Illustrations of Engagement Styles: 
Four Teacher Candidates

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ABSTRACT: The inherent complexity of preparing future teachers and the associated high stakes upon graduation continue to motivate educators to examine how best to engage teacher candidates as students so that they will be skilled and adaptable once they become teachers. To this end, a new conceptualization of engagement styles is presented and illustrated in four case studies. Information about engagement styles is important because it provides the individual with a context with which to self-monitor one's responses to distinct social–cognitive expectations. This article begins with a brief description of the literature pertaining to the development of engagement styles, which are identifiable as an assessed product of the LIBRE model problem-solving activity. Included is a discussion of the implications of the use of the LIBRE model for the preparation of future teachers, with explicit attention to the relationship to teacher identity development and how self-monitored engagement styles can assist novice teachers in the classroom.

Educators understand the importance of engagement in relation to teacher development. It is often this person-centered and contextually influenced attentiveness and engagement that teacher candidates practice as students that sustain their transition and ultimate success as novice teachers. Engagement has been defined as active, goal-directed, flexible, constructive, persistent, focused interaction with either physical or social environments (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Demonstrated within this article are four case studies drawn from a larger research project to address the notion that individuals possess one of four foundational engagement styles that operate more or less independently of context and as a means of receiving and processing information. Engagement styles affect teacher candidates first as students, with their teacher identity development, and then as teachers in the context of the classroom (Guerra, 2006a).

Personal engagement style develops as other behaviors do, as a result of social experience, and it is integral to one's sense of self as he or she learns how to attend and respond to the environment—home, school, and larger context (Guerra, 2004). The principal effect of these contexts is to orient individuals to one set of phenomena rather than another. For example, persons working
from one engagement style are likely to seek active involvement in as much environmental stimulation as is possible: actual engagement. Others with a different style focus on only the specifics of a particular task or import or interest: goal-focused engagement. A third style is one's comfort with observation rather than participation: potential engagement. The fourth engagement style is based on a strong initial attentiveness to the environment (self in context) that is not sustained toward action or change: venting engagement.

People can move from one engagement style to another; however, their preparation, self-awareness, and experienced consequences influence the skill and ease of transition from one style to another. Whether expected or unexpected, it is as persons experience the challenge and change of environment with similar but different social contextualized cues that self-awareness (or nonawareness) of personal engagement style facilitates and protects enabling adaptive adjustments—or the reverse. Engagement styles are experientially constructed “base operating systems” that predispose to particular organization and filtering of information. Individuals who have developed alternative engagement styles and have sufficient self-awareness can learn to use these distinct engagement styles as needed.

Teacher candidates’ use of engagement styles can be observed through the nature and processing of assignments and challenges. For instance, performance-oriented students (i.e., with the goal-focused engagement style) desire to know and understand assignment details and due dates with the first class contact. They are likely to manage personal concerns in the same fashion. Students with actual engagement want, along with the assignments, the investment of discussion and background information as shared by teachers and peers. In reference to personal concerns, they clearly articulate all issues with the surrounding details associated with each apprehension (Guerra, Flores, & Claeys, 2009). For the less experienced or self-aware student, a passive environmental filtering (i.e., potential engagement style) serves them well; they approach personal concern with this same distancing. The student with venting engagement, however, finds it difficult to sustain interest; with personal concerns, this person will listen but not be inclined to act. Thus, the four present case studies based on engagement styles offer examples of the varied patterns of initial and sustained attention (Guerra, 2004, 2006a) assessed from a structured problem-solving dialogue: the LIBRE model. The intention in exploring these stylistic engagements is to demonstrate assistance to self-development and as an extension to better teaching.

**Theoretical Framework**

Self-efficacy research has contributed to the understanding of changes in engagement. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) explained that as persons
become self-aware and skilled, their academic performance and subsequent engagement—namely, their willingness to persist—increase. Individuals with a strong self-efficacy are more willing to shift engagement approaches in response to external demands. Early inquiry results related to individual problem solving suggested discernable engagement approaches as fairly stable and comfortable ways of dealing with the world (Guerra, 2004). Heppner (1988) and Heppner, Cook, Wright, and Johnson (1995) identified these consistencies as approach-avoidant coping and problem-solving patterns.

**Problem Solving as an Expression of Self**

The problem-solving task is an ideal context to examine differences in engagement. The problem-solving process involves multiple foci and application (or lack thereof) of the appropriate and relevant skill (J. R. Anderson, 1993; Chi, Feltovich, & Glaser, 1981). The component elements of problem solving involve skills and competencies necessary to recognize a problem and to define its parameters. In addition, problem solving involves commitment to a solution. It is reflective of behavioral and cognitive expression. One’s faith, fact, or beliefs are frequent elements in problem solving (Guerra, 2006a). In the counseling literature, congruency and self-congruency (i.e., remaining congruent and self-congruent) are terms used to describe how individuals approach and process identified problems. The language is intended to capture clients’ willingness to engage and participate in change. The problem-solving exchange allows for the identification of multiple types of attentiveness and, thus, engagement. As a context for this examination, self-congruent problem solving provides a framework for examining a person’s typical manner of attending, considering, adapting, and modifying—entry, midthought, and culmination.

