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**Learner Engagement: A Review of Approaches in the Psychology of Education and Art Education**

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**Abstract**

This article critically examines the concept of ‘engagement’ as it has emerged within two distinct bodies of literature in the fields of art education and the psychology of education. In order to grapple with the heterogeneous nature of this literature, a meta-narrative review was conducted whereby recurring narratives from various sub-fields including special educational needs, gallery education and human development, were systematically identified and analysed in order to clarify the diversity of ways in which the concept of engagement is used within different research traditions. Areas of overlap between the ways in which the concept is understood and treated within these various texts were examined, as well as a consideration of the potential for any tensions to arise between them. It will be argued that the gap between the manner in which learner engagement is conceived and employed within these disciplines is not as wide as one might presume and that rather than these being incongruous with one another, in many respects, the approaches adopted within each discipline are complementary. It will be suggested that with further disciplinary exchange, especially with respect to the role of educational artefacts and social signals arising during the learning process, wider scope arises for advancing our understanding of learner engagement.

***Keywords*.** ·Learner engagement; Meta-narrative review; Academic achievement; · Art education; Inter-disciplinary comparison

**Learner Engagement: A Review of Approaches in the Psychology of Education and Art Education**

The present literature review arises from an ongoing piece of applied psychological research in an alternative school setting in the North West of England whereby a visual arts programme aimed at enhancing pupils’ engagement in learning has been developed and implemented with view to assessing its impact. However, if psychological research such as this is to make a valuable contribution to the practice of education, and educators are to make use of these contributions, it is essential that the various conceptual devices which are used by each set of professionals are effectively interpreted, translated and in some cases, even transformed (Kelly,2012). Indeed, as Salomon (1995) argues, there is a growing demand for greater ecological validity and practical relevance within research onthe psychology of education so that scope of this field broadens to consider individuals within wider social and cultural context. Feldman (1987) adds that whilst it is typically considered “natural” for an applied field like art education to look to foundational fields in order to look for insights that may prove useful for practice, less frequently recognised is the stimulation and challenge that applied fields can provide for the more theoretical fields. As Feldman (1987, p.257) goes on to argue:

“it is often the case that the applied field will move ahead (or at least change) well in advance of any theoretical or empirical impetus from a foundational field. Then it falls to the foundational field to try to catch up-in effect, to give sound reasons why things have gone the way they have”.

While inter-disciplinary research is frequently lauded for its potential to generate fresh insights and provide more holistic approaches to complex issues (see Nissani, 1997), the tensions that arise between collaborating disciplines are not always productive since major discrepancies can also give rise to retreats from inter-disciplinary interchange. Indeed, such discrepancies have frequently been acknowledged and speculated upon in the case of the psychology of education and art education. Arnheim (1989), for example, points out that the application of insights obtained via the scientific method to art education is likely to be received with distrust by a certain number of educators who maintain that any kind of reasoning about the artistic activity endangers the spontaneity of creative process. Similarly, Feldman (1983) has argued that a preoccupation within developmental psychology (especially the Piagetian variety) to represent intellectual achievements that occur universally has placed it at odds with art education approaches which aspire to foster unique and idiosyncratic elements within creative practice. Despite such schisms, other scholars such as Freeman (2014) and Kozbelt and Seeley (2007) argue that there exist numerous areas of common interest between artists and psychologists since many of the creative processes that the art teacher facilitates can provide unique insights into psychological processes such as attention, object perception and mental representations. As such, in recent years there has been a small but notable shift towards what Freeman calls a “reconciliation” between these disciplines.

In light of these recent attempts at bridging the gap between art education and the psychology of education, this article considers another common area of interest between these disciplines - the case of ‘learner engagement’. Although this notion is deployed in a variety of different ways by professionals working within each discipline, the potential for a cross-fertilization of ideas between both disciplines has been overlooked. So whilst in the field of psychology, the notion of engagement has crystallized into a number of relatively discrete schools of thought; in the field of art education, the notion of engagement comprises a more diffuse set of ideas that typically centre around various socio-political ideals. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to provide a critical comparison of some of the most recent and relevant scholarship in art education and the psychology of education. The overriding aim is to consider whether any evidence of overlaps, conflicts or gaps between discourses of learner engagement in each discipline may serve as a useful catalyst for future advances in developing a deeper understanding of this complex educational phenomenon.

