

Engaged Homeschooling

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How do we recognize engagement?

Ben Johnson explains one “classroom version” of engagement in his article for *Edutopia*, “How Do We Know if Students are Engaged?”

Edutopia.org/blog/student-engagement-definition-ben-johnson

In teacher-directed learning, you will see students...

- Paying attention (alert, tracking with their eyes)
- Taking notes (particularly Cornell)
- Listening (as opposed to chatting, or sleeping)
- Asking questions (content related, or in a game, like 21 questions or I-Spy)
- Responding to questions. . . .
- Following requests (participating, physical response, storytelling, Simon Says)
- Reacting (laughing, crying, shouting, etc.)

In student directed-learning, you will see students individually or in small groups...

- Reading critically (with pen in hand)
- Writing to learn, creating, planning, problem solving, discussing, debating, and asking questions
- Performing/presenting, inquiring, exploring, explaining, evaluating, and experimenting
- Interacting with other students, gesturing and moving

Other behaviors in engaged kids:

- Practicing without prodding
- Working on things at the edges of their abilities
- Researching
- Requesting additional opportunities
- Wanting to learn from mentors, teachers, and coaches with greater expertise
- Focusing
- Creating original material (art, music, technology, dance, construction, engineering projects, etc.)

- Achieving “flow”
Psychology.About.com/od/PositivePsychology/a/flow.htm
- Learning outside of designated “student” environments and situations – on the athletic field, in an apprenticeship, doing field work, playing music, in paid employment, as an entrepreneur, doing family chores or work, as a volunteer, through play

Tasks of Engaged Homeschooling parents:

- allow engagement to develop
- stimulate engagement
- recognize engagement
- capitalize on engagement
- be an example of engagement
- enjoy engagement

Paying attention vs. Engagement

- Do not automatically equate “paying attention” with “engagement” – and help your kids know the difference.
- Children who are said to be “not paying attention” are probably attending to *something*, just not what the authority figure wants.
- Children can fail to display signs of paying attention – of *attending behaviors* – and still be highly engaged in learning.
- Some children at some ages in some situations *need* to display non-attending behaviors while learning certain things. For example, fidgety and physical children often need to be *doing something* while listening or thinking, *in order to engage*.
- Attending behaviors are developmental, personal, and situational.
- Attending behavior should be learned and can be learned by most kids for reasons of etiquette, respect, and social/academic

acceptance – but should not be confused with authentic engagement.

- Provide kids with tools and developmentally appropriate expectations for learning to demonstrate they are paying attention.

Ben Johnson:

If true learning is to occur, then students have to be at the very least participants in the process, and not merely products.

The ultimate engagement is to put the learner in charge of learning. Create a rich learning environment and a motivation to learn, and the students do all the hard work of learning, while the teacher merely facilitates.

