

Practical Teacher Resources for Supporting Student Engagement & Retention



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About the Engaging Minds Project



Engaging Minds: Improving Student Retention Through Best Practices is an Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership project that brings together partners from Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Sweden to better understand the factors that influence student engagement, motivation, retention, and the risk of early school leaving in secondary education.

Across Europe, schools are increasingly facing challenges to support students who, while remaining formally enrolled in education, may experience, disengagement, stress, and uncertainty about their future or difficulties connecting with school life. While early school leaving is often viewed as a single event, the research consistently shows that it is the final stage of a gradual process of disengagement. This process can begin months, or even years before a student leaves education.

The Engaging Minds project sets out to explore this process by combining research, policy perspectives, educator perspectives, student voice, and examples of best practice from participating partner countries. Through surveys, interviews, focus groups, case studies, and comparative analysis, the project examined the factors that put students at risk of disengagement and the conditions that help them stay engaged and successfully completing their education.

Student retention is influenced by more than academic performance alone. Students are likely to be more engaged when they experience a sense of belonging, have positive relationships with teachers and peers, feel supported when they face challenges, understand the importance of their education to their future, and can access relevant support when they need it.

The Practical Teacher Resources in this document have been developed as a practical addition to the Engaging Minds Handbook. It brings together evidence based and successful activities, approaches, and examples from participating countries that can help teachers and schools strengthen engagement, support wellbeing, and reduce the risk of student disengagement and early school leaving. The examples included reflect real practice used by teachers across Denmark, Finland, Ireland, and Sweden that demonstrate how engagement and retention can be supported through everyday classroom interactions, building good relationships, wellbeing initiatives, and whole-school approaches.

Ultimately, the Engaging Minds project goal is to help schools and teachers create learning environments in which students feel they belong, are supported, feel motivated and are able to thrive.

How to use this Resource

This collection of Practical Teacher Resources is designed as a practical reference and tool for teachers, tutors, mentors, student support teams, school leaders, and other educational professionals who want to strengthen student engagement and reduce the risk of disengagement and early school leaving.



The resource is organised around the key protective factors that emerged from the Engaging Minds research, documented in the Engaging Minds Handbook. Each section focuses on a particular aspect of student engagement and retention and includes practical activities, evidence-based approaches, and examples provided by partner schools and project partners.

Each activity includes information about its purpose, who it is intended for, when it may be most useful, how it can be implemented, and how it might contribute to student engagement. Some activities can be used in classrooms immediately, while others describe broader programmes or practices that schools may wish to adapt and develop further.

The activities in this teacher resource are most effective when integrated in a whole-school approach to creating learning environments where students feel safe, valued, connected, and supported. Teachers are encouraged to select and adapt activities based on the needs of their students and the realities of their own school and classroom context.

The practical examples included in this teacher resource were contributed by project partners in Denmark, Finland, Ireland, and Sweden. While all examples aim to strengthen student engagement and retention, each partner brings a distinctive perspective shaped by their experience, context, and areas of expertise. Together, they demonstrate that there is no single solution to improving engagement. Instead, engagement is strengthened through a combination of supportive relationships, meaningful learning experiences, student participation, wellbeing supports, future aspirations, and coordinated school systems.

While each partner brings a distinctive perspective and area of emphasis, it is important to recognise that many of the activities and approaches support multiple engagement factors simultaneously. For the purposes of this resource, activities have been grouped according to the engagement factor to which they most strongly contribute.

However, student engagement is a complex and interconnected process, and many of the examples included throughout the handbook could legitimately sit within more than one section.

The country perspectives presented below therefore highlight the predominant themes within each partner's contribution rather than providing a definitive categorisation of their activities and practices.



Denmark: Classroom Engagement and Reflective Teaching Practice

The Danish examples focus on the role of everyday classroom experiences in supporting engagement. They demonstrate how clear lesson structures, student participation, active involvement, intentional technology use, and reflective teaching practices can contribute to more engaging learning environments. A particular emphasis is placed on teacher-student interaction and the role of teacher reflection in shaping students' experiences of learning.



Finland: Wellbeing, Self-Awareness, and Student Belonging

The Finnish examples highlight the importance of helping students understand themselves, develop confidence, strengthen peer relationships, and build a sense of belonging within the school community. Through reflective activities, wellbeing-focused tools, and peer support structures, the Finnish contribution demonstrates how engagement can be strengthened by supporting students' personal development and social connectedness.



Ireland: Relationships, Family Engagement, and Coordinated Support

The Irish examples emphasise the importance of strong relationships, mentoring, family engagement, and early intervention systems. They illustrate how schools can create coordinated structures that identify students who may need support, strengthen connections between home and school, and provide multiple layers of academic, pastoral, and wellbeing support to promote engagement and retention.



Sweden: Mentoring, Future Aspirations, and Pathways for Success

The Swedish examples focus on helping students develop confidence, identify strengths, and connect their learning to future opportunities. Through mentoring, entrepreneurship, project-based learning, and future-readiness activities, the Swedish contribution highlights the importance of helping students develop aspirations, explore pathways, and see purpose and relevance in their education.



