



What follows represents the views of the EQUALS National Executive and members of the North East FLSE who have both met this month to consider the potential statutory imposition of the Aspects of Engagement by the DfE. In summary we are all fundamentally opposed to the statutory use of the Aspects of Engagement, however, we do welcome in principle the direction they take us in describing the needs of this group of learners.

The engagement scales have been developed as they are considered to be a proxy indicator for achievement. They were not originally developed for the group of children operating in the p1-p4 range (in old terms). It is important to remember, as with all proxy indicators, they may not provide valid data for all pupils.

Aspects of Engagement Feedback:

- The Aspects of Engagement, (the seven descriptors of the broken down aspects), are useful in that they prompt child-centred reflection on how best to increase the learner's engagement with their environment (be that the physical environment, resources, activities, staff, time of day or even sensory inputs and stimuli)
- When reflected on individually and then considered in the context of each other these aspects can be useful in determining the best possible conditions for learners to engage with and, therefore, progress in their learning
- The current definitions or the Aspects, as defined in the Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD) Research Project (2011), are simple enough for most practitioners to easily follow and understand
- The definitions, however, are potentially too simple in that without further materials and breakdown, or in the absence of more thorough standardised definitions, there is a strong possibility of a lack of consistency in their interpretation between practitioners and settings
- Additionally, some of the definitions are extremely similar. E.g. 'Curiosity' and 'Discovery' or 'Initiation' and 'Investigation'. This could lead to a lack of clarity and consistency in how these are recorded, discussed or even understood.
- The recording of the Aspects is inextricably linked to both the way in which they are intended to be used and the subsequent understanding of the seven aspects, and how they relate to one another. As these factors are not entirely clear it is hard to speculate on the effective recording of the aspects other than to reiterate, as was reported by the settings in the STA's Qualitative Evaluation of the 7 Aspects, that the qualitative nature of the aspects makes it very difficult to observe more than one aspect at a time with a pupil at any given activity and that simultaneous recording of several aspects was found to be extremely difficult by practitioners and schools and extremely time consuming to implement.
- The feedback from the pilots clearly evidenced that there is no common interpretation of the engagement scales. It was also clear that there is no common interpretation on who the

scales should be applied to. What one school considers a child operating at p1-p4 (in old language) to look like will be very different to another. This will present difficulties when comparing the data that is collected.

CLDD's Engagement Profile and/ or Engagement Scale

- Use of the CLDD's Engagement Profile and/ or Engagement Scale as documents or systems to measure the Aspects has implications for workloads as these are documents that do not necessarily complement the variety of electronic cloud based evidence recording systems now generally used by Specialist Settings when working with children engaged in pre-subject specific learning
- They are also prone to all of the problems outlined above regarding simultaneous recording of Aspects as well as understanding and moderation within and across settings
- Neither document is able to provide clear summative information regarding assessment of the child's developmental progress or any threshold of readiness for Subject Specific Learning. It was noted in the STA's Qualitative Evaluation of the 7 Aspects, that when a pupil's engagement increased over time, schools did not necessarily feel this resulted in the pupil making progress in learning outcomes.

Summative Assessment

- The Aspects of Engagement overall do not provide strong summative assessment information as the qualitative information that they generate is too contextually dependant and variable in nature
- A further implication of this is that some form of developmental assessment would still need to be used alongside the Engagement Profile/ Scale/ Aspects to provide settings and practitioners with some form of developmental information about the pupil's progress in order to determine developmentally appropriate next steps, learning activities, opportunities or experiences. This would further impact on workload.

Formative Assessment

- Consideration of the Aspects does provide useful formative assessment information
- There are clear benefits around teaching staff increasing their knowledge of what engages their pupils and, specifically, which combination of environmental factors, resources, staff and timings increase a pupil's persistence, motivation, curiosity etc.
- There is benefit in identifying ways that practitioners could increase engagement levels on an individualised and pupil-centred basis. This is true, however, for all pupils with complex learning and special educational needs including those engaged in subject specific learning
- The **statutory use** of the Engagement Profile or Scale is **not necessarily** needed to do this.

Making use statutory:

- The Aspects of Engagement do aid good practice in identifying effective teaching activities for engaging pupils in their learning or experiences
 - This kind of qualitative reflection on teaching and learning should form part of normal classroom practice

- This could also be achieved through a range of methods without specifically recording it or by adopting one of these models to drive classroom practice for learners not yet accessing subject specific learning
- Settings and practitioners could be given the freedom to decide how they want to assess, plan and deliver next steps for the most complex pupil's they teach.

We strongly urge the DfE to listen, discuss, reflect on our thoughts and work in partnership with practitioners to ensure we have an assessment tool fit for purpose.

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