Challenges to Creating Engagement in Schools

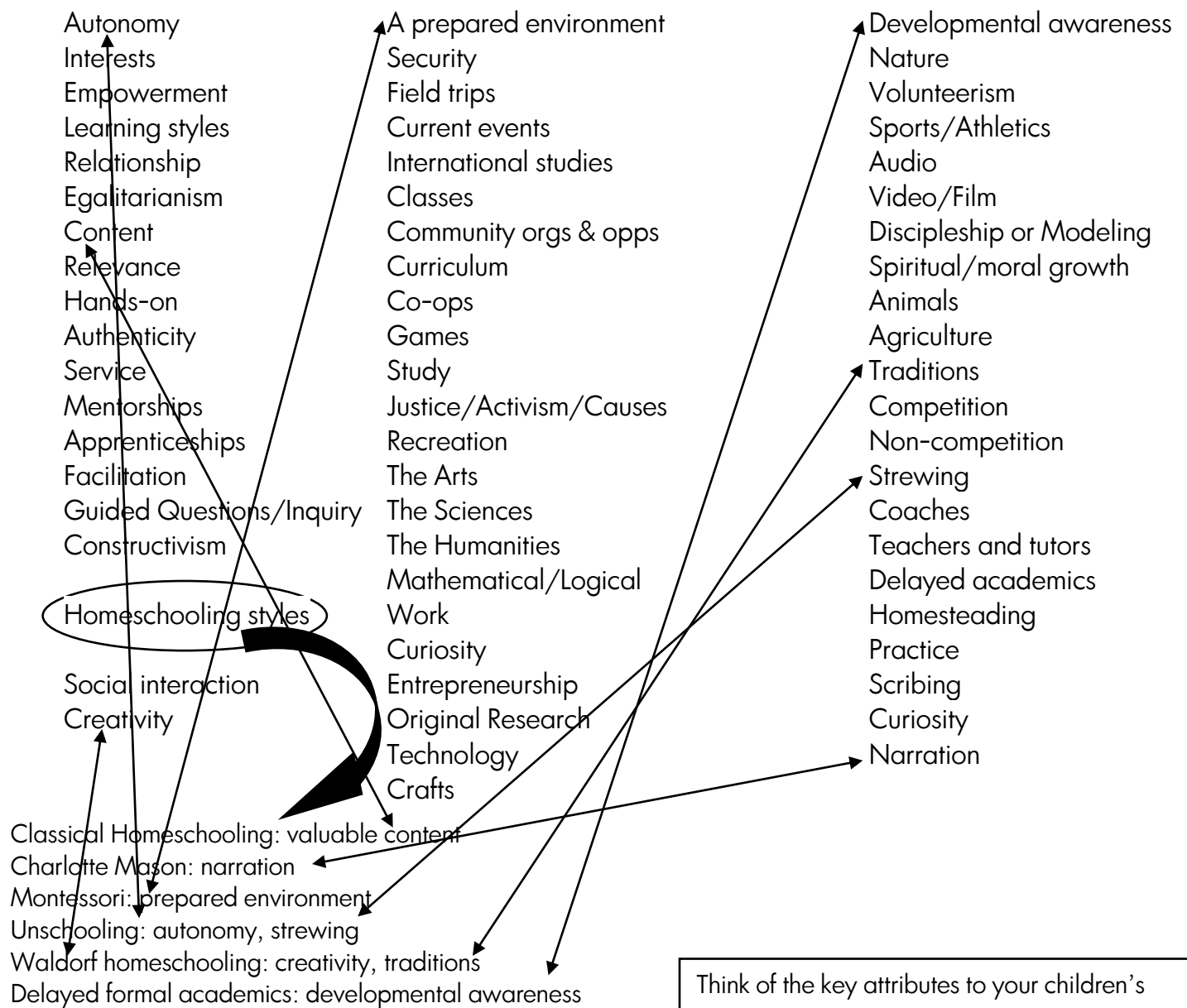
Creating engagement in many public school settings is currently difficult because it is at odds with:

- standards-based accountability approaches, such as Common Core
- large class sizes
- emphasis on developmentally inappropriate academics (for example, scripted reading “lessons” in preschool and kindergarten; learning abstract math)
- insufficient student autonomy
- lack of support for authentic vocational programs
- a shortage of (or discouragement of) parental involvement
- suppression of teacher initiative and academic freedom
- corporate and political agendas for public education

A Parent using an *Engaged Homeschooling* approach will ask:

- What activities and conditions seem to naturally create engagement in my child?
- What environment can I create that stimulates engagement in my child? (Montessori)
- When my child is engaged, how can I help him or her extend learning?
- Am I recognizing engagement when it occurs?
- How can I model engagement in my own life?
- Can I pare away activities, approaches, and circumstances that reduce engagement or block engagement completely – *that aren't working?*
- What Tools of Engagement can I use to kindle engagement?

Tools of Engagement



Challenges to Homeschooling for Engagement

- Need for deschooling of parents and children – transition from school thinking/doing to homeschooling
- Multiple children, multiple engagement factors for each, usually changing over time
- High parental facilitation requirements
- Turning everything into learning – the “yadda yadda yadda” effect
- Education may not look typical in pace, content, or approach
- Fitting engagement into transcripts for college or career
- Other goals competing with engagement

Focus on creating engagement, but remember homeschooling has to work for everyone in the family.

Hoop Jumping and Slogging

“Not everything that needs to be done is engaging. How will my child learn to do the boring, repetitive, unrewarding, bureaucratic, hard stuff that just sometimes has to be done?”

- Hoop jumping and slogging are necessary skills, but with an emphasis on Engagement, you keep the “you-can’t-make-me” to a minimum.
- Hoop jumping and slogging are not easy for all personality types, *regardless of approach to education*.
- Hoop jumping and slogging are partly developmental.
- A child’s approach may be mismatched with the parents’ approach to hoop jumping and slogging.
- Parents must balance what is needed to *get through the day* with what the child will need to *get through the years*.
- Goals and objectives *may* counter a “dependency” on engagement if they are not overused. Model setting goals, doing the hard stuff, and reaching/reinventing goals – and support your child in doing the same. (Read about the downside of over-emphasizing goal setting here: “Why Goal Setting Doesn’t Work,” by Ray B. Williams for

Psychology Today.