Context: The Engaging Minds Research Framework



The Engaging Minds research documented in the Engaging Minds Handbook highlights that student engagement and retention are shaped by a combination of academic, social, emotional, and institutional factors. Across partner countries, the findings consistently demonstrate that disengagement rarely results from a single cause. Instead, it develops gradually through the interaction of multiple risk factors, including stress, low support levels, weak familiar connections to school, uncertainty about pathways, and difficulties experienced during key educational transitions.

At the same time, the research also identified a number of protective factors that help students remain engaged and successfully able to complete their secondary school education (and beyond). These protective factors are the basis of the Engaging Minds Research Framework and provide the structure for this practical teacher resource.

It is organised around seven interconnected themes, briefly described in the table below:

Protective Factor for Student Engagement and Retention

1. Belonging and School Connectedness

Students who feel connected to their peers, teachers, and wider school communities are more likely to participate in learning and remain engaged in school life. Feelings of belonging strengthen resilience and help students navigate challenges and transitions.

2. Relationships and Support Networks

Trusted relationships with teachers, mentors, tutors, and peers emerge as one of the strongest positive factors identified across the project. Positive relationships provide emotional support, increase willingness to seek help, and create a sense of safety and connection.

Protective Factor for Student Engagement and Retention

3. Student Agency, Voice, and Participation

Students are more likely to engage when they feel heard, valued, and actively involved in the learning process. Opportunities for participation can strengthen motivation, confidence, and ownership of learning. Engagement is more likely when learning feels relevant, achievable, and purposeful. High-quality teaching, understanding expectations clearly, receiving supportive feedback, and opportunities for active participation contribute to strong engagement in the classroom.

4. Future Pathways and Aspirations

Students who understand the relevance of their education and connect learning to future goals are more likely to persist through challenges. Motivation is strengthened when students recognise their strengths, understand their aspirations, and can see meaningful pathways beyond school.

5. Wellbeing, Motivation and Resilience

Stress and anxiety emerged as one of the most significant stress factors associated with disengagement. Students frequently report pressures associated with workload, assessments, deadlines, and balancing competing responsibilities.

6. Early Identification and Responsive Support

Across Europe, transitions are recognised as periods when students are increasingly vulnerable. Moving between educational stages, choosing subjects or programmes, planning future pathways can create uncertainty and increase the risk of disengagement. The research identified mentoring, guidance, and flexible pathways as solutions to support student retention.

7. Whole-School Culture and System for Engagement

Student engagement is strengthened when schools embed supportive relationships, inclusive practices, and coordinated support systems throughout everyday school life. A whole-school approach to student engagement helps to create the conditions for sustained engagement and successful participation in education. It ensures that students are known, valued, supported, and connected.

How the Research Framework Is Used In the Teacher Resource

These protective factors presented in the Engaging Minds research framework provide a practical and evidence-based understanding of how to support and improve student engagement and retention.

They also provide a structure for this practical teacher resource. Each section explores one of the protective factors in more detail, explains why it matters, and presents practical examples and activities for teachers that can be used to strengthen engagement and reduce the risk of student disengagement and early school leaving.

Legend for Icons Used

Icons are used throughout the activity descriptions. This is what they mean.



Instruction



Tool



Action



Compare



Discuss



Reflect



Attention



Why it works



Practice Example

Belonging & School Connectedness

Why it matters?

A strong sense of belonging is one of the most protective factors to support student engagement and retention. Students who feel connected to their peers, teachers, and school community are more likely to participate in learning, seek support when difficulties arise, and stay committed to completing their education. On the flipside, feeling isolated, having no or weak peer relationships, and not feeling attached to school increase the risk of disengagement and early school leaving.

Belonging is not something that develops automatically. It is achieved by offering intentional opportunities for students to get to know each other by participating in shared experiences. This makes students feel they are a valued part of the school community. In Denmark, belonging showed one of the strongest protective relationships with retention, while Swedish and Finnish students reported positive peer relationships as important contributors to their school experience.



Practical Tools

Similarities and Differences Activity



Objective: Supporting peer / group relationships



Suitable for: Tutor groups, Form classes, New student groups



When to use: Beginning of the school year, during transitions, when building group cohesion



Time required: ~30minutes

Purpose

Humans have a need to feel that they belong with others, to be part of something. At the beginning of a school year at a new school, a student reflects on how they might connect with others and what they have in common with the other members. At the same time, it is important for them to feel unique, to have something that sets them apart from the rest.

How it works



The group is divided into smaller groups of 4–5 people. Give each group some paper and a pen.



The goal is for each group to produce as many things as possible that they have in common. These can include things that everyone likes or dislikes, does or does not do, things that everyone has or does not have, and so on.



After the activity, each group chooses one common feature to present to the others in a fun and creative way. For example, through mime, a short skit, a living statue, etc.). The rest of the participants guess what it is.

Why it works



This activity helps students discover shared interests and experiences, strengthening connections and creating a sense of belonging within the group. At the same time, it recognises individual differences and encourages students to value each other's unique perspectives. Strong peer relationships and a sense of belonging are important protective factors for student engagement, wellbeing, and participation in school life.

