PRACTICE 6:
Opportunities to respond

What is an Opportunity to respond (OTR)?

An Opportunity to Respond (OTR) refers to teacher behaviours that prompt or solicit a student response, whether verbal, written, or gestural. OTRs involve instructional questions, statements, or gestures aimed at actively engaging students. They also address how often teachers provide requests requiring student participation (MILLER, 2009).

The use of OTRs includes strategies for:

- Presenting materials
- Asking questions
- Correcting students' answers as appropriate

Incorporating OTRs into classroom instruction enhances student engagement and learning.

Increasing Opportunities to respond

Maximizing Opportunities to respond (OTRs) in classroom instruction helps engage and actively involve students. When students spend more time actively engaged during instruction, they are more likely to learn and less likely to engage in off-task or inappropriate behaviour.

Optimal rates

Research into OTRs suggests they are most effective when:

- Each student has many opportunities to respond
- There is a high likelihood of success

The following guidelines (REINKE ET AL., 2013) are designed to maximise student engagement during instruction:

New material	Review material
During instruction, aim for four to six student responses per minute. Ensure students can respond accurately about 80% of the time.	When reviewing learned material, aim to increase the response rate to around eight to twelve responses per minute. Ensure students can respond accurately about 90% of the time.

When learning new material, learners should typically be able to respond correctly to about 80% of opportunities. When reviewing material, this increases to around 90%.

Getting started

Step 1: Plan a variety of verbal response opportunities

Verbal responses involve students orally answering questions, sharing ideas, reviewing or summarising prior learning, or repeating new concepts after the teacher.

There are two common types of verbal response strategies: individual and choral.

Individual responses

Individual response strategies involve the teacher inviting many students to answer instructional questions. These methods can include:

- Calling on students individually with increased frequency
- Using a round-robin approach for individual responses
- Pulling a random student's name out of a container

Choral responses

A choral response is when all students in the class respond in unison to a teacher's question. This technique is suitable for review, teaching new skills, drills, or lesson summaries. Choral responding can be effective at all levels—primary and secondary grades, for students with and without disabilities (MISSOURI SCHOOLWIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT, 2019). It is ideal for curriculum content that:

- Can be answered in short (one to three word) responses
- Has only a single correct answer to a question
- Can be presented in a fast-paced manner

To introduce choral responding, provide clear directions and model the procedure. Use a clear, consistent cue to signal to students when to respond to avoid confusion.

When using choral response, some students may offer incorrect answers; provide feedback to the group about the 'majority' response (the response called out or signalled by the largest number of students).

Step 2: Allow 'think time'

'Think time' is the pause between delivering a question and calling on a student or cueing a group response. It involves simply pausing after asking a question and counting for a set amount of time.

Some teachers may be concerned that students will lose focus or behave inappropriately if responses are not given quickly; however, the opposite is true. When only one or two seconds of think time is provided, only the quickest students remain engaged. Providing a longer think time of at least three seconds increases overall participation and decreases disruptions. Pausing for three to ten seconds, or more, after asking a question can reduce the need for redirects and minimise discipline problems (ROWE, 1974; 1987).

Step 3: Plan non-verbal responses

Non-verbal responses involve all students actively responding to the teacher's directions. These strategies offer the same benefits as verbal response strategies. Some of the most common approaches include:

Whiteboards

Give students personal whiteboards and erasable pens to write their responses to questions. These boards can be used for writing letters, words, and numbers, drawing symbols, or solving problems. When cued, students hold up their boards to display their answers. An eraser, sponge, or cloth can be used to clear the boards in preparation for the next question.

Response cards

Provide students with pre-printed cards with 'choice' words on each side. For example:

- 'Yes'/'No'.
- 'True'/'False'
- Odd'/'Even'
- Set of choices, (e.g., 'noun', 'pronoun', 'verb', 'adverb')

Signalling and movement responses

Use signalling or movement activities in addition to other non-verbal strategies. For example:

- thumbs up/thumbs down
- stand up/sit down
- move to four corners
- other creative signals.

It is critical to teach response procedures when using movement activities. Teach and practise the procedure in a game before transferring it to academic tasks.

Technology

There are many technology products and services that facilitate OTRs during instruction. Some of these tools also offer automated data collection, aiding in both pre and post-assessment.

Step 4: Collect baseline data

Calculate your current use of OTRs by asking a colleague to observe you for 10 minutes and keep a tally, or by recording a lesson and counting the OTRs yourself.

Step 5: Plan to increase OTRs

Decide how and when you will focus on increasing OTRs. Identify times during the week when inappropriate behaviour is likely. Plan how to collect baseline data and monitor progress. Reflect on how increasing OTRs impacts student behaviour and your teaching experience.

Self-assessment:
Opportunities to Respond

Self-assessment feature	In place	Partially in place	Not in place
I provide multiple opportunities to respond during instruction.			
I use a variety of strategies to increase student opportunities to respond.			
I use think time to increase student opportunity for thinking.			
I plan instructional questions and response methods before the lesson.			