Bandura (2006) explained that agentic self-process changes as a result of meaningful social-situational feedback to one’s activities, in combination with self-referent information that includes behavior and consequences. These visual and other sensory cues work together to describe agency as an interactive and evolving process of self-development. Bandura (1977, 1986, 2001) asserted that four core emergent properties contribute to an individual’s adaptability:

- **intentionality**—the formulation of plans and strategies to act;
- **forethought**—the development of goals and anticipated outcomes to guide and motivate;
- **self-reactiveness**—the self-regulated choices and actions appropriate for the execution of identified plans; and
He also indicated that the development and expression of self-identity involve the reciprocal interactions of person, behavior, and environment.

Ethnicity and culture have likewise been identified as contributors to identity formation (Flores, Clark, Sanchez, & Guerra, 2008). As demonstrated in a study involving teacher candidates, students' self-concepts and ethnic identities influence the development of teacher instructional efficacy (Flores, Desjean-Perrotta, & Steinmetz, 2004). As individuals develop greater self-managed skills, or self-efficacy, they experience greater confidence in themselves. They become less constrained by social experience and prior preparation, which allows them to be more actively involved in determining their behavior and less dependent on habit and conditioning, such as tradition. That this capability exists does not require persons to use it; however, it does offer a greater probability of self-actualization (Maslow, 1998).

To synthesize, the way that teacher candidates appear to learn is related to their strategy formation and management in attending to information and to self (efficacy and awareness). To learn, an individual must be able to determine what is important and to sustain the attention needed to acquire the new knowledge. Furthermore, the extent to which a person is self-aware is related to one's greater likelihood of maintaining attention to acquire the new knowledge. Shifts in engagement styles may conceivably facilitate how the student enters into a situation and the level of sustained attention and management.

Maslow (1998) examined self-identity in terms of meeting needs. He theorized that human needs can be arranged in a hierarchy. A person's success at meeting these needs is important to the ultimate realization of self-potential. Considered from the perspective of personal development previously presented, it seems clear that the manner in which a person engages the environment will be influenced by context but not necessarily determined by it. Thus, the nature of engagement will be predicated both on previous experience and on consistency with personal identity, which results in one's strong tendency to approach situations in more or less the same way, shifting approach only when the awareness of need is identified and when it is possible to do so. This experience, and the resulting identity development, influences engagement in that it predisposes individuals to attend differently to various phenomena, based on which needs they are attempting to meet. Maslow asserted that self-actualization is the level of personal awareness of self and opportunity; it is the facility to intentionally shift between altruism and selfishness, and it is with this fluid self-regulated strategic use of personal resources that time, energy, and investment are managed.

To further explain the characteristics of engagement styles, the precursor of attention must be examined. Attention can be understood in terms of the degree of allocation of cognitive capacity (R. C. Anderson, 1982; Palmer, Stowe, & Kueker, 1985). An information-processing perspective defines attention as a prerequisite for entry of information into the cognitive processing system (Schunk, 2004). Attention as an element of engagement is simi-
larly influenced and developed as a matter of experience and identity. Carver and scheier (1981) proposed that differences among individuals’ attentions serve as determinants of perception and, therefore, of constructed reality. This makes sense from the perspective that the tendency to attend to one point rather than to another is based on fundamental values and needs. From this perspective, it is clear that identity and experience play a significant role in orientation to particular stimuli and the manner of engagement. In subsequent research, Carver and scheier (2000) asserted that individual attentiveness ultimately affects self-regulation and the willingness to act. A person develops patterns, or loops, that are self-maintained. These behaviors have a social context, thereby suggesting the importance of social–cognitive considerations. The previously mentioned notion of triadic reciprocity among person, environment, and behavior provides a parallel lens in understanding why persons attend as they do. What is suggested is the role of self in engagement and subsequent congruence in the management of expression.

Paris, Byrnes, and Paris (2001) contended that levels of participation, perhaps analogous to engagement style, are related to differences in identity, values, and expectations. The individual acts, and is acted upon, in any behavioral situation. The individual operates on the basis of personal perception (i.e., interpretation of the task as contextualized in an environment, with associated values and expectations) such that consequent learning or experience influences the tendency to attend. Therefore, differences in a person’s willingness to attend and prioritize certain aspects of problem solving rather than others can provide important information about the “person in place” in terms of approach avoidance, persistence, resolution plan, criteria, locus of control, and likelihood of action. All these elements result from the influence of prior experience and identity. If this is so, examination of the manner in which attention is engaged for particular purposes, such as problem solving, can suggest significant insights into the individual’s level of self-awareness and willingness to apply skills. Because these self-elements are within a person’s identity and have been honed over time, the probability of their application to an event is automatic. These predispositions or tendencies to respond in a certain way are the consequences of time, experience, and values (Guerra, 2007).

