

Using the practice

Focused classrooms

Planning for maximum student engagement

Creating a focused classroom is important to maximising student participation and is a key practice in creating high expectations in a classroom. In these classrooms, teachers create the space for all students to learn and engage.

- Explicitly teach verbal and non-verbal cues. Examples of cues may include:
 - a designated standing space in the room that signals when you are ready to speak to the whole class
 - a focus signal, such as clapping or certain words or actions
 - using student names and eye contact often to build a sense of trust and visibility
 - consistent pre-planned language to address off-task behaviour so that all students know the behavioural expectations
- Include students in the planning of routines. For instance, can students agree on how class discussions should be managed? What are your class protocols for transitioning between tasks? What are the class rules, and what are the appropriate actions to take if these aren't followed?
- Provide opportunities for all students to answer questions and contribute to discussions. Think about how you structure your whole-group discussion so that you are not just asking for 'hands up'. For instance, you might try:
 - providing thinking time for students so that they have time to prepare a response to a question
 - having students share their answer to a question with their neighbour first
 - asking students to summarise the main idea or concept being studied in 2 sentences and then passing it to the person next to them to add to the answer

- have all students write an answer on a card or whiteboard and hold it up
- mixing up groups to help break down barriers and reduce competition in the room between "high" and "low" achievers. During guided instruction activities, think about grouping students randomly by:
 - asking students to group according to favourite colour
 - grouping by birth month
 - shuffling names randomly
 - having a "roster" where all students must work with each person in the class at least once in a term or set period.

These practices seek to maximise student participation, meaning less time needs to be spent getting students back on task.

High expectations for focused classrooms

Teacher expectations influence how students behave, interact and achieve in class. There are many teacher behaviours that convey high expectations, all of which help create a focused classroom.

Some common ways to have high expectations are:

- starting the lesson on time
- managing interruptions quickly and routinely
- keeping students on task through positive redirection.

Establishing learning routines also help convey high expectations to students, as they help students feel settled in the learning. You can create learning routines by:

- setting specific, challenging time limits so that students know how long they have
- establishing and communicating clear and challenging learning goals that push all members of the class
- engaging in questioning practices that develop students' understanding and direct students towards higher-order thinking
- frequently expressing goal statements that are clear and specific, such as what you believe they can achieve.