Strengthening Lesson Delivery Skills through Increased Opportunities to Respond

Extended time successfully engaged with lesson content leads to increased student achievement (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Therefore, it is important teachers of students with learning disabilities (LD) plan for and provide ample opportunities for students to remain engaged throughout a lesson. Providing frequent opportunities for students to respond allows a teacher to maintain high levels of student engagement, to decrease off-task behavior, to assess student understanding, and opens increased opportunities for immediate affirmative and corrective feedback (Messenger, Common, Lane, Oakes, Menzies, Cantwell, & Ennis, 2017). The current research-to-practice piece highlights reasons supported by research to provide ample opportunities to respond and outlines methodology for immediately increasing opportunities to respond in the classroom.

Why optimize opportunities to respond?

Research has long-documented the link between increased opportunities to respond and increased levels of successful engagement with content (Brophy & Good, 1986). However, students with disabilities are often less likely to participate and remain engaged than their peers without disabilities (McLeskey et al., 2017). Using strategies to promote active student responding to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties across settings has recently been established by Council for Exceptional Children as a High-Leverage Instructional Practice in Special Education (see HLP-18). In addition to increased engagement and academic achievement, a number of studies have linked opportunities to respond and reduction of off-task and disruptive behavior in the classroom (Armendariz & Umbreit, 1999; Lambert, Cartlege, & Heward, 2006; Munro & Stephenson, 2009; Wood, Mabry, & Kretlow, 2009).

Opportunities to respond can also serve as brief, informal assessments of understanding. If students are continually engaged and responding within a lesson (whether verbally, physically, through writing, or using technology), it is possible to frequently assess understanding throughout the lesson and immediately adjust instruction according to student strengths and needs. In other words, the teacher can evaluate whether students are responding to instruction during the lesson, rather than only evaluating response-to-instruction after reviewing permanent products, such as exit tickets or submitted independent work samples. Using an abundance of on-the-spot assessment of responses can help a teacher answer questions such as, "Are my students processing the language of this academic skill, rule, or concept? Do students know how to use this rule or apply this concept? Do students know when (and when not) to use this rule? Are there any misconceptions? Are my students ready for a challenge or generalization activity?"

Moreover, active responding opens more opportunities for immediate, accurate affirmative and corrective feedback (Cooper, Whitney, & Lingo, 2018). Monitoring responses and providing feedback is especially important when working with students with LD and difficulties, given their higher likelihood of errors. If students are not responding frequently, teachers may assume students are on track, may mistakenly praise content acquisition speed, and/or may release scaffolds too early, putting students at risk for unknowingly practicing and learning errors. Instead, providing regular opportunities for all to respond throughout the lesson allows the teacher to hear from and see student progress and immediately provide specific praise or target and remediate misconceptions accordingly before releasing support. In sum, teachers should optimize opportunities to respond to:

1. Increase successful practice opportunities,

2. Increase student engagement,

3. Increase academic achievement,

4. Decrease off-task and/or disruptive behavior,

5. Assess understanding and immediately adjust instruction accordingly, and

6. Provide immediate affirmative or corrective feedback; avoid learned errors.

What are examples of easy-to-implement methods of increasing opportunities to respond?

Eliciting a unison response is an effective way to engage all learners quickly and frequently. Teachers can easily request responses from all learners by requesting a unison choral, written, or physical response. Use of pre-made response cards is also a simple, effective way to increase opportunities to respond in the classroom. Each of the methods described below are easy-to-implement and should be heavily infused within explicit instruction lessons, but can also be integrated into *any* instructional approach to increase active student responding.

