

Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to
Accelerate Student
Learning

Companion Guide

Chapter 4: Emotional Engagement
Introduction



Chapter 4

This chapter's intentional steps are divided into three types of engagement: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. Under each intention, there is a description of what that goal might look like and strategies for taking meaningful steps toward achieving it.

Emotional Engagement

When students are emotionally engaged, they feel safe in their learning environment, are comfortable taking risks, and believe in the purpose and value of what they're learning. Emotionally engaged students are more motivated to learn and more likely to ask for help when stuck. They make educated guesses and predictions and are willing to try new things. Emotional engagement gives students the confidence to grapple with challenging content and move through tasks with intention.

Investing in emotional engagement means inquiring about students' interests and what they are excited to learn. Teachers can begin by building strong, positive relationships that convey genuine interest and concern for their students. Hattie's research has shown that these authentic relationships have a .52 effect size on student achievement (Visible Learning, n.d.). Understandably, students crave these kinds of positive connections with their teachers.

Engagement levels also tend to go up when teachers demonstrate authentic care and concern for students' wellbeing. With the foundation of these strong relationships, teachers will better understand students' interests and can shape their instruction to reflect that. As a result, the learning process becomes relevant to students' lives, allows for self-expression, and encourages a growth mindset. For more ideas on cultivating positive teacher-student relationships, see Chapter 3.

Emotional engagement also benefits from the use of positive language that supports a culture of growth. As researchers have pointed out, "the simple identification and acknowledgment of the things a student naturally does well can be an immediate boost to their self-esteem, wellbeing, engagement and hope" (Reckmeyer, 2019, para. 8). Whether verbal or written, Growth Mindset affirmations help students recognize their strengths and talents as well as set goals for step-by-step improvement. Understanding what they already do well helps them start from a place of strength and can make a significant difference in their levels of engagement and overall performance in the classroom. For tips on developing a growth mindset in the classroom, see Chapter 14.

A small but powerful thing we can do for our students is to remind each of them every day that we care about their wellbeing, learning, and growth—and mean it.
