

HLP 18: USE STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE ACTIVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to our video for HLP #18, Use strategies to promote active student engagement.

There are 22 High Leverage Practices for special education spread across four domains. HLP #18, use strategies to promote active student engagement, is listed under the Instruction domain.

The main sources for content in this video is the Handbook of Research on Student Engagement edited by Christensen, Reschly, and Wylie, and the HLP in Special Education book published by CEC and the CEEDAR center.

This video is split into two parts. In part 1, we define active student engagement and provide rationale for this HLP. In part 2, we highlight and demonstrate three essential components of this practice.

Part 1: Definition and rationale

The simplest way to think about student engagement is to picture a teacher digging deep into their bag of tricks to keep students actively involved in the learning process. This notion of student engagement is important, and the focus of this video within our series on HLPs for special education.

Experts view student engagement as a multidimensional construct. Students can demonstrate behavioral engagement, which involves such behaviors as raising their hand, watching the teacher, and answering questions. Students are also impacted by affective engagement. Affective engagement involves positive feelings about the learning process, such as motivation to learn, and is reflected in students taking responsibility for their own learning.

Engagement is a relevant construct for all teachers and students. Students who report higher engagement within school are less likely to drop out, or get in other trouble in and out of school. Engaged students are more successful on immediate school-related tasks, but also make healthier life choices, have stronger social-emotional well-being, and go on to more rewarding and lucrative careers (Brophy, 1986; Rosenshine, 1976). This is true regardless of socioeconomic status or other student factors (Klem & Connell, 2009).

We focus here on the role of the general and special education teacher in supporting engagement of students with disabilities within academic lessons and other school settings.

Teachers can generate active student engagement for students with disabilities by using a range of motivational strategies which help them make the most of learning opportunities during class and beyond.



High-Leverage Practices in Special Education

A hallmark of a teacher who generates actively engaged students is they build and maintain positive relationships with students. This is achieved by proactively taking an interest in students' lives, and prioritizing positive relationships in all facets of the school day. We elaborate in part 2 of this video.

Another hallmark is effective teachers provide students with numerous scaffolds to actively participate during lessons, and then offer meaningful feedback on their performance.

In sum for part 1, Active student engagement in learning is critical to academic and behavioral success. Although engagement is a bit of a controversial construct given its many possible definitions and permutations, there is broad agreement that teachers play a critical role in helping students remain engaged within lessons and school writ large, which is essential for students with disabilities.

Part 2: Three key components to support student engagement.

There are three key components of this HLP. They are: 1. Teachers must build positive teacher-student relationships, 2. Teachers should use a variety of strategies for ensuring student engagement during lessons, and 3. Teachers need to actively monitor for engagement and provide ongoing, specific feedback.

First, teachers must build positive teacher-student relationships. Teachers can build positive relationships with students in a number of ways. One key opportunity to build positive student engagement is by forging connections to students' lives. Teachers can leverage entry points into student's lives at numerous junctures including academics, sports, pop culture, and of course by considering and attending to students' cultural and familial backgrounds.

A good idea is for teachers to greet students at the door before class with a warm smile and greeting. Asking the student about a sport they play, or activity they participate in is an easy way to show they care about the student as a person. Going the extra mile to attend a game or other event in the community is also a worthwhile investment in building a positive teacher-student relationship. These student interests can easily be incorporated into lessons. For example, teachers might construct real world math problems based on student interests, use metaphors and similes that include students' daily lives to illuminate content, and select reading materials that connect students to content in more personal ways.

Teachers who make an overt effort to better acknowledge, celebrate, and understand students' diverse backgrounds are using another essential strategy for setting students up to be engaged during class. Simply being open to the fact that student's individual backgrounds are a core part of how they see the world, and honoring that worldview is one powerful way to connect. Attending or hosting heritage fairs, visiting students' homes or neighborhoods, and inviting parents and other family members to be regular contributors to the classroom are all viable options for boosting students' engagement.



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In this clip, Ms. Iesha Samuels leads her inclusive elementary classroom through a fun call and response chant to help build confidence and self-esteem, and in the short term, get ready for the forthcoming mathematics lesson. Her slogan, “push through” is used routinely throughout the day to help her students stay engaged, and is a cornerstone of her positive relationship with students.

Component 2. Teachers should use a variety of strategies to ensure student engagement during lessons.

Teachers have numerous opportunities within any lesson to promote student engagement. Providing multiple opportunities to respond to various prompts and questions is a terrific option for keeping students engaged. These opportunities to respond can be teacher or student led.

Teacher-led opportunities to respond can include oral questions, response cards, choral gestures, using technology such as clickers, and numerous other options. There is no optimal and scientifically agreed upon number of opportunities students should have to respond per minute to ensure success, but the number is higher than 0. Prompts to respond should cut across academic and behavioral domains.

Student-led options can include students working in pairs or groups to further their learning. Including routines that promote collaborative learning not only keeps them engaged, but also creates a space where they take on the role of expert and have the opportunity to try out new skills and concepts with independence. Teachers can also leverage technology to promote engagement, whether that is having students use individual devices or whole group methods such as interactive whiteboards or other options that allows students to share and contribute to skills and processes.

This component is also key to several other HLPs, including HLP #16, using explicit instruction, HLP #17, use flexible groupings, and HLP #19, use assistive and instructional technologies.

In this clip, Ms. Raines is having a morning meeting in her low incidence classroom. Students each have an opportunity to use the interactive smart board and software. Note her use of multiple opportunities to respond, clear feedback, and appropriate pace for the level of her students.

Video Clip.

Component 3. Actively monitor engagement and provide ongoing feedback.

Teachers should also closely monitor students’ learning, and provide meaningful feedback immediately following completion of a task or behavior.



High-Leverage Practices in Special Education

It is generally not enough for teachers to assume students will be inherently interested in a lesson, and demonstrate engagement. This is particularly true for students with disabilities.

Because many students with disabilities struggle with limited background knowledge and cognitive functioning, they often experience frustration and failure in school. General and special education teachers need to be particularly vigilant in their monitoring of student progress or lack thereof.

It is therefore essential that students need to receive meaningful feedback on their progress as often as possible.

When it is determined students with disabilities are not engaged as evidenced by poor academic or behavioral performance, the team should brainstorm new evidence-based approaches to hopefully make a positive impact.

HLP video #8 and 22 provide specific examples of how to provide high quality feedback.

In this clip, Ms. Angie Norman is leading her inclusive 2nd grade class through a mathematics lesson. She is actively monitoring her students during independent practice time. She pays particular attention to a student who has been struggling, and uses a strong feedback loop to help him and the class fix a common error during subtraction with regrouping.

In summary, actively engaged students have the best chance to succeed within learning and behavioral tasks. However, to ensure high levels of engagement, teachers must maintain and communicate high standards for all students. This includes providing scaffolds to help all students make progress toward academic and behavioral goals and objectives and celebrating when students' meet milestones. It also includes allowing for students' voice and choice in the classroom. This could mean including students in the selection of materials and methods for instruction, but it could also mean being purposeful with regard to how teachers attend to students' expressions, concerns, and critical questions during class.

More information about active student engagement and its role in supporting the needs of students with and without disabilities can be found at highleveragepractices.org.

Thanks for watching, and please continue using resources from this series on high leverage practices for special education.



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