Yarn Circle Discussions



Objective: Supporting peer / group relationships



Suitable for: Tutor groups, Form classes



When to use: When building group cohesion



Time required: 10 - 15 minutes

Purpose

This activity encourages students to participate in group discussions, share their perspectives, and listen to the experiences and ideas of others. It supports the development of positive peer relationships while helping teachers create an inclusive environment where all students have an opportunity to contribute.

How it works



Students stand up in small groups (4-7 students in each) sThey take turns answering the specific question written on the whiteboard.



The question should be broad as to ensure all students have something to say.



The first student holds a yarn skein and after they are done speaking, they pass it to another student, while still holding on to the end of the yarn.



This creates a 'web' of thoughts that makes it easy for the teacher to see which students have participated most/least in the discussion.

Why it works



Students are more likely to feel connected to their peers when they are given structured opportunities to share and listen in a supportive setting. The visual yarn web makes participation visible, encouraging balanced involvement and helping teachers identify students who may be less engaged in group discussions. The activity promotes active listening, inclusion, and mutual respect, while strengthening students' sense of belonging within the group.

Compliment Your Partner



Objective: Supporting peer / group relationships



Suitable for: Tutor groups, Form classes



When to use: When building group cohesion



Time required: 10 - 15 minutes

Purpose

This activity helps students build positive peer relationships by creating opportunities to recognise and celebrate the strengths, achievements, and qualities of others. It encourages students to listen attentively, develop empathy, and learn more about their classmates in a supportive and respectful environment.

How it works



Divide the students into pairs.



Listen to your partner as they tell a story about an achievement they are proud of. The listener's role is to listen carefully. If necessary, the listener can and should ask follow-up questions.



Afterwards, the listener shares their partner's achievement either in a small group or with the whole class and explains what they admire about the story they have just heard.



The teacher can do another round, or the same pairs can share the other person's story in the following week's session.

Why it works



Feeling valued and recognised by peers is an important contributor to students' sense of belonging and wellbeing. By listening carefully to another person's story and then sharing it with others, students practise active listening, perspective-taking, and positive communication skills. The activity shifts attention towards strengths and achievements, helping to build mutual respect, strengthen social connections, and create a more positive and supportive classroom culture.

Peer Support Programme



Objective: Student-to-Student Support



Suitable for: Senior students and transitioning students



When to use: Beginning of the school year, during transitions, when building group cohesion



Time required: Year-round commitment for students and a support teacher

Purpose

In Finnish upper secondary schools, the tutor student system is a form of peer support in which volunteer students from the second year are selected to support first-year students, i.e. those new to the school. The purpose of the system is to help new students settle into the school environment, strengthen the sense of community, and provide support with studies and everyday school practices.

How it works



Tutoring is based on voluntary participation.
Interested second-year students can apply to become tutors.



The selected students are given training for the role.
This training is organised by one teacher who is compensated for and trained in the role, They work together with various non-profits to provide the best training possible.



Tutor students work in groups or small teams and are often assigned to specific first-year groups. The main responsibilities of tutors include:

1

Welcoming new students and introducing them to the school's routines at the start of the academic year.
eg. Giving campus tours, Supporting 1st-year students during their first two school days

2

Supporting group cohesion and helping to create a positive atmosphere,

For example by organising group activities on the first days and weekly form teacher sessions

3

Providing peer support in areas such as study skills, time management, and general questions related to upper secondary studies

4

Taking part in everyday school life, for example by helping to organise events and themed days together with staff

5

Acting as approachable support figures whom new students can turn to for advice



Tutors do not replace teachers or guidance counsellors, but they complement the school's support network by offering accessible peer support.

Why it works



The transition into a new school environment can be challenging for many students and can affect their sense of belonging, confidence, and engagement. Peer support programmes help reduce this uncertainty by providing new students with accessible guidance from peers who have recently experienced the same transition themselves.

Because tutor students are often seen as approachable and relatable, they can help new students build social connections, navigate school routines, and feel part of the school community more quickly.

This strengthens students' sense of belonging, promotes positive relationships, and provides an additional layer of support that can contribute to successful engagement and retention.



Relationships and Support Networks

Why it matters?

Having trusted and supportive relationships emerged as one of the most consistent protective factors in the Engaging Minds research. Students who feel recognised, supported and understood by teachers, mentors, and peers are more likely to stay engaged in learning and seek help before challenges become overwhelming. Having strong teacher – student relationships is particularly important during periods of transition and for students experiencing academic, social, or personal difficulties.

Students who are at greater risk of disengagement often report lower levels of perceived support from school. Having or building strong relationships is central to retention efforts. It emphasises the importance of creating opportunities for regular check-ins, mentoring, and personalised support.



Practical Tools

Form Teacher System to Promote Wellbeing & Relationships



Objective: Relationship and Support Networks | Whole-school support structure



Suitable for: School leaders, tutors, form teachers, guidance counsellors, student support teams



When to use: Throughout the academic year as part of a structured support system



Time required: Ongoing throughout the year. Requires time allocation for teachers involved

Purpose

The Form Teacher System aims to support student well-being, motivation, engagement and retention by ensuring that every student has access to a designated teacher who provides guidance, support, and is a consistent point of contact through the year or entire studies.

