ENGAGE

> The willingness to tell our stories, feel the pain of others, and stay genuinely connected in this disconnected world is not something we can do halfheartedly. To practice courage, compassion and connection **is to look at life and the people around us, and say, "I'm all in".**
>
> Brené Brown[2]

What does it mean to be engaged? To be "all in"? For some, it may mean a sustained commitment of time, effort and resources. It might be the way that something holds our interest and attention. Being engaged could be visible to the eye; the way a person is immersed in something, paying attention or 'in the flow'. It can mean strong, visible ties to a relationship. It could mean being part of an action or a change effort in a community and generously offering your energy to that. Whatever the form, engagement includes elements of commitment, action, attunement and perseverance or as Brené Brown sees it, Courage, Compassion and Connection.

Engagement is also part of a Learner's journey. Simply put, this is the stage of learning where they are "all in". They've found your door, they walked in your door, and now they are coming through that door on a consistent basis, drawn to an experience where they find courage, compassion and connection!

What do we see when participants are engaged? Coming early and helping to set up is one of the signs. They are booking and keeping their appointments. They are doing their homework. Asking questions and sharing their stories are also signs they are engaged, as is making eye contact. And, as throughout all the stages of a participant's pathway, relationships are central. They are making friends, meeting peers outside of class and connecting with you. Here are some of the things participants said at this stage of their journey:

- o *I knew my friends would be there. The facilitators were welcoming and friendly. I liked meeting people and hearing other people's stories. I liked learning that what I was going through was normal.*

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[3] Brown, B. (2010). *The gifts of imperfection*. Center City, MN: Hazelden. (p. 21)

- *I started to make friends in the group.*

- *I could trust the group with what I shared.*

- *I felt like I [had] a purpose. Coming gave me a chance to reflect on things, on life as a person, not just as a parent.*

If we were to unpack the visible signs of engagement further, this stage of the learner's pathway points us to two central themes. One of those themes is the power of community and the other is the power of possibility.

Community is the birthplace of possibility.

Community:

Whether you are meeting as a group in a class, connecting with someone to provide one-to-one tutoring, or hosting a small learning circle, the opportunity to build community is present. Community is a difficult concept to define: for some it means a physical location, such as a neighbourhood, a school, a town or a farming community. It may also mean a group of people, like a book club, sports team, or spiritual group. Community can also mean an organized gathering like a women's peer group, a weekly ESL conversation group, or a meet up hiking group. People name something "community" if it is based on location, shared interests, common life stages, something they are acting on, something they belong to, pay into, or have been born into. The meanings of community are vast and in some cases, presumptuous.

Paul Born, Founder of the Canadian based Tamarack Institute and Vibrant Communities says: "*I believe that there is a word that gets at the essence of all these different understandings {of community} and that word is belonging. A sense of "knowing that I belong" is the most common desire of those who wish to build community, but it is also one of the least realized desires…Belonging means to feel that we are in the right place, to be made to feel welcome in a place or group. It is to be cared for and to reciprocate that caring, to know that "I am home." It is a willingness to extend our identity to a people or expe*rience."[4]

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[4] Born, P. (2014). *Deepening community*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Inc. (p.56)

He goes on to define **four acts that deepen community**, all of which can be found in the way that Learners and CALP staff describe the learning community at this stage. The four acts are:

> Maybe the anxiety they have of being new or being around other people and not having connections is replaced with "We have a place where we belong."
>
> CALP Staff

- o Sharing our Stories
- o Enjoying One Another
- o Caring for One Another
- o Working Together to Build a Better World (Contribution)

Possibility:

Embedded in the power of the learning community is **the power of possibility**. This is the stage where a Learner's internal dialogue shifts and they imagine new possibilities for their lives as a result. One Learner said, "*I began to feel I could actually do this. I liked that if I didn't understand something the teachers would try to show it to me in a different way. They would keep trying until I understood. I never felt judged and I felt cared about*."

