TODD WHITNEY · JUSTIN COOPER · TERRANCE M. SCOTT

CREATING an ACTIVELY ENGAGED CLASSROOM

14 STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
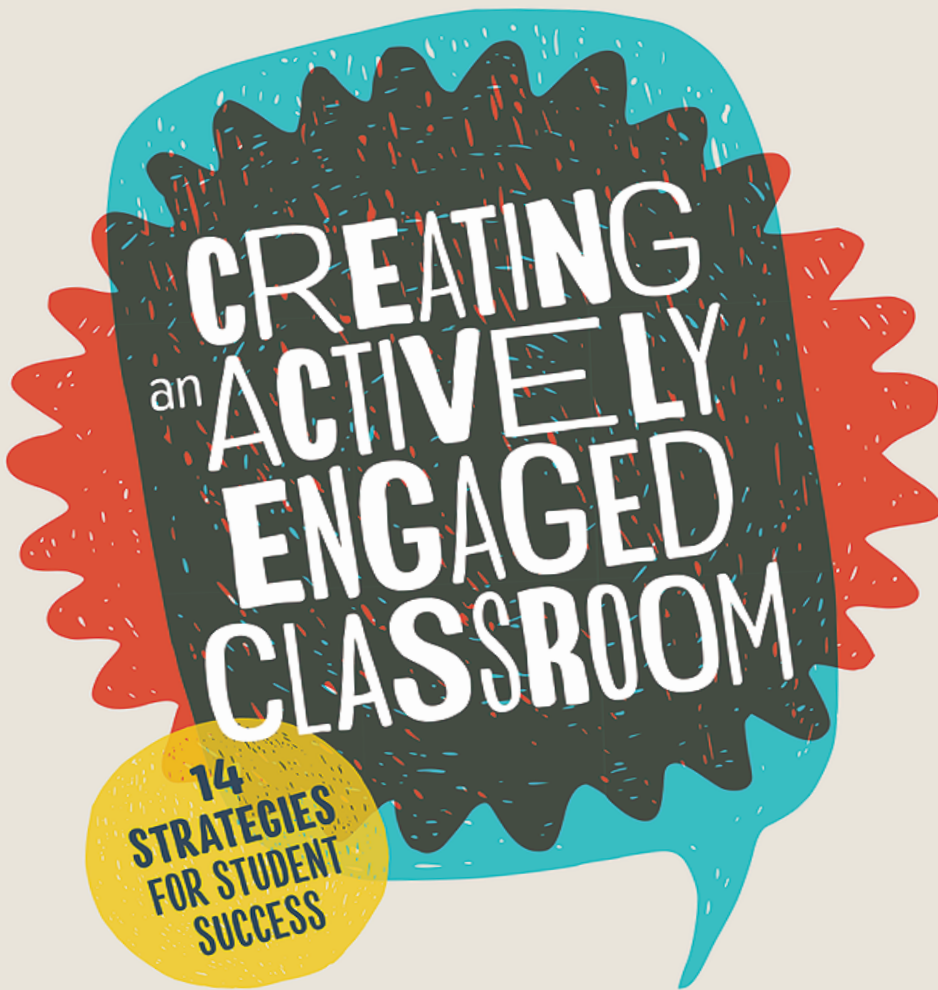
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Introduction

Student Engagement and Teacher Responsibility

Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life.

—Martin Luther King Jr., 1947

As teachers, we have an incredible opportunity to affect the lives of our students through instruction. Research has clearly demonstrated that teacher quality is associated with increased student outcomes both in school (Stronge, 2013) and throughout life (Chetty et al., 2011). With this power comes great responsibility to use our time with students in a manner that maximizes the probability of student success. Thinking logically, time spent on less effective strategies comes at the expense of more effective strategies and at the expense of probabilities for student success. Thus, it is incumbent on us to consider the instructional strategies and tactics at the core of effective instruction and to make those the core of our definition of teaching.

