Positive Behaviour Support: Active engagement

Overview and rationale

Positive relationships underpin all effective classroom management practices. This resource is the seventh component in a suite of resources collectively called Positive Behaviour Support – Effective Classroom Practice, which are available through the Universal Resources Hub. It provides classroom teachers with support to:

- understand and describe what active engagement is
- explain why active engagement is important
- develop and establish active engagement in their classroom.

Active engagement is one of the many effective classroom practices which research shows has the greatest positive impact on learning and behaviour. These proactive strategies assist teachers to increase the time available for instruction and decrease the amount of time spent responding to inappropriate or unwanted behaviour.

Effective classroom management is critical to the provision of a safe and supportive learning environment and helps build positive relationships. Research has consistently demonstrated the relationship between effective classroom management and both academic achievement, and teacher and student wellbeing.

Target audience and instructions for use

Teachers across all school settings can use this resource to support all students P-12.

When to use/ timeframes: Teachers can use this resource at any time in the year as a stand-alone resource to support them to establish and maintain active engagement or as part of the suite of effective classroom management resources. The first resource is about positive relationships, which underpins all resources in the suite.

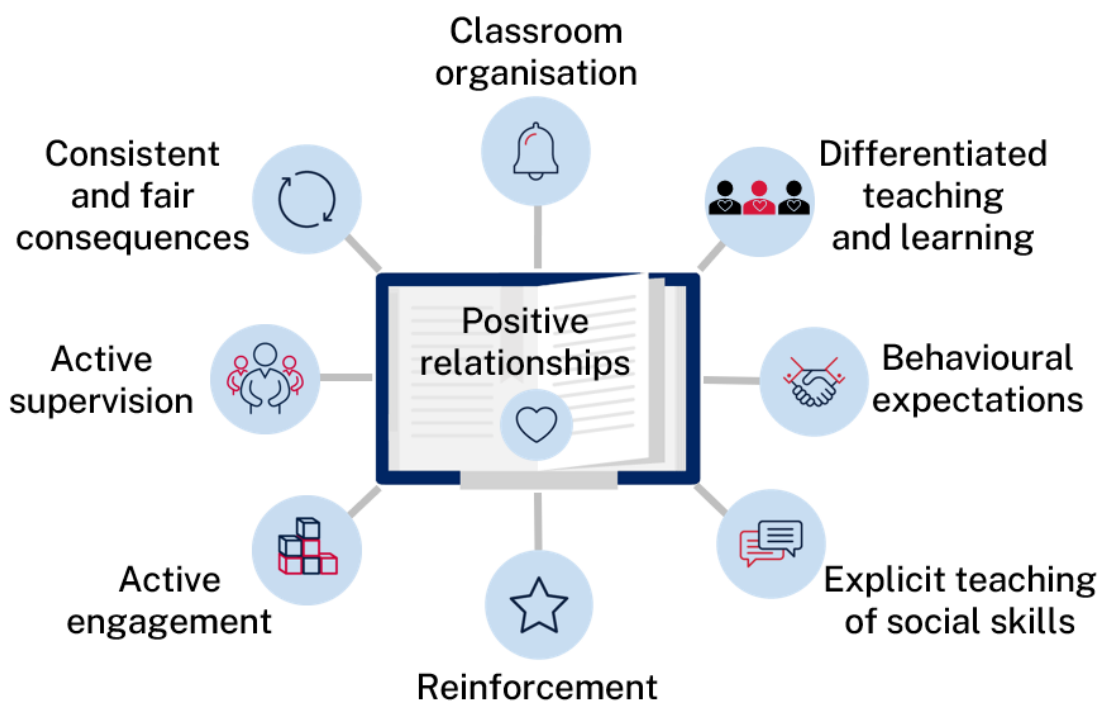This resource will work most effectively when:

- a whole-school framework for behaviour support and student learning and wellbeing is in place

- schoolwide systems are in place for teaching, acknowledging and responding to behaviours
- data-based decision-making is in place to guide implementation
- classroom systems are linked to the schoolwide system of positive behaviour support
- effective pedagogy, including differentiation, is in place in classrooms.