Subsequently, attention maintained over an extended period is generally identified as self-regulation, which is associated with control: the ability to self-manage, self-direct, and self-maintain sustained motivation toward achievement of a predetermined objective (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004). Self-regulation includes self-investment in achieving a goal, as exemplified by the nature and extent of efforts to overcome interfering obstacles (Wright & Brehm, 1989) involving cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains. Self-regulation is process-oriented self-control, which integrates emotionality, compliance, moral development, and social competence (Eisenberg, Smith, Sadovsky, & Spinrad, 2004), as derived from experience. Self-regulation
contributes to and results from the individual's sense of identity. From this integrated connection, the self-aware individual sustains attention as monitored self-regulation to process the additional element of cognitive-operational skill, particularly as it relates to the task at hand. In practice, self-regulation can be observed in the way that tasks such as problem resolution are approached and in the level of motivation, sustained investment, and attention that the person extends to the task's characteristics and demands.

Self-regulation is learned (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001) but is very much an aspect of self-dependence. It contributes to a sense of efficacy, competence, and confidence. Carver and Scheier (1981, 2000) and Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) described self-regulation as cyclical feedback loops of past performance related to current performance that enable self-congruence to be maintained. These feedback loops operate independently of physiological responses. To further support this concept in application to identity formation is the notion that feedback loops appear to depend on perception, resulting in behavioral consistency. Individuals operate in patterns that correspond to their beliefs and values. Individuals self-regulate on the basis of not only real knowledge but also perceived knowledge, which suggests that in any given situation, a person will behave in ways that are personally, socially, and situationally in expected, triadic reciprocation.

In the research literature, only minimal information is available regarding attention and engagement in problem-solving context situations among teachers or teacher candidates. Pintrich and Garcia (1991) reported that teacher candidates can be differentiated through strategy use. Manning and Payne (1993), employing Vygotsky's zone of proximal development as their theoretical framework, suggested that self-talk is a better means to understand the metacognitive and thought processes of teacher candidates. Finally, Corno and Randi (1999) identified problem solving as one of 10 learner-rich environments for teaching self-regulation to teacher candidates.

In examining problem-solving tasks, Swanson, O'Connor, and Cooney (1990) compared novice and expert teachers and found that formally structured problem solving compromised the problem-solving efficiency of expert teachers but not that of novice teachers—namely, because expert teachers have sufficient experience or a sufficiently strong social-cognitive framework to be able to rely on social context and individual behavioral cues and thus respond rapidly and proficiently. Experienced teachers assess, evaluate, predict, and decide; in contrast, novice teachers lack these social-cognitive frameworks.

Ball and Cohen (1999) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993), among others, have demonstrated the importance of problem-solving skills as part of teachers' professional growth. 'Teachers' adaptive and routine expertise have been studied from various problem-solving contents and contexts to better understand the developmental patterns associated with learning how to be more efficient (Ball & Bass, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Wineburg, 1998). However, Chi (2006) and Wineburg (1998) suggested that
the application of adaptive expertise in problem solving can be attributed to difference in what is experienced or learned. Routine expertise involves the application of existing knowledge and skill in problem solving, whereas adaptive expertise results in the construction of new knowledge as a result of problem solving (Crawford, 2007). What is of interest here is that problem-solving expertise is not necessarily limited to experienced teachers; rather, it can occur during, and it can contribute to, the development of expertise at any point of a teacher’s professional career, from preparation to practice (Crawford & Brophy, 2006; Hatano & Oura, 2003).

Patel, Glaser, and Arocha (2000) asserted that increased levels of competence result in increased internalized self-regulation. This assertion is important because it suggests that mechanisms free cognitive capacity and enable knowledge construction (i.e., competence in combination with self-awareness to be able to produce adaptive expertise rather than mere routine expertise). My previously reported clinical work (Guerra, 2006b; Guerra, Flores & Claeys, 2009) with the LIBRE problem-solving model demonstrated an increase in participants’ levels of self-awareness that resulted in more effective self-regulated decision making.

