



TEACHER AS NOTICER

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT CUES

BY YVONNE GODBER

Improving educators' abilities to recognize and respond to signals that indicate students are upset, confused, or disengaged is a powerful but often underused strategy for ensuring that all students are accessing rigorous learning. Research has shown that when adults respond to students' social and behavioral cues for help in a timely, proactive, and sensitive manner, students are more able to get back on track with important learning tasks at hand. Such supportive responses have been linked to increases in student achievement, peer relationships, and engagement, and decreases in exclusionary disciplinary practices (Gregory et al., 2016), all of which can help schools achieve important equity goals.

Are you and your colleagues prepared to recognize and meet all

students' needs?

Teachstone, a company using education technology to improve the ways teachers interact with students, has developed practical tools that can help teachers notice and respond more quickly and effectively to student academic and social-emotional cues. The tools are grounded in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a framework underlying teacher professional learning models that grew out of research conducted at the University of Virginia. CLASS is an evidence-based method for measuring, evaluating, and improving teacher-student interactions that helps teachers cultivate supportive, structured, and engaging experiences for children and adolescents from birth through high school.

CLASS pulls out and measures complex **classroom interactions** as the key determiner of students' social,

emotional, and academic outcomes. The framework describes how students benefit when they:

- Feel emotionally connected to adults and peers (**connection**);
- Understand the organization and routines of their environment (**organization**); and
- Are appropriately challenged, engaged, and curious (**challenge**).

One aspect of the CLASS framework identifies specifically how adults and peers cultivate warm and supportive relationships with one another. The ways adults and peers respond to a student who struggles in some way (academically, socially, developmentally, behaviorally, emotionally) influence whether that student is able to get back on track to the task of learning or, instead, his or her issue escalates and interferes with

his or her ability to grow and learn socially or academically. In other words, responsiveness matters.

WHY DO WE NEED TO ASSESS INTERACTIONS?

Classrooms are busy places. Planning and implementing thoughtful learning experiences is challenging, even without simultaneously watching student responses and cues to make sure students are really benefiting from the intended strategy. Yet those responses are essential for the carefully planned lesson to succeed as planned. Even though a pilot sets a flight plan before taking off, adjustments occur in flight, based on weather, traffic, plane functioning, or passenger needs. Similarly, even the best planned lesson can get off course if adults are not aware of and responding to the many diverse needs students bring with them each day.

At times, students manage to get the help they need on their own by using their own skills, peers, and developmental resources. At other times, though, they rely on adults to notice and attend to their needs to get back to the task of learning and the instructional activities planned for them.

Without a doubt, observant and supportive teacher practices are requisite for students' engagement and ability to learn, benefit from, and contribute to instructional content. Luckily — with support, feedback, and practice — these are skills that teachers can learn to refine while enhancing responses to better match student emotional needs and get students back to the important learning goals at hand.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Teachstone created the following professional learning activity (pp. 54–58) to encourage teacher reflection and support adult awareness of and responsiveness to students' needs and cues.

This resource is designed to be used

COACHING PROJECT FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

Learning Forward, Teachstone, and American Institutes for Research are collaborating on a federally funded Education Innovation Research grant to refine and scale a validated, strength-based supplemental coaching program for middle and high school teachers based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). For further information visit www.secondarycoaching.org.

Early validation research on this program, the MyTeachingPartner (MTP) 1:1 Video Coaching Model for teachers, showed a nine-point achievement gain for secondary students (50th to 59th percentile), and the model has been recognized in the What Works Clearinghouse (Allen et al., 2011).

independently or in conjunction with other social and emotional learning (SEL) professional learning strategies that address SEL and teacher-student relationships. It can be used in many different ways, depending on the teacher and contextual needs. For instance:

- Individual reflection and planning;
- Promoting a coaching conversation;
- A guide for professional learning community discussions; and
- Larger staff meetings.

The objectives of this activity are to help teachers:

- Reflect on how students let those around them know that they require additional support to meet their academic, behavioral, developmental, or social-emotional needs;
- Practice identifying both student cues and teacher responses; and

- Plan for more effective, sensitive, and timely responses to student cues.

The activity includes two sections:

PART 1: Part 1 asks teachers

to reflect on how their students demonstrate various academic or social-emotional needs and recollect specific scenarios in their classrooms to describe how they responded to these needs at the time.

If used in conjunction with one-on-one coaching, a PLC, or a staff meeting, Part 1 can be completed ahead of time in preparation for a shared conversation.

PART 2: Part 2 includes several brief online video clips of real classroom footage at different age levels. Teachers follow a link to a web page to view a clip of their choice where they identify student cues that they need some type of help or support and the degree to which the teacher responded in a way that supported students' academic, behavioral, or social-emotional growth.

Part 2 can also be completed individually or as part of a group learning experience.

The activity ends with a reflection on why sensitive and timely responses are important to student development, along with goal planning to increase the quality of timely and sensitive responses.

REFERENCES

Allen, J.P., Pianta, R.C., Gregory, A., Mikami, A.Y., & Lun, J. (2011).

An interaction-based approach to enhancing secondary school instruction and student achievement. *Science*, 333, 1034–1037.