Choral Responses

Choral responses involve all learners saying the answer at the same time. This practice is most effective when the answer is short and involves only one likely wording and when the teacher has reasonable expectations that most students should know the correct response (Archer & Hughes, 2011). To elicit a choral response, the teacher should pose a question and provide a lead-in to keep the desired choral response short, allow wait time for all learners to think about the answer (thus, all learners are remaining engaged), and then signal for a response. The purpose of the signal is to allow opportunities for wait time, creating an environment that welcomes and allows all to participate, practice, and receive feedback, rather than only those who process the question and answer fastest and raise their hand quickly and confidently (and quite possibly, intimidatingly) or simply blurt out the answer. In other words, the teacher is making opportunities to respond accessible for all learners by using the procedure outlined above. Best practice involves the teacher visually and auditorily assessing responses and providing immediate affirmative or corrective feedback to the learners.

Classroom example. A science teacher might use unison responses during a lesson intended to develop conceptual understanding of liquids vs. solids and gases. While helping learners to process wording of the definition of liquids, she might say, "Can liquids take the shape of their container?" She would allow for wait time and then signal for all to respond. Following the signal, students would then reply, "Yes" together. The teacher should simultaneously scan the room to determine if most have responded and may keep an eye on learners she believes are having difficulty with this particular concept. If a strong response is given, she knows she can provide immediate affirmative feedback and move forward because students have accurately processed this part of the definition. She might say, "Excellent. Liquids do take the shape of their container. Let's use our definition to determine if the following matter are liquids or are not liquids."

Written and Physical Responses

Eliciting written or physical unison responses is another easy-to-infuse method for increasing opportunities for students to respond within a lesson. Unison written responses involve all learners writing the answer at the same time. Unison physical responses involve all learners doing the same thing at the same time. Like choral responses, the unison written or physical response is typically short. The method for eliciting written responses is also similar to the method for eliciting a choral response: pose a question, allow for wait time, provide a lead in, signal for response, and provide affirmative or corrective feedback.

Classroom examples. When eliciting a unison written response, a math teacher might say, "We know 7 x 5 = 35. Use the commutative property of multiplication to show me the answer to 5 x 7 on your whiteboard. Wait time. On my signal, hold up your answers so I can see them! Fantastic work. Everyone remembers 5 x 7 = 35." The teacher might then follow up with, "How do you know 5 x 7 is also 35? Wait time. Maria?" Like unison written responses, unison physical responses can be easily integrated across lessons across the curriculum. A language arts teacher may encourage students to stand up when they hear an opinion vs. a fact, use fingers to indicate a choice of A, B, or C in any content-area, or show a facial expression to indicate conceptual understanding of the vocabulary term "elated." Here again, the teacher should pose the question, allow wait time, signal for response, and provide feedback.

Response Cards and Technology-Based Responses

Response cards can serve as a fun, non-threatening way to actively engage all learners and assess student understanding (Munro & Stephenson, 2009). Response cards are prepared ahead of time by the teacher. Typically, the teacher will pose a question, students select the corresponding response card, the teacher provides wait time and signals a response, students hold their card near their chin, and the teacher provides affirmative or corrective feedback.

Classroom example. A social studies teacher might want to link the day's lesson on rural communities to previous lessons on urban and suburban communities. She might wish to provide a strong practice activity to support maintenance of previous content, discrimination between new and old content, and generalization of the new and old concepts across a wide range of examples and non-examples. She may create (or have students create) response cards to respond to questions regarding types of communities. The cards may read "urban," "suburban," and "rural." The teacher might show a picture of a community or describe characteristics of a community and ask the students, "Is this an urban, suburban, or rural community? Take a moment to think. On my signal, hold your card under your chin. Everyone? *Teacher scans responses to assess understanding.* Outstanding. You all identified this as a rural community." She might then follow up with an individual question such as, "How do you know this? *Wait time.* Janelle?"

Like response cards, technology-based opportunities to respond can also be provided within lessons through the use of clickers or websites such as Kahoot!, Poll Everywhere, Zoho Survey (which offers multilingual surveys), etc. Technology-based responding activities/websites are readily available, are often free, and are engaging to the students, mimicking much of their communication and response methods in daily life. These opportunities can be easily integrated in the same manner as the unison response opportunities outlined above.