Bandura (2006) explained that individuals are not onlookers or products of their behavior; rather, they contribute to their own circumstance. However, not all individuals invest at the same level or in the same way regardless of situation, condition, or circumstance. This is evidenced within the LIBRE model (Guerra, 2001) by a consideration of differing degrees and intensities of attention, a critical determinant of self-regulated engagement. Initial and sustained attention is the result of self-regulation, as influenced by experience in pursuing some end. Successful application of attention in problem solving depends on personal self-awareness. For instance, a person who is accustomed to identifying problems so that someone else may solve them will more than likely be attentive in only the identification of the problem. Different levels of experience and skill in relation to self will influence how the person approaches and sustains attention to the identified problem. Over time, successful problem solvers develop a personal understanding of their typical approach to dealing with problems (i.e., self-awareness). As a result, they can more easily adjust to choosing less obvious approaches that are nonetheless more appropriate to a given situation. The observed behavior of a self-aware individual using adaptive expertise is likely to be more reflective and participatory than that of a person using routine expertise, who is not self-aware and who responds with automatic behavior based on earlier experiences. In examining engagement styles, viewing the self in context with the environment and with learned and conditioned experiences offers component information about the person and how the person attends in both the short term and the long. As a structured problem-solving approach, the LIBRE model offers an ideal context for the examination of teacher candidates’ individual engagement preferences and attentiveness to self and environment (Guerra, 2004).
The LIBRE Model

The LIBRE model is a structured and facilitated problem-solving approach. LIBRE derives its name from an acronym, with letters that operate as prompts for the process:

L: Listen and list challenges you are experiencing.
I: Identify your focus.
B: Brainstorm options.
R: Reality test by writing possible action responses.
E: Encourage the development of a personalized best plan to solve the identified concern.

Both in general application and in these interviews, open-ended questions assist participants in identifying and exploring self-motivating issues or concerns. From among these, participants select the one concern that they most want to explore. The participants then generate and evaluate options and develop a plan of action (Guerra, 2001). The notion of self-regulated interviews is an adaptation of research by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1988) in which they presented a self-regulation strategy model involving 14 skills found to be generalizable across six context areas. Although their population was younger (high school students), the undergraduate teacher candidates in the present, structured interviews were not much older. As based on clinical work, the use of strategy and non-self-regulated responses in the present study is similar to that of the sample identified in the Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons study.

The resulting information patterns and attention processes identified with the completion of the LIBRE model activity led to the rubric used with the identification and assessment of engagement styles. The recognizable patterns that emerged were as follows: individuals who began the activity motivated and engaged but when it came time to actually develop a resolution plan, they were not interested; individuals who, in similar fashion, began the initial exchange enthusiastically but sustained that level of enthusiasm to the close of the session; individuals who were not invested and who participated more in compliance than investment; and those who were not interested until they identified a concern of interest, at which point they became motivated to develop a solution to the identified concern. The goal became the impetus from which the individual’s investment shifted and continued to the point of developing an action plan to resolve the identified concern (Guerra, 2006a).

Early work with the LIBRE model focused on providing a mechanism for guided problem resolution as well as a technique through which to develop self-directed problem-solving skills (Guerra, 2004). Preliminary clinical results suggest its usefulness as an intervention and as an assessment tool (Guerra, 2005). However, differences in how the activity was approached were noted. The LIBRE process was facilitated by the LIBRE stick figure
tool, developed as a facilitator protocol and a participant graphic organizer and record form for the LIBRE model activity (Guerra, 2004). Clinical experience suggests that the form is useful for recording indications of participant self-regulated attention; initial entry into the problem-solving activity; management of the problem-solving process; and sustained attentiveness to the close of the activity with the development of a resolution plan.

Case Study

Case studies offer a rich source of in-depth data (Stake, 1994) and provide information gathered over a period to best illustrate distinctions in individual engagement styles. Triangulation of data ensured trustworthiness of the results. The LIBRE model was used to provide a problem-solving activity from which the engagement styles were assessed. Four undergraduate teacher candidates were recruited from an educational psychology undergraduate class offered at a Southwestern regional metropolitan university serving a predominately Hispanic population. Participants were upper-division undergraduate education majors and included three Mexican Americans and one Caucasian, each of whom was invited to participate in these interviews, which occurred in conjunction with their educational psychology class. The findings illustrate four distinct engagement styles. Engagement styles assessments were not the focus here but rather the distinctions found in initial and sustained attentiveness; additional detail to the actual assessment of engagement styles is available (Guerra, 2004, 2006a, 2007, 2009). Pseudonyms are used to protect identities.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to illustrate distinct engagement styles in relation to teacher identity development and as a teacher resource. As previously mentioned, engagement styles provide information about how individuals receive and process their social contexts.

Engagement Style

Engagement style identification that was applied earlier in a clinical study was found to be useful in identifying how individuals attend to self, what they identify as challenges, and how they frame these challenges. Identified approach distinctions found in the LIBRE model problem-solving activity included attention preferences, self-regulatory skills, willingness to process, willingness to develop an action plan, creative adaptability, and the categories of concerns experienced. Social–cognitive context information was
determined by language and items identified. The LIBRE model became the conduit for this assessment. This process supports individual strength-based experiences and skills.

**Engagement Style Representations**

Engagement styles emerge as a combined expression of self-regulatory attentiveness to a concern that is self-defined and demonstrated as personal preferences in initial and sustained attention. Engagement styles are assessed through systematic examination of the quantity and quality of response to a structured problem-solving dialogue with the LIBRE model and LIBRE stick figure tool. Engagement styles occur as one of four identifiable approaches: potential, venting, goal focused, and actual engagement.