**Background Context to the Literature Review**

**Modelling Learner Engagement: Recent Directions in The Psychology of Education**

The impetus behind the psychological study of engagement has been driven by a practical motivation amongst psychologists to understand and enhance student learning and achievement as well as to prevent pupils from prematurely ending their educational career either through voluntarily dropping out or being permanently excluded (Furlong & Christenson, 2008). As a result, we have witnessed the emergence of a number of different perspectives on engagement whereby it is typically conceived as the visible manifestation of various sets of underlying behavioural, affective and cognitive processes. For example, Finn’s (1989) Participation-Identification model posits that learners' sense of belonging at school and valuing of education is maximised when students maintain multiple and expanding forms of behavioural participation in school-relevant activities; whilst the Self-System Model of Motivational Development posits that when pupils' psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy are met by their educational environments, they will engage more constructively in their learning (see Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Reeve, Ryan, Deci & Jang,2007; Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Other researchers have sought to examine the more immediate aspects of educational engagement as it emerges during concrete interactions in educational environments (Hidi, Renninger & Krapp, 2004). For example, Shernoff and colleagues (2003) have developed an ‘experience sampling method’ whereby, in response to a signal from an electronic pager at random moments during school time, participants’ report on their location, activity, affective and cognitive experiences. In recent years, there has been a noteworthy trend towards developing more comprehensive models of engagement by bringing together a wide array of academic, behavioural, cognitive and affective factors. For example, Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) conceptualized engagement as a multidimensional construct which centres around participation in academic, social and extracurricular activities; positive and negative affect arising from interactions with teachers, peers, and school; as well as personal investment in school, self-regulation and striving for mastery in learning tasks (see also Martin, 2007). Thus, with the emergence of such complex models, the concept of engagement has been elevated to the level of a meta-construct which brings together many previously separate lines of enquiry (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). While the latter approaches tend to employ standardized universal descriptors when presenting the contexts surrounding learners’ engagement processes (i.e. variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, and income), other researchers like [Göncü](https://www.google.co.uk/search?PARAMS=xik_2dKszV8DPgnPVQHivnkkxBaHv4qfd6Cu2CQ8N8DqdCDzHHCh8ZeQb1MwXRDEAWkB4V7a5QiLKi99R8uFyBiUBo8cDfti9DQsEshR3YdAB4SSdh) (1999) argue that such descriptors are insufficient to understand the moreparticular aspects of context that that impact upon learners engagement. Rather than adopt the universalist position that certain aspects of the individual’s mind, actions or needs are vital and so are to be discovered residing within all societies and historical time frames; researchers adopting a Cultural Historical Activity theory (CHAT) perspective emphasise the culturally-situated and inter-subjective qualities of engagement. Researchers such as Gaskins (2000) and Esmonde and colleagues (2011), for example, have adopted a pluralist approach and explored different variants of notion within specific, local contexts, while others such as Rainio (2008) and Finn and Vandermaas-Peeler (2013) focus on patterns of interaction as young people learn under adult guidance.

**From Models to Modality: Engagement in the Field of Art**

Whilst the concept of engagement has recently developed into a burgeoning research programme in the psychology of education, the notion of engagement is grounded in much older philosophical traditions in art education. In order to build up a more comprehensive picture of how the notion of engagement is be deployed in this field, it is useful to broaden the scope of the background analysis to include a consideration of more general trends in art practice, as this will have influenced successive generations of art educators who typically come into regular contact with these trends during their training. In fact, according to Berleant (1993), philosophical thought on the notion of engagement spans most of the history of the arts as they have functioned in diverse societies, and can be traced back to ancient Greece with Aristotle’s theory of catharsis. Notwithstanding this rich historical precedence, Berleant points out that the notion of engagement has taken on increased importance in more recent times. Indeed, according to Berleant, the notion of engagement captures a 20th-century reaction in the art world against the European romantic tradition which tends towards the compartmentalisation and spiritualisation of art, viewing it as an elevated sphere of existence that is divorced from everyday human effort (see Shusterman, 1992). In a similar analysis, Fotiadi (2012) notes the rise of ‘socially engaged art’ in the late 20th century whereby a predilection has emerged amongst many artists for collaborative and participatory working formats in order to subvert the romanticist ideal of the innate creative vision of the unique artist.

In the field of art, then, it would appear that the notion of engagement in the field of art arises in response to various socio-political and philosophicalideals. Because the notion is not deployed within the confines and structures of a conceptual model as is so often the case in the psychology of education; it is argued that the notion of engagement in the field of art is better thought of as a 'mode' or 'modality' through which certain types of information or values are communicated. In other words, it does not function in precisely the same manner as an abstract representations of a phenomenon whereby the elements deemed to encompass this phenomenon are explicitly defined, operationalised in more concrete terms and then considered alongside various other similarly derived phenomena. Instead of this more systematic approach, it is suggested here that, in the field of art more generally, the meaning of the notion of engagement is conveyed via more expansive units of language containing various combinations of more abstract ideas which eventually become normalized with increased usage.

