teacher. So I appreciated that.... (P1)
I haven’t been observed here yet at all, so, um, but I do, I do want to say that it interesting, you can have sometimes the, a really great lesson. If somebody’s going to gauge your lesson by how the children are responding to it, it’s not always terribly accurate because I can do the same lesson in different classes, and it works really well in two classes, and for some reason, just doesn’t work as well in another class. So you have to kind of wonder. It’s sort of a crapshoot depending upon when someone’s coming in to see your lesson. You feel real concerned. It’s like the snapshot issue that you could have. So hopefully they’re looking at the lesson plan and looking at what the children are doing besides how they’re responding to it, because it could just be those kids on that particular day not responding, where maybe if it had been the day before, or they would have responded. And sometimes it is a crapshoot as to, in the same day, different kids how they’re going to respond to a lesson, and sometimes I’ll let somebody think that fifth, sixth is going to respond great, and my eighth, ninth isn’t. And it’s the opposite way around, and, and there’s so way to, in another words, I don’t think, maybe there’s something I need to learn, but I see it as there’s no way to figure it out so, so that snapshot issue is, is a problem. I see a lot of teachers talking when they see Jeff walking around with his, ah, white pad, and, and everybody is nervous because he’s coming in because there always is that that thing where you really, is you don’t know what’s going to happen in, in any room in any given day really, and, um, so it’s just, it’s just an interesting... But it’s that snapshot issue I guess. They only see a little piece on a particular day. (P7)

I don’t know who mentioned it, but somebody had mentioned that, ah, that it’s, it’s an opp, opportunity to have the experience be like a learning experience. Ah. may, maybe it was you, P1, about it being a learning experience. (P6)

Well that’s what he said. (P1)

Right, but, but if it’s, it’s looked upon as like a partnership with the administrator, like, like you’re partnering with that administrator, to really, for growth and development, you know like in training and development, and as a teacher and as a human being, right, it could be a like a great opportunity. You know it could. But if it’s, you know, but like, you know, everybody like a human being, is like, ohhh, you know the police are there. Did I do something wrong? It’s like, you know, like it’s like, a normal like human response kind of a thing. (P6)

You know you make a great point because especially non-tenured teachers, you, they want us to, to improve, to do better. So why make it a surprise visit? Like I know I would say the, um, the social studies supervisor sets up a meeting for a pre-conference. What’s your lesson going to be about? So you have a lesson plan? Okay great. So what should I expect to see? And then you have a post conference, um, you know, versus somebody just, okay are you in here today? Oh, have a seat. Let me find you a copy of my lesson plan. You know it just throws you right off the pace of, uh, your today’s statement, everything you’re going to talk about in your anticipatory set, because you’re now scrambling up
there. Where's that lesson plan that I have to hand that person? Because I don't know about you guys, but I don't carry my lesson plans from room to room when I teach because I know what my lesson plan is for the day, and I also know that I'm gonna have to maybe adjust a couple things depending on the group of kids I have in any given room. So why does it have to be, why does it have to be a, um, surprise?... (P4)

I had this experience, and, ah, I am really well-planned for the day after teacher's convention this year because, because the day after teacher's convention, Monday, and I'm sick, I'm doing this lesson that is, it's, it's an evaluation lesson off of the brand new curriculum. No one's ever taught it before, and we have no clue how it's gonna go, and in comes the guy with the white pad, and sits down, and goes do you have a lesson plan, and I'm like well, ah, here it is, and you know, I'm not even in my own room. I'm in someone else's room cause that's where I taught first period, and I'm like well this is great, first period on a Monday after teacher's convention. I will never have a tougher evaluation time slot in my career I'm sure. But I said to my husband, I am so well-planned for this Monday after teacher's convention. I'm gonna be bummed if I don't see the white pad in my room cause I'm ready to roll with something that's more tested and true. You know so it was great. I didn't get a bad evaluation, but I was, I felt uncomfortable because I didn't feel like I was my best. (P4)

Let me tell you that I was so surprised by that visit that I got that he actually got up and left because I was babbling in the front of the room. I was like, ah, ah, ah, and I'm like well, I guess I said, okay wait a minute, okay let me start over, and he said I'll come back, I mean, because I couldn't speak. (P3)

Um, two things...I've seen both sides, where they come to you and ask you what lesson you would like to be observed in. I actually have to say I prefer, my feeling is I prefer the surprise visit because I will have anxiety for weeks knowing that the principal, or vice principal, or whoever is coming in to visit, and, um.... (P5)

You know what our vice principal does. I'm sorry to cut you off. But because I've been observed this year so far, and you know [name of staff member] comes in. She sits down in my classroom, and I'm like, oh are you here today? She's like, yeah I was looking at your lesson plans, cause you know how you submit the week coming, I was looking at your lesson plans, and this lesson looked really interesting, and I wanted to see how you taught it. So she has done her homework before she surprised me, and she has basically said to me in that one statement that she valued my planning, and she wanted to see my execution, and it put me so at ease, like okay cool, I can get up here and perform my execution now cause she knows what's coming. I don't have to try and communicate to her why my anticipatory set looks like this and what my procedures have to do with what I'm trying to accomplish in my closure because she's seen it. And so I thought that that sort of surprised me. That's fine. But maybe look at my plan in advance before you surprise me. (P4)
I don’t know. I, I like it, my, I like the surprise. (P5)

Can I just say one thing about the surprise? (P8)

I just want to get one thing in, one little thing, and after you know the anxiety of the observation and what not, if it does go bad, I always say to myself they know what’s going on in the building. (P9)

Right. (P8)

They know that it could just be that day, and cause they, they walk around. They see, and they know that we’re good teachers. So I, I say that to myself, and it helps. So if you need me to say that to you I will. (P5)

I, I think that, ah, I see, ah, I, I don’t feel one way strongly about it than, than the other. But I just think that, that the surprise factor is so much more realistic than, than the okay I’m coming to plan, I’m coming in and planning on sitting in on your lesson, which there’s nothing wrong with that, but I just think that, and I look at it is more of, more of a perspective from the students, that you go through your day on a daily basis, whether you’re a teacher, whether you’re a you know a business person, that you’re gonna come through obstacles every day, and whether it be something that takes away your focus from teaching, whether it be an administrator coming in and sitting in on your lesson, whether it be something that happens with a student, whether it be you getting a personal phone call, something that happens in your personal life, and you know over the intercom, of you know, um, P9, you have, ah, ah, personal phone call or, and you know it’s an emergency. You’re, you’re dealt with things every day on a daily basis, and that’s what makes you learn to, to you know go down that lane, and, and, and focus on what you’re trying to do rather than you know going by, a, um, um, a set plan. But I just, I don’t feel one way strongly about it than the other. I just look at it as the surprising as, you know what, it is what it is. You gotta deal with it. If it happens, you, you deal with it, and it, just treat it as if something happened like a student doing something, you know dramatic or something, in your classroom. And of course 22 students are now, or whatever your class size is, is going to be completely focused rather than one just being, you, so, um, I, it kind of throws them off too. You know what I mean? Like, oh, um, but it throws them off into you know their own state as well when they see somebody sitting in the back of the classroom, so… (P8)

I agree with that to a certain extent, but for me, and I can’t speak for anybody else, not all of the people that observe me, but some of them, like the one that comes in with the white pad, makes me very nervous. And I am not myself when they’re there because it’s such a shock when I have an idea of when they’re coming. You don’t have to tell me you’re coming on December 14th, or whatever, but if I know you’re thinking about coming eventually and I can mentally rap my brain around that someone’s coming in to observe me, I’m not going to do
anything differently. I’m not, I’m not going to teach one way because someone’s not there and a different way because someone is there, because, the, none of us sitting here are those kind of teachers, but it just, I don’t think that they get an accurate picture from me because I get nervous. It makes me nervous, and I just…. (P2)

Well we heard about the babbling before. (Researcher)

I have had that. I have had a piece of paper in my hand and a piece of paper trying to put it on the board, and I couldn’t get it off of the board and…. (P2)

In the Group 2 discussion of the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement, a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written), the classroom observation process as a tool for growth, and nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process were mentioned. Giving the impression she had been neglected by the principal, P2 opened the discussion with a monologue addressing focus group interview guide question 10 as it was intended to be asked. It is to be noted this participant was the only participant in the study who did so. P2 indicated a need for feedback in regard to the implementation of differentiated instruction.

I feel there’s a lot of talk about, and justified talk, about differentiated instruction for students. I think absolutely without a doubt each child learns in a different way. For me, I struggle very, very much with the fact that I have children for 36 days, 36 if I’m lucky. And, it’s hard to try and get through the information that I need to get through and meet all the children’s needs. And as soon as I start to get a feel for them, which I got better at getting a feel for them more quickly, I feel like it would really be helpful to sit down with someone and go is this really differentiated. What can I do to make this better in the amount of time? Let’s be realistic about the amount of time that I have with these kids. Am I doing everything that I can do for these kids? And I don’t feel that, I don’t know if that’s the role, or if as a 1st year teacher, your mentor is supposed to take on that role, um, I know my mentor was a computer teacher. Okay, as a music teacher, a computer teacher can only do so much, and can only offer so much insight. And especially with regards to the differentiated instruction, I would love it, if after an observation, to sit down and have an extended conversation, take a look at either the particular unit or lesson that was observed, and say take a look at it as a whole, not just the individual day that was observed, but as a whole, what are you
doing from beginning to end. What aspect was this particular lesson, and are you doing everything you can do, and give suggestions as to what could be better to differentiate. What's an activity with something, almost as a brainstorming. Um, I know that I would find that really helpful, and I know that I struggle with it cause I'm the only person in my subject area besides, um, another teacher who is not here in the building, and, and though he and I collaborate some, we think very differently, and we have different perspectives on what is differentiated. Um, and so I would really enjoy sitting down with a building principal, um, or someone who is well-versed in differentiated instruction to, to see what can I do to engage my students more, um, am I doing everything I can or is there more that I can do, um, so that students are more engaged and getting more out of what I'm doing in the classroom. I find it difficult based on the time constraints, um, some people think that that's a valid reason and excuse, some people don't, um, the time constraints. So that's what I think and feel would be most helpful after a classroom observation about student engagement.

A range of pitfalls for the classroom observation process were communicated in terms of the remaining discussion.

I think the problem with observation, and even when we watched the video clip, um, one of the things that we were saying was there was no communication other than a letter written to her. This is how it's going to be. So there was no room for discussion. But I do feel, um, being here, this is my 3rd year, um, and seeing that non-tenured teachers get observed 3 times in a year, and tenured only once, um, makes a difference, because, um, I think as non-tenured individuals, we put so much pressure on ourselves, on those observations. And here's the thing. You can't be on every day, 24-7, in that magnitude that I think it's perceived by non-tenured teachers to be what you have to be doing every day. Do you know what I mean? Like it can't all be magnificent every day. It just doesn't work that way. And I think people are led to believe that that's how it has to be and... so in some ways I think it's like a farce. I just think, and it's my opinion, I think in a lot of ways it's a waste of time, valuable time, when instead you could be conversing and learning, and you know what I mean, and all that pressure and that feeling, a magnificent teacher is going to be magnificent whether or not they get observed, I feel. So I just, I don't know, there's something just very, uh, about an observation, very negative. (Discussion point made passionately by P6)

There's a lot of pressure, and I mean I know personally, I knew I was getting observed before November 30th, and I was freakin' out since September 7th, until the day it happened, thinking of them to come, and am I differentiating. Am I improving right, and for me closing is, is a thing, wrapping the lesson up, making sure that my students are leaving the classroom knowing one thing that P2 mentioned before, like being able to grasp, grasp something, that's something I'm trying to work on cause you have only 40 minutes then they go. And not being on a team is hard because you see your students once, then they go off, and I don't
have a team to go to and say well how was he in fifth period. (Discussion point made with a worried tone by P5)

I don’t have a team either, and I’m in a, I’m in a worse position than you are because I’m strictly in-class support, which is making me, um, partially because I’m not feeling well, but I’m kind of silent because a lot of the strategies and everything, I just have to go with the flow of the content area teacher. (P11)

How do you feel about this process? (Researcher)

Um, well I haven’t been observed yet. But I, it certainly would be helpful, any feedback is always helpful to me. It helps to make you better at what you do, and more effective. So I, I appreciate any feedback, and certainly if it was anything negative, um, I would do whatever I could to change it. (P11)

I think non-tenured teachers are just looking for nothing but feedback, nothing but help, you know it’s, I’ve seen, I teach social studies personally, and I have a, a great interest in social studies and teaching it, but when I converse with other soc, regular social studies teachers, they’re in such a different level of how they can approach their students, and I feel as if I’m not maybe giving my kids enough cause I see these other people, and I’m like oh my gosh, I, I sometimes I just can’t do in my class cause, they’re, it’s, it’s so hard to, to go with the flow of school when, it’s feedback, it’s important. (P5)

To go with the flow of the school and the flow of the classroom… (P11)

Yeah. (P5)

Very established, well 2 out of 3 very established teachers have their 20-30 years of experience, and I’m coming in, and you know just trying to…. (P11)

Yeah, it also depends on the teacher for you two sure because there are some, um, being I’m a, I’m fairly good friends with an ICS teacher, and it really is dependent upon the classroom teacher, whether or not the ICS teacher takes on the role of a co-teaching or whether or not your…. (P2)

Well it depends on your knowledge of the subject area. (P11)

Absolutely. (P2)


But I mean now being in the math class, I mean it’s totally not related to the subject, but just even getting feedback from that, even though I hated it back then, I have such an appreciation for it now, and I look at it in such a different way as
being in the teacher role. I get it now, like I love it. I’m thinking about getting my Masters in math now. You know, it’s, it’s a totally different, but again, I like the feedback more than 3 times a year. (Discussion point made with an excited tenor by P5)

Huh? (P11)

Just to jump in, P4 and P3, if you want to just chimie, chimie in or add anything for this just for maybe a minute, briefly, so we can round out with the last question. You don’t have to. (Researcher)

Yeah, well, no, um, yeah, okay. I just, ah, I want to say that the most helpful learning experience as far as observations are concerned was, um, in college, when my sup, you know my, ah, actual college teacher would come to observe me because it was, it was a true learning process. And that’s what I feel like observation should be about, not so much are you doing your job correctly, but how can you learn from maybe it’s your mistakes, but how can you even learn from what you’re doing correctly, and how often you should do it. And so I like that format because it wasn’t a format of being a true learning process. Right now they come in, they watch you. They tell you what you’re doing wrong. You have to fix it. Yeah that’s kind of a learning process, but it shouldn’t be that way. I like...I want.... (Discussion point made by P4 who appears to be complaining)

You want, while we’re preaching differentiated instruction for us to do to our students, but then what about us as students, living, human breathing adult students? Shouldn’t we have differentiated instruction as well? Our professional development is reading and watching videos and answering questions. How differentiated is that? (Discussion point made by P2 who appears to be complaining)

So, the, the format that it took on that I would love to see be replicated in this school district is actually, the, it’s gonna be like the third observation that I have here, and it’s one that I am most looking forward to, it’s from my content area special, the K through 12 supervisor. What they’re gonna do is, they’ll, they will receive my lesson plan for that period, for that time. They’re gonna read it, give me feedback on it before the, the, a, actual lesson is done, then they will come in and observe the lesson, and then afterwards, even, even more feedback how did the lesson actually go. Did you make the adjustments? Were they good adjustments? Was, was the lesson better for it? So, when in college, I would send her my lesson plans. She would look over all of them. You know ask me questions. Well how can you incorporate authentic text into that lesson on Thursday? How can you, um, address products, practices, and perspectives when you are talking about this culture lesson? They, she would give me questions so that I could look at my lesson plans and improve them. (P4)

And there was a dialogue.... (Researcher)
There was a dialogue, continual dialogue, continual dialogue, so... I knew that it's hard for a vice principal or principal to do that, but I mean it would be wonderful if you could have that. I could send my lesson plans in, and then get them back, and have questions like how could you have done this lesson differently, or even like more specifically, how could you include this. How could you differentiate this? Maybe this is a good idea for differentiating this lesson. And then, you know they can come in and see how your lessons have evolved from their feedback. So that's what, ideally my situation. I would love to see that, and I know that it's difficult, and there's no time for it, but that, I feel like is the best way for me to learn as a person how to be a better teacher, so that format. If, I'll write it out for you if you want. (P4)

For focus group interview guide question 10, Group 3 participants reviewed a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written), the classroom observation process as a tool for growth, nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process, and the benefits of announced/unannounced classroom observations. Multiple research probes were unsuccessful in eliciting participant responses to the intended question. A light-hearted tone was apparent, and P2 and P7 drew essential conclusions in the discussion segment perhaps due to greater life experience than other participants.

I think a direct response, I mean for me personally I mean if, if I get observed then I get, I get feedback on it. I want to know exactly what you think I can improve in, where you think I can improve, and cut out the fluffy words. And you don't really need to build my confidence, like I mean some people I mean, I can, I can understand why some people you handle everyone differently as an administrator, but I think if an administrator knows their teachers and knows their, knows, knows who's in their building, then like me personally, you can just tell me straight out what I need to do better, what I've, I've done well, so I continue to do what I've done well, and I'll work on what I need to do better. Then I can work in that structured environment. There's too many fluffy words a lot of times, with, um, well you could think do, you could think about doing this, or, or why don't you just do this. (P5)

Let me ask you a question. (Researcher)
Go ahead. (P5)
Is it, when you say fluffy, just so I, it's clear in my mind, do you mean fluffy in the sense of the actual recommendation, I'll use that word, or do you mean fluffy in the language that's used on the document? (Researcher)

The language that's, the language that's used on the document. Instead of just directly saying this is what I, I would like to see next time, it seems like it, um, it's, it's written so it doesn't hurt anyone's feelings. A lot of times as a teacher, like it might not so, so it basically doesn't pierce right through the teacher. It, it's put in a nice way. And, and that's fine. I mean that, that's fine, but it's just a lot of extra words that, that might you know might hide the meaning of what, what the person's trying to say, what the administrator is saying to say. I had a four page, ah, when I had, um, [name of staff member] come in, he's excellent. I mean I love [name of staff member]. And he, he write, I mean I had four pages of, of notes. And really out of that I could have condensed that to a paragraph and a half. (P5)

This is the staff developer? (Researcher)

Yes. And he's excellent. I mean, he has, I mean his job is also to build our confidence as 1st year teachers. I know that. So I mean I know that. I'm new. I can see that. (P5)

I actually prefer, um, I had the same person observe me, and I like all the things written out because I know some people, like for specific example like, when you were walking into the heart of the room with this student. Oh, like I know some people might not like that, but I need to remember the specific things that I did. Instead of saying, oh well you could do classroom management better. Like I'd be like I don't know what that means. So, um, I don't think I really like specifics, even if they're some are good, and some are bad. You need improvement specifically in this. Good. That really helps me. (P3)

Sp, specifics are important, definitely. I think I agree with that completely. Specifics are important. Just to the point through. Yeah. (P5)

He's a staff developer so it's a different format... (P2)

Absolutely. (P5)

Than you're gonna get from your school administrators. You're gonna get something that that's a little bit more, you know areas that need improvement, that kind of thing. And it's meant to be constructive. So there are, there are going to be a little fluff in there because it's supposed to be, you know it's not meant to bring you down. And some people have a hard time with constructive criticism. Some have a lot, um, but the other thing that I was gonna say is that for me I think the hardest thing is, and, and it's not because of my nerves, cause I'm okay with observations, whether you pop in, or you don't pop in. But I think a pre-conference is a great thing. And I know time-wise, it doesn't always happen here.
But it’s almost as if it’s safe to say they need to know what’s going on in that classroom. Maybe those kids are not doing well with group work, so you pull back, and it’s an individual project, and then your administrator says well you know it would be better in a group environment. So there’s some information they need to know about each particular class before they come in. With, with our curriculum supervisor, we do, do a pre-conference. You can lay that all out on the table. Oh, this one has some class management issues lately, so you know I’m, I’m structuring the lesson this way. And see how it goes. I would’ve preferred to do it this way. You know they just pop in, and you know they don’t have all that background information about what’s going on in that particular class. And I know that it can’t be done overall, so maybe they weren’t that engaged because something happened the day before. You know that kind of information I think is important to get out with your administrator. I don’t want to say that after the fact, but it’s already down on paper. And I know you’re signing it to say that you know you received the observation, not necessarily that you agree with everything. Okay, I said my piece. (P2)

Oh, I agree with you definitely, just to say what you did the week before, like what has led up to this. They walk into your room, and you might be at the end of something, just be able to explain well I’m coming from...this is what we’ve done, ah, the whole week before, and now we’re here you know. (P6)

Yeah. I think the pop ins... Yeah. I think the pop ins, ah, the way I look at it is, is they want to catch you, not that they want to catch you, but they want to see what, how you act on an every day basis. If they hired you, i think that that’s, that’s kind of a, maybe they don’t, they don’t trust that you’re doing the same thing every single day, if you, you meet with them, they know that you’re gonna prepare an exceptional lesson. But if they keep you around, and they, they hired you in the school, I think to, to ah, do observation, finish what you know, when they’re coming in. I mean they could pop in whenever they want to see if you’re actually following up with that day-to-day. But I mean when they actually write their real observation, I, I, I would think a pre-conference would be, would be an excellent idea. (P5)

I, I taught last year in a school district where it’s like with your supervisor here. You sit down the day before, several days before, you do a pre-conference. And I agree with what everyone said, the positives are they know exactly where you are. They know what the class is like. But on the other side of the coin, I really think it’s authentic observation. There’s no show. This is how you are. This is how you react. It’s like you can’t script how the game’s gonna unfold. So you know it’s kinda like let’s see what they have when all the stakes are, are there. And believe me, if it’s a formal observation, I, I’m like anyone else. You know you want the principal to know what the class is like. But from their perspective, I think it’s a great gauge of how good a teacher you have. (P7)
I think you mix it up. I think that you do... If they’re gonna do four, I think they do two of each. (P5)

Right. (P7)

I don’t think it has to be four pop ins. I, I don’t see the point to that, and if you prove that you can react to a situation twice, then why can’t you actually prepare a lesson and not know that you have a visitor there at least once or twice? I mean maybe split. Yeah. I, I think that that’s… (P5)

And what has the experience been here? Has it been, a, a balance, or a mix of pop in and I’m coming? (Researcher)

Well, ah, I know actually, um, I haven’t been formerly observed yet, but it’s been like coming. It’s looming. On, on the day that it almost happened, it happened to be my worst day of the whole school year so far. I had a bad week. I was running on like 4 hours of sleep, and the Internet wasn’t working. And I was doing a whole Internet lesson, and down the hall comes my administrator. I’m like… and luckily, um, they were nice enough to kind of reschedule, and I would have handled the situation if they hadn’t rescheduled and dealt with it. I think that would’ve been a good learning experience for me. But, um, they were nice enough to say you know I’ll come back when you’re having a better day. You like, you are going to have a breakdown. And I was like yeah. So… (P3)

And that’s probably why it’s better to split instead of just drop in. (P7)

Yeah. So… (P3)

Actually during my student teaching, um, we, my, ah, the head professor had our peers come in and observe as and then sit with us and give us a conference. And, um, I loved it so much. Actually my first job I had asked. I was a 1st year teacher you know right out of college. I had asked my, ah, older special ed. teachers who had been there. I said can you just come in, and from a teacher’s point of view, like tell me if everything I’m doing you know…and that to me, was you know I respect what the administrators say, but to have a peer, um, observe you, tell you what they think, you’re doing right, and what you might need help with. I think that to me was the most valuable. (P6)

And whether you’ve had that experience or not, that P6 identified, as far as the peer coming in to observe you and give you feedback, which one do you feel more comfortable with, a building principal coming in to observe you even if it’s not a, even if it’s not a formal observation, it’s informal, as opposed to a peer coming in? Which one rattles you more? (Researcher)

I think I’d be more comfortable with a peer because, um, like everyone’s been saying, the, the pre-conference idea and everything. Your peers you can talk to
every day and pretty much know what’s going on in your classrooms if you’re having problems, and so even like if you have your mentor come in. I would be more comfortable with that cause they know what you’re going through as opposed to like an administrator who kind of has an idea of what you’re going through but might not know specifics, the problems you’re having. (P3)

What about their roles in your professional lives? Does that impact how you feel about who’s coming in, again in terms of comfort level? In other words, if it’s an informal with the principal, does it still give you that, that feeling or that…. (Researcher)

It’s, it’s your job. (P5)

I mean I haven’t been observed by our building principal yet, but I see him sometimes walk down the hallway, even if I just see him walk down the hall, my heart just stops. I’m like oh no, he’s coming. He didn’t come yet, but either way it still would make me nervous, not totally comfortable. (P1)

I think it’s how well-prepared you are. (P5)

Oh no, go ahead. (P1)

I think it depends on how well-prepared you are too. If, if you feel like you have a real good lesson at hand and you see him walking down, you might want him to come in. You might be hoping that he comes down. If that day you might’ve not prepared as well as you wanted to, you’re like, ah, saved my life. (P5)

I mean going back to, to teaching, we both had the same what’s it professor that would come in and observe us, and he was the nicest guy in the entire world. Like he would tell you so many positives, but even him coming in like once every 2 weeks or something, you’d still get a little bit nervous. You know even though you knew it was gonna go fine, and he was there just to like help you out, to give you some positive feedback and such, though you’d still get a little bit nervous. I won’t be the first to say when I got observed this year I think he told me to relax about 5 times, you know before he actually sat down. You know I was like…but then by the end of the class though, I was fine. I was completely fine. I was you know, and it was that he could have stayed for the rest of the day. I didn’t care. Yeah. You had to get over just the little…. (P1)

That’s what I was gonna say. You get nervous in the beginning, and then when the students are there, and they are looking at you, and you know you’re on. You know it’s like, it just kicks in, instinct, and your lesson’s goin’ great. You’re like oh yeah, this is great keep them…that instinct kicks in it seems like, and you can relax. (P10)
Four themes developed in the Group 1 discussion of the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement, a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written), the classroom observation process as a tool for growth, nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process, and the benefits of announced/unannounced classroom observations. Six participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience, three with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written); three participants each with 9 or more years teaching experience representing multiple content areas identified the classroom observation process as a tool for growth; two participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process; and three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified the benefits of announced/unannounced classroom observations. All but P9 offered a response during this segment of the discussion, and the self-sustaining dialogue was relaxed with levity noted several times. Camaraderie was apparent.

Pertaining to Group 2, three themes emerged in the discussion of focus group interview guide question 10, a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written), the classroom observation process as a tool for growth, and nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process. In the self-sustaining exchange, few researcher prompts were interjected. A less than positive tone was
pervasive as was the case for an earlier portion of the focus group session for Group 2. Eight responses were recorded for five participants (three with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas who identified a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written); three participants (two with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas identified the classroom observation process as a tool for growth; and three participants (one with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience, one with 9 or more years teaching experience) identified nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process.

During the Group 3 discussion of the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement, four themes surfaced, a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written), the classroom observation process as a tool for growth, nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process, and the benefits of announced/unannounced classroom observations. Five responses were recorded for four participants (three with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas who identified a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written); one participant with 1-3 years teaching experience representing one content area identified the classroom observation process as a tool for growth; four responses were recorded for three participants each with 1-3 years teaching experience representing multiple content areas who identified nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process; and six responses were recorded for four participants
(three with 1-3 years teaching experience, one with 4-8 years teaching experience) representing multiple content areas who identified the benefits of announced/unannounced classroom observations. Eight of 10 participants responded, and the self-sustaining discussion was relaxed and contained levity.

Research question 8—between groups comparisons. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement as being related to classroom management skills? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7, and 10 corresponded to research question 8.)

Four themes arose across three groups for focus group interview guide question 10, a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written), the classroom observation process as a tool for growth, nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process, and the benefits of announced/unannounced classroom observations. Each of the three groups identified a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written); each of the three groups identified the classroom observation process as a tool for growth; each of the three groups identified nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process; and two groups (groups 1 and 3) identified the benefits of announced/unannounced classroom observations. Multiple content areas were represented for nearly every response for every theme. Groupthink and reversals were not evident with respect to the 44 participant responses. Twenty-seven of the 44 responses were provided by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience, six from participants with 4-8 years teaching experience, and 11 from participants with 9 or more years teaching experience. There frequencies accounted for the highest rate of
response for each experience category of participants. Other aggregates fell within a 15-30 response range. Only participants with 4-8 years teaching experience reported the same amount of responses for focus group interview guide question 5A. With a total of 42 minutes spent discussing focus group interview guide question 10, it is sensible that such a high frequency would occur across each experience category. What puzzled the researcher, to some extent, was the fact that only one participant actually answered question 10 as it was intended to be asked. Participants seemingly shifted the majority of the discussions to what the principal should do rather than focusing on specific feedback desired relative to student engagement. The assistant moderator and researcher noted that this 42-minute exchange across the groups appeared to be a platform to air concerns about the classroom observation process. At the top of this list by nearly twice the amount of responses as the other three themes was a need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written). Regardless of the oral script shared before the start of the focus group sessions, and the exhaustive attempts by the researcher during the focus group sessions to prevent a wayward platform for question 10, participants simultaneously generalized and personalized the question, making it very difficult for the researcher to extract data pertaining to student engagement. While participants did not fixate on the principal’s evaluation of their performance, improving the processes of teaching and learning was eclipsed by a to do list for the principal. At what point is there a realization that the classroom observation process is a collaborative one in which both the teacher and the principal provide each other with feedback?

In conjunction with this issue, the researcher did anticipate the highest rate of response to be recorded for focus group interview guide question 10 even though it was
the final question for discussion before the summative rank order response presented in question 11. The researcher, however, was extremely surprised by the fact that no participant responses for question 10 corresponded to question 7 (classroom management). Much of the literature reviewed in Chapter II indicated teachers with fewer years experience struggle with classroom management inclusive of clear expectations and goal setting. Although a sense of collegiality was pervasive throughout the discussions marked by levity and self-sustaining exchanges, maybe the participants did not feel comfortable answering question 10 in that it would have been perceived as exposing weaknesses. Nonetheless, saturation would likely occur for each of the four themes if the researcher were to conduct additional focus groups.
Chapter V

Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations

Summary of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine what instructional strategies are perceived by middle school grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers as having the greatest positive impact on student engagement. Do teacher-student rapport and the connection to social-emotional learning have the greatest positive impact according to the focus group participants? An ancillary component of the study was to provide a synthesis of the participant feedback to the principal should this site host wish to utilize these data for professional development purposes. The marriage of these data and site-specific value-added assessments holds promise for systemic renewal.

The purpose of the study was one of several Chapter I sections. Background, statement of the problem, research questions, rationale and theoretical frameworks, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and definitions of terms comprised the other sections. A segue to Chapter II, the problem was described as the combination between the ethical dimension of disengagement as noted in the National Survey of Student Engagement and the unique academic and social-emotional needs of middle school students. In Chapter II, a review of the literature included a historical synopsis of middle school philosophy, the developmental nature of the pre-adolescent learner and multiple student engagement constructs, an overview of instructional strategies that impact student engagement including teacher-student rapport, classroom management, authentic learning, and student-centered instruction, and the connection teacher supervision and the classroom observation process shares with professional development.
The subsequent chapter, Chapter III, was linked to Chapter I in regard to the parameters for the research design. The methodology consisted of an overview, qualitative research design, focus group participant selection, instrument with question overview, jury of experts, focus group setting, data collection, and data analysis. Pertaining to data collection, Appendix A contains a copy of the focus group interview guide, focus group discussion transcripts, written responses to focus group interview guide question 11, and correspondence needed to obtain permission for the study from district and school staff members. The research findings were shared in Chapter IV via descriptive focus group discussion analysis within and between groups for each of the eight research questions articulated in Chapter I. A summary of the research indicative of prior studies (Chapter II) and the focus group research conducted in this study (Chapter IV), conclusions drawn by the researcher from this summary, and recommendations for practice, policy, and further research constitute Chapter V.

Specific to Chapter III, 27 grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers from one suburban New Jersey middle school participated in three focus group sessions and addressed these eight research questions embedded in the focus group interview guide.

1. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers understand what is meant by the terms middle school philosophy and student engagement?

2. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers measure student engagement in the classroom setting by observing student affect, time on task, and level of participation?
3. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive teacher-student rapport as being the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement?

4. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport?

5. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive clear expectations and goal setting, as part of effective classroom management, as having a positive impact on student engagement?

6. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning as having a positive impact on student engagement?

7. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive student-centered instruction, which is considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, as having a positive impact on student engagement?

8. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement as being related to classroom management skills?

Summary of Chapter IV Research Findings

Research question 1. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers understand what is meant by the terms middle school philosophy and student...
engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 4, 5, 5A, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 corresponded to research question 1.)

In addition to the National Middle School Association and Carnegie Council/Task Force descriptors inclusive of Chapter II, Armstrong (2006) provided the framework for middle school philosophy through the cited experiences of Alexander.

In July of 1963, William Alexander, chairman of the department of education at George Peabody College, was on his way to deliver an address at Cornell University on the successes of the junior high school movement when his flight was delayed at LaGuardia Airport in New York City. Because he had nothing else to do while waiting for his flight, he reviewed his speech and decided that it needed rewriting. Starting with the presentation he had planned to give—a fairly conventional talk on junior high school—he used the several-hour layover to write a new speech that called for substantial reforms in the education of young teens. Criticizing the junior high school format as merely a “junior” version of high school, he suggested changes that would take into consideration the special developmental needs of early adolescence. He argued that there should be a unique institution that would meet those needs: an intermediate or “middle” school between elementary school and high school. The speech that Alexander ultimately gave at Cornell was the beginning of the middle school movement in America (Alexander, 1995)....

The emergence of the middle school movement in the 1960s represented a milestone in the history of Human Development Discourse. This movement recognized that young adolescents are not simply older elementary school students nor younger high school students, but that there are dramatic changes that occur during this time of life requiring a radically different and unique approach to education. Middle school educators understood that the biological event of puberty fundamentally disrupts the relatively smooth development of the elementary school years and has a profound impact upon the cognitive, social, and emotional lives of young teens. In line with this important insight, they saw the need for the provision of special instructional, curricular, and administrative changes in the way that education takes place for kids in early adolescence. Among those changes were the establishment of a mentor relationship between teacher and student, the creation of small communities of learners, and the implementation of a flexible interdisciplinary curriculum that encourages active and personalized learning. (pp. 111-112)

Captured in Chapter IV as research findings for this study, five themes for middle school philosophy were noted across three focus groups. Of the five, a whole child focus
academic teaming, relevant learning, and a student-centered environment dovetailed with
the cited literature. Although participants identified the transition to high school as part of
middle school philosophy, the reviewed literature was contrary to the context for this
finding. Nonetheless, 4 of the 16 responses for participants with 1-3 years teaching
experience reflected transition to high school as part of middle school philosophy.
Academic teaming, synonymous with small learning communities, equated to 7 of the 16
responses being offered by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience.

With respect to the second part of research question 1, six subthemes were
recorded across three focus groups for observed student behavior and teacher approach to
elicit student engagement in Chapter IV of this study. General, specific, and inconsistent
behaviors for students were among those identified for observed student behavior, and
individualizing learning to accommodate varying learning styles, including relevancy,
and incorporating teacher passion were among those identified for teacher approach to
elicit student engagement. Five of 11 responses for participants with 1-3 years teaching
experience coincided with specific observed student behaviors. Only 2 of 11 responses
offered by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience reflected the interpretation of
inconsistent behavior. The 4 of 9 responses (of participants with 1-3 years teaching
experience) for individualizing learning to accommodate varying learning styles were
consistent in that responses to the middle school philosophy part of research question 1
included a whole child focus. The composite findings for the student engagement part of
research question 1 suggested participants with 1-3 years teaching experience mostly
understood the behavioral construct of student engagement.
The Chapman (2003) reference from Chapter I comprised the selected definition of student engagement for this study.

Student engagement has been used to depict students' willingness to participate in routine school activities, such as attending classes, submitting required work, and following teachers' directions in class. . . .

Another definition focuses on more subtle cognitive, behavioral, and affective indicators of student engagement in specific learning tasks. This orientation is reflected well in the definition offered by Skinner & Belmont (1993):

Children who are engaged show sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by a positive emotional tone. They select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest. The opposite of engagement is disaffection. Disaffected children are passive, do not try hard, and give up easily in the face of challenges [they can] be bored, depressed, anxious, or even angry about their presence in the classroom; they can be withdrawn from learning opportunities or even rebellious towards teachers and classmates. (p. 572) (as cited in Chapman, p. 2)

Multiple, interrelated constructs of student engagement were explored in Chapter II as an extension of the Skinner and Belmont definition. Academic, behavioral, cognitive, psychological, and socio-cultural constructs were referred to regarding pre-adolescent stages of development.

"...Stage-environment fit theory suggests behavior, motivation, and mental health are influenced by the fit between the developmental stage of the adolescent and the characteristics of the social environment" (McNeely et al., 2002, p. 118). Wavering (1995) fused the cited work of Bayley, Eichborn, Wadsworth, Roth, Vaisiner, Elkind, George and Lawrence, Secord and Blackman, and Beane, Lipka, and Ludewig to explore the relationship between the social environment and constructivism.

What prompts the subject-infant, child, or adult-to engage in cognitive activities vis-à-vis the environment? Perhaps the most common answer among
psychologists at large is that these actions are motivated by primary drives-hunger, thirst, sex, etc.-or by secondary needs derived from these. Piaget does not deny the role of bodily needs and their derivatives but maintains that the fundamental motive governing intellectual endeavor is of a different sort entirely. His position is simply that there is an intrinsic need for cognitive organs or structures once generated by functioning, to perpetuate themselves by more functioning.

Piaget’s learning theory emphasizes activity, curiosity, flexibility, exploration, and other related areas as substrates of the educational process.

Bayley concisely summarizes the effect of the variables discussed in preceding paragraphs with these remarks:

It becomes evident that the intellectual growth of any given child is a resultant of varied and complex factors. These will include his inherent capacities for growth, both in amount and in rate of progress. They will include the emotional climate in which he grows; whether he is encouraged or discouraged, whether his drive (or ego involvement) is strong in intellectual thought processes or is directed to other aspects of his life field. And they will include the material environment in which he grows; the opportunities for experience and for learning, and the extent to which these opportunities are continuously geared to his capacity to respond and to make use of them. Evidently all of these things are influential in varying amounts for different individuals and for different stages in their growth.

(Eichhorn, 1966, p. 34)

As Wadsworth (1978) reiterated Piaget’s position, “Each and every child constructs the world from his or her actions on it. The child must act on the environment for development to occur. These actions are the raw materials for assimilation and accommodation, and generate the development of mental structures or schemata” (p. 21, italics in original).... Constructivists maintain that students make meaning of the world around them by “constructing stories that fit this world.” (Roth, 1992, p. 308) In other words, individuals weave the events, experiences, and observations of their lives into personalized narratives that make sense and provide meaning. Roth (1992) noted that researchers have found that “this weaving of stories is a function of the context in which it happens and that knowing and doing are inseparably tied together.” (p. 308)

Thus, the social environment—or culture—provides a framework in which the person composes or constructs his or her life. “The developing child and the cultural environment of the child are intrinsically related,” wroteValsiner (1987) in his summary of Vygotsky’s learning theory. “The cultural environment is organized by active members of the culture who belong to the generations older than the child. That environment itself guides the child toward the personal (but socially assisted) invention of culture.” (p. 64) The reality of this cultural framework mandates the consideration of numerous factors that are salient in
understanding adolescent social and emotional development, especially gender, multicultural, and other diversity factors....

The early adolescent is moving toward a sociocentric view of the self-increasingly seeing himself or herself as a part of society as it is organized around roles, rules, requirements, responsibilities, and relationships. At the same time, the egocentrism characteristic of the middle level years means that young adolescents tend to perceive that they are constantly on "center stage." (Elkind, 1967) People around them may be viewed as either an admiring or a fault-finding audience that is as intrigued by what the young adolescent is wearing, saying, or doing as he himself or she herself is.

The tension between egocentrism and sociocentrism is only one of the tensions faced by young adolescents. George and Lawrence (1982) have cataloged numerous competing forces operating in the social and emotional development of early adolescents. For example, the young adolescent wants to conform to peer group standards but at the same time wants to be recognized as unique. He or she may feel a need to seek peer group acceptance, support, and companionship (experiencing the outer world), but at the same time may be introspective and engrossed in experiencing the inner world of "a new emotionality—strong subjective moods, feelings, and sensations." (p. 79) Reaching out to peers as a primary reference group may also compete with "a reluctance to break the long-standing, supporting family relationship." (p. 77) Similarly, the desire to think for oneself and form one's own belief and value system competes with lifelong beliefs handed down from parents....

Second and Backman (1974) listed three aspects of a person's attitude toward himself or herself—the cognitive, the affective, and the behavioral. "The cognitive component represents the content of the self, illustrated by such thoughts as, I am intelligent, honest, sincere, ambitious, tall, strong, overweight, etc., they wrote (p. 524, italics added). How one feels about oneself comprises the affective component, and how one acts toward oneself comprises the third, or behavioral, component"....

In a similar vein, Beane, Lipka, and Ludewig (1980) pointed out three dimensions of self-perception: self-concept ("the description we hold of ourselves based on the roles we play and personal attributes we believe we possess"), self-esteem ("the level of satisfaction we attach to that description or parts of it"), and values ("what is important to us") (p. 84).... (pp. 80-83)

The Check & Connect study defined academic engagement as work completion and accuracy, class preparation, eagerness to learn, and persistence. Anderson et al. (2004) identified the contributions of Finn and co-authors and Skinner and co-authors in.
summarizing, "...Other studies have demonstrated a link between student engagement, achievement, and school completion (e.g., Finn & Cox, 1992; Finn et al., 1991; Finn & Rock, 1997; Skinner et al., 1999), and students who improved in attendance were rated by their teachers as exhibiting better academic and social engagement with school" (pp. 108-109). Appleton et al. (2006) provided an extensive synthesis representative of multiple cited researchers in this regard, spanning 12 pages of this resource.

Although interest in engagement has increased exponentially in recent years, its distinction from motivation remains subject to debate. As one conceptualization, motivation has been thought of in terms of the direction, intensity, and quality of one’s energies (Machr & Meyer, 1997), answering the question of “why” for a given behavior. In this regard, motivation is related to underlying psychological processes, including autonomy (e.g., Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990), belonging (e.g., Goodnow, 1993a, 1993b; Goodnow & Grady, 1993), and competence (e.g., Schunk, 1991). In contrast, engagement is described as “energy in action, the connection between person and activity.” (Russell, Ainley, & Frydenberg, 2005, p. 1) Engagement thus reflects a person’s active involvement in a task or activity (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004). This conceptualization suggests that motivation and engagement are separate but not orthogonal. (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Skinner & Belmont, 1993) That is, one can be motivated but not actively engage in a task. Motivation is thus necessary, but not sufficient for engagement.

Although motivation is central to understanding engagement, the latter is a construct worthy of study in its own right. Klem and Connell (2004) argued that there is a strong empirical support for the connection between engagement, achievement and school behavior across levels of economic and social advantage and disadvantage. Furrer, Skinner, Marchand, and Kindermann (2006) also noted that engagement may be vital within a motivational framework as it interacts cyclically with contextual variables; resultant academic, behavioral, and social outcomes, then, are the products of these context-influenced changes in engagement. In addition, the construct of engagement captures the gradual process by which students disconnect from school. (Finn, 1989; Consistent with the understanding that dropping out of school is not an instantaneous event, but rather a process that occurs over time, engagement provides a means both for understanding and intervening when early signs of students’ disconnection with school and learning are noted....

Engagement is typically described as having multiple components. In Finn’s (1989) model, engagement is comprised of behavioral (participation in class and school) and affective components (school identification, belonging, valuing
learning). Similar definitions have also been offered by Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn (1992) and Marks (2000). Two recent reviews of this literature, however, concluded that engagement was comprised of three subtypes: behavioral (e.g., positive conduct, effort, participation), cognitive (e.g., self-regulation, learning goals, investment in learning), and emotional or affective (e.g., interest, belonging, positive attitude about learning). (Fredericks et al., 2004; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003)

Based on the theoretical work of Finn (1989), Cornell (Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991) and McPartland (1994) as well as implementation of the Check & Connect intervention model over 13 years in varied school settings, we have proposed and refined a taxonomy, or organizing heuristic, not only for understanding student levels of engagement, but for recognizing the goodness-of-fit between the student, the learning environment and factors that influence the fit (Christensen & Anderson, 2002; Reschly & Christenson, 2006, in press). In our taxonomy, engagement is viewed as a multi-dimensional construct comprised of four subtypes: academic, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological. There are multiple indicators for each subtype. For example, academic engagement consists of variables such as time on task, credits earned toward graduation, and homework completion, while attendance, suspensions, voluntary classroom participation, and extra-curricular participation are indicators of behavioral engagement. Cognitive and psychological engagement includes less observable, more internal indicators, such as self-regulation, relevance of schoolwork to future endeavors, value of learning, and personal goals and autonomy (for cognitive engagement), and feelings of identification or belonging, and relationships with teachers and peers (for psychological engagement).