The styles are described as follows and include case study illustrations of what each can look like within an academic interview.

*Potential engagement style.* Observed as uninterested, Ana, a Mexican American female, participates in the problem-solving activity; however, her investment is minimal and may be characterized as compliant. As Ana enters the problem-solving activity, presented challenges are vague and nonspecific and, in some cases, represent concerns outside her control. When she is invited to identify an important concern, the challenge is presented as a compound statement or stated as a complex problem. Although options may be offered to address the concern, they are again general and nonspecific so that as a plan is developed, the plan may be no more than a repetition of previous statements. Ana begins with minimal interest that she carried through to the close of the interview:

**Interviewer:** Thanks again for coming in. To begin, why don’t you tell me what is going on; any challenges that you are experiencing?

**Teacher candidate:** Well, I’m moving, and then there is school... graduation, my upcoming wedding and work.

**Interviewer:** Anything else?

**Teacher candidate:** Bills.

**Interviewer:** OK, what I heard you say is that you are moving, getting ready for graduation, you have an upcoming wedding, work, and bills. Do you have any other concerns? [*When the participant indicates no, the interviewer continues.*] Now I’d like you to identify one concern that you would like to discuss and let’s write that item as a question.

**Teacher candidate:** How fast can I get it done?

**Interviewer:** Let’s brainstorm some realistic and unrealistic options to resolving your identified concern. What are some ways to get it done?
Teacher candidate: (1) Take more classes per semester; (2) summer classes; (3) test out of classes. I think that is about it.

Interviewer: Are there any items that you would like to eliminate that are not really something that you would do? [Teacher candidate shakes her head no.] If you were to reality test the possibility of your actually following through your identified items, what would each look like? Let’s start with the first option generated and work though the others. What would it look like if you did go through with this option [pointing to the first item listed]?

Teacher candidate: Just add or take two more classes; take four classes or depending on the loan see what I qualify for getting as credit.

Interviewer: What steps do you see as your best solution to the problem you identified?

Teacher candidate: Talk to the Financial Aid people; working it in with work; seeing what classes are available; and I could sign up for more classes if I need to.

Interviewer: So what additional detail is required for you to complete your plan for example—what are your timelines?

Teacher candidate: If I were able to finish quicker, I’d take off school and be able to work faster and make more money so it would be less of an issue.

Interviewer: Do you have a word of encouragement that you would like to offer yourself?

Teacher candidate: No, nothing right now.

From this dialogue, it appears that Ana is not ready to identify a specific challenge. The question responses presented are vague and nondescript. Although Ana appears compliant, little investment was noted in terms of a specific goal and direction. This lack of commitment can be seen in the problem-identified: “How fast can I get it done?” Here we do not know what “it” is or how “it” will be achieved or measured once completed. For a teacher candidate student, there is the opportunity to begin teaching some specific self-check-in strategies. It would be important to observe the frequency of time that Ana selects to pull away from opportunities to participate. As an instructor, she may need to be encouraged to participate by assigning herself leadership roles. As feedback, Ana should be given the opportunity to reflect and explore self-development. If this engagement style is the only repertoire that Ana has, it is likely that she will assume this approach in the classroom as a teacher—and her predominate identified challenge will be that of classroom management.

*Venting engagement style*. The venting engagement style is demonstrated by storytelling attentiveness. When asked to list challenges, the respondent using
this style is enthusiastic, expressive, and often emotive. He or she may present numerous challenges—some realistic and specific, some vague or conceptual, and some outside his or her control. Victoria, a Mexican American female, seems invested in the problem-solving activity; however, when she is invited to identify a concern, the presented problem is general. General problems cannot be solved, because they are vague, abstract, or outside the individual’s control. Brainstorming consists of affect and cognitive venting and results in alternatives, which are generally unworkable for various reasons. Reality testing is minimal. When Victoria is invited to develop a plan of action, she fails to provide a plan. Instead, the suggestions offered are minimal, unrealistic, and too vague to be of any value to the problem’s resolution. Individuals with this type of engagement style may sometimes appear engaged, but a closer review of information provided clearly suggests that this person is venting, communicating affect and thought without action or the intention to act. Victoria’s interaction is as follows:

**Interviewer:** Thanks again for coming in. To begin why don’t you tell me what is going on; any challenges that you are experiencing?

**Teacher candidate:** Well, there is my health, getting to know someone, moving on from a breakup, tackling courses, getting a job, and dealing with my mother.

**Interviewer:** OK, what I hear you saying is that you have some concern with your health, getting to know someone, moving on from a breakup, tackling your coursework, getting a job, and concerns with your mother. Is there anything else?

