Managing your learners' attention and energy level: energizers, warmers, coolers

The chapter examines different aspects of engagement in educational activities and provides ideas on how to manage engagement in both in-person and online educational settings. After exploring this chapter, you should be able to:

✓ Explain the importance of various forms of engagement,

✓ Give examples of managing learners' motivation and energy levels in an online setting,

✓ Compare managing the learners' attention and energy levels in face-to-face, online synchronous, and online asynchronous educational settings.

The chapter includes the following sections:

1. What is engagement, anyway?
2. The educator as a designer of learners' experience
3. How to manage your learners' attention and energy level
4. Motivation and engagement in face-to-face, synchronous and asynchronous education
5. Challenges: „Zoom fatigue" and what can we do about it
6. Questions for reflection
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1. What is engagement, anyway?

In broad terms, engagement in an educational setting can be composed of behavioural, cognitive, affective, and social parts.

1. **Behavioral (body) engagement** can be easily seen and is often referred to as *on-task behaviour*. For example, learners are looking at the camera or making notes on *Jamboard*.

2. **Cognitive (mind) engagement** happens in learners' heads and refers to their effort to understand the material or gain new skills. It involves thinking about concepts, coding new ones, and recalling learned information.

3. **Affective (emotional) engagement** pertains to learners showing interest, curiosity, enjoyment, and a positive attitude about a task. It is also essential to think about values, personal relevance, or the importance of knowledge or skills that learners gain.

4. **Social engagement** is, simply, connections learners make to you as their educator, as well as to other learners. While not directly linked to the material and skills, it mediates the effect on the body, mind, and emotions. It can make learners more engaged, boost their self-esteem, motivate them to take accountability for their learning process, and energize them toward reaching their goals.

Do we have the attention span of a goldfish?

Generally speaking, it is quite hard to agree on the meaning of „attention span". Are we talking about selective, alternating, or sustained attention? The main answer is: **No, we don't have the attention span of a goldfish.** That idiom rests on dubious claims and is sometimes dubbed [The Goldfish Myth](). Attention is very task-specific, and average attention span is simply not something that you can measure.

Short, digestible information is helpful, but **it's better to focus on offering your learners quality and informing them of possible gains clearly and upfront**. They may not have short attention spans, but they will quickly give up content they see as not worth their time in an ocean of information and online content.

To **make your learning program easily accessible**, organize the modules to take care of your learners' energy levels, impacting their ability to focus and maintain their attention in an online setting.

Using short activities such as energizers, warmers, and coolers can be a great way to grab your learners' attention and engage them with material and each other for that social element.

2. The educator as a designer of the learner's experience

As an (online) educator, it is your responsibility to **know your learners' needs, interests, and particularities**. When designing a learning environment, course, or lesson plan, it is important to balance the interests and needs of your learners. How do you get to them? You can read research on your target audience, do a survey yourself, or use evaluations to make your program better.

Once learning is in session, **your role is to monitor the engagement of your learners**. Set up clear objectives. For example, it is easy to measure behavioural signs: do they show on camera, click when asked, and type on forum…
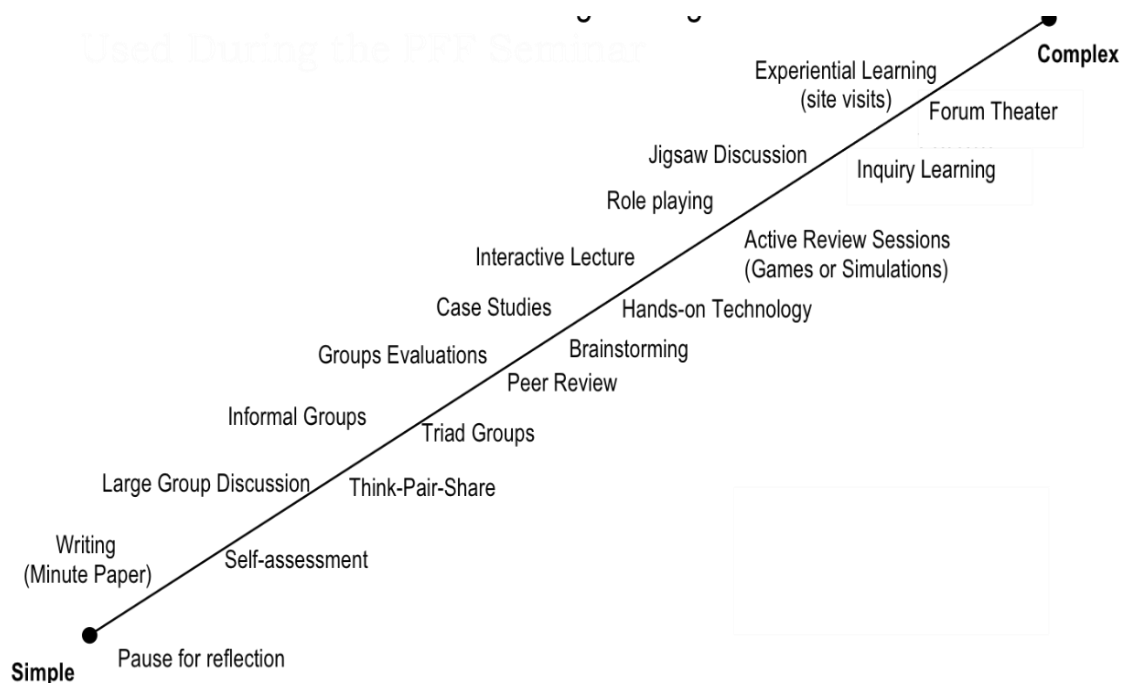
It is important to know there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The most important thing is to ask for feedback and improve.