Key components of effective classroom management

The visual below depicts the components of effective classroom management demonstrated by research to reduce rates of inappropriate or unwanted behaviour and increase student engagement with learning. Each component can be broken down into a number of practices, which teachers can utilise to build a positive classroom environment and maximise instructional time.

This resource focuses on active engagement. Refer to the separate resources for more information about each of the other eight components.

Active engagement

Actively engaging students results in decreases in disruptive behaviour and increased on-task behaviour. Providing students with multiple opportunities to respond is an effective way to increase active engagement and has been shown in studies to improve academic outcomes.

When students are engaged, they are more likely to concentrate, remain absorbed with a task, persist in the face of difficulty, experience satisfaction, and feel pride in what they do. Conversely, lack of engagement leads to inattention, giving up, withdrawal, boredom, and frustration, anger, or self-blame.

What is engagement?

Student engagement refers to the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes and participate in academic and non-academic school activities. Research suggests engagement is one of the most effective strategies in creating a well-managed classroom
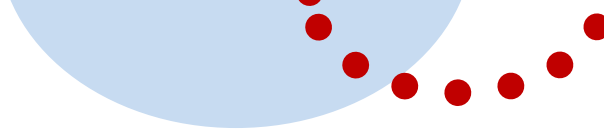
Benefits of active engagement

There is a correlation between increasing student engagement and positive behaviours in the classroom. A lack of engagement increases the incidence of unproductive and disruptive behaviour making classroom management more difficult.

Know your students and how they learn

The Australian Professional Standards for Teaching state that knowing our students and how they learn is an essential part of planning and designing effective lessons.

It is important to consider the 'whole student' when planning for their learning and wellbeing. Consider:

- language background
- additional support needs
- intellectual development
- socioeconomic background
- cultural background
- emotional needs
- physical development

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- learning styles
- literacy levels
- religious background
- interests
- strengths
- numeracy level
- linguistic background

"Engagement in the classroom results when a child's attention is attracted to an idea or a task …. because it links with an experience, interest or talent that is significant to them, or because it is at the right level of challenge to stimulate rather than to frustrate or bore them - or likely because of a combination of these conditions" (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014)
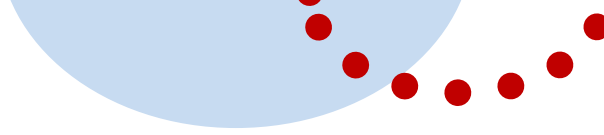
Given the diverse nature of students and the fact that they each access information differently, we need to vary the presentation of content delivery. This will make the classroom more engaging and accessible for the students in the classroom.

In the classroom

Use of opportunities to respond includes presenting materials, asking questions, checking for understanding and other interactions with students. Teacher talk should be limited to less than 50 percent of the time to provide more opportunities for student interaction.

Teachers can encourage student participation and engagement by incorporating a variety of teaching methods and activities into lessons. Drawing on students' prior experience, and linking new content to examples from students' own experience enables all students to contribute. Simple strategies, such as using student names in worksheets and examples, are also effective in maintaining student engagement.

Teaching students to work in pairs and groups to check work, provide feedback and teach or revise concepts is also an effective way to increase student participation. Working in pairs or groups needs to be explicitly taught and peer tutoring is most effective when students are allocated specific roles and provided with scripts. Simply asking one student to help another is unlikely to be effective, without clear guidelines and parameters in place.

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Incorporating movement breaks into the school day is another way that teachers can foster engagement. Many students need to move at regular intervals, and all students benefit from physical activity. Plan for a movement or brain break at least every 20 minutes; this can be an opportunity to stretch, fetch materials or change seats and need only take a minute.

Some students may need modified seating arrangements in order to concentrate, such as sitting on a fit ball, standing to work, or sitting on a stool at a bench. It can also be useful to give individual students classroom tasks which enable them to move around, such as handing out equipment or managing the light and fan switches.

The most effective ways to ensure student engagement are getting to know students and providing differentiated instruction at the correct level.

While it is important to try to make work interesting, it is also important for students to learn that at times we all need to do work that we don't particularly like. Providing a rationale, giving choices and being empathetic work well to encourage students to engage in non-preferred tasks, so long as there are multiple opportunities throughout the school day for students to engage in more preferred tasks.