In response to this second question, the teacher candidate continues to address the many concerns with mother and ex-boyfriend and offers details about the problems identified. However, she is not willing to address any specific concern. The dialogue does not move beyond this point—and at the close of the session the teacher candidate said, “Thanks for listening,” and left. As a teacher candidate, she will present herself as a team player; however, she will have difficulty with follow-through, a challenge that her peers will quickly identify. To teach Victoria to self-regulate, attention needs to be offered to sustained investment, with self-checks addressing strategies to set goals and manage change. As a novice teacher, this person interviews well and will likely be hired; however, as with the potential engagement style, this novice teacher will not be successful in classroom management, because the personal self-investment is not managed. If this is the individual’s only repertoire, the novice teacher will be much more comfortable complaining in the teachers’ lounge than teaching in the classroom.

**Goal-focused engagement style.** Felipe, a teacher candidate and Mexican American male, is observed being minimally invested from the onset of the
activity. In goal-focused engagement style, responses to the initial prompt are limited and may require significant effort and encouragement. Individuals with this engagement style generally appear not interested in participating in the activity. However, when he is prompted for a specific concern to work on, a notable change in attentiveness occurs. The identified problem is specific and consists of a single manageable concern within the person’s control. The level of demonstrated personal investment changes, as seen when Felipe offers numerous options during brainstorming. The individual typically appears to be creatively invested in exploring possible options and choices of action. Felipe’s reality-testing evidence is concrete, with detailed considerations of probable implications. His action plan is realistic, executable, and likely to succeed, and it includes timelines and measurable benchmarks.

Felipe’s response is as follows:

Interviewer: Thanks again for coming in. To begin why don’t you tell me what is going on; any challenges that you are experiencing?

Teacher candidate: I have only one item—my ex-girlfriend’s baby.

Interviewer: If we were to consider this concern as a question, what would that question be?

Teacher candidate: What am I going to do if the baby is mine?

Interviewer: Let’s brainstorm some realistic and unrealistic options to solving your identified concern.

Teacher candidate: I could help out with money and taking care by being in his life; be a part of his life; have a better relationship with my ex-girlfriend; get another job; hit the lottery; leave and I could take it slow.

Interviewer: Are there any items that you would eliminate that are not really something that you would do?

Teacher candidate: Yeah, I’m not going to hit the lottery or leave; I won’t leave.

Interviewer: If we were to reality test the possibility of your actually following through your identified items, what would they look like? Let’s start and work through each. What it looks like if you did . . .

Teacher candidate: Well, I will be getting another friend; we were really good friends, talked a lot. It would be for the baby. I’d be a dad; I guess it will be fun, probably be hard sometimes. A lot of work, but I’d be there and learn a lot. I’d need to get a part-time job.

Interviewer: What steps do you see as your best solution to the problem you identified?
**Teacher candidate:** (1) Tell my family; (2) talk to her more and communicate more; (3) get to know him; (4) help out with everything or anything they need; (5) look for another job; (6) try to find a way to stay in school; (7) I'd be a part of his life and be a father with a son.

**Interviewer:** So what additional detail is required for you to complete your plan? For example—what are your timelines?

**Teacher candidate:** (1) First I need to find out pretty soon; (2) as soon as I find out, I need to tell my family and this will probably be in 2 weeks. (3) Starting slow, I need to get to know him, being around; (4) helping out with what they need; (5) looking for another job might take awhile; (6) I need to figure something out for school—right away. (7) It will take awhile before we are father and son.

**Interviewer:** Do you have a word of encouragement that you would like to offer yourself?

**Teacher candidate:** Don’t panic.

Felipe has only one item on his mind, and this one concern is the area in which he is invested and willing to process. He shares his thoughts and action plans, offering a positive encouraging word to assist himself with his perseverance. As a teacher candidate student, he is likely to be a high achiever and valued participant in the classroom. His teachers will see him as a conscientious student. As a novice teacher, he will do whatever needs to be done to accomplish his defined task, and with support he will likely adapt and be successful. Other engagement styles are important in assisting this student because he may be frustrated with those students of other styles and those who do not share his goal-focused passion.

**Actual engagement style.** Actual engagement style is the classic example of engagement. When invited to reflect and list current challenges, individuals with actual engagement style are quick to respond and offer numerous realistic items that are identifiable within a self-stated context. The problem is specifically stated and has a single focus that becomes the goal for the activity. This was exemplified by Lucy, a Caucasian female, in the next case study. The identified challenge is within control and is manageable in terms of resolution. Brainstorming and reality testing are diverse in creative thought and are expressive in implications, should any particular options be developed toward resolution. There is an open willingness to explore what it would look like if acted upon. By the close of the activity, a detailed workable plan with timelines is developed. Lucy’s responses illustrate her actual engagement style:

**Interviewer:** Thanks again for coming in. To begin why don’t you tell me what is going on; any challenges that you are experiencing?
Teacher candidate: Well, I was diagnosed with skin cancer; my brother's wife was killed by a drunk driver; school; family; work; time management; retake courses to bring up my GPA.