The majority of research has focused on the more observable indicators that are related to academic and behavioral engagement. Although less research has focused on cognitive and psychological indicators of engagement (in comparison to academic and behavioral indicators), there is evidence to suggest their importance to school performance. For example, a robust relationship has been found between cognitive engagement and both personal goal orientation and investment in learning (Greene & Miller, 1996; Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Akey, 2004; Pokay & Blumenfeld, 1990), which in turn has been associated with academic achievement (Miller, Greene, Montalvo, Ravindra, & Nichols, 1996). Similarly, psychological engagement has been associated with adaptive school behaviors, including task persistence, participation, and attendance. (Goodenow, 1993a) In general, students who feel connected to and cared for by their teachers report autonomous reasons for engaging in positive school-related behaviors. (Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994) Given these findings, it is necessary to move beyond indicators of academic and behavioral engagement to understanding the underlying cognitive and psychological needs of students (see National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004, p. 212 as further support).
Measuring of student cognitive and psychological engagement is central to improving the learning outcomes of students, especially for those at high risk of educational failure. Accurate measurement informs intervention that can be targeted to improve student levels of these subtypes, and in doing so improve deep processing of schoolwork, commitment to education, persistence in the face of challenge, and fulfillment of the fundamental needs of autonomy, belonging, and competence. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000; Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000) Effort devoted to these outcomes will help to ensure that students leave secondary schools as competent and committed learners rather than disenchanted casualties.

This study examined the psychometric properties of the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI), which was designed to measure the less overt subtypes of student engagement: cognitive and psychological engagement. Factors conceptualized as underlying cognitive and psychological engagement (e.g., family support for learning, teacher-student relationships) were supported by exploratory methods using one half of the sample, and confirmed using the second half of the sample.…..

Our model extends the engagement literature by providing empirical support for a self-report scale, based on previous theory (e.g., Finn, 1989; Connell & Wellborn, 1991) as well as our own ongoing work with youth (e.g., Sinclair et al., 2005) that assesses multiple components of cognitive and psychological engagement. (pp. 2-13)

In addition, Hickey (2003) referenced several researchers and expressed the implications associated with a lack of motivation and engagement.

Regardless of perspective, motivational practices are ultimately about getting and keeping students engaged in learning. A sociocultural view of learning supports a characterization of engagement as meaningful participation in a context where to-be-learned knowledge is valued and used. (Wenger, 1998) This participation involves the maintenance of interpersonal relations and identities in that community as well as satisfying interactions with the environments in which the individual has a significant personal investment. (see Greeno et al., 1996, p. 26) Put differently, from a sociocultural perspective, engagement is a function of the degree to which participants in knowledgeable activities are attuned to the constraints and affordances of social practices and identity. This differs in important ways from the empiricist view of engagement as a function of contingencies in the environment, as well as the rationalist view of engagement as a function of learners' goals, expectancies, and values: "Regarding motivational issues, the situative perspective emphasizes ways that social practices are organized to encourage and support engaged participation by members of communities and that are understood by individuals to support the continuing development of their personal identities" (Greeno et al., 1998, p. 11).…..
The critical point is that the knowledge practices that learners are participating in (and therefore learning) may be unrelated or antagonistic to the intended practices. Put differently, one can argue that the standards and values that motivate engagement are a function of the same negotiations between the social and material worlds that gave rise to other knowledge. Engaged participation is about negotiating one’s identity with different and potentially conflicting and competing communities of practice. This necessarily involves both conformity to and alienation from prevailing standards and values.

Successfully negotiating absent-minded doodling during study hall supports a very different identity than during biology; doodling during an achievement test is different still. Likewise, a child’s mindless banging of a tree with a stick means something quite different on the playground than on a field trip. In a useful elaboration, Wenger (1998) distinguishes between peripheral and marginal nonparticipation. The former is associated with an inbound trajectory toward a community of practice. Peripheral nonparticipation is enabling because it conveys both opportunity and expectation for fuller participation. In contrast, marginal nonparticipation is associated with an outbound trajectory relative to the particular community of practice. Marginal nonparticipation conveys neither opportunity nor expectation for fuller participation. This forces us to acknowledge that many learning environments offer trajectories that are not remotely inbound toward the knowledge practices that they intend. Just as the notion of legitimate peripheral participation has become widespread among sociocultural instructional theorists, the notion of marginal nonparticipation seems a valuable notion for sociocultural motivation theorists.

Marginal nonparticipation seems particularly useful because it illuminates the complex motivational reality of the disadvantaged students who are so profoundly at risk of school failure. (e.g., Bempechat, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; McCombs & Pope, 1994) By the time students are labeled “at-risk,” their mutually constituted trajectory may be so misaligned with the knowledge practices of formal schooling that it is impossible for most individuals to redirect it. Eckert (1989) showed how nonparticipation by “jocks” and “burnouts” plays a central role in identifying the practices that define the boundaries of both communities. In the case of antisocial practices among students such as defiance, bullying, drug use, delinquency, truancy, and so on, the communities that form around those practices are defined by their opposition to the intended prosocial practices of the school community—and vice versa. (pp. 410-414)

Common to the reviewed literature and research findings for the study as evidenced in Chapter II and Chapter IV, respectively, is the concentration on academic and behavioral constructs of student engagement. Although cognitive, psychological, and
socio-cultural constructs have been identified to some extent in the field and study research, the observance and reporting of these constructs are limited in scope. Essentially, student engagement can be ill-defined by the field researcher and the non-tenured teacher with 1-3 years teaching experience given the complexities presented by affiliated construct concepts such as the zone of proximal development, attribution and goal theory, self-efficacy, expectancy-value theory, and types of motivation.

Research question 2. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers measure student engagement in the classroom setting by observing student affect, time on task, and level of participation? (Focus group interview guide questions 5 and 5A corresponded to research question 2.)

Research question 2 was threaded with affective (student affect), academic (time on task), and behavioral (level of participation) student engagement constructs. In response to this question, three themes for methods utilized to measure student engagement were recorded across three focus groups. Observation, interaction, and self-assessment/self-evaluation constituted the Chapter IV research findings. Congruent with part two of research question 1, 6 of the 8 responses provided by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience were associated with the method of observation. Eight as a total number of responses for participants with 1-3 years teaching experience could be considered low in that 16 teachers with 1-3 years teaching experience participated in the study. This implied these participants struggle with measuring student engagement as qualified by Group 2’s P4 who stated,

... I think one of the skills that I am developing is, ah, measuring student engagement. And I said one of the things that is most difficult for me is that, um, I say to myself it is difficult for me to go on anything else besides body language because I don’t know what else there is to go by as of right now, for me as a 1st
year teacher, like, it, that's the most difficult thing for me to do, um, because I
know that I can look at a student, and he looks like he's engaged. And we even
talked about the nodding of the head, ah, you know the nodding of the head to me
means nothing. It doesn't mean that they're engaged. Yeah, exactly, exactly, it's
just something to please me. And, you know so I'm sitting here while
everybody's talking, trying to think well what else can I go on, and I'm a little bit
stumped. So that helps the conversation go along, I even wrote it here. It is
difficult for me. What else do I have to do on?

According to Chapman (2003), "The most common way that student engagement
is measured is through information reported by the students themselves. Other methods
include checklists and rating scales completed by teachers, observations, work sample
analyses, and case studies" (p. 3). Bishop and Pfleum (2005b) expanded upon this point.

Continuing pressure of public accountability challenges middle school teachers
more than ever to effectively engage students in learning. But how do teachers
know their students are engaged? To measure engagement, the education
community has long relied on formal observations. External observers have
evaluated when, and sometimes to what extent, students are engaged by noting the
degree to which students are "on task." While these observations can indeed be
useful to teachers, real engagement is a complex phenomenon. Certainly the
young adolescents in our middle schools occasionally "pretend attend," appearing
to focus on the reading aloud, the dialogue ensuing, or the lecture at hand, while
thinking about other matters. Conversely, there are times when students may be
deeply engaged, while appearing to drift or daydream....

We as educators and educational researchers must seriously question the
assumption that we know more than the young people of today about how they
learn or what they need to learn in preparation for the decades ahead. It is time
that we count students among those with the authority to participate both in the
critique and in the reform of education. (p. 4)

The findings from the Pintich, Brown, and Weinstein administration of the MSLQ,
Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire, were included in Chapter II as well.

The reviewed literature clearly indicated a need to collectively analyze data from
students and teachers to determine student engagement levels in classroom environments
Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) referred to the collaborative work of Skinner, Wellborn, and
Connell and Skinner at Belmont to express,
There is a complex web of relations between teacher perceptions and student engagement. Teachers' perceptions and students' perceptions have been found to influence each other. In recent studies, teacher perceptions of student engagement were found to have reciprocal effects with students' self-report of perceived control and academic performance. (Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990)

Specifically, students' perceived control influences their academic performance by promoting learning engagement, as reported by teachers, and teachers positively influenced students' perceived control through their contingency and involvement, as reported by students. Moreover, when the effects of teacher behavior on student engagement over the course of a school year were examined (Skinner & Belmont, 1997), teacher perceptions of student engagement appeared to have reciprocal effects with teachers' own behavior and with students' self-reports of engagement.

Students' perceived control seems to influence their academic performance by promoting their learning engagement, and teachers positively influence students' perceived control by their involvement with students and by conveying a sense of choice to them. Moreover, teachers' perceptions of student engagement appear to affect teachers' own behavior toward students and their instruction as well as students' perceptions of their own engagement. Hence, a series of interactions seems to occur between teachers and students that affect changes in each other's self-perceptions and perceptions of each other. These changes appear to precipitate changes in teachers' and students' behavior in the classroom. (p. 92)

With observation, interaction, and self-assessment/self-evaluation emerging as themes for research question 2, the focus group participants demonstrated a continued understanding of academic and behavioral constructs of student engagement.

Additionally, the participant responses indicated an awareness of the link between teacher and student perceptions of engagement levels even though uncertainty existed with respect to the application of varied measurement methods spanning multiple student engagement constructs.

Research question 3. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive teacher-student rapport as being the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 6, 6A, and 11 corresponded to research question 3.)
Regardless of the definition, research links higher levels of engagement in school with improved performance. Researchers have found student engagement a robust predictor of student achievement and behavior in school...” (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 262). Akey (2006) isolated environmental characteristics that have a positive impact on this link, focusing on the development of relationships.

Relationships between students and teachers and the climate in the classroom are positively associated with levels of student engagement and academic competence. Similarly, meaningful and challenging learning environments have been linked to both engagement and perceived competence. When students are authentically engaged in meaningful, quality work, the likelihood increases that they will learn something new and remember what they learned...

Although learning involves individual cognitive and emotional processes, student motivation is also significantly influenced by a supportive network of relationships. The likelihood that students will be motivated and engaged in school is increased to the extent that they perceive their teachers, family, and friends as supportive. Schools that engage students promote a sense of belonging by personalizing instruction and creating a supportive, caring social environment where adults show an interest in students’ lives in and out of school. The research on belonging in educational contexts is relatively new, and the direction of causality has not been definitively established. Nevertheless, many correlational and non-experimental studies have shown that students who report caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in school have more positive academic attitudes and values and are more satisfied with school. Such students also are more likely to attend school, learn more, and report that they are more engaged in academic work. (p. 5)

The Lounsbury and Clark (1990) eighth grade shadow study of 1989 mentioned in Chapter II continued,

... The fundamental importance of the teacher and the resulting student-teacher relationship must not be overlooked. When all is said and done, the quality and character of the individual teacher personality is of more importance in facilitating learning than the content, the materials, or the organizational arrangement. In this shadow study, as in the previous ones, this fundamental truth was readily apparent—the teacher makes the difference. (p. 139)
In a Klem and Connell (2004) study that examined links among teacher support, engagement, and academic success with the Self-System Process Model designed by Connell,

... Only 14% of middle school students in the sample reported optimal engagement while 31% reported disengagement. Middle school students with high levels of teacher support were almost three times more likely to have high levels of engagement, and 74% less likely to feel disengaged, with 40% of supported students optimally engaged and only 8% disengaged. Middle school youth reporting low levels of teacher support were 68% more likely to be disengaged from school, an increase from 31% to 53% of the low support students at risk levels on engagement. These youth also were 71% less likely to be engaged in school, a decrease in optimal levels from 14% to 4% of students....

Similarly, teachers reported that 19% of middle school students were at optimal levels, while 17% were at risk levels on engagement. Middle school students experiencing high levels of teacher support were 47% more likely to appear engaged to teachers (from 19% to 28%). Highly supported students also were 47% less likely to appear disengaged (from 17% to 9% of the sample).

Middle school students whose teachers were perceived as unsupportive were 35% more likely to appear disengaged in class according to teacher reports, an increase from 17% to 23%. These students were 32% less likely to have teachers describe them as highly engaged in class, a decrease from 19% to 15%....

Student experiences of engagement were more strongly influenced by high levels of teacher support at middle school than at elementary school.... Middle school students with high levels of teacher support were 2.5 times more likely to report engagement. (pp. 269-270)

Following the middle school years, relationships continue to be reported by students as having a significant impact on student engagement. In the spring of 2006, University of Washington Teaching and Learning Center affiliates conducted a qualitative study to investigate experiences that impact student engagement at the post secondary level. Riordan (2006) claimed,

... Of the six themes, students overwhelmingly reported that relationships (student-instructor, instructor-student, and student-student) were the most important feature in their being engaged. Students report that they are engaged when they sense a mutual respect and trust between themselves and the instructor.
One student said, "It starts with again, that relationship. And that respect factor. I feel that I'm much more willing to dive head first into a class if I feel that respect from and to the instructor." In addition, students' engagement is enhanced by other qualities of their relationship to their instructor: the instructor knows them and interacts with them in class; the instructor is accessible, gives helpful feedback, and relies less frequently on lectures. (p. 1)

Similar to that which was revealed from the reviewed literature, three themes surfaced across three focus groups regarding teacher-student rapport and the impact on student engagement. The general effect, teacher-student connections, and safety were among those themes. Thirteen responses were communicated by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. Considering responses from participants with 4-8 years teaching experience and 9 or more years teaching experience, 22 responses were noted for focus group interview guide question 6. The findings from focus group interview guide question 11 included 13 of 26 responses identifying teacher-student rapport as being the discussed instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement. Six of these responses were provided by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. Of the four instructional strategies discussed, teacher-student rapport (focus group interview guide question 6), classroom management (focus group interview guide question 7), authentic learning experiences (focus group interview guide question 8), and student-centered instruction (focus group interview guide question 9), teacher-student rapport accounted for the most total responses and the most responses shared by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience relative to having the most positive impact on student engagement. Group 3's D5 provided an insightful analogy for this view.

When I think about student-teacher rapport, um, I just think the closest correlation to like a sport. I mean if you work with the best coaches in the world motivate, motivate their players. They engage their players. The good players love their
coach. They'll put out 100% on the list. When their players don’t love their coach, you can see it. You can see it in their eyes. You can see it in their actions and everything. So I, I mean basically, if I had to put it in one sentence, I would say that people perform for people they care about. That, that’s the whole definition for that.

Research question 4. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport? (Focus group interview guide questions 4, 6, and 6A corresponded to research question 4.)

Three themes arose across three discussion groups for focus group interview guide question 6A, teacher-student connections and safety, an interrelationship between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport, and teacher awareness techniques. Comparable response rates were recorded for focus group interview guide questions 6 and 6A, with 18 responses to question 6A articulated by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. The consistent response rates implied these participants have an understanding that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport and have a sense of urgency in terms of applying that understanding to the middle school learning environment. The combined five responses provided by participants with 4-8 years teaching experience and 9 or more years teaching experience were balanced across the three themes as was the case for focus group interview guide question 6.

There is an overlap of the reviewed literature and the research findings. Much of the literature included a description of social-emotional programs such as CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), Open Circle, PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies), RCCP (Resolving Conflict Creatively
Program), and SDM/SPS (Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving). Goleman’s EQ and Gardner’s MI theory surfaced, too.

Note to the point and conveyed in Chapter IV, Kress et al. (2004) cited numerous researchers while addressing the connection between emotion and cognition.

Research has demonstrated that emotions drive attention, learning, and memory. (LeDoux 2000) Students distracted, or even overcome, by emotions this interfere with learning may find it difficult to accomplish simple academic tasks, such as following directions. (Zins et al. 1998) Thus, understanding the context in which students learn entails recognizing that students of all ages bring their social and emotional struggles with them to class. By equipping children with the social and emotional competencies they need to successfully negotiate their way through these challenging times, SEL helps pave the way for effective academic instruction and the attainment of core curriculum standards.

In a meta-analysis of educational research over the last 50 years, Wang and colleagues (1993) revealed that social and emotional variables have the greatest influence on learning, including students’ metacognitive processes (e.g., planning), prosocial behaviors, effort and perseverance, and classroom management and climate.

Social and emotional learning program outcomes include improvement related to the development of positive relationships between students and teachers, attachment to school, student attitudes and motivation, and decreased nonattendance/dropouts. (Elias et al. 1991; Fenter et al. 2001; Hawkins et al. 1999; Hawkins et al. 2001) These factors are important determinants of school success and the achievement of state standards.

In a content analysis of literature reviews, government reports, and summaries of educational trends, Day and Koorland (1997) found that the competencies most frequently projected to be important to today’s students as they progress into adulthood are those associated with SEL. In order of frequency, the five most frequently mentioned competencies were higher-level thinking/problem solving, interpersonal communication, decision making, communicating effectively, and self-management. (pp. 71-74)

Put simply, focus group participants echoed Wavering’s (1995) comments.

“Effective teachers are sensitive to the social and emotional needs of students. They nurture a positive self-concept and provide opportunities for young people to develop e
sense of identity. These professionals look for ways to assist early adolescents in
exploring the questions that are most important to them” (p. 161).

Research question 5. To what extent do non-tutored grades 7-8 teachers perceive
clear expectations and goal setting, as part of effective classroom management, as having
a positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7,
10, and 11 corresponded to research question 5.)

Two themes developed across three groups for focus group interview guide
question 7. As evidenced by these participant responses, clear expectations and goal
setting have a positive impact on student engagement.

On a more specific level, um, for like what your expectations are for a particular
day, I think if kids know what you expect them to learn or what you’re hoping
they’re going to learn by the end of the period, I think that they feel like they have
a handle on where they’re, where they need to go. And some kids are afraid they
may not be able to meet your learning expectations, but once they know that this
is the piece you’re working with today, I think that they, they are able to calm
down and feel capable, and if you, they, they know they’re going to be working on the
same piece for a couple of days in different ways, then they know well if I didn’t
do it today then tomorrow I’ll get to look at differently, and so I think they try
harder. So if they know where you’re going like if this is the unit and this is where
we’re headed, today we’re going to look at it this way, tomorrow we might look
at it this way, I think that they, um, they try harder. They don’t get as scared, and I
think you get more out of them, and I think they learn more because they know
ultimately what you want them to know by the end of whatever you’re discussing. Um, so on a more specific level, I think that they learn more if you, from a
learning perspective, they know where you’re headed and what you want them to
got out of the lessons. (Group 1’s P7)

You know well I can talk about but never go to Paris, but for them that’s like way
out there. And, um, and so for me the experience that I’ve had so far with setting
personal goals has been more specific, and generally, it’s either a, like, as a
student, like a learner type of goal, or it’s a specific behavioral goal, or it’s a
specific, um, language point in the unit, and I’ve worked with kids on setting
those specific goals, and it’s been really neat for me to see. Um, I have one
student who just like the first half of the first marking period was lost. It’s his 2nd
year of French, but he got lost last year. And so coming into the 2nd year, he’s
more lost, and just was kind of flailing around. And, uh, he broke down into tears
1 day after class, and that was hard for me, but, um, we sat down, and I kind of
broke down for him, you know what are really the important things in this unit, you know like is it really important that you sit down and like memorize this vocabulary. Well yeah for the unit, but I can't do that for you. So, um, I broke down the concepts that I thought were most important, and I showed him that he was able to do those specific concepts. And so once he saw that you know okay I'm not, I don't need to be overwhelmed by this, I can focus on this one part, um, he had something to work towards, and that actually now in class there's a dramatic difference in his just, his overall like demeanor in class. He doesn't have that throw my hands up in the air I'm gonna give up because I can't do it attitude. He'll say I have a question, can you help me on this, you know I need to get this concept... So, um, for me that personal goal setting I've had, yeah, it's shown a lot of through that particular student, anyway, positive impact on student engagement. (Group 2's P3)

Interestingly, only Group 3's P7 identified classroom management, inclusive of clear expectations and goal setting, as the discussed instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact to student engagement for focus group interview guide question 11 despite the significance of classroom management identified in Chapter II. "In a study reviewing 11,000 pieces of research that spanned 50 years, Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993/1994) identified 28 factors that influence student learning. The most important one was classroom management" (Boynot & Boynton, 2005, p. 3). This limited response rate in terms of focus group interview guide question 11 suggested classroom management has a less positive impact to student engagement than the other instructional strategies discussed by the participants. Inclusive of the Chapter IV findings, eight participants with 1-3 years teaching experience expressed the positive impact clear expectations have on student engagement, and three participants with 1-3 years teaching experience expressed the positive impact goal setting has on student engagement. The six composite responses from participants with 4-8 years teaching experience and 9 or more years teaching experience equated to a relatively balanced distribution across both themes. If anything, a greater concentration could be found within goal setting. Contrary
to the researcher's expectation of topical findings, there was no connection between research question 5 and research question 6. Participants did not identify classroom management as an instructional strategy to be reviewed with the building principal during the classroom observation process, although the literature referenced in the final section of Chapter II did specify classroom management as an area beginning teachers struggle with. To this end, Clement (2000) cited Dollaze, Gordon, and Veenman when stating,

"...the problems of beginning teachers are real and do exist. (Dollaze, 1992; Gordon, 1991; Veenman, 1984) The recurring problems include classroom management and discipline, motivating students, dealing with students' problems, insufficient supplies and materials, dealing with special needs students, insufficient time to prepare, and working with parents, administrators, and community."

In 1996 I surveyed 150 beginning teachers who were completing their first or second years in the classroom to assess their problems, stress, and intention to remain in the teaching profession. These teachers were all graduates of one regional midwestern university and included preschool through high school teachers...The highest rated problems from this group included motivating students, dealing with students' social and emotional needs, classroom management and discipline, and dealing with the large numbers of students in classes. (p. 69)

Brock and Grady (2001) echoed a segment of Clement's findings and mentioned Clark. "Classroom discipline has been a recurring struggle for novice teachers. Studies spanning the decades (Clark, 1986) report the difficulties that novice teachers as they struggle to develop a style of discipline that is responsive to student needs and that is consistent with the discipline policy of the school" (p. 22).

The participant responses and much of the reviewed literature focused on the combined impact of teacher-student rapport and classroom management on student engagement. In a related Chapter II segment, Marzano and Marzano (2003) articulated this very point and credited other researchers such as Emmer and Glasser in the process.
In a recent meta-analysis of more than 108 studies (Marzano, 2003b), we found that the quality of teacher-student relationships is the key to success for all other aspects of classroom management. In fact, our meta-analysis indicates that on average, teachers who had high-quality relationships with their students had 31 percent fewer discipline problems, rule violations, and related problems over a year's time than did teachers who did not have high-quality relationships with their students.

...The most effective teacher-student relationships are characterized by specific teacher behaviors: exhibiting appropriate levels of dominance, exhibiting appropriate levels of cooperation, and being aware of high-needs students.

...In a study that involved interviews with more than 700 students in grades 4-7, students articulated a clear preference for strong teacher guidance and control rather than more permissive types of teacher behavior. (Chiu & Talley, 1997) Teachers can exhibit appropriate dominance by establishing clear behavioral expectations and learning goals and by exhibiting assertive behavior.

The seminal research of the 1980s (Emmer, 1984; Emmer, Sanford, Evertson, Clements, & Martin, 1981, Evertson & Emmer, 1982) points to the importance of establishing rules and procedures for general classroom behavior, group work, seat work, transitions and interruptions, use of materials and equipment, and beginning and ending the period or the day. Ideally, the class should establish these rules and procedures through discussion and mutual consent by teacher and students. (Glasser, 1969, 1990) (pp. 6-12)

Literature reviewed in addition to that which can be found in Chapter II substantiated the value of goal setting, again in relation to teacher-student rapport.

...29, 338 students completed the My Voice Survey. Ninety-one (91) schools from 12 states representing various sizes and socioeconomic backgrounds administered the survey. QISA Founder & President, Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, provides his analysis of the data. The condition of Confidence to Take Action is the pinnacle of the 8 Condition framework and also the goal of all educational ventures: to provide students with enough belief in themselves that they can set goals for the future and take steps in the present to reach those goals. When asked questions about goal-setting, 77% of students surveyed reported they think it is important to set high goals; 85% said they work hard to reach their goals. The ability to set and reach goals is directly connected to a positive view of one's future. Ninety-one percent (91%) of students surveyed agreed with the statement "I believe I can be successful. Seventy-eight percent (78%) said that they are excited about their future, yet just 57% agreed "I believe I can make a difference in this world." Finally, when asked about the connection between school and their future, 88% of students surveyed agreed with the statement "Going to college is important for my future," while just 73% said that their current schooling is
preparing them well for the future. A greater number of sixth graders (70%) than eighth graders (67%) agreed that school is preparing them well for their future. ...There is a difference between dreaming about the future and taking the steps needed to reach those dreams. The condition of Confidence to Take Action is defined by the successful integration of these two processes and the majority of students surveyed appear to know that it is important both to set high goals and work hard to reach them. Yet almost a quarter of the students surveyed do not see goal setting as important. Other troubling questions that arise from the data include: Why do so few students see their present schooling as relevant, in particular when compared to the higher percentage who see going to college as relevant? What does this tell us about students' understanding of the steps it takes to reach the goal of attending college? The fact that 4 out of 5 students believe teachers expect them to be successful is a positive finding. Teachers play a key role in helping students believe in themselves and their abilities to reach their goals. How can middle level educators sustain and even improve on this finding? (Quiglia Institute for Student Aspirations, 2006, p. 1)

This action research project evaluated a program for improving middle school and high school students' engagement and ownership of the learning process. The problems of students exhibiting an inadequate level of engagement and ownership was documented through data showing quality of student work, anecdotal records kept by the teachers, and observations of student behavior. The targeted population consisted of middle school students in a middle class community and high school students in a lower middle class urban community in northern Illinois. Participating in the interventions were students in one sixth grade communication arts class, one seventh grade communication arts class, and one ninth grade health class. The 5-month intervention comprised 3 parts: (1) lessons requiring goal setting; (2) a series of cooperative learning activities; and (3) provision of greater student choice in learning activities and assessment. A pretest-posttest comparison was used to assess the impact of the intervention. The findings indicated that there was an improvement in student engagement as shown by students being more involved with the tasks, setting and achieving goals, and completing tasks in more depth. (Catlin, Lewan, & Perigone, 1999, Abstract)

Many of the educators I interviewed emphasized the personal connection they make with their students. They act as role models, pushing students to identify short-term and long-term goals and then inspiring them to go the distance to achieve them. ...Tight's "Go the Distance" project provided an ideal analogy and catalyst for talking about goal setting in the Network program. Tight explained, "The message I try to get across to the students is that they can reach any goal they choose. However, it's not just going to happen because you want it to happen. You can achieve those goals if you're willing to put the time and effort into going the distance. We talked in class about how sometimes we set goals and don't reach them, but that's OK. What's important is how we deal with that and what we learn from it." (Miller, 2006, p. 56)
In part a reiteration of Chapter II, clear expectations also do not exist in isolation of teacher-student rapport. "Students tend to learn as little or as much as their teachers expect. Teachers who set and communicate high expectations to all their students obtain greater academic performance from these students than do teachers who set low expectations" (Wong & Wong, 1998, p. 40). Kerman, Kimball, Martine, and colleagues were referenced in Boynton and Boynton (2005) pertaining to the effects of teacher expectations.

Research on teacher expectations and student achievement has shown that expectations have a dramatic impact on student academic performance. (Kerman, Kimball, & Martin, 1980) Student behavioral performance is also dependent to a large degree on the expectations of significant adults in students' lives. Numerous studies indicate that the expectations teachers have for students tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies. It is therefore critically important for educators to monitor their interactions with the goal of communicating appropriately high behavioral and academic expectations to all students, not just to high achievers...

Increasing latency (Kerman et al., 1980) is another technique you can use to communicate that you have positive expectations for a student. Latency is the amount of time that elapses between the moment you give a student a response opportunity and the moment you terminate the response opportunity. Kerman and colleagues (1980) explain that the amount of time we give to students to answer questions is directly related to the level of expectation we have for them. We give more time to students when we have confidence in their ability to answer a question. Conversely, we give less time to students in whom we have little confidence. When you quickly give up on a student who is struggling with a response, it is clear to everyone in the classroom that you don't expect him or her to come up with the right answer. In addition, when you give up on a student who initially struggles with a response, the student realizes that all he or she needs to do to "get off the hook" is respond to your question with a confused expression or blank stare. What you will find when you make a conscious effort to extend the length of latency you allow for low-achieving students is that these students will begin to pay more attention, become more actively involved in discussions, and minimize their behavior issues...

You also communicate positive expectations by giving hints and clues to your students. In their work on teacher expectations, Kerman and colleagues (1980) point out that teachers usually do more "delving and rephrasing" for students for whom they have high expectations and less for students for whom they have low expectations. It is important that we communicate to all our students that we have
high expectations for their success, and one way to do this is by giving more hints and clues to all students, especially the low-performing students....

Another way to communicate positive expectations to students is by directly telling them they have the ability to do well. When you tell your students you have confidence that they can handle a difficult assignment or improve their behavior, you impart a very powerful message. Students often will work hard and behave appropriately to prove that your confidence in them is justified. Every child needs to have at least one significant adult in his or her life who believes that he or she can do well....

You can also let students know that you have positive expectations for them by referring to past successes (Kerman et al., 1980)..., correcting students in a constructive way..., developing positive classroom pride..., demonstrating caring..., and preventing and reducing frustration and stress.... (pp. 7-29)

Research question 6: To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning as having a positive impact on students' engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 8, and 11 corresponded to research question 6.)

Stated in Chapter II, "Newmann's recent research generally confirms the value of authentic learning. In a study of 24 public schools, when teaching was consistent with the standards for authentic instruction, assessment, and performance, students achieved at high levels, regardless of social background (Newmann & Associates, 1996, p. 14)" (as cited in Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 71).

Newmann's research was implicit in the four themes communicated across the three focus groups for authentic learning experiences. Real-life connections, simulations, service learning, and interdisciplinary units were identified as having a positive impact on student engagement. Albeit highlighted in the Chapter II literature as having a positive impact on student engagement, problem-based learning was not discussed by the
participants as having either a positive or negative impact on student engagement. Each group discussed focus group interview guide question 5 for a respectable 7-10 minutes, even though the total number of responses varied significantly from group to group. Authentic learning experiences had the second highest response rate for focus group interview guide question 11, with six participants indicating authentic learning experiences was the discussed instructional strategy having the greatest positive impact on student engagement. Five of those 6 responses were from participants with 1-3 years teaching experience, a narrow second to the six responses from participants with 1-3 years teaching experience, identifying teacher-student rapport as the instructional strategy with the greatest positive impact to student engagement. The margin becomes even closer when considering the total number of discussion points for participants with 1-3 years teaching experience, 13 for teacher-student rapport and 14 for authentic learning experiences.

Group 1’s P9 summarized the global aspects of authentic learning and the relationship to student engagement. In doing so, P9 bridged focus group interview guide question 8 with themes explored in previously discussed questions.

...I guess you know making connections to either prior knowledge or to other things that they’re actively participating in within a week or a reasonable amount of time, ah, is, yes, it impacts so much on student engagement. If you can make those connections, it draws out that interest, and it makes you want to seek out the goal even more, so, um, and then when it’s being related between all the different subject areas, they really start to make connections and see their learning as a whole, as a part of life rather in just the particular subject itself. So it gets them more engaged because they see how it can actually relate to their way of living.

With each of the three groups having commented on interdisciplinary units (IDU), there was a crossover among the Chapter II meaning and motivation passages, the Beane research, and the Chapter IV findings. The academic team is a middle school structure
that allows for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of interdisciplinary instruction within a single-subject curriculum model. This being the case, it was predictable for participants to share their experiences with IDUs in the discussions, given many of the participants identified the meaningful nature of their membership on academic teams.

In view of all that is happening in the young adolescent's life, it might be useful for educators to consider some insights from James Beane (1990). Beane has suggested an interdisciplinary-based curriculum and instructional approach that takes into account the unique developmental needs and personal concerns of early adolescents. According to Beane, an appropriate middle school interdisciplinary curriculum would include such life skills as reflective thinking about the meanings and consequences of ideas and behaviors, describing and evaluating personal interests and ambitions, and identifying and defining personal beliefs and principles. In addition, Beane suggests that an interdisciplinary curricular design supportive of adolescent development should include themes such as understanding and making transitions in the context of a changing world, independence and interdependence, diversity, and consumerism and commercialism. (Wavering, 1995, pp. 103-104)

To direct teaching and learning toward understanding will require uncovering the absolutely essential concepts and ideas embedded in lengthy standards and developing a curriculum that reflects these essential concepts, both subject-specific and generic, thus revealing connections within and across content areas. With concepts as the framework for learning, the topics and facts can be hooked into a structure, within which those seemingly disconnected scraps become part of a coherent whole. To be sure, this is no small task, but it is a necessary one if poorly conceived state and local standards are to make sense as the basis for educating young adolescents. (Jackson & Davis, 2000, pp. 38-39)

The quest for meaning reviewed in the literature and in the research findings for the study was connected to student affect, specifically the intrapersonal development of the pre-adolescent learner. In fact, the need for connections had emerged as a theme for the previously discussed focus group interview guide questions 5 and 6a pertaining to teacher-student rapport and social-emotional learning, respectively. Further exemplifying
the need to establish and maintain connections are points made by Simon and Group 3’s

P7. In the Simon remarks, Sizer and Meier were cited.

Every subject we teach would become more engaging if we considered how it links to the question that human beings perennially ask and then structured learning around these questions...like others who have argued that school should be focused more on developing “habits of mind” than on ingesting particular sets of information (see Sizer, 1992; Meier, 1995), I am arguing that school should be a place to practice the habit of inquiry into moral and existential questions: “What are the implications of what I am learning for my own beliefs and actions?” “How does this material help me understand life and my place in the world?” (Simon, 2002, pp. 27-28)

Any time you learn something I think you need to experience it. It’s just like if all you did was practice, and you never competed. It’s like you have to live whatever it is you, you’ve been reading about or taking notes about. So, authentic learning has to be incorporated somehow, or otherwise the student is just gonna black out, you know, black out basically. (Group 3’s P7)

Among the focus group discussions, real-life connections accounted for six total responses; simulations accounted for six total responses; service learning accounted for three total responses; and interdisciplinary units accounted for five total responses.

Recent research on service-learning has documented positive effects of service-learning participation on student engagement and has begun to explore the hypothesis that engagement may mediate the relationship between service-learning and academic achievement. (Meyer, Hofseher, & Billig, 2004) Student engagement may represent a key area of impact for service-learning which, in turn, affects a range of positive outcomes for young people. (as cited in Meyer, 2004, p. 1)

Simulations, on the other hand, were referenced less frequently in the reviewed literature yet still emphasized a positive impact on student engagement.

Research questions 7. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive student-centered instruction, which is considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, as having a positive impact on
student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 9, and 11 corresponded to research question 7.)

Four themes were discovered across three groups pertaining to focus group interview guide question 9, an interdependent relationship among multiple instructional strategies, differentiated instruction and readiness levels, the importance for teachers to vary instruction, and a need for teachers to address learning styles. Participants stated that each theme had a positive impact on student engagement, but the collective interaction from each group seemed less forthcoming, comfortable, and fluid than the earlier discussion segments. The researcher and assistant moderator presumed the reason for this to be the participants' anticipation of question 10 as many eyes anxiously wandered ahead to this section on the focus group interview guide. However, in comparing and contrasting the research findings with the reviewed literature, the term student-centered was either too nebulous or too broad in scope with respect to the eight subsets for focus group interview guide question 9. Twelve of 16 participants with 1-3 years teaching experience responded to focus group interview guide question 9 with a balanced distribution across the four themes, and the themes for the question did not self-select or categorize as was the case for focus group interview guide question 7 classroom management subsets, clear expectations and goal setting. The response rate did not connote understanding of the question subsets particularly for differentiated instruction. Only one participant with 4-8 years teaching experience appeared to have a grasp of differentiated instruction, and only three participants with more than 3 years of teaching experience provided responses for question 9. Oddly enough, student-centered instruction had the second highest response rate for focus group interview guide question 11, with
six participants indicating student-centered instruction was the discussed instructional strategy having the greatest positive impact on student engagement. Three of those 6 responses were from participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. Perhaps this was the case due to this question’s overlap with the findings for focus group interview guide question 1’s middle school philosophy component.

In the Chapter II literature, Tanner et al. (2001) served as an overview of student-centered instruction.

Student-centered learning is based on the belief that active involvement by students increases learning and motivation. Good student-centered learning values the student’s role in acquiring knowledge and understanding. Within the context of course standards, this approach empowers students to ask questions, seek answers and attempt to understand the world’s complexities. The teacher and students share the responsibility for instruction and assessment. The levels of student involvement may vary. The low end may consist of the teacher’s incorporation of student needs, interests, learning styles and abilities. High level of student involvement may consist of students’ playing a role in planning instruction. Regardless of the level of involvement, the basic expectation is that the teacher and students are partners in instruction and learning. While student-centered instruction focuses on the student rather than the teacher, it always is driven by the content standards. (p. 8)

Pertaining to cognitive engagement and student-centered instruction, Akey (2006) added these insights.

Research on learning shows that students become cognitively engaged when teachers ask them to wrestle with new concepts, explain their reasoning, defend their conclusions, or explore alternative strategies and solutions. Students enjoy learning more and are more likely to participate in school tasks when their teachers employ active pedagogical strategies. Collaboration among peers-students working together in pairs or small groups to help one another learn—also has been associated with increased engagement and learning. When students can put their heads together rather than work in isolation, they are more receptive to challenging assignments. (p. 6)

Upon examining only this overview in terms of the literature, it is clear that the participant responses were much less robust than the reviewed literature. However, the
need to utilize varied instructional strategies peppered the findings as communicated in this Group 3 exchange.

Um, I think being a 1st year teacher, especially and just coming fresh out of school learning about all these techniques, I really try even though it can be, um, like a struggle some time, to bring it like a lot of different, um, learning strategies and like every single week, like I day I'll do like partner share, I day they'll do group work, I day I'll have to lecture cause, cause they learn a new topic. And I think that really helps the kids because they'll come in the classroom and be like what are we doing today, and are we going to be in groups, are, are we doing this, like they come in without like oh, I'm gonna take out my homework and do notes every single day, so that they kind of, it's spontaneous. And they kind of definitely do, they want to see what we're doing different than we did the other day. (P3)

And I think as teachers, sometimes you can get caught up in negativity that, ah, they're just throwing another theory at us, which in a lot of ways is true, but all it is, is just change it up. No one wants the same thing every day. You know, if, if you kind of look through the I don't know educational terminology that, that's always put at you, all it is, is just something different every day, not necessarily every day, but within your instruction, that's, you know in human nature. People want to see things in different ways, so you know you just have to be conscious of that. That's all. (Discussion point made by P7 with a practical inflection)

I think it's also important, like everyone was just saying, like vary your instruction, and, um, like meet the needs of your different students. You know everyone like learns in a different way. And maybe like if we lecture I day and you know teach a really new concept, one student might not get it, but maybe the next day, if we do like cooperative learning or we do some like hands-on manipulatives. Maybe they'll get it then. So it's also important to like change it up, not just to keep them interested, but also to try to help them learn it in a different way. (P9)

Additional literature affirmed this view presented by participants. The Education Encyclopedia-State University Com (2007) offered,

...Contemporary conceptions of instructional strategies acknowledge that the goals of schooling are complex and multifaceted, and that teachers need many approaches to meet varied learner outcomes for diverse populations of students. A single method is no longer adequate. Effective teachers select varied instructional strategies that accomplish varied learner outcomes that are both behavioral and cognitive (p. 1)
According to Bowen (2007), varied instruction spans the subset of focus group interview guide question 5 and has a positive impact on student engagement as noted by several researchers.

The teacher should provide a variety of learning experiences and resources, including technology. (Zorfiass & Copel, 1995) Osberg's (1997) research found that using virtual reality, whether in a constructivist or traditional classroom setting, produced highly engaged, self-directed students.

Several studies demonstrate the importance of the teacher's actions. Based on a research project begun in the mid 1980's, Strong et al. (1995) outlined a model for student engagement called SCORE (success, curiosity, originality, and relations). According to SCORE, teachers should clearly define the criteria for success, model the skills, connect unresolved topics for study and creative projects to students' lives, and give work that will augment relationships with people the students care about...

Well known theories form the foundation for practice in this area. Anderman and Midgley (1998) suggest that middle school teachers and administrators consider three theories when adjusting the instructional practices to engage all students: attribution theory, goal theory, and self-determination theory. Middle level students learn best when they are actively engaged with content and when the teacher acts as a mentor, coach, or “guide on the side” rather than the “sage on the stage” giving lectures to the whole class. (Hancock & Betts, 2002; Jones et al., 1994; Starnes, 1999) In a synthesis of recent research, Hancock and Betts (2002) present a scenario of a future classroom in which it is the exception rather than the rule to “find teachers conducting stand and deliver lectures in a whole-class setting. More often, they act as mentors, coaches, and guides for individuals and small groups.” (para. 7) An instructional strategy that is based on passive learning, especially in a whole class setting, does not appear to promote learner engagement. However, when individual, active learning is designed around a variety of content rich materials, students showed a higher rate of achievement related to core concepts. (Hancock & Betts) By building on prior knowledge, students can develop thinking processes that allow them to ask questions, pose answers, and gain understanding (Bievenue & Gentry, 1997; Day, 2002; Jones, et al., 1994, Osberg, 1997; Starnes, 1999; Wasserman, 1995).

A Massachusetts middle school devotes Fridays to Home, based on the fiction English teacher Horace Smith in Horace's Compromise and Horace's School by Theodore Sizer (as cited by Murdock et al). Students spend all day Friday with one teacher working on intensive, project-based learning projects. Teachers found that working on an open-ended project over an extended time period fostered student engagement and emphasized student work. Students planned their own projects and set their own deadlines....
Being given a chance to work with others, or affiliation, is an activity Schlechty theorizes will enhance student engagement. "Students are provided opportunities to work with others (peers, parents, other adults, teachers, students from other schools and classrooms) on problems, issues, products, performances, and exhibits that are judged by them and others to be of significance." (p. 121) Teamwork is important. Dewey referred to it as building "common and shared life..." (as cited by Barnes, 1999) ...Affiliation promotes cognitive effort, planning and organizing, and self-monitoring. Students work hard to give a good example to other students, parents, and teachers. They like the feeling of belonging and helping others. Reluctants or at-risk learners are willing to be involved in academic activities because of the people in the group despite a dislike for the activities themselves. Their social group influences middle school and high school students' level of engagement as much, if not more, than teachers, parents and other adults. (Brewer & Fager, 2000) Cooperative learning builds acceptability and understanding among the members of a group. (Marzano, 1992) Students learn that cooperative learning can lead to the accomplishment of group and individual goals. (Renchler, 1992) At-risk students can work as part of a collaborative group and be judged on their ability to successfully complete a complex task. Technology can help foster productive cooperative learning relationships. Students help each other learn (Means, 1997) ... (pp. 4-48)

As with focus group interview guide questions 7 and 8, a great deal of the literature and the research findings is multifaceted. Both hinted that teacher-student rapport, classroom management, and authentic learning experiences are connected to student-centered instruction for the pre-adolescent learner. Equally as apparent with respect to focus group interview guide question 9, the subsets of the question are interrelated in design and in the Chapter II and Chapter IV research with an overarching recommendation for a blended approach to instruction by theorists and focus group participants, respectively.

Research question 8. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement as being related to classroom management skills? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7, and 10 corresponded to research question 8.)
Tucker and Stronge (2005) explored teacher evaluation systems in their research.

How do we support and cultivate effective teachers for all our schools and all our children? It is our belief that teachers want and need feedback, not only on the act of teaching, but also on the results of teaching. Timely, informative feedback is vital to any improvement effort. For instance, consider the role of a track coach, fitness trainer, or weight counselor. These individuals provide guidance on how to perform better, but the evidence of their effectiveness as professionals manifests in tangible results: improved running time, weight lifted, or pounds lost. It is evident that "people work more effectively, efficiently, and persistently... while gauging their efforts against results."

Teacher evaluation systems are often intended to serve the purpose of providing feedback and guidance for improving professional practice. In fact, most authors identify the fundamental purpose of teacher evaluation as improving performance and documenting accountability. The performance improvement function relates to the personal growth dimension and involves helping teachers learn about, reflect on, and improve their practice. The improvement function generally is considered formative in nature and suggests the need for continuous professional growth and development. The accountability function, on the other hand, reflects a commitment to the important professional goals of competence and quality performance. Accountability is typically viewed as summative and relates to judging the effectiveness of educational services.

Teacher evaluation traditionally has been based on the act of teaching and documented almost exclusively through the use of classroom observations. In a study conducted by the Educational Research Service, 99.8 percent of U.S. public school administrators used direct classroom observation as the primary data collection technique. However, primary reliance on formal observations in evaluation poses significant problems (e.g., artificiality, small sample of performance) for teacher evaluation. Even under the best of circumstances, when principals might visit a classroom three or four times in a given year, the observation

Can be artificial by nature,

Suggests an inspection approach to supervision,

Has limited validity biases on the skill of the observer.

Is narrow in scope (i.e., restricted to instructional skills only), and

Involves a small sample of the teacher's actual work with students (e.g., four hours of observation would equal less than 1/5 of 1 percent of a teacher's time teaching during a given year).