**Methods and Procedures**

**Methodological Approach to the Analysis of the Literature**

A meta-narrative mapping approach was adopted in order to determine the various ways in which the notion of ‘engagement’ is used by educationalists and psychologists across a range of literature produced by specialists within each field. This approach to reviewing combines the rich analytical dimensions of traditional narrative research - storytelling, historicity, context, and human relations - with the comprehensiveness and rigour of systematic literature reviews and seeks to tease out the over-arching storylines of different research traditions over time. As Greenhalgh and Heath describe (2010), this is done by asking four key questions: how is the topic conceptualised in each separate tradition?, what are the key theories?, what are the preferred study designs and ways of knowing? and what are the main empirical findings? Thus, the primary consideration is not ‘what is the best approach to researching this topic?’ but, rather, ‘what can we learn from the range of different approaches?'. Consequently, it is particularly suited to exploring tensions between different research traditions and making sense of conflicting findings.

According to Smith (2000), most narrative researchers would probably agree that a narrative refers to an account of events that features a mixture of story-like constructions, descriptions, interpretations, expectations and related material. From a narrative theory perspective, then, the accounts contained within research publications are characterised by a particular perspective, whereby the author's disciplinary point of view determines what is mostsignificant, as well as being embedded within a particular context, whereby they become subject to external influences such as historical period, physical surroundings and social setting (Smith, 2000). Therefore, in order to adequately consider the impact of these various layers of context surrounding the research literature, a three-staged analysis was conducted drawing upon Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach and Lieblich's (2008) model. This encourages an initial exploration of the more concrete elements of context as evident within the text under consideration, before moving on to those more abstract elements of context which are found to reside beyond it. From here it is suggested that a systematicexploration of the linguistic features within that text is conducted with reference to both these layers of context.

In order to investigate these more concrete contextual elements in the present analysis, a preliminary content analysis was conducted on larger samples of articles retrieved using the database cataloguing information. This preliminary analysis served to capture the essential features of each discipline’s knowledge-base on engagement and served as a useful device for refining key areas for further enquiry. Thus, following the formation of questions arising from these preliminary analyses, the focus turned to the text themselves and the prevailing language and imagery used by art educationalists and psychologists to 'tell the story' of their work. Comparable texts were grouped together on the basis of common themes and shared linguistic devices and the overall key findings and implications for future practice were distilled through an iterative process of cross comparing texts and considering these texts with respect to the existing conceptualizations of the context surrounding each literature base.

**Sampling Strategy for the Preliminary Content Analyses**

Although the popularisation of the notion of engagement in education is often traced back to the 1990s[[1]](#footnote-1), the origins of the concept certainly predate this with the educational philosophies of Dewey (1938) and Freire (1998) along with Astin’s work on student involvement (1984) being cited as important forerunners to the development of this field (McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Trowler & Trowler, 2010; Zyngier, 2008). Although it is difficult to ascertain the precise reasons for this increasing and more explicit interest in student engagement in more recent years, it is likely that with the rise of the positive psychology and positive youth development movements in the 1990s, scholars were bolstered in their efforts to consider well-being and optimal functioning in more sustained ways rather than rather being constrained by an exclusive focus upon ‘fixing’ supposed human deficits. In light of this particular trend, the preliminary literature search was conducted on articles published from 1990 onwards to the most recent research available in 2013.

The ERIC and PsycINFO databases were used to search for literature within the respective disciplines of art education and the psychology of education. However, the coverage of literature within each database sometimes spans beyond publications in these disciplines. Therefore, rather than obtaining a randomized sample from a dataset containing all potentially relevant papers, the electronic catalogue was firstly used to sort all papers retrieved according to their overall relevance for the current purposes. Following a series of trial searches, it was decided to select peer-reviewed articles from academic journals which were retrieved within each database using the search term engag\* since the latter Boolean operator permitted a range of terminological variants such as ‘engage’, ‘engagement’ and ‘engaged’. In the case of the ERIC database, the term ‘art’ was added to the search operators in order to retrieve articles focused upon issues in art education but without limiting the search to a small collection of dedicated art education publications. It is important to acknowledge that the decision to limit the literature search to the immediate family of terms around “engagement”, rather than, for example, including related concepts such as motivation, participation and student involvement, creates the possibility that some potentially relevant literature could have been excluded from the analysis. However, because the aim of the current review was to move towards a more in-depth linguistic analysis, priority was given to the principle of precision rather than that of coverage when considering the capacity of the databases to retrieve relevant articles.The databases were also used in order to specify literature which applied to a wide spectrum of school-going age groups, i.e. from pre-school age (2-5 years) to adolescence (13-17 years).