Interviewer: If you were to consider any one concern as a question, what would that question be?

Teacher candidate: What should I do about my class?

Interviewer: Let's brainstorm some realistic and unrealistic options to solving your identified concern.

Teacher candidate: Talk to the professor about extra credit; tape-record class; get a 100 on two remaining exams; drop class; get Bs or higher on remaining exams/work; put more time into studying; tutoring; get a note taker.

Interviewer: Are there any items that you would eliminate that are not really something that you would do?

Teacher candidate: Yes, getting a 100 on the remaining exams and tutoring.

Interviewer: If we were to reality test the possibility of your actually following through your identified items, let's start and work though each to explore what that would look like.

Teacher candidate: Go to the professor's office; discuss the situation with him; I could drop the class as a last resort. I could study in a quiet room; organize with books, note cards, and notes. I could go to disability services to discuss possibilities of getting a note taker.

Interviewer: What steps do you see as your best solution to the problem you identified?

Teacher candidate: (1) Get thoughts organized—write down exactly what I need to do and develop a plan; (2) have someone read over my plan to see if it is doable; (3) have someone read my notes out loud so I can tape-record them and listen to them.

Interviewer: So what additional detail is required for you to complete your plan? For example, what are your timelines?

Teacher candidate: (1) By next class go talk to the professor and (2) by the end of next week, make a decision about dropping the class.

Interviewer: Do you have a word of encouragement that you would like to offer yourself?

Teacher candidate: Try.

Here Lucy is as specific as she can be about her identified challenge. Lucy remains invested from the beginning to the end of the interaction, developing
several options and timelines for the resolution of her identified challenge. This engagement style is generally used to define the perfect student: wanting to learn for the sake of learning and unlimited in willingness to invest. The challenge Lucy experiences as a student in self-development is self-monitoring but not from the point of underinvestment, as with the potential engagement style, but rather overinvestment. She is so inclined to continue to bring in and process new information that it is sometimes difficult to stop and say Enough! As a teacher, she is likely to go the extra mile; however, because of the continued desire to process “everything,” her performance may look scattered. It is important for her to have other repertoires to assist with self-development and management.

**Summary and Implications**

These four distinct responses to the same stimulus support the notion that there may be gradient levels of engagement. Although some respondents begin enthusiastically, their levels of attention wane in processing the self-identified challenge; others begin slow but shift once their challenge is identified. Incorporating an assessment of problem-solving styles to identify distinct engagement offers potential insights that may be used to support approaches to instructional communication (see Table 1). Information is first provided here as strategies in how best to present instruction to each of the four teacher candidate engagement styles as they learn to attend to self as self-development, then as opportunity to explore how best to provide instruction to others with similar or different engagement styles.

In extension, identifying attention patterns can be used to better tailor the students’ preparatory curriculum in self-development and as novice teachers. Once attention patterns are identified, engagement style instruction can be provided in accordance to preferred styles and then as extension as others may prefer to receive instruction.

Advantages include better communication with the students using their identified preference in engagement style. Instead of the students’ having to adjust to the instructor’s engagement style, the students’ styles are acknowledged and incorporated into the lesson, thereby establishing rapport and facilitating the processing of instruction and information. For example, students with goal-focused engagement styles will want the lesson to be presented around the goal; therefore, it will build on their identified preferences.

This provides a way to instruct teacher candidates in how to engage their future students using engagement styles. Rather than focus on the students’ differences in terms of deficiencies, the recognition of different engagement styles values students’ preferences in processing new information. In terms of self-identity development, a consideration of individual engagement styles may help structure the class-based social–cognitive exchange between
Table 1. Teaching to Identified Engagement Styles