Despite these substantial drawbacks to the traditional evaluation process, the truly fundamental flaw in such an approach is the assumption that the presence of good practice during the observation equates to the academic success of students. If student learning is our ultimate goal, then it should be measured directly and not
extrapolated from limited observations of classroom instruction. A more balanced approach to teacher evaluation would involve an assessment of the act of teaching as well as the results of teaching. We don't suggest throwing out the use of classroom observation to foster teacher improvement; rather, we advocate that teacher effectiveness be judged and demonstrated by both classroom instruction and the learning gains of students. (pp. 6-7)

Moreover, Hoerr (2005) addressed the limited scope of classroom observations relative to overall teacher performance.

Observations provide a slice of a teacher’s performance, but they miss important aspects of a teacher’s professional role. What happens in the classroom is the top priority, of course, but other facets of a teacher’s role need to be considered when thinking about growth. What about a teacher’s ability and willingness to work with newer teachers? What about the teacher’s relationships with her students’ parents and administrators? What about a teacher’s ability to design and develop curriculum and to create assessment tools? How willing is the teacher to work with colleagues? Can the teacher handle feedback and make modifications in his behavior? These factors come together to create a full picture of the teacher as professional. (p. 101)

Reflecting upon the compliance aspects of teacher evaluation, Goldrick (2002) provided these insights.

Teacher evaluation typically has been designed as a personnel action, not as a tool for instructional improvement. Though evaluation serves as a mechanism for assessing job performance, in practice it is often cursory, subjective, and based upon insufficient observation. Moreover, it seldom results in the termination of truly poor educators. Charlotte Danielson, a development leader at Educational Testing Service, describes evaluation as “an activity that is done to teachers.” Similarly, a Massachusetts education consortium calls it “a task that teachers endure, a task conducted by already overextended school administrators.”...

A purposeful evaluation system measures teaching outcomes, not simply teaching behavior. Evaluations that are well-designed and integrated with curriculum and professional standards can accomplish more than justifying basic competence. They can help states and districts measure the effectiveness of teachers at various points in their careers, identify highly skilled teachers, offer specific recommendations to improve teaching, inform professional development, and demonstrate accountability for student achievement. State policymakers should treat teacher evaluation as an integrated component of a comprehensive strategy to improve overall teaching quality. ... (pp. 2-6)

Presented in Chapter II,
...Research and the experience of hundreds of school districts support the fact that, when properly conducted, observations, including pre- and postconferences, can yield valuable and valid information about teacher performance. This model is based on the assumption that teachers will reflect on and analyze the feedback to improve instruction and student learning. (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006, p. 73)

Of particular importance in this regard is the ability of principals to shape the craft of novice teachers. "... ‘Helping beginning teachers succeed is a critical responsibility for all principals as every new teacher represents a potential investment of $1 million dollars or more over the duration of a lifetime career. All beginners deserve the best possible nurturing and development principals can provide’" (Brock & Grady, 2001, p. 43).

Brock and Grady (2001) included Zumdahl and highlighted the importance of ongoing feedback and support for novices.

Efforts to keep a new teacher growing need to begin as soon as the teacher is hired and should continue throughout the early years of teaching. Too often, new teachers have conversations with their principal only when problems occur or when it is time for formal evaluations. In addition, new teachers are largely ignored by their experienced peers and seldom have the opportunity to observe any of them teaching. For growth to occur, new teachers must have a psychologically safe environment that is conducive to nonevaluative problem solving, analysis, and reflection. The new teachers must be exposed to frequent sharing with their experienced colleagues. (Zumwalt, 1984) Induction programs must be geared to fit individual needs as perceived by the beginning teachers. (p. 15)

With respect to communication between the beginning teacher and the principal, Hoerr (2005) described,

...Reflection can and should happen even if no observation takes place, but teacher observation can facilitate the process. Indeed, the most important aspect of an observation can be the thought and dialogue that come before and after. How a lesson becomes an opportunity for teacher growth is far less important than the fact that the thought and reflection take place....

One possible approach is to agree on which particular issues will be the focus of the observation. Will the principal be looking to see how the teacher responds to "During the lesson, how well do I know that we are all succeeding? If things are not
going well, what adjustments might I make?” Or will the principal be focusing on “Which students grasped the skills or concepts and which struggled?” or “Were all racial groups and both genders equally involved in the lesson?” Agreement on the focus of the observation can be addressed in a pre-observation conference or, even, through a note or e-mail that asks the teacher which issues she wants to focus on. However the agreement is reached, the questions can help frame a rich post-observation conference between the teacher and principal. Beyond this, teachers can use the questions for their own analysis, regardless of whether a formal observation occurs.

Face-to-face meetings and discussions between a teacher and principal are usually best, but a teacher’s thought and reflection can be supported in other ways, too. There are a number of creative ways in which reflection and constructivist analysis can take place, some of which do not include meetings with the principal. Depending upon the principal’s time and skills, the expertise and interest of the teacher, and the school’s culture, one or a combination of the following strategies may be appropriate:

Teachers engage in pre-observation and postobservation conferences with the principal or another administrator.

Teachers complete pre-observation and postobservation forms that elicit their thoughts and rationale and submit them to the principal.

Teachers from a similar grade level or subject area engage in peer observation to offer feedback and suggestions.

Teachers from a different grade level or subject area (or perhaps from a different school) engage in peer observation.

Lessons are videotaped, and teachers review them with peers or administrators.

Teachers keep a portfolio that includes pre-observation and postobservation forms and videotapes of lessons. (pp. 94-96)

Brock and Gady (2001) contended,

...The first official observation fills the new teacher with uncertainty and trepidation. Much rests on how the principal handles this important event. Making a hasty judgment based on the performance of a fearful teacher might be damaging. A pre-observation conference minimizes the uncertainty and demonstrates the principal’s interest in fairness and accuracy. Beginning teachers profit from a clinical model of supervision. They benefit from frequent and specific feedback and opportunities to collaborate on ideas and strategies. They need to know what they are doing well in addition to hearing about their shortcomings. (p. 114)
The participant responses leading to the four themes that arose across three focus groups for interview guide question 16 mirrored the literature reviewed in Chapter II and the additional literature cited in the first Chapter V section for research question 8.

Maybe the observation should be more of a question and answer. Maybe it should be more of a dialogue rather than a one-sided snapshot like P2 suggested. Ah, perhaps it should be, um, a dialogue between the administrator and the teacher, or the person being evaluated, as to so how would you rate student engagement today, why would you rate it that way, what did you see today that you may or may not see on a regular basis. If that's what they're looking for, then it's not that that information is unavailable. They just have to solicit it. Now granted that's more time consuming, and I'm not quite sure how that would, or where that would appear on, on a, on a observation report, or even how it would be included. But at some point, if they want to know about student engagement, the person who would be best able to judge that should be the teacher. (Group 1's P3)

I think the problem with observation, and even when we watched the video clip, um, one of the things that we were saying was there was no communication other than a letter written to her. This is how it's going to be. So there was no room for discussion. But I do feel, um, being here, this is my 3rd year, um, and seeing that non-tenured teachers get observed 3 times in a year, and tenured only once, um, makes a difference, because, um, I think as non-tenured individuals, we put so much pressure on ourselves, on those observations. And here's the thing. You can't be on every day, 24-7, in that magnitude that I think it's perceived by non-tenured teachers to be what you have to be doing every day. Do you know what I mean? Like it can't all be magnificent every day. It just doesn't work that way. And I think people are led to believe that that's how it has to be and... so in some ways I think it's like a farce. I just think, and it's my opinion, I think in a lot of ways it's a waste of time, valuable time, when instead you could be conversing and learning, and you know what I mean, and all that pressure and that feeling, a magnificent teacher is going to be magnificent whether or not they get observed, I feel. So I just, I don't know, there's something just very, uh, about an observation, very negative. (Group 2's P6)

There was a dialogue, continual dialogue, continual dialogue, so... I know that it's hard for a vice principal or principal to do that, but I mean it would be wonderful if you could have that. I could send my lesson plans in, and then get them back, and have questions like how could you have done this lesson differently, or even like more specifically, how could you instill this. How could you differentiate this? Maybe this is a good idea for differentiating this lesson. And then, you know they can come in and see how your lessons have evolved from their feedback. So that's why, ideally my situation, I would love to see that, and I know that it's difficult, and there's no time for it, but that, I feel like is the best way for me to
learn as a person how to be a better teacher, so that format. If, I'll write it out for you if you want. (Group 2's P4)

You’re gonna get something that’s a little bit more, you know areas that need improvement, that kind of thing. And it’s meant to be constructive. So there are, there are going to be a little fluff in there because it’s supposed to be, you know it’s not meant to bring you down. And some people have a hard time with constructive criticism. Some have a lot, um, but the other thing that I was gonna say is that for me I think the hardest thing is, and, and it’s not because of my nerves, cause I’m okay with observations, whether you pop in, or you don’t pop in. But I think a pre-conference is a great thing. And I know time-wise, it doesn’t always happen here. But it’s almost as if it’s safe to say they need to know what’s going on in that classroom. Maybe those kids are not doing well with group work, so you pull back, and it’s an individual project, and then your administrator says well you know it would be better in a group environment. So there’s some information they need to know about each particular class before they come in.

With, with our curriculum supervisor, we do, do a pre-conference. You can lay that all out on the table. Oh, this one has some class management issues lately, so you know I’m, I’m structuring the lesson this way. And see how it goes. I would’ve preferred to do it this way. You know they just pop in, and you know they don’t have all that background information about what’s going on in that particular class. And I know that it can’t be done overall, so maybe they weren’t that engaged because something happened in the day before. You know that kind of information I think is important to get out with your administrator. I don’t want to say that after the fact, but it’s already down on paper. And I know you’re signing it to say that you know you received the observation, not necessarily that you agree with everything. Okay, I said my piece. (Group 3's P2)

I mean I haven’t been observed by our building principal yet, but I see him sometimes walk down the hallway, even if I just see him walk down the hall, my heart just skips. I’m like oh no, he’s coming. He didn’t come yet, but either way it still would make me nervous, not totally comfortable. (Group 3’s P1)

A need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written), the classroom observation process as a tool for growth, nervous feelings affiliated with the classroom observation process, and the benefits of announced/unannounced classroom observations were the four themes revealed in the discussions. Twenty-seven of the 44 responses were provided by participants with 1-3 years teaching experience; 6 of the 44 responses were provided by participants with 4-8 years teaching experience; and 11 of the 44 responses were provided by participants with 9 or more years teaching experience.
These frequencies were recorded over a total of 42 minutes and accounted for the highest rate of response for each experience category of participants. Only one participant mentioned specific desired feedback relative to student engagement. The other participants criticized the classroom observation process and identified a different role to be assumed by the building principal to establish and sustain a more effective process. The collective exchange became a platform to air concerns about the classroom observation process with the need to increase principal-teacher communication (oral and/or written) serving as the thematic priority by nearly twice the amount of responses as the other three themes. Despite the oral script shared prior to the focus group discussions and the exhaustive attempts by the researcher during the focus group sessions to prevent a wayward platform for question 10, participants simultaneously generalized and personalized the question making it very difficult for the researcher to extract data pertaining to student engagement. While participants did not fixate on the principal’s evaluation of their performance, improving the processes of teaching and learning was eclipsed by a to do list for the principal. The Chapter II and additional literature reviewed seemingly represented the same approach. Lists of principal responsibilities and lists of principal recommendations comprised most of the teacher evaluation research. Posed in Chapter IV, at what point is there a realization that the classroom observation process is a collaborative one in which both the teacher and the principal provide each other with feedback? Principals facilitate the process; yet, teachers have a responsibility to actively participate by seeking formal and informal feedback from the principal rather than waiting for the process to fall upon them.

A Danielson and McGreal (2000) excerpt from Chapter II addressed this point.
Recent findings (initially based on teachers' reports of the certification process for the NBPTS, and more recently based on their experiences in newly developed district evaluation systems) have suggested that schools and districts enhance professional learning when teachers themselves play a larger and more active role in the evaluation process. For example, they can conduct a self-assessment, collect documents from a lesson (plans, instructional artifacts, student work), and then describe the practice to the evaluator. Although the administrator and the teacher may disagree about a particular aspect of teaching (and it is the evaluator's judgment that, in the end, must prevail), the professional conversation is likely to be rich, and the teacher may indeed convince the administrator of her point of view.

In many schools and districts, teacher evaluation is synonymous with classroom observation. Indeed, a classroom observation is the best, and the only, setting in which to witness essential aspects of teaching—for example, the interaction between teacher and students and among students. An astute observer can note how the teacher structures the physical environment, how the teacher engages students in learning, how he establishes and maintains standards of conduct. (pp. 46-47)

Rubinstein (1994) supported the need for frequent classroom observation and feedback.

Preferably, the administration evaluates each teacher several times a year. Teachers should insist on this. I don't like being evaluated only once per year, because I am under pressure to perform the one time the administrator comes into my class. I can only hope the students cooperate. Being evaluated in this way is just as bad— with all the pressure, stress, and import-as taking a final exam. A visit like this has little to do with helping teachers improve.

I would much prefer the administrator drop in for informal visits to my class several times during the year, even if it's for only part of a period. After each visit, we can compare notes in a scheduled meeting. In such a meeting the teacher has the opportunity to chat about feelings and thoughts-in a nondefensive manner—concerning the class and to ask for the administrator's observations. Ask for suggestions on how you can improve, be more effective, or better relate to and help students. You impress the administrator with your concern for your students, your teaching, and your professionalism in soliciting positive, constructive feedback. (p. 127)

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine what instructional strategies are perceived by middle school grades 7-8 non-tutored teachers as having the
greatest positive impact on student engagement. Do teacher-student rapport and the connection to social-emotional learning have the greatest positive impact according to the focus group participants? Several conclusions can be drawn from the summary of research in order to frame responses to the eight research questions first listed in Chapter 1 of the study.

Research question 1. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers understand what is meant by the terms middle school philosophy and student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 4, 5, 5A, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 21 corresponded to research question 1.)

Though each participant was a non-tenured teacher, those participants with 1-3 years teaching experience demonstrated knowledge of middle school philosophy, and those participants with 4-8 years teaching experience and 9 or more years teaching experience demonstrated an understanding of middle school philosophy. Common across experience categories, an awareness of a relationship between academic excellence and developmental responsiveness surfaced as the need to address the whole child and academic teaming were discussed.

Akin to the first component of research question 1, participants with 1-3 years teaching experience demonstrated knowledge of student engagement, and those participants with 4-8 years teaching experience and 9 or more years teaching experience demonstrated an understanding of student engagement. Regardless of years of experience, participants had a limited view of multiple student engagement constructs (academic, behavioral, cognitive, psychological, socio-cultural). The term was ill-defined
in the reviewed literature and in the participant responses probably as a result of the complexity of these constructs.

Research question 2. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers measure student engagement in the classroom setting by observing student affect, time on task, and level of participation? (Focus group interview guide questions 5 and 5A corresponded to research question 2.)

The limited view of student engagement presented by participants coincided with responses to research question 2. Participants with 1-3 years teaching experience struggled with identifying student engagement measures. As these measures were described by participants, emphasis was placed on the behavioral construct such as the observation of body language. In fact, a few participants sought assistance from one another in this segment of the focus group session to gain insight into additional methods to measure student engagement. Participants across the groups did provide some evidence of measuring the academic and cognitive constructs with respect to examining student work. Student affect dominated the discussions for this question with participants indicating they utilized observation of displayed student behavior as a routine method to measure student engagement. Not having a grasp on the multiple constructs hampers the utilization of methods to measure student engagement in that the participants cannot even consult the literature for assistance as to which measurement tool is aligned to which construct. No such information or data was discovered in the literature.

Research question 3. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive teacher-student rapport as being the instructional strategy with the most positive impact
on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 6, 6A, and 11 corresponded to research question 3.)

Both the reviewed literature and the research findings designated teacher-student rapport as the instructional strategy with the most positive impact on student engagement. The participant responses for research question 4 were supported by the observation of the heightened emotional needs of the pre-adolescent learner. This perception led the researcher and the assistant moderator to believe the participants could identify these needs for their individual students, thereby making it difficult to separate aspects of this instructional strategy from responses to focus group interview guide questions 7, 8, and 9.

Research question 4. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive that a connection exists between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport? (Focus group interview guide questions 4, 6, and 5A corresponded to research question 4.)

Stemming from research question 3, the participants perceived a clear connection between social-emotional learning and teacher-student rapport. A focus on trust and connections emerged in the discussions, and Group 1's P4 comment encapsulated the relationship as it was also explained in the reviewed literature.

I'm not sure that I understand the question, but, um, I think children are more likely to allow, allow you to mold them socially or emotionally if they trust you, and if that's what the question means, then if you're, they'll adapt your value system, and be more likely to change in their behavior and grow in their behavior if they value you. So if you have a good rapport with them, then they're going to allow you to mold them and allow them to grow.

Research question 5. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive clear expectations and goal setting, as part of effective classroom management, as having
a positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7, 10, and 11 corresponded to research question 5.)

Across the focus groups, participants emphatically perceived clear expectations and goal setting as having a positive impact on student engagement. Similar to research question 1, participants with more years of experience had a greater understanding of these question subsets than participants with 1-3 years teaching experience. One participant did identify classroom management as the instructional strategy discussed having the most positive impact on student engagement. It is likely that many of the participants associated appropriate student behavior and compliance with the core of classroom management, resulting in less support for this instructional strategy than the others regarding focus group interview guide question 11. The lack of connectivity to research question 8 may be attributed to this association or to the sensitive nature of the topic. Nonetheless, teacher-student rapport was embedded in the reviewed literature and the participant responses for clear expectations and goal setting, as part of effective classroom management.

Research question 6. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning as having a positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 8, and 11 corresponded to research question 6.)

Pervasive in participant responses to research question 6, student affect and social-emotional learning were inclusive of the perceptions that real-life connections, interdisciplinary units (IDUs), simulations, and service learning have a positive impact on
student engagement. Taking focus group interview guide question 11 into consideration, authentic learning experiences was recorded at the discussed instructional strategy with the second highest rate of response having a positive impact on student engagement. The reviewed literature focused on this instructional strategy as well. A strong academic team structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities could describe the site middle school. Multiple examples of team IDUS and service learning activities were offered by participants. Given that this was not the case for problem-based learning, it could be construed that participants do not have knowledge or an understanding of this approach.

Research question 7: To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive student-centered instruction, which is considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, as having a positive impact on student engagement? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 9, and 11 corresponded to research question 7.)

A student-centered environment emerged as a theme for research question 1, and some uncertainty was apparent for research question 7. Quite a few participants perceived student-centered instruction as the discussed instructional strategy having the most positive impact on student engagement with respect to focus group interview guide question 11 responses. Much of the response context included references to college or university learning and inaccurate distinctions between differentiated instruction and varied instruction. In the aggregate, however, the participants perceived utilizing varied instructional strategies as a prerequisite to effective instruction. As such, the intersection of teacher-student rapport, classroom management, and authentic learning was apparent.
Compatible with the reviewed literature, participants structured their responses with this unasked question underscoring each: How do I frame instruction to meet the needs of every learner?

Research question 8. To what extent do non-tenured grades 7-8 teachers perceive the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement as being related to classroom management skills? (Focus group interview guide questions 5, 7, and 16 corresponded to research question 8.)

The participants did not perceive the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from the building principal for the topic of student engagement as being related to classroom management skills. With the exception of one participant, no desire for feedback was identified for student engagement. However, continuous dialogue and pre-conferences were requested by participants. In conjunction with research questions 1 and 2, participants do not have a firm enough understanding of student engagement to ask for feedback from the principal other than for the purposes of substantiating or defending their responses or lack thereof to observed student behavior during the classroom observation process. Participants did perceive the onus of the process to be one-sided with the building principal assuming the responsibility for its ineffectiveness. As such, the participants painted themselves as passive recipients of principal feedback who were either satisfied with or afraid of expressing the shortcomings of the classroom observation process. Even though more communication with the building principal was requested by participants and indicative of the reviewed literature, the approach to collaboration was imbalanced.
Recommendations

For practice. A lack of enthusiasm for the site school daily professional development period (PDP) manifested itself in the participant responses for each of the three focus groups. Neither participants did not mention this unique job-embedded structure or expressed concerns pertaining to the absence of meaningful PDP experiences. Seemingly, PDP was just another thing to do or be responsible for during the school day. Factoring these perceptions into the need for grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers to develop a better understanding of the multiple student engagement constructs, a full program evaluation for the PDP is recommended. The words of Stroge (2002) denote the focus for the evaluation.

To improve teacher effectiveness, we need to consider all aspects of the profession—from preservice and inservice training to recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers. Many behaviors and characteristics found in effective teachers can be cultivated among novices through awareness brought about by observing other teachers, receiving peer feedback, cultivating collegial relationships, and participating in lifelong learning experiences.

For those already in the field, high-quality professional development activities are necessary tools for improving teacher effectiveness. These activities must be collegial, challenging, and socially oriented, because learning itself entails these characteristics. Additionally, professional development training must be tailored to the individual teachers within a particular school to support both the individual and organizational needs as they exist within a particular context. In essence, teacher effectiveness is not an end product; rather, it is an ongoing, deliberate process. Teacher success is a lifelong pursuit. (pp. 63-64)

It will be presumed by the researcher that a possible outcome of this evaluation will be the need for the building principal, vice principal, and content area supervisors to routinely attend PDP sessions and to obtain more input from teachers when planning PDP activities. Perhaps a committee, parallel to that of the district professional development
committee, could be formed to elicit this feedback. Essentially, the structure is in place yet underutilized in terms of maximizing its effectiveness.

To further inform PDP planning, the cyclical review process, and the formal evaluation of teachers, it is recommended the building principal, vice principal, and content area supervisors for the site school conduct walkthrough evaluations. This may quell the anxiety associated with the present teacher evaluation process as grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers become more comfortable in the presence of administrative evaluators. It will also serve as the impetus to more continuous dialogue, a priority indicated in the Chapter IV research findings by focus group participants. Steps in this direction reflect the research of Davidson-Taylor (2002) and Fink and Resnick as cited in this work.

Many are wondering how they will find time to be instructional leaders when they are so busy dealing with daily school-management concerns. Finding time to adequately function as an instructional leader and to complete the myriad other administrative responsibilities is indeed a challenge. However, it is not impossible and it can be done ....

If effectively implemented, the walk-through process will provide a holistic view of the schools' educational program because it enables principals to look at their school's total learning environment. (Fink & Resnick) Data obtained from a school walk-through can be used to generate conversations with teachers regarding student learning and their use of best educational practices. The data can also be used to identify the areas a school should focus on for instructional improvement and staff development and training needs....

The steps required for the successful implementation of the walk-through process include:

Teacher and staff training....

Daily classroom visits to observe teaching and learning....

Using data obtained from classroom visits to identify and implement strategies for instructional improvement....
Restructuring staff meetings to focus on instruction and student learning....

Developing a communication process to keep parents informed about the learning expectations your school has established for their students.... (pp. 30-32)

A prescription for learning is not practical, but assessment is. With this in mind, it is strongly recommended that school staff members devote time to developing measurement tools for the multiple constructs of student engagement. Mentioned in the reviewed literature, checklists and surveys are readily available. As a practice, grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers could design these tools as they build a greater understanding of the constructs and align each assessment to a construct to ensure validity. This approach will also afford teachers the opportunity to self-evaluate and learn more about the impact their present classroom practices have on student engagement.

By virtue of their size, requirement for routine, order, and practice, and typical population, schools are a natural haven for boredom. When we examine the reasons people will endure boredom, we begin to see that certain school practices that conflict with motivation to learn remain because of their power to control bored students. In most cases people in this culture endure boredom because of fear, pressure, extrinsic goals, and lack of alternatives. In the workplace money and survival make boredom tolerable. In schools fear of failure and grades make boredom tolerable. (Wlodkowski & Jaynes, 1990, p. 86)

For policy. While social science can be an avenue for change, the avenue can become increasingly confounding amid the absence of common terminology. Chapter II contains many pages of student engagement interpretations spanning several 20th century decades. Among the multiple constructs identified are the academic, behavioral, cognitive, psychological, and socio-cultural. This synthesis of diverse research does not yield a universal definition for student engagement. How can teachers be evaluated on something so nebulous? A policy recommendation born from this study is to adopt a universal definition for student engagement. The effective, behavioral, and cognitive
indicators shared by Skinner and Belmont are worthy of this consideration as these indicators are referenced in much of the literature and are probably palatable for grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers. Focus group participant responses did reflect elements of this definition. Implications for this recommendation follow in the Nicholls and Thorkildsen (1995) comments.

Researchers who are concerned with describing typical or average motives and prescribing general policies or classroom practices would never uncover the things Candace learns about her students' motivation. They spend their time designing practices that reflect their own particular visions of cooperative learning and argue about the superiority of these practices. In doing so, they join a conversation or debate with other researchers about how education should be conducted. In these discussions, the convictions of individual researchers are never met with universal agreement. Overall, the academic community tolerates diverse priorities or visions of what schools should accomplish. Ironically, however, the individual members of this community rarely advocate that such tolerance be accorded to students. Each prophet argues that his or her vision of truth applies to all children. (p. 159)

In tabulating the time needed to address the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, curious to the researcher is just how long it would actually take under optimal conditions for a given content area. Along this continuum, the second policy recommendation requires flexibility with respect to curriculum design. The reviewed literature of Chapter II and the research findings of Chapter IV support a combination of effective classroom management, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction when considering a positive impact to student engagement. Teacher-student rapport is the conduit for the articulation of this multifaceted instruction, and personalized learning is the intended outcome. Ultimately, this approach focuses on the whole child and includes the intersection of academic excellence and developmental responsiveness. This approach must be the cornerstone for curricula.
Most students become deeply engaged only when they see opportunities to expand and test their own ideas....Student engagement depends on activities that let them demonstrate their unique knowledge, perspective, personalities, and beliefs....

...The prospects for personalization are not prohibitively difficult. Like the recommendations in Breaking Ranks, practices that personalize learning are internally consistent and interdependent. Success with any single project usually leads toward the next challenge. As success accumulates within a school, students, faculty members, parents, and the community begin to understand how high schools can engage all students in learning. The most important step is to begin the inquiry. How can we engage all students in learning?

The principal is at the center of a system that cannot improve student performance until it is adjusted to support personalized learning. Although they do not control the system, principals are the only professionals who can influence all the factors that matter. The shadowing study showed that personalizing the high school experience was possible but exceedingly rare because so many facets of school life have to change to support it.

To engage all students in learning, school boards and government agencies must develop policies that allow students to succeed by demonstrating that they can use academic knowledge to solve practical problems. District administrators must reduce their priority on uniform practices to allow different schools to develop successful methods for engaging uniquely directed students. Educators within schools must reduce their reliance on familiar structures and systems that restrict active inquiry by students and teachers alike. Teachers must revise their self-conceptions and guide each student through personalized learning rather than broadcasting knowledge to a classroom as if all students were identical. Students must come to see that they cannot succeed in high school by remaining passive recipients of knowledge, waiting for graduation day. Existing structures may bring comfort to all parties, but they do not promote engagement. And without engagement, there is no learning. (Clarke & DiMartino, 2004, pp. 20-23)

Inclusive of Chapter I, value-added assessment is a key measure of student achievement. Utilizing student achievement data via standardized testing or benchmark assessments at the district level is a policy recommendation regarding this study. What are the longitudinal student achievement gains or losses relative to perceived student engagement levels? Tucker and Stronge (2005) clarified the application of value-added assessment and stressed the need for multiple measures.
While numerous pitfalls exist with the unschooled use of assessment data for evaluation of any sort, particularly for use in performance evaluation, it is important to maximize the benefits and minimize the liabilities in linking student learning and teacher effectiveness. Therefore, we propose several practices to reduce possible bias and increase the fairness of using student assessment data in teacher assessment.

1. Use student learning as only one component of a teacher assessment system that is based on multiple data sources.

2. Consider the context in which teaching and learning occur....

3. Use measures of student growth versus fixed achievement standards or goals....

4. Compare learning gains from one point in time to another for the same students, not different groups of students....

5. Recognize that gain scores have pitfalls that must be avoided....

6. Use a timeframe for teacher assessment that allows for patterns of student learning to be documented in a fair manner....

7. Use fair and valid measures of student learning....

8. Select student assessment measures that are most closely aligned with existing curricula....

9. Don’t narrow the curriculum and limit teaching to fit a test unless the test actually measures what should be taught (pp. 96-102)

For future research. Previously recognized in Chapter IV and Chapter V of the study, “For educators to be maximally effective in their efforts to improve student engagement in school, thereby increasing the chances for student success, they must know about the influences of the multiple, modifiable contexts that positively or negatively influence student engagement” (O’Farrell, Motriso, & Furlong, 2006, p. 1).

We also need to learn more about what promotes engagement, both in undergraduate programs and in other levels of education. In the foreword to the “NSSE 2002 Report,” Russ Edgerton and Lee Shulman wrote, “Students can be engaged in a range of effective practices and still not be learning with understanding.” And students can be learning with understanding but not be able to apply what they are learning to practical matters or in different contexts. To
respond to some of the messy NSSE questions raised earlier we need to determine the optimal and minimal levels of engagement in the various practices that yield satisfactory amounts of learning for various groups of students at different institutions or in various programs and levels of study. (Kuh, 2003, p. 31)

Cognizant of the significance affiliated with these perspectives, the limitations of the study listed in Chapter I provide a starting point for future research recommendations. Of these, limitations 1, 2, 3, and 7 complicated the study thwarting both the validity and reliability at times.

1. Non-tenured teacher perceptions from one grades 7-8 New Jersey public middle school were considered, even though most middle schools in the state provide services for grade six students as indicated within the New Jersey Department of Education School Directory Website link (2006).

2. Of the one district that participated in the study, the FG District Factor Group (DFG) was the only District Factor Group represented according to the New Jersey Department of Education District Factor Group-4 (DFG) for School Districts Website link (2006). Including an even greater cross-section of District Factor Groups, districts, and schools would allow for the collection of more diverse data from non-tenured teachers.

3. As per Gann Law Books (2005) New Jersey Statutes (18A: 27-3.1), “Every board of education in this State shall cause each nontenure teaching staff member employed by it to be observed and evaluated in the performance of her or his duties at least three times during each school year but not less than once during each semester.” With the requirement of three observations for non-tenured teachers coupled with content specialization at the middle school level, common supervisory practice has been for content area supervisors,
assistant principals, principals, and central office administrators to collectively observe non-tenured teachers. For this study, the building level principal was the only administrator whose classroom observation feedback was considered and whose request to receive participant feedback were honored by the researcher.

4. Including only non-tenured teacher perceptions suggested that the feedback was from inexperienced educators, despite the fact that participants had a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience. More than likely, the input of tenured teachers would yield more in-depth perceptions that focus on instructional strategies that have impacted student engagement levels in the classroom over a more extensive period of years.

5. Equally as important was the need to continuously and carefully identify the purpose of research question & prior to and during the discussion of its corresponding focus group interview guide question. Non-tenured teachers had to be willing to offer responses that speak to improving teaching and learning without fixating on the evaluative undertones of the question.

6. Utilizing the early months of the school year for data collection could have potentially skewed participant responses, given that teachers had not had consistent contact with students since the preceding year. Students tend to be more eager at the onset of the school year, which may have inhibited findings as well.

7. Excluding the actual observation of classrooms presented a less robust study than multimethod research. Dunn (1994) cited,
...The use of multiple methods to observe policy processes and outcomes—for example, the concurrent use of organizational records, mailed questionnaires and ethnographic interviews—promotes the plausibility of knowledge claims by triangulating on the same object with data obtained from two or more instruments. Multimethod research moves beyond positivism, at least as this term is conventionally understood, by rejecting the ideal of quantification and, instead, systematically integrating quantitative and qualitative observations. (p. 8)

8. The selection and categorization of primary instructional strategies suggested as having an impact on student engagement represent that which was found in the literature. The four strategies presented in the study may not have been exhaustive in the sense that the teacher participants may implement additional strategies that have a greater impact on student engagement thus far in their experiences.

Conducting future studies inclusive of grades K-5, grades 6-8, and grades 9-12 is necessary to complement and inform the findings from the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) administered at the postsecondary level. In addition, these studies must incorporate samples with varied demographic composites, school size, student socioeconomic background, community type, and so forth. Clearly, this recommendation addresses both limitations 1 and 2 and would be even more valuable if a multimethod approach to research was utilized. With qualitative and quantitative research to embody these studies, more robust data would likely emerge. Of interest to the researcher are future studies that closely examine the impact instructional strategies have on student engagement for individual content areas. During the focus group sessions, cross-content variation was alluded to by a handful of participants. Moreover, how do gender and teacher certification status impact student engagement? The sample for this study did not
invoke these issues given the relatively nonexistent variation for each among individual participants.


Multiple sources and types of data should be used to evaluate teaching. The most common sources of data are students, peers, and teachers themselves (Centra, 1997; Paulsen and Feldman, 1995a; Seldin, 1999b; Theall and Franklin, 1990)....

Quantitative student ratings of teaching are used more than any other method to evaluate teaching performance. (Cashin, 1999; Seldin, 1999b) Student ratings play a dominant role in the operational definition of what constitutes effective teaching. Components of effective teaching identified from analysis of student ratings include six common dimensions of skill, rapport, structure, difficulty, interaction, and feedback. (Coxen, 1987) Other scholars have identified from nine (Marsh, 1984) to as many as twenty-eight dimensions (Feldman, 1997)....

Although many experts agree that students are qualified to assess many aspects of classroom teaching (for example, clarity of presentation, interpersonal rapport with students, concern for students' progress), they also assert that for some aspects of teaching (mastery of content, course goals, course organization and materials), only peers have the substantive expertise required for meaningful evaluation. (Cashin, 1989; Chism, 1990; Hoechings, 1996b) In short, peer review brings context-based contextuality to evaluation of teaching....

Although self-evaluations by teachers lack the validity and objectivity necessary for summative evaluation (Centra, 1993), support is growing for the use of teaching portfolios with data supplied by the instructor. (Arreola, 2000; Braskamp and Ory, 1994; Centra, 2000; Chism, 1999; Seldin, 1993) “Course syllabi and exams” and “self-evaluation or report” were among the fastest-growing sources of data used in evaluating teaching performance between 1988 and 1998. (Seldin, 1999b, p. 14) The expanding use of these data sources is consistent with the nationwide increase in the use of peer review of portfolios to evaluate faculty teaching performance. (pp. 8-12)

In turn, Danielson and McGreal (2000) designated an extended timeframe for teacher evaluation.

Expectations for secondary school classrooms are also raising the bar on levels of student engagement. Classroom instruction that encourages more active, authentic teaching, when combined with reform initiatives dealing with alternative scheduling, has altered the basic use of time in many classrooms. For new
teachers in middle, junior, and senior high schools, we recommend that evaluation
committees define an observation of extended duration as observing the teacher
during the same period over three consecutive days. This form of observation
provides good evidence of the teacher’s ability to link days and events and to
display a fuller range of instructional and assessment strategies than is possible in
a single class period. Districts should consider observations of an extended
duration as a part of the beginning teacher program. (pp. 87-89)

Future studies of the impact peer review, self-evaluation, portfolios, extended
observation periods, and value-added assessments have on teacher performance are
recommended in an effort to personalize professional development and to evaluate
student engagement levels. Focusing merit on the building principal feedback in the
classroom observation process is a limitation educators can no longer afford to embrace.


Dovey, N. (2004). *The relationship between perceived teacher caring and school performance for students at risk of educational failure*. (UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations No. AAT3157133)


Appendix A: Focus Group Interview Guide
Focus Group Interview Guide

Question #1 – How many years have you been teaching?

Question #2 – Are you a traditional or alternate route teacher?

Question #3 – What grade level(s) and content area(s) do you presently teach?

Question #4 – What is middle school philosophy?

Question #5 – What is student engagement?

Question #5A – If I was observing one of your lessons, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement?

Question #6 – How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?

Question #6A – How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport?

Question #7 – Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?

Question #8 – How do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impacts student engagement?

Question #9 – With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this approach to instruction impacts student engagement?
Question #10 – What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement?

Question #11 – Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is ___________ because ___________.)

Question #12 – Now that we have discussed middle school philosophy, student engagement, instructional strategies that impact student engagement, and the classroom observation process, please take the remaining time for the focus group to talk about any topics that you think should have been part of the discussion. To share any additional information after the focus group session, please use the self-addressed stamped envelope on the table to mail comments.
Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Transcripts
Moderator - Welcome. We’ll begin with focus group interview guide questions 1 through 3. We can probably go around the table beginning with participant nine to my left, by addressing all three, so if you would, participant nine, tell us how many years you’ve been teaching, if you’re a traditional or alternate route teacher, what grade level and content areas you presently teach, and then we’ll just move about the table.

P9 - Okay. Uh...let’s see. I’ve been teaching...this is my 12th year. I think, yeah, 12th year. This is my 3rd year here in this district. I went through traditional route, and I teach eighth grade math.

Moderator - Thank you.

P9 - You’re welcome.

P6 - Okay. I’m not a teacher. I’m a counselor, and I’ve been a counselor for...This is my 9th year, and uh, traditional route I guess. Um, and I’m sorry. Uh, grade level is eight, seventh and eight right now.

Moderator - Thank you.

P1 - Um, I’ve taught for a total of 14 years. Um, I’m a speech and language therapist. And, um, I did take the traditional route, although to get here was kind of not traditional. Anyway...

Moderator - Fair enough.

P8 - Uh, this is my 2nd year teaching. Um, I took the traditional route, and I teach seventh and eighth grade health and physical education.

Moderator - Thank you.

P7 - This is my 4th year teaching, and I went alternate route, and I teach language arts to seventh grade.

P3 - I have 15 years teaching. I am a traditional teacher. I took the traditional route. I’m currently teaching seventh and eighth grade, and I teach two classes of Spanish, science, and math.

P4 - Um, my 2nd year teaching, and I took the traditional route after a 20 year career in a different field, and I teach seventh grade social studies.

Moderator - Thank you.
PS - I have been teaching for 9 years, and um, I'm a traditional route teacher, and my grade level this year is seventh, and I'm teaching math, language arts, um, social studies, and science.

P2 - Uh, this is my 3rd year teaching. I'm traditional route teacher. I'm currently teaching eighth grade, um, two science, two social studies, and a math.

Moderator - Thank you.

Moderator - Now that we've talked a little bit about our backgrounds, think for a moment in terms of your present experience, your past experience, any training, or research that you've been a part of in the field of education, and tell me if you would a little bit about what your interpretation of middle philosophy, and what it actually is. And, at this point, we don't need to necessarily begin with participant nine and move around the circle. Any one of you, as a participant in this focus group discussion, can begin by responding to the question, and then feel free to take turns answering.

P4 - I'll start.

Moderator - Thank you.

P4 - Um, when I think of middle school philosophy, I think of two things. One is, um, turning points, and the other is sort of an acknowledgment that you need to focus on the middle school age and the adolescence as a different stage of learning from little kids and high school kids. It is a whole body of approach to teaching, and approach to the kids that's just different.

Moderator - Did anyone want to piggyback off of that response or take it in another direction?

P2 - I think that, um, the middle school philosophy is very student-centered; whereas, at the high school level you see a lot of teacher-centered lecture. At this level, we tend to center around the students more than some other age groups do.

P5 - And, at this age, I feel that teaching the whole child, socialization and academically.

P9 - Um, I think that as Karen had said too, middle school is like a bridge between the elementary and the high school. They're maturing, and uh, they're starting to take more responsibility for themselves, but they're still exploring who themselves are so we have to meet those needs and also, um, help them develop and mature, so um, I think one of the main things that we often do is make it student-centered and, and let them discover things and explore things on their own with our facilitation.

Moderator - Someone had ment...go ahead.
P8 - Um, I was gonna agree with what, um, he had said as far as the maturity. And being in the subject area that I'm in, there's, I see such a vast difference between seventh graders and eighth graders, and keeping things student-centered more than on the lecture that you see more so when you get to the high school, is such a huge importance at the middle school level. And keeping students involved to recognize and help them through this, you know to some students is a very difficult and happy, and you know a lot of emotions that they're feeling, so I think that it is student-centered is, is very important between that vast difference between the two different grades.

Moderator - Go ahead.

P7 - Um, peer pressure plays a really big role I think at this age level, and I, I always try to keep in mind, um, based on their maturity, why they are behaving and responding in certain ways based on what they think other people see or think about them, because I think this seventh grade age level is an important, it's an important time for them to figure out where they fit in with other kids, and I think that's more important to them than almost anything else.

Moderator - Someone had mentioned in the opening comments, one of the participants, that you were a counselor. So is there, is there anything from a counseling perspective that, that maybe you, you've observed in your experiences that some of the participants here have mentioned already or...?

P6 - Um, the majority of, of the participants have already mentioned it, but you know again to reiterate it, if like you know what P5 said that the, um, it's the whole child like, the focus is the whole child, not just academics and, um, my experience with that is very similar to what a lot of people have said that they're, they're somewhat, um, elementary, and they're almost high school, and but they're not quite either one. And there's such a, a conflict that they experience internally that, um, is quite often reflected in their academics. And, um, so to, to sort address the whole student would, would actually be detrimental academically, I think to the student, and my, also my experience, um, in working in both elementary and high school myself, is that there is a perhaps, I guess you might call it like a judgment on on the part of other age group teaching staff that might happen because there might be, um, it's looked upon as too much coddling. Um, that it's a bit, a bit of a judgment you know, and it's, it's an unfair judgment because it really is, is essential at this particular age group. I mean the things that they're doing are so elementary and so high school like at the same, like in the same day, you know. I'm not going to get into the things, but you know like that.

Moderator - Would anyone else like to add anything for that question-what is middle school philosophy? What I heard a number of you mention is the idea that middle school philosophy, in many of your opinions, has to do with student-centered instruction. Taking that a step further, what does student engagement look like in some of the classroom environments that either you facilitate or maybe you've even observed?
P3 - Well engagement I think can take a number of forms from active eye contact, to enthusiastic responses, to cooperative discussions, to engagement on a project individually, or in the group.

P7 - Ah, the learning has to be meaningful. And many times, the children are at different levels. So trying to figure out, looking at your kids and trying to figure out what's meaningful for different children is very, very important because, ah, depending upon what their abilities are and their interests are, the same lesson isn't going to work for everybody. Um, so differentiation plays a big role in having students engaged because if you're, you're not differentiating for their needs, then you're going to have some students in the classroom who are not going to find what you're doing meaningful.

P2 - For some of my students, engagement is something as simple as sitting up and watching what's going on because some of them might not have the capability at certain points to participate in, in all of the activities that are going on, but to at least be taking some of it in. Um, and for other students, it's the, the excitement that asking questions, the making comparisons, the participating, and answering questions, and helping other students when they don't get it. It takes different forms for different kids depending on the activity that we happen to be doing at the time.

Moderator - As an extension of your point, participant two, would you say, and maybe this is something for the participant that is involved with physical education to address or respond to, would you say that based on what participant two just mentioned it also takes on different forms depending upon what context area is it? Does student engagement look the same in a language arts literacy course as it does in gym?

P8 - Well, one of the things that, um, I was going to comment on was one of the, that I, I look to is as a benefit but in the same token just as a 2nd year teacher, I am still kind of getting the grasp of, of, um, getting is that I may have a student who excels in physical education aspect, but when I get the student in the health classroom, it's a completely different ball game. Um, as far as learning goes, I may have a student who in physical education is you know this tremendous athlete and has abilities and, and, um, is coordinated and, and everything that goes along with doing well in physical education. But once I get them into the health classroom, it's a completely different you know, um, whether their, um, participation lowers, um, they tend to sit towards like the back of the classroom, where in physical education they're the first volunteer. So I'm still trying to get a grasp of how to coordinate the two engagements. I'm there to, to involve student engagement in the two subject areas is different but how to involve the student in the same way between physical education and health is something that I am still trying to learn, and you know using my peers that I, that I work with to get that down pat for the students. But in the same token, students who are very quiet in physical education and don't like it and don't enjoy coming, when I go to the health classroom, I see a completely different end to them. And I say to myself, my goodness how you know different they are in the classroom, and, and it is, it is one of the things I look forward to when I have a class in physical education, taking them to the health classroom because I learn so much more about them. So I have an advantage where, where I see children in
two different classroom atmospheres. But at the same token, I am having, ah, I'm still trying to grasp how to connect the two.

P1 - Um, students that I see come out of their classroom, and ah, they first of all, some of them look at me and say why am I here and, and we have to go through that together because it isn't just, um, you know simple sounds or something like that. I work on critical thinking skills, reasoning, and also try to help them to, to see that what they're learning with me is isolation can be applied in their classroom such as note taking or whatever, but what I've found is that unless they totally buy into it, um, I can't follow them around, and they just will not succeed. And just recently, I dismissed somebody who really made up his mind that he had to, um, you know do it himself basically, and he was successful, and he's you know, and so that kind of taught me that I can't just kind of feed them this information, but that they really have to buy into what it is that we're doing together in order for them to succeed.

P4 - When I think of student engagement, I think of enthusiasm. I mean it's sort of like what they say. You know it when you see it. You see these kids. You walk into a classroom, and you know. I actually sometimes on, on a prep I'll be in a room that another teacher is teaching in, and I love watchin' some of these teachers teach cause the kids are just so signed up to some of the lessons. And they know, when you see it, the kids are like, they're paying attention. Their hands are up. They're on task, whatever it is that they're doing, whether cooperative learning or you know whatever, you, you just can tell. I mean you can tell when they're, when they're there, and they're psyched.

P6 - I just...

Moderator - No, go ahead.

P6 - I, I just have to, um, I don't know if I call it disagree with that, but I would have to say something along the lines of what P2 said, that sometimes it's as simple as like having a kid who normally would be down on the desk, and you know just like physically sitting up...