The approach recognises that students face different challenges at different stages of their educational journey. By providing consistent and structured support, form teachers help student with those challenges by developing social and study skills, promote time management strategies, offer wellbeing practices, and help build resilience throughout their education to effectively manage and overcome challenges.

How it works



When students begin upper secondary school, they are assigned to a homeroom class and a designated tutor or form teacher.

This teacher is responsible for supporting the overall wellbeing and school motivation of students within the class and acts as a first point of contact when concerns arise.

In 2022-2023, schools in Tampere region in Finland worked together on the "Suunta" project, which developed and shared classroom tools and support approaches designed to assist form teachers in their role. These tools were organised according to students' stage of study and focused on four broad themes: Social Skills and Team Building, Study Skills, Time Management, and Wellbeing and Stress Management.

1

Social Skills and Team Building

Helps students build relationships and develop a sense of belonging during their first year of upper secondary school. As students come from different schools and backgrounds and study in varying course groups, activities focus on strengthening social connections, communication skills, and group cohesion.

2

Study Skills

Students are supported to identify effective ways of learning and managing the demands of upper secondary education. The focus evolves throughout their studies, beginning with study habits and learning strategies, and later emphasising goal setting, motivation, sustained effort, and preparation for the matriculation examination.

3

Time Management

Students are encouraged to develop practical strategies for managing their workload, organising their time, prioritising tasks, and preparing for periods of increased academic demand. Attention is given to supporting students during the first and second years of study as they adapt to the pace of upper secondary education.

4

Wellbeing and Stress Management

The approach encourages students to reflect on their wellbeing and develop strategies for managing stress. Throughout their studies, students are supported to recognise their strengths, maintain balance, and develop ways of coping with increasing academic demands.

**Tutor Collaboration**

A key aspect of the approach is strengthening collaboration between professionals involved in supporting students. The project promoted cooperation between:

- Subject teachers
- Form teachers and tutors
- Guidance counsellors
- Special education teachers
- Student tutors
- School psychologists
- School social workers
- School nurses

The project also established a regional tutor network to support the sharing of classroom tools, experiences, and best practices between schools.

Why it works



The Form Teacher System provides students with a consistent and trusted adult who can support them throughout their studies. By combining regular contact, structured support, and collaboration between professionals, the approach helps schools respond to students' academic, social, and wellbeing needs in a coordinated way.

The approach highlights how engagement and retention can be strengthened through proactive support structures that help students navigate the increasing demands of upper secondary education while maintaining motivation, wellbeing, and a sense of belonging.

Peer Buddy System Guide



Objective: Whole-School Culture and Systems for Engagement | Teacher Reflection and Professional Learning



Suitable for: Teachers, tutors, and school leaders



When to use: As part of ongoing professional development, school improvement initiatives, or collaborative reflection on teaching practice.



Time required: One lesson observation plus a follow-up discussion (approximately 60–90 minutes in total)

Purpose

Peer Observation provides teachers with an opportunity to learn from one another's classroom practice, reflect on teaching approaches, and discuss strategies that support student engagement and learning.

The approach encourages professional dialogue and helps teachers gain new perspectives on classroom interactions, participation, lesson structure, and learning environments.

How it works



Two teachers agree to participate in a peer observation process.



Before the Observation

The teachers meet briefly to discuss the purpose of the observation and identify specific questions or areas of focus. Examples might include:

- How actively do students participate during lessons?
- Do students have opportunities to contribute and ask questions?
- How are digital tools used during learning activities?
- What classroom strategies appear to support engagement and concentration?
- How does the teacher encourage interaction and discussion?

The observing teacher uses these agreed questions to guide their observations.



During the Observation

The observing teacher attends the lesson and records observations related to the agreed focus areas.

The emphasis is on understanding classroom practice and identifying strengths, patterns, and opportunities for reflection rather than evaluating performance.



After the Observation

Both teachers meet for a debriefing conversation. The discussion focuses on:

- What was observed
- What appeared to support student engagement
- Questions or insights that emerged
- Possible ideas for future practice
- The aim is collaborative learning rather than formal assessment.

Why it works



Teaching can often be an individual practice, with limited opportunities to observe colleagues in action. Peer observation creates structured opportunities for professional reflection and shared learning.

By discussing real classroom experiences, teachers can gain new ideas, reflect on their own practice, and develop a shared understanding of effective approaches to student engagement.

Within the Danish context, experiences with peer observation were mixed. Some teachers viewed it as a valuable opportunity to learn from colleagues and observe different teaching approaches. Others perceived it as an additional demand on already limited time or as a form of monitoring.

These experiences highlight the importance of establishing trust, clear purposes, and a developmental rather than evaluative approach.

Home School & Community Liaison Programme



Objective: Strengthening home-school-community partnerships to support student engagement



Suitable for: Whole-school implementation, school leadership, students support teams, parents and guardians



When to use: Throughout the school year, particularly when supporting student transitions, attendance, and family involvement in education



Time required: Ongoing throughout the school year

Purpose

To strengthen the partnership between home and school by building trusting relationships with families, improving communication, and working collaboratively to remove barriers to attendance, engagement, wellbeing, and learning.