Choice

Research indicates offering choices, especially during academic tasks, not only increases student engagement and reduces disruptive behaviour, but can also improve response accuracy.
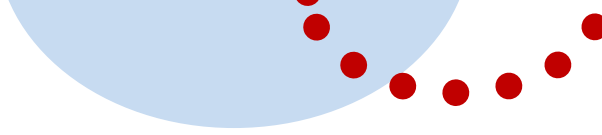
Choice can be applied to the whole class or individuals. It may be beneficial for students who have difficulty completing learning tasks or sustaining motivation.

Choice it is also commonly used with the student that has multiple unfinished tasks. Offering choice on which task to do first can empower the student and increase the likelihood that work will be completed.

When used class-wide, choice can have a powerful group effect – however there may be a small number of students who will not respond to these efforts and may require an individual approach.

Using activity choice in increasing engagement

- the type of activity or task to be completed
- the order in which tasks will be completed
- the kinds of materials students will use to complete an assignment

- who students will work with
- where students will work
- use of time before, during and after an activity or assignment

Providing Opportunities to Respond

Opportunities to respond refers to instructional strategies that provide a variety of opportunities for student response, thereby increasing levels of student engagement. High rates of opportunities to respond during instruction increases the likelihood that students will be engaged in the task, demonstrate appropriate and on-task behaviours, and provide more correct responses.

There are many ways to increase opportunities to respond in the classroom. These are three categories of response: verbal, non-verbal and other approaches.

Both verbal and non-verbal strategies include practices that can provide for individual and group responses. These can be used when presenting materials, asking questions, and correcting students' answers to increase the likelihood of an active and desired response.

Effective teachers use a variety of opportunities to respond to increase student engagement and to provide feedback on student learning. They choose the methods that will best suit the learning context and student need. Frequent feedback allows teachers to ensure learning is of sufficient challenge and that misconceptions are identified and quickly addressed.

1. Verbal response strategies

Individual questioning

Guidelines:

- ask question, pause then call on student by name
- use a system to track students called on.

Considerations:

- Calling on students unpredictably heightens student attention, but some students will require extra reassurance, prior notice, and practice.

Choral responding

Guidelines:

- use for questions that have only one correct answer
- use for answers of 1-3 words only
- wait 3 seconds before the prompt to respond
- use a signal or cue for students to respond.

Considerations:

- can be used to review or teach new skills but requires a brisk pace and immediate feedback.
- expectations for listening and responding will need to be taught.
- best used with individual questions interspersed.

2. Non-verbal response strategies

Personal whiteboards

Guidelines:

- students write or draw response
- when cued, students hold up the board
- students erase answer and wait for next question.

Considerations:

- taught in advance.
- provide clear, specific feedback on responses.
- if a number of students do not respond correctly, provide an explanation and re-teach.

Response cards

Guidelines:

- provide pre-printed cards with one response on each
- limit to between 2-4 responses
- when cued, students hold up the card.

Considerations:

- taught in advance.
- provide clear, specific feedback on responses.
- if a number of students do not respond correctly, provide an explanation and re-teach.

Gesture, movement or demonstration

Guidelines:

- students signal their response (for example, thumbs up/down)
- students stand, sit or move to a designated area or demonstrate engagement by an action.

Considerations:

- easy to do and provides movement breaks
- students will need to be taught expectations.

Guided notes

Guidelines:

- prepare handouts to lead students through key concepts
- use diagrams, tables, concept maps and cloze
- provide formatting clues such as blank lines and numbers.

Considerations:

- helps with outlining skills and reduces amount of writing required
- can be used by students for revision of key concepts.

3. Other responses

- class-wide peer tutoring
- direct instruction
- reciprocal teaching
- literacy circles
- jigsaw collaborative groups
- partner talk strategies e.g., think pair share.

These strategies have been sourced from different research. They range from low tech to high tech, low movement to high movement and can be chosen based on resourcing, learning styles and topic. Each of these strategies needs to be explicitly taught.

Students with additional learning and support needs:

There are some students in your class with additional learning and support needs that may require adjustments to the strategies mentioned above. For example, a student with anxiety may need pre-warning before they are expected to provide a verbal response.

