

Strategy 5: Understand how teachers create outcomes

We came across Hattie's (2012) description of teachers as *activators* and liked this concept very much. If your yoga or workout instructors are anything like ours, they are always telling us to “engage your core” or, in other words, tell your stomach muscles it is time to think about getting to work or become an active participant in a position. Highly effective workouts are built from warm-ups that prepare us for what is to come: stretch, engage (turn on targeted areas), and activate (recruit more muscles). They say activation exercises can maximize workouts and prepare your muscles for challenging work ahead—sounds exactly like steps we would take for getting brains ready for learning each day.

Then, we encountered Fullan's concept of teachers as *cultivators*, which we equally loved. This evoked related images in that cultivation ensures that the soil is ready for new seed, maximizing the opportunity for growth, along with visions of tending to the seedling as it grows. Your job as observers, through comprehensive evidence collection and feedback about impact, is to help teachers understand how they are (or can be) serving as cultivators and activators of learners.

Recognizing Impact on Learning

As you think about how the brain works, you are already headed down the path of pondering cause-and-effect relationships and how teaching practices impact a learner's ability to learn. We mentioned social-emotional learning, but we know developing brains are significantly impacted when Maslow's (1943) basic safety and physiological needs are not being met. “Very high levels of stress over time are damaging and can impair cognition” (Jensen, 2005, p. 74), and “stress does impair verbal and working memory” (Jensen, 2005, citing Lupien, Gillin, & Hauger, 1999). We want to acknowledge that we are well aware of the challenges students face in their lives every day that are not within the control of a teacher, coach, or leader.

We want to acknowledge the extraordinary emotional, psychological, and physical means educators use to best support students in varying levels of trauma—and how much more frequent this need is becoming. It is important to remember to take care of yourselves (another book, for another day). Remember though, school may be the only place a student can feel safe and successful—things we can control through our classroom environments and instructional choices. Therefore, for our purposes in this book, we want to focus on those things within our control in our classrooms.

Danielson (2016) cites Glasser, Deci, and White, among others, who identify additional psychological needs that need to be met in classrooms (think of the belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs from Maslow). Teachers' choices and actions directly impact how students experience the following:

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT LEARNING?

- Belonging and making connections with others
- Competence or mastery: “Part of the satisfaction is the struggle itself: If it’s too easy, if there is no challenge, the result is cheapened. Mastery of complex content, then, represents *power*.”
- Autonomy or freedom
- Intellectual challenge (pp. 38–39)

The Chicken or the Egg

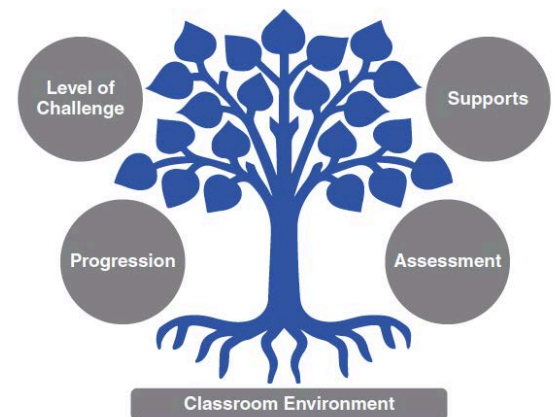
When it comes to what impacts our learners, figuring out what causes specific outcomes reminds us of the chicken-or-the-egg dilemma—which comes first? For learners to become empowered, we need to challenge them to think deeply, but they need to feel empowered to persevere and work through a challenge. Our challenges need to include collaboration, but for collaboration to occur, students need to know how to make connections with each other and feel safe doing so. No wonder teachers feel overwhelmed!

Determining Causal Attribution

As we make the shift to observing and providing feedback with attention to teaching *and* learning, the analysis and focus need to remain on how the teacher is impacting or causing the outcomes. The goal is to help teachers see the causal attributes as strengths and areas of growth through our feedback. We know from Bandura that this is the source of self-efficacy and can lead to increased levels of collective teacher efficacy.

So far in this chapter, you have encountered several factors that impact learners, and we know there are plenty of things we encounter every day that are not in our control. But to help teachers more clearly see what is within their control, we organized instructional practices into categories, or five focus areas, that impact engagement and learning (Figure 2.8), introduced in *Feedback to Feed Forward*. As you move through each one, think about what the related teaching and learning look and sound like in a classroom and how teacher choices within each area could potentially impact students. Heading into observations, thinking about factors that influence learners and their inter-connectedness better prepares you for evidence collection, which, in turn, will help you determine how the teacher impacted engagement and learning while you visited.

FIGURE 2.8: FIVE FOCUS AREAS



Source: Tepper and Flynn, LLC.