As Martin Luther King Jr. (1947) so eloquently reminds us from more than 70 years ago, the goal of education is not to create a workforce or to further the goals of society. The role of the teacher is to provide students with the knowledge and skills required to have a happy, healthy, and productive life while maintaining the freedom to think critically and act accordingly. With this goal in mind, research has clearly identified the tenets of effective instruction. First, instruction needs to be explicit. That is, teachers must clearly communicate to students why a concept or skill is important and how it fits into the larger context of their lives and well-being, and provide opportunities for critical discussion. These discussions allow

the teacher to clarify misconceptions and allow students to gain both clarity and understanding of the relevance of the content to their own lives. Second, a key component of this discussion is the ability of the student to be engaged as an active learner rather than a passive receptacle for knowledge. But engagement can be considered as both a strategy for enhancing the acquisition of knowledge and a process by which students increasingly apply that knowledge to their own lives.

Third, students must have the opportunity to receive feedback on their performance, and that feedback should be largely positive. Positive feedback builds student confidence and increases the probability of future success. Inability to provide high rates of positive feedback is an index of ineffective instruction. If we consider the first two tenets (explicit and engagement) simply as strategies for maximizing the probabilities for student success, then it becomes obvious that when students are not sufficiently successful, we can consider that instruction has been insufficient and it is the teacher who must change by enhancing or differentiating the explicit and engaging components of instruction.

Inherent in this model of effective instruction is the teacher as an active participant whose job it is to make instruction relevant and engaging for students. Again, we refer to this as a teacher responsibility. Over a long history of educational research, this model of instruction has been repeatedly shown to be the most effective manner of creating student success (Brophy & Good, 1986; Hattie, 2009; Stockard et al., 2018; Teasley, 1996). Because science has clearly demonstrated that effective instruction provides students with their best chances for success, disregarding these strategies represents an abdication of responsibility. The purpose of this book is to highlight the strategies available for engaging students, many of whom have a history of failure resulting in lack of confidence in their ability to be successful, and so do not wish to be engaged. This is important because a student's lack of engagement is associated with higher rates of dropout and school failure (Reschly & Christenson, 2006).

Engagement is a student behavior that is created by the teacher. Clearly, there are students who actively engage

themselves in their learning without the need for any teacher actions. While these students are likely not the norm, in any classroom the teacher's behaviors can create increased opportunities for students to be engaged (Christenson et al., 2012). While the term *engagement* can mean many things, we define it as the student's active involvement in a lesson, involving verbal or physical actions that are related to the lesson content and communicated to the teacher or others. While this definition purposefully omits actions such as reading or listening, this does not mean that there is no place for these activities in a lesson.

Engagement

The student's active involvement in a lesson, involving verbal or physical actions that are related to the lesson content and communicated to the teacher or others

Rather, because the focus here is on instruction, engagement is conceived of in terms of teacher behaviors that are meant to keep the student alert and interested through interaction focused on the curriculum. To make this distinction, reading and listening are referred to as *passive engagement*, requiring no effort other than what is often called "being on task."

Active engagement involves students actively using their words, gestures, or other physical actions (drawing, creating, etc.) to interact with the curricular content. During practice, active engagement is built-in, with students actively engaged in doing. But during the introduction and heart of a lesson, there is less inherent opportunity for the student to be actively engaged, so the teacher must provide specific opportunities for the students to respond, or what we call OTR. An OTR is defined as any action by the teacher that provides a curriculum-related opportunity for students to respond in some physical manner (verbalize, gesture, or create). Research has shown that OTRs at a rate of at least three per minute during instruction are associated with significantly higher rates of student active engagement and significantly

lower rates of student disruption (Gage et al., 2018; Sutherland et al., 2003). In fact, recent research has identified higher rates of OTR to be associated with lower rates of suspension and that the combination of OTR and positive feedback is associated with an increase in the percentage of students at the proficient and distinguished levels in both reading and mathematics (Scott & Gage, 2020).

The combination of OTR and positive feedback seems logical and obvious. The more opportunities students have to respond, the more opportunities teachers have to provide feedback. Again, if instruction is effective, this provides more opportunities for positive feedback. But this raises an important issue with regard to the purpose of OTR. The purpose is not to assess students, nor is it to challenge them. Clearly, these are legitimate actions as part of a lesson, but the OTR is used for the purpose of *engaging* students. Difficult questions and OTRs that put students in a challenging position will not only be unsuccessful in facilitating student engagement, they also greatly increase the likelihood of student misbehavior. During instruction, OTR is a strategy to be used when other, more naturally engaging activities are not available.