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3. How to manage your learners' attention and energy level

1. **Clear goals and expectations**. Have a clear purpose and make learning outcomes clear at the beginning of the program and each session. Show your learners what knowledge they will gain and ask them about it not just for assessment purposes but also for self-reflection.

2. **Effective feedback**. Instant, task-specific feedback that includes information about the next steps learner should or can be a powerful tool for boosting engagement and educational accountability in your learners.

3. **Gamification**. Bringing some elements from gaming into education can benefit your learners and yourself. Besides boosting attention, it also leads to higher performance on practical assignments, encourages collaboration, and supports attitude and behaviour change. Provide multiple paths to the goal, give chances for failure, and „level up" instead of „getting points". Reward your learners with badges, certificates, and similar tokens.

4. **Active learning strategies**. They allow learners to learn by engaging with the material they are learning and gaining new skills! Active learning strategies are closely linked to learning outcomes and use learning material differently. Below you will find examples from Active learning activities arranged on a scale from simple to complex.

Complex

Experiential Learning
(site visits)

Forum Theater

Jigsaw Discussion

Inquiry Learning

Role playing

Active Review Sessions
(Games or Simulations)

Interactive Lecture

Case Studies

Hands-on Technology

Brainstorming

Groups Evaluations

Peer Review

Informal Groups

Triad Groups

Large Group Discussion

Think-Pair-Share

Writing
(Minute Paper)

Self-assessment

Simple

Pause for reflection

This is a spectrum of some active learning activities arranged by complexity and classroom time commitment.

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5. **Energizers**, **warmers**, **and coolers**. Activities that engage your students not just with the learning material but with each other, their environment, and the online setting are potent ways to keep their energy up. They are motivating and challenging, boost the social aspect of the learning environment, and offer a respite from periods that require a lot of effort. Check out our Toolkit for more ideas!

6. **Breaks**. Human beings can't sit in front of a computer screen for a whole day. Make breaks an integral part of your lessons, and point out the usefulness to your learners. Introduce shorter intervals every 45 minutes (a 10-minute break sounds ideal) and a longer one after 90 minutes (20 minutes break).

More on energizers, warmers, and coolers

Short, interactive, and engaging activities for your learners can be sorted into energizers, warmers, and coolers.

1. **Energizers** can help you keep the minds of your learners fresh and engaged, and bring the group close together. Use them after breaks, at the beginning of complex activities, or to make a transition from one activity to another. Energizers can be done with words (spoken or written), gestures, drawing, or body movement. We love using music. Check out the activity "Good morning radio" for more!

2. **Warmers** are used to bring awareness to the physical bodies of your learners, make them move, and take care of their bodies. It usually involves movement, shutting off, or moving away from the camera. You can use it as a way to relax your learners with self-massage at the end of the session or energize them after a lunch break. Check out the activities What is my body telling me or Dancing hands to start!

3. **Coolers** are activities that you can use as a finishing activity, before or after reflection. You can also use them after invigorating discussions, or heavy topics. They usually involve introspection and relaxation. Check out the activity Breathe or Warmth of the heart to get some ideas.

4. Motivation and engagement in face-to-face, synchronous, and asynchronous education

Types of engagement	Face to face education	Synchronous education	Asynchronous education
Behavioural engagement	Body language makes up more than 80% of all communication. Educators can quickly gauge the engagement with the lesson material by studying learners' body posture, eye contact, gestures, and subtle voice cues. Learning by doing or experiential learning can be organized by giving learners the ability to practice and interact with each other, solve problems in real-time, and fail and learn in a safe environment.	In video conferencing apps, only the head and shoulders are visible. Also, cues that we usually use in face-to-face context are not applicable: there is no real eye contact, and glancing out of the camera doesn't mean disinterest – your learner can be looking at their kid that just entered the room. That confuses our brain and creates an extra layer of fatigue. Instead, use direct and visible forms of feedback: ask a question, design a short poll, use chat for gathering the thoughts of your learners, and ask for reactions by using hand signs or emojis for those that have cameras off. Introduce short stretching sessions when appropriate or needed.	There is almost no way to use behavioural cues. Instead, create an environment that fosters engagement. Make it possible to react to the content by likes, hearts, or comments (Padlet does this well). Make a short poll or ask a question throughout the material and at the end.
Cognitive engagement	It is very easy to foster discussion in a face-to-face setting. Simply asking a question can alter the flow of the lesson and make learners pause and think. Group work can be done quickly, and mingling between groups is natural and can foster discussion and peer-to-peer learning. Exploration of the natural environment can be utilized by field trips, bringing materials to the workroom, or giving your learners tasks to do outside of it.	Asking questions can be a powerful tool in video conferences, and learners can answer by using their voice, by writing in chat, reacting with emojis, or simply raising their hand. Provide clear instructions for break-out rooms, and check on your learners' progress regularly. You can use free online boards like Jamboard for collaborative work and ask quick questions with Kahoot or Mentimeter. Try to switch up your activities, break them into smaller chunks, and use breaks and energizers to let your learners recharge!	Designing questions for reflection at the end or „For those who want more" segments can be a nice and easy way to give your learners something to think about. Put questions in the middle of your videos, poll your learners from time to time, organize peer-to-peer review assignments, and provide opportunities for project-based work that will use new knowledge and skills of your learners through the whole program!