Through early intervention and ongoing family support, the Home-School Liaison programme helps create the conditions that enable every student to participate fully in school life.

How it works



While many of the examples in this teacher resource focus on relationships within school, the Irish Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) approach demonstrates how partnerships with families and community organisations can strengthen student engagement, attendance, wellbeing, and retention.



The Home-School & Community Liaison (HSCL) approach promotes and supports engagement with parents.

It focuses on building strong partnerships between the home, school, and wider community to support students' educational success, attendance, well-being, and inclusion.

The HSCL Coordinator encourages parents to become active participants in school life through open communication, support services, and welcoming initiatives like free parent classes and workshops.



Examples of parent engagement in the school include:

- Organising parent coffee mornings and informal gatherings to help parents feel welcomed and connected to the school community.
- Free parent classes like Yoga, Zumba, Bookclub, Spanish and a Parents Support class that runs throughout the year.
- Free workshops like 'Learning how to use their child's iPad', 'Internet Safety' and 'DIY' workshops have been very successful.
- Supporting attendance initiatives and working collaboratively with families to improve student engagement and retention.
- Providing guidance and information sessions around education, careers, and transitions through events such as Career and Education Fairs.
- Maintain regular communication with parents through meetings, phone calls, and home visits.
- Linking families with relevant community supports like a family support centre and other services where needed.
- Promoting positive relationships between parents, teachers, and school leadership to ensure students are supported holistically.



The HSCL approach in the school reflects a student-centred and inclusive ethos by recognising parents as the primary educators of their children and valuing collaboration as a key factor in improving student outcomes, confidence, attendance, and overall well-being.

Why it works



Students are more likely to engage and succeed in school when the key adults in their lives work together to support them.

Strong partnerships between home and school improve communication, build trust, and create a shared understanding of students' needs and strengths.

By reducing barriers to parental involvement and connecting families with relevant community supports, the HSCL approach helps create a stronger support network around students.

This contributes to improved attendance, wellbeing, engagement, and retention while fostering a more inclusive and connected school community.

Student Agency, Voice, and Participation

Why it matters?

Students are likely to remain engaged when they can see a connection between their current learning and their future aspirations. Motivation is stronger when students understand their strengths, recognise progress, and feel capable of achieving meaningful goals.

The Engaging Minds research highlighted the importance of helping students develop self-awareness, identify personal strengths and build confidence in their ability to succeed.

Students who have a sense of purpose and direction are often better equipped to overcome setbacks and persist when learning becomes challenging.

The activities in this section encourage students to reflect on their strengths, identify sources of motivation, and create realistic pathways towards achieving their goals.



Practical Tools

Green -Yellow - Red Response Cards



Objective: Encourage Student Participation



Suitable for: Whole Class Teaching



When to use: Checking for understanding, Gathering opinions or feedback, Encouraging quieter students, Opening or closing a lesson, supporting classroom discussion



Time required: 2 - 10 minutes

Purpose

The Green-Yellow-Red response cards activity provides a simple and inclusive way for all students to participate in classroom discussions and feedback activities. This strategy enables teachers to quickly gauge student understanding and opinion without requiring them to speak in front of the whole class.

The activity can help create a more participatory classroom environment by giving every student an opportunity to contribute, including those who may be more reluctant to speak up.

How it works



The teacher distributes the cards and explains the meaning of each colour. Depending on the question, the meaning may change.



The teacher then asks the class a question.
Some examples could be:

- Do you understand today's topic?
- Do you feel ready for next week's assessment?
- Do you know where you need help with this topic?



The students respond by holding up the card that best represents the answer. They are encouraged to answer honestly.



The teacher scans the room and identifies any answer patterns.

- Mostly green: may indicate confidence or understanding
- Substantial number of yellow: may suggest uncertainty or a need for clarification
- Several red responses: may indicate confusion, disagreement, or a support need



The teacher follows up on the response patterns of the class if appropriate.
Examples:

- Can someone who chose green explain their thinking?
- What would help to move your response from yellow to green?
- Would anyone who chose red explain what they found difficult?



Teacher Tip

Use the same cards consistently throughout the year. Over time, students become familiar with the routine, making it easier to check class opinions and needs quickly without disrupting the flow of a lesson. It is a practical classroom tool instead of a one-off activity.

Why it works



Students are more likely to engage in learning when they are given safe and accessible ways to participate.

The Green–Yellow–Red response cards allow every student to contribute simultaneously, including those who may be reluctant to speak in front of their peers.

The activity provides teachers with immediate feedback on student understanding, confidence, and support needs, enabling them to adapt instruction and address misconceptions in real time.

By making participation visible, routine, and low risk, the approach encourages student voice, supports formative assessment, and helps create a more inclusive and responsive classroom environment.

Structured Study Questions



Objective: Student Voice | Participation | Classroom Engagement



Suitable for: Whole Class Teaching, Small group work, revision activities, discussion-based lessons



When to use: Classroom discussions, group work activities, learning review activities, encourage participation, supporting classroom



Time required: 10 – 20 minutes

Purpose

Many students are reluctant to participate in classroom discussions because they are unsure whether their answer is correct, or are anxious about being called upon unexpectedly or at all. This activity provides students with time to prepare and sets clear expectations.

