

# Engage Them: Strategies to Spark Learning and Communication

## Building Blocks for Teaching Students with Complex Needs

**Learning emerges from engagement in social-emotional experiences!**

Fredericks, J.A., Blumenfeld, P.C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence. Review of Educational Research, pp. 74, 59-109

### Grow Communication / Provide Language

Language is the gateway to communicating, learning, establishing social relationships and advocating for one's needs. It is a basic human right.

We must provide AND model language tools and opportunities for students to become competent communicators.

### Support Autonomy: Establish Expectations → Scaffold Success

Children benefit from structure and predictability to navigate environments, activities and interactions. Establishing routines and habits that foster independence creates automaticity with these tasks to "free up" brain power for learning and communicating. It can also foster a sense of well-being and safety.

### Sensory Considerations

Sensory considerations refers to an individual child's:

- 1) optimal sensory channel(s) for learning.
- 2) need for sensory input to establish a physiological state of readiness for learning.

Sensory channels to consider include visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, proprioceptive and vestibular. In unique cases, smell and taste may also be considered.


### Presume Competence

Assume the child will learn, communicate and contribute to the classroom community.


Use ability-positive language. Talk to the child as if she understands. Provide opportunities for engagement and learning, even if it doesn't elicit a response.

In summary, provide learning opportunities for all by creating accessible & inclusive spaces.


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<p><b>Emotional Engagement</b></p> <p>Positivity of emotion, enthusiasm or level of interest during learning.</p> 	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to be interested, we provide the modeling, communication opportunities, and language the child requires to engage.</p>	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to be interested, we honor the child's need for stable and predictable interactions, so more cognitive energy is available for learning.</p>	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to be interested, we provide tools and an environment that motivate learning and learning behaviors.</p>	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to be interested, we teach to the child's emotional (and social) needs.</p>
<p><b>Barriers for many Students with Disabilities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Anxiety</li> <li>● Low self-esteem</li> <li>● Difficulty engaging with others</li> <li>● Receptive and/or Expressive language impairment</li> </ul> <p><b>In the Classroom:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Challenging Behavior due to poor communication skills</li> <li>● Difficulty understanding expectations</li> <li>● Decreased willingness to engage in activities and demands</li> </ul>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Model positive, controlled, problem-solving and respectful interactions.</li> <li>2. Provide language for the scope of emotional experiences.</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engage authentically</li> <li>2. Model positive interactions by using respectful interaction behaviors such as speaking with an appropriate tone and volume, getting eye-level with the child, offering choices, &amp; avoiding power struggles.</li> <li>3. Foster social relationships: peer buddies, partner-focused questions, greet friends while passing out materials.</li> <li>4. Systematically support Emotional Competence: Identify emotions, talk about it, review and reflect on the experience.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide predictability.</li> <li>2. Give an "out".</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies :</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish routines to decrease anxiety.</li> <li>2. Incorporate "novel differences" to pique interest and mitigate boredom.</li> <li>3. Give kids power over their interactions:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. give an out</li> <li>b. offer controlled choices.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify sensory inputs and environmental structures the child requires to want to learn.</li> <li>2. Provide tools to motivate the child to persist with difficult tasks.</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. First / Then</li> <li>2. Token Economy</li> <li>3. Reduce clutter</li> <li>4. Label &amp; organize spaces for storing items and guiding movement throughout the classroom.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assume the child wants to learn.</li> <li>2. Identify needs, attitudes, and/or experiences that are interfering with the child's ability to emotionally engage.</li> <li>3. Be mindful of "self-fulfilling prophecies".</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Honor the path from joint attention to successful participation.</li> <li>5. Provide Social Narratives to foster understanding.</li> <li>6. Use Video Modeling to teach new skills with decreased anxiety.</li> </ol>

