

ALWAYS, SOMETIMES, OR NEVER TRUE: DISCUSSION GUIDE

As the facilitator, your role is to guide the discussion around the categorization of these statements. As there may be varied responses for each of these statements, this guide provides some research and conversation stems for each of the statements in the lesson.

“Always, Sometimes, or Never True” Statements

1. **Student engagement describes a student's willingness to attend and participate in class, to submit required work, and to follow directions.**

This statement may appear in “always” or “sometimes” categories of your groups. This statement does describe what a student may look like if they are behaviorally engaged. However, one important point is that just because students are not disruptive does not always mean they are cognitively or emotionally engaged in learning or school. Obedience or compliance can often be conflated with engagement. This is a good statement to return to after learners have read the research on different types of engagement. As a facilitator, you could guide learners to think about the differences in engagement and what other clues would be needed to know if students were truly engaged in learning and school in addition to non-disruptive behavior, such as a love of learning, positive academic outcomes, and participation in activities and school events.

2. **A supportive environment with the inclusion of different learning approaches will increase student engagement.**

This statement may appear in the “always” or “sometimes” categories. Learners may cite learning styles or student-centered learning as evidence of the truth of this statement. While research shows that students may be more cognitively engaged during some learning activities than others, it is also important to understand that merely offering different learning approaches does not improve student engagement. There are a number of factors that influence the effectiveness of a learning approach. As a facilitator, when you return to these statements at the end of the lesson, you may want to draw connections to classroom culture, teacher-student relationships, and effective implementation of learning approaches as possible influences on whether this statement is always, sometimes, or never true.

3. Students who feel like they can trust their teacher learn more from them.

See research and conversation stems for this statement after #4.

4. Students don't learn from people they don't like.

Statements #3 and #4 are both related to teacher-student relationships. Research shows that teacher-student relationships are among the most important factors in student engagement, and trust is a major factor in building relationships. These statements may also be put in the “always” or “sometimes” category by the learners. Learners may call attention to nuances in the words “trust” and “like,” and learners may even put #4 in the “never” category based on the word “like.” As a facilitator, you can lead a discussion on the difference and similarities between “trust” and “like” and how those can influence a student’s engagement with school and learning. When you return to these statements at the end of lesson, you can lead learners through a discussion of how their understandings of those terms may have changed and how these two statements are linked to emotional and affective engagement.

5. Engaged students work harder.

Learners may categorize this statement as “always” or “sometimes” true. One major misconception about engagement is that students who are visibly compliant are more engaged. As a facilitator, you may lead a discussion on what “working harder” looks like and how working hard may or may not relate to learning or enjoying school. When you return to this statement at the end of the lesson, you may discuss what kind of engagement working hard is (behavioral) and how that type of engagement does not always mean students are having positive outcomes or are affectively or emotionally engaged in school.

6. Involvement in extracurricular activities yields higher engagement in academics/school.

Another common misconception about engagement is that if students are engaged in something such as a club or a sport, they will have more positive outcomes in school. For this reason, learners may place this statement in the “always” or “sometimes” categories. While research does show that extracurricular activities can improve engagement for some students, this is not universally true for all students, and performance in extracurriculars does not always equate to performance in academics. When you return to this statement at the end of the lesson, this may be an appropriate place to start a conversation about how involvement in extracurriculars (behavioral and emotional engagement) can be combined with how students feel about themselves (affective) and learning in the classroom (cognitive) to improve overall outcomes. It may also be appropriate to have a conversation about the many ways students can be engaged in school.

7. Engagement in schooling is the same as engagement in learning.

This statement may be placed in the “always,” “sometimes,” or “never” category, depending on how individuals or groups define schooling and learning. As a facilitator, it may be a worthwhile conversation to discuss the definitions of the two terms and how they are related during the Engage session at the beginning of the lesson. While your district or school may create its own definitions based on your context, you could define schooling as “the formal processes of education including instruction,” and learning as “the acquisition of knowledge or skills.” When you return to the statement at the end of the lesson, you may lead the team through a discussion of how engagement levels can differ in the larger school environment and within each classroom.

8. Teacher-student relationships are the number one contributor to student engagement.

This statement is closely related to #3 and #4. While #3 and #4 focus on trust and likability, this statement focuses on relationships. Research has repeatedly shown that teacher-student relationships are one of the most important factors in student engagement. Research has also shown that strong, positive relationships with teachers can mitigate more negative relationships with other teachers. When you return to this statement at the end of the lesson, it may be appropriate to discuss how teacher-student relationships are related to each of the four types of engagement. You could use the strategies at the end of the research brief to start conversations on how teachers can work on relationship building and supporting students in all four areas of engagement.

9. Group discussions increase participation.

This statement is related to statement #2. Learners may group this statement in the “always” or “sometimes” categories. During the Engage session, it may be appropriate to facilitate a discussion about the term “participation” and how it relates to “engagement.” You may ask guiding questions such as, “Are participation and engagement the same thing?” or “Can a student participate and still be disengaged from learning? From schooling?” It may also be appropriate to discuss how the effectiveness of learning strategies, such as group discussion, are impacted by a number of factors, and how implementation, culture, relationships, etc. can all play a role in how they meet their learning objective. If you discuss the difference between participation and engagement in the Engage phase of the session, you may return to that definition at the end of the lesson and discuss any changes that may need to be made.