

## **Student Well-being: A Collective Responsibility**

**John Almarode**

### **Balancing the Types of Engagement**

JOHN ALMARODE: With the three different types of engagement, it requires us to monitor and balance those three types. So some classrooms are heavy on emotional engagement, and ignore the other two. So this is your classroom, where there is a party every week, they're celebrating constantly. And students generally have a good time in these classrooms, they love them. It's a party from start to finish. The problem is, you don't get a lot of learning from those classrooms. They feel really, really good, but we see minimal growth and achievement in those classrooms, because we overlook the thinking and the behaviours outside of the feel-good, party atmosphere.

And then we have some classrooms where we're so heavy on thinking that students tire and get fatigued. So then we don't see the growth there, because they're miserable, they don't feel very good. And then their behaviour starts to fall apart. If I have students sit for 90 minutes and focus, focus, focus for 90 minutes, that is too heavy on the cognitive part. The brain doesn't get its break that it needs to process information, and now we're out of balance yet again.

And then there's the third type, and the third type of classroom that focuses on behaviour only; our classrooms that are so heavy in procedures. They're so heavy in the dos and the don'ts. Everyone's on page 86. Everyone's using a red-coloured pencil. There's a procedure for turning in homework. There's a procedure for setting up your cubbies. Now don't get me wrong, procedures are important. But procedures can't be the only thing we focus on, because then students just simply go through the motions and not think about it.

Let me give you an example from research on this. If you go to the United States and ask any individual to draw a penny from memory -- draw a penny. You give them a sheet of paper, you give them a pencil, and you say, I want you to draw the front side of a penny. Almost to a person, no one can do it. But yet, we use pennies all the time. Thousands and thousands of times I've handed pennies over to store clerks, to cab drivers -- the list is long. But it was because I was going through the motion and I wasn't thinking about what a penny looks like. So then when we assess students that have simply gone through the motions, we find they really don't know a lot of content, but they can certainly jump through hoops.

So the idea behind it is, you want balance. Some days you'll need a lot of emotional engagement, because the content calls for it or something has happened in the personal lives or in the environment of the school that needs that emotional pull. Sometimes we need a lot of cognitive engagement, because the content is either

really, really difficult or really, really complex. And then some days, because it's Friday, there's a snowstorm coming, there's a holiday coming, we need a lot of behavioural engagement, because the students are all over the place.

So the trick behind it is balance. And how do we balance? It goes back to knowing your students. Do you communicate with your students and give them a voice, so you know when they're frustrated, you know when they're tired? Do you monitor your classroom in a way that allows you to detect behaviours that indicate that they're tired and they need a break? Do we use strategies that make their thinking visible, so that I know what they're thinking about, how they're thinking about it, and then I use that information to decide, where do I go next? This is the idea behind formative assessment, continuous feedback. These strategies allow us to monitor all three types of engagement and fine tune it and make tweaks to that balance each and every day. But no one day will look the same as another day.