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# The Highly Engaged Classroom



**THE CLASSROOM STRATEGIES SERIES**

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*Italicized entries indicate reproducible pages.*

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# INTRODUCTION

*The Highly Engaged Classroom* is part of the series of books collectively referred to as *The Classroom Strategies Series*. The purpose of this series is to provide teachers as well as building and district administrators with an in-depth treatment of research-based instructional strategies that can be used in the classroom to enhance student achievement. Many of the strategies addressed in this series have been covered in other works such as *The Art and Science of Teaching* (Marzano, 2007), *Classroom Management That Works* (Marzano, 2003), and *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Although those works devoted a chapter or part of a chapter to particular strategies, *The Classroom Strategies Series* devotes an entire book to an instructional strategy or set of related strategies.

Engagement is obviously a central aspect of effective teaching. If students are not engaged, there is little, if any, chance that they will learn what is being addressed in class. A basic premise of this book is that student engagement happens as a result of a teacher's careful planning and execution of specific strategies. In other words, student engagement is not serendipitous. Of course, no teacher will have all students engaged at high levels all of the time; however, using the suggestions presented in this book, every teacher can create a classroom environment in which engagement is the norm instead of the exception.

We begin with a brief but inclusive chapter that reviews the research and theory on engagement. Although you could skip this chapter and move right into those that provide recommendations for classroom practice, you are strongly encouraged to examine the research and theory, as they are the foundation for the entire book. Indeed, a basic purpose of *The Highly Engaged Classroom* and others in *The Classroom Strategies Series* is to present the most useful instructional strategies based on the strongest research and theory available.

Because research and theory can provide only a general direction for classroom practice, *The Highly Engaged Classroom* (and each book in the series) goes one step further to translate that research into applications for the classroom. Specifically, it addresses four emblematic questions students ask themselves, the answers to which determine how involved students are in classroom activities.

The first question, "How do I feel?," addresses the affective side of learning. The second question, "Am I interested?," deals with the extent to which classroom activities intrigue students. These first two questions combined constitute what we refer to as *attention* (as opposed to *engagement*). Attention is a short-term phenomenon that ranges from a few seconds to a few minutes. Emblematic questions three and four deal with engagement—a more long-term phenomenon lasting beyond the parameters

Many elementary schools in New Hampshire are participating in CircusFit, an exercise program created by Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey. Clowns, acrobats, and trapeze artists in the company visit schools to have some fun and show off physical skills. Kids learn that these skills require fitness and practice. Teachers can visit the website, [www.circusfit.com](http://www.circusfit.com), to learn how to create a safe and fun classroom circus program that meets the President's Challenge criteria ([www.presidentschallenge.org](http://www.presidentschallenge.org)); classes that stick with it are rewarded with circus tickets or in-school visits from performers (Snyder, 2008).

Exercise 2.2 provides some practice at identifying how physical movement can be used to increase students' energy levels. (See page 49 for a reproducible of this exercise and page 161 for a reproducible answer sheet. Visit [marzanoresearch.com/classroomstrategies](http://marzanoresearch.com/classroomstrategies) to download all the exercises and answers in this book.)

## Exercise 2.2 Incorporating Physical Movement

After reading each of the following classroom scenarios, determine which of the following strategies for physical movement is being employed:

- A. Stretch break
  - B. Movement related to rehearsal
  - C. Give one, get one
  - D. Vote with your feet
  - E. Corners activities
  - F. Drama
  - G. Physical representation
1. Mr. Rush's language arts class has been reading some poetry. In order to help the students begin to think about the abstract concepts in the poems and to lift the energy level in the room, he asks his students to stand. "I'm going to call out a word and I want you to do something with your body that you think represents its meaning." When he begins by calling out the word *beauty*, his students are a bit hesitant, but as the exercise continues they begin to have more fun with it and create many different poses.
  2. The students in Mr. Ulrick's first class of the day are often still tired and lethargic. In order to energize them a bit, he often asks them to stand in the beginning of class and do some simple exercises that are designed to wake up both sides of the brain.
  3. Ms. Rollin's choir class has been looking at potential songs for an end-of-year performance. She has put together four possible programs students can choose from. She gives them the song list for each of the four programs at the end of class one day, giving each program a number 1–4. She asks them to think overnight about which program they like best and why. Before class the next day, she places four posters, each with a number (1–4) in different places around the room. When class begins, she asks them to stand under the number that represents the program they have chosen. She then asks students under each number to explain why they like that program the best. However, simply liking or disliking the songs in each program is not sufficient. She asks each of them to provide technical justifications, using vocabulary and concepts they have learned throughout the year to articulate their opinions. She finds that while they have not had many in-depth discussions about music in the past, many of her students are able to speak technically and articulately and even have strong opinions. Finally, she gives them a chance to change their votes after having heard the opinions of some classmates.

## Using Effective Verbal Feedback

Verbal feedback is part of almost every lesson. Effective feedback helps students affirmatively answer the question “Can I do this?” Its effectiveness is important because verbal feedback helps set the stage for the self-theories the students will cultivate. To this end, the following planning questions are useful:

- During what activities today could I provide feedback to students?
- What are some phrases I should avoid when providing feedback?
- What are some phrases I should use when providing feedback?

The following vignette depicts a teacher using one or more of the daily strategies for the purpose of enhancing attention and engagement.

*Ms. Rhodes is planning the next lesson for her elementary EL class, and she wants to make sure the lesson captures their attention and engages them as much as possible. Because the next lesson is on Monday she knows she will spend a few minutes at the start of class building relationships with her students by discussing any important events over the weekend or the previous week. She knows how important it is that students feel accepted by her and by their peers. They are accustomed to this routine and often bring in photos, ticket stubs, concert programs—anything that is symbolic of a recent discovery or accomplishment to hang on the display board she set up in the back of the classroom. Before planning the rest of the lesson, she reads over the learning goals for the unit she is currently teaching and makes a mental note of how the class seems to be progressing. While she has noticed that, generally speaking, her students can properly identify items in isolation (a drawing of a single house or item of clothing), they have trouble identifying objects in a more complex setting. In order to help them progress, she decides to use an activity that will allow her to provide feedback easily. She spends some time thinking through the ways to provide feedback so that it reinforces the growth theory of competence. She has also noticed that her students do well in collaborative settings, so she will ask them to gather in the home groups they are already familiar with. This too should help students feel accepted by their peers. She plans an activity in which students will look at various colored drawings, each depicting a complex scene, and work together to pick out the items she calls out. For example, she might ask them to find all of the drawings in which a dog appears.*

*In order to challenge them a bit more, she plans a third activity, one which will require students to independently identify objects or events in a video clip. She plans to do these activities in a back-to-back fashion, thus maintaining a lively pace throughout class. She prepares for the lesson by obtaining the drawings and videotape*