Possibility thinking is marked by our willingness to change our stories and an attentiveness towards what is available and here *now*, inside ourselves and from others. It's about being creative with options and resources. It's about moving from a failure/success mindset to that of a growth mindset, or a contribution mindset. [3]

Possibility thinking shows up in a Learner's life in many ways. It's marked beautifully by a learner who said: "*I try not to use the words "at" least" anymore. I can give more empathy, not sympathy. I learned how to change the bad thoughts about myself. It was the first time I looked at my strengths and saw areas I needed to work on in my life.*" CALP staff echo these changes in a learner's attitude: "*Believing you can do something is an important first step in actually doing something.*" "*It's important to stay positive. We want to be giving messages of "you can do it!*"
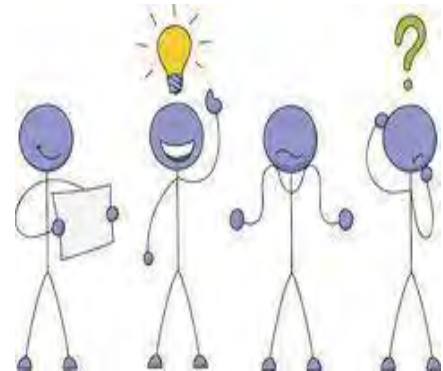
> "I settled on a game called I am a contribution. Unlike success and failure, contribution has no other side. It is not arrived at by comparison. All at once I found that the fearful question, 'Is it enough?' and the even more fearful question "Am I loved for who I am or for what I have accomplished?" can both be replaced by the joyful question, "How will I be a contribution today?"
>
> Stone Zander & Zander[5]

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[5] Stone Zander, R & Zander, B. (2002). *The art of possibility*. New York: Penguin Books. (p. 57)

So what do CALP Staff do to keep Learners engaged? What are the key things they do that keep people coming in their door? It's all about setting up!

- o **Setting the Tone in the Relationship**
- o **Setting the Tone in the Environment**
- o **Setting up the Learning**
- o **Setting up for Success**

Setting the Tone in the Relationship

Many aspects of setting the tone in the relationship echo strategies used in the *Attract* stage of a learner's journey. What is different at this stage is hopefully a deeper connection, knowledge and understanding of a learner's life. What might also be different is that the relationship is no longer a 'you' and 'them', but there is also an 'us' or 'we'. CALP staff spoke about the ways they communicate this, by having coffee/tea or meals together and making time for participants inside and outside of class. There are conversations happening that are personal and where humor, relatedness and knowledge of each other are shared.

Setting the Tone in the Environment

The environment continues to be a major influence in a learner's journey. They have come to expect and count on the little touches that have been present all throughout, like coffee/tea and food, childminding, flexible hours and a safe and welcoming environment. Being consistent in conveying a warm and welcoming tone encourages the learner to trust not only you, but the process. In the midst of whatever they are going through in their lives outside the classroom, knowing they can count on being welcomed, feeling safe and being cared for goes a long way in keeping them engaged for the long haul.

> Building rapport is so important. If there is good rapport, there's greater chance the learner will stay engaged.
>
> CALP Staff

Setting up the Learning

CALP staff shared their wisdom as to how they set up the learning once learners are engaged and "all in". One of the key pieces of wisdom shared repeatedly was to be flexible and have a Plan B! It is critical to have this for many reasons: learners continue to face barriers and challenges in their lives and understanding this can be a source of help and relief to participants. Childminding falls through, a partner's spouse gets sick, there are unexpected job demands. All of these things can affect attendance, attention, and motivation.

We learned that if learners can see that you are willing to ask them what they need, customize the learning to meet their needs and be resourceful in finding a Plan B, they are more likely to stay engaged and even more likely to continue to build trust in themselves and you.