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<p><b>Behavioral Engagement</b></p> <p>Observable behavior such as time-on-task, overt attention, classroom participation, question asking, and choice or challenging task.</p> 	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to participate, we provide the language / communication opportunities and tools needed to participate.</p>	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to participate, we provide tools to help shape predictable interactions.</p>	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to participate, we provide accommodations and modifications to maximize access to learning material.</p>	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to participate, we provide multiple and individualized ways for a child to demonstrate learning.</p>
<p><b>Barriers for many Students with Disabilities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Motor skills</li> <li>● Attention to task</li> <li>● Independent task completion</li> <li>● Sensory Needs</li> <li>● Receptive and/or expressive language impairment</li> </ul> <p><b>In the Classroom:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Difficulty managing materials to show learning</li> <li>● Distracted behavior</li> <li>● Disruptive sensory seeking behavior</li> <li>● Lack of willingness to participate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Empower with the POWER of communication.</li> <li>2. Teach language needed to initiate, control and terminate an interaction.</li> <li>3. Provide and model the language needed to participate in the activity.</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Control others and one's environment (with the power of communication).</li> <li>2. Use receptive cues to foster appropriate participation.</li> <li>3. Provide and model:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. context- specific communication tools (as appropriate).</li> <li>b. Use familiar core vocabulary displays.</li> <li>c. Provide and model robust communication.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide tools to teach management of time and tasks.</li> <li>2. Incorporate predictable structure to manage and cue changes in routine.</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visual / Personal Schedules (between activity schedules)</li> <li>2. Transition Schedules</li> <li>3. Task Analysis Checklists (within activity schedules)</li> </ol>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify sensory inputs and environmental structures the child requires to be an active participant.</li> <li>2. Provide tools to motivate the child to persist with difficult tasks.</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Black / high contrast background.</li> <li>2. Upright presentation.</li> <li>3. Alternative point to show learning: focus finder, flashlight, etc.</li> <li>4. Decrease environmental distractions: low lighting/headphones to reduce noise.</li> <li>5. Incorporate movement or sensory breaks.</li> <li>6. Access to Fidgets.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assume the child wants to participate.</li> <li>2. Respond to baseline behaviors to shape increased participation.</li> <li>3. Identify barriers to participation and make appropriate accommodations or modifications.</li> <li>4. Be mindful of "self-fulfilling prophecies".</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide alternative means to demonstrate learning.</li> <li>2. Provide alternative (but compatible activities).</li> <li>3. Provide an "out". NO is a valid response</li> </ol>

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<p><b>Cognitive Engagement</b> Mental effort such as meaningful processing, strategy use, concentration and metacognition.</p> 	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to learn, we provide essential language, modeling, and communication opportunities to express ideas and demonstrate learning.</p>	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to learn, we honor the child's need for stable, predictable, and interesting interactions, so cognitive energy is activated for learning.</p>	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to be learn, we provide tools and an environment that motivate learning and learning behaviors.</p>	<p>When we assume a child WANTS to learn, we attend to the child's subtle behaviors that show learning and seize the opportunity to sustain interest.</p>
<p><b>Barriers for Students with Disabilities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Limited Life experiences due to medical conditions, limited mobility or challenging behaviors</li> <li>● Slow Processing</li> <li>● Receptive and/or expressive language impairment</li> </ul> <p><b>In the Classroom:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Limited background knowledge</li> <li>● Limited vocabulary</li> <li>● Limited ability to ask questions to gain information</li> <li>● Difficulty understanding new information</li> </ul>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide and model robust language.</li> <li>2. Support receptive AND expressive communication by modeling language with meaningful modalities.</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Model communication for a variety of purposes.</li> <li>2. Model key concepts with language displays, high-tech or low-tech.             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Student tools</li> <li>b. Classroom CORE Book</li> <li>c. Classroom CORE boards</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Expand Vocabulary.</li> <li>4. Ask purposeful questions: What did you like? How did you do it?</li> <li>5. Maximize social engagement and language opportunities within routines: greetings, snack, transitioning to specials.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide predictability.</li> <li>2. Give an "out" or alternative for difficult tasks.</li> <li>3. Attend to the child's interests / motivators.</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Intersperse difficult and easy tasks.</li> <li>2. Construct meaning with before, during and after learning strategies.</li> <li>3. Employ beneficial teaching strategies such as repetition, wait time, and providing relevant feedback.</li> <li>4. Incorporate multi-media learning opportunities.</li> <li>5. Attend to child's interests: topics, characters, activities.</li> <li>6. Provide an appropriate level of prompting.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify sensory inputs and environmental structures the child requires to be available for learning.</li> <li>2. Provide tools to motivate the child to persist with difficult tasks.</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teach content with high-activities.</li> <li>2. Incorporate music.</li> <li>3. Provide manipulatives (and guidance for using them functionally).</li> <li>4. Incorporate movement within learning activities.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Do This:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assume the child wants to learn.</li> <li>2. Assume the child WILL learn with appropriate accommodations or modifications.</li> <li>3. Be mindful of "self-fulfilling prophecies".</li> </ol> <p><b>Tools &amp; Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Use "ability-positive" language and actions.</li> <li>5. Provide age-appropriate materials, activities and language.</li> <li>6. Use language of engagement rather than language of compliance.</li> </ol>