P4 - But I see that as enthusiasm. I mean I see the kid who is sometimes sleeping in my class who now his eye contact is there, and he's following along, and I'm not saying sit up...

P6 - Yeah.

P4 - That, that's to me enthusiasm. So I don't mean like rah-rah I'm a cheerleader about it, but you just see that they're, I don't want to use the word engaged, but you just see that they're actually, you know a participant, even if it's just not super active, but that they're more aware than usual.

P6 - So that, that's part one of what I was going to say. And part two of what I was going to say is that sometimes, um, ah, my experience has been that sometimes they're not
looking engaged, and they’re actually getting it. And that’s not always like the majority
of the time, but my experience has been that you know looks can be deceiving, that they
are totally getting everything that’s coming, you know, out through all avenues, but
they’re just not perhaps reflecting that so I, I have learned that I need to like take a little
step back and say I can’t assess necessarily the accuracy of that you know, oh yeah,
they’re definitely engaged or definitely not engaged so you know, and really it might
even just require a simple you know do you get it you know, or something along those
lines, like you know, so that they can you know, reflect back what it is that I’m saying, or
it coming from all other different areas.

P3 - I think speaking to that goes to our use of multiple intelligence teaching, that we do
try as an academic society. Here we are encouraged by our administration to try to reach
out at multiple intelligence levels so that the child, for example, for P.E., participates in
gym class. She can come up with a kinesthetic exercise in the classroom where that child
who likes to move can succeed, and in the gym, perhaps she can come up with the child
who would much rather read about something first. Maybe there’s some sort of activity
that they can do that will facilitate their growth in that activity and increase their comfort
level. So I think that’s one way that we try to I mean, I know I do, and it’s difficult to try
to always reach the, you know to do a wheel activity, a unit in a wheel. But I do find that
as much work as it takes, the children are also patient when we’re not working in their
mode because they know their mode is coming, and that we will get there, and I think
that helps them be engaged in an activity they might otherwise completely disconnect
from. That they will become patient because they know that there’s another fun activity
coming because they can be, much rather be, up and moving than sitting and reading.
And sometimes there are kids who like to do that, but not everybody likes all of that you
know focus sitting down work. That type two child is one who really succeeds, but the
other three areas really need to be attended to as well. So I think that, that’s one way that
we, we get there from here.

Moderator - If I was observing any one of your lessons, just as an outside individual
corning in, not necessarily as a teacher, as an administrator, a parent, not wearing any of
those hats, based on what was just shared in this discussion here today, what would I see
you doing as educators to measure student engagement? Many of you as participants here
have identified what it looks like in terms of your experiences, your training, your
research, maybe before this school, maybe just this school, maybe a combination thereof.
What do you do as educators to measure it?

P1 - Um, my classes range from one child to maybe four or five, and um, a couple of
things that I do first of all, um, when we’re doing an activity, and I give one child an
opportunity to answer and they’re not able to, um, you know give them a moment to give
an answer whatever. Um, the other children are given an opportunity to answer as well.
We call it stealing, but you know it’s kind of to reinforce the idea that if a teacher is
working with a student, that they owe it to themselves to be listening and not looking out
the window, and you know we talk about how to be in a classroom with a group of, of
people. The other thing is that, um, at each of their seats they have one of these erase
boards, those white eraser boards, and they take notes, either abbreviations or single
weeds or whatever, and then afterwards, we just kind of look to see. I take notes also, and we compare to see if we're basically taking the same kind of notes you know, so that we can keep track of what's going on in the class. So that's basically what I do to you know, and of course, if somebody's not climbing all over his chair and sitting under it or you know turning with his back to me or something, I mean, you know there I am measuring it, then I just kind of take those notes because for each of my sessions I you know kind of write down whatever's been going on, so I kind of you know just keep track of what's going on as I'm doing it with them.

Moderator - Does anyone else here keep a sort of journal, if you will, or running record?

P5 - I, um, I write down at the end of class, I'll write down the questions that the students will have for me when I'm teaching social studies. I'll know they're engaged by the questions that they want to ask me to take it a step further. And in my small class size, if I'm talking about Alexander the Great, for example, and I'm teaching the lesson, I know that they understand what I'm talking about by them, them spiraling different things back at me, like it could be in my class they could ask what kind of clothes was he wearing, or it could be you know, um, it really could be anything in, in the small resource room that I have. But by their questioning, it helps me understand that they understand what I'm talking about. That's how I measure it.

Moderator - P3, you were going to say something?

P3 - Well one of the things that I introduce to the group is actually use a participation rubric, and I explain to them that participation isn't just raising your hand. Participation, um, because that's how I see engagement, I see engagement as participation, and part of that is on my rubric is being on time, being prepared, ah, coming in and getting your things out, and being ready to work because all of those things are key to at least being ready to participate, that without that or being late, um, can hinder their participation as well as whatever is going on in the class when they arrive late. And the children are often, and then I give them that at the end of the week, and I ask them to fill the rubric out themselves, and it really does help them remind themselves that they don't. It's not always the one who just puts their hand up that can always be the participating person, that participating can be if you're sitting at a table, and you have a partner, and your partner you know your table buddy is lost, participating can be that you reach over and you help them and bring them along because I can see that. I can see that he's on task, and the other one is, is kind of struggling. So to participate by helping the child next to you is also considered participation and engagement in my room, and I guess that's part of our continual review process you know. You present information in whatever format, but you do survey as you go through the lesson. You ask questions looking for feedback, and I look for you know I will call someone's name who just to make sure that they're participating you know or listening so they may not have their hand up, but it sometimes it's surprising that just because they don't have their hand up when you do call them and give them a survey question they have the answer, and sometimes that's surprising I think even to an observer. I think that that can be surprising to any observer. Sometimes it surprises me but never mind the observer so...
P4 - One thing, um, I wish I could do more of is watch, is kind of keep notes if you will on each individual student. But when you have like 116 students, you're pretty happy if at the end of the period you make some notes to yourself about how that lesson went, what some of the issues were in that class, what were some of the desires if you will from those students on what they would like to have had you spend more time on, um, so that either you can the next time you teach it the next period or next year, you can then adjust your lesson. Um, but when you have that many kids in and out of the room, um, you, you can't be as personal as I would like to be with the kids, find it difficult.

Moderator - P7 I think was going to mention something and then P9.

P7 - I, um, first of all, when I start my class, I usually when we do our do now, it is usually something having to do with what we've, what I think they've already learned, and I want to see where they are. And even if they don't raise their hand and share their do now, I collect it at the end of the period, so at the end of the day I can see where they are. So that for the next day, I can plan to meet those issues. But then when we do our closure, it has to do with what we did that day, so that even if they don't raise their hand and share their closure at the end of the day, I can look at what they had to say about the activity, and that's mainly to see are they getting the skills that I'm trying to present, but during the period, when they're working I spend time with them, visiting them, to see where they're having difficulty if they're. If I have that attention, if they're interested in what they're doing and how much their participation, um, but one of the things I started, um, actually just this week was keeping notes on their like spelling mistakes, sentence structure, ah, mistakes, paragraphing in a book, and on Wednesdays, we do three different types of groups, and the kids who are working on spelling, or grammar, or paragraphing are working specifically on the problems that they've had in their, that they've shown me they have. I'm not just teaching all the grammar or all the writing or all the paragraphing to everybody. They have to work on the particular mistakes that they're making. For example, homophones, they the kids who had problems with homophones did a homophone worksheet. We talked about homophones. So I'm trying to do more of that. I really just started trying to be more particular. But it worked. I, I thought it was going to be mayhem because I had three different groups working in three different areas, but they actually liked it a lot because I made them identify what their spelling problem was and then tell me what they needed to fix that problem, and it was, it was pretty amazing so, but it was meaningful to them because they weren't learning about nouns, while I know what a noun is, but that person doesn't know what a noun is. I'm learning what I need to know to improve my writing personally. My personal problem is this...

P6 - Ugh, this is really embarrassing because it is on tape. But I have to use the ladies' room...I'll be right back.

Moderator - Not a problem...Please feel free to come and go as you need to for that reason or others related, P9.
P9 - Um, besides visually observing whether your students are engaged or not, and also sometimes having them write up a critique of themselves and maybe other group members, and also I like to go around, ah, when they're interacting with others or working on their own, and, ah, interview them, question them. Sometimes the, the best feedback of whether or not they're engaged or not is what you get from the students by talking with them, see what they've accomplished see where they plan on taking it from there, um, that's pretty much it.

Moderator - Thank you. Thank you. Moving through to the next segment of the focus group interview guide, some of you as participants here today have already commented on things like multiple intelligences theory, differentiated instruction, and various leveling issues that you've experienced in your classrooms. Putting that out there for you as, as a recap or review of what some of you have mentioned is a nice segue into the next section or the body ultimately of the focus group interview guide, and that is the section of questions pretty much 6 through 9 that has to do with instructional strategies and the impact that they specifically have on student engagement. Just if we could for a few minutes maybe field question 6, and then we'll get to 6A as a subset of that. How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement?

P2 - I think it's huge, student engagement. I think that, um, and we had actually started discussing this in our icebreaker a little bit, you get back a lot of what you give to the kids. So if you come in, and maybe you're not having a good day, or something happened, or a student does something that sets you off, and you're not in the best of moods, or you're not approaching them the way you normally do, or you know the kids, the kids read it very quickly, and they respond in turn. If you're having a bad day, and you are being snappy with the kids, they shut down, so they're, they're not learning what they need to be learning cause they're not with you at all. They're not, they're not participating the way they need to be participating in order to make, um, the learning meaningful and important to them.

P1 - Um, before I said that I took the traditional path and then it was nontraditional. Well in between I was a ra, a tv, radio, radio salesperson, and, um, I always feel as if I'm kind of selling you know, and, and it's not, and, and when you're selling, you're not really selling something and pounding it. You're really just kind of drawing somebody in to, to want to be able to do that. And I get the feeling that when I'm working with the kids that, that, that's what it is, that, um, I have something to offer them, and you know I want them to, to want to do that. So it's my old experience kind of helps out I think.

P5 - For me and my small class size, um, I have to somehow make the connection with the student, or they are not going to want to learn for me, it especially, in like I said in my small group size, and, um, I've seen it in the past, that if I can make that connection with that child, either something that they're interested outside of school, something that they're interested inside of school, they will work for me. I have seen it, and, ah, um, it works, making that connection with the child cause they can, they can just take it, and they can fly with that so, so...
P7 - I see it as a trust issue. If they feel that you're fair and they can trust you, then you're going to get a better response from them, and um, in the beginning of the year, I always tell my kids that my intention is always to be fair, and that they have the opportunity to tell me when, if I'm not being fair, as long as they say it in a respectful way so that they know that you know if I'm accidentally or not realizing that I'm doing something that they don't feel is fair, that I'll take that feedback and I'll adjust if I feel that you know we can have a discussion about it, if I feel that, um, I recently gave a test that was a little too long, and I was not at all offended that they were able to tell me, and it was nice that they were able to tell me that it was a little too long, and I said thank you for that feedback because I will change that the next time that I do this unit. And I think if they feel safe and they feel they can trust you, you're gonna get more benefit from, from them.

P9 - I think one of the key words was safe cause that's how I feel with, um, student rapport, that if they feel safe and, um, that they will be willing to take risks in the classroom. Um, and one of the most important things to reach a goal is to take those risks. A lot of times students are you know they shut down because they're scared, and they don't want to embarrass themselves in front of the classroom, and they don't want to look bad in front of the teacher. But if they feel comfortable in the room and have that rapport, they're more willing to take those risks and not feel embarrassed, even if they make a mistake. So I think it helps them come closer and closer to the goal because they're willing to take steps to do it.

Moderator – How do you handle that in the gym, in particular, not necessarily the health, the health classroom, knowing that you have by and large, and I'm making an, an assumption here in your class size, and I'm incorrect please correct me if your class size is maybe 35 as opposed to seven in, in another participant's example maybe, what is how, how does that impact what, what you do?

P8 - Um, well last year our class sizes were a lot, a lot bigger. On average, my class size is about 22-23, um, so it's, it's actually a little bit better this year, um, but to an extent, especially in phys. ed., it starts from the locker room. As a female in the locker room, um, you know you have certain female issues that go on with, with girls in the locker room, that they have to right away you know kind of open themselves up to you, and it's so important from the female phys. ed. perspective to set a rapport with the girls in the locker room from that perspective. But then when we go into the classroom, um, there's not always times when we are in the gym, that we are just strictly teaching our particular set of number of students if we're doing like in the winter time, when we're inside in, in the gym, and we have four, four classes that snwy in the gym and work all together. So at some point, we have you know almost a hundred kids in the gym all at once, and you have, um, a teacher who is strongly like myself with basketball. I tend to teach the mass students during the unit of basketball, and I have to set a rapport with not only my students who pretty much know me, but I have to set a rapport with the other three phys. ed. teachers' students in the gym. Um, so I, I don't have that difficulty, I don't find myself having a difficult time doing it with students. Um, I actually find it the larger the numbers the easier for some reason. I don't, it's, it's odd, but um, I, I guess maybe it's the approach that I, I use. I'm not sure. I really haven't figured it out as far as what it is, but
for the most part, I think I have a pretty good rapport with the students. But I think that the larger the number, the easier it is for myself, and I know other teachers that I teach with feel the same way. I enjoy teaching a hundred students compared to 22 students. I do. I mean I like going to the health classroom for other reasons, but when we're indoors, I mean I like going outside, but I like teaching a hundred students just because it's a lot, but I guess because it makes me feel that much more rewarded at the end. You have 80 students who are used to you rather than 22 that you're used to working with, so, um, it's different.

P6 - Are we allowed to ask questions?

Moderator - Please.

P6 - Okay, so wait you said it starts in the locker room? Would, would you say you know in terms of the rapport, would you say that that there's any difference between the females in the female locker room and the males in the male locker room? Which, and I know you can't speak from a male perspective, but like, like as far as...?

P6 - as far as what?

P6 - Well, as far as the rapport? Like establishing the rapport, or like you know, like just like, the females would have to, you'd have to create a space for them to open up and be confident with you, would you say that's the same with the males?

P8 - Um, I think it's different because of who boys are and who girls are at this age.

P6 - Yeah.

P8 - Um, girls at this point from, from my perspective, from what I view you know, it's a fight for the mirror.

P6 - Yeah.

P8 - It's a fight for the bathrooms because we only have two stalls in the locker room, so you have girls who, un, are embarrassed to change...

P6 - Yeah.

P8 - in front of other girls, so it's a line for, ah, you know the bathroom...

P6 - Yeah.

P8 - to get in to change, but that's something we have to set from the beginning with the students is that these are the areas that you're allowed to change in, and that's it, it's not that we make accommodations to you know certain clothing that they're allowed to wear like if they want to wear a sports bra, or they want to wear the tank tops with the elastic,
um, I don't know what they're called, yeah like the shelf bras that are in the tank tops already, and they can just put a tee shirt on over that or whatever. So we do make accommodations for them, but on the boys' side, well from what I've heard, um, from the coworkers that I have, um it's, it's just so immature. The immaturity that goes on, on that side and, and what they try to get away with, and what they try... They have so many more rules on the boys' side that they do than on the girls' side just because of the theft that goes on the, um, the, um, like the breaking of lockers and the, just the boyish things that they do, if a boy doesn't have a lock on their locker, then they'll, they'll take a lock off, and they'll switch the clothes that are in this locker into that locker so the boy is spending his 4 minutes that he has to get dressed searching for his clothes, and they think it's funny. So it's the girls, it's more like a gossip you know, and they come, and once they're dressed, they're told what to do. And a lot of them come in. I sit at the beginning of the locker room, and I watch. You know I don't take my eyes off of them. You don't ever have a problem in the locker room as far as fighting or any kind of discipline problems, and they kind of you know navigate towards the front of the locker room, and they'll you know discuss and, and that's part of developing that rapport with the students.

P6 - Yeah, ah. I'm, I'm just curious like how it would be with the boys you know, like in developing the rapport, like you know where that might come in. It's just like a question I have. I don't know if you can answer it or not.

P8 - It's, it's I don't know. I think maybe personality has something to do with it, and you know with the males that are, that are, um, but I, I think it's, I think it's the boys, just the age that the boys are. No matter how, I mean it could be different, it could, I mean I could, excuse me, I could be wrong. But, I don't know.

P6 - That boy thing...

P8 - It is, it's really...

P3 - Boys will be boys.

P1 - They're too busy being not intimate.

Moderator - As an extension to that, I'm sorry...

P1 - No, just that they're doing their silly thing so they, ah, maybe they're avoiding being intimate. I don't know.

P9 - Look what they get to grow up to...

Moderator - That was P9. As an extension to the teacher-student rapport having an impact on student engagement, just looking at 6A there, let's take part of our time. How do you think social-emotional learning is connected to teacher-student rapport, meaning social and emotional learning for the student?
P3 - Well if I could jump in, I would tell you... I, in my class again, I’m a resource room teacher, and my classes don’t get much bigger than 10 or 11, um, but if the children in my class think that you care, if they feel like you care, they generally will jump through hoops for you. They will do just about you know whatever you want them to do, they’ll take a shot at doing because they really want to make you happy. They want your praise. They want your, they want to see that satisfaction on your face that they got it, that they did it, and that they’re coming, because in my class a lot of the children have you know they’re not always the most successful students in other academic areas, so when they come to resource room it’s almost like if we can’t get them to succeed there, then we’re in the wrong business. So our job is to, I think that’s where the social-emotional learning comes in. It’s, it’s you have to have that connection with them, and then they’ll reach for you, and, and that comes back to the trust, to the feeling safe, and that’s how you can get them to try themselves, to, to go for it, to try and build some self-confidence in themselves.

P4 - Like I say it’s, it’s not just the small classroom though because even you know with a class size of like 26, 27, last year 30, um, you still see the same thing. You still see they, they really do wanna do it for ya. They really do you know. They feel like you believe in them. They’re right there trying to prove that you’re believing in them for a good reason, um, you know and, and not every child, not every day, not every time, but on the whole, I do see that.

P2 - That’s true.

Moderator – I see a lot of heads nodding. Did anyone nodding want to comment? Meaning nodding again, I’m. I’m making an assumption you’re nodding in agreement? Anything you want to add to what P3 mentioned? I mean P4.

P7 - I’m not sure that I understand the question, but, um, I think children are more likely to allow, allow you to mold them socially or emotionally if they trust you, and if that’s what the question means, then if you’re, they’ll adapt your value system, and be more likely to change in their behavior and grow in their behavior if they value you. So if you have a good rapport with them, then they’re going to allow you to mold them and allow them to grow.

P2 - I think that your rapport, the student-teacher rapport, um, is directly related to how much of themselves the kids will show to you. If they don’t feel safe in your room, if they don’t feel like they can take a risk and not be made fun of, or have comments made, or, you know or if they don’t feel that you understand them, they’re not going to show you who they are truly you know outside of you know little Johnny sitting in the desk. And I don’t think that, um, unless that rapport is there, I don’t think you can even begin to touch the social-emotional learning of a student because you’re not seeing that side of them at all...so...

P8 - I completely agree with, I think of what I was going to say before she said it, was classroom environment, I think goes along with teacher rapport, and if you are the type of
teacher where the student feels comfortable from the minute they walk into the door to
the minute that they walk out of your classroom, and they feel comfortable, and you
know they don't have this quote unquote fear while they're in your classroom, then the
matter what kind of rapport as far as teacher student goes, I don't think that you're gonna
get the social-emotional learning from them. But if you have the two of them in
combination with each other, then I think you know social-emotional learning will
definitely take place in the classroom. But I think when it comes to social-emotional
learning, I think the two coincide and go, go together.

Moderator – Let's move in the direction of classroom management, which is the second
instructional strategy. I don't know that we've talked about this specifically, so I'll just
put it out there in the way of what's on the actual focus group interview guide from
question 7. Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are a part of effective
classroom management, again just a part, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts
student engagement? Before... you, you want to start for us?

P4 - Sure, I was going to say that, um, that's how you build trust, that's how you sort of
you, you create an atmosphere in your classroom that says this is, this is what's
expected, and if you, you know live up to these expectations these, these monies, these
norms, if you will, then you are gonna be treated fairly, and the room is gonna function the
way it's supposed to, and I think that they're essential to kind of starting out the year like
P7 said, you know setting, setting the tone with the students.

P1 - Well I think it's very important as well. Um, I had gone into a classroom to observe
one of my students you know in a classroom setting, and I was I, I... There was a
language arts classroom, and it, the teacher had put a huge chart up, and on it were all the
dates when things were due, and, um, and you know when the next test was going to be,
and the next term paper was going to be, and I thought, wow, you know nobody, I don't
think that any one of the kids could have said while I didn't get my homework done
because I didn't know that such and such wasn't there, I mean there was something for
this teacher to talk about with her students, and I just thought that, that was incredible, so
to me it just looked as if there was some real, real expectations, you know expectations
and goals and things that were put out there for them, and I thought it was great.

P7 - On a more specific level, um, for like what your expectations are for a particular
day, I think if kids know what you expect them to learn or what you're hoping they're
going to learn by the end of the period, I think that they feel like they have a handle on
where they're, where they need to go. And some kids are afraid they may not be able to
meet your learning expectations, but once they know that this is the piece you're working
with today, I think that they, they are able to calm down and feel capable, and if you, they
know they're going to be working on the same piece for a couple of days in different
ways, then they know well if I didn't do it today then tomorrow I'll get to look at
differently, and so I think they try harder. So if they know where you're going like if this
is the unit and this is where we're headed, today we're going to look at it, this way,
tomorrow we might look at it this way, I think that they, um, they try harder. They don't
get as scared, and I think you get more out of them, and I think they learn more because
they know ultimately what you want them to know by the end of whatever you're discussing. Um, so on a more specific level, I think that they learn more if you, from a learning perspective, they know where you're headed and what you want them to get out of the lessons.

P2 - I think for students that are very concrete, um, which a lot of the teachers deal with through dealing with a lot of the special ed. kids, when you set a clear expectation, the kids are more likely to try and do something; whereas, if you're not very clear about what you're expecting, you're not clear about the level of work you're expecting, what product you're expecting, the kids tend to not even try to start anything because they don't even know where to go. So I think that when you're very clear, and you let them know where you're going, and you let them know what you're looking for, and you let them know what level of work you expect from them, and you let them know that you're expecting them to do the best that they can do, that they at least make an attempt, which you know if we're talking about student engagement, is much more than someone who's sitting there saying I don't know what I'm supposed to do, I don't know what I'm expected what's expected of me, I don't know what the point of this is, I don't know, and their, their students are the ones who will sit there and may might become the behavior issues, or whatever, because they don't know what to do. So they don't get started, and they're not engaged in learning.

Moderator – What about personal goals for students? Moving away from clear expectations that many of you commented on already, not necessarily just, just to clarify the use of the word goal, not in the sense of putting as objective on the board, maybe seeing that move as a clear expectation, if you will, which I think had been highlighted by a couple of the participants so far in our discussion, but more think of it in terms of as an educator, administrator, teacher, paraprofessional, for the most part we set goals for ourselves as professionals through an annual PIP, or you have a professional development period here, things of that nature. For students in classes, how does goal setting, along the same lines, impact student engagement? Does it make a difference?

P7 – As they look at their learning as not competing with someone else across the room and their learning as what they're improving themselves then I think they learn more because they're more concerned with how can I get better at the rate that I can get better. Um, if they're worried about what the other person across the room is doing who's maybe 10 times above where they are, then they're gonna shut down because there's no way they can do the same thing that person is doing. But if they're setting a personal goal, and it may not be the same goal as someone else, um, then and they see that goal as attainable, and they set that goal with a teacher, then they're going to learn more during the course of the lesson or the year.

P8 – One of the things, um, in phys. ed. that at this grade level, more so with eighth graders than with seventh graders, um, and we always have eighth graders after they've had lunch so it's, it's an extra issue on top of that, um, is lack of participation, you know these kids they, they come, and they use phys. ed. as you know their social time on top of lunch, and we have a hard time getting them to participate during particular activities. I
mean if we're doing something like basketball or, or a mass game then, that's it's not an issue, but physical fitness training or, um, a circuit training day, which we call physical fitness day, that we do, um, we have a hard time getting students to participate. And one of the things that we have to do is have personal goal setting and make it competitive amongst the students, like we have on you know on the walls as far as how many pushups. I meet with the teams that we have here, six teams, you know the, the highest thing we did today was, ah, the bleep test. The highest, the highest score for the, ah, um, period two was you know 11/7, so period three came in, knew what the, wats the record was and used their determination and set goals for themselves individually and as a team to try and beat that 11/7, um, and we, we reward them based upon you know performance and, the, the goals that they set for themselves. So we kind of use it in, ah, ah, little opposite. We use personal goal setting and competition to motivate the kids and get them to participate, um, in our grade subject.

**Moderator** — What about from a counseling perspective, thinking maybe as you're moving along a continuum, is there a goal setting feature here...maybe not formally?

**P6** — Uh, yeah...there's, there's nothing formal at all, um, you know and, and of course the goal varies, like you know what P3 said, you know to come or, or P7. You know to compare to the case across the room wouldn't be appropriate because of the different situations and the different circumstances of each student presents with, um, but, ah, you know, ah, the question is how it relates to student engagement. Um I, I don't know. Ah. I'm, I'm not sure if you know if it's, if it's, you know, if it's, um, it's something that I don't emphasize. Let me, let me put it this way. I don't emphasize personal goal orientation. You know I haven't. I have move of an opportunity to have the student, um, it, um, come up with their own thing that they want to get to. Ah, how, how do I explain this without um, um, okay, so if an example would be, um, if a student comes in, and their, their, their concern is something related to something that's going on at home right now. I'm not going to sit with them to you know set a particular goal you know because I'm not, um, technically allowed to do that because my, my, my, um, focus has to be on education and prevention and, and not intervention with what's happening at home. But at the same time, I'm gonna say that I do that. You, you know, so I actually do that. So, so for example, if there's something, I work with a lot of the students who have situations at home that are, um, not good okay, drinking, drug use, and things like that going on at home, where my personal goal working with the student might be, might look like, be safe, don't get in the car with your parent who's drinking, you know like that. I can't technically do that, but I do that, yet, um, so, so but my goal like personally would just be like giving information about the dangers of drinking and, and, um, driving and things like that. Does that make sense without actually revealing what I...?

**Moderator** — Yeah. I think you're fine...

**P6** — Okay, got it.

**Moderator** — based on what you mentioned.
P6 – Yeah. Yeah.

P2 – I taught, um, for the last 2 years a study skills class, and I did a unit with my kids on setting goals as a way to mark how they’re doing in the classes and to really look at specific skills that they need to work on, where setting a long-term goal for a marking period and then setting short, a couple of more short-term goals that we could revisit on a weekly or biweekly basis. If a student I know, a student has trouble focusing in class, you know, some of their goals might be related to that, or if a student has trouble with their note taking, some of their goals might be related to that. So when they’re slipping in some of their other classes, when we go back and look at their goals, they are very much able to say you know what, this week I really wasn’t thinking about ... what is what I teach them about active listening, and you know things like that, and they can use those to really measure how because the skills, I teach, a lot of the skills I teach are related to how to be engaged in the classroom as opposed to just saying pay attention. How do we pay attention? How do we take notes? How do we listen...those types of things? So those, those goals are very much related to how they’re doing in the classroom. Um, I don’t know that I do enough of that outside of the study skills class, but, um, I’m probably at fault when I tell them you can’t just do it in the class, in this classroom, it’s got to be in other classrooms too. But, um, in that particular very concrete setting, I was able to see that direct relationship.

P6 – I just want to say something else about what I was saying before and about cause, cause I was trying to you know like work with the question which really talks about how it, it would impact student engagement. And one of the things that, that my experience is, is working with a student from a counseling perspective would be that, um, they’d be much more engaged like we’d have much more student-teacher rapport if, if the goal setting was there and, and established. Now, now, now can I technically do that no but do I do that yes. So, so as a result of that it actually directly impacts the student-teacher rapport, but that happens where they can actually come back and, and, and say more about what actually is going on at home, so that they can get the appropriate referrals necessary for them in their own personal goal, you, you know, so it like you know, while it isn’t happening in the moment, it actually furthers the conversation to get further goal, personal goals met so...

Moderator – in a support staff type of way.

P6 – in a support staff type of way, right, correct.

Moderator – That’s what I’m hearing you say...

P6 – Yeah. Yeah. Yup.

Moderator – which I think clarifies what you asked before.

P6 – Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. cause it you know just in light of like you know how it, how that they, they kind of go together you know.
Moderator – Participant nine, the male voice of the group, why don’t you read question 8 for us off of the focus group interview guide about authentic learning and then answer it. You’re going to have to build in your own wait time.

P9 - Ah, how do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impact student engagement? Ah, I guess you know making connections to either prior knowledge or to other things that they’re actively participating in within a week for a reasonable amount of time, ah, is, um, it impacts so much on student engagement. If you can make those connections, it draws out that interest, and it makes you want to seek out the goal even more, so, um and then when it’s being related between all the different subject areas, they really start to make connections and see their learning as a whole, as a part of life rather in just the particular subject itself. So it gets them more engaged because they see how it can actually relate to their way of living. It doesn’t even have to be something that you necessarily do in a job, but it relates to life itself. And when they see the whole, all those connections, and when they’re actually, it, it also mentions simulations, um, and if they’re actually in the experiment, part of the experiment, ah, they can also relate to it.

Moderator – Some of the teachers, and I believe on this side of the table, have mentioned you know resource setting or working with special education students, and again I’m going to make an assumption, and some of this group shared anyway, based on the courses or the classes that you provide instruction, you tend to work with multiple content areas and also different cross sections of students, maybe not this year, but just in general, it tends to be part of the experience. In thinking about it from, from that perspective, how, how, how, where are you coming from as far as authentic learning with the different populations and different content areas?

P2 – I think that it can be really great, or it can be totally off base, when you’re in regards to a resource room, because when we do interdisciplinary units during the team, and you know we try to make the units very meaningful for our kids, and we’re very careful about tying it into every subject, and, um, you know making sure that it fits with everybody’s curriculum as much as possible, but then I find, and I don’t know if you guys find this, I am not always at the exact same pace that the gen. ed. class is at with my resource room. Sometimes we have to spend a little longer on a unit, or sometimes it gets shorter, or you know, and we don’t always stay right on the same path. So while we want to include the kids so as not to make them feel like they’re a separate entity within the building, we bring these resource kids in to these simulations or these interdisciplinary units where don’t necessarily fit that well, you know during the moment, and I think it sometimes for them, it’s so out of place that it has very little effect on their learning and their engagement in the room. I don’t know if you guys would agree with that.

P3 – I just would like to piggyback on that because I have the same, um, concern. Um, this is the 1st year I’m teaching science, and I wanted so desperately where I was so interested in, um, trying to stay on pace with the other, you know my, my general ed. content teacher. We were doing great, but then we fell behind, and one of the things that
troubled me was that some of my kids were taken out to go to a team unit, but I was never told that they had to have completed a certain assignment before they got there. So the kids left, and then they were asked to leave because they hadn’t finished the page or the exercises that they needed to finish in order to get there. So it was very disheartening for both of us because you know in our team environment, when you go back to middle school, philosophy, we’re very much into houses and teams and trying to make everybody feel included, that they’re not just stuck in this big school with you know 600 students, and they’re just you know fragmented. Yet when you get a special ed. class or you have a team activity that’s tied to an activity that they haven’t done simply because well, I don’t know, I should’ve known, could’ve known, whether it was my responsibility or not, they left without the right information, and they were asked to leave. They really felt horrible. It really undermined the team effort that the school thinks they’re putting forward, and I’m not sure, I mean there are times that I guess that I think it works, but I think the special ed. kids don’t really feel like they’re part of the team. They want to, but I’m not sure that they really do. And these are the little things that happen that trip them up that make them feel disincluded, and so when we talk about authentic and interdisciplinary units, I try to bring those things in on our own because I don’t want to bring them in and have them feel like, like, ah out like, the fish out of water, because I think it really, I don’t know, I think bringing them in only makes them stick out more than doing it in a classroom and having their own interaction. Ah, so I, I have mixed feelings about that in your general ed. population mixes with, with my kids. I’m not clear that I like that.

P5 – Well the same thing recently just happened to me, ah, where I brought my kids into, um, another classroom, and we were not up to what they were learning. But I took it as turning it into something positive that they’re going to now go into that classroom, and they’re going to learn from the other kids, and then when we come back into my classroom, and when I start that unit on, ah, Athens and Sparta, they will have they’ll have a prior knowledge from the other students. So I turned it into a more positive spin because that does happen. So you just have to look at it from the other side when you know it’s going to happen, but it’s...

P4 – I have to, I have to jump in. It was my classroom that P5 came into, and my, it, ICS class, so it was actually a great population to mix everybody into it cause there’s a total range of abilities. Um, and my kids really enjoyed taking your kids under their wings, and the next day when they weren’t in they were like where are they’re part of our city state, how come they’re not here, like it was, it worked. I mean, um, it really did. But to P5’s credit, she’s like I said, these are the 3 days we’re working on this, and she’s like we’re going to come in for these two but not these, it’s like okay, fine, you know, we, we had a dialogue about what, where it was going to work and where it wouldn’t work. But also my ICS teacher is very good about keeping the, the level of communication between the two resource seventh grade teachers that have our same kids, our team kids, and me so that there’s a dialogue that works by me, so that there’s a dialogue.

P5 – Uh-huh, uh-huh...
P4 - And that works by me. I mean that’s bridged by my ICS teacher not by me. It’s like she does a phenomenal job of keeping that open.

Moderator - So, making the assumption that in the ideal world as working with special education students that communication would be there, okay. and all the time or consistently, can you think of either in a self-contained environment or of as part of in-class support, how that authenticity impacts student engagement? Again, if you had those ideal scheduling and communicative pieces in place, essentially how, how does it rank really?

P3 - In, in the ideal world, it would rank at the top.

P2 - I don’t, just to, um, I mean rewind a little bit. I kind of approached it from a negative standpoint. I don’t think it’s always negative. I think it has the potential to be negative, and when it’s bad, it’s bad. When it’s bad, they get sent out of the room, and they feel awful. But when it’s good, it’s really good, and they feel like they’ve learned something, and they’ve gotten to know people. And I think that when it’s good, and they can make those connections, and they get to see it in a more real light, or see how this one math concept really goes across the curriculum, and it goes into other areas, I think it’s really great for them to make these ties, and I think they really latch onto the knowledge in that way, um, when they’re given that opportunity.

P5 - It’s, it’s like I look at it as a giant force when they can make those connections across the curriculum, especially in special education. I mean they just go. They go far with it. They really, they really attribute it to the everyday world, you know in their real life, so it’s, it’s great. It’s a great thing.

Moderator - And someone had used the word meaningful, I believe once or twice in our in our discussion here. Also another word that was mentioned and just coming to the conclusion of the instructional strategies, and then we’ll close with the last three questions, which will move a little more quickly, not necessarily as in-depth, it had been mentioned again once or twice, in early on, student-centered, I think by some of you here. Just looking at that last question on the bottom of the first page, as far as instructional strategies, does student-centered instruction, considered to be a balance of, and you see all of those many items listed there, it doesn’t have to be in its entirety, think of it again from the perspective of your experience and research, training, and things of that nature, cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, multiple intelligence theory, how do you think this approach, piecs or all of that, meaning student, student-centered instruction, impacts student engagement? We’ve spoken of three other instructional strategies. We’ve talked about teacher-student rapport. You’ve spoken to classroom management, having to do with clear expectations and goal setting. You’ve also spoken to authentic learning. Just looking at student-centered instruction as the final cog in the wheel so far as the strategies impacting student engagement, where are you again within your experiences with student-centered instruction and the impact to student engagement?
P8 – Um, from the, the health perspective classroom, um, one of the things that I’m still trying to get used to is amongst my classes I have, um, special ed. students that are in the classroom, that as a health teacher, we don’t get ECS support for in the classroom, so what I do to better understand my students is go and read you know any information that I need to get about these students. Um, and I tend to do more of the group work rather than, uh, um group work and, um, project work, project-based activities to involve these students with, um, some of the higher students in the classroom, so that they can kind of, may you know help along the students. And, and, um, ah, ah, I guess, I don’t know, that I don’t know what the right word to use is, um, ah, I guess to kind of ease them into the ‘topic that we’re, that we’re talking about because a lot of times it’s, it’s difficult for them to understand the whole concept, and like in the class that I have now, I have 9 special ed. students in my one classroom out of 22 kids. So for me to, to spend special, you know with nine kids during the activity, it’s rather difficult for me to do cause I lose time getting to the classroom from, from the locker room after I’m done on duty from the period before, so I’m already down to like 35 minutes rather than 40. So I tend to do group work and put them with, I group them myself. I don’t allow them to, sometimes I do, but depending on the activity, I tend to group them myself and put them with the higher students in the classroom, and have them kind of work with each other. And it’s been so far for the most part pretty much effective cause I don’t want them to feel as if they’re never raising their hand, and they’re never getting involved in the classroom because they’re not understanding, or they don’t want to you know answer something incorrectly, and, and be you know shadowed away from being involved in the classroom.

Moderator – So what you’re saying is the student-centered approach, primarily with group work, is having a positive impact on student engagement in the overall class?

P8 – Yes.

Moderator – Okay, I’m, I’m just clearing it.

P8 – Yes, I’m just having a hard time explaining it, but...

Moderator – Yes, well you know I’m just clearing it for myself. That’s all. P4, were you going to add something?

P4 – Yeah. I was going to say that, um, the, the student-centered approach keeps the students engaged. But I think that, um, some of the other things we talked about are, are kind of like first, that base one has to be established first. There has to be the rapport. There has to be an understanding of what’s expected, and then you, you, you build on that with all your student-centered, um, activities, be it cooperative learning or even lecture, cause some students really love that believe it or not. And, um, that’s how you keep momentum. It’s not, you can’t not, you can’t be missing trust. You can’t be missing goals. You can’t be missing clear expectations and think you’re gonna throw a couple good group projects at them, and they’re gonna be signed up. You know what I’m saying? I mean, you guys, know what I’m saying?
Moderator - I'm hearing you saying teacher relationships...

P4 - But it's, it's like it, it, it keeps that momentum going. But it can't be the only thing that you have going in your room. You can't just give 'em a, a killer IDU, is not going to keep 'em engaged every day.

Moderator - Go ahead.

P3 - Ah, I'm actually going to say, I guess, the opposite of what P4 said because I think that you can use, if you use the balance of the cooperative learning, and the group work, and the discussion, etc., you can give them I think, I think, that tells them that you're interested in reaching them, and I think it helps you to set the expectation, and helps them understand that they can trust you, and you can get your classroom management in line because the teach, the children are engaged. When they're engaged, you have fewer disciplinary problems because they don't have time. They're busy doing what they want to do, and they're having a great time. So I would kind of say that while I, I don't agree, I don't disagree with P4, but I, I just see it as when the, ah, I see these components as, as almost being the center of the well, somehow or other, I see the relationship being that when you give them these activities, you get to set the expectation level because they understand that this activity isn't the regular lecture that they just have to sit there and listen to, and that this is the reason for the increased expectation. So it's sort of like if you want to have fun and do good things, the classroom management piece has to be there. They have to take that responsibility on themselves, and then you find out that they tend to keep everybody in line because if any one person or group acts out or is in some way uncooperative, then they know that there's the likelihood that they won't get to do that again. So I think that all of those components make a stew of sort that play off each other at different times and different manners.

Moderator - Let's take a look at the second page, question 10. We'll use that question as a lead-in to the next part. What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement? I'm just going to point out two key words in the question, and it's not meant to, it's not meant to throw anybody in any way, shape, or form. What do you think and feel, opinion and as we did mention in the opening script, it's alluded to at least, it's an emotional process, being evaluated. I'm speaking from my own experience. You may, you may con, concur. You might not concur. Ah, I know that many people have shared with me over, over the years that I've been in education as a teacher and an administrator, that it's an emotional process, and, um, again. I'm looking at that from, from both perspectives, um, so just general opinions. And also if you feel comfortable sharing some of your feelings, keep in mind that anything that is shared here is obviously in the absence of your building principal. And if you're speaking about experiences from the past, same thing, meaning 'this is not, ah, there's in no way, shape, or form this information is reported back to, to the principal as far as what you're speaking about. Again this is just meant to get at the communication that occurs in the evaluation process with the building principal and really focusing on the goal of improving teaching and learning as, as you respond to it. But it, I, I think it would be negligent on my part not to
at least point out that yes I understand that there's an emotional component to it, ah, again at least based on my own experience. So just kind of think about it maybe from, from that angle or through that lens as, as you address it.

P2—Um, I think that we had discussed much earlier on in the questions what is student engagement, and I think that a lot of times because not just the building principal, but anyone who comes in to observe you, only sees a snapshot in 180 frames, doesn't know that the kid who's sitting up and paying attention is actually engaged because the day before he had his head down on the desk, and while he wasn't necessarily raising his hand and participating in that manner, every now and then you go in, and the principal or whoever, will say well so and so wasn't, wasn't engaged, wasn't participating, and they don't, it's not always taken into consideration that they don't know what that student is like, or on the whole. Do you understand?

Moderator— I think, I, what I'm hearing you say is, is that it's, it's only a small piece in time, and there might be other mitigating factors that lead to the observation for that piece in time...

P2—Right they...

Moderator—the other person's not aware of.

P2—Right, because we know our students, because we spend so much time with them. I might know that that student is engaged because they're not doodling, and they are watching, and their head is up; whereas, someone who comes in just for a, a brief moment doesn't know that that is what engagement looks like for that student, and can misread it as well because they weren't answering questions or asking questions, that they weren't engaged.

Moderator—What would you, based on your point having to do with it just being a snapshot in time, what would, what would be helpful as far as student engagement and just feedback you get?

P2—Um...

Moderator—Take it to the, to the post conference, to that point.

P2—I think at the post saying so and so was acting unengaged or didn't seem interested in the lesson or didn't seem to be participatory in the lesson, asking about that student or a regular basis is, and how they were that day as compared to other days, as opposed to just saying they weren't engaged, what for that student that was engagement.

P3—Maybe the observation should be more of a question and answer. Maybe it should be more of a dialogue rather than a one-sided snapshot like P2 suggested. As perhaps it should be, um, a dialogue between the administrator and the teacher, or the person being evaluated, as to so how would you rate student engagement today, why would you rate it
that way, what did you see today that you may or may not see on a regular basis. If that’s what they’re looking for, then it’s not that that information is unavailable. They just have to solicit it. Now granted, that’s more time consuming, and I’m not quite sure how that would, or where that would, appear on, on a, on a observation report, or even how it would be included. But at some point, if they want to know about student engagement, the person who would be best able to judge that should be the teacher.

P4 – Can I add to what she said? Um, it’s almost like after you’re observed, cause I think that you have a great idea, that you should sit down for 5 or 10 minutes with the administrator who is observing you, where it’s like a, a quick rap up on the observation. How did it go today? Was this typical? You know, um... I noticed this kid in the back sleeping. Oh yeah, well you know... Oh really? That’s what that kid is all about... just to sort of get like a snapshot perspective not, not definitive or anything, just to help the administrator be in your room on the other days when they’re not, just by giving them your perspective on how the class was versus the typical class. And I think that would really, I know that’s not how it’s done, and I don’t even know if they’re allowed to do it that way. But I think that that would really, um, when they go to write their summative comments and sit down with you, then would really sort of have, have a better perspective on, on how that lesson really was compared to a typical lesson.

Moderator – You’ve got food in your mouth, so we’ll come back to you.

P5 – I think that’s a really good idea. Um, what P4 was, ah, saying about, um, I think that if there’s, and we can’t do a dialogue, maybe some sort of write-up. We’ll know if they could give us a form if they’re leaving the room, or put a form in our box. Do you think the lesson went well...yes, no, yes, no... really quick write it up, and then give it to your supervisor, just, say, so and, so before they do the write-up.

P3 – Actually they did this in the district I was in. Ah, they would sit in your class and then they wouldn’t necessarily be able to see you right after your class, but you had an almost, or as an immediate follow-up as possible, post conference, I mean post observation conference. And it was just meant to be this little informal, how did it go. Did you like it? What would you change? Talk to me about... whatever their talking points were. And it was just a conversation. Then they would write their comments, and then we were brought, brought back in to get the written evaluation where he would discuss what he saw, what we had to say, because he, the, the assessment program there recognized that on any given day it may or may not be a routine day. And I think that it did give us a certain respect for the administration because it wasn’t like I said, that it, it said to us, we’re aware that this is only I shot out of 180. Tell us what you see. Tell me what you liked. Tell me what you didn’t like. Did you try something new? What do I need to know in order to look at this and think of this in a critical manner...and not necessarily critical meaning bad, but to do critical thinking about this. How do I think about this? And I think that it was very well-received by the teachers in the district. I mean we liked our building principal a great deal because he really seemed interested in our own personal growth, and the observations weren’t meant necessarily to be critical. They were meant to be growth tools.
P1 - I think I had the perfect person coming in then. I was, um, I was, I was, I was observed. Thank you. I was observed, um, last week, and before this person came in, he wrote me a note, and it's almost like what we try to say to the kids you know. You don't come to school knowing everything. You're here to learn, and he said to me, um you know what, whatever I say will really help in your growth. And I really appreciated that. And I did have the opportunity right after the session, which was not a great one, because he happened to pick not one of the great groups, um, but we got to sit down and, and have a conversation about it. And he did ask me what I thought of it, and you know whatever, and, um, it was very worthwhile. But it was immediate, and he had written down all these notes, and he gave those to me. This is, um, a less formal interview or observation then I, I would now be getting, I guess from our principal. But it was great, and I, I wasn't as fearful as I thought I would be because he said to me, it's about helping you to become a better teacher. So I appreciated that.