> "I never felt judged at the program, they were always understanding and really cared about me and getting me to pass the exams. No one in high school ever cared like that."
>
> Participant

> "We use language like, 'we're glad you're coming and we'll see what we can make happen for you. It's all about the learner. It's their agenda, not ours."
>
> CALP Staff

And while flexibility is critical at this stage, so is sensitivity. Encouraging conversation and having time for people to connect and share remains important, even when you are knee deep in curriculum. One CALP staff said: "*The curriculum is a resource, not a prescription.*" It's about understanding the different needs, barriers, learning needs, and energy levels. At the end of the day, the message learners need to hear is "*we're glad you're here.*"

Setting up for Success

Every stage of the Learner's path has unique markers of success. In the "FIND" stage, making that first call for an appointment is a mark of success. With the "ATTRACT" stage, speaking up and sharing personal experiences with others can be seen as a mark of increased confidence and success. With the "ENGAGE" stage of learning, success may look both traditional and unconventional. Learners may be seeing results from marks, grades or progress through a course or workbook. They may be reaching milestones they set out for themselves regarding completing an assignment, coming to class regularly, or practicing a skill they learned in class in their everyday lives.

> Effort is often revelation in slow motion.
>
> Mark Nepo,
> The One Life We're Given, p. 104

Success can also look different. It may be the outward validation you give to a learner when you see them persist through something difficult. It could be a celebration of someone's contribution to the class or their helping attitude. Key aspects of setting up for success is simply to not miss it! Giving feedback right away and having visual reminders of their goals and accomplishments can be the fuel that helps the learner keep going. As one CALP Staff so eloquently put it, "*It's the relationship, encouragement and determination all working together*. "

> Hope is not an emotion; it's a way of thinking or a cognitive process. Emotions play a supporting role, but hope is really a thought process made up of goals, pathways and agency. "I know where I want to go, I know how to get there, I'm persistent, and I can tolerate disappointment and try again. I can do this!"
>
> Brené Brown (2012),
> (sharing C. R. Synder's work on hope, p. 239)

What Gets in the Way? (Participant Barriers and Challenges)

There are many challenges and barriers that are part of a learner's story all throughout the stages of learning. The beliefs learners have about themselves, life trumping learning and learning differences can remain a storyline from start to finish. Key challenges and barriers at this stage fall into three categories:

- **Inner Thoughts and Beliefs**
- **Life Trumping Learning**
- **The Learning Doesn't Fit**

Life circumstances, addictions, and old patterns are very difficult to change. Sometimes it's as simple as their current housing or food needs. If they are living in their vehicle, it is difficult to get the rest needed to learn. Old ways of thinking or poor self-esteem is hard to get past for learners. They often do not have the belief they are worthy of the opportunity and at times self-sabotage it by not attending or dropping out.

CALP Staff

Inner Thoughts and Beliefs

Old patterns of thinking continue to surface for learners no matter what stage they are at or what success they have experienced. Negative self-talk, unrealistic expectations of themselves and worthiness all factor into what gets in the way. Some CALP staff shared that some learners do not think they are worthy of the opportunity. They are also so close to the completion of the learning opportunity, some of them can't handle the loss that it will end. It has become part of their routine, they have built community and they have felt belonging – who will they be when it is over and where will they find this again?

Life Trumping Learning

Sabotage can have many faces and learner's lives can be filled with them. Childminding arrangements can change suddenly and they are no longer able to come to class. Family members may not be used to or feel threatened by the growth and changes the learner is displaying and consequently, influence the learner's confidence or abilities to keep on going. Basic needs may not be met and alternative arrangements must be made, like looking for work. Sometimes learners experience homelessness or are unable to manage their homelessness any longer. Sometimes they take extended trips back home to see family. Health issues and complications can also trump learning at this stage; things like lack of sleep, physical health issues, mental health and trauma triggers can be factors in a learner not remaining engaged.

> When we choose to be true to ourselves, the people around us will struggle to make sense of how and why we are changing. Partners and children might feel fearful and unsure about the changes they are seeing…Some will find inspiration in our new commitment; others may perceive that we're changing too much – maybe even abandoning them or holding up an uncomfortable mirror.
>
> Brené Brown (2010) p. 50

The Learning Doesn't Fit

Our CALP community demonstrates multiple ways they offer relevant learning opportunities. Sometimes, however, the learning simply doesn't fit for the learner. They may experience challenges working through certain sections of a curriculum or course.

Other ways the learning doesn't fit can simply be logistics. The hours, timing, and location of the learning opportunity may not work with the learner's life anymore.