A more purposeful strategy was required when sampling the articles retrieved from each catalogue because the aim of the current review is not to seek a single ‘correct’ answer to what constitutes learner engagement, but ratherto examine the complexity of different conceptualizations of this notion. Therefore, when the literature was refined by the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria, a series of preliminary content analyses were conducted on the various literature bases in order to more carefully consider the selection process for the next phase of the analysis. As Booth (2011) points out, this strategy is better aligned with more iterative approaches in qualitative research whereby questions, samples, data collection and analysis procedures are constantly refined and optimized in response to emerging insights

[Insert Table 1 about here]

**A Preliminary Content Analysis of the Art Education and Psychology of Education Literature**

**Rates of Publication**

When the entire yield of articles featuring adolescent and child populations was classified according to year of publication, it was found that research output on the topic of learner engagement did not gather pace in either field until the 2000s. Indeed, as *Table 2* below shows, of the 648 articles indexed by the PsycINFO database under the major subject heading of ‘student engagement’, the vast majority of psychology articles on student engagement were published between 2010 and 2013. Although there were no articles indexed under ‘student engagement’ in the ERIC database for art education in 1990s, the rate of publication featuring the notion of engagement has grown from just 12 articles in the 1990s and risen to 71 articles between 2010 and 2013. Thus, it appears that the notion of a research field explicitly dedicated to matters of ‘student engagement’ is a rather new phenomenon in psychology but one which has rapidly grown in the past few years. In the field of art education, while this notion has not crystallised into a dedicated area of scholarly expertise, the usage of the term in publications has also seen a rapid increase in recent years.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

**Methodologies Employed**

A large majority of the articles indexed by the PsycINFO database under the major subject heading of ‘student engagement’ (507 out of 648 articles) were classified as having adopted a quantitative research methodology. In contrast to this heavy focus upon empirical research using quantitative approaches, in the art education literature we see a much lower degree of emphasis upon such kinds evidence – of the 355 articles retrieved from the ERIC database on learner engagement, only 61 articles had been catalogued according to any research methods deployed and indeed, where details of methods do exist, these were distinctly qualitative: 12 case studies and 10 interview-based studies.Therefore, rather than testing the relationship between engagement and academic outcomes; Wang and colleagues instead extended their analysis in an alternative direction, using covariance and mean structures to consider whether discrepancies exist between groups with respect to the affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions of engagement. Indeed, in this study differences were found between students when theywere segmented by gender and ethnicity and this led the authors to call for further research into the possible causes and consequences of such differences. Another interesting example of this tighter focus on the antecedents to engagement is King, McInerney and Watkins' (2012) investigation of the role of social goals in academic engagement amongst 1147 students in the Philippines. King and colleagues argue that in studying engagement, educational psychologists have been overly focused on achievement whilst overlooking the potential role that social goals such as social status, affiliation, approval and responsibility might play. Interestingly, by using questionnaires which incorporated various items to measure the latter constructs, it was found that social status goals were the most highly endorsed goal for the students sampled. It is pointed out that this finding corroborates much previous research which indicates that achieving social status through education is a relatively common perceived goal of education amongst various groups in Asia more generally (Kumar & Maehr, 2007; Lee, 1996; Salili, 1996; Sue & Okazaki, 1990) as well as within the Philippines (Bernardo Salanga & Aguas, 2008; Church & Katigbak, 1992).

Upon conducting the preliminary content analysis, the question was raised whether the strong focus in the psychology of education literature upon academic achievement in relation to student engagement places it at odds with an art education which actively seeks to resist reductive styles of assessment which judge artworks according a narrow selection of formal elements. The meta-narrative review of the psychology of education literature on engagement has revealed a trend towards highly complex forms of analysis whereby a wide range of social and psychological factors are considered in relation to educational engagement. We have also seen some cases where there a strong research interest to incorporate alternative, non-academic student outcomes, and others where the emphasis shifts away from fixed, external indicators of scholastic success (i.e. grades and test scores) towards teachers’ and students’ own perceptions of the educational process. It is difficult to see how such exploratory styles of research could be swiftly co-opted by a performative educational system for more regulatory ends, since such systems are typically characterised by an overriding drive to maximize beneficial outcomes while simultaneously minimizing resource inputs (Duineveld, Beunen, van Assche, During & van Ark, 2009; Elliott,2001). Thus, to derive a cost-effective solution response to problems like student disengagement, guidance from the psychology of education literature sampled here would need to be selective to a point which risks obscuring the original complexity of the analyses.

