



# Flow

Pamela Markus, McGill University

## ABSTRACT

What is student engagement? How do teachers engage their students? As a way to address these questions, I used collage as an arts-informed method for exploring the subject of student engagement. The collages are displayed and I describe the process of producing this work.



**A**s an art form, collage thrives on spontaneity and intuitiveness, and encourages discovery. As a method in research, collage becomes a process of learning to see and seeing to learn (Markus, 2007). In this brief essay, I describe the process of creating a series of collages that I have entitled *Flow*.

As I began thinking about the topic of student engagement, the first thing that came to mind was a photograph I had seen of two children squatting on a beach looking at something. They were so immersed in what they were doing that they were oblivious to the camera. This image became the springboard for the collage process, which I believed would help me find the words to describe the experience depicted in the photograph.

I began the collage by holding the snapshot of the two children in my mind as I spontaneously selected images from magazines. I tried to represent the feeling portrayed in the photograph rather than to visually represent the picture. Once I had collected enough images, I glued them onto three small cards, using an intuitive, rather than calculated approach for creating the composition. The next step was “translating” the images into words on a literal level by describing them with as little interpretation as possible. I listed them: suspension bridge of the water, part of a metal arc, a chestnut still attached to the branch, cracked open, spherical light bulbs, branches of trees, calm water. In this way, the images were transformed into textual metaphors of experience. I then transformed the list into more abstract terms. For example, the bridge could be seen as *reaching/bridging*; the nut cracked open, as the *core*; the light bulbs, as having *internal energy*; the branches, as *reaching/spreading*; and the water, as *flow* (hence, the title of the collages, *Flow*)

From these words, I was able to see an aspect of student engagement that I was unable to put into words before. The role of teaching and of engaging students (“spreading flow”) involves reaching out and tapping into the internal energy. Students need space to express what comes from within them. There is always that energy at the core.

## References

- Markus, P. (2007). *Drawing on experience*.  
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University, Montreal, QC.



**Pamela Markus** is a Sessional Lecturer in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University, where she teaches courses on art education. She received her M.F.A. from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, and recently completed her Ph.D. at McGill. Her research interests include: the role of art in general education, arts-informed research, and youth culture.