Unfortunately, despite the evidence supporting OTR, research consistently shows that teachers at every level and in every content area provide OTRs at rates far below the recommended rate of three per minute (Scott et al., 2017). When presented with this fact, teachers are often surprised, thinking that they had facilitated much more active engagement than was the reality. This may be a residual effect of the fact that preservice teachers are rarely provided with information regarding the effects of OTR or opportunities to consider and practice different OTR strategies.

TEACHING STUDENTS ABOUT OTR

A large predictor of success in increasing active student engagement is the degree to which the teacher has effectively taught students the components and expected behaviors associated with each individual OTR. This should be delivered in the same manner as has been described as effective instruction herein. Distinct OTR strategies should

be introduced individually, giving it a name and a rationale. The name is important so that when the teacher calls out the name, all students immediately know what is coming and what is expected of them. Recall that explicit instruction involves clear descriptions along with a rationale for why and how it fits into the larger picture. In this case the larger picture is students having an active role in the lesson. Depending on the students' age and cognitive abilities, teachers may need to break OTRs down into their component behaviors and teach each component separately. For example, the teacher may need to specifically teach each type of gesture or how to attend to different teacher signals for choral response.

Throughout the explicit instruction, the teacher must engage the students, giving them opportunities to discuss and practice components as a group. Finally, the teacher must provide repetitive opportunities for student practice with immediate feedback before using the strategy in a natural instructional context. As we have previously discussed, the purpose of this instruction is to set students up for success and to provide them with positive feedback. As OTRs are introduced, students need to have enough practice with teacher feedback so that they are confident in their ability to respond correctly the next time they hear the name called.

GENERAL RESPONSE ROUTINES

As we have just discussed, establishing response routines for implementing OTR is critical if your goal is to increase active student engagement in an effective and efficient manner. To maximize the impact, the routines will need to incorporate components of explicit instruction and be implemented with consistency. Although there may be differences between distinct OTR strategies, each will share similarities with the others. In general, it is suggested that each OTR strategy incorporate either an individual or a partner/team response routine.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE ROUTINES

Individual response routines start with the teacher asking a question or giving a prompt that has an expected verbal

or nonverbal response from either an individual student or a group of students. For it to be considered an OTR, the question or prompt should be related to the curriculum. In other words, asking "What is the capital of Oregon?" would be an OTR if you were reviewing state capitals. However, saying "Have a seat; we are about to start the lesson" would be a direction, not an OTR. Additionally, to be an OTR, the question or prompt must allow for a student response instead of being rhetorical. An example of this would be if a teacher says, "What is the capital of Oregon?" and immediately follows with "Salem, right?"

After the teacher asks the question or gives a prompt, it is then important to allow appropriate wait time. Determining the appropriate wait time is dependent on two things: (1) the question or prompt given and (2) the students' ability to process the information needed to complete the request. For example, you may be able to use a short wait time of three to five seconds before students respond for lower–cognitive demand requests, such as "What is 2 × 3?" or "Is the word *truck* a subject or a verb?" On the other hand, a longer wait time would be necessary for higher–cognitive demand requests, such as asking students to write down the main idea of a story or summarizing what was just learned.

After the students have had adequate time to formulate a response, a clear and consistent cue for the student(s) to respond is needed. A variety of cues can be used to cue students, including clapping, snapping fingers, dropping hands, or using a verbal cue. When choosing a prompt, it is best to select one that best fits your teaching style and your students' preference. Once selected, it is important to implement it consistently so that the students begin to learn that a response is needed whenever they see the cue.

Finally, the student response will allow for feedback to be given. This feedback will provide students with information to improve or maintain their performance, as well as increase student motivation, engagement, and independence (McLeskey et al., 2017). Although there are many ways by which a teacher can provide feedback, there are specific types of feedback that are most effective. If a student responds

with a correct answer, the teacher can provide behavior-specific praise or instructive feedback. On the other hand, the teacher can use corrective feedback for any incorrect responses by providing students with specific information about what they can do differently the next time. Corrective feedback should always be paired with praise for anything that the student did correctly.