PsychologyToday.com/blog/wired-success/201104/why-goal-setting-doesnt-work)

- An emphasis on process over product gives the child experience in wanting to do what it takes to be his or her authentic self. Note that this can be counter to overt goal setting; thus, the caution on goal setting, above. Read about Montessori and constructivist approaches to learning.
- Your child may show you that not all hoops are meant for all people.

Resources about Blocking Engagement: Creating Disaffection

- [How to Destroy A Child’s Learning in 15 Easy Steps](http://Project-based-homeschooling.com/camp-creek-blog/how-destroy-child-s-love-learning-15-easy-steps)
Project-based-homeschooling.com/camp-creek-blog/how-destroy-child-s-love-learning-15-easy-steps
- [Why Young Kids are Struggling with Common Core Math](http://WashingtonPost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/11/09/why-young-kids-are-struggling-with-common-core-math/)
WashingtonPost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/11/09/why-young-kids-are-struggling-with-common-core-math/
- [Setting Up Children to Hate Reading](http://NancyEBailey.com/2014/02/02/setting-children-up-to-hate-reading/)
NancyEBailey.com/2014/02/02/setting-children-up-to-hate-reading/
- [The Wrong Way to Teach Writing](http://TheAtlantic.com/education/archive/2014/02/the-wrong-way-to-teach-grammar/284014/)
TheAtlantic.com/education/archive/2014/02/the-wrong-way-to-teach-grammar/284014/

Resources for Engaged Learning

Note that many of these are about qualities that are absent, difficult to implement, or seen as innovations in public education settings; however, they are often cultivated and present among families who practice Engaged Homeschooling

- “Benefits of Homeschooling: Inquiry-Based Learning”
TheHomeschoolMom.com/inquiry-based-learning/
I wrote this for *TheHomeSchoolMom*, noting findings reported by *Scientific American* that informal environments allow for inquiry more effectively than typical schools, which leads to critical thinking and engagement.
ScientificAmerican.com/article/critical-thinking-best-taught-outside-classroom/
- “Genius Hour” is a movement that allows students to explore their own passions and encourages creativity in school classrooms. It provides students a choice in what they learn during a set period of time during school with powerful results. Read about the impact at the *Genius Hour* website GeniusHour.com/
- “Homeschooling develops the habit of engagement”
In “Homeschooling is About Creating Good Habits” *Penelope Trunk*. 1.25.13.
Education.PenelopeTrunk.com/2013/01/25/homeschooling-is-about-creating-good-habits/
- “Presence Not Praise: How to Cultivate a Healthy Relationship with Achievement”
Maria Popova, *BrainPickings*
BrainPickings.org/index.php/2013/05/23/stephen-grosz-examined-life/
- “How A Radical New Teaching Method Could Unleash a Generation of Geniuses”
by Joshua Davis for *Wired Magazine*, 10.15.13
Wired.com/business/2013/10/free-thinkers/2/
- “Subverting the System: Student and Teacher as Equals” Luba Vangelova for *Mind/Shift*, 11.13.13
Blogs.kqed.org/mindshift/2013/11/subverting-

the-system-student-and-teacher-as-equals/?utm_content=socialflow&utm_campaign=nprfacebook&utm_source=npr&utm_medium=facebook

- “School Starting Age: The Evidence”
Delaying formal academics and the importance of play, University of Cambridge, 9.24.13
Cam.ac.uk/research/discussion/school-starting-age-the-evidence
- “How Creativity is Affected by Time”
A Hungarian communications company uses a class of schoolchildren to show how creativity can be affected by time. Watch how, by giving the children the same task twice, but with different time restraints, the results are changed.
Cam.ac.uk/research/discussion/school-starting-age-the-evidence

“Learning can only happen when a child is interested. If he’s not interested, it’s like throwing marshmallows at his head and calling it eating.” ~ Katrina Gutleben, as quoted on the Throwing Marshmallows blog ThrowingMarshmallows.com by Stephanie Elms.

My online resources --

EngagedHomeschooling.com – much of this handout is available online in website form

At Each Turn

JeanneFaulconer.wordpress.com/ Personal website, including homeschooling

TheHomeSchoolMom This is my “job blog” where I write about homeschooling for a large audience

TheHomeschoolMom.com/author/jeannefaulconer/