Individual Responses

Although unison responses are an undoubtedly effective way to increase opportunities to respond, eliciting frequent opportunities for individual responses is appropriate for engendering deeper reflection on content and aids in diversifying the types of response opportunities to maintain increased engagement. Diversifying the ways students participate within the lesson is recommended to maintain increased

engagement. When eliciting an individual response, posing the question *before* calling on a particular student will allow for all learners to remain engaged and to think about the answer (and will allow all learners to practice this content). Consistent with best practice techniques outlined for unison responses, the teacher might pose the question, provide ample wait time so all learners can reflect on the answer, and then call on a student and provide feedback. So, a teacher might say, "Why did you change the y to i and add -es when spelling 'copies?' Think about your response. *Wait time*. John?"

Children at-risk for and with LD and learning difficulties demonstrate exceptional needs in their growth, development, and learning. The easy-to-implement, evidence-based techniques outlined above can be utilized to maximize engagement, content practice, and short- and long-term outcomes for all students, especially students with learning difficulties.

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Opportunities to Respond

If a student raises his or her hand and provides an incorrect answer, I can simply call on a friend to help him or her out. This method saves him or her from embarrassment, right?

Although this frequently used procedure (i.e., fishing for answers) is well-intended, it is not an effective procedure when working with learners with processing difficulties and may not achieve the desired outcome. For example, if a student with processing difficulties, John, incorrectly labels the color blue as yellow and the teacher says, while pointing, "No, this color here is not yellow. Help John out, Stephany?" Stephany says purple. The teacher says, "No this isn't purple. Help them out, Vivian?" Vivian finally says blue and the teacher moves on to the next color. By this time, John has seen and heard the wrong label 3 times and has not had an opportunity to practice the correct label. Additionally, he has witnessed Vivian, who is always responding correctly, give the correct answer and receive praise (again) from the teacher. In this scenario, John is not saved from embarrassment, he has not practiced the content, and he has not received encouragement/praise for a correct answer; the desired outcome was not achieved.

So, how can I correct errors without fishing for answers?

Instead of fishing for answers, Archer and Hughes (2011) provide alternatives to error correction that are more likely to lead to increased understanding, save instructional time, and create a safe space for future participation. For fact based errors, the teacher can simply tell the student the answer. In the example

outlined in the question above, (i.e., John incorrectly labels blue as yellow), the teacher can simply state "This color is blue. What color is this, John?" John responds, "Blue." Then, the teacher might provide feedback by saying, "Excellent. This color is blue. What color, everyone?" The students respond together, "Blue." The teacher praises, "Well done, all." John has practiced the content and received praise. A similar procedure can be used for procedural errors, but rather than telling the student the correct answer, the teacher would simply support/prompt the student through the procedure as much as needed.

My students with learning difficulties are very sensitive to providing an incorrect answer in my inclusion class. Are there alternative options I can use to encourage participation?

When eliciting any response, it is possible to have students share answers with a partner and give one another feedback before calling on a particular student. This method provides an opportunity for practice and reflection on content in pairs or small groups before sharing with the larger classroom.

Additional Resources for Teachers

https://explicitinstruction.org

Dr. Anita Archer provides expert video-based examples of optimizing engagement within her lesson samples provided on this webpage.

https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources/high-leverage-practices/

Vanderbilt's IRIS Center has published free modules that outline strategies for promoting active student engagement within the classroom.

https://highleveragepractices.org/701-2-5/

Council for Exceptional Children and The CEEDAR Center have provided a video-based resource to assist teachers in using strategies to promote active student engagement.

https://highleveragepractices.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Instructionshort1.pdf

Council for Exceptional Children and The CEEDAR Center's high-leverage instructional practices document includes text-based information on HLP-18: Use strategies to promote active student engagement.

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