As responsibility for a specific questions is assigned at the beginning of the activity, students know in advance when they will be expected to contribute. This helps reduce anxiety, encourages participation, and ensures that all students have an opportunity to engage in classroom discussions

How it works



The teacher prepares a set of questions related to the lesson topic.
The questions could:

- Review previous learning
- Explore a new concept
- Encourage discussion or critical thinking
- Support exam preparation



The teachers divides the class into small groups and shares all the questions with every group *and* assigns each group with a the specific question.

Each group will be asked to answer their specific question in class, but will also investigate and discuss the other questions they were given.



Give students time to discuss and answer every question within their groups
Encourage them to pay particular attention to the question they have been assigned as they will lead the discussion on that question later.



Bring the class back together and invite each group to share their response to their assigned question. Other groups can contribute additional ideas, or alternative viewpoints.



After each question has been discussed, the teacher summarises the key points and clarifies any misunderstandings.

The teacher encourages the students to reflect on similarities and differences between the responses shared by separate groups.

Why it works



Students are more willing to participate when expectations are clear, and they have time to prepare. The activity promotes accountability while also reducing anxiety. Through this exercise, students can prepare their answer and feel safe in knowing there will not be any uncomfortable surprises.

Teacher Engagement Reflection Checklist (adapted from QTI)



Objective: STeacher Reflection | Professional Development



Suitable for: Teachers, School Leaders, Education Support Professionals



When to use: Ongoing professional development, teacher reflection and self-evaluation, Acting on student feedback



Time required: Long-term professional development process

Purpose

Understanding how students experience classroom interactions can provide valuable insights into student engagement. The Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) offers a structured approach to help teachers reflect on how their teaching style is perceived by students and how this aligns with their own intentions and aspirations as educators.

This approach is not a performance review but a tool to support professional reflection and dialogue about teacher-student relationships in the classroom.

How it works



The QTI process was successfully implemented in the Danish school over a period of approximately 18 months (about 1 and a half years).

During this time:

- Teachers participated in two rounds of the QTI process
- Participation was encouraged and supported by school leadership
- Teachers received feedback that enables them to compare different perspectives on classroom interactions.
- The focus is on personal reflection and professional learning.



Teachers are encouraged to consider classroom relationships and interactions from three perspectives:

1. How did students experience and interpret the teacher's interactions?
2. How did the teacher perceive their own interactions?
3. How would the teacher ideally like those interactions to be experienced?



The resulting QTI reports provide opportunities for individual reflection and professional dialogue.

Some helpful reflection questions may be:

- How do students experience my classroom environment?
- Do students feel comfortable participating and asking questions?
- How approachable am I when students need support?
- How do I communicate expectations and feedback?
- Are there any differences between how I intend to interact with students and how those interactions may be experienced?
- What aspects of my teaching practice contribute the most strongly to student engagement?



NOTE: The Questionnaire of Teacher Interaction (QTI) is a proprietary professional development tool developed by Dorte Ågård.

The Engaging Mind project does not reproduce the QTI instrument or methodology within this teacher resource.

Further information about the QTI approach is available from Dorte Ågård via <https://dorteagaard.com/qti/hvad-er-qti>.

Why it works



Positive teacher-student relationships are among the strongest protective factors for student engagement, wellbeing, and retention.

However, teachers and students do not always experience classroom interactions in the same way. Structured reflection processes such as the QTI encourage teachers to consider multiple perspectives on their practice, including how their interactions are perceived by students.

This can help identify strengths, uncover potential gaps between intention and experience, and support meaningful professional growth.

By increasing awareness of how classroom relationships influence participation, belonging, and motivation, the process helps teachers create more supportive and engaging learning environments for all students.

Student SWOT Analysis



Objective: Motivation | Self-Awareness | Confidence Building | Future Planning



Suitable for: Individual students, tutor groups, mentoring session, career guidance activity, transition support programmes



When to use: Career guidance sessions, goal setting activities, start of the school year, transition planning



Time required: 20 – 30 minutes

Purpose

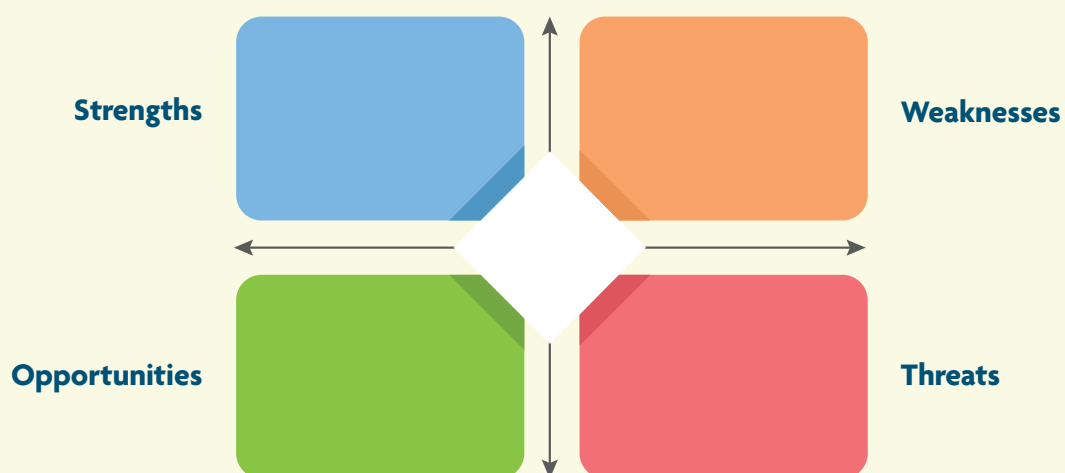
The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis is a structured way for students to think about themselves as learners and to identify practical actions that can support their personal and professional growth.