One interesting perspective a CALP staff shared was that for some learners, once they start their learning journey, they realize how far they have to go. Sometimes the view of that long road ahead is interpreted by the learner as an impossible feat.

In looking at the interviews and feedback we received for this part of the research, the strategies that "make a way" are found in the ways that CALP staff *RETAIN* participants. These strategies will be discussed in that section of the Field Guide.

ENGAGE TOOLKIT

If you are wanting to learn more about how to keep Adult Foundational Learners engaged, these additional resources may be of specific interest to you. These resources follow the main themes that CALP staff shared for this stage of the learning journey. This toolkit gives you a "taste" of the concept or idea. The links and resources follow each topic in the toolkit.

Different Learning Styles:
There are many different learning styles and each person is unique in how they learn best. Also, the ability to learn and retain new information is improved when a combination of learning styles are used. Traditional school settings rely mostly on a lecture type style of teaching. This teaching style works well for auditory learners (those who learn best through listening), but if someone is a visual learner or a kinesthetic (hands-on) learner they may have difficulty learning in that type of setting. Since everyone has distinctive learning styles, it's important to consider how you will deliver the information and make efforts to offer the learning experience in a variety of ways (see below) to reach every person.

Different learning styles include:

- The **visual or spatial learner** who requires the use of graphs, pictures, diagrams, and other visual aids.
- The **physical or kinesthetic learner** who needs to be able to use his or her hands to manipulate and interact with objects.
- The **aural or musical learner** uses melody and rhythm to gain understanding.
- The **verbal learner** is one who is most comfortable making speeches and presentations.
- The **logical or mathematical learner** understands patterns, numbers, categories, and statistics.

- o The **social or interpersonal learner** is comfortable and energized in group settings.
- o The **solitary or intrapersonal learner** tends to be an introvert and works best alone.

- 7 major learning styles and the 1 mistake everyone makes: https://www.learndash.com/7-major-learning-styles-which-one-is-you/

- Tesia Marshik: Learning Styles and the Importance of Critical Reflection: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=855Now8h5Rs

- 8 types of learning styles: https://www.skillsyouneed.com/rhubarb/fingerprints-learning-styles.html

Reflective Practice:

The idea of Reflective Practice is more than just examining or learning from past experiences or mistakes. It is a skill and process that involves contemplation, critical thinking, and active learning. The goal of Reflective Practice is to create an environment of awareness and to challenge unconscious biases or assumptions by examining an event, reflecting on what is learned, and asking how that learning can be applied to future events.

Although reflective practice can be done alone, it's best done within a supportive group setting which encourages questioning and a diversity of ideas. Key questions that guide the Reflective Practice process are: What? (what happened?); So What? (what does this mean?); Now What? (what action do I/we take now that I/we know this?).

- Borton's Framework of Reflectivity: https://www.physio-pedia.com/Borton%27s_Development_Framework; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGyjF9Ngd8Y

- What is Reflective Practice: https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/reflective-practice.html

- Getting Started with Reflective Practice: https://www.cambridge-community.org.uk/professional-development/gswrp/index.html

Deepening Community:

Community is more than just the neighbourhood or town that we live in and more than just a geographic area or a building. Community is created by people who share common interests, backgrounds, situations, afflictions, etc. It is organic and in constant ebb and flow with tides of ideas and circumstances.

In community, voices come together and harmonize for a better world. The opposing force of community is competition and individuality where importance lies in being faster, stronger, smarter, and richer. Without community, there's a lack of collaboration and people tend to compete against, rather than work with each other. This type of competitive atmosphere doesn't support learning as it discourages vulnerability and risk taking. Lacking a sense of safety and belonging, productivity decreases and loneliness continues. By choosing to step into community and allowing it to shape our interactions with others, we are creating a healthier environment with more desirable outcomes.

Resources for Deepening Community:
- Book: Born, P. (2014). *Deepening community*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

- Videos with Paul Born:
    - Deepening Community Rap: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujYTi74ICuI
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InCNo3URXxs
    - http://www.deepeningcommunity.org/

- Book: Block, P. (2008). *Community: the structure of belonging*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

Possibility Thinking & Growth Mindsets:

The underlying concept of mindsets and possibility thinking is that words and thoughts matter. The conditions of an event or circumstance themselves are of no real concern, but the approach and the perspective taken during and after an experience creates the mindsets that an individual will hold onto.