PARTNER/TEAM RESPONSE ROUTINES

Although the partner/team response routine is similar to the individual response routine, there are additional components that need to be implemented in an effective and efficient manner. First, the teacher will assign students to partners or teams. Although this can be done in various ways, we suggest purposefully assigning students beforehand instead of letting the students decide. Archer and Hughes (2011) suggest purposefully assigning students so that you can put them in either heterogeneous groups (e.g., low-performing student with middle-performing student) or homogeneous groups (e.g., high-performing student with high-performing student). Conversely, students will most likely pick a friend as a partner, which may or may not be the most appropriate instructional match. To increase efficiency and reduce downtime, you may also consider sitting partners/teams together before the lesson starts and assigning each student within the pairs/team a designation (e.g, 1, 2, 3, 4; A, B, C, D).

After the question or prompt is given, the teacher will cue the students to work together to formulate a response. Although partners/teams can be used in a variety of ways, cueing students to work in pairs/teams may need to involve explicitly teaching and reminding students how to work with their peers. This may include teaching students how to be effective listeners and speakers, instruction on turn taking, and/or instruction on how to provide appropriate feedback. As the students are formulating their response, the teacher will circulate the classroom and provide feedback when needed. After adequate time is given to formulate a response, students will be cued to share it with the other pairs/teams while the teacher provides feedback on their responses.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE ROUTINE	PARTNER/TEAM RESPONSE ROUTINE
1. Ask question/give prompt	1. Assign partners/teams
2. Give appropriate wait time	2. Ask question/give prompt
3. Provide response cue	3. Cue students to work together
4. Provide feedback to responses	4. Give appropriate wait time
	5. Circulate and provide feedback
	6. Cue sharing of responses
	7. Provide feedback on responses

RESPONSES TO TYPICAL RESISTANCE TO OTR

As teachers, it's not our job to assess or evaluate what our colleagues do. However, as advocates for the students in our charge, it is our responsibility to speak the truth regarding effective instruction and strategies that provide students with the greatest probabilities for success. When others make illogical or untruthful statements about effective practices, it is incumbent on us to have a logical response. To be clear, we are not advocating for arguing or shaming, as it's unlikely we will change anyone's behavior in this manner. The goal is simply to provide a counterpoint for others to hear and a basic logic to challenge illogical statements. Below are some typical statements we have heard made with regard to OTR and some possibilities for logical responses.

"USING OTR IS TOO TIME-CONSUMING— ESPECIALLY AT THREE PER MINUTE"

As will be demonstrated throughout the book, the teacher can present OTRs in a variety of ways that are very simple, with quick student responses. But it is important to make

clear that engagement is not done *in addition to* instruction; it is an inherent part of instruction. As such, OTRs should be planned as part of the lesson and provided to maintain students' active engagement. Because we know that actively engaged students have better academic and behavioral outcomes, there is an inherent illogic to thinking that OTRs take up too much of the lesson. More accurately, OTRs *are* the lesson. Furthermore, OTRs are not needed throughout the lesson, only during the parts where more authentic practice is not yet available. Similarly, three per minute is an average, and it is not necessary to provide three during every minute of instruction. Some minutes may be stacked with an array of several quick OTRs, while others may have a single peer discussion opportunity. It is the teacher's job to design instruction in a manner that best makes use of OTRs to maintain student engagement throughout the course of the lesson. And just to be clear, the provision of OTRs becomes more second nature to teachers with repeated use and experience. With some practice the process simply becomes part of your natural teaching.

"IT IS NOT MY RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE SURE THAT STUDENTS PAY ATTENTION AS LONG AS THEY ARE NOT DISRUPTIVE"

This one presents a bit more of a challenge because it gets to the heart of how teachers see their own professional responsibilities. We are careful here not to make this personal while providing a logical rebuttal. First, when responding to such statements, it is best to use "I feel" statements that simply express a perspective rather than challenge another person's beliefs—for example,

> I feel like I have a lot of students who won't engage unless I do something to engage them. And because I have that ability, it feels to me like I should use it to increase my students' chances for success.