Additional information

While this resource provides an explanation and examples of strategies for active engagement, it is important to remember that becoming an effective classroom teacher involves a thorough understanding of the principles of positive behaviour support. The aim of classroom management is for students to become self-managing, and to create a respectful learning environment where positive relationships are fostered, and individual learning is encouraged.

Becoming an effective classroom teacher also takes self-reflection and deliberate practice. Self-assessment and coaching have been shown to improve implementation of [effective classroom practices](#). Teachers are therefore encouraged to work with colleagues and school leaders to develop and refine classroom management understanding and skills.

Peer tutoring

Peer tutoring supports academic progress by having one student (the tutor) help another student (the tutee) to learn or master a concept or process. Peer tutoring benefits both the tutee and the tutor and is an effective way to increase student engagement.

It takes time to set up an effective peer tutoring system and consideration needs to be given to when and how peer tutoring will be used; it should not be a substitution for teacher-led instruction or individual practice. Peer tutoring will be most effective when:

- tutor/tutee pairs are formed by the teacher, considering the particular skill to be mastered and the likelihood of the pairs working together well
- roles and responsibilities for tutors and tutees have been developed and taught
- pre-requisite social skills have been taught
- clear guidelines are in place for tutors, including checklists of the steps they need to follow
- clear criteria are in place for what the tutee is expected to demonstrate or learn
- selection of skill to be taught/learned should be matched to individual strengths and needs
- assessment procedures are included

- students are reinforced for successful outcomes.

[Back]

Steps for using choice

Choice appears to help both with compliance and affect or positive feelings students have for school and their teacher.

1. Create a 'choice' menu
2. Consider your menu when you plan
3. Decide what types of choice are appropriate
4. Provide choices as planned while teaching a lesson
5. Solicit student feedback and input.

Tips for managing choice

- Remember choice can be offered in the task or learning experience
- Each choice is explicitly taught on a previous occasion
- Choice involves choosing from a planned range of familiar options, not free choice.

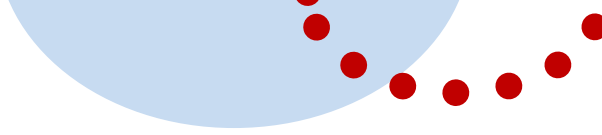# Alignment and identified need

System priorities and/or needs

- This resource aligns with:
- the Student Behaviour Strategy
- the Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful Schools policies
- the Premier's Priorities to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy and HSC attainment
- the New South Wales Department of Education's strategic outcomes of improving academic achievement and wellbeing.

School Excellence Framework

- Learning domain – Learning culture, wellbeing, curriculum, assessment
- Teaching – effective classroom practice.

Relevant frameworks

- Disability Standards for Education 2005

- [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#)
    - Standard 1: 1.2 and 1.6
    - Standard 3: 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5
    - Standard 4: 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4
    - Standard 6: 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4
- [NSW Wellbeing Framework for schools](#) – behaviour, discipline and character education.
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Existing resources

- [Behaviour Support Toolkit](#)
- [Behaviour Professional eLearning:](#)
    - Classroom management fundamentals
    - Understanding behaviour support planning
    - Introduction to Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)
    - PBL Tier 1 School-wide support
    - PBL Tier 1 Classroom support
- [Inclusive Practice hub](#)
- CESE:
    - [Classroom Management: Creating and maintaining positive learning environments](#)
    - [Classroom Management: Maintaining positive learning environments](#)
    - [What works best 2020](#)

Consultation

Reviewed by:

- Behaviour Services, Behaviour and Student Participation
- Delivery Support, Student Support and Specialist Programs

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Feedback: studentbehaviour@det.nsw.edu.au

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Evidence base

Materials adapted with permission from the Guide to Effective Classroom Management (Queensland Department of Education).

Research has consistently demonstrated:

- the importance of effective classroom management as a component of effective teaching
- the relationship between effective classroom management and teacher self-efficacy and wellbeing
- the positive outcomes associated with a small number of specific classroom management practices.

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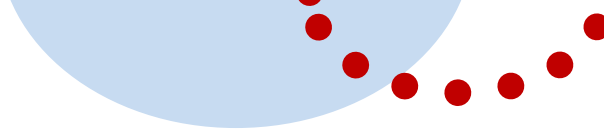
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