Gregory, A., Hafen, C.A., Ruzek, E., Mikami, A.Y., Allen, J.P., & Pianta, R.C. (2016). Closing the racial discipline gap in classrooms by changing teacher practice. *School Psychology Review*, 45(2), 171–191.

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Yvonne Godber (contact@teachstone.com) is a Teachstone consultant.

INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS

Purpose: Practice noticing and responding to student cues for support.

Uses: Individual reflection, coaching conversations, PLC, staff meeting.

Grade levels: K-12

This activity guides you to reflect on your students’ needs and think about how you respond to their cues in the moment. The goal is to help you identify student needs and strengthen the quality of interactions by adjusting your response to better match their cues. When our responses reflect students’ emotional needs, their academic engagement increases and they learn more.

PART 1

Directions: Use the space in the chart below to write your reflections to the following prompts.

ABOUT YOU		ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS
In moments when you as an adult feel insecure, bored, or disconnected, how do you let others know that you need additional support? How do you let them know verbally and nonverbally?	What do others do that helps you feel better and get back on track?	Brainstorm: What do students in your class need from their classroom environment to learn and grow socially and academically?

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INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS, continued

Whether adults, children, or adolescents, individuals communicate their needs in different ways. Take a moment to think of two students who show their stress or needs in very different ways from each other.

Write their names at the top of the chart below in the columns for Student 1 and Student 2. Next, think about something they recently said or did (consider both verbal and nonverbal cues) and how you responded in that moment. Write your reflections in the space provided for each student.

Reflection prompts	Student 1	Student 2
Describe one of the ways each student lets you know that he or she needs something from you, peers, or the classroom environment. <i>Example: She puts her head on her desk when she is frustrated.</i>		
When you notice this need, how do you tend to respond?		
Which of these students do you find it easier to respond to in a sensitive or effective manner? Mark your response with a check mark (✓).		
Which of your own beliefs, experiences, and skills makes it easier for you to respond to the student you marked with the check above?		
Now, consider the other student whom you did NOT mark with the check above. Which of your own beliefs, experiences, and skills makes it <i>harder</i> for you to meet these types of student needs?		
Continue to Part 2. Return to answer the next reflection questions after completing Part 2.		
Brainstorm ideas on how to respond more effectively (quickly or sensitively, for example) to each specific student need you described in row 1.		
Set a strong and feasible goal describing when you will test out your new response.		

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INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS, continued

PART 2

<p>The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) focuses on classroom interactions as a key determinant of student outcomes. Research shows how students benefit when they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel emotionally connected to adults and peers (connection); • Understand the organization and routines of their environment (organization); and • Are appropriately challenged, engaged, and curious (challenge). <p>We all find some of these needs more difficult to address than others. To take a broad view of student needs, reflect on which are easier and harder for you.</p> <p>Circle the student need that is generally hardest for you to catch and respond to in the moment: connection, organization, or challenge.</p>	Student need	Example responses
	Connection	Cultivating warm, supportive relationships with our students.
	Organization	Organizing students' time, attention, routines, and behavior.
Challenge	Encouraging students to try new things, analyze, talk, and engage.	

As you engage in the following video activity, pay particular attention to the type of student need you identified.

VIDEO ACTIVITY

Directions: Visit [teachstone.com/student-cues](https://www.teachstone.com/student-cues) to watch a brief video clip of a real classroom. There are several age-level clips available. Choose the one that is closest to the ages of the students in your setting.

Watch the clip once, paying close attention to student cues that communicate the need for support. Watch for both subtle and obvious cues. These might be verbal or nonverbal, at the individual or group level, or focus on a broad range of concerns such as academic, behavioral, or social-emotional. Write your observations in the box below.

My observation notes:

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INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS, continued

Now that you've recorded some observations about student needs in the classroom video, let's look at how the teacher responded to those cues for support.

1. In the first column (Student needs) in the chart below, summarize each student cue you identified in the clip. List each of the cues separately in the rows provided in the first column.
2. Rewatch the video, this time paying close attention to the teacher's actions.
 - a. In the second column, Teacher response to student(s), note how the teacher reacted to each need. What did she do to support the student(s)? Did she see the cue? Was a cue missed?
 - b. In the final column, Resolution, note if each student need was effectively addressed and how you know. For example, the student(s) could return to the learning activity because their need had been met or their problem was resolved as a result of the teacher's attention and efforts.

Student needs	Teacher response to student(s)	Resolution
<p>Example A: A student has her head on the desk.</p> <p>Example B: The class is asking a lot of similar questions about the assignment; students seem confused.</p>	<p>Example A: The teacher notices and then walks over to ask how she's doing.</p> <p>Example B: The teacher notices and says, "Hold up everyone. Let me try to re-explain what you're supposed to do."</p>	<p>Example A: The student sits up and gets to work.</p> <p>Example B: Students nod and get started on the assignment.</p>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

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TOOLS

INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS, continued

REFLECTION

Why is it important for teachers to notice and respond sensitively to students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional cues?

Lined area for writing a response to the reflection prompt.

Return to the last rows in the Reflection Prompts table from Part 1 on p. 55 to revisit the two students you described earlier and consider:

- How can you increase your awareness of the needs they present in your classroom?
• How might you try responding differently the next time they indicate a specific need?
• When will you try this response?
• If in a group, discuss and share your ideas.

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