**Meta-narrative 2: Engagement as Participative, Immersive Experiences for Learning**

In contrast to the psychology of education literature, which is typically based upon structured empirical investigations, the literature within the field of art education tends to be produced by practitioners who are reflecting upon their own classroom experiences where they often have to exhibit thinking and behaviour that is more rapid, intuitive and holistic. In fact, the majority of the articles sampled (15 out of 26) are written from the perspective of a practitioner reflecting upon theirinvolvement in a wide array of art projects and activities including: puppetry (Sickler-Voigt, 2011), photography (Ruich, 2012), quilting (Mitchell, Whitin& Whitin, 2012) cloud-making (Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2011), map-making (Ng-He,2010) , self-portraiture (Armon, Uhrmacher & Ortega, 2009), story-boarding (Bruce, 2011) and socio-historical explorations of family heirlooms (Rose, 2012). Within these accounts, however, what is meant by learner engagement is rarely explicitly defined.[[2]](#footnote-2) Rather it appears that the notion of engagement acts more as an interpretative device, used by practitioners to denote a certain kind of desirable aesthetic experience. Indeed, an analysis of the linguistic features of the sampled art education texts reveals some of the more tangible properties assigned by practitioners to these experiences. For example, whereas in the psychology of education literature, the notion of engagement is much more likely to appear in the form of an abstract noun (i.e. as the concept or notion of 'engagement'), in the art education literature, it is more likely to be deployed to convey action (i.e. in a verb form so that the teacher is 'engaging' pupils in/with something/some action). In fact, if we compare the average proportions of noun to verb forms of engagement in both samples of literature, we find that in the art education sample, writers use approximately twice as many verbs forms as noun forms, and in the psychology of education sample, the noun form appears almost six times more than the verb form. This subtle linguistic difference suggests that within the psychology of education literature, there is more emphasis upon formally abstracting the notion of engagement from various other real-world phenomena and then considering it alongside various other factors which correspond to a particular conceptual framework. In the art education literature, however, the focus remains on classroom action.

Indeed, further textual analysis finds that art educators frequently deploy the notion of engagement when articulating a desire to move away from activities which position students as bystanders and move towards activities that encourage them to think, act, and develop ideas. For example, when outlining the benefits of using story-boarding processes with high school students in order to visualise texts, Bruce draws a contrast between the process of creating images with that of reading:

one problem with reading is that it is often seen by students, particularly reluctant readers, as a passive activity…creating storyboards encourages students to engage and interact – or in a reader- response term, transact – with the text (2011, p. 79)

In addition, in many of the sampled art education contexts, the role of the teacher is not necessarily confined to one who organises and oversees at adistance; rather, the teacher can participate in the action too for this provides him/her with an opportunity to attend to the concrete details of students’ behaviours and interactions in order to obtain clues in relation to their interests, difficulties and levels of engagement. For example, Baylin attends to such details in his reflections on his students’ response to using a large aperture and shallow depth of field during a photography lesson:

Even more telling about their understanding and appreciation for this new “tool” were their subsequent self-directed efforts. They started using it by choice, in other words, transferring their knowledge from the first assignment to self-selected situations, a sign of genuine learning. (2010, p. 97)

Arguably, this focus upon learners' signals of engagement within the sampled art education literature is where we begin to see a convergence with approaches in the psychology of education, since, as was outlined above, once the latter makes a departure from an exclusive focus upon academic achievement as a desired outcome, we begin see a focus upon alternative, relational properties of engagement which includes the teacher's capacity to estimate students' engagement levels by attending to various behavioural, cognitive and agentic signals. It is also worth noting that there is widespread evidence of the deployment of psychological concepts in the art education literature. For example, we see art educators draw upon psychological ideas such as novelty for the arousal of interest (Bruce, 2011), autonomy and relatedness in the classroom (Haskins, 2012), emotional intelligence (Scholes, 2012), resilience (Heise & MacGillivray,2011) and socially-mediated learning (Shaffer, 2011). The frequent deployment of psychological concepts such as these indicates art educators wish to actively make sense of their classroom experiences by applying those ideas which they deem most relevant to understanding their practice. Moreover, it is suggested here that the collaborative development of a more formalised evidence base for such practice might to be a fruitful undertaking, especially since, as we have seen above, psychologists of education have already begun to incorporate alternative and non-standardized indicators of successful student outcomes into their analyses and would no doubt, profit considerably from further consideration of how this might apply in the case of creative activities.

Indeed, one area of inquiry that might represent a useful starting point for such collaborative work is the non-human dimensions of educational engagement since this receives a great deal of attention in the art education literature yet was virtually absent from the sampled psychology of education literature. Within the art education articles, attention is not only paid to the *teacher* as the key facilitator of student engagement; art objects, tools and materials are also conceived as bridging devices between the learner and various forms of knowledge. Indeed, much of the language used in the sampled literature vests art forms with assistive properties to suggest that the learner's interactions with these forms indirectly bring about deeper levels of understanding. Thus, many of the art education papers sampled are replete with examples of indirect causative processes being attributed to art forms, so that, for example, photographic images are considered to '*provide* [emphasis added] students a historical visual stepping-stone to document an examine the everyday play-engaged lives of both children and adults' (Ruich,2012 p.25), anda collection of handmade quilts are regarded as something which '*offers* [emphasis added] a rich opportunity for students in grades four through eight to develop appreciation for pattern, rhythm, and innovation while learning about history” (Mitchell, Whitin& Whitin, 2012 p.26).