Possibility thinking involves positive attitudes and shifting the limited gaze to acknowledge that there is less to fear and more to learn. This is not about looking through rose-coloured glasses and pretending life to be perfect or without problems because there is no authenticity in pretense. This is, however, about being present in the situation and understanding that the choices made, and the attitudes portrayed, influence and shape the individual as he or she faces challenges and strives for success.

Resources for Possibility Thinking & Growth Mindsets:

- Book: Stone Zander, R. & Sander, B. (2002). *The art of possibility*. New York: Penguin Books

- Videos with Benjamin Zander:
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTav0D3YIN4
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d54-4mDLXYo

- Book: Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: the new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.

- Video with Carol Dweck:
    - Mindset Works: https://www.mindsetworks.com/science/

- Learning and Violence Network. All or Nothing article and video: https://learningandviolence.net/ourresources/student-kit/all-or-nothing/

ENGAGE Checklist

These are the broad themes, suggestions and practices that have come from our CALP community related to the ENGAGE aspect of the Learning Pathway.

The following checklist can serve several purposes for you. It can provide you with:

- ✓ A quick assessment of the different elements that can keep people engaged, involved and invested in their learning journey
- ✓ A tailored strategy of things to try out, change, tweak or consider
- ✓ A regular review of your progress
- ✓ A conversation tool to use in your team or network to assess priorities

Areas to Consider	Yes	No	Not possible	Let's do this!	Priority rating
SETTING THE TONE					
Do you communicate that you are glad to see people and you are glad they are here? (HOW do you do this?)					
Do you communicate welcome, positive energy and approachability? (HOW?)					
Do you communicate that you are in this together? (HOW?)					
Do you communicate that you go where the participant wants to go (meaning at their pace, their interest, their energy)? (HOW?)					
Do you make time for participants inside and outside of your session time?					
Do you check in with participants to see if you are meeting their needs?					
Do you provide food, snacks or refreshments? Do you enjoy this with them?					
Do you use humor? Do you bring elements of play, fun and creativity to the sessions?					
Do you move to Plan B if Plan A isn't working? Are you attuned to when this needs to happen?					
Do you use the curriculum as a resource, not a prescription?					
Is the learning session set up to engage all different learning styles and different kinds of social energy?					
Do you provide time for people to talk, share and process?					

Areas to Consider	Yes	No	Not possible	Let's do this!	Priority rating
Do you provide opportunities for participants to talk with each other?					
Do you teach in a circle or horseshoe?					
Do you provide fidget tools and ways for different types of participants to stay focused/calm?					
Do you smile, laugh and use people's name?					
Do you give body breaks?					
Do you stagger the learning activities so that there is variety for all kinds of participants?					
Is your space welcoming and acknowledging of the Land, different gender orientations, family life, cultures, learning styles?					
Are there tutors or support available in real time?					
BUILDING SUCCESS					
Do you facilitate from a place of possibility? (HOW?)					
Do you model and facilitate from a growth mindset? (HOW?)					
Do you validate your participant's successes, large or small?					
Is your language positive, affirming, encouraging and hopeful?					
Do you chunk success? (provide ways for them to experience success early on)					
Do you provide feedback right away?					
Do you ask people what they need?					
Do you acknowledge barriers and challenges?					
Do you encourage participants to have goals AND dreams?					
Do you plan activities for participants to bring their goals or dreams to life? (i.e. vision boards, story-telling, collages)					

Areas to Consider	Yes	No	Not possible	Let's do this!	Priority rating
Are there ways for participants to define success on their terms?					
Do you have rituals or celebrations to mark important dates, milestones and success? (WHAT are they?)					
Do you utilize alumni or bring in special speakers that can help motivate, validate and inspire?					
Do you take pictures or find ways to commemorate the learning journey along the way (not just at the end)?					

Your Notes: _____