Students are often encouraged to focus on what they need to improve but may have fewer opportunities to recognise their current strengths, skills, and achievements. This activity helps students better understand their strengths and development areas. It also helps them consider the factors that support or hinder their learning.

How it works



Students create a table with four sections: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.



Example of a SWOT Analysis Diagram for Students



IDENTIFY STRENGTHS

Students first identify their Strengths and add them to the table.

Prompts may include:

- What can you do well?
- What are you good at?
- What do others recognise you as being skilled in?
- What skills and knowledge do you already have?
- What achievement are you proud of?
- What personal qualities help you succeed?



IDENTIFY WEAKNESSES

Next, ask the student to consider areas where they would like to improve. In the table's weaknesses section, write down the areas where you need to improve and learn more.

Prompts may include:

- What knowledge and skills do you still need to develop?
- What do I find challenging?
- What study habits could I improve?
- What tasks do I tend to avoid?
- What areas would I like to become more confident in?

Remind students that identifying weaknesses is not about criticism but about recognising opportunities for growth.



IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES

Students identify opportunities next.

Ask them to reflect on factors that can support their learning and engagement.

Reflection questions may include:

- What motivates me?
- What interests me?
- How can I spark my curiosity and enthusiasm for learning?
- What opportunities are available to help me learn and grow?
- Who can support me in achieving my goals?
- What experiences would I like to explore?
-

Encourage students to think about both school-based and personal opportunities.



IDENTIFY THREATS

Finally, the students consider the factors that may reduce motivation or create obstacles to success in the threats section of the table.

Prompts may include:

- What reduces my motivation?
- What makes learning difficult for me?
- What distractions affect my studies?
- What challenges may prevent me from achieving my goals?
- What situation makes it harder for me to learn effectively?
-

Remind students that they should focus on recognising barriers rather than judging or blaming themselves.



Once the SWOT analysis activity is completed, students are invited to review their completed SWOT analysis and identify key insights.

Depending on the group, students may discuss their reflections with a partner, small group, tutor, or teacher.

Why it works



Students are more motivated and engaged when they understand their own strengths, recognise opportunities for growth, and feel capable of influencing their future success.

The SWOT analysis encourages structured self-reflection, helping students develop greater self-awareness, confidence, and ownership of their learning.

By identifying both internal factors (strengths and areas for development) and external factors (opportunities and challenges), students gain a more balanced understanding of their current situation and can begin to develop realistic goals and strategies for improvement.

This process supports motivation, self-efficacy, and future planning while encouraging a growth-oriented mindset.

Managing Stress and Supporting Wellbeing

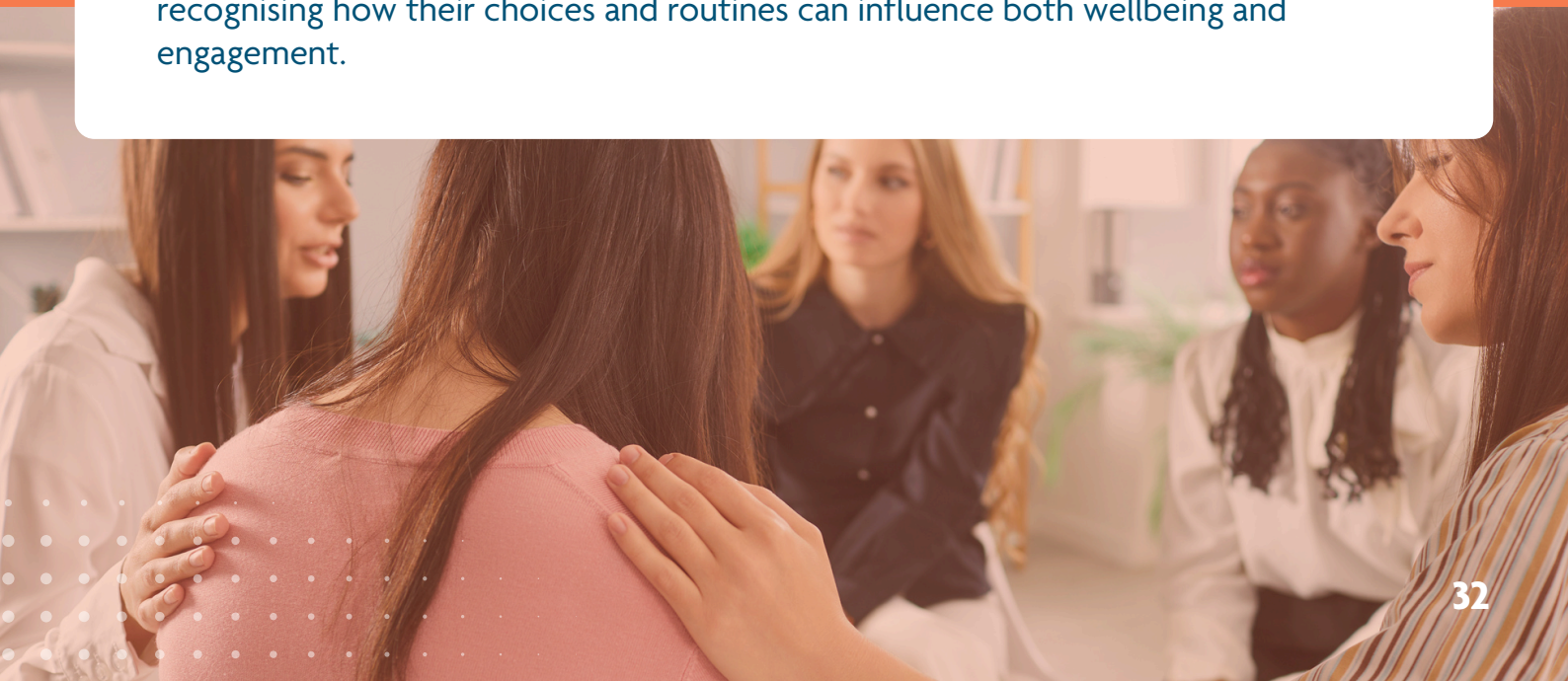
Why it matters?