Types of engagement	Face-to-face education	Synchronous education	Asynchronous education
Affective engagement	Face-to-face interaction offers many ways to foster effective engagement. Close social proximity provides plenty of opportunities for feedback, motivating gestures, and connection with others.	Set clear rules at the beginning of your program, and talk with your learners about possible ways to uphold them. Make feedback relevant and constant, as well as specific. Read our chapter on *Giving and receiving feedback* for more information! Always call your learners by name, and invite them to share something about themselves or things they value. Ask them about their motivation, and write it down. Also, ask them about their fears and take care to address them when relevant.	Create an environment that feels intuitive and user-friendly. Make videos as accessible as possible by using text-to-speech options, sign language, subtitles, and easy navigation options. Write out some suggestions for self-care activities and practical activities your learners can try out on their own, in their own lives, using the material you teach. Lead by example: show vulnerability, and always give something of yours if you ask your learners to do so. For example, if you ask them to „Describe the view from their window", you better have your own directly below that sentence! Use real-life examples and stories if teaching about abstract concepts so that learners can connect. Use movies, books, music, and similar material. Reward your learners with badges, certificates, and other tokens to show their progress and keep them motivated.

Types of engagement	Face-to-face education	Synchronous education	Asynchronous education
Social engagement	The face-to-face setting provides simple ways to connect with the educator and other learners. It is sometimes hard to engage everyone the same, and educators' time and attention are usually in low supply when working with more people at a time, so setting up office times for one-on-one sessions and individual facilitation can greatly help some learners.	Looking at video conferencing boxes or black boxes of those without the camera on can be off-putting. Try to avoid Zoom fatigue by following our tips at the end of the chapter. Your learners could be socializing via private chat, so take care to set clear rules about it and a safe way for them to reach out in case of abuse from other learners. You can also switch chat off when you don't want to use it. Break-out rooms can be a great way to bring group work in an online setting, as well as using online boards (Jamboard, IdeaBoardz) Energizers that foster feelings of connection can be a great help. Consult the TRENDSS Trainer's Toolkit for various creative ideas!	Set up „office hours", a designated time in the week or month that learners can reach you, and set up a meeting with you online. Open a forum in which learners can socialize, share the material, and lead discussions. Organize the celebration and end of the program face-to-face or synchronous for those who want to attend. Print out some diplomas, give out candy, and take pictures together!

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5. Challenges: „Zoom fatigue" and what can we do about it

Zoom is to video conferencing what *Google* is for web search, so *Zoom fatigue* widely refers to **fatigue and exhaustion from participating in video conference calls with any platform**.

It is a form of burnout. The **most common symptoms include** feelings of exhaustion and/or burnout, anxiety, depression, anger, forgetfulness, lack of motivation, frustration, irritability, social detachment, pessimism, insomnia, headaches, low productivity, and physical symptoms (pain, muscle tension, etc.). **It impacts women more than men** and depends on the frequency and length of video interaction and the time between them.

Here are five tips on mitigating the *Zoom fatigue effect*:

1. **Reduce the size of the window**. Excessive amount of close-up eye contact is not a usual way we interact and usually signals intimate or dangerous situations with others. Don't use full-screen options, and create a space to the length of your arm between yourself and the screen to reduce the cortisol-inducing closeness.

2. **Make „Camera off" an option**. When not necessary, let yourself and your learners shut the camera off. It gives your mind and body a chance to recuperate, and you can use turning the camera on and off to significant effect!

3. **Hide your self-view**. While it can be fun and help you hold yourself to a higher standard, it also drains you of energy. Constant self-monitoring also takes your attention from the topic and learners!

4. **Take breaks**. Take care to introduce breaks into your sessions. While taking the break, it is essential to shut the camera off and take the effort to bodily face away from the screen!

5. **Use Zoom for fun**. Use them for fun activities to weaken the link between video conferencing tools and stressful situations. Meet your friends and family online, hold gaming sessions, and watch a movie with someone in real-time.

6. Questions for reflection

1. *Think about content that attracts your attention online. Can you use it to enhance your learning program?*

2. *What would be the most effective energizers for waking up your learners after a long break?*

3. *How could you include your favourite energizer in asynchronous education?*

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