In general, the type of learning experience which art educators are alluding to here are immersive so that the learner becomes involved in activities which appeal to their senses and trigger powerful semantic, psychological associations (Dede, 2009). In fact, throughout much of the art education literature we see frequent allusions to classroom experiences which require pupils to shift between an exocentric and an egocentric frame of reference so that perspectives on art forms are derived not only via the physical senses but also through one's own inner repository of personal beliefs, emotions and values. So while some authors explicitly celebrate the sensory possibilities afforded by art objects and activities, many others draw attention to the value of providing opportunities for learners to draw more personal meaning from the process by emphasizing the potential for *connections* to emerge between the world of the learner and the art they experience. Thus, while Shaffer (2011, p.45) recommends “bringing objects into the gallery that children can touch” in order to permit sensory exploration, Christopolou (2013, p.47), emphasises the capacity for collaborative discussion during art projects to generate coming to generate “greater personal and communal awareness” amongst students. From reflections such as these, it would seem that a major advantage of immersive art experiences, is that they have the potential to draw on the strengths of both frames of reference whereby the learner is involved in embodied, concrete learning as well as developing more abstract, symbolic insights with reference to one's inner world of personal meanings. Indeed, the specific emphasis on forging connections between learner and art-form, and the quest for deriving personal meaning in the process strongly resonates with Belenky and colleagues' (1986) notion of 'connected' approaches to knowing whereby, rather than focusing upon a critical form of analysis that excludes personal feeling and beliefs; the learner actively seeks to understand others' ideas and points of view as well as emphasizing the fundamental value of personal experience and the context in which these views have arisen.

**Conclusion**

At the outset of this article, it was noted that characterisations of the relationship between the disciplines of art education and the psychology of education have ranged from one of distrust and divide to that of mutual interests and reconciliation. In light of their common focus upon the issue of “learner engagement”, the aim of the current analysis was to assess the extent to which approaches towards this notion within each discipline might be complementary, convergent or inherently conflicted. Upon conducting the preliminary content analysis, a strong distinction was drawn between how the notion of engagement is deployed within each discipline and this raised various questions regarding the extent to which they might be divided on the issue of educational achievement. It was feared that the dominance of quantitative approaches and deployment of standardised assessment scores in the psychology of education wouldbe incommensurable with the more intuitive, immediate and complex reality of teaching the unique, individual creative expressions that are typically valued by art educators.

However, the meta-narrative analysis revealed a much more complex state of affairs. In the psychology of education literature it was found that the notion engagement was not conceived as a crude determiner of academic performance, but instead, was considered as a dynamic phenomenon that arises within a unique social context. Indeed, many of the psychology of education studies that were sampled focused upon various antecedents to engagement, some of which were relatively fixed socio-demographic traits whilst others were more malleable intra-personal features. As a result, it became difficult to position such approaches within the general mode of a performative culture that seeks to make schools subject to increased accountability using a limited selection of outcome indicators. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that there still remains a gap between what such research can address and its application to teaching practice since teachers do not work within systems which are composed of abstract, self-contained categories. In fact, there have been repeated calls from educational psychologists for further research on student engagement in the context of school-based interventions since it is noted that efforts here have been particularly sparse (see Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris,2004; Reschly & Christenson (2012). It is argued here that another way in which psychology of education researchers might profitably move towards bridging the gap between psychological theory and teaching practice would be to work collaboratively with art educators in order to benefit from the latter’s expertise in areas such as the culture of the participating students, the nature of the school context and the community systems that would need to cooperate with researchers if effective changes are to be delivered. Thus, the goal of this collaborative work would be to bring together two different kinds of expertise to increase knowledge on engagement processes via research which is theoretically-informed as well as culturally-situated.

Notwithstanding the gap between theory and practice, the meta-narrative analysis also revealed that there was a small but noteworthy shift in the psychology of education analyses away from fixed, numerical indicators of academic success, towards a more detailed focus upon the antecedents to engagement as a significant outcome in itself, the incorporation of alternative, non-academic outcomes and the examination more immediate elements of the educational process like students’ personal goals and teachers’ perceptions of their students. With the latter phenomena being more directly forged out of classroom interaction, it is here that approaches in the psychology of education and art education begin to converge. One important implication of this convergence is the potential that arises for art educators to contribute towards the expansion of alternative avenues for psychological analysis. For example, in the art education literature, beyond the focus upon human relations in the classroom, we also see the relationship between humans and objects taking on more prominence in analyses. Indeed, it was found that art educators frequently vested the art objects themselves with assistive properties so that learners' experiences of viewing or use of these objects led to more engaging experiences which in turn, was considered to foster deeper levels of understanding. However, in the psychological approaches to learner engagement reviewed in this paper, the silent assumption that operated was the central role of human-to-human interaction when considering the various dimensions of learner engagement. Of course, as a social science, psychology, has long faced charges of anthropocentrism (for example, see Yerkes, 1933); however, by attending to the unique insights brought by the specific concerns of art educators, it is suggested that one profitable future direction in the psychology of learner engagement would be to more seriously consider the role of cultural artefacts in shaping learning.