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<tr>
<th>Overview</th>
<th>Initial Attention</th>
<th>Sustained Attention</th>
<th>Summary/Closing</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Potential engagements</strong></td>
<td>Offer one-on-one discussion or small group activity to develop interest with the student. Develop subtasks with closure to each activity. Develop assignments with a product.</td>
<td>Monitor the interest of the student. Set up report times to address progress made. Have student address the synthesizing of information drawn from subactivities.</td>
<td>Closing activities should include small group discussion and possible application to lessons learned.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Venting engagement</strong></td>
<td>The student will begin with a great deal of interest and energy. Have the student assume a leadership role in setting the stage for the task or goal. Allow the student an opportunity to participate in the standard, the due dates, and what the task will look like once completed.</td>
<td>The student is likely to lose interest midstream. Have the student address the motivational factors associated with the task or activity, as well as how to monitor and self-monitor. Shift the instructional dynamic as to capture and recapture interest.</td>
<td>Student will have a difficult time closing the lesson. Have the student monitor or journal daily progress and review with instructor levels of interaction within the academic social context. <strong>Caution:</strong> This student is likely to become frustrated and to complain when expectations are placed on performance.</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goal-focused engagement</strong>&lt;br&gt;Present immediate context and purpose, along with the identified task or goal.&lt;br&gt;Detail timeline of events, models to follow, outcome expectations, and the form in which the task is to be presented.</td>
<td>Provide time to work independently and to ask questions as needed.&lt;br&gt;Encourage individual management of task or activity.&lt;br&gt;Facilitate the personal management and expression in completing the task.&lt;br&gt;Provide concise written and oral presentation of goals and timelines with opportunity for questions.</td>
<td>Allow student to provide task activity in a variety of expressions.&lt;br&gt;Empower student to contract with instructor regarding the details of what the product should look like; however, if the student has no desire to offer a creative expression, be prepared to offer the model that can be used to complete the work.&lt;br&gt;Be ready to respond to questions and to receive project early.</td>
<td>The student will be providing &quot;self&quot; the closing understanding of the activity; if the product does not reflect the expectation, then ask the student to dialogue about the thinking behind the assignment.&lt;br&gt;This may not be necessary if the student assumed the goal-oriented self-expression that often accompanies this style.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Actual engagement</strong>&lt;br&gt;Present context and content of activity.&lt;br&gt;Process background and implications of lesson.&lt;br&gt;Offer opportunity for self-reflection and creative expression.</td>
<td>Advanced organizer can be used to open dialogue with brainstorming to extend lesson or activity.&lt;br&gt;Provide detail.&lt;br&gt;Offer open and flexible discussion to the outcomes of the lesson or activity.&lt;br&gt;Encourage personal expression and creativity.</td>
<td>Student will remain attentive over the entire period.&lt;br&gt;Precisions in presentation of lesson and expectation are necessary.&lt;br&gt;Establish feedback loops.&lt;br&gt;Encourage the freedom to customize or extend the lesson to meet individual needs.</td>
<td>This student will value the learning and will be ready to explore implications or extensions to the lesson or activity.</td>
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instructor and student and offer a relevant, additional context for understanding self in relation to the triadic reciprocality of causality (Bandura, 1982).

Finally, incorporating engagement styles into the presentation of information affords teacher candidates the opportunity to hone their attention and self-regulatory skills. These skills can then be better utilized in professional development and identity formation, maximizing professional preparedness.

For the highly regulated actually engaged student, the preparation and presentation of information encourages opportunities to learn and practice communicating with persons in terms of how they receive information and how others differentiate attentiveness—for example, how to deal with someone who needs additional prompts to begin attending (goal focused) or how to sustain a student's attention when he or she would rather vent and process than act. Engagement styles provide a rubric for inclusiveness in communication, expanding the concept of engagement from a dichotomous representation to include two gradient measures.

**Conclusion**

Bandura (2006) framed self-development as agency in explaining adaptation of self in relationship to one's social-cognitive environment and behavior. Self-actualization occurs as one successfully adapts in response to environment and to self in organization, regulating, and reflection. These perspectives provided by Bandura and Maslow suggest that individuals use feedback from their environments to develop a stronger sense of self as they meet their personal needs. Individual investment or engagement is influenced by values, experience, temperament, perception, and context. Although the roles of culture and ethnic identities contribute to base engagement style, the intention of this study was not to address specific cultural influences but to suggest that all persons are influenced by conditioned and learned experiences.

The LIBRE model, as a problem-solving assessment tool, complements and expands the understanding of self in the context of challenge. To this end, engagement styles suggest levels of investment determined by environmental persistence, or the intensity of personal investment in response to contextual demands and self-determined attentiveness. Self-regulated or managed behavior is found in identified engagement style. For example, a potential engagement style mismatch may derive in a situation between a student who is from a culture that expects her to “remain in the background” and the school staff who expect her to be competitive and demonstrate a certain level of assertive independence in the pursuit of her scholastic goals.

An understanding of engagement styles provides the basis for interpreting the student's behavior in a more productive and potentially positive way, and it suggests that additional information is necessary before making judgments about students' response to school expectations.
Examined here were four gradient levels of participation and engagement styles to offer value to differences in the receiving and processing of information. It is not the content of the information but rather the pattern in processing the information that is the focus. Goal-focused and venting engagement styles are variants of the traditional engagement versus nonengagement constructs presented here, respectively, as actual engaged and potential engaged. Self-awareness, attention, self-regulation, and social cognition, as developed within the integrated problem-solving activity, are used to identify engagement styles. Conceptually suggested is the relationship between teacher identity development and engagement styles. As teacher candidates learn about themselves and their personal attention and investment patterns, there is opportunity for them to learn of other styles that may be useful for personal management and classroom management as they interact with students that have similar and other styles. Although the information offered with the case study illustrations at times reflected personal rather than professional content, what was significant was how and what was resolved. The completed or noncompleted processing of the tasks provided critical information about how the person managed and filtered the environment. To this end, understanding the individual in context provides additional insight to the preparation of future teachers and the associated high-stakes professional development.

References


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