It's hard to argue against this simple statement of personal perspective. Remember, these responses are not necessarily meant to change this person's mind. Rather, this response provides a different perspective that is logical and nonthreatening for others to hear and consider.

"MY STUDENTS GET OUT OF CONTROL OR MAKE RUDE RESPONSES WHEN I GIVE THEM OPPORTUNITIES TO SPEAK"

This statement is akin to saying that engaged students are more disruptive than sleeping students and encouraging sleeping thus makes sense. To the extent that the potential for misbehavior is higher when students are engaged, we must consider how to effectively select and use OTRs in consideration of student and classroom challenges. Clearly, some strategies make more sense under only specific classroom circumstances, and the teacher must be thoughtful in planning for the most appropriate OTR strategies. But there is also an inherent illogic in considering disengaged students to be behaving appropriately. In fact, we know that students who are bored or disconnected from instruction are more likely to engage in misbehaviors to distract from the lesson or to attempt to escape. If our goal is to have students engaged as a means of maximizing their success, then it becomes our responsibility to develop that engagement.

"MY STUDENTS ARE ENGAGED ON THEIR OWN—I DO NOT NEED TO FIND WAYS TO ENGAGE THEM"

First, if this statement is true, then it truly represents an outlier as this is not the case in a typical classroom. But logically, how can students be actively engaged while the teacher is introducing, demonstrating, and delivering a lesson? Likely what this person is saying is that students sit quietly and are not off task. But remember, we are looking for active engagement during instruction as well as during practice. The OTR strategies we discuss in this book will keep students actively engaged through the parts of instruction that are typically filled with only passive engagement. Even in the most ideal classroom, there are a range of students and a range of competing stimuli to attract attention away from instruction. In this case one might consider the use of OTR as a prevention strategy—keeping student attention through active engagement and lessening the likelihood of the attentional drift to which we all are susceptible.

CONCLUSIONS

This book is designed to provide teachers with a range of very specific strategies for actively engaging students during instruction. Recent events have caused most educators to adjust their delivery of instruction to virtual formats for all or part of the time. This has brought with it new challenges in engaging students during virtual instruction. Educators have indicated that virtual instruction has led to fewer students attending to instruction, fewer students asking questions during lessons, and students who, even though attending a virtual class, are obviously doing other things during instruction—like using their phones or other devices. Several strategies discussed in this book can be used in both virtual and face-to-face classroom environments with ease and efficiency. For these strategies a description for both in-person classroom and virtual instruction will be provided.

Across all strategies it is assumed that OTRs are used as a means of engaging students during the introduction and heart of instruction and not as a means of assessment. However, each OTR does provide the teacher with an opportunity for feedback and some information about the degree to which students are understanding the skills and concepts being discussed. Ideas for differentiating these strategies for individuals with unique abilities are included, along with special considerations for when it may or may not be especially useful. Teaching students about OTR also involves establishing routines that incorporate components of effective instruction and implementing these routines with consistency. Although there are differences between distinct OTR strategies, each will incorporate either an individual response routine or a partner/team response routine. Table 1 summarizes each of the strategies in terms of recommendations under a variety of circumstances.

TABLE 1 ● Recommended Uses for the Strategies Discussed in the Book

STRATEGY	FACE-TO-FACE	VIRTUAL	INDIVIDUAL	PARTNER/ TEAMS	QUICK/ SHORT RESPONSES	IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION	PREPARATION OF MATERIALS
Whip around	*	*	*		*		
Quick poll	*	*	*		*		
Choral responding	*	*	*		*		
Individual questioning	*	*	*		*		
Stop and jot	*	*	*		*		
Guided notes	*	*	*		*		*
Response cards/ response slates	*	*	*		*		*
Hand signals	*	*	*		*		
Turn and talk	*			*	*	*	
Cued retell	*			*			*
Numbered heads together	*			*		*	*
Four corners	*			*		*	*
Snowball	*			*		*	*
Classroom mingle	*			*	*	*	*