

Abstract

There is a general agreement that engagement in learning is important for success in school. School engagement refers to the students' level of connectedness, involvement, and commitment to school, as well as to learn and achieve (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Student engagement is found to be a robust predictor of student achievement and behaviour in schools. Students who are engaged and connected to their schools demonstrate increased academic achievement (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Disposition for student engagement is a process that results from the interaction between individual and contextual factors, specifically the classroom environment (Lawson & Lawson, 2013) and school characteristics help in creating positive experiences of school from the teachers and managing staff. Current studies drawn upon by Lawson and Lawson (SE) (2013) and Florian (IP) (2015) have demonstrated the importance of student engagement on outcomes for mainstream students. However, empirical evidence as to whether student engagement promotes inclusive practices in the classroom is limited. The present study hopes to contribute to filling this gap. Providing a good fit between individual and contextual characteristics is a challenge that schools face for all learners, specifically when considering a minimising of learner barriers. To some extent engagement in learning may be an inherent trait. However, engagement can be promoted e.g. by using inclusive pedagogical strategies that enhance student engagement (Florian, 2013; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Students must be fully engaged in school and classroom activities – both behaviourally and emotionally - to reap the full benefits of inclusive education. This study uses data from six South African school contexts situated in Johannesburg to investigate empirically the classroom practices of Foundation Phase teachers' to promote student engagement as an inclusive pedagogy. The findings of this study identified that the teachers were able to draw on theory regarding inclusive pedagogy that was learnt during their Honours year, but most drew on aspects from their experience of being in the classroom and knowing their learners to promote student engagement as a tool to support inclusive pedagogy. The participants were able to reflect on how they applied their understanding of the concepts of student engagement and inclusion in their teaching. The findings indicate a need for further research in the

area of student engagement and the promotion of inclusive pedagogy.