

Academic Engagement: Current Perspectives on Research and Practice

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Abstract. Classroom behaviors that enable academic learning are the focus of this article. A brief perspective is offered on the development and validation of one enabler—engagement in academic responding—and recent findings are provided of an effort to bridge the gap between research and practice by employing this knowledge in Title 1 elementary schools to improve instruction. In prior research, the authors identified a class of “academic responses” (e.g., reading aloud), positively correlated to student achievement as measured by standardized tests, that were differentially accelerated by instructional situations and interventions, and mediated the relationship between instruction and achievement. Translating these findings to practice within three magnet schools, teachers were provided engagement information on individual students in their classrooms as well as (a) school-wide engagement and classroom behavior norms, including trends over grade levels and type of learner, and (b) instructional situations that accelerated versus decelerated engagement for use in the instructional decision making of teachers. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

What students do while being taught in the classroom has long been of interest to educators and educational researchers. If a student is unruly and disruptive, he or she will be unable to respond to academic opportunities or manage subject matter tasks rapidly and accurately. These actions may “spillover,” preventing the learning of others, and may alter or in-

terfere with a teacher’s plans for teaching. If many students are engaged in this behavior, subject matter teaching and learning may be stopped altogether. Alternately, if students are well-behaved, watching and listening to the teacher, waiting to receive materials and instructions on what to do, their rate of progress in learning a subject matter will advance. When

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