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**Footnotes**

[1](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?PARAMS=xik_MNrr2t2cv8z3dm7deXoPdmr5FAGzh4WyxDci75xCxgoTs3YzoNoKTP1dinkvg5ZM26ufuYEt1oT4XiWoFUETFvU4sxsiqxHrNwDcC7U2yLTZNxVdV5YV1pLtimWR7oAxoTrZYgNjGNQ3fAkxtgprJ2T6mXoZPcXqRvjJQCeQ7ajQD9UH6PN4AF7RwhrX8LaBBnXs5eFSgibSt6jLjHjfzRvNAorprQ9EPGwrsy8ij3dGXq54eRvEuWc2kt1hPSf8E12eRg79DDrr81UTS5NnzBNKWu6c1fxJo3SVRR8JAeyzViZ4urbrtPCm6y6VxZiVmLDbq5uv)The articles sampled here were the top 30 articles listed by the database in accordance to their overall relevance to the terms searched.

[2](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?PARAMS=xik_At6qYkT7NM8z1zie5dyD2NapT7QgqtWtYqMPEHGnc8cUsvVeNUUNDw3uEtCYu7qV2GANi1a1Yeoo6HpJtAbzAeESp7jT39U1Tjpzvk7NtxjrJmkmuimmyBSPrp3Wez2KR9zK5zfbDKQ3BNJYvu4seZeJqr9jAw9TBTZQzzFxeARidVn7YjgPowEGsLVLiuCZvpCHvt1jZPx59UVSPrpCwtn8VibeHeQQUKQ8VjduD2e2Bwuojn9kRYLqQnpdo5uaxtJBEHNDnaYZzwxkrgwTp8Rbz55RFakyPSaiW8QP8Uutbddxdde8fLFXe4iRWc3Gs6gvjf2F) Kind and colleagues (2005) discussion of 'engaged pedagogy' and Levine's (2009) provision of a definition are two notable exceptions here