Moderator - Ah, I'll, I'll just comment that you're fielding the question as it was intended to ask think and feel. I just wanted to point that out. So it's, it's moving, it's moving along.

P1 - So, um, ah, it's gone

Moderator - Sorry...I didn't mean, I didn't mean to make you lose your train of thought there.

P6 - But just something else that you had said, P1, um, that I, um, wh, what I do is not only, um, difficult to observe, but it's also, um, not allowed to be observed you know. They can't come in and observe a counseling session, right, because it's just, it would be, it would defeat the purpose, yeah, you know, the, the confidentiality, the federal law, bah, bah, but, um, in it, so, so like my observations are in totally different settings you know, different, um, scenarios right, so, so that being said, um, I you know, I've had really very extremely, um, unusual observation, um, and, ah, what do you call it, evaluations, right, um, unusual meaning like you know, they don't know what to say, you know most people who are my supervisors really don't even know what I do, right, um, given my particular position, right. And, and I don't mean that disrespectfully. I just mean that like, they just have not ever done that particular position before. Anyway the point I'm trying to make is that my experience in the observation, ah, the procedure of it is that in the post, um, observation, it, that's, that's the arena where you can actually have these conversations. And in the written summative of what actually happened in the evaluation process, um, it's not been my experience that it's been, um, adversarial or in, in all three of my districts, not just here, like it's in all three of my districts. And it, it could be due so my position, and again given that they don't really know what I do, but, but my experience has been that, that, at that particular time. And I did get 1 of my 9 years, I did get one evaluation that I had I was not okay with. And so my response was to have the post you know meeting and then, but, but I during that, before that I brought something up, and I said this is what I have to say about what you have to say, and that's like it was just done and over in like you know, and it wasn't like, um, I think you used like, um...I think you used it doesn't have to be like necessarily defensive or positional.
It's, it's more of like, a okay thank you for your insight, and this is what I have to say, like, this is pretty much how, so it's, so you know, but, but I like the idea of like being able to do that like a few minutes ahead of time, like what is this like usually. But in my case, it wouldn't matter because...

P1 - They don't know what you're doing.

P6 - They don't right, know what I do anyway. Ah, but exactly, but I mean I get the, the whole world of teaching. A kid who might for the 1st time ever be just sitting there, and that is like a huge part of this so...

P7 - I haven't been observed here yet at all, so, um, but I do, I do want to say that it interesting, you can have sometimes the, a really great lesson. If somebody's going to gauge your lesson by how the children are responding to it, it's not always terribly accurate because I can do the same lesson in different classes, and it works really well in two classes, and for some reason, just doesn't work as well in another class. So you have to kind of wonder. It's sort of a crapshoot depending upon who someone's coming in to see your lesson. You feel real concerned. It's like the snapshot issue that you could have. So hopefully they're looking at the lesson plan and looking at what the children are doing besides how they're responding to it, because it could just be those kids on that particular day not responding, where maybe if it had been the day before, or they would have responded. And sometimes it is a crapshoot as to, in the same day, different kids how they're going to respond to a lesson, and sometimes I'll let somebody think that fifth, sixth is going to respond great, and my eighth, ninth isn't. And it's the opposite way around, and, and there's no way to, in another words, I don't think, maybe there's something I need to learn, but I see it as there's no way to figure it out so, so that snapshot issue is, is a problem. I see a lot of teachers talking when they see Jeff walking around with his, ah, white pad, and, and everybody's nervous because he's coming in because there always is that that thing where you really, is you don't know what's going to happen in, in any room in any given day really, and, um, so it's just, it's just an interesting...but it's that snapshot issue I guess. They only see a little piece on a particular day.

P6 - I don't know who mentioned it, but somebody had mentioned that, ah, that it's, it's an opp opportunity to have the experience be like a learning experience. Ah, may, maybe it was you, P1, about it being a learning experience.

P1 - Well that's what he said.

P6 - Right, but, but if it's, it's looked upon as like a partnership with the administrator, like, like you're partnering with that administrator, to really, for growth and development, you know like you're training and development, and as a teacher and as a human being, right, it could be a like a great opportunity. You know it could. But if it's, you know, but like, you know, everybody like a human being, is like, ohhh, you know the police are there. Did I do something wrong? It's like, you know, like it's like, a normal like human response kind of a thing.
P4 - You know you make a great point because especially non-tenured teachers, you, they want us to, to improve, to do better. So why make it a surprise visit? Like I know I would say the, um, the social studies supervisor sets up a meeting for a pre-conference. What's your lesson going to be about? So you have a lesson plan? Okay great. So what should I expect to see? And then you have a post conference, um, you know, versus somebody just, okay are you in here today? Oh, have a seat. Let me find you a copy of my lesson plan. You know it just throws you right off the pace of, uh, your today's statement, everything you're going to talk about in your anticipatory set, because you're now scrambling up there. Where's that lesson plan that I have to hand that person? Because I don't know about you guys, but I don't carry my lesson plans from room to room when I teach 'cause I know what my lesson plan is for the day, and I also know that I'm gonna have to maybe adjust a couple things depending on the group of kids I have in any given room. So why does it have to be, why does it have to be a, um, surprise?

P8 - Uh, well, uh, I have a question for P4. Were you, ah, approached by administration and they were asking for the lesson plan, or is it you wanting them to have...?

P4 - I had this experience, and, ah, I am really well-planned for the day after teacher's convention this year because, because the day after teacher's convention, Monday, and I'm sick, I'm doing this lesson that is, it's, it's an evaluation lesson off of the brand new curriculum. No one's ever taught it before, and we have no clue how it's gonna go, and in comes the guy with the white pad, and sits down, and goes do you have a lesson plan, and I'm like well, ah, here it is, and you know, I'm not even in my own room. I'm in someone else's room cause that's where I taught first period, and I'm like well this is great, first period on a Monday after teacher's convention. I will never have a tougher evaluation time slot in my career I'm sure. But I said to my husband, I am so well-planned for this Monday after teacher's convention. I'm gonna be buried if I don't see the white pad in my room cause I'm ready to roll with something that's more tested and true. You know so it was great. I didn't get a bad evaluation, but I was, I felt uncomfortable because I didn't feel like I was my best.

P3 - Let me tell you that I was so surprised by that visit that I got that he actually got up and left because I was babbling in the front of the room. I was like, ah, ah, ah, and I'm like well, I guess I said, okay wait a minute, okay let me start over, and he said I'll come back, I mean, because I couldn't speak.

P5 - Um, two things...I've seen both sides, where they come to you and ask you what lesson you would like to be observed in. I actually have to say I prefer, my feeling is I prefer the surprise visit because I will have anxiety for weeks knowing that the principal, or vice principal, or whoever is coming in to visit, and, um...

P4 - You know what our vice principal does. I'm sorry to cut you off. But because I've been observed this year so far, and you know [name of staff member] comes in. She sits down in my classroom, and I'm like, oh are you here today? She's like, yeah I was looking at your lesson plans, cause you know how you submit the week coming. I was
looking at your lesson plans, and this lesson looked really interesting, and I wanted to see how you taught it. So she has done her homework before she surprised me, and she has basically said to me in that one statement that she valued my planning, and she wanted to see my execution, and it put me so at ease, like okay cool, I can get up here and perform my execution now cause she knows what's coming. I don't have to try and communicate to her why my anticipatory set looks like this and what my procedures have to do with what I'm trying to accomplish in my closure because she's seen it. And so I thought that that sort of surprised me. That's fine. But maybe look at my plan in advance before you surprise me.

P5 - I don't know. I, I like it, my, I like the surprise.

P8 - Can I just say something about the surprise?

P5 - I just want to get one thing in, one little thing, and after you know the anxiety of the observation and what not, if it does go bad, I always say to myself they know what's going on in the building.

P8 - Right.

P5 - They know that it could just be that day, and cause they, they walk around. They see, and they know that we're good teachers. So I, I say that to myself, and it helps. So if you need me to say that to you I will.

P8 - I, I think that, ah, I see, ah, I, I don't feel one way strongly about it than, than the other. But I just think that, the surprise factor is so much more realistic than, than the okay I'm coming to plan. I'm coming in and planning on sitting in on your lesson, which there's nothing wrong with that, but I just think that, and I look at it more of, more of a perspective from the students, that you go through your day on a daily basis, whether you're a teacher, whether you're a you know a business person, that you're gonna come through obstacles every day, and whether it be something that takes away your focus from teaching, whether it be an administrator coming in and sitting in on your lesson, whether it be something that happens with a student, whether it be you getting a personal phone call, something that happens in your personal life, and you know over the intercom, of you know, um, P8, you have, ah, ah, personal phone call on, and you know it's an emergency. You're, you're dealt with things every day on a daily basis, and that's what makes you learn to, to you know go down that lane, and, and, and focus on what you're trying to do rather than you know going by a, um, um, a set plan. But I just, I don't feel one way strongly about it than the other. I just I look at it as the surprising as, you know what, it is what it is. You gotta deal with it. If it happens, you, you deal with it, and it, just treat it as if something happened like a student doing something, you know dramatic or something, in your classroom. And of course 22 students are now, or whatever your class size is, is going to be completely focused rather than one just being, you, so, um, I, it kind of throws them off too. You know what I mean? Like, oh, um, but it throws them off into you know their own state as well when they see somebody sitting in the back of the classroom, so...
P2 - I agree with that to a certain extent, but for me, and I can’t speak for anybody else, not all of the people that observe me, some of them, like the one that comes in with the white pad, makes me very nervous. And I am not myself when they’re there because it’s such a shock when I have an idea of when they’re coming. You don’t have to tell me you’re coming on December 14th, or whatever, but if I know you’re thinking about coming eventually and I can mezzably rap my brain around that someone’s coming in to observe me, I’m not going to do anything differently. I’m not, I’m not going to teach one way because someone’s not there and a different way because someone is there, because, the, none of us sitting here are those kind of teachers, but it just, I don’t think that they get an accurate picture from me because I get nervous. It makes me nervous, and I just…

Moderator - Well, we heard about the babbling before.

P2 - I have had that. I have had a piece of paper in my hand and a piece of paper trying to put it on the board, and I couldn’t get it off of the board and…

Moderator – I’m going to jump in at this point, not that this was, not because we can’t continue this conversation, moving along very well, but time wise, we’re coming to the conclusion here. So what we’ll ask you to do is just if you would take a minute or 2, whatever you need, rather than read, I’m just going to hold up, well P2’s card from the envelope, and the, the pencil, if you want to use a pen fine, and basically you would complete the statement on the index card that’s in front of you. Write down your response. Feel free to go to the back. I’ll read it out loud quickly, and feel free to start as you need to. Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is blank because blank. So in other words pick 1 of those 4.

P9 - It has to be 1 of those 4?

Moderator – Pick 1 of those 4. If you are adamant that, or you, you, for whatever reason, you can’t pick one, just explain where you’re coming from. But it’s meant to be a rank order question.

P9 – Ah, can we actually give them numerical values?

Moderator – If you would like, that’s fine. At the same time, we’re really just looking for you to pick one. But we’re not going to hold your feet to the fire so to speak. We’ll just sit quietly and wait. We will ask you just to go around in conclusion and just read your card.

P4 – Do we keep these, or do we give these back?

Moderator – You can if you would like. Just the pencil and the card we need back. Okay, it will take 1 minute, and we’ll rap up here. We’ll start in the opposite direction we
started with P9. We’ll begin the discussion with P2, and we’ll move around this way. Please read your card. If you don’t feel comfortable with what you wrote on it, you can just skip. It’s not a problem.

P2 – Um, I put teacher-student rapport because the way the student responds to everything in the classroom, including the method of instruction or the discussion, which I feel kind of encompasses the rest of the options, is directly related to their comfort level in the classroom, which I think is in direct relation with their comfort level and rapport with the teacher.

Moderator – Thank you.

P5 – I chose teacher-student rapport as well, and it’s, ah, related to the others.

Moderator – Thank you.

P4 – I chose authentic learning experiences because students are more engaged when they see the relevance of your lesson to their own life.

Moderator – Thank you.

P3 – I also chose the authentic learning experiences because I believe they, um, lead to the other three.

Moderator – Thank you.

P7 – I chose student-centered instruction, meaning student-centered instruction, meaning that you’re meeting the need of that individual student, and I see that as a way to establish rapport or authentic learning experiences, and then I feel it translates into better classroom management.

Moderator – Thank you.

P8 – Um, I chose teacher-student rapport as well because when positive relationships, um, are in need, I feel that, ah, that positive relationships with students are, um, an effective piece when it comes to student engagement. And I think as long as there’s student engagement in the classroom, it’s a teacher’s, um, observation to see that there’s learning going on in the classroom.

Moderator – Thank you.

P1 – Teacher-student rapport, they’re on a journey together - sometimes difficult, other times exhilarating.

Moderator – Thank you.
P6 - Ah, teacher-student rapport, basically it's trust and developing a safe space.

Moderator - Thank you.

P9 - Ah, student-centered instruction, because if the instruction evolves and revolves around the student, they're extremely likely to be engaged, and they're part of the focus and have a better rapport with them.

Moderator - Thank you, and question 12 we don't have to go over word for word. Essentially, at this point, as we're concluding, is there any comment for the good of the order, or topic that you would like to bring up related to the study, meaning what we've talked about here today? It's perfectly acceptable either way.

P4 - I have one comment. It just, hearing my colleagues, the other p's around the table, talk they kind of, it kind of struck me that depending on, on the student population, or the subject that you teach, some of these, like you have a different perspective on what really works, and I, I would, I would wonder if, your study if you're tempering your conclusions or, or adding something onto your conclusions that said you know in small group, um, special ed. instruction, or in like I know, um, p, what number are you seven, said about teaching skills. But I'm like I don't really teach skills. I teach content, yet there's skills involved. But I also have to do a lot of content, and so I just wonder if, if you're looking at the study and saying different things work for different populations in different ways.

Moderator - I think one of the things that is most valuable in terms of the conversation today, which I will say has been very rich, it's, it's, it's been good stuff, um, not because I agree or disagree with, I'm, I'm just talking about the dynamic, and in, in part of that analysis, what comes to me immediately, and Katherine and I will debate on this, on our take on what we, we read from the, from the conversation, and also from the tape, is that you do have very varying backgrounds, math, special ed., language arts, phys. ed., speech, counseling, that kind of thing. And I think that will come out in the tape. And I think that's what will naturally unfold and become part of this group's analysis in the dissertation, if that answers your question.

P4 - Um, it does.

Moderator - Um and yes, as you're bringing up before, in prepar, in what I have written so far in the dissertation, there's, there's a connection to what you're mentioning here again without saying too much.

P4 - No, it just struck me cause we all have such different perspectives.

Moderator - And, and again, I think that's what's really contributed to the, to the dynamic. I mean I get the sense, I know you have to get out of here bottom line, but I mean we could probably pick this up, and I'm not suggesting we do this, um, you know in a week or 3 days, and there'd be more to talk about. Um, at the same time, there, there has to be limits to whether it's research, or you know the practicality of life. So you, you
move forward. Um, but it's, it's been a very valuable experience I can say from just being here and trying to be as quiet as possible, and, um, you know non, nondescript as possible, which is very difficult because we become passionate as educators about this kind of, um. Anything else anyone wanted to comment on? Any, any, any topic you wanted to bring up? You want to clarify something you said? Okay, um, I think Katherine's going to stop the tape now. All we need to collect from you would be the pencil. You can leave, in a pile in the middle, and the index card... if you want to leave them in the middle too. We have your participant numbers on the back, so you don't have to put your name or anything on these. Um, everything else you can keep. Your copies of the focus group...
Group 2

Moderator – Good morning and welcome. We’re going to start with focus group interview guide questions 1, 2, and 3. And it probably will work out pretty well if we just go around the table, and we’ll start with the person to my left, which is participant seven. And we’ll move this way obviously skipping our assistant moderator there in the middle at the other head of the table. And if you would, you, you could start by sharing how many years you have been teaching, arc you a traditional or alternate route teacher, what grade level or levels and content area or content areas do you presently teach. We can probably roll all of that into one.

P7 – Okay, I’ve been teaching for 9 years. This is my 10th year. I’m a traditional teacher, my traditional certification, and I currently teach seventh grade language arts literacy.

Moderator – Thank you.

P2 – I am participant two. I’ve been teaching for 2 years. Well this is my 2nd year. I’m a traditional route teacher, and I teach seventh and eighth grade general music and chorus.

Moderator – Thank you.

P5 – I am participant five. This is my 1st year teaching. I am a traditional route teacher. I am a special education teacher. Um, I teach resource room social studies seventh and eighth, and I am in-class support for seventh and eighth grade math and seventh grade science.

Moderator – Thank you.

P4 – Um, I am participant four, and I’ve, this is my 1st year of teaching. I’m a traditional route teacher. I teach eighth grade, and my content area is Spanish.

Moderator – Thank you.

P3 – I am participant three. This is my 6th year teaching. I’m a traditional route teacher, and I teach seventh and eighth grade French.

Moderator – Thank you.

P6 – I am participant six. Um, my, um, I’m a guidance counselor, so I taught for 3 years, and I’ve been counseling for ten. Um, I was an alternate route teacher, and, um, seventh and eighth grade. I taught high school and elementary school.

Moderator – Thank you.

P1 – I’m participant number one. I’m a 1st year teacher. I’m a traditional route teacher, and I teach seventh grade resource, um, for language arts literacy, and I’m an ICS teacher
for eighth grade language arts literacy and seventh grade Spanish and seventh grade science.

**Moderator** — Thank you.

**P11** — Um, I’m number P11, and I have been teaching, I believe this is my 7th year, traditional route. I’m special ed. teacher, and right now I teach in-class support eighth grade language arts, seventh grade science, and eighth grade science.

**Moderator** — Thank you. Now that we’ve pretty much addressed questions 1 through 3 of the focus group interview guide, we’ll shift into question 4. [Name of school] is a school that is a grades 7-8 school, and if I were to ask you a little bit about, based on your experiences, research, maybe at [name of school] or even prior to [name of school], because many of you have indicated in the opening questions that you have experience in other districts or other places working with children, what would you say is middle school philosophy? What does it mean to you? And at this point, we don’t have to necessarily start with participant seven and move around the table. Any one of you could start as participants in fielding the question and feel free to jump in or bounce off of one another as you feel you need to.

**P11** — Um, 11…

**Moderator** — Yeah. That’s okay, and you, you don’t need to tell us each time. That’s fine.

**P11** — Okay, um, well middle school is exactly what it says. It’s far, you know, I, this is actually my first experience in middle school. But, it’s preparing you for high school. It’s, ah, you’re at a certain maturity level now, and a lot of things should come more naturally in school, should quote unquote. And if by the time a student jumps to high school, they should be ready for, have the skills necessary to achieve in high school, and obviously go on to college from there. It’s a jumping stone, um, for a lot of kids, you know from immaturity to maturity. Ah, that’s my feeling.

**P6** — I think it’s more of like a middle child syndrome, kind of lost. A lot of times I think a lot of people don’t know what middle school really provides. You know years ago it was junior high then you know it upper elementary. Now it’s kind of its own entity. Um, so yeah it, it’s preparation for high school. Um, but it’s you know maturity; it’s changing; it’s hormones; it’s a lot of different things. So it kind of is like both the middle child doesn’t really know what, you know where it stands, I think at times.

**P2** — I think part of middle school philosophy at least in, um, the middle schools I’ve been in through my practice and my student teaching were both at the middle school level, um, is I think the teaming aspect is something that is different that you don’t see at the high school level unless you have, ah, what do they call them the, they, they’re starting to group, and I think they’re going to do it at the high school where they’re grouped by where you think you’re gonna go with your career, interest-based core
groups, where you can almost like you can do trade, or if you’re going to go into social studies you’ll be heavy on computers, or you’ll be heavy on this. Um, but the teaming aspect I think ha, is for as far as I have seen is very big as far as the difference between elementary. You go from bring in, ah, I believe it’s called a self-contained classroom where they are with one teacher pretty much all day long, and high school it’s fairly demanding. You’re moving from class to class, and it’s supposed to be preparatory for college. Middle school kind of allows for the kids to come out of that self-contained. They’ve been nurtured, and some would say even coddled, depending on the elementary school. And it’s you know, it still gives them that team aspect, a little bit of reinforcement. They work with the same teachers, a smaller group of people. But also, I feel that it’s her job to really get them to be a little more independent as young adults, and transit, transition them from child to young adult, cause that’s also happening psychologically and emotionally, to prepare them to go into high school and then beyond, be productive young adults in society.

Moderator – Just to jump in here, you had mentioned, participant two, in the opening responses to questions 1 through 3, that you were with students at the middle and the high school levels.

P2 – I, I work only with middle school children. I teach at the high school, zero period 2 days a week, um, for chorus. I meet chorus kids at the high school, but I’ve never taught at the high school level.

Moderator – Is there a difference in changing the environment as far as your experience at the high school?

P2 – Um, the children are, are fairly secluded away from the majority of the high school kids. I know that at the beginning of the year when they’re on the bus with the high schoolers, cause they get on the high school bus to go to the high school to report and then the [name of school] bus, buses pick them up to come back here. I find that in the beginning of the year they’re very much in shock. They sit at the front of the bus. They don’t talk to the high schoolers. Um, they’re very, very shaky and terrified as they come off the bus, and then towards, as the school year gets on, they get more comfortable, and I think that going up to the high school 2 days a week, I think from what I’ve noticed, with my eighth graders last year, they were very ready and were more comfortable. That 1st day of high school was less of a shock to them because they’ve already done that. They’ve been on the high school bus 2 days a week. They’ve shown up early. They, and they’re, they’re already familiar with the building, and they seem to be more comfortable, from the girls who I taught that are now ninth graders, seem to. They were very, they’re like in anticipation of high school, they’re oh it’s no big deal you know we’ve been there, we’ve done that. Um, and I think that they were able to kind of put their foot in the water with having zero period at the high school, which may prepare some of them, some of them, it may make no difference because they come straight to the chorus room where there’s no high schoolers in sight, and they work with me, and then I put them on the bus, and then they come back here with the rest of their peers. So, with some I think it helps,
um, prepare them even more, and others I don't know that it affects them. I think it depends on the child. Did I answer your question?

Moderator - I think we're moving along very well. Thank you.

P5 - Okay, um, I just wanted to go off of what P2 said about transitions. I think, ah, being a special education teacher I feel as if in the middle school environment that is a huge thing for my students, being able to help them make that transition and knowing that it's not going to be the same transition for everyone. In my classes and what I've observed even in my in-class support classes, that, it's the support, the kids, the students are looking for support from the teacher, while they're, they're looking for feedback. They're looking for direction to go on because in elementary school they're given this track of what they need to do. Now they come to [name of school], and some students are on teams. All students are on teams, but some of them are pulled out from their team classes, and it's hard for them to find a direction. So I think it's important to set up a path and help students and just be that. I think it's important for just to help support the transitions, ah, you know, vary your instructional strategies, you know just be able to be flexible, is, if you're flexible, then your students will be flexible, and they'll be flexible and will be able to think to be flexible in order to get to the next step because high school is completely different, a completely different environment it is, and that in middle school. So they need to be confident in themselves before they go out.

P2 - I think a lot of it is based on the student's readiness level. There are some students that come in and midway through their 7th grade year they carry an aura of, huh, ah, almost maturity. Some seventh graders are more mature than others, and there are some kids that even at the end of the 8th grade year, they still mentally and emotionally are not quite ready. And I think ideally the middle school philosophy would enable the teacher to at the child's readiness level, you know either keep them where they're at in maturity, or, and continue to help them grow, or with children who need more direction and special attention, offer that through them either through, um, you know student-teacher rapport or through modifications if it's a special ed. child to help them, set them up for success for the maturity level that's gonna be required of them, at least somewhat at the high school level.

Moderator - P4, you were going...

P4 - Yeah, I saw this. Yeah, I was, I was thinking about something. I was originally hired to work at the high school, and, ah, I had to make a decision. I came to [name of school]. I, ah, walked around, saw the school, talked with the principals about you know what are the pros and cons of coming to [name of school]. And one of the things that they said to me that really convinced me to become a middle school teacher was that we still have an effect on who this child becomes. Um, they mentioned the word, and I had never heard it before, of teaching to the whole child, not just teaching them your content area, but teaching them how to transition into the high school. It is part of our job, ah, you know, part of the middle school philosophy is that it is part of our job to teach that student how to be successful as a student and how to be successful as a person. And that is essentially
the reason why I decided that I wanted to be a middle school teacher because I want to have that effect. I want to be involved in making a whole child. I don’t want to get them and have this child already made. I want, I wanna be, there. So it was a hard decision to make, and one of the things that convinced me was the middle school philosophy. Ah, ah, at least as it was presented to me. So, ah, yeah. I just wanted to add that, the transition, the idea of the transition, being a part of the transition, the even the idea of being part of a team because that is part of making them successful in the transition. Ah, he, me being with a team every day to discuss what we’re going to do for these students, discuss you know interdisciplinary units, or whatever is a part of the middle school philosophy. Ah, you know I wanted to be a part of it, and that’s why I’m here.

P6 – I think, um, cause I’ve, I did all three levels, I taught elementary, middle, and high school, seniors. So, um, and I’ve always come back to middle school. It’s my favorite because, um, there’s a depth to them that still exists that isn’t there developmentally in elementary school. And, in high school, they’re already past that kind of cause they are individuals getting ready to go out into college or the work force. Um, and middle school there’s just a depth to them that’s humorous and quirky and enjoyable that’s definitely part of the philosophy of, of teaching to the whole child like you said. So I definitely agree with that.

P2 – I know when people ask why in heaven’s name do you teach middle school, bless you, um, you must be crazy. I, I always respond to them, um, any middle school experience was not a, en, enjoyable one. It was not a pleasant one, and I initially wanted to teach middle school because I wanted to be a more enjoyable student, ah, experience for them than it was for me. But what’s great about middle schoolers is that they do as P6 said, they have a, a little more depth to them than elementary schoolers and even you see it in sixth grade. They start to get there. But by seventh grade, they’re able to have a real conversation with them about real things, things that matter. And, but, as soon as they start to get to the ninth and 10th grade level, they, there’s almost, the, the I don’t know walls go up, or it almost seems like okay I’m done growing up, you, there’s nothing, at times, it feels like they’re, you’re, they’re no longer malleable. They’re ready to be who they are. They’re ready to move on. And the middle school level, I feel like they’re, they’re no longer children, but they’re not quite at that I am an individual, and I am moving forward. You can still be a part of shaping them into being mature, ah, responsible young adults with character, with, um, ah, to be educated and not to be ignorant about things. Then you kind of still get to, to get your hands in the Play-do a little bit, so, um,....

P4 – No, I was, I was, you just brought up the word character, and I was thinking about how last year they had character education here. And, I know that they, ah, got rid of that program; however, you know, character education is one of the parts of teaching a child to be a whole. So, I, I just thought it was interesting that they got rid of it. But, at the same time, I think you’re right because now it’s our, each and every one of our responsibilities, to teach character education. Yes they don’t have a specific class for it, but it’s still on our table, and it’s still a part of our responsibilities.
F2 - I think you're right. I think it almost makes the individual teacher more responsible to reinforce character and honesty and consideration and sensitivity in your classrooms every day rather than just saying oh well that's going to be so and so's job because they teach character ed., um, and, and, whether or not I think it's more effective when it's reinforced every period of every day with every single teacher. It doesn't matter whether or not you get the answer right or wrong so long as you put forth the very best that you can cause that builds who you are and integrity as a human being, and that's a huge part of, of growing up.

Moderator - P7, P3, or P1, did any one of you want to tap into anything that's been mentioned so far? I've heard people, just to review some of the responses, I've heard words like whole child, modifications pertaining to special education, transition, things of that nature, preparation for high school, along with the transition, anything you want to introduce or just tap into or extend as far as what's been mentioned before we move on?

P7 - I do. I agree with everything that's been said so far and the idea of middle school philosophy. We have to remember always that we're dealing with the emotional, educational, and physical changes in these children, and, they, they are children. And some of them, their bodies are growing faster than their emotions, and, and it's just a, a great big ball of confusion as they feel themselves very often and, and I think it's our responsibility to recognize that, and to help them through those difficult times. And, even if, peer- to-peer relationships, our, our job doesn't stop with okay you punctuated the sentence properly you're good to go. It, it's more than that. It's, it has to be more than that. I don't see it being any, any alternative. We have to look at the whole child, and, and going back to that phrase, the whole child. That's what it is. And I, I agree. It does kind of stop at a certain age because people have always asked me too, well why do you teach that age. That's when they get really crazy and the hormones and, and because they're still pliable, they'll still do goofy things in the classroom once in awhile. They won't worry you about it, you know. There's a certain part where that window closes, and they're more self-conscious. Or, if they haven't had that strength, they haven't developed that inner strength to stand up to you know maybe some strange thing that they like to do, and they'll do it in front of the class, they'll sing a song when everyone else is, is snickering behind their hands or whoever, and, and that's all there. That's, that's the, that's the good part because if they'll still do this without those inhibitions. And hopefully they'll get strong enough when they get to high school. They'll continue to do, succeed without what society squeezes around them. So it's ideal, but that's, that's the goal I think.

Moderator - Thank you.

P3 - Um, I think for me it's been interesting because this is my 1st year here, and I'm not on a team because I'm the only French teacher, so I have kids from every team. But in my previous teaching experience, I was on a team. And that's actually one aspect of the middle school experience that I personally miss because of the things that everybody else has said, being able to kind of get a better picture of the whole child. I see them for 40 minutes a day and then unless I have to, unless I go out and talk to the teams and say hey
what's going on with this kid, I don't get the daily interaction, the daily discussion, and how's you know he or she doing in that class, or maybe it's a problem with just this area or whatever. And so, um, I think that the teasing aspect is actually really, ah, a huge part of the middle school philosophy, um, in terms of teaching the whole child, and, um, likewise when someone else mentioned teaching character, um, I feel like the team is vital in doing that. And so for me not being part of the team, I've kind of, I feel like for me in my own content area which is French that, um, I've sort of taken on this idea that my content area is actually more of a vehicle for teaching the child to become a a person of character, which I don't, I don't know if that's how it's supposed to be, but it's not that I can't you know be slack on my content, but I do feel like at this age level, at the place where they are developmentally, that for me if they come away from middle school and they don't remember every French vocabulary word that I taught them, that is not so much an issue for me than if they walk away from middle school and don't know how to treat another person. And so, um, I think for me at this point I do tend to look at the middle school age as that you know we use our content, um, to get at, at the kid, and who they really are, and who they are going to become. Um, and so for me, it's, it's been good, ah, teaching French. This is my first year teaching French, but, um, I do miss that teasing aspect of being part of kind of the bigger picture of what's going on with the, the child.

P1 - I'm sorry.

Moderator - That's okay.

P1 - Um, I just want to say something brief cause I totally agree with what everyone is saying. I also feel that as far as what P2 said about them being coddled throughout middle school or elementary school, I feel as they transition into the middle school they're going from the beginning stages of learning how to be responsible and being accountable for things more often. And, transitioning into the high school, they have more of that, and because of what we do in middle school, that's how they transition to high school. You understand what I'm saying? I'm not really saying it right.

Moderator - I'm hearing you say that a lot of the experience, and correct me if I'm interpreting you incorrectly, or not accurately, that really the experience at the middle school level yes is in preparation for the high school. At the same time, it's a situation where the coddling almost needs to occur in order for them to get to the next point, for the bridge to be a smooth one to travel across.

P1 - Right, or like supporting them through that transition.

Moderator - So, in practice, practices can become, and I think people alluded to this in their comments earlier, practices can be scrutinized due to all of the changes, the physical, the emotional, and, and those kinds of things. At the same time, it, it really depends upon the extent to which you want to look at it. And, as middle school educators, you might look at something one way; whereas, people at the high school level might be looking at it from, from another perspective. Just to, yes, she needs water. Just to keep us
moving, and the dialogue has, really been moving along very well so far, as far as a richness to it, which is, which is great. And probably you know those kinds of things. We want to move along before we get to instructional strategies, because that's the core of the focus group interview guide, to the segment having to do with student engagement. One of the ice breakers that some of you attended had to do with looking at pictures. So I don't know if the people who actually attended that station, if you will, wanted to maybe open as far as this next question, question 5, what is student engagement?

P7 - Well in addressing the, um, the ice breaker the, the photos one, there was a clear difference. One child had both arms in her, um, raised up in the air, she had a great smile. Her eyes were open, her book was open. It was all good. And then the other picture was a boy who was kind of slumped over his desk, lying across his papers. His eyes were there, but he wasn't really looking or attending to the papers that were on his desk. He was clearly not engaged, wasn't interested. So, um, when we think about those, student engagement is really their active participation I believe. It's their active participation. Now not everyone is going to be waving their hands in the air and smiling brightly. Um, but, they will attend to what's going on. You see that with different body postures. You see that they're sitting upright, and they're paying attention. Their books are open, um, if they all are participating in some way. They may not all be waving the flag, but certainly a contrast to the child who is slumped across the desk. And, I was commenting when we were looking at those pictures that I have, ah, first and fourth period class, and the first period class I have someone who's lying across her desk cause she's tired. By fourth period, she's not hands up in the air waving, but she is alert and attentive. So I think, um, when we consider student engagement, we do have to look at the time of day, what their outside activities are, is what their personal lives may impact them as far as their energy level, in the morning, and things that are going on. So student engagement. Me to me, to sum up, is really having the students interested in what's going on and participating in what's going on to the extent that they're capable, at that time.

Moderator – What about from a counseling perspective?

P6 - Um, I don't necessarily feel that for a student to be engaged that they have to participate. Um, I think it's engage, as an individual, and that means different things to different kids. Um, you know even when I'm going like a guidance lesson in the classroom, um, sometimes just you know, a, a, a look or, um, I don't know you'll see like a, a smirk on a face that they're getting it, but they may not be the ones you know raising their hands or verbally saying something. So, um, you know, and I know even some kids don't necessarily even make eye contact when they're attending. Some kids are doodling, but they're listening, um, and are still engaged. So you kind of, I think it's individual thing you know.

P3 - I know that I deal in the music classroom. I do a lot of listening assignments with, where I play music, and then there's a guided listening where there's questions and the students respond based on questions of what I've asked them to listen for. And we talk about passive versus active listening. What is passive listening? What is active listening? What are some things, um, when do you passively listen? And the students will say when
I get bored with a teacher, or when, um, you know when I don’t want to listen to my Mom, and she’s yelling at me, or and then what is actively listening, and what does it look like to me if you’re actively listening versus if you are passively listening? And, there are times when we’re in the middle of a listening assignment, and I will see body language that says to me that ch, child has tuned me out, and I will direct the conversation, ask the question directly to the child. What was the text there? What, what lyrics did you just hear? And they will say it verbatim. They were actively listening, but their body language informed me that they weren’t. So I might think that they are not engaged based on their body language, but in reality, they were right along with me. They were doing exactly what we were doing, and, but I may not have known it just by looking at them. And I, I agree with P6 in the fact that each child may not look like they’re actively engaged, but it’s a teacher’s job to kind of figure out with the children who are in your room, you know they come in from gym, they need you know, they need a little bit of, ah, whether you call it an anticipatory set, or whether you call it something else, they kind of need to be brought in, and, and the teacher needs to be aware of where they’ve come from, what class they’ve come from, and what’s going on so that we don’t misinterpret body language or exhaustion because they just had to run, run the mile in PE, which the majority of my students come to me from PE, and as not wanting to participate in class. And sometimes it’s hard cause I will take it personally, or I will think am i not doing my job, am I not engaging them, but in reality, they were running around during PE and had to run the mile that day, and they’re just exhausted. Um, and so I think it has to be gauged based on where the students come from, and what, um, and what’s going on in their lives, and what classes, etc., etc. Each student is different, is the way you have to read them.

Moderator — What P2 is mentioning raises a question, and I’ll just put it out there for the group. There are special education teachers here, and some of you have identified as participants, with that hat on, that you work with multiple content areas. And, the self-contained experience, not in-class support, is a smaller environment as far as groups of kids, many times. With that in mind, how does student engagement, does it change, does it look different in that type of environment, or even if you take it a step further, in different content areas? In other words, if I am working with a group of students in science, in a self-contained science resource setting one period, and then a couple of periods later I’m working with the same group or a comparable group at least numbers wise, maybe not total demographic or even grade, just grade level in language arts, does the, does the engagement look different in different content areas? And I’m kind of putting this out there because I’m picking up on what P2 just mentioned, thinking about large groups of kids, the complete opposite and even in reference to phys. ed., you know coming out of that kind of experience and what had been ment, you had mentioned as far as where they’re coming from. So just the people who have worked with or work with special education populations, what, what does it look like as far as the different content areas and just the smaller numbers?

P5 — Um, well, in my resource, um, classes my students if I’m doing social studies, I have found in my social studies resource room classes, the majority of the students seem looking attentive. They, they give off that persona that they’re there, they’re listening to
me, and I don’t even have...There’s one student who I thought was right on, thought was just doing great. And it came time where I gave, um, first formal assessment. He didn’t know anything. When I got that grade back, well not just the grade, but when I got the answers back, and I was reading his answers, and I was just like wow he seemed so there, but he was in a totally different place. And I had to change my whole format of how I was teaching the class, but also how I could reach him, for him to be able to understand and make the right connections, of where the content was going, and it just changed my whole perspective of what engagement is. That if the student is there nodding and giving me eye contact, he’s doing it to please me thinking that that’s what he needs to do in class, and he’s you know a great kid. Um, so that’s one perspective. But then when I go into my ICS class, I have two math classes. A lot of students, I gave them my own survey in the beginning, and I wanted to know how they felt about math. Math for me was a scary subject when I was in middle school. I actually used the word hate when I talked about it, and I got, I will admit I was intimidated walking into an in-class support math class cause I was like can I help these kids? And it was important for me to know if the students felt that way cause I wanted to you know to eliminate that for them. And some students expressed their uncertainty, so I looked for their facial expressions. Sometimes you see there’s literally a, you know a gleam of hope, in their eyes. You kind of see that light bulb going off, and it helps. But other students, I actually found, the ones who are doodling on their papers are the ones who have it. They are not the ones who you know, they, they can’t keep going over you know to them pay attention. I have one student who’s actually doodling a cartoon to go along with the math lesson, and that’s the way he connects it, and he makes it. Doodlers are not people we need to be worrying about. Actually, the ones who are saying yeah, so I actually see a connection between the resource with the nodding, and okay yet doesn’t mean I’m there. The doodlers are the ones usually asking to help other students.

**Moderator** - P11, you are nodding or...

P11 - I’m thinking.

P5 - I’m sorry if that didn’t make sense or...

**Moderator** - I, I think everyone is answering the questions...

P5 - Okay.

**Moderator** - whether they’re the focus group interview guide questions or just extensions. I think we’re moving along very well. It is. She’s still thinking.

P2 - I think some of it...Um, I think part of it is also based on the child’s learning style, um, having some, a special ed. population in all of my classes and dealing with I would say 80% of the school population over the course of the year. I teach about 650 kids over the course of the year. Um, I, I, all without ICS. um, it’s based on the way the child learns best. Some kids, if they are artistic, will doodle and draw because that’s how they start to put things together. Other kids, with the example that you used with science, may be
more engaged in science in hands-on activities based on, um, the Bernice McCarthy Format. Um, if they're a type three, they're gonna be more hands-on, and they're gonna excel with that, where in a language arts class if they're reading and discussing that's a lot more left brain activity, um, that's more of a type two, depending on the class, direct instruction, and I think they based on the child's learning style they could engage differently in different classes, and their appearance, they may, they may be less engaged in one that is in next because of the way they learn whether or not the teacher is, is, is changing their, is teaching to their learning style enough or at all. Um, ideally we would hope that all teachers are teaching to the different learning styles and being able to connect to the, every student that's in the room. But matter of factly, not every day, um, it; it doesn't happen every day. Some days, whether emotionally or mentally some students aren't able to enter the classroom, physically they're there, but mentally and emotionally, some days they aren't depending on, os personal reasons, or on learning styles, or what the activity is, and interest level. That's something we're dealing with in our professional development this year is, um, you know for me learning to, how to engage the students not only, um, tiering assignments, and differentiating, but also getting interest activities in there to engage the students who would seemingly be unengaged, who would otherwise be unengaged. So I think regardless of special ed. or regular ed. classroom, I think the interest level and learning style has a lot to do with it too.

P5 - Just one thing I want to just add, shortly, off of that. If a student is engaged, is engaged 1 day and not engaged the next day, it's important to take into account what that student is going through, a ten they might have had to study for the night before. I have some students who have, not even special ed. students, who have extreme anxiety levels, and these are things you need to take into account. You can't. Some teachers, and, and it's hard, some teachers immediately take it personally. They get you know frustrated, you know why can't you just listen, or why aren't you, uh, answering your question. You need to take into account what happens in the students' lives cause I'm sure when we wake up every day we come to school, and I had a conversation with P2 during our ice breaker, some days we come to school and just don't have it, but, and the same things happen with the students. That's what you need to take into account with student engagement, that it's not gonna be the same every day.

Moderator - Let me jump in here, just too, for a minute maybe try to encourage a couple of other people to, to jump in, to a response to this. If I'm looking at question S/A, just piggybacking off of student engagement and the responses that have been shared so far. If I was observing one of your lessons, not necessarily as an administrator, a teacher, a parent, just a person entering, not even maybe a colleague, just a, a person with no history with you coming in, what would I see you doing to measure student engagement? The word survey was used before by P5. To get a sense of students, and, and again the word interest is coming up, to get a sense of student interest level, whether it's a survey or it's some other type of tool, can you comment on what you utilize in the classroom specifically to measure? How do you move from as P7 had mentioned with the ice breaker feedback, how do you move from observing something yourself as a teacher to making the determination that the child is engaged?
M4 – Um, alright, I, I was just making some notes cause I...

Moderator – We saw you doodling.

M4 – I wasn’t doodling.

Moderator – You were doodling.

M4 – Alright, um, first of all, I like to say that as a 1st year teacher, and while cause I was with the photo prompt group, one of the things that I said was as a 1st year teacher, um, I think one of the skills that I am developing is, ah, measuring student engagement. And I said one of the things that is most difficult for me is that, um, I say to myself it is difficult for me to go on anything else besides body language because I don’t know what else there is to go by as of right now, for me as a 1st year teacher, like, it, that’s the most difficult thing for me to do, um, because I know that I can look at a student, and he looks like he’s engaged. And we even talked about the nodding of the head, ah, you know the nodding of the head to me means nothing. It doesn’t mean that they’re engaged. Yeah, exactly, exactly. It’s just something to please me. And, you know so I’m sitting here while everybody’s talking, trying to think well what else can I go on, and I’m a little bit stumped. So that helps the conversation go along. I even wrote it here. It is difficult for me. What else do I have to go on? So that inspired conversation cause I would love to hear what you guys have to say.

Moderator – P3, P3 tell us.

P3 – Well that there’s kind of two different questions there so, um, I guess for me, in my French classroom, I don’t, I don’t know if I use so many like specific tools or necessarily like surveys or assessments. I do, at the beginning of the year, um, I’ll ask the kids about their interests at the beginning of every unit to get them engaged just as an overview cause we’re still doing like basic, it’s basic French, you know so we were talking about like food with activities. So it’s easier to talk about what they like and what they don’t like and, um, to get them to participate that way. So I guess on a daily basis, um, it’s more of the monitoring, what’s happening as I’m teaching the lesson. I’m walking around all the time and kind of keeping an ear on that conversation over there even while I’m working with this group over here. Um, and keeping in balance like they’re in middle school, and so you know there are times when they’re gonna talk about something that happened yesterday, or you know something that’s happening at lunch, or whatever, and knowing when it’s okay to let them do that as long as they’re doing the task, um, and then and knowing when to kind of bring them back, and call them back into focus. And so, for me I think it’s more of actually doing that kind of monitoring, and then it really depends a lot on getting to know the students individually, um, which is why for P2, I can’t imagine like having different kids the whole year, like every 5 weeks or something, cause for me it takes like the whole first marking period just to get to know the kid well enough to say okay he doesn’t look like he’s doing what I asked him to do, but is he getting what I’m saying. Um, so you know it the, the way that the student’s engaged, it’s different for every child. Um, so for me for the one student where he sits in class, and it’s hard for him
to even like start, when he comes in and actually is doing like the Do Now or whatever, um, then it's sign for me, okay he's engaging; whereas, for the other person you know, I have a really bright student where she can do her Do Now in like 2 seconds, and she's totally not even paying attention. And so for her, it's, it's a different level of engagement that I expect, and so it's really, it's getting to know my students and getting to know where they are individually, um, so it's yeah that and monitoring them, just a lot of you know prompting and making sure that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. I don't know if that's a specific tool, but...

P2 – I agree with P3. I think the student rapport, um, getting to know your students as individuals, as, as people is, is one of the most important ways to, um, that we can use to gauge, to gauge engagement. Um, I, I what's your number? Oh, P4, um, I think to answer your question body language is one, but, ah, getting to know your students as people and raising verbal prompts, and you know how much are, what of this are you getting, or what aren't you getting, and, and using the maybe your anticipatory set or even your closure, ah, what was something you learned today, and have everyone like what's one word that you can walk away with, what's one thing you walk away with today that you didn't know when you came in the room. And, just go around. Everyone gets to say. It's not a matter of picking on kids. It's just what is something that you're taking away? And some kid may say pass, I don't know. And, um, I usually, if I get more than one pass a week, if a child does pass more than once a week, then I know that I need a little more, I need to work with that child a little more to make sure they're actually walking out of the room, and they've taken something with them, something that they hadn't thought of before. Um, you know they may not be able to walk out and go I learned five new verb tenses today in French, woo-hoo. But if they had never listened to a song, and actually listened for, not to for what the words say, but what do they mean, if they go I never really thought of listening to music like that before. That's a huge progress for one. And if a child can walk out of the room and not view what they say as, and they're not allowed to, there's some repetition when we go around, but I try to ask them to you know what's something that you haven't, and it's try not to get a repeat. Um, and sometimes you get repeats, and sometimes you don't. But I find that I use my closure as a really, not only walking around and talking to students throughout the period, but to kind of get a feeling for where the class was. How effective was the activity? How effective, you know, did they get as much out of it as I had hoped they would?

