Active student and teacher engagement: Practices for effective classroom management

In order for students and teachers to achieve maximum benefit from the learning experience, it is critical to facilitate a positive classroom climate with active student and teacher engagement. Actively engaging students with increased opportunities to respond enhances teacher-student relationships, increases on-task behaviour, and decreases the opportunities for students to engage in problem behaviour. Actively engaging students during instruction is one of the most effective evidence-based classroom practices within a classroom management system. No matter how well a classroom is organised or how often the expectations, routines, and procedures are taught, if instruction is not engaging, other practices will not be sufficient to support appropriate behaviour and facilitate an optimum learning experience.

What does it mean to actively engage students?

By actively engaging students, teachers provide a variety of opportunities for student response that include the use of prompts and precorrections to maintain pacing and instructional momentum[1] (such as brisk pace with 5-sec. wait/think time). Opportunities to respond are classroom practices that promote active engagement by requiring interaction with students through asking a question or making a request. Providing high rates of opportunities to respond increases instructional pacing (the time students are directly engaged in the learning process), delivers ongoing feedback about student learning, and provides feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching strategy[2]. This form of actively engaging students is effective with any content area, age, or setting (whole group, small group, cooperative pairs, and soon) and works best in the classroom when other evidence-based practices (maximising structure, teaching expectations, routines and procedures) have been well-established and are actively implemented (by acknowledging appropriate behaviour, responding to inappropriate behaviour, and so on) during instruction. Two types of opportunities to respond with examples are described below.

1. **Non-verbal** responses typically involve the use of tangibles (such as response cards) and may include student response systems (like computer assisted instruction) and guided notes (graphic organisers, content webs, fill-in-the-blank, and so on). For example, all students may be instructed to write their answer independently on small white boards and hold them up for teacher review. Other examples include:

   • Polls or clickers

   • Cards indicating 'Yes/No' or 'True/False'

   • Gestures, such as 'Thumb's up if you agree with the character's choice in the story' or 'Hands up if you got 75 for the answer'

2. **Verbal** responses can be requested from individuals, small groups, the whole class, or a mixture of settings. The following are examples of verbal responses used with different settings:

   • For individual students, use a response pattern to ensure that all students are called on to participate.

   • With small groups (tables or teams): 'I just showed you how to do #1. I am going to start #2 on the second row. Now, you get ready to help explain my steps.'

- For the whole class, have all students respond in unison (choral response) to a teacher question, read a morning message together, or recite a passage together.

- 'Write a sentence to summarise the reading independently. Then share with your peer partner before sharing with the class' is a form of mixed responding.

Research indicates that an average of 4-5 opportunities to respond per minute is effective when teaching new material, but increases to 10 response opportunities per minute when reviewing previously learned information[3]. While many instructional strategies exist to increase student learning, it is critical that all students are actively engaged by being provided with a high rate of opportunities to respond, regardless of the selected strategy used in the classroom. It is ideal when school leadership supports and endorses a school-wide system that establishes consistent practices within and across classrooms for a cohesive approach to learning that benefits all.

References

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