Table 1

*The Sampled Literature*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Psychology of Education  | Year | Area of Interest  | Methods | Sample | Research Region |
| Sample 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lee & Reeve | 2012 | Motivation, teachers | Questionnairesstatistical analysis | 8 high-school teachers and 340 students | South Korea |
| King, McInerney & Watkins | 2012 | Social goals, achievement goals | Questionnaires,statistical analysis | 1147 secondary school students | Philippines |
| Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White & Salovey | 2012 | Achievement motivations, Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological theory | Interviews, questionnaire research, statistical analysis | 48-1389 students (9 - 15 years) | USA, Russia |
| Elliott & Tudge | 2012 | Emotional climate, achievement | Class observations, statistical analysis of school data | 1,399 fifth- and sixth-grade students | USA |
| Martin | 2012 | ADHD, personal best goals, academic achievement | Questionnaires,statistical analysis | 87 students with ADHD, 3374 non-ADHD students | Australia  |
| Plenty & Heubeck | 2013 | Mathematics, academic motivation,academic achievement  | Questionnaires,statistical analysis | 519 students, grades 7-9  | Australia  |
| Motti-Stefanidi & Masten | 2013 | Immigrants, resilience, academic achievement | Comparative analysis of research findings | Existing literature on academic achievement of immigrant children  | Western Europe, North America |
| Moreira, Dias, Machado Vas & Machado Vaz | 2013 | Persistence, motivation, study skills | Questionnaires ,statistical analysis | 384 secondary school students | Portugal |
| Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro | 2013 | Contextual factors, academic achievement | Comparative analysis of existing theory and research  | North American and European literature on engagement | Western Europe, North America |
| Psychology of Education  | **Year** | **Area of Interest**  | **Methods** | **Sample** | **Research Region** |
| Sample 2 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Ainley & Ainley | 2011 | Achievement emotions, enjoyment, interest | Secondary analysis of questionnaire data | >400,000 15-year-old students  | PISA data from 57 countries |
| Ladd & Dinella | 2009 | Classroom participation, academic achievement | Questionnaires,statistical analysis | 383 children (grades 1-8) | USA |
| De Castella, Byrne & Covington | 2013 | Fear of failure, motivation, self-handicapping, academic achievement | Questionnaires,statistical analysis | 1,423 Japanese & 643 Australian high school students | Japan, Australia  |
| Irvin | 2012 | Resilience, African American students, low-income backgrounds, academic achievement | Questionnaires,statistical analysis | 335 6th-9th grade students | USA |
| Fantuzzo, Le Boeuf, Rouse & Chen | 2012 | African American boys, risk, resilience, academic achievement | Secondary analysis of public administrative data and school district records | 889 third-grade students | USA |
| Gillen-O’Neel & Fuligni | 2013 | School belonging, academic achievement | Questionnaires,statistical analysis | 572, 13-19 years olds/9th-12th grade students | USA |
| Lam et al | 2012 | Academic achievement, gender, contextual supports | Questionnaires,statistical analysis | 3420 students (7th, 8th, and 9th graders) | 12 countries in Europe, Asia, North America |
| Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Lens, Michou & Soenens | 2013 | Self-determination theory, achievement goals, motivation,parenting | Questionnaires,statisticalanalysis | 923 students(grades 7-12) | Belgium |
| Wu, Hughes & Kwok | 2010 | Teacher–student relationship quality, Growth trajectories, academic achievement | Interviews, questionnaire research, cluster analysis | 706 students (grades 2-3)  | USA |
| Wang , Willett & Eccles | 2011 | Measurement invariance, perceptions of school, student behaviours, academic achievement | Questionnaires,statistical analysis | 1103 middle school students | USA |
| Wang & Peck | 2013 | Mental health, academic achievement | Questionnaires,Interviews and secondary data analysis | 1025 9th and 11th grade students | USA |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Art Education  | Year | Topic/Area of Interest | Literary Form | Population  | Research Region |
| Sample 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Barrett, Everett & Smiguel | 2012 | Aesthetic thinking, drawing elicitation techniques | Empirical | Children (5-8 years old) | Australia |
| Brinda | 2008 | Reading motivation, theatrical production | Reflective | Adolescent students  | USA |
| Baylin | 2010 | Photography, connections between emotion and cognition | Reflective | Adolescent students | USA |
| Brisco | 2012 | Creative problem solving | Advisory | High school students | USA |
| Bruce | 2011 | Story-boarding, text visualisation | Reflective | High school students | USA |
| Haskins | 2012 | Montessori learning, classroom environment | Advisory | Montessori school children  | USA |
| Ng-Hye | 2010 | Community development  | Reflective | Undergraduate students  | USA |
| Rose | 2012 | Family heirloom project, art history | Reflective | Undergraduate students | Australia  |
| Scholes & Nagel | 2012 | Inclusive education, creative arts curriculum | Empirical | Primary school pupils | Australia  |
| Sample 2 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Cummings | 2012 | Strategies for motivating learners | Reflective | Middle school students (grades 9-12) | USA |
| Christopoulou | 2013 | Political cartoons | Reflective | 5th grade pupils | Greece |
| Armon, Uhrmacher & Ortega | 2009 | Art and literacy, self-portraits | Reflective | Children from low-income backgrounds | USA |
| Art Education  | **Year** | **Topic/Area of Interest** | **Literary Form** | **Population**  | **Research Region** |
| Bryant | 2010 | Creative problem solving, computer animation | Reflective | High school students | USA |
| Chin | 2011 | Aesthetic experiences in learning | Advisory | K-12 pupils | USA |
| Darts | 2011 | Socially engaged art in school  | Reflective | High school students | USA |
| Sickler-Voigt | 2011 | Puppetry, use of found objects | Advisory | Pupils (grades 6-12) | USA |
| Danko-McGhee & Slutsky | 2007 | Critical thinking, Reggio Emilia approach  | Reflective | Children aged 2-8 | USA |
| Andrews | 2010 | Student-centred approaches to art lessons | Reflective | High school students | USA |
| Lenz Kothe | 2012 | Participatory practice, interactive art galleries | Critical commentary | Gallery visitors | Canada |
| Heise & Macgillivray | 2011 | Implementation of an art programme in a homeless shelter | Evaluative | Children in a homeless shelter | USA |
| Levine | 2009 | presentation of an art problem for learners | Reflective | 8th grade pupils | USA |
| Ruich | 2012 | Photography, social documentation of play | Advisory | Pupils (grades 5-8) | USA |
| Shaffer | 2011 | Museum education for young children  | Critical commentary | Children aged 3-6 | USA |
| Nagawa | 2012 | Interactive tours of artists' studios | Reflective | Gallery visitors | Uganda |
| Mitchell, Whitin & Whitin | 2012 | Quilting, multi-disciplinary approaches to education  | Advisory | Elementary school pupils (grades 4-8) | USA |
| Kind, Irwin, Grauer & De Cosson | 2005 | Holistic curriculum perspectives, artist school visit | Reflective | 3rd-4th grade pupils | Canada |

Table 2

*Number of published articles retrieved on student engagement from 1990-2013 in the fieldsof Psychology of Education and Art Education.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Time period | 1990-1999 | 2000-2009 | 2010-2013 |
| Psychology | 4 | 227 | 417 |
| Art Education | 12 | 106 | 71 |

1. For example, see Fredricks, McColskey, Meli, Mordica, Montrosse, & Mooney, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kind and colleagues (2005) discussion of 'engaged pedagogy' and Levine's (2009) provision of a definition are two notable exceptions here. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)