P4 – Because, um, I mean you're saying that if they're engaged they would be able to introduce...

P2 – If they were engaged, they would be able to walk away with something even if it's just this big, and you know a centimeter. Um, if they walk away with a little bit every day, if by the end of the 6-week cycle, you know you get, you get this much. And, and starting from nothing, that's a pretty good amount of time out, out of 6 weeks. And the luxury that you have, and I do call it a luxury, is that you get the same group of kids you know all year. Um, and you know before the first marking period is up, I've got a new set. And so, I think it's, it's, it's interest, just a matter of getting to know your kids, and, um, some people do it really quickly, some people don't. I think after last year I got to
have to be good at getting to know them really quickly and getting to kind of gauge them and discuss with them and move forward, um, because otherwise they come and they leave so quickly, and I feel like I impart nothing, um, because of how quickly the cycle goes. Um, so that may be something, I know as a 1st year teacher, it's you know, that's maybe something that you haven't had to learn as quickly because you know it feels like, it feels like this is my 6th year because of the five cycles last year, and now it's gonna be you know again this year, the whole, it feels like it's the 6th time I'm going through the curriculum. It's the sixth set of students I've gotten, and it's just, um, I think it comes with practice, and time over, and experience, at least that's what I've observed. It was much easier at the end of last year to gauge student involvement in the classroom then, than at the beginning I think.

P3 - I think that another thing I do kind of along the same lines is, um, sometimes I'll do in the middle of a class, like right after we've done an activity, something that I'm trying for the 1st time, and I'll just ask them you know what did you guys think of that activity? Was that helpful for you? And, I'll just ask them for feedback right then, and then sometimes if it's like a bigger, like a unit or an activity that takes a couple days, afterwards, I'll say you know I'll put up a few questions, and I'll lay you know take a piece of paper and write out the answers to these questions and really think about your learning. And that's been really helpful for me, actually to kind of evaluate whether the activities that I'm doing are, are engaging them and are allowing them to process the information, and I'll just ask them questions like you know what was helpful about this activity, what would you change about doing this activity, um, and then just anything else you want to tell me. And so, it's been interesting for me cause a lot of times when I do that it's actually the, um, the kids who I would say we're struggling a little bit, or are having a harder time with the language concepts, or whatever, who will tell me you know this was helpful because you know I got to work with people in my own group, or you know people who are at the same pace, or you know whatever, and then you know there, there's a whole range of stuff, and I've gotten comments where it's like I didn't like, it wasn't helpful from the group, and you know so that helps me to know maybe not to check the whole activity, but maybe something needs to be modified or, um, whatever, and so I do think like that works. Okay you're in middle school now. Let's think about how you're learning. Things like that, which probably...

**Moderator** - In the, just to, you had mentioned instructional strategies again and the thinking behind how you approach different lessons and how it relates to student engagement. Just be mindful of the time so we have enough to designate for each question, and again the conversation is moving along very well. It's very rich, so we're, we're in a good place as far as the content of it. Just looking at that next question here, and it's really a body of questions, if you take a look, just skimming down the focus group interview guide here for a moment, pretty much from question 6 through 9, it's okay, from question 6 through 9, that's the body of what we're going on next, and that pertains to instructional strategies, and the impact to student engagement. P2 had referenced teacher-student ra, rapport before, so that's a nice segue, and again, P3 had mentioned the biggest, the bigger picture, if you will, as far as instructional strategies in general. So, why don’t we just dive into question 6 as far as how you think teacher-
student rapport impacts student engagement. P11, we haven’t heard from you in a bit. You’ve had time to think. Can you tell us a little bit about...

P11 – I’m not feeling well today. I’m very dizzy and lightheaded sitting here.

Moderator – You don’t have to respond then.

P11 – No that’s okay. She just told me she threw up, so I’m deathly afraid I’m going to catch something.

Moderator – Maybe we should have invited the nurse to the study.

P11 – Um, well, I, I think just to answer briefly, question 6, um, well certainly if you have a good rapport with your students, you’re gonna engage them better. I mean, I just you know follow, it flows right through. So, if you have students that don’t like you, respect you, or you know don’t like your style, or, or, or anything about you, they’re gonna turn off. They’re not gonna pay attention to you so...

P6 – I disagree. I mean I hear what students say about teachers cause they tell me, um, and they may not necessarily like teachers or certain teachers, or like their methods or their styles, but the good students are gonna do well, um, because it’s important to them, um, so I think in even, when I did teach, I always said to kids you may not like necessarily the way I do something or what I’m doing in, making them a part of it. I would always encourage my students for feedback, constructive feedback. Um, like you said, asking them what did you learn from it, or what, like involving them, making them a part of it is so important. Um, but I have kids who will come in and say oh this teacher’s too hard, or I don’t like this. But they’re still engaged. and they’re still making the grade. Um, sometimes I think engagement has more to do with, and looking further in the questions, the social-emotional part of things, um, I think is sometimes where we lose engagement amongst kids. Um, some won’t engage, and they will turn off, and they will do poorly. I don’t think that’s the only reason though.

Moderator – P11, were you going to...

P11 – Um, yeah, some, certainly some students who want to do well are going to do well no matter what. But the ones that absolutely can’t stand the teacher, can’t stand the style, they’re going to turn off, and you’re gonna lose them, so you, you’re gonna have a variety in the classroom.

P2 – I think there’s also a balance between not liking someone and or not liking their style and respecting. There is a student that I have in one of my classes right now. He does not like me. I do not like him, but we have this conversation before class started, before the cycle started. We do. But, throughout the course of the cycle, surprisingly, a form of respect has, has kind of, we respect the fact that we’re leaving the fact that we don’t like each other’s, we, we butt heads. I think we have very similar personalities. We’re both fairly strong-willed, and we end to, to come to a head every now and again.
And, I think that even when you don’t like someone, there is a, in a matter of respect, and if you treat that child with respect for who they are regardless of whether or not you like them, whether regardless of whether or not they like you, they in turn, will give you respect. And this one child is, is the perfect example of that. You know we started off with a very negative start to the cycle, and it, it really bothered me how negative it was, and I have treated him with the utmost respect, and in fact even call him as I do with almost all my students Mr. or Ms. so and so and their last name because it establishes a level of respect within the classroom.

And it has really, the negative, negativity has gone away because of the respect that has been established from the very beginning. And we were able to get past the, the negativity of the beginning. And he’s making sign, significant progress where we dwelt on the fact that we didn’t care for each other, he never would be able to move forward regardless of how good of a student he is, cause he’s a fantastic student. But if, if I were to feed into that negativity, then he would never, and not establish the respect, I don’t think that we would have been able to move forward like we have. Um, so I think it’s a, it’s a balance between whether or not the child likes you, and do they respect you. And you know you can use the same analogy except in a relationship with I love you. I don’t always have to like what you do, but I love you. And with like a partner of some nature and respect, and I think liking is along the same thing. I can respect you, but I don’t always have to like everything you do. And it’s, it’s a balance you have to find so... And I think that the rapport doesn’t always have to be liking, but it needs, there needs to be a respect, and there needs to be a matter of what that child is bringing into the classroom positive or negative, is there, and you need to take it for what it is and then see what you can do with it.

P7 – I agree with P2, and I can look at the opposite end of the spectrum. There are occasions when you, you but heads with a student, and per, personality-wise you just, are, are very rarely going to see eye-to-eye. But on the other ends of the spectrum, you have sometimes that rapport that has gotten too friendly. And you’ve got the buddy system going on and, and, and too much of the you know crossing the line, crossing the line, and that student is no more engaged sometimes than the one who you know perhaps doesn’t like you. So it is that fine line, and it’s that finding that respect for each other. You respect me for the job that I’m doing, and I’ll respect you for the job that you’re doing, and hopefully that helps, that the rapport will help engagement because when you do have a, it’s like a fulcrum. You have to get in that middle, that middle spot of the seesaw in order to get the motivation from the students.

P6 – Yeah. They, they weigh a lot on liking the teacher. That’s... Do you know what I mean? That’s what their lives are about right now, social, being liked, who likes me and who doesn’t. And you know I always tell them that’s really such a small part right now. And it’s okay not to like a teacher, but you’re here for a purpose. So you know you need to kind of go along with what’s going on and be successful. Um, you know just to try to put, put some perspective you know into the whole school’s like work is going to be. You’re not going to like everybody, or they’re not going to like you. And that’s okay. You can still peacefully coexist, and everything can still work in your favor, um, you know in the grand scheme, in the big picture it’s not about like or dislike. It’s kind of just
getting through. Um, and I had students say to me about a particular teacher here, that they felt that they were going to do so poorly based on that, the teacher they said the teacher didn't like them, and when I pulled up their grades and showed them they got A's, they were like oh my gosh, like wow it had nothing to do with what I thought that teacher felt about me. So I think trying to help them in my role, at least putting things into perspective a little bit, kind of helps. I think them...

P2 - And that's kind of what I was trying to get at is that it's not a matter of like or dislike, and sometimes as much as at the middle school age it's a huge part of who they are and what's going on in their lives. By encouraging them to move beyond that, and, and to establish a respect with the fact that regardless of whether or not they like the teacher, the teacher has an expertise in the area that they're in that class for, and to respect the expertise. And the two, and if not respect the expertise, respect the fact that they have some years of experience in life that, that child doesn't have then, that you can kind of draw from the, that experience the, the life experiences of someone to learn from, um, so, um, just to reinforce what you said, I, I really agree with that.

Moderator - And P6, you, if you wouldn't mind maybe opening up question 6A, you had actually just sped ahead in a good way and linked some things together.

P6 - Yeah.

Moderator - It is 6A. It is a subset of...

P6 - Yeah.

Moderator - If you kind of want to field that for us.

P6 - I think that when, when children are emotionally not equipped to, school is not foremost in their lives, there are so many things impeding them, and they come to school, and sometimes, um, it's hard for people in education to say hey this kid's got a lot more going on, like they're doing so poorly in school, um, to get perspective on well this kid's got so much else going on that, that's just not foremost in their mind, or you know I mean they're here, but they're not really here. They're not engaging. There's just so much going on, and, um...

Moderator - How does that social and emotional part of things connect to the rapport?

P6 - I think if the student feels like they have support, and I don't even mean like you know, like positive feedback, in the sense of grades. I just mean like social and emotional support, like hey how's it going, or you know even just a hand on the shoulder, like you know just any kind of reinforcement to let them know even though maybe you're not doing well academically, like there's you know I'm here for you, can sometimes turn things around for, for, I've seen it happen with a student especially special ed. students. When there's, you have less kids to look after and that student relies on that ICS teacher to get them through, and sometimes it makes such a big difference.
P5 – It’s real important for me as a special ed teacher, um, to develop that relationship where that student feels comfortable, feels welcome. They can come and talk to me. Some students who are, I notice have behavioral differences or, ah, levels of anxiety, I’ll say on a Monday morning, if I know they had a bowling tournament the weekend before, how did your bowling tournament go. How did you do on bowling? And the smile just lights up. And you say well that’s good you know. I’m glad to, I’m glad you did well so let’s move on now to our Do Now, and Sean that’s a good answer, or well whatever his name is, that’s a good answer...  

Moderator – fictitious...

P5 – right, fictitiously, let’s, I said that’s a good answer. When I say for question I who would like to answer, why don’t you give me that answer, so you bring it back to what you want to do, but you say hey you know that teacher really wants, you know, to know about the and really wants me to get into it, and you do it with other students too, and it really, it emotional, and then it just ties right into the teacher rapport because that student feels comfortable with you. They can go to you, and you know like in return, respect will develop.

Moderator – P4...

P4 – Yeah.

Moderator – And after you add your comments, which we want to hear very much, if you could then again just thinking about time here, if you could read question 7 for us, just put it out there for the group.

P4 – Sure. Yup. Um, just the one thing that she mentioned was the interest in a student outside of the academic context area, and, um, I think it’s, it’s obvious to a, to a student when you are interested in more than just how they’re doing in your class. And, ah, you know I think of it as I said going back to middle school philosophy, um, I feel as the middle school, at least this middle school, is designed to involve a teacher in more than just a content area. That’s what we have teams for, so that we know what is going on in all of the content areas. And I think that is essential to you, you know our own involvement. I would, I would, never in a million years would I know that much about a student if I was not on a team. I wouldn’t have the time to find out the information, and I wouldn’t have, ah, the resources really, in nearly, to find out that kind of information. Now I have 40 minutes in a day when information is presented to me; I’m given that time and the resources to know about a student. Um, I, I just think that it’s obvious, when I mean like she said, she knew about that, she asked him in class the next day. It’s the same thing, if I knew about these things and I continue to show an interest, and show them how their, their life is involved with learning, then that engagement can be involved. So I’m not exactly sure that’s the way I wanted to say it, but that’s okay. Alright, question 7, um, recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are part of effective classroom management, how do you think the inclusion of each impacts student engagement?
Moderator – You could approach it together, clear expectations and goal setting, or you could take either one. We'll spend about 5 minutes or so on this question, so we can allocate time for 8 and 9 to round out the instructional strategies.

P5 – I, no, I, uhh, I'm hoping that this goes along well with it. I think a good part of any classroom is for the students to know the expectations and the goals for the classroom, so to each day write them on the board. You know not maybe your exact objective, but what the goal, what we would like to cover, the steps we're going to do, the Do Now, the, the, this page; I mean not a whole detail, just a brief overview. The homework should be on, on the board already when they come in. Just get the students involved and on, u, a path of what they need to follow. You know okay we did this, okay now we're going to do this. Some students like the structure, it helps build structure in their life, and structure is important in the classroom. If you say okay I think we're gonna do this today, and just go off, the students are gonna read and see that, if you're not, you know organized, and if you're not organized, they're not gonna be organized.

Moderator – What about personal goal setting? And again, it might appear, saying it might be different from a counseling perspective or from a French in the French classroom, those kinds of things. Does anyone here work with personal goal setting with kids, as in, as an addition to what P7, or P5 rather, had mentioned about listing the objective on the board or the goals for the class? What about personal goal setting with children? Has that been part of your experience or something you might be interested in pursuing? You mentioned your craft is evolving.

P4 – Yeah, Right, um, there's just, just, at the beginning of the year and really I wish I did it more often, and obviously I could but, um, ah, the, the, the students had received, there were three questions, and one of the questions was, um, what do you want to walk away from this class with. So that in and of itself, was then setting their goal. At the end of the year, they want to be able to do this. And it was their own. I didn't influence them in any way. I mean it was 100% the first 2 days of class, and so there was no way that my personality or anything that we were going to do in class would influence that. So that is their personal goal, and when we do the midterms, they'll be going back to look at what their personal goal was and to see how far they've gotten this year to attaining that goal. So, um, some of them were funny of course, but some of them were really good. One of them. I know they wrote that their personal goal is, um, to be able to help a Spanish speaking person without any English, um, in a grocery store. I think it was a grocery store because that was their experience. They had been in a grocery store. One lady was looking for something. They asked, she tried to ask that person, and they weren't able to do anything. But, so now they want to leave this classroom with that ability. And yes it's something very specific, but it's a goal, and I was happy with that.

Moderator – Is that, how does that impact the learning experience for those kids or that experience period? How do you, how would you predict that that would impact the engagement level of the classroom itself?
P4 – Um, well I was just excited that that student had a real-life scenario that they wanted to attend. And, they have this real-life scenario, I knew for sure that when we got to, like comida, food, that they were going to be engaged cause they had this real-life scenario. They had this goal to get to that place. Um, like, can you repeat your question cause I’m not sure I’m answering it.

Moderator – I think you’re doing fine as far as answering the question. Don’t worry about it.

P4 – Um, I, I just, I do...

Moderator – I’ll, I’ll combine what you said with what P5, who I mistakenly called P7 before, what P5 had mentioned and what you had mentioned. Looking at things like listing the objective on the board, or goals, in the sense of maybe even clear expectations, so kids know what’s anticipated for the period, as they come in and they sit down, they work on the Do Now, or whatever the actual assignments are, following the Do Now, whatever, and also looking at the activity that you introduce in the year early on, and engaging the interest which went back to what P2 and P5 had mentioned earlier, and some of what P3 had talked about too, and in general what the group has mentioned here, looking at listing them all on the board and then getting a sense from them where they want to go, as far as their different goals or benchmarks for themselves for the year, putting those two pieces together, including that in your practice as a teacher, how does that over the year impact student engagement? Is it a positive relationship? Is it a negative relationship? Are there intermediate? Does it shift?

P4 – Um...

Moderator – You as a teacher setting up clear expectations, and you’ve got these personal goals based on their interest...

P4 – Right.

Moderator – So if that’s all in place, how does it impact student engagement?

P4 – How does it impact student engagement? Got it, okay. Um, definitely there is a positive relationship, and the reason for that is that the student knows what they’re gonna leave the class with. Yes you could teach them a lesson on food, but what does that mean to them? That doesn’t mean anything unless you give it a real-life scenario, real-life situation. If they have what their goals, then they know how to approach every single activity that you ever do, and they also know what positive product they’re gonna get out of it, especially if it’s related to their own goals, which, you, I mean, it’s hard to change the curriculum, but there are always ways that you can find in order to bring their goals back into the, the curriculum. So, when I was looking at them again, some of them are silly, but some of them are fantastic, and yes maybe food is not in our curriculum, but going to the supermarket is. So you find a way to positively reinforce their own goals
through your instructional strategies. And when they have the goal, they know the end results, and it’s easy for them to relate, to engage, to take an interest.

**Moderator** - P3, do you see similar things in your French classroom as Spanish was just used as an example, or not, or?

**P3** - It’s a little bit different with French I think just because there aren’t as many real-life situations where they might need French, um...in the United States.

**P4** - ...in the United States. Right, right.

**P3** - You know well I can talk about but never go to Paris, but for them that’s like way out there. And, um, and so for me the experience that I’ve had so far with setting personal goals has been more specific, and generally, it’s either a, like, as a student, like a learner type of goal, or it’s a specific behavioral goal, or it’s a specific, um, language point in the unit, and I’ve worked with kids on setting those specific goals. And it’s been really neat for me to see, um, I have one student who just like the first half of the first marking period was lost. It’s his 3rd year of French, but he got lost last year. And so coming into the 2nd year, he’s more lost, and just was kind of flailing around. And, uh, he broke down into tears 1 day after class, and that was hard for me, but, um, we sat down, and I kind of broke down for him, you know what are really the important things in this unit, you know like is it really important that you sit down and like memorize this vocabulary. Well yeah for the unit, but I can’t do that for you. So, um, I broke down the concepts that I thought were most important, and I showed him that he was able to do those specific concepts. And so once he saw that you know okay I’m not, I don’t need to be overwhelmed by this, I can focus on this one part, um, he had something to work towards, and that actually now in class there’s a dramatic difference in his just, his overall like demeanor in class. He doesn’t have that throw my hands up in the air I’m gonna give up because I can’t do it attitude. He’ll say I have a question, can you help me on this, you know I need to get this concept.

**Moderator** - So the level of engagement is higher?

**P3** - Yeah, definitely.

**Moderator** - That’s what I’m hearing you say.

**P3** - For, for that particular student, and, um, it’s been, it’s a really, it’s been a positive change because he has a specific goal, and if he needs it, I’ll break it down for him and say don’t worry about this, focus on this.

**Moderator** - Chunking...

**P3** - Right. And then you know I give him opportunities to you know make up quizzes or things like that, where you know in the end for me, it’s no, I don’t know what’s that, whatever the phrase is, it’s not a big deal for me. But for him to have the opportunity to
you know retake that quiz that he did poorly on and they're kind of gotten it better, it's huge. And so even if it's only like a difference of three points for him, that's three points, that he got on his own because he learned it. So, um, for me that's a great and saying, I've had, yeah, it's shown a lot of through that particular student, anyway, positive impact on student engagement.

**Moderator** - And I think in the conversation, just the two of you had offered, the idea of being real came up, and someone else had used the word authentic earlier. Just looking at that next question 8, and again being mindful of the time, how do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences such as interdisciplinary units, or you might refer to them here as IDUs, even sometimes as integrations, and we won't get into the, also for the two, but if that's how you refer to it, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning, how do any or all of those impact student engagement, this attempt to make things real for kids? How do you, how do you see engagement fluctuating one way or the other? Is there a positive, again, is there a positive relationship? Is there a negative relationship? Is there no relationship?

PT - Um, I think the a, there's a positive relationship between interdisciplinary units and student engagement, cause again when you go back to the concept of working with the whole child, we also have to realize that we're not learning our content, students aren't learning in isolation, or, in theory, they shouldn't be but should be seeing, or, or being coached, coerced to see that there is a connection among all of the content areas. And some, sometimes we have to point it out to them, and eventually they'll recognize hey I, I was talking about this in science class. My son is doing that now. He's making connections through what's going on at home and different things, and what he's learning in school, and it's, it's wonderful. I love it. So, and but he's you know high school level, so at the middle school level, I think that the, the, um, IDUs are, um, important to try to get the child seeing a bigger picture. And from the teaching standpoint, it's, it's I feel it's my responsibility to help push that, and, and encourage that development, that seeing the big picture, because they are very self-centered at this age, and very concerned about their own everything. It's all about me. And, and it's their age. Do we have to get them to go outside themselves, and we grasp at pictures of content, and greater pictures of their role in society, and the whole, seeing the whole picture? So I think, um, that implementing IDUs definitely impacts student engagement in a positive way, and then thereby their success in a positive way.

PT - Taking that one step further, moving outside of IDUs and making connections to the real world, as they mentioned with food and the grocery store, and you know I, I'm gonna have to call and make a reservation because I'm going to Paris in April, and, and the fact that at some point you may need to call and make a reservation in French, and it's like, it's something I keep putting off because I just don't want, it's, you know, I don't want to stumble over it and be the...

**Moderator** - You have to get into her class.
P2 — Um, I’ll, I’ll have to talk to P3 after the session. Um, but connecting it to outside of school cause school to them I think is very isolated. They, they don’t see school as connecting to their life yet. They see it as something they have to go to every day, and they look forward to when they get to leave that building, and then they go, and they continue on with real life, which I think teachers kind of feel that same way too, where it’s you know I work to live, I don’t live to work, if you’ve ever heard that expression before. Um, sometimes it’s a matter of it this, in this building our life, or is our life what’s outside of this building? And how do they connect? Um, being more specific with my subject area, my curriculum is to teach the kids about the middle Middle Ages, the Renaissance composers, classical composers, so an and so forth, and what I tell, we you know, when I have discussion with the kids about what they’re gonna learn, they are area, well are we gonna learn about Bach and Beethoven, all those old guys? And I say no. Those old guys, do they are they significant in music history? Yes. Are they significant in history, um, and a part of cultural development? Yes. But as far as these kids who are in my classroom are concerned, those old men, they’re dead, and they have very little connection to them. But what I show them is that what those old, dead men created, there is, we would not have the music we have today if it wasn’t for the music of the past. And what aspects that each one of those composers, what aspect of music they developed in their own time do we still see in music today? The development of the verse chorus format out of the classical period, almost every single song you hear on the radio starts with an introduction. You hear a verse, which tells a story. You hear the chorus. You hear another verse maybe, a bridge, an instrumental break, the chorus, and then some form of ending sequence, or coda. That was developed by Mozart, by Schubert, in the classical time period. You show them a song from that time, and they, they can identify orally, with their ear, where the chorus is. They don’t have to understand the language. They don’t have to understand that you know what, what voice part is singing it, but they know this is a part that is repeated the most, without any prompting. They know what the chorus is. Where do we see that in music today? And making that connection to music that they listen to, they all listen to music every day, and making the connection between the music of the past and the things that parallel in music of today, and taking it not just in the classroom of we’re learning about Mozart today, and he was born in such and such, and he died in such and such, and this was his life then, but what he did he create musically, and how can you see that today still. And learning to appreciate, um, what went into creating that music, not only do they like it or not, but can you appreciate the amount of effort that went into it, which is part of the creating, of developing the whole child, and expanding their musical horizons. I always work to expand their musical horizons, but I want them to be able to see the connection with the stuff that they, you know they put their headphones in some of them the moment they walk out the building, and they get on the bus. And when they listen to their music, do they listen to it a little more critically? Do they go oh that’s the chorus. Um, that part’s, that’s there for a reason. It has a purpose. What is the purpose of the chorus? And then you know other things with lyric analysis, and the development of lyrics, and lyrics of the music, and all of that is stuff that they listen to and can connect to their outside world, to their life outside of school. And I think it’s really important in a positive way to have what you do in the classroom connect to what you do, to what they do outside the classroom.
Moderator – And I would imagine that many of you could add onto that certainly as far as the connectivity from past, present, and maybe even future, whether it’s from a musical standpoint, for your own individual content areas. Just if we could take about 5 minutes or so to round out the end of the instructional strategies, which is number 10, and then get on a separate page, we can kind of keep to our timetable. I’m just reading the bottom of page 1, question 9. With student-centered instruction considered to be a balance, balance the key word here, of cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligences theory, how do you think this approach to instruction impacts student engagement? Now it’s a lot to think about, and that’s why I have the word balance utilized. Some of you might find that your discipline lends itself more so to cooperative learning, others might subscribe to group work. Questioning came up before as a means for assessing student engagement from a couple of you, so maybe discussion is something that you really lean toward. But in the ideal world, thinking about a combination, meaning a minimum of two, of these items in a given lesson, or in a given week, as far as what you’re articulating, your instruction with kids, what that looks like, how would you say this approach, we talked about teacher-student rapport as an approach that impacts student engagement, we spoke about classroom management with a focus on clear expectations and goal setting and how that impacts student engagement, we spoke about authentic, authentic learning experiences, and now student-centered instruction. How does that student-centered instruction impact student engagement? Maybe if just two, two of three of you could comment on that.

P4 – Alright, um, ah, just, there’s one thing that P3 said before about personal goals, how her student had a personal goal, and she set it for him. And I think that ties in with, ah, with differentiated instruction. When each student has their own personal goal, and they know what that personal goal is, I think it’s easier for them to engage because there’s not just this one overarching, overwhelming class goal. You have your own personal goal. And along with that, combined with multiple intelligence theory, um, I’m just thinking of an activity that I’ll be doing next week where the students will have stations, and each group, which we’ll, I’ll put them heterogeneously together, um, will have their own, um, their own goal so they establish what area of the content they need to, they have to work on, even before they know what the stations are, they will establish okay I need help in this area. I cannot, this, not to get too specific, but I cannot, um, tell people where things are in a room, I need help doing that. Okay? Or, I cannot, um, it, you know describe what my mother’s like for the life of me. I need help doing that. Um, so when each student has a personal goal and they have different ways of attaining that goal, you know visually, ah, auditory, whatever, by whatever means, I think it’s easier for them to engage because they know that you’ve provided them with multiple ways of getting to that goal. And therefore, when you enable them, provide them with scaffolding, provide them with the tools to attain their goals, they will appreciate that and be able, have that interest instead of shutting down when a goal is overwhelming, so...
P5 - Yeah, um, in, when I was in college, I was mandated with all these different instructional strategies and what you need to do in your classroom, and I found the best thing that works in my classroom to increase student engagement is discussion. I might prompt a question, a student answers, and then the other one says well how about the, how about this, or, and actually you see the students going back and forth, maybe a debate thing, no you're wrong, and I think this cause of why, and that really, you know gets the gears moving and moves onto a plaza, and it might totally be off of what I wanted to do for that lesson, but I'm seeing understanding, and that understanding is leading to more engage, engagement, and more confidence in a student to want to be involved in the class, and have a voice in it. And that's really important to me. And so that's what the discussion, but also differentiated instruction is something that's very big here at [name of school]. Using it in the resource room and the ICS classes has shown, um, let other students shine and opportunities for student engagement giving them an opportunity to, for me to differentiate a certain content essential question that they want us to answer, but having different activities and different ways to approach it really, um, you know bring student, brings students alive. So I think discussion and, and differentiated instruction seem to work best for, in my situation.

Moderator - P6, maybe just to round this out, you mentioned before you'd had, what I think it was at the time when we were talking about teacher-student rapport, kids will tell you lots of things about teachers in classrooms, so you have a pulse of the building...

P6 - Uh-huh. I think, um...

Moderator - What do kids like about these? What do they like? What do they complain about or?

P6 - It varies, which is what makes this so hard to answer. It's such an individual thing. Um, you know I have kids who say there's way too much writing, too much you know essay writing, focus on writing, and too much projects, too many projects, too many different, like you know things have gone so far beyond just basic learning, or basic memorizing, basic skills, um, that I think it's hard for, I think they're pulled in so many different directions, and obviously we're differentiating, in all those different methods that we use, finding each and every kid, so it's like years ago when it was like lecturing and memorization, and that didn't apply to everybody, but neither does this. It's sort of like, I don't know, like a big, I don't know, enigma. I think kids don't know, like in some ways, what's goin' on, and it's made, the, it's made learning I think better in some ways but more difficult for them today. I think they're under tremendous amount of stress and pressure, um, you know just trying to keep up, you know, and now factor in the transition, and all the stuff that's going on, especially in seventh grade, and then you factor in all of this, it's just, it's, it's a lot. It's a lot for them, not necessarily bad, but just, it's different, and it's going to take time for them to get used to it. So I don't know. I, I think, um, how it impacts student engagement, and, um, I think in some ways, um, you know kids will benefit from it. I think it's very important, like a lot of what P5 said and P4, um, making it real and doing classroom discussion, and involving them in it. I think is better than maybe some of the other things. I don't know.
Moderator – I’m going to shift gears here to the second page because again I’m just being mindful of the time. Take a few minutes, you know for this one. Before we actually speak to question 10, please know that we realize from an administrative and teaching perspective, that this is a sensitive topic, the evaluation of your performance. I would be remiss if I didn’t put that out there, looking at it from both perspectives, as the evaluator, as a building level administrator in a couple of different environments, and also as someone being on the receiving end of it, as a teacher and an administrator. So a reminder here would be just focus on teaching and learning. Alright? It’s tough not to personalize it, whether it’s been a positive experience for you or not, whether you’re thinking just this building, you’re thinking other experiences before this place, wherever you’re coming from on this, we’re really just trying to get a sense of what would be helpful feedback from your building principal, presently, with respect to student engagement. And the two key words here are the two verbs. What do you think and feel, opinion, just belief, and then maybe a little bit, if you could add, just having to do with your feelings as far as what some of the experiences have looked like. Maybe you want to talk about conferences. Maybe you want to talk about the lesson observation report itself. Okay, that kind of thing. Some of you were in the prompts or the ice breaker earlier on with “Mona Lisa Smile,” having to do with that segment where the principal or the head person of the school was actually preparing a lesson observation or their end year evaluation of the performance of Julia Roberts, her character. So if you want to just kind of dive in here for a few minutes, and then we’ll we’ll round out with question 11.

P2 – I feel there’s a lot of talk about, and justified talk, about differentiated instruction, for students. I think absolutely without a doubt each child learns in a different way. For me, I struggle very, very much with the fact that I have children for 36 days, 56 if I’m lucky. And, it’s hard to try and get through the information that I need to get through and meet all the children’s needs. And as soon as I start to get a feel for them, which I got better at getting a feel for them more quickly, I feel like it would really be helpful to sit down with someone and go in this really differentiated. What can I do to make this better in the amount of time? Let’s be realistic about the amount of time that I have with these kids. Am I doing everything that I can do for these kids? And I don’t feel that, I don’t know if that’s the role, or if as a 1st year teacher, your mentor is supposed to take on that role, um, I know my mentor was a computer teacher. Okay, as a music teacher, a computer teacher can only do so much, and can only offer so much insight. And especially with regards to the differentiated instruction, I would love it, if after an observation, to sit down and have an extended conversation, take a look at either the particular unit or lesson that was observed, and say take a look at it as a whole, not just the individual day that was observed, but as a whole, what are you doing from beginning to end. What aspect was this particular lesson, and are you doing everything you can do, and give suggestions as to what could be better to differentiate. What’s an activity with something, almost as a brainstorming. Um, I know that I would find that really helpful, and I know that I struggle with it cause I’m the only person in my subject area besides, um, another teacher who is not here in the building, and, and though he and I collaborate some, we think very differently, and we have different perspectives on what is differentiated. Um, and so I would really enjoy sitting down with a building principal, um, or someone who is well-versed in differentiated instruction to, to see what can I do to engage my students more,
um, am I doing everything I can or is there more that I can do, um, so that students are more engaged and getting more out of what I'm doing in the classroom. I find it difficult based on the time constraints, some people think that that's a valid reason and excuse, some people don't, um, the time constraints. So that's what I think and feel would be most helpful after a classroom observation about student engagement.

P6 – I think the problem with observation, and even when we watched the video clip, um, one of the things that we were saying was there was no communication other than a letter written to her. This is how it's going to be. So there was no room for discussion. But I do feel, um, being here, this is my 3rd year, um, and seeing that non-tenured teachers get observed 3 times in a year, and tenured only once, um, makes a difference, because, um, I think as non-tenured individuals, we put so much pressure on ourselves, on those observations. And here's the thing. You can't be on every day, 24-7, in that magnitude that I think it's perceived by non-tenured teachers to be what you have to be doing every day. Do you know what I mean? Like it can't all be magnified every day. It just doesn't work that way. And I think people are led to believe that that's how it has to be and... so in some ways I think it's like a farce. I just think, and it's my opinion, I think in a lot of ways it's a waste of time, valuable time, when instead you could be conversing and learning, and you know what I mean, and all that pressure and that feeling, a magnificent teacher is going to be magnificent whether or not they get observed. I feel. So, I just, I don't know, there's something just very, uh, about an observation. Very negative.

P9 – There's a lot of pressure, and I mean, I know personally, I knew I was getting observed before November 30th, and I was freakin' out since September 7th, until the day it happened. Thinking of them to come, and am I differentiating. Am I Improving right, and for me closing is, is a thing, wrapping the lesson up, making sure that my students are leaving the classroom knowing one thing that P2 mentioned before, like being able to grasp, grasp something, that's something I'm trying to work on cause you have only 40 minutes than they go. And not being on a team is hard because you see your students once, then they go off, and I don't have a team to go to and say well how was it in fifth period.

P11 – I don't have a team either, and I'm in 4th, I'm in a worse position than you are because I'm strictly in-class support, which is making me, um, partially because I'm not feeling well, but I'm kind of silent because a lot of the strategies and everything, I just have to go with the flow of the content area teacher.

Moderator – How do you feel about this process?

P11 – Um, well I haven't been observed yet. But I, it certainly would be helpful, any feedback is always helpful to me. It helps to make you better at what you do, and more effective. So I, I appreciate any feedback, and certainly if it was anything negative, um, I would do whatever I could to change it.

P5 – I think non-tenured teachers are just looking for nothing but feedback, nothing but help, you know it's. I've seen, I teach social studies personally, and I have a great
interest in social studies and teaching it, but when I converse with other soc, regular social studies teachers, they're in such a different level of how they can approach their students, and I feel as if I'm not maybe giving my kids enough cause I see these other people, and I'm like oh my gosh, t. I sometimes I just can't do in my class cause they're, it's, it's so hard to, to go with the flow of school when, it's feedback, it's important...

P11 - to go with the flow of the school and the flow of the classroom...

P5 - Yeah.

P11 - Very established, well 2 out of 3 very established teachers have their 20-30 years of experience, and I'm coming in, and you know just trying to...

P2 - Yeah, it also depends on the teacher for you two sure because there are some, ust, being I'm a, I'm fairly good friends with an ICS teacher, and it really is dependent upon the classroom teacher, whether or not the ICS teacher takes on the role of a co-teaching or whether or not your...

P11 - Well it depends on your knowledge of the subject area.

P2 - Absolutely.

P11 - You said you hate math. You said you hate math, I like math. Why aren't I in math?

P5 - But I mean now being in the math class, I mean it's totally not related to the subject, but just even getting feedback from that, even though I hated it back then, I have such an appreciation for it now, and I look at it in such a different way as being in the teacher role. I get it now, like I love it. I'm thinking about getting my Masters in math now. You know, it's, it's a totally different, but again, I like the feedback more than 3 times a year.

P11 - Huh?

Moderator - Just to jump in, P4 and P3, if you want to just chime, chime in or add anything for this just for maybe a minute, briefly, so we can round out with the last question. You don't have to.

P4 - Yeah, well, no, um, yeah, okay. I just, ah, I want to say that the most helpful learning experience as far as observations are concerned was, um, in college, when my, my, you know my, ah, actual college teacher would come to observe me because it was, it was a true learning process. And that's what I feel like observation should be about, not so much are you doing your job correctly, but how can you learn from maybe it's your mistakes, how can you even learn from what you're doing correctly, and how often you should do it. And so I like that format because it wasn't a format of being a true learning process. Right now they come in, they watch you. They tell you what you're
doing wrong. You have to fix it. Yeah that’s kind of a learning process, but it shouldn’t be that way. I like... I want...

P2 — You want, while we’re preaching differentiated instruction for us to do to our students, but then what about us as students, living, human breathing, adult students? Shouldn’t we have differentiated instruction as well? Our professional development is reading and watching videos and answering questions. How differentiated is that?

P4 — So, the, the format that it took on that I would love to see be replicated in this school district is actually, the, it’s gonna be like the third observation that I have here, and it’s one that I am most looking forward to, it’s from my content area special, the K through 12 supervisor. What they’re gonna do is, they’ll, they will receive my lesson plan for that period, for that time. They’re gonna read it, give me feedback on it before the, the, a, actual lesson is done, then they will come in and observe the lesson, and then afterwards, even, even more feedback how did the lesson actually go. Did you make the adjustments? Were they good adjustments? Was, was the lesson better for it? So, when in college, I would send her my lesson plans. She would look over all of them. You know ask me questions. Well how can you incorporate authentic text into that lesson on Thursday? How can you, um, address products, practices, and perspectives when you are talking about this culture lesson? They, she would give me questions so that I could look at my lesson plans and improve them.

Moderator — And there was a dialogue...

P4 — There was a dialogue, continual dialogue, continual dialogue, so... I know that it’s hard for a vice principal or principal to do that, but I mean it would be wonderful if you could have that. I could send my lesson plans in, and then get them back, and have questions like how could you have done this lesson differently, or even like more specifically, how could you include this. How could you differentiate this? Maybe this is a good idea for differentiating this lesson. And then, you know they can come in and see how your lessons have evolved from their feedback. So that’s why, ideally my situation. I would love to see that, and I know that it’s difficult, and there’s no time for it, but that, I feel like it’s the best way for me to learn as a person how to be a better teacher, so that format. If, I’ll write it out for you if you want.

Moderator — No, again, I think you answered the question. I think we’re in good shape.

And I know that we could continue on probably talking about this question and many of the others for a much longer period of time, but recognizing that you have commitments for the rest of the day, let’s take a look at eleven very briefly here. This is where you’re going to pull your card. Some of them are yellow. Some of them might be pink. Don’t worry about it, pencil, pen, either one is fine. I’m just going to read what’s actually on your card, word for word, not this first statement. Please complete the statement that is on the index card now in front of you by writing down your response. And this is what follows. Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, these four we discussed,
the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is blank, so select one or two, it’s meant to almost be a rank order question, because blank, provide a reason why. So again, you’re going to pick 1 of these 4 that we talked about. List it as having the greatest positive impact, and just provide a brief reason to support your response. And what we’ll do, is you finish this, is just actually go around, and we’ll reverse the order this time and start with P11, and we’ll just read what’s on the cards, which will take about a minute, and anything else you folks feel you need to add we can wrap up in the next 5 minutes in total. If you need to go on the back, you can, of the cards. Okay, I know P3, and maybe P4 and P6, are just kind of putting finishing touches on. P11, do you need more time?

P11 – I do.

Moderator – Okay, we can skip you. P6, you’re okay to start? If you just want to share your response with us.

P6 – I just said I think given what I do now, and in the past, it’s the social, social-emotional piece. Um, I just believe, especially in middle school, that we talk about the whole child. I just think is the integral part of middle school education, so that was what kind of stuck out for me.

Moderator – Thank you. P3...

P3 – Um, I also said along the same lines of teacher-student rapport, piece mainly because they’re, while I think that all of them are really integral, I’m, as we’ve discussed, it’s become even more evident, they’re all really important, because of student engagement, um, for me is my experiences, especially with middle school students, that teacher-student piece really impacts how you do all those other things in the classroom.

Moderator – Thank you. P4, you need a moment?

P4 – Yes, please.

Moderator – P5.

P5 – I, ah, chose teacher-student, uh, rapport, um, because it’s a logical step between the teacher and the student, which will then provide a base for an enriched learning environment for the student as a whole.

Moderator – Thank you.

P2 – I’m the problem child as P2. Um, I think that what has a positive impact on student engagement is authentic learning and the teacher-student rapport the, because the students connect to the material based on experience outside of school and make their learning applicable. And they do so, with the knowledge, that right or wrong, the teacher is going to respect their thoughts and efforts in the classroom. So I think that both they have to
know that they're gonna be validated, and it relates outside of their own, inside academic world.

**Moderator** - Thank you. And just, for the tape itself, before we get to P11, P1 and P7, just for reference, were not here at this time.

**P11** - Okay, well, I was having trouble concentrating. Um, I believe teacher-student rapport is important because making a connection with your students and showing an interest in their personal lives and classroom learning, they will be treated as a whole student.

**Moderator** - Thank you. At this time, we don't have to read word for word, question 12. However, before we collect what we need to collect, P4, we almost forgot you. You've got to get in there.

**P4** - Sure. Sure. Um, oh I said the, ah, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is, um, the authentic learning experiences because when a learning goal is personal and has significance to a student's real-life experience, their engagement in the lesson will be a logical byproduct of that connection.

**Moderator** - Thank you. We did not mean to omit you. We were skipping around a little bit. Question 12, we started to mention, we don't have to read word for word. It's an opportunity for you to bring up anything or to make a comment about the study, if you have any concerns. This is not from the perspective of what do we collect, let us outta here. Well, I'm up, and on the way, how about some chocolate. It's more is there anything you want to go back and you want to clarify as far as your comments, or you want to extend a point, or again you want to take it in another direction, and you want to just ask a question about what's going to happen, with the dissertation itself. It's up to you. You don't have to say anything, or you can mention any of those things I just brought up.

**P5** - What will happen to the dissertation?

**Moderator** - What will happen at this point, today will be the last day of the research, as far as what I'm conducting here. And then I will take what's on tape, from all of the groups that I have worked with, will transcribe. In other words, I type word for word just in a Word document, your comments, again without names or anything like that. It's going to be P2, P4, you know that kind of thing. That'll become part of the appendix of the dissertation, again maintaining that anonymity and confidentiality. Then I will write Chapter IV, which is just kind of a summary and an analysis of what was on the tape for all three groups, and then I'll write Chapter V, which is the conclusion, summary, recommendations, keeping in mind that the first three chapters pretty much lead up to obviously four and five. Once it's all said and done, and it's approved by Seton Hall University, you'll probably wind up with a copy of it bound, all five, 600 pages of it, over there in your professional development library. In the interim, just to reiterate, if you want to send any comments, or you think of something on the way out of here, or have
any feedback for us in any way, shape, or form, feel free to use that self-addressed, stamped envelope, or you can just discard it. And in addition to that, probably after the holidays or right before, we will reach out to you by e-mail, if you are interested in hearing. In addition to reading later on down the line what the findings were, from the study, we can certainly come back and discuss them with you as a group, or individually, or however you want to handle it, although as a group is probably better to do, since you all participated as a group. But that’s pretty much it. And again, it all needs to remain as anonymous and confidential as possible. Anything else just for the good of the order, something you need to say, clarify? Okay. Recognizing we’re all set, you can keep everything with the exception of two items, the pencil that we put in the envelope, if you don’t mind, and also the cards, these, and again you don’t need your name on it. In fact, it should not be on it. We have it all coded on the back. If you want to just make maybe two piles, that’s fine, slide them down towards Katherine, the index card and the pencil. And we’re all set. And what I can say is, coming full circle, from our experience, I know it was mentioned several times throughout, the dialogue was very rich. Again, we could have continued talking probably about a lot of these things all day. But we do know there have to be limits. So people answered the questions as they were intended to be asked as far as responding to them, not analyzing your individual responses for quality or whatever, but you answered the questions, and you, you worked with one another in that process very well. It went very well, and we are very grateful. We’re very grateful to you for giving of your time. Alright? The only thing we’ll say is help yourself to coffee, muffins, tea, whatever you want to on the way out. Katherine’s going to step the tape, and thank you.
Group 3

Moderator — And I’ll pose the first question. We have the tape on?

Assistant Moderator — We do.

Moderator — Okay. Thank you. Welcome. We’re going to start with the first three questions from the focus group interview guide, and what we’ll do is move from one side of the circle around to the other. We’ll begin with participant one, and we’ll move this direction. Participant one is going to begin, and you can follow suit right in a row with questions 1, 2, and 3. And again, looking at the focus group interview guide, participant one is going to begin by addressing how many years she has been teaching, if she is a traditional or alternate route teacher, and what grade level or grade levels and content area or content areas she presently teach or teaches.

P1 — Okay, well, I’m a 1st year teacher, so I’ve been teaching 2 or 3 months, feels like 2 or 3 years. Um, I’m a traditional route teacher, and I teach seventh grade Spanish.

Moderator — Thank you.

P3 — I am participant three, and I have been teaching for 1 year, a few months. Um, I’m a traditional route teacher, and I teach seventh grade math.

Moderator — Thank you.

P4 — I am participant four. I’ve been teaching, this is my 2nd year. Um, I’m a traditional route teacher as well, and I teach seventh grade language arts.

Moderator — Thank you.

P8 — I’m participant eight. This is my 1st year teaching, and I’m traditional route that teaches seventh grade social studies.

Moderator — Thank you.

P5 — I’ve been teaching for, ah, 2 or 3 months. Um, actually certification program teacher so in between traditional and alternate route. And, um, I teach seventh and eighth grade phys. ed. and health.

Moderator — Thank you. Phys. ed. and health?


Moderator — Thank you.
P7 – I’m participant seven. This is my 2nd year of teaching. I’m a traditional route teacher. I teach eighth grade social studies.

Moderator – Thank you.

P10 – I’m participant ten. This would be, I’m participant ten. This is my 1st year teaching, traditional route teacher, and I teach eighth grade social studies.

Moderator – Thank you.

P6 – I am participant six, and I’ve been... This is my 5th year teaching. Um, I’m a traditional teacher, and I teach eighth grade, um, resource room. And in the resource room, I teach language arts and social studies, and in the in-class support, I teach social studies and science.

Moderator – Thank you.

P2 – I’m participant two. This is my 2nd year of teaching, I’m a traditional route teacher, and I too, teach eighth grade language arts.

Moderator – Thank you.

P9 – I’m participant nine, I, this is my 2nd year teaching. I’m traditional route teacher, and I teach seventh grade math.

Moderator – Thank you. And just for clarification, we don’t have to repeat what participants had mentioned this for questions 1 through 3, for those of you who consider yourself to be in your 1st year of teaching, and you can, you can just nod your heads. And I’ll mention that for taping purposes, you have had practicum experiences or student teaching experiences which supplement the 2 to 3 months time, which makes you eligible to participate in this study. Fast enough? Yes. Okay, we see nodding from the people who have indicated that yes this is their 1st year teaching. Moving along, looking at question 4, you work at a seventh and eighth grade school. Just from your perspective, and we do not have to identify who we are as participants with our numbers as we address this or respond to it, and we also do not have to start at one end of the board and move around. You can go back and forth. You can start from the middle, whoever would like to field this question first, and then we’ll tap into what that person answers. Think about question 4 in terms of your time here, this year, in your past years as an educator, maybe as a student teacher, in other districts if you’ve been privy to other districts, any training, or research that you’ve had an opportunity to participate in. Putting all of that together, what would you say is middle school philosophy? It looks like a participant on the end. I can’t see your number but, is it five? Thank you. Would you like to begin?

F5 – Oh, it’s five. Yeah. Um, personally, I, I mean I know every sort of you know teach to the whole child. I, I, I personally like to teach toward like toward the life, not toward the day. And I, when I teach health especially through health and phys. ed., um, I
don’t think the, that I teach them out of the book with vocab. and things like that. That doesn’t really do much, I try to teach them what, what they’re gonna come through their entire life, to go through the next 4 years. Um, I know sometimes it’s not appropriate to use along in class, but if they’re gonna hear it in the next 4 years of their life, I think that has a place in the classroom as long as it’s appropriate as well.

Moderator – Thank you. I see people nodding. Did any of those nodders want to add? P6?

P9 – Ah, well, yeah I definitely, I mean I teach social studies, and social studies can be very distant for people to learn about because they think it’s history. It’s in the past, and so it’s not important to their life today. And so, um, just like you were saying, I think it’s important to teach to their life, and why is this relevant. What skills are you gonna learn? Um, from that, that they don’t have yet but will need later in their lives. Um, I think the other really important thing with teaching in the middle school is teaching. I think it’s really important. You know so those students aren’t, um, lost in the system. You know they’re like more than one person, just looking out for them. So I think it’s really important in middle school philosophy.

P3 – To add onto, um, P8, I agree with the teaching concept in that, um, when teachers discuss the same students that they have, they find, um, common interests among students and how a student might learn the best way. So I think that’s definitely part of middle philosophy, um, finding what type of learner your student is and catering to that.

P4 – And to add onto that actually, um, in addition for the students, teaching is great for the teachers as well. The students gain a sense of belonging, and as teachers, you gain colleagues that you can go to, and I think that, that translates to the students. They see how you work with somebody else, and you know they’re learning by example I guess. 

Moderator – Just to ask, if I may, as an extension, this would be an example of one of those probing questions. Can you talk a little bit about the structure that is in place or isn’t in place to facilitate that collegiality that you’re referencing?

P4 – Well, we all have a common team planning time, and, um, I guess it’s for core content teachers as well as, um, special ed, education liaison. And as, um, P3 was saying, um, you’re able to talk about the students and any issues that you might feel are concerns, and, um, it’s just really great to have that kind of soundboard to bounce ideas off of.

P9 – Um, it’s also good when dealing with the parents that you have the team behind you because of most times they’ll be saying the same thing across the board, and then you can approach the parents as a team and try to come up with a solution or how to best help the child.

P5 – Ah, just to switch gears for a second, I think it’s also important, ah, in, especially in middle school, with extracurricular activities, um, if you’re teaching, well I can only speak for health. But I mean I try through history. I try through math. I try through
science. I think it's important for kids that age, students that age, to realize the relevance of the other subjects in, within, within a subject area that they're taking at that time. Then as they get older, they can focus when they're in math, when they're in science, when they're in history. I think at this age they, they're always questioning why they have to learn this. In this class, what's it going to do for this class and how, how do they relate. That's real important.

**Moderator** - Anyone else on this side of the table, who might want to jump in, just a minute or 2 about middle school philosophy?

**P2** - Well, I think one of the things that might have come up that, um, was said ever there on the other side, um, when teaching in a team, um, the students are able to travel around together. And it creates this positive learning environment. They're comfortable in the classroom because they're with the same group of students throughout the day as opposed to a junior high middle school setting where they're just moving around on their own. And I think that really helps students learn because, again, they are comfortable in your classroom because they're with the same students all day. Um, and again, um, I don't want to use names, P4 mentioned that, um, they see us working together as a team, and that is a benefit. That thinking, they remember seeing how the teachers work together. And they can model that.

**P1** - And also the students, um, they know that the teachers, because we have a common planning time every day, they know that whatever happens in one class will quickly filter to the other teachers, and they see that we communicate so...

**Moderator** - Why don't we take it a step further and talk a little bit about question 5. P5 had identified that relevance was important in the health and phys. ed. classroom, and there were some other participants who spoke to middle school philosophy in terms of practices that occur presently here, meaning your own experience. And in keeping with that, one or both of those, let's talk a little bit about what student engagement is, again from your experience, your practice, maybe it's tied to that relevance... P10.

**P10** - Um, I teach social studies, and the same thing as P8 was saying. If you don't make it relevant for the kids, they're not gonna be interested. And so I think also with student engagement, you have to make the kids active learners. You have to have you know student-centered. They have to be doing things. They can't just be sitting in the desk, reading the book, taking notes. They're not gonna be excited about it. But to get them engaged, I think that really helps the content. If your content is gonna be more exciting, then they're gonna, maybe want to go to your class every day.

**P3** - I think also for student engagement, um, I agree that it's important to have them be active and out of their seats. And also as a teacher to be excited about what you're teaching, so the kids see that. They're like oh wow they're real excited about math. I should be excited too, and hopefully that it catch on.
P4 — I would agree with that. As a language arts teacher, I love talking about a book to a student, a group of students, the whole class, and, um, you know it's really important that I'm enjoying the book. If I didn't really care for it, then that's gonna show. And, um, when they get excited, then that is what you want. So, it's really is then a race give and take.

P5 — Yeah. I have the benefit of, ah, I, I, I can teach like, um, on-the-edge instruction because of the content area I teach. Especially in the eighth grade, we talk about drugs. We talk about sex. We talk about STDs. We talk about all types of narcotic, everything. I mean it's very easy for me to engage conversation, engage their interest. I mean all I have to do is be quiet and spit something out that, that shocks them for a second, then you, you get a total conversation all over the place. So I think I have an advantage like that with my content area.

Moderator — So what I'm hearing you say, P5, is that maybe engagement presents itself in different forms or at different levels.

P5 — A lot of anticipatory set as well, I mean for health you can do a million things. I mean you can, you can have five anticipatory sets in, in the lesson.

Moderator — So some content areas might lend themselves more readily?

P5 — It might be a little tougher, yeah, it might be a little tougher for other content areas as well, some time...

Moderator — And it's a great point to bring up this early on in the discussion, probably it would be a question that I would have for the group. You have such varying backgrounds. So do you, do you agree with what P5 is really bringing to the surface right now as far as student engagement, right now where we are in this discussion as a social studies teacher or as someone who works with smaller groups in special education, maybe across multiple content areas? Do you, would you predict that your experiences with student engagement are the same or different than P5's, who's health and phys. ed.?

P6 — Well, I teach the resource, and I have a very small group. I only have three students who are the lowest level are resource. Um, for my language arts, and I definitely, student engagement is tough. Um, and I found that with my group when they find some kind of success. Because we are so often our special ed. kids not meeting success and being easily discouraged. Um, helping them warm what kind of learner they are, you know by doing different things in the beginning of the year, and helping them figure out what is the easiest way for them to get new concepts and then really tapping into that I think helps student engagement, teaching them how to think and how their mind works, and giving them tools I think automatically increases student engagement. And when they meet success, and when they're having choices in their learning and directing their own learning, I think that's the time when I see the most engaged, and most interested in what's going on personally in the resource room.
P7 - That's almost exactly what I was going to say as far as giving options. I think I found that when they have options and they can choose where they want to go with the topic area, they seem to be into it or engaged more.

Moderator - If you had to piggyback on one of the words you just utilized, into it, or words, into it, if you had to, without using those words, give it almost a dictionary definition, the denotation of what, what is engagement. If you just had a phrase, or you just, what would you say? It doesn't have to be P7 again...

P7 - Right.

Moderator - to continue with this. But if you looked it up in the dictionary, what would it say, next to engagement or student engagement? What would that phrase or word be?

P2 - What would it say, or the actual definition?

Moderator - Either one. You could, you could share both, and again, it could be P7; it could be P2 who jumps in here...

P2 - Excitement. Energy, um, interest, just to name a few.

P3 - I would throw out curiosity with that. It can help to leave some things mysterious, and they're oh I wonder why that is, or something like that. It can help engagement.

Moderator - P7, did I cut you off?

P7 - No, I was gonna say enthusiasm, but we've already kind of gone that way with the last response so...I'm good.

P5 - Um, I think option is important too. He, he mentioned options. I mean I know we had a discussion in, um, conference the other day about homework. Kids aren't, kids aren't doing their homework in school. I mean, personally, I had the same problem in the beginning. What I do is I give a homework assignment. I might give four different options on the homework assignment, four different homework assignments. They pick which one they want to do. Ever since that, I really haven't had, haven't had an issue because I feel like they take, I feel like they've taken responsibility. They're engaging in their activity, and they're, they feel responsible for picking what they, what they chose. So they kind of feel the need to get it in.

P9 - I think it's also important that they see how it relates to their life. I mean if you're doing a project or an activity that they see a, a purpose to it, that they're eventually gonna use it again like they're not just multiplying decimals just because, like there's a reason behind it. And once they see that, I think that they're more involved in it and more interested in it.
P5 - I think it goes back to cross-curricular activities too. I think if every subject area decides if they're gonna have cross-curricular activities and use math, use different, different subject areas, then the kids will feel relevance for, for each subject. That's real important.

Moderator - If I was coming in to observe one of your lessons, this is a question off of the focus group interview guide, not necessarily as an administrator, not necessarily as a parent, not even a colleague, someone who you each with, or just even know, just someone you don't know, coming in, and I'm sitting in the back of whatever classroom environment it is, it happens to be, what would I see you doing to assess the enthusiasm, to measure the excitement, the energy, using your words, as far as having you define student engagement? Are there a set of tools that you employ? How do you get from, some of you participated in the ice breaker with the pictures of the students, maybe behaviors that you've seen demonstrated time and again in your classroom environments, how do you get from looking at children demonstrating or exhibiting those behaviors to making a judgment as to whether the kids are engaged, or they're not? Do you record it somewhere?

P3 - I think, um...

Moderator - In terms of measure...

P3 - I know I was in the ice breaker group with the pictures, and you can tell a lot by facial expressions and body language. And, um, I know in my classroom I don't formally all, always keep track of that type of thing, but in my head, it kind of leads me in the direction of where I need to go with my lessons, if I should spend some more time, whether it's with student minds, or focus on another topic, or give them something more interesting to do, things like that.

P8 - Um, I think it's important too, ah, you know your students. And if you have a student who, I was also in that ice breaker group, um, whose head is on their desk, and they don't seem engaged, I think it's important that you know that that student plays basketball, for instance. Then, how you know, how can off-the-cuff can you relate your topic to something that they're interested in? Maybe it's just like a short mention of playing basketball, then all of the sudden you know their head is up, and they're interested, even if you never mention basketball again. Like that one instance, where you mentioned it, if you know that student, then all the sudden they're engaged. I think it's a good way to get them excited about what you're talking about.

P2 - I think you also have to be willing to abandon whatever strategies you're currently using, and if everyone in your class is staring out the window, or coloring in their journals, or you know, put their heads down on the desk, you have to be willing to try something else and to think on your feet. I think somebody said that. Um, and mix it up a lot, different types of activities. I know we teach language arts, language arts teachers teach in a block. In order to keep the kids engaged for 80 minutes, you have
to do 10 minutes of different activities just to keep them engaged. And if this doesn’t work, then throw it out, and try something else.

P5 – I found the kids at the middle school level like, like competitions. And so when I, when I give discussions in my classes instead of just having them sit, I’ll put them in groups. Instead of maybe having them do group work, that, that group of four might be a team. And we’ll have a discussion, and the rule is that each person every time they answer a question right, that group gets a point. And in order for someone to answer a question twice, the whole group has to answer one correct. So all four people have to participate before that, the other person can answer again, and what I do is I kind of like I keep track of prizes like two points prize might be some candy that I have, or something like that. And, um, that seems, that seems to work pretty well because they end up actually communicating with each other, and they all, they all have to participate in order for their team to do anything. So that works out.

P6 – I think the product that your students give you can tell you a lot about how engaged they are. You know, for example, in my language class, we’re doing, um, The Outsiders, and I have a whole layered project for them, to do where they choose three from this category, two from this category, one from this category. And I find, you know I can tell a lot by how engaged they are by the stuff they’re giving me. You know oh I’m done might seem well, and they give it to me, and you know it’s not well thought out. It’s not. I know it’s not, they’re not meeting you know their, ah, you know how high they could go, I can, you can tell a lot from what they give you, um, how much thought they’re putting into it, and how into it they are. You know that’s what I found.

Moderator – To continue with, with what P6 is identifying, realizing that you have a daily professional development period, with job-embedded opportunities for professional development, that collegiality with one another aside from the team planning periods, would you say that there are opportunities for you to evaluate or assess student work, whether it pertains to this topic student engagement? Is that something that’s done on a routine basis? In other words, in other words, you had, you had mentioned that looking at student work as a way to measure student engagement. During your FDP, your professional development period, do you have any kind of critical friends group or any, do you meet as a group of teachers? Do you ever, in those opportunities, bring student work, student work there and show each other, kind of talk about it?

P3 – Actually, I think it can be a little bit difficult because, um, teachers that we’re, we’ve matched with or grouped with, um, might teach a different grade or not have the same students as us. So while we can bring general ideas, it might be difficult to talk about specific things in content areas. That’s what I find.

Moderator – So, in other words, let’s say if your math teacher, P9, brought a unit assessment, it might not necessarily be helpful to look at that unit assessment that a couple of students did well on or didn’t do well on, anywhere along the continuum, as opposed to what a language arts teacher brings to the table in the way of an open-ended response. Okay.
P9 - We do that in team though. Like sometimes some of the teachers will bring in a
student’s work, and they say this is what I saw, you know with this child. Are you seeing
the same thing in other classes? Even like the language arts teacher, you know was doing
the writing. In math, we do journal entries. So we still see the writing, just not as much,
but we might still be able to pick up on the same thing. So we do that within our team
because we’re looking at each child.

Moderator - Does that make sense, how I rephrased it?

P2 - I think that’s easy to do in team when you have teachers with the same kids.
But I know during our professional development like I usually don’t have it with
someone with the same kids. So we really don’t have things to compare, really. I’m lucky
I have the benefit of having a language arts partner that I’m both professionally and
personally, um, you know we’re friends, and we also work very well together, and we do
that all the time. And it helps us assess our lessons, if the student are, students aren’t
giving us the quality work, um, then maybe they didn’t like the lesson. They weren’t
engaged. And you know we’ll change it up for next time. So I have that one person that I,
I do have the benefit of working with like that, but not as a team so much because I don’t
think necessarily we’re all looking at the same thing.

Moderator - Which maybe goes back to the question before about student engagement
looking the same or different depending upon the content area... anyone else want to add
anything to that last piece of engagement, 5A? The bulk of our conversation today will
focus on instructional strategies, and so far we’ve pretty much, you’ve pretty much as
participants highlighted a lot of the language we, ah, that we actually are going to talk
about in questions 6 through 9 including 6A. So we can get right into it and talk about
teacher-student rapport. And again, the bulk of this conversation, think of it in terms of,
your experience, you research, prior to or even now, right where you are in your
teaching career, your profession, in terms of how it impacts student engagement, these
four specific instructional strategies. Looking at the first one here, question 6, how do
you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement? Is it a positive or
negative, or can it be both?

P7 - I think it’s primary. I think it’s the number one thing that determines whether or not
a student wants to be involved in class, um, and it’s just a bit different that if you had a
conversation on the street with someone. If you feel like you have rapport with that
person, you want to hear what they have to say. If you were turned off by that person,
then you’d completely zone out even though you’re kind of nodding your head like
you’re listening. So it’s you know if you like the teacher, not to say that you’re best
friends, but if you feel like they’re looking for you, in the sense of educationally,
you’re gonna listen to that class and, and try to participate.

P2 - Um, I... sorry.

P7 - No, go ahead P2.
P2 – I was going to say, um, I definitely agree with what the last participant said. I can’t see his number. Um, I think it definitely has a direct impact on student engagement. I look at where I was last year at this time in my 1st year teaching and how nervous I was, how standoffish I was, how I didn’t have that rapport with students until later in the year, and how little they seemed to care about the lessons that I was teaching; whereas, this year, being much more comfortable, having a good teacher-student rapport, I feel with most of my classes, um, they’re so much more engaged. And I feel it’s a direct correlation. And it’s definitely there.

P1 – Actually I had an experience with a student this year. In the 1st like few weeks of school, he would do bad and say inappropriate things in class and wasn’t the most engaged student, and then somehow we were talking about football in class, and he likes the Jets, and I like the Eagles, so that was our connection instantly. And now, the Eagles are losing a lot, and he’ll come into class you know, Senorita, the Eagles lost, ah, so like we have that connection now. We’ll always just talk about football, and ever since then, he’s been one of the people in class that participate the most. If the class is talking during the warm-up, he’s the one guy come on be quiet, be quiet, so there’s, it definitely helped, you know, he’s done a total 366 in class so...

P4 – I was gonna agree, sorry...

P7 – No go ahead.

P4 – um, with P2 briefly. Um, last year was my 1st year teaching, and it felt like until after Christmas, I didn’t get that connection with the kids. And this year, you knew it was pretty emotional that I wanted to rectify that, to change that. And, um, it’s just little things. It’s giving pieces of yourself just casually sometimes. Um, and, and not being so businesslike all the time. I mean I, I ran a structured classroom, and you, and you have to be structured, but you have to pull back sometimes, and be able to joke here and there, and a lot of them see that reality I guess.

P6 – I think it goes back to what we were talking about with the middle school philosophy, about how we want to teach the whole child. And that, you know, we try and make our learning environment as comfortable, and a place where they can take chances and not feel like they’ll be ridiculed or single out. And I think that goes right along with when you provide that environment of safety and comfort, um, through giving you know, how pieces of your life, or you know, just having that rapport, I think that’s when most of the engagement, student engagement happens is when they feel they’re in a safe place. And especially, and I’m a special ed. teacher, so I tend to be more, you know, making my students feel happy with being in school and making it a positive place where they find success. And I think they’re tied in very closely.

P5 – When I think about student-teacher rapport, um, I just think the closest correlation to like a sport. I mean if you work with the best coaches in the world motivate, motivate their players. They engage their players. The good players love their coach. They’ll put out 100% on the line. When their players don’t love their coach, you can see it. You can
see in their eyes. You can see it in their actions and everything. So I, I mean basically, if I had to put it in one sentence, I would say that people perform for people they care about. That, that's the whole definition for that.

Moderator – You're getting a lot of people shaking their heads in agreement I'm assuming, on what you just captured.

P10 – Um, just to go off on that too, I think that p. P5, next to me, that if they're engaged, it's gonna enhance the class so much more too, and also like they feel comfortable cause if you're having like a debate or something in class, you divide the class up, in half, and these kids aren't comfortable with saying things out and, in front of their other classmates, they're not gonna say anything. It's gonna be very quiet, very dry. But if they like the class, you know they're really into it, and they have a good rapport with the teacher as well as the other students in the classroom. I think it'll be really effective.

P9 – I also think it's really important we talked about you know how you show that you care about them and care about their success. Um, last year, I was in a different district, but, um, this one student never ever did his homework. For like the 1st whole month of school, never ever, there was not one homework assignment. And then 1 day he did it, and I made such a big deal like when I was checking homework I said oh my gosh you did your homework! I'm so happy! I feel so proud of you. And ever since that, he was a different kid. He handed in every single homework assignment in every day, and I'd make a big deal of it. And if I didn't, he would be like I did my homework today. Oh, I'm so proud of you. You know, and he was like a different kid once he thought like I cared, I wanted him to do his homework.

P3 – I just wanted to, um, add onto what a lot of people were saying about student rapport, and I do think it's definitely very important, and, um, I just wanted to add that I think each class kind of has its own personality, and, and as a 1st year teacher, it was kind of hard for me to see that, like in the 1st few weeks. And I try to act the same way with all my classes, but I've had, have little types of my personality for each of my classes, which is kind of interesting. But, um, like some of them would, would talk more and act out more in a certain way while I was still trying to make a good rapport with them. So I kind of changed my techniques a little bit. So it can definitely be a little tricky, I think to find like your right comfort level with the classes.

P5 – I think, ah, as teachers too we have to realize that sometimes we take for granted, we think that these kids go home, and they have good rapport with their parents, they have good rapport with friends, they have good rapport with family. A lot of kids that we teach might not have any rapport with anyone. So when they, when you, when you show like teacher, student-teacher rapport, and they really have that with you, I mean they might feel even closer connected then you would even imagine because they might not have that when they go home. So they might only feel that between eight o'clock and three o'clock.
Moderator – And that's a great segue into 6A, which branches off of that. Talk a little bit about social and emotional learning and how it’s connected to teacher-student support, and it could be outside of the school day. You work with middle school kids, so how does their social and emotional well-being, or state of being, have an impact on the rapport that you develop or don’t develop with them?

P5 – With kids in general, I just don’t, they don’t really, I don’t, they usually don’t have the ability to leave their baggage at the door. I mean that as, as a teacher, you have to. I mean you, you could have the worst day in the world, but you have to leave it at the door, and your emotions and everything else. Like, kids don’t do that. So I think very important to that, be aware, be able to read people. I mean I, I can usually look at, look at people, and I’ll look at students and have a pretty decent idea of what mood they’re in, of what, of why, like you know if they’re, if they’re feel like they want to talk, if they feel like they’ve had a bad day, usually can tell that, and I mean if you’re aware of that, you, you see the differences in them as they walk in day-to-day.

Moderator – How do you adjust your practice?

P5 – Um, if I feel like a kid had a bad day, I, I mean if he walks in, and, and I mean I can see he’s down, I usually I try to throw in a couple things that maybe I know he’s interested in. I pretty much know what my kids are like, what, what they’re interested in. So I might start off with, with a, anticipatory set that engages them, that something that might take their mind off of what happened during the day, even if it’s for 3 minutes. It’s gonna help them. It might map them out of it for a little bit, depending how severe, I mean how severe the case is.

P2 - I think you have to keep in mind, and you said baggage, that these kids come to school with, sometimes it’s just amazing that a student is actually sitting in your room, and they are there, and they have a backpack with books in it, based on all the things that are going on at home, and you know, I’m not saying I would, um, necessarily, um, accept homework from the student if it’s a constant thing, but sometimes you have to know when to pull back and say you know what he’s sitting here, and he’s reading the book. And maybe he didn’t do his study guide questions; whereas, a student who, you know, you know maybe they come from a good environment, and, and they maybe don’t have as much baggage, you might ride that kid a little bit more. You know, you need to put in more effort, or something like that. In addition, you also have to keep in mind these kids are 13 years old and think back to when you were 13 years old, um, and the things that you did, and the way you approached school so all of that, really, um, you have to keep that in mind when you’re trying to develop relationships with students. I might not find that successful when students don’t do their homework. But maybe when they go home, Mom isn’t home. Dad doesn’t live with them. You know, Grandma is in, and eat. There’s so many different types of things.

P7 - I think aside from, ah, just the home life of a student, I think you have to be aware of also kids that don’t fit in, ah, emotionally, socially, also. I know I always try to look out for that because some of those kids get lost in the shuffle a lot of times. Um, you
know just this last quarter I had lunch duty, and you can really see it in the cafeteria, you
know who doesn’t fit in, who has trouble socializing with their peers. And I think that if
you reach out to those kids, um, sometimes they get too attached, and I have to you know
put ‘em in their place so to speak, but you knew, at least they don’t so much as care as
someone else is looking out for them. And you can kind of hopefully guide their process
in fitting in with, with the rest of the crew so to speak.

P4 — And I think it’s for those students it’s important to highlight their strengths,
something positive. There is a student that I have now who, he does not fit in, in school.
He’s, um, but he’s a great artist, and so you know, if there’s ever an opportunity to
highlight that I try to do my best to do that. And the students actually, you know they got
really excited when they saw his work. Wow, he did that. So just highlighting the
positive...

P5 — Also, if you’re a well-liked teacher, if, if the students in general, I mean the whole,
most of them, if they like you, and they respect you, and then you show like, um, P7 said.
When you show that maybe a kid that generally does not fit in, if you show them the
respect, if you, if you make just sly comments like I, that’s awesome. You know it’s cool.
Well, I think just, just little things like that I think sometimes rules off on other students. It
doesn’t mean that they’re gonna call them at home and say come hang out on, on Friday
with me, but a lot of times it takes, it takes attention away, and the, the tension that
they’re all feeling in the morning, I think it eliminates that sometimes. I can see that in
class.

P4 — Yeah. I totally agree. If maybe not highlighting them, that’s not what I meant, but
those side...

P5 — Yeah. Uh-huh.

P4 — kind of just casually, and like you said, it really does rub off in the classroom
atmosphere changes I think. I think if they hear that, from you.

Moderator — To what extent, and we don’t have, unless I’m incorrect on this, your
backgrounds, we don’t have any counselors here...To what extent do the two school
counselors work in this area, social and emotional learning? Do you think they see it from
a different, through a different lens than you all do as teachers? How would they predict
how they would respond to these questions, this question in particular, teacher-student
rapport and social and emotional learning.

P5 — I think that they, that, um, if I was a counselor, I, then my number one priority
would be their emotional well-being. And as a teacher, we also have to take into account
the productivity and what they, what they have to do in our classroom. As a counselor, I
mean I’ve been in a few different schools, um, from student teaching, my parents were
both teachers growing up, I’ve seen a ton of different counselors. Some use both where
they care about the purpose, they care about their emotional status. Others don’t really
care if they do your work. They don’t care if they do your homework. If that kid is where
they want them emotionally, then that's their job, that they're in school, that they're, that they're, they're at least showing up, they're, they're here all day. And I mean that's really the number one major concern, and some counselors will get upset if you push one of those kids that does have a problem. You really shouldn't, I'm, I'm a little sensitive to this. But they will get upset if you affect that emotional well-being. They will get very upset.

P3 - I know that we're lucky enough in our school that on some teams, I think all teams, meet with the guidance counselor once a week, so that we can discuss how, um, different problems or things that are going on with students, whether academically or emotionally. So we might say, like, um, oh this student is, the grades are dropping. Is there anything going on at home? Do you know anything that they might have talked to you about, or even like also emotional things? So, I really like how we have that connection so we can all be on the same page and offer our expertise whether academically or emotionally and socially.

P4 - I think our counselors here are great too, and along with the Child Study Team, being a special ed. teacher, because, ah, any kids you know besides having academic issues, are very socially immature. Um, a lot of them have emotional problems at home. Um, and I am constantly with our guidance counselor. And you know, she and the psychologist comes in once in awhile and they'll have a social skills group with my kids. And we all do it together. Um, and I think that social-emotional piece is so important, um, especially for my kids who are the outliers and do get picked on when they're in gym because they have resource room classes all day long, and they are the special ed. kids, and people look at them differently. Um, so as a special ed. teacher, I feel like I am so connected to the guidance counselors and our Child Study Team, um, because of the social issues that come along a lot with special ed. students. That's why I think it's a really important piece.

Moderator - What else, having to do with teacher-student rapport, anything?

P2 - Well I think we talked about the positive. But I mean if there's an issue where you're not going to develop a rapport with every student, if it's, you can't, and there are issues, then it will impact the student in a class and the student engagement. Sometimes you just, it doesn't happen. So we have to keep that in mind too.

Moderator - Did you all have that experience before?

P5 - I've seen negative before with, with someone, not teachers in this school, you know, um, I know a couple teachers my Dad, my Dad taught with in his school, which is, we won't mention, ah, they had a lot of negative rapport, ah, like, um, it's fine to be sarcastic and be witty. But they were sarcastic in a devious way, where they would basically pick on kids, and they would instead of having a positive rapport, they would have like kind of like, side arguments with a lot of animosity, the students would have a lot of animosity toward those teachers. And I mean, you, you could see that from a mile away. And that, that destroys the whole classroom, I mean obviously.
P2, P4, P5 – I think you have that here too. I, I was going to add something. I definitely have seen... definitely... yeah you do, if, it’s really upsetting, to be you know, teachers who are out to get kids, or single someone out. Yeah.

Moderator – And for the record, none of them are participants here.

P6 – But I think it goes on everywhere, sadly.

P5 – Of course it does. I’m just trying to...

P6 – It certainly goes on. We can all think back to our early school careers in high school, and you can remember the teachers who were a little too sarcastic with certain students. And I think that stays with you. I definitely...

Moderator – What do you think contributes to that, the erosion of positive rapport, if you had to speculate?

P6 – Um, I think it’s in some of the cases I’ve seen. I guess it’s just a personality conflict, maybe the kid is you know asks too many questions or is a little pushy, kind of you know anxious, or your, you know a behavior problem, or someone who talks back, I think that erodes, you know maybe the teacher’s feelings towards that student. And then in turn, the teacher is at battle with that student, almost like a power struggle. Um, and I’ve seen it, I’ve, I’ve taught emotionally disturbed kids, in a, in my previous district. And when they would go out to the mainstream, it would be a constant power struggle because, um, they would challenge. You know they weren’t your typical student that would follow in line. They, they would challenge teachers, and a lot of teachers take that as a threat to their authority. And, ah, I think that can cause tension between the teacher and the student, definitely.

P5 – It only takes 1 time. I mean, ah, yeah, I think handling situations that you escalate or deescalate a situation in your classroom can definitely affect the rapport. I mean the kid 13 years old can love you for 6 months, and then 1 time, one instance, it might not be that big of a deal, but you handled it the wrong way, you can become their number one, most hated person in the world. And I mean that would kill any rapport that they have with you, and they’ll try to make your classroom a chaotic situation.

Moderator – And much of what you describe, as a group here, really leads nicely into the next question on the focus group interview guide, having to do with classroom management. I think sometimes, and I’m just going to throw this out there for you, we hear classroom management as educators, and we think discipline, how we handle our class. And not that we’re asking you as far as the guide question that pertains to this, to set that completely aside, but think about this next question, question 7, as an extension of discipline, kind of weaving it in there. Recognizing that clear expectations and goal setting are pan of effective classroom management, I mean put the discipline over here, you’ve got goal setting, and you’ve got clear expectations over here, how do you think the expectations and goal setting, including your own, how you manage your classroom,
impacts student engagement? Is it a good thing to include goal setting and clear expectations or not a good thing?

P7 - I, I personally, this is my opinion, I like to be, ah, I feel like people like to be, not told what to do, but they like to have structure I think. And that doesn’t mean they’re constantly being controlled. It just means that they want some form of organization. And I think that goes from adults down to kids. Um, you know if we went into a faculty room, and there was really no rhyme or reason to what was goin’ on, we would be like, what are we doin’ here? You know we want an agenda. We want to know when things are gonna happen. So, my approach is, have what we’re gonna do for the day up every day, and have the objective up every day. And I think that helps because when they sit down and they come in, they know what we’re gonna do and what they need to do by the end, by the time they leave. So, that’s my opinion on it as far as that goes, but, that reduces I think discipline problems and helps with management.

Moderator - P1, you’ve been quiet for awhile.

P1 - Basically, what, um. P7 just said I agree with, um, every day, I have the objective, and I have a list of what the students should do, say for example, I introduce a project, and I give them a good 30 minutes to work in their groups on their project, but you know after 10 minutes, I’ve said okay you should be done thing this and moving onto this tag, task, and 10 minutes later, you should be doing this now, and you should be doing this now. And it was kind of good to transition them from task to task, and more than just oh we have 30 minutes, let’s just sit and talk about our hair and you know what we saw on TV, so it’s just like...

Moderator - Thank you.

P9 - I do the same thing. Like I have a list of everything we’re gonna do for the day. I write the objective, and I even for more structure, I even have like the title for each day, so like they know exactly what we’re doing. And that helps like keep me on task but also keep them on task because like if we’re gonna take notes or do some sample problems, then they know that’s not gonna be a half an hour long. So if they’re like a little bored, or maybe a little off task, they know it’s gonna be over soon, and we’re gonna be switching to something else. So I think it helps them stay interested and fairly on task cause they know we’re gonna eventually move to something else, and they know we’re moving to.

P5 - I like to include the students like, um, I like to include them in making the expectations and the goals like, like per, if I’m teaching about cocaine, I like, I like for them, um, just like really in class, what do you want to know about cocaine? What do you expect to know about cocaine? What should you know? Um, the different aspects like that. And basically they make their own goals. They make their own expectations, and they have to meet them by the end of class with, with their conclusion. Let’s, let’s see if it works out that way.
Moderator - Does that hold their interest?

P5 - It, um, as long as, it holds their interest if, if done in a structured way. You can't just have, you know you have kids that are making comments or issue, you have kids yelling out, that I usually, I usually don't have that many discipline problems, with, um, inside the classroom. So I mean it usually works out for me. I don't know if it will work in every subject area, but it definitely works for me.

Moderator - Does anyone else have experience goal setting with students? Aside from the clear expectations in the beginning of the year that you introduce, your content area with goals, or set benchmarks with them, kind of as a guiding tool?

P2 - As a teacher, we do a morning procedures, we do normal procedures, and each class takes like at the end of class or what to do when you walk into the room. And we kind of set up the procedures so they know what to do when they get in every classroom. So each teacher would take a different, um, aspect like what to do when, when there's a substitute, what to do when you're absent. And we make them set, um, the procedures that they follow throughout the school, school year. As far as my own classroom goals, I also have certain expectations and, and the way I want to run my class you know, which I focus on, on the beginning of the year: day in and day out. And it's just a matter of follow through. Because I started to do that last year, and then I got lax. You just have to stay on top of it.

P6 - I did the, um, before any unit that I begin, we do the essential questions, um, and I leave them posted up throughout the whole unit, so we might have five essential questions or whatever, um, unit we're beginning, and we talk about them, and we, you know I tell them this is, this is what, you should, you should be able to answer these thoroughly by the time we're done you know. And we visit them every day and see if we can build upon our answers and if we've gotten to that yet. And then by the end, they are successful usually, but in answering whatever essential questions that I've set up for my unit, I find that works pretty well.

Moderator - Anyone else want to comment on that, goal setting, or the clear expectations? Overall, I'm hearing you say that it's positive. Both experiences are positive, for both of those practices in terms of the impact on student engagement. If you take a look at that third instructional strategy listed there, for question 8, and again some of this has been wrapped into I think earlier comments, what do you think the implementation of authentic learning experiences, such as interdisciplinary units, or you might refer to them as IDUs, simulations, problem-based learning, and service learning impact student engagement? Maybe you've had experiences with one or more of those. How does incorporating those, one or more of them, in combination or again as stand alone, impact student engagement levels in your classrooms?

P8 - Well I know in social studies, um, we've done a bunch of simulations with the curriculum that we have, and, um, one of the things I did in the beginning of the year, it was totally spur of the moment. We were just kind of having a little discussion about the
geography of the ancient Greece, which is you know can be pretty boring, and then all the sudden I started having the kids walk around the room as people that were climbing over mountains, and I had one student who, who was the cart and like they had to be bouncing up over like all along these rocks, and you know it was totally spur of the moment thing but just the fact that they're up and being this sort of like noentity idea out there just really engaged students. And they still really were like remember when he was the cart and like the geography of ancient Greece was really rocky. Like they still remember that, so I think simulations are things that they can really, um, grasp upon, and then they can always reference back and say they have a stake in it almost and really participate then.

P2 - I think any time that you can take context learning and incorporate it in your classroom or in your team definitely enhances your unit. When we studied the Holocaust, these, you know you could read Diary of Anne Frank or Night, you could talk about how horrible it was, and, um, talk about tolerance, but when you invite Holocaust victims in to speak about their experiences, it takes on a life of its own. We had last year, a parent, um, not a parent, we had six speakers went to each room. We had, um, those older people that were hidden as children, we had people who survived the camp, we had people who left Germany after a principle amount of time and just, it, the buss that you could feel, and, and the emotional impact. I mean the kids were crying and hugging. They didn't want the survivors to leave, and we didn't want them to leave. And it was such a buzz in the building that day, and it really took it to another level. They really understand how, what it is to be a victim, um, what happens when you're a bystander and things like that. And it really drives the point home. I know another team also had the survivors in. Would you agree with that?

P4 - Oh, definitely. As you said, you can only talk about it so much, but when we get them to actually experience it, and listen, and hear real people telling real stories, I think that was the most powerful thing, and for the teachers too.

P2 - Right.

P6 - You know it was just unbelievable.

P7 - Any time you learn something I think you need to experience it. It's just like if all you did was practice, and you never competed. It's like you have to live whatever it is you, you've been reading about or taking note about. So, authentic learning has to be incorporated somehow, or otherwise the student is just gonna black out, you know black out basically.

P5 - Does it include role playing as well?

Moderator - Yes. Think about that as simulations.

P5 - Yeah. That's what I thought, because I do I mean I do a lot of role playing in health. I mean especially when it gets to like, um, areas that kids aren't comfortable talking
about like STDs. They'll come in and like when they, when they present I'll have them really present like gonorrhea, and they'll be like Mr. Gonorrhea.

**Moderator** — I don't mean to interrupt, but we appreciate your thoroughness.

**PS** — Yeah. Well, I mean, I just, I mean I think role playing is great for...I mean I do like an HIV unit, and I have then actually, whether, whether it's a family member or, or a speech to a school, in which they have to make a fake name for the character, everything like that, and a way that they contracted the disease, and, um, it kind of makes them look through the eyes of, of someone like that. I think it gives a little sympathy for that person as well. So I think role playing is definitely important.

**Moderator** — Stay with what you're, you're talking about, even if it's not the role play or simulation, if you move that same child into the gym...

**PS** — Right.

**Moderator** — maybe in more of the academic or less inclined athlete, how do you make it real for them, in the gym? How do you, how do you make it real? How do you make it authentic for, for maybe the non-athlete in the gym?

**PS** — Um, basically when I teach gym class, I, I do more of a sports model instead of...it's not like everyone plays basketball and that person who is not athletic or doesn't excel as much as the athletic person, what I do with a unit, ah, for people like that, um, that may not excel in the sports side, I'll have on the side when they're sitting down they're actually like journalists. They have to write like a journal entry, on, on like the game that is going on at that point for like 5 minutes. Everyone is the class has to do that. Some kids will act as referees. I have, some kids act as coaches. When we play flag football, there's one coach that I, it changes. I mean they have different roles, different, um, completely different responsibilities everyday. And so I, ah, I mean that's, that's the way I teach phys, phys, ed.

**Moderator** — You include options.

**PS** — A ton of options, I mean I even have a girl that loves cheerleading. We're doing flag football. I let her be a cheerleader for 10 minutes. I mean anything that engages them. I mean, ah, it is part of the game I mean, you know, you know it's not like an athletic perk, but, um, I mean they're there. You watch a football game on TV, there are, there are cheerleaders, And that's what she wants to be, she, you know it's definitely oral participation.

**PS** — I teach Spanish so I always say you know like oh when I lived in Spain, or when I went to Mexico, you know I couldn't just speak English I had to communicate with them in Spanish. And you could say, you could say, ah, and they're like you know whatever. Everyone speaks English, but for Day of the Dead, which is the, the huge celebration, I had to create stations. For one station, I created my own little Mexican bakery, and I had
the student, they had to come up to me, and if they wanted to have bread, they needed to speak with me and have a conversation totally in Spanish beforehand, and if they weren’t good, you know go back to your seat and work on it. So, they were like this is really hard. Well this is what you’re gonna have to do. And then it finally clicked, like oh this is why I was learning Spanish. Now you can tell them that I got it from a bakery in New Jersey, so I didn’t have to travel too far. But that’s just for Spanish though. I thought it was a good experience for them.

Moderator – Anyone else on the authentic learning?

P10 - Even just like something as simple as like a class field trip, somewhere like, I remember when I was in eighth grade we went to Gettysburg. And like I ne, I never remember being like so into history from just like seeing it. You know you have to see, you have to experience it. And I think that basically just goes with the whole authentic learning when the kids are seeing it, when they’re experiencing it, when they’re walking around you know visually, and hearing it, that they’re gonna become a lot more engaged. And to take them on like a field trip, we live so close to you know either Washington, DC, or Philadelphia, or something. If we’re talking about the Constitution, then everything about you know 1776 and such, take them to Philadelphia where it all happened. That would be like an eye opening experience for them, for them to be like really into it.

P5 – I, I think that’s really, that’s a good point like, ah, if you experience like I mean field trips, things like that. I would love to take phys. ed., I would love to organize a class trip for like, um, a tour of the Special Olympics, or like, um, or like Junior Special Olympics, and have the kids actually see that hands-on, like first-hand. I mean I know they’ll have a completely different opinion of, of, of those like events. I, I would love to do that.

P2 – We do that with a simple community visit. We, we study community as the first unit, and we talk about what makes up the community [name of community], and they all say well there’s a lot of older people here. There are so many 55 and older communities. And we talk about the my, myths and misconceptions they have, of those people. Then we take them to Assisted Living, the 55 and older communities, and the nursing home at [name] Care Center. And they go, and they ask them all these questions about their lives. And they go in, and they’re really hesitant, and they come out, and they’re like that was the greatest experience. So you can do something simple like that, and it really shows you the value of each member of the community and what you can learn from them.

P1 – And as I’m listening to everybody, I’m just thinking all authentic learning does. Create community within your classroom too, from um, what P8 was saying in the very beginning. They still say remember when he was the oat you know, and all of the students will have a role in it and might have that name for a few weeks, but if you know, fine, and it makes them remember that knowledge, and it cement it kind of a thing.
P3 – I just wanted to add on about um, interdisciplinary units, which really wasn’t brought up a whole lot. Um, I know a team that I’m on, we are kind of in the middle of our, our IDU, and um, our kickoff date like every single class is doing something with wreaths, and even though you hear some comments oh wreaths again, like, if, you can see that it’s in every single class, and you can do like, like, um, brief literature or mathematician wreaths, or I can do that in Spanish or, um, like it was just tied in, and I think it made them important. It was important for them to see that like you can tie almost any subject to any other subject. And that’s why we do, like IDUs, and things like that.

Moderator – What about service learning? In addition to what one of the other participants mentioned, about the trips, maybe it’s a combination, viewed as a combination of some of these, is there any other service learning experience that you work on with the kids too?

P2 – What does your team do?

P7 – We’re just taking a field trip to the Old...

P2 – No, the one that’s coming up in December, kind of could be service learning.

P7 – I wish I knew what that was. Oh, I’m sorry. Well...

P2 – I don’t know if it was service learning, but it was still helping the community I guess.

P7 – Yeah. Well it’s, ah, the one you’re talking about is the coasts drive, the coast drive we’re doing. It’s like, oh, you can get extra credit for bringing in coats for the, well I think it’s the homeless. I should know about all this coat drive we’re doing, but I’m not really giving out the extra credit. Yeah.

P6 – We’re, I, I, I do the Builder’s Club, which is a service learning organization. Um, and I mean, it’s not my class. It’s just an after school activity, but, um you know definitely we go to the Care Centers. And we, um, collected cans for, um, for Thanksgiving. And we collected telephones for abused women and children, to drop off at a shelter. Um, and you definitely see the students, um, into it, and feeling like they’re making a difference. And that, you know, especially we talk about kids that are 13 and 14 who believe they are the center of the universe, when they realize there’s a world around you, and you know not everybody lives the way you do. And you know we are a community, we help each other, and, um, I think the Builder’s Club is, um, it’s, and it’s a great bunch of kids. And I think they really, um, enjoy it and really feel like they’re making a difference in their community. And I think that’s really important.

Moderator – You had shared in jest that students as being the center of the universe, and maybe that’s a way we can pretty much lead into question 9. Maybe that’s humorous, maybe from a more serious side, moving away from the humorous side we sometimes see at this age level, with student-centered instruction considered to be a balance of
cooperative learning, group work, discussion, lecture, the application of technology, differentiated instruction, project-based activities, and multiple intelligence theory. How do you think this approach to instruction impacts student engagement? Now as you think about how you might want to field this one, again the key word is balance. You might not necessarily, depending upon your experiences, your research, your training, just where you are presently, you might not necessarily utilize or implement cooperative learning like you are really focused on group work where maybe the roles and responsibilities of students in your classroom aren’t maybe as clearly defined as they would be in, in a cooperative learning experience. Or, maybe you’re a big proponent of Howard Gardner and multiple intelligence theory knowing that you have, you have some, some experiences that really relate to one or more of these things, how would you, how have you utilized these strategies in your classroom, or techniques, how has it impacted the student engagement level with your kids?

P3 - Um, I think being a 1st year teacher, especially and just coming fresh out of school learning about all these techniques, I really try even though it can be, um, like a struggle some time, to bring in like a lot of different, um, learning strategies and like every single week, like 1 day I’ll do like partner share, 1 day they’ll do group work, 1 day I’ll have to lecture cause, cause they learn a new topic. And I think that really helps kids because they’ll come in the classroom and be like what are we doing today, and are we going to be in groups, are, are we doing this, like they come in without like oh, I’m gonna take out my homework and do notes every single day, so that they kind of, it’s spontaneous. And they kind of definitely do, they want to see what we’re doing different than what we did the other day.

P7 - And I think as teachers, sometimes you can get caught up in negativity that, ah, they’re just throwing another theory at us, which in a lot of ways is true, but all it is, is just change it up. No one wants the same thing every day. You know, if, if you kind of look through the I don’t know educational terminology that, that’s always put at you, all it is, is just something different every day, not necessarily every day, but within your instruction, that’s, that’s you know, in human nature. People want to see things in different ways, so you know you just have to be conscious of that. That’s all.

P9 - I think it’s also important, like everyone was just saying, like vary your instruction, and, um, like meet the needs of your different students. You know everyone likes learns in a different way. And maybe like if we lecture 1 day and you know teach a really new concept, one student might not get it, but maybe the next day, if we do like cooperative learning or we do some like hands-on manipulatives. Maybe they’ll get it then. So it’s also important to like change it up, not just to keep them interested, but also to try to help them learn it in a different way.

Moderator - Which of the techniques listed in question 9 would you say you had the most familiarity with? Whether you utilize it in your classroom environment, or you don’t, which one do you have the most familiarity with?

P5 - Discussion.
Moderator - In the gym and health classroom or?

P5 - Ah, both. I like to. I like to. I mean even, even, in my classroom, I'll use discussion probably throughout 10 minutes a day, but, you know, it's important to have, you know before, it's very important because you learn a lot as well as the teacher. Yes, you think you know what the kids are thinking, but when they come back to you with answers and questions, then you can actually basically assess yourself. In the gym, I do the same thing. I mean when it comes to sports I would just teach football, and here it is. I like to discuss the whole history of football. I mean you can come into my classroom, my kids that, kids that might not know a thing about football might know who Gale Sayers is, running back for the Bears, might not know something about, might know that Emmitt Smith has the career rushing record, that can be, rushing is a new career. I think it's important all, all the way through. I discuss everything, about the topic, the entire topic.

Moderator - P8, what do you think?

P8 - Um, well, P10 and I exchanged a look because when at college, we get a lot of multiple intelligences theory because hit on that a lot, and, ah, it really, focus on that college experience...

P10 - Yeah. We went to the same college.

P8 - We went to the same college. He was very, everything was Howard Gardner.

P10 - Yeah.

P8 - Howard Gardner. Howard Gardner. Yeah. Um, so it's very focused on that, so I actually took time out of the beginning of the year to you know give my students tests based on how there are different multiple intelligences and how they can utilize them in the classroom, and, um, I, I do a lot of group work and changing things up, and, ah, a lot of times in the group work I'm like alright if you remember back to when you took the MI test and if you were more of a visual person, you might be the go to person for this part of the project. If you're a verbal person, you're gonna be the go to person for this part of the project. To really bring it back and make them focus on okay you know I can use this to you know help myself learn, to help the other students in the class learn so... I know in college we got a lot of MI theory.

Moderator - And what's the impact to student engagement? Does it make a difference?

P8 - I think it does because I think when, um, they realize that they have a stake in their learning, that okay if you know this, if there's a lecture going on, I might not get it because I'm more of a visual learner, so I can use this to help me understand it better. Or I might ask a question that'll you know if I see a picture, that will, that might help me. So I think if they understand how they learn, I think they'll be more engaged and in tune with the subject matter.
Moderator — Anyone want to add to that, or pick at another piece of that question?

P7 — I don’t have too much background with multiple intelligences as far as my education goes, but, and this, this is kind of a question for everyone else, like if you figure out how you learn, so does that mean that if I’m doing a lesson on, that’s not visually centered, what if I was told well I’m a visual learner, so I, I can’t get this. I figure out something else to teach them with. I mean I don’t know. Is that maybe a drawback of that theory, and, and I’m kind of asking people that have that background. Because, cause the multiple intelligence thing from my perspective is well I learn this way. So I don’t get it.

P6 — Well, I don’t think it has to be like… you, you might just be strongest in your one way of learning…

P7 — Okay. So it’s more knowing your strength.

P6 — Yeah. It’s more knowing your strength. It’s not I’m a visual learner so that I can never hear any auditory thing…

P7 — Right. Okay.

P6 — It’s more I’m a visual learner, so you know a copy of the notes would help me rather than just hearing it aloud you know?

P7 — Right. Okay. So then when you study, you would know how to study cause you’re more visual.

P6 — Exactly. Yeah. It, it doesn’t necessarily, I, for my interpretation, I could be speaking out of turn, but, you know I, I that’s just the strength. I don’t think that it has to be the only way you can learn…

P7 — Right.

P6 — you know, and you can try and strengthen your other, your auditory learning or your kineshetic, ah…

P10 — And I think that’s so important. And so important why the teacher needs to do differentiated instruction. If the teacher is not differentiating instruction, the kids aren’t gonna learn. You know cause if you’re teaching one way the entire time, and you’re just speaking it, you’re not writing notes on the board, you’re not showing pictures, or you’re not you know doing anything out of the seat, all those learners aren’t going to be able to learn the content as well except for the auditory, the only ones that are gonna understand the content you know. The kinesthetic learners, they’re out. The visual learners, they’re out. And so, you differentiate it a lot more students will be able to learn it, and therefore, be engaged in it.
**P5** - With so many students, I mean I know I teach that way anyway. We have a visual; it's not a movie. Maybe I'm just gonna pop it on the projector and sit there. I mean you, you might have it up there, you might if they have a sheet, you're, you're gonna talk about it while, while they're reading the sheet, while they're looking at the, the visual at the same time. So I mean I think even naturally I, I think as teachers that we would teach that way even if we didn't think of it as, as a theory.

**P2** - It's also important to know, I think we've all touched on it, but what type of learners you have in your classroom and what type of learner you are because you have to step out of your comfort zone and remember that you know, and I, I focused a lot on Format results, and you know I'm a two, I'm proud to say it, but um, you know, and I know that I have creative kids in the class, and I have, I know I have the hands-on kids in the class, so it's important that you know most of my things focus on all those different learners. And grouping them so that the ones, two's, three's, and four's are all together, so that everyone can have you know a certain, especially with the projects, that focus on everyone's strength, but really step out of your own comfort zone. You know, and that's important.

**Moderator** - P9, you said maybe a word maybe we can, come back to in response...levels...levels, and looking at different levels of, of learners. Has there been anything as far as your exposure to differentiated instruction that has an impact on student engagement based on how you adjust your activities, your instruction, according to different levels of learners you have in your class?

**P9** - Well, I, I, I am very fortunate. I know I'm the only one here. I have three students in my class, so a lot of times I'll have three different lesson plans because their levels are so varied, um, and I think another thing to think about is not just their levels but you know their readiness for certain topics. Um, cause I do a pretest for everything I do in language arts because I feel like if they have it there's no reason for me to reteach it. You know if they have a complete understanding of what is a verb, then I don't have to teach that to that student. They can move on; whereas, another student struggles with verbs. Therefore, I focus on them. So I think it's, um, not just their levels but their readiness for the topic at hand. I think that's really important when you're looking at differentiation, personally.

**P5** - I think something even more important too is for teachers, um, when we're talking about differentiated learning, we're always worried about how the students that may not get, get the topic that we're talking about they may not get it as much as the person that, that understands it completely, but I think what we do a lot of times with that is that we'll end up not challenging that student that's here at, as much as we can. And this student obviously will get, will get a little bored with the topic. I mean what, what I've found in my, my health classes is that I even with the seventh grade I teach a nutrition unit that's extremely complex, like it's not out of the book, it's actually probably at a high school level. And I did it on purpose cause I wanted to see how the students would react. And the kids that were, that I know were lower level, lower level learners even though they don't, they don't ace, they don't go through the test and fly through it, they definitely struggle, but by me pushing them to that extent, they learned so much more than, than I
would have, than I would have imagined that they even could. I mean, even, and, ah, like I said, cross-curricular math. I mean a lot of different situations they actually get, they get, they get, they get a lot. They’re gonna mess up half of it because I push them, and I, um, I, I wasn’t tentative to teach to the 10, to the lower part. I just taught to, to a higher part and differentiated my learning toward them during the class.

Moderator – Raise the bar.

P5 – Raise the bar, surely raise the bar. I, I took it to an extreme with the seventh grade class. I kind of did an experiment for myself. I did it with one unit. It, it was a tough one.

Moderator – Let’s take a look at the second page. Just keeping in mind, we want to make sure we stick with that. Before we get to question 10, I’ll just put this out there for you. Please know from a personal standpoint as a teacher and an administrator, your beyond, here I understand that this is, there’s a certain level of emotionality attached to this question. The evaluation process can be an emotional one from a positive or a negative standpoint. So please just know that I feel I would be remiss if I didn’t at least let you know that I identified that. So answer this question to the extent that you feel comfortable answering it, whether you’ve been observed, you haven’t been observed, or how many times it’s been, but just know that again having been on both, sitting in, in both seats as far as the evaluation process goes, I understand that it can be a tough one sometimes. It can be nerve-racking, that kind of thing. So we understand that. Also though, focus on your response, focus your response on what we had mentioned in the opening comments, the fact that it’s about really improving teaching and learning as opposed to it being complete concerns having to do with something, someone coming in to grade you, if you will, at some point, okay? And remember that you’re, what you share here, what you choose to share here, what you choose not to share here, is confidential. Your name is not attached to it. So just be mindful of that as we address it. And the question specifically is, what do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement? And again no matter how many times you’ve been observed, or you’ve haven’t been, the key verbs are think and feel, your opinion and maybe some of the feelings that you associate with the process itself. You might choose to look at it from the conference perspective. Some of you were in the ice breaker with the video clip from “Mean Lisa Smile” and that was more of a written, almost like the summative evaluation you receive at the end of the year, or classroom lesson observation report, kind of thing. So you can approach it from the written or the verbal as far as your response to that.

P5 – I think a direct response, I mean for me personally I mean it, if I get observed then I get, I get feedback on it. I want to know exactly what you think I can improve in, where you think I can improve, and cut out the fluffy words. And you don’t really need to build my confidence, like I mean some people I mean, I can, I can understand why some people you handle everyone differently as an administrator, but I think if an administrator knows their teachers and knows their, knows who’s in their building, then like me personally, you can just tell me straight out what I need to do better, what I’ve, I’ve done
well, so I continue to do what I've done well, and I'll work on what I need to do better. Then I can work in that structured environment. There's too many fluffy words a lot of times, with, um, well you could think do, you could think about doing thin, or, or why don't you just do this.

**Moderator** – Let me ask you a question.

**P5** – Go ahead.

**Moderator** – Is it, when you say fluffy, just so I, it's clear in my mind, do you mean fluffy in the sense of the actual recommendation, I'll use that word, or do you mean fluffy in the language that's used on the document?

**P5** – The language that's, the language that's used on the document. Instead of just directly saying this is what I, I would like to see next time, it seems like it's, um, it's, it's written so it doesn't hurt anyone's feelings. A lot of times as a teacher, like it might not so, so it basically doesn't pierce right through the teacher. It, it's put in a nice way. And, and that's fine. I mean that, that's fine, but it's just a lot of extra words that, that might you know might hide the meaning of what, what the person's trying to say, what the administrator is trying to say. I had a four page, ah, when I had, um, [name of staff member] come in, he's excellent. I mean I love [name of staff member]. And he, he writes, I mean I had four pages of, of notes. And really out of that I could have condensed that to a paragraph and a half.

**Moderator** – This is the staff developer?

**P5** – Yes. And he's excellent. I mean, he has, I mean his job is also to build our confidence as 1st year teachers. I know that. So I mean I know that. I'm new. I can see that.

**P3** – I actually prefer, um, I had the same person observe me, and I like all the things written out because I know some people, like for specific example like, when you were walking into the heart of the room with this student. Oh, like I know some people might not like that, but I need to remember the specific things that I did. Instead of saying, oh well you could do classroom management better. Like I'd be like I don't know what that means. So, um, I don't think I really like specifics, even if they, some are good, and some are bad. You need improvement specifically in this. Good. That really helps me.

**P5** – Sp, specifics are important, definitely. I, I, I agree with that completely. Specifics are important. Just to the point though. Yeah.

**P2** – He's a staff developer so it's a different format...

**P5** – Absolutely.
P2—If you're gonna get from your school administration, you're gonna get something that's a little bit more, you know areas that need improvement, that kind of thing. And it's meant to be constructive. So there are, there are going to be a little shift in there because it's supposed to be, you know it's not meant to bring you down. And some people have a hard time with constructive criticism. Some have a lot, um, but the other thing that I was gonna say is that for me I think the hardest thing is, and, and it's not because of my nerves, cause I'm okay with observations, whether you pop in, or you don't pop in. But I think a pre-conference is a great thing. And I know time-wise, it doesn't always happen here. But it's almost as if it's safer to say they need to know what's going on in that classroom. Maybe those kids are not doing well with group work, so you pull back, and it's an individual project, and then your administrator says well you know it would be better in a group environment. So there's some information they need to know about each particular class before they come in. With, with our curriculum supervisor, we do, do a pre-conference. You can lay that all out on the table. Oh, this one has some class management issues lately, so you know I'm, I'm structuring the lesson this way. And see how it goes. I would've preferred to do it this way. You know they just pop in, and you know they don't have all that background information about what's going on in that particular class. And I know that it can't be done overall, so maybe they weren't that engaged because something happened the day before. You know that kind of information, I think is important to get out with your administrator. I don't want to say that after the fact, but it's already down on paper. And I know you're signing it to say that you know you received the observation, not necessarily that you agree with everything. Okay, I said my piece.

P6—Oh, I agree with you definitively, just to say what you did the week before, like what has led up to this. They walk into your room, and you might be at the end of something, just be able to explain well I'm coming from...this is what we've done, ah, the whole week before, and now we're here you know.

P5—Yeah, I think the pop ins...Yeah, I think the pop ins, ah, the way I look at it is, is they want to catch you, not that they want to catch you, but they want to see what, how you are on an every day basis, if they hired you, I think that that's, that's kind of a, maybe they don't, they don't trust that you're doing the same thing every single day, if you, you meet with them, they know that you're gonna prepare an exceptional lesson. But if they keep you around, and they, they, they hired you in the school, I think to, to ah, do observation, finish what you know, when they're coming in. I mean they could pop in whenever they want to see if you're actually following up with that day-to-day. But I mean when they actually write their real observation, I, I, I would think a pre-conference would be, would be an excellent idea.

P7—I taught last year in a school district where it's like with your supervisor here. You sit down the day before, several days before, you do a pre-conference. And I agree with what everyone said, the positives are they know exactly where you are. They know what the class is like. But on the other side of the coin, I really think it's an authentic observation. There's no show. This is how you are. This is how you react. It's like you can't script how the game's gonna unfold. So you know it's kind of like let's see what they have when
all the stakes are, are there. And believe me, if it's a formal observation, I, I'm like anyone else. You know you want the principal to know what the class is like. But from their perspective, I think it's a great gauge of how good a teacher you have.

P5 - I think you mix it up, I think that you do... If they're gonna do four, I think they do two of each.

P7 - Right.

P5 - I don't think it has to be four pop ins. I, I don't see the point to that, and if you prove that you can react to a situation twice, then why can't you actually prepare a lesson and not know that you have a visitor there at least once or twice? I mean maybe split. Yeah. I, I think that that's...

Moderator - And what has the experience been here? Has it been, a, a balance, or a mix of pop in and I'm coming?

P3 - Well, ah, I know actually, um, I haven't been formerly observed yet, but it's been like coming. It's looming. Oh, on the day that it almost happened, it happened to be my worst day of the whole school year so far. I had a bad week. I was running on like 4 hours of sleep, and the Internet wasn't working. And I was doing a whole Internet lesson, and down the hall comes my administrator. I'm like...and luckily, um, they were nice enough to kind of reschedule, and I would have handled the situation if they hadn't rescheduled and dealt with it. I think that would've been a good learning experience for me. But, um, they were nice enough to say you know I'll come back when you're having a better day. You know, you are going to have a breakdown. And I was like yeah. So...

P7 - And that's probably why it's better to split instead of just drop in.

P3 - Yeah. So...

P6 - Actually during my student teaching, um, we, my, ah, the head professor had our peers come in and observe us and then sit with us and give us a conference. And, um, I loved it so much. Actually my first job I had asked. I was a 1st year teacher you know right out of college. I had asked my, ah, older special ed teachers who had been there. I said can you just come in, and from a teacher's point of view, like tell me if everything I'm doing you know...and that to me, was you know I respect what the administrators say, but to have a peer, um, observe you, tell you what they think, you're doing right, and what you might need help with. I think that to me was the most valuable.

Moderator - And whether you've had that experience or not, that P6 identified, as far as the peer coming in to observe you and give you feedback, which one do you feel more comfortable with, a building principal coming in to observe you even if it's not a, even if it's not a formal observation, it's informal, as opposed to a peer coming in? Which one rattles you more?
P3 – I think I'd be more comfortable with a peer because, um, like everyone's been saying, the pre-conference idea and everything. And pretty much know what's going on in your classrooms if you're having problems, and so even like if you have your mentor come in. I would be more comfortable with that cause they know what you're going through as opposed to like an administrator who kind of has an idea of what you're going through but might not know specifics, the problems you're having.

Moderator – What about their roles in your professional lives? Does that impact how you feel about who's coming in, again in terms of comfort level? In other words, if it's an informal with the principal, does it still give you that, that feeling or that...

P5 – It's, it's your job.

P1 – I mean I haven't been observed by our building principal yet, but I see him sometimes walk down the hallway, even if I just see him walk down the hall, my heart just stops. I'm like oh no, he's coming. He didn't come yet, but either way it still would make me nervous, not totally comfortable.

P5 – I think it's how well-prepared you are.

P1 – Oh no, go ahead.

P5 – I think it depends on how well-prepared you are too. If, if you feel like you have a real good lesson at hand and you see him walking down, you might want him to come in. You might be hoping that he comes down. If that day you might've not prepared as well as you wanted to, you're like, ah, saved my life.

P1 – I mean going back to, to teaching, we both had the same what's it professor that would come in and observe us, and he was the nicest guy in the entire world. Like he would tell you so many positives, but even him coming in like once every 2 weeks or something, you'd still get a little bit nervous. You know even though you knew it was gonna go fine, and he was there just to like help you out, to give you some positive feedback and such, though you'd still get a little bit nervous. I won't be the first to say when I got observed this year I think he told me to relax about 5 times, you know before he actually sat down. You know, I was like...but then by the end of the class though, I was fine. I was completely fine. I was you know, and it was that he could have stayed for the rest of the day. I didn't care. Yeah. You had to get over just the little...

P10 – That's what I was gonna say. You get nervous in the beginning, and then when the students are there, and they are looking at you, and you know you're on. You know it's like, it just kicks in, instinct, and your lesson's goin' great. You're like oh yeah, this is great keep going...that instinct kicks in it seems like, and you can relax.

Moderator – Believe it or not, and I would imagine we could probably continue talking about this question and the others on the first page for quite awhile. However, there have
to be limits. So we’re going to come to the last question. And if you would just locate your index card, your question, the one from the envelope. I’m just going to read it to you from the focus group interview guide. It’s really meant to be a rank question. The first sentence is not on the index card. Please locate the statement on the index card that is now in front of you, and write down your response. And this is what it reads. Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the four instructional strategies we discussed in our time here today, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is blank. So pick 1 of those 4 if you had to, because blank, and provide support for what you chose. If you need to go on the back, you can. And again, pen or pencil is fine. Once you finish in a few minutes, we will go around, and we will ask you to read your card, unless you are uncomfortable with that, you can certainly skip. This time what we’ll do when we go around is we’ll move in the opposite direction of the beginning where we started with P1. This time we’re going to start over here, and again, take another minute or 2. I think there are still a few people writing. Again, the point is just to share orally what it is that you have recorded on your cards. And then we’ll wrap up with question 12. Okay, P9, would you like to start?

P9 - Um, okay. Do you want me to read the...

Moderator - You don’t have to.

P9 - Okay.

Moderator - You can just...

P9 - Well, I just wrote, um, well I kind of cheated and picked more than one. Um, um, okay I said group work and project-based learning that’s differentiated, so not just like one project, but giving them a project with maybe like different levels or different choices that they could pick. Um, and I said because it shows students, at least like in my content area, how the content in the subject area is related to real life and provides specific tasks to complete, um, that will help them reach an objective.

Moderator - Thank you.

P2 - I said student-centered instruction. I said students are more engaged when they take an active role in their own learning.

Moderator - Thank you.

P6 - Very similar, I had student-centered instruction because, ah, students tend to be more engaged when their needs are being met, and they have, um, control over their own learning.

Moderator - Thank you.
P10 - I wrote teacher-student rapport cause I wrote if a student enjoys you as a person, as a teacher, then they'll most likely enjoy your class and have the desire to succeed cause they don't want to let you down. They want to be there to prove...

Moderator - Thank you.

P7 - I put classroom management. I thought that, ah, that when they know and understand the objective and they feel comfortable enough in the environment to reach the objectives, that goes hand in hand.

Moderator - Thank you.

P7 - Un, okay, do you want me to repeat that?

Moderator - Classroom management.

P7 - Yeah, I just said...

Moderator - Do you want to read it again?

P7 - Well I just said management basically because they feel when things are organized then they feel comfortable, and then hopefully they can you know achieve an objective of some sort. That's all.

Moderator - Thank you.

P7 - Yup.

P5 - I said, ah, student-teacher rapport because students perform for people they care about and for those that care about them.

Moderator - Thank you.

P8 - I said student-centered instruction because they're more engaged in the topic, and, ah, they have a stake in their learning...

Moderator - Thank you.

P4 - I said teacher-student rapport, um, because I've personally seen a tremendous difference in their engagement this year and understanding because I focused on that.

P3 - Okay, um, I chose instructional strategy because when lessons are well-designed and varied the students will be engaged, and there's also classroom management and teacher-student rapport, also stem from well-planned and implemented instructional strategies.
Moderator – Thank you.

P1 – Um, I chose authentic learning experience, also has to do with my content area. Um, some of the students really have the chance to go and practice their Spanish in Spanish-speaking countries, so doing that, providing or facilitating the experience of a real-life situation. And that’s what I put down.

Moderator – Thank you. At this point, we don’t have to necessarily refer to and read question 12 word for word. Really what we’re attempting to do with this question is provide all of you as participants today in the focus group discussion session, an opportunity to clarify or bring up anything that you wanted to say or to revisit a topic or just comment on anything having to do with the study. Maybe you are wondering what is going to happen at this point as far as what’s on tape, or anything having to do with the dissertation. You might be curious about it. It’s fine either way. You might have no questions. You might have lots of questions. It’s, it’s up to you. Anything for the good of the order? Okay, just to give you a few pieces of information, some of which may already be a little bit of a repeat from earlier on. You all have a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Please take these with you, even if you decide to discard it right away. If something pops into your mind that you feel you want to share, you want to clarify something that you didn’t bring up because it wasn’t the time for it, or that kind of thing, or you want to give us some feedback, please feel free to send us that. Or again, just discard this. The other thing is, at this point, what will probably happen just before the holidays or a little bit after that timeframe, is that I will reach out to you, or we will reach out to you through e-mail, just to see if you are interested in coming back together in some way, shape, or form but more as a group if you want to hear anything about the actual findings, or the results, in terms of the study itself. If that is something from a time perspective that you don’t think is going to work, or maybe you’re not interested but really would like to see the dissertation, there will be a copy of it, probably housed over there on the professional development library shelves. I’m thinking around April or in the spring months. So you will have an opportunity to actually see the transcripts from what’s taped here, again without your names, just your participant numbers. So if you remember what p you were, you’ll know, and you’ll recognize I’m sure your own commentary in your own way. So that’s what the timeline looks like. Right before you rip off, and you go, you’re okay, the only thing we ask you to turn in, two items, and you can take everything else with you, the pencil or pen that was actually in your envelope and the index card. We don’t need your name on it. But if you want to just make a pile in the middle of where you are, the card and the pen. That’s fine. If you want to take any soda or candy, please stop and take some. Thank you.
Appendix C: Written Responses to Focus Group Interview Guide Question 11
Question #11: Please complete the statement on the index card that is now in front of you by writing down your response. (Based on my classroom teaching experiences with middle school students, I believe that when considering teacher-student rapport, effective classroom management, authentic learning experiences, and student-centered instruction, the instructional strategy that has the greatest positive impact on student engagement is __________ because __________.)

Focus Group 1:

P1: teacher-student rapport because they are on a journey together, sometimes difficult, other times exhilarating.

P2: teacher-student rapport because the way the student responds to everything in the classroom (the activities, discussions, etc...) is directly related to their comfort level in their classroom, which is in direct relation to their rapport with the classroom teacher in many ways.

P3: authentic learning experiences because these activities allow the teacher to build rapport and trust for teaching the whole child. I also feel that it leads to effectively building student-centered instruction.

P4: authentic learning experiences because students are more engaged when they see the relevance of your lesson to their own life.

P5: teacher-student rapport because it is the lead in to the others... by making the connection with a student you can teach them the world.

P6: teacher-student rapport because without trust and/or a safe space to learn, the student is just here in the seat—not necessarily learning.
P7: student-centered instruction because to me student-centered instruction means meeting the need of the individual student as you do that you are establishing rapport, and giving students authentic learning experiences and this translates into better classroom management.

P8: teacher-student rapport because positive relationships with students I see are the most effective piece when student engagement is the focus. The more student engagement, the more learning takes place.

P9: student-centered instruction because if the instruction involves and revolves around the student, they are extremely likely to be engaged when they are part of the focus.

Focus Group 2.

P1: did not submit a response

P2: authentic learning and student rapport because the students connect to the material based on experiences outside of school and do so with the knowledge that right or wrong the teacher respects their thoughts and efforts.

P3: teacher-student rapport because I believe that while all of these are integral components of student engagement, knowing the students impacts the others.

P4: authentic learning experiences because when a learning goal is personal and has significance to a student’s real-life experience their engagement in the lesson will be a logical byproduct of that connection.

P5: teacher-student rapport because this allows for respect between the teacher and student which will then provide the base for an enriched learning environment for the student as a whole.
P6: for me it's the social-emotional piece because I believe in middle school teaching the "whole child" is an integral part of education.

P7: did not submit a response

P11: teacher-student rapport because making a connection with your students and showing an interest in their personal lives and classroom learning they will be treated as a whole student and be successful.

Focus Group 3:

P1: authentic learning experience because it gives the students a chance to step "outside of the box" and relates the curriculum to real-world experiences and make it meaningful.

P2: student-centered instruction because students are more engaged when they take an active role in their own learning (also, when they come to their own understandings).

P3: instructional strategy because when lessons are well-designed and varied, students will be engaged. Successful classroom management and teacher-student rapport also stem from well-planned and implemented instructional strategies.

P4: teacher-student rapport because I have seen a tremendous difference in student engagement and understand with my increased focus on developing a positive rapport with students.

P5: teacher-student rapport because students perform for people they care about and for those that care about them.

P6: student-centered instruction because when the students' needs are being met and they have control over their learning, their engagement levels are positive.
P7: classroom management because students can feel comfortable when they know and understand learning objectives. In a well-managed classroom students can dictate their own learning.

P8: student-centered instruction because the students are more engaged in the topic. They realize that the subject is being taught to them and not at them. They have a stake in their learning and the learning of the peers. Students can utilize their strengths and improve their weaknesses.

P9: group work and project-based learning that is differentiated because it shows students how the content and subject area is related to real life and provides specific tasks to complete.

P10: teacher-student rapport because if a student enjoys you as a person and as a teacher, they will most likely enjoy your class and have a desire to succeed because they do not want to let you down. Also, by talking about things (non content related) will grab their attention in the classroom and can relate it to the content.
Appendix D: Letter to Superintendent/Letter to Middle School Principal
Dear Superintendent:

As a Seton Hall University College of Education doctoral student in the Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy program, I am presently preparing to conduct focus group research for my dissertation. The title of my dissertation is: New Jersey Public: Middle School Grades 7-8 Non-Tenured Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Strategies That Impact Student Engagement.

The purpose of the study is to determine what instructional strategies are perceived by middle school grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers as having the greatest positive impact on student engagement.

Once I receive approval from the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin my qualitative research, I would like to conduct my three focus groups with grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers from your district’s middle school for 2 hours per session in October. Arrival time for the participants would be one-half hour before the start of the focus group session for check-in and complimentary refreshments. The date and time for the three 2-hour sessions would be scheduled with the middle school principal in advance so as not to interfere with any school or district events. A letter detailing the general information for the study will be mailed to the middle school principal.

The focus group would meet in a comfortable location for the teachers, the faculty room or school library. The principal will not be participating in the focus group session. I will be able to share the findings of the study in aggregate form with the focus group participants and separately with the principal. While doing so, I will maintain the utmost confidentiality and anonymity relative to the focus group discussion participants and their responses.

Shortly, I would like to mail a letter to the grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers, with a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience, requesting volunteers for the study. The first 10 teachers to sign off on the Informed Consent Form for each session and return it will comprise the focus groups. By completing and returning the Informed Consent Form and participating in the focus group discussion, the teachers are consenting to participate in the study.

Please be aware that signing off on the Informed Consent Form permits me to tape record the participant responses in the focus group discussion. The audiotapes will be transcribed for the purpose of data analysis as I attempt to recognize common perceptions present in the three focus group discussions. With that in mind, no names of
personal identification information will be reported or shared in any way other than the participants' number of years teaching, traditional or alternate route status, grade level assignment(s), content area assignment(s), and gender. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained before, during, and after the study with each volunteer being assigned and referred to as a participant number. These measures are fully disclosed in the Informed Consent Form.

With respect to the focus group sessions, I will conduct the focus group sessions as the moderator. I will utilize a focus group interview guide containing open-ended questions to facilitate group interaction. In generating conversation among participants, I will pause and probe as necessary.

As assistant moderator will be present to record session notes, to ensure that environmental factors do not impede upon the focus group discussion, to monitor the functionality of the tape recorder, and to set up the refreshments. The assistant moderator and I are well-versed in terms of the requirement for complete participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Given that participation in this study is voluntary, any participant can leave the focus group session at any time for any reason without a penalty or loss of any kind. Even though the participant responses will be tape recorded following the signing off on the Informed Consent Form and then transcribed into written format for analysis, the participant names and the district name will not be referenced in the dissertation. Each volunteer will be assigned and referred to as a number.

Equally as important, the data will remain secure, under lock and key. The data will not be removed from my locked cabinet until it is destroyed, 3 years after the study. Again, the participant names and the district name will not appear in any part of the dissertation. As a procedural requirement, I have attached a self-addressed stamped envelope for the letter granting me permission to utilize your school district for my study. Upon receiving this letter from you on district letterhead, I will be sure to block out the district's name and your name to maintain confidentiality.

Participant responses will be kept completely confidential. As such, there are no risks in this research. Although there are no monetary benefits for participating, I will make a donation to your district's middle school in appreciation of the teacher participation in the study. As a reminder, refreshments will be provided too.

Thank you in advance for considering my request to conduct my research at your district's middle school once the Seton Hall University IRB approves it. I am very much looking forward to conducting the research while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be more than willing to speak with you on the telephone or in person.
Sincerely,

Jeanette Baubles
jbaubles@aol.com/(732) 449-8061
Dear Middle School Principal:

As a Seton Hall University College of Education doctoral student in the Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy program, I am presently preparing to conduct focus group research for my dissertation. The title of my dissertation is: New Jersey Public Middle School Grades 7-8 Non-Tenured Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Strategies That Impact Student Engagement.

The purpose of the study is to determine what instructional strategies are perceived by middle school grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers as having the greatest positive impact on student engagement.

Having received approval from the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin my qualitative research, I would like to conduct my three focus groups with grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers from your middle school for three 2-hour sessions in October. Arrival time for the participants would be one-half hour before the start of the focus group sessions for check-in and complimentary refreshments. I would like to schedule the date and time for the three 2-hour sessions with you in advance so as not to interfere with any school or district events. A letter detailing the general information for the study was mailed to the superintendent. The superintendent has provided me with written approval to conduct my research in the district.

The focus groups would meet in a comfortable location for the teachers, the faculty room or school library. As the principal, you would not be participating in the focus group sessions. I will be able to share the findings of the study in aggregate form with the focus group participants and separately with you. While doing so, I will maintain the utmost confidentiality and anonymity relative to the focus group discussion participants and their responses.

At this time and with your guidance, I would like to mail a letter to the grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers, with a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience, requesting volunteers for the study. The first 10 teachers to sign off on the Informed Consent Form for each session and return it will comprise the focus groups. By completing and returning the Informed Consent Form and participating in the focus group discussion, the teachers are consenting to participate in the study.

Jennette Bashees
Seton Hall University
College of Education and Human Services
Dept. of Ed. Leadership, Management, and Policy
Jubilee Hall, Fourth Floor
400 South Orange Avenue
South Orange, NJ 07079

October 2006
Please be aware that signing off on the Informed Consent Form permits me to tape record the participant responses in the focus group discussion. The audiotapes will be transcribed for the purpose of data analysis as I attempt to recognize common perceptions present in the three focus group discussions. With that in mind, no names or personal identification information will be reported or shared in any way other than the participants' number of years teaching, traditional or alternate route status, grade level assignment(s), content area assignment(s), and gender. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained before, during, and after the study with each volunteer being assigned and referred to as a participant number. These measures are fully disclosed in the Informed Consent Form.

With respect to the focus group sessions, I will conduct the focus group sessions as the moderator. I will utilize a focus group interview guide containing open-ended questions to facilitate group interaction. In generating conversation among participants, I will pause and probe as necessary.

An assistant moderator will be present to record session notes, to ensure that environmental factors do not impede upon the focus group discussion, to monitor the functionality of the tape recorder, and to set up the refreshments. The assistant moderator and I are well-versed in terms of the requirement for complete participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Given that participation in this study is voluntary, any participant can leave the focus group session at any time for any reason without a penalty or loss of any kind. Even though the participant responses will be tape recorded following the signing off on the Informed Consent Form and then transcribed into written format for analysis, the participant names and the district name will not be referenced in the dissertation. Each volunteer will be assigned and referred to as a number.

Equally as important, the data will remain secure, under lock and key. The data will not be removed from my locked cabinet until it is destroyed 3 years after the study. Again, the participant names and the district name will not appear in any part of the dissertation. To this end, I have blocked out the district name and superintendent's name on the letter I received from the superintendent granting me permission to conduct a portion of my research in your district.

Participant responses will be kept completely confidential. As such, there are no risks in this research. Although there are no monetary benefits for participating, I will make a donation to your middle school in appreciation of the teacher participation in the study. As a reminder, refreshments will be provided too.

Thank you in advance for permitting me to conduct my research at your middle school now that the Seton Hall University IRB has approved it. I am very much looking forward to conducting the research while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact me.
Sincerely,

Jeanette Babbles
(973) 761-9297
Appendix E: Informed Consent Form/Letter of Solicitation
Affiliation:

Jeanette Bambas is a Seton Hall University College of Education doctoral student enrolled in the Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy program.

Purpose of the Study:

The title of the study is: New Jersey Public Middle School Grades 7-8 Non-Tenured Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Strategies That Impact Student Engagement. The purpose is to determine what instructional strategies are perceived by middle school grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers as having the greatest positive impact on student engagement. The researcher will conduct three focus groups with grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers from your middle school for three 2-hour sessions in October. Arrival time for the participants would be one-half hour before the start of the focus group session for check-in and complimentary refreshments. The date and time for the three 2-hour sessions would be scheduled so as not to interfere with any school or district events. The focus group would meet in a comfortable location, the faculty room or school library.

Procedures:

The researcher will conduct the focus group sessions of grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers from your middle school as the moderator. The researcher will utilize the focus group interview guide you have already received a copy of for discussion. The discussion will be recorded with an Olympus VN-360 PC Digital Voice Recorder tape recorder. Two of these tape recorders will be brought to the focus group session in the event one malfunction. The tape recorder will be utilized to prevent missing the acquisition of data. An assistant moderator will be present to record session notes, to ensure that environmental factors do not impede upon the focus group discussion, to monitor the functionality of the tape recorder, and to set up the refreshments. Participant names will not be utilized to identify participants, instead, participants will be assigned and referred to as a number.
teaching, traditional or alternate route status, grade level assignment(s), content area assignment(s), and gender, no other measures will be utilized to identify participants. The assistant moderator and the researcher are well-versed in terms of the requirements for complete participant confidentiality and anonymity as well as the rules for participants' rights.

Focus Group Interview Guide:

A focus group interview guide will be utilized by the researcher to facilitate group interaction. The focus group interview guide consists of 12 open-ended questions designed to generate discussion among participants pertaining to middle school philosophy, student engagement, instructional strategies that impact student engagement, and the classroom observation process. Two of the 12 focus group interview guide questions include: (1) How do you think teacher-student rapport impacts student engagement? (2) What do you think and feel would be the most helpful type of classroom observation feedback from your building principal with respect to student engagement?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

By signing this Informed Consent Form and participating in the focus group discussion, you are consenting to participate in the study. You are also to be fully aware that your discussion responses will be tape recorded and later transcribed to written format. I will share the findings of the study in aggregate form with the focus group participants and separately with the principal if so requested. While doing so, I will maintain the utmost confidentiality and anonymity relative to the focus group discussion participants and their responses. Given that the participation in this study is voluntary, you can leave the focus group session at any time for any reason without a penalty or loss of any kind.

Anonymity:

Focus group research involves face-to-face consent making anonymity an impossibility for the research phase of the study. You will be anonymous, however, to those individuals not affiliated with the study who review the information included in the dissertation.
Security of Stored Data:

The audiotapes and the transcripts will remain in the possession of the researcher after the focus group sessions. The data from each will be locked in the researcher's cabinet and will be secured in this location until it is destroyed 3 years after the study. No other individuals other than the assistant moderator and the researcher's Seton Hall University faculty mentor, Dr. Colella, will have access to the data. Responses will be kept completely confidential.

Confidentiality of Records:

No individuals will have access to the list of participants for the research, the name of the principal, the name of the school, the name of the superintendent, or the name of the district. The data analysis will be included in the dissertation; however, no names of participants, the principal, the school, the superintendent, or the district will be included in the dissertation. The researcher, the assistant moderator, and the researcher's Seton Hall University faculty mentor, Dr. Colella, will be the only individuals who have access to the data, and the data will be locked and stored in the researcher's cabinet for 3 years after which time it will be destroyed.

Risks:

There are no risks in this research.

Benefits:

There are no benefits in this research.

Alternatives to Research Study:

Any participants who are unable to attend the focus group sessions will be permitted to respond in writing to the focus group interview guide questions and return the responses in a self-addressed stamped envelope. Confidentiality and anonymity will be extended to participants who respond in writing relative to the disclosure of said information.

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Contact Information:

There is one researcher for this study, Jeanette Babaei. Her Seton Hall University faculty mentor is Anthony Coella, Ph.D. The researcher may be contacted with questions or concerns regarding the study or for information about participants’ rights by writing to her at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy, Julibee Hall Fourth Floor, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, or by telephoning her at Seton Hall University at (973) 761-9397. Dr. Coella may be contacted with questions or concerns regarding the study or for information about participants’ rights by writing to him at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy, Julibee Hall Office #406, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, or by telephoning him at Seton Hall University at (973) 761-9389. Additionally, Mary F. Rozicka, Ph.D., the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Director, may be contacted with questions or concerns regarding the study or for information about participants’ rights by writing to her at Seton Hall University, Office of the Institutional Review Board, Presidents Hall Third Floor, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, or by telephoning her at Seton Hall University at (973) 313-6314.

Permission to Use Audiotape Recorders:

In having participants complete the Informed Consent Form, the researcher is requesting written permission to tape record the focus group sessions. The participants will be identified by participant number on tape, not by name. The researcher will utilize the audiotapes to prevent missing the acquisition of data. Participants will have the right to review any or all portions of the audiotapes and request the tapes be destroyed. The researcher, the assistant moderator, and the researcher’s Seton Hall University faculty mentor, Dr. Coella, will be the only individuals who have access to and listen to the audiotapes. The audiotapes will be transcribed by the assistant moderator in the presence of the researcher, stored in a locked cabinet by the researcher, and destroyed 3 years after the study by the researcher. It is to be noted that the transcript data and subsequent analysis will be included in the researcher’s dissertation.
Acknowledgement of Informed Consent Form:

I have read the above information, and I agree to participate in the study. I am aware that I will be given a copy of this Informed Consent Form for my records before the research is conducted.

______________________________  ____________________
Signature                      Date
Dear Middle School Teacher:

As a Seton Hall University College of Education doctoral student in the Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy program, I am presently preparing to conduct focus group research for my dissertation. The title of my dissertation is: New Jersey Public Middle School Grades 7-8 Non-Tenured Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Strategies That Impact Student Engagement.

The purpose of the study is to determine what instructional strategies are perceived by middle school grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers as having the greatest positive impact on student engagement.

I have received approval from the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB), your superintendent, and your principal to begin my qualitative research at your school. I would like to conduct my three focus groups with grades 7-8 non-tenured teachers from your middle school for three 2-hour sessions in October. Arrival time would be one-half hour before the start of each focus group session for check-in and complimentary refreshments.

We will meet in a comfortable location, the faculty room or school library. No district administrator, including your principal, will participate in the focus group sessions. I will be able to share the findings of the study in aggregate form with the focus group participants separately with your principal. While doing so, I will maintain the utmost confidentiality and anonymity relative to the focus group discussion participants and their responses.

At this time, I am requesting grades 7-8 non-tenured teacher volunteers with a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience to participate in the study. The first 10 teachers to sign off on the enclosed Informed Consent Form and return it in the self-addressed stamped envelope will comprise the focus group for the respective session. By completing and returning the Informed Consent Form and participating in the focus group discussion, you are consenting to participate in the study.

Please be aware that signing off on the Informed Consent Form permits me to tape record the participant responses in the focus group discussion. The audiotapes will be transcribed for the purpose of data analysis as I attempt to recognize common perceptions present in the three focus group discussions. With that in mind, no names or
personal identification information will be reported or shared in any way other than your number of years teaching, traditional or alternate route status, grade-level assignment(s), content area assignment(s), and gender. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained before, during, and after the study with each volunteer being assigned and referred to as a participant number. These measures are fully disclosed in the Informed Consent Form.

With respect to the focus group sessions, I will conduct the focus group sessions as the moderator. I will utilize the attached focus group interview guide containing open-ended questions to facilitate group interaction. In generating conversation among participants, I will pause and probe as necessary.

An assistant moderator will be present to record session notes, to ensure that environmental factors do not impede upon the focus group discussion, to monitor the functionality of the tape recorder, and to set up the refreshments. The assistant moderator and I are well-versed in terms of the requirement for complete participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Given that participation in this study is voluntary, any participant can leave the focus group session at any time for any reason without a penalty or loss of any kind. Even though the participant responses will be tape recorded following the signing off of the Informed Consent Form and then transcribed into written format for analysis, the participant names and the district name will not be referenced in the dissertation. Each volunteer will be assigned and referred to as a number.

Equally as important, the data will remain secure, under lock and key. The data will not be removed from my locked cabinet until it is destroyed 3 years after the study. Again, the participant names and the district name will not appear in any part of the dissertation.

Participant responses will be kept completely confidential. As such, there are no risks in this research. Although there are no monetary benefits for participating, I will make a donation to your school in appreciation of the teacher participation in the study. As a reminder, refreshments will be provided.

Please note that this study has been reviewed and approved by the Seaton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research. The IRB has identified that the research procedures safeguard the subjects’ privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be contacted at (973) 313-6314 for further clarification.

Thank you in advance for considering to participate in the study. I am very much looking forward to conducting the research while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. If after reviewing the enclosed focus group interview guide you would like to participate, please complete the Informed Consent Form and return it in the self-addressed stamped envelope. Each participant will be provided with a copy of the signal
Informed Consent Form for his/her records. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jeanette Basables
(973) 761-9397