Stress emerges as one of the most significant risk factors associated with disengagement across the Engaging Minds project. Students reported experiencing pressure related to workload, deadlines, assessment demands, future decisions, and balancing school with other responsibilities.

Supporting wellbeing is not simply about responding to problems when they arise. It also involves helping students develop awareness of their habits, routines, and use of time, while at the same time encouraging healthy approaches to learning and self-management.

The research suggests that students benefit from opportunities to think about the factors that support or hinder their wellbeing, and to develop strategies that help them maintain balance during demanding periods.

The activities in this section support students in developing self-awareness and recognising how their choices and routines can influence both wellbeing and engagement.



Practical Tools

Clock Diagram Time Audit – Reviewing Time Use (Finland)



Objective: Wellbeing | Self-Awareness | Time Management | Healthy Study Habits



Suitable for: Individual students, tutor groups, mentoring session, Wellbeing programmes, study skills classes.



When to use: As part of wellbeing lessons, as part of study skills or self-management programmes, when supporting a student experiencing stress or difficulties with time management, at the start of the school year.



Time required: 15 - 20 minutes

Purpose

Students can feel constantly busy without having a clear picture of how they actually spend their time. This activity encourages students to reflect on their daily routines and identify how their time is divided between compulsory activities, personal responsibilities, leisure activities, and rest.

The Clock Diagram helps students develop greater awareness of how they use their time, and whether their current routines support their wellbeing, learning, and personal goals. By comparing their current use of time with their ideal use of time, they can identify opportunities for a healthier and better-balanced daily routine.

How it works



Introduce the activity and explain it is not to judge how students spend their time, but to help them better understand their daily routines.



Provide each student with two copies of the **Clock Diagram Worksheet** (see Figure 1). One will be to record how they currently spend their time, the other for how they would ideally like to spend their time.



Ask the students to think about a **typical weekday**.

Using the **first** Clock Diagram, students should honestly record how they spend their time over the course of a day.

Encourage students to include a mix of mandatory, essential and leisure activities.

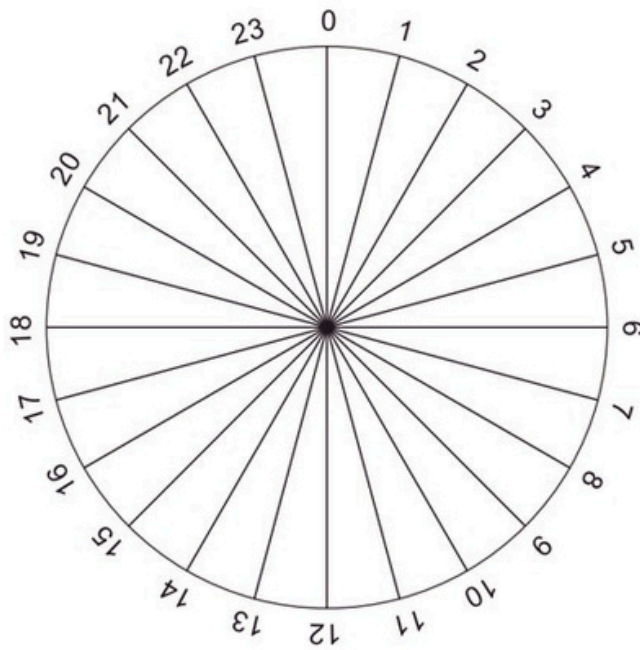


Figure 1. Clock Diagram Template

Example activities to mark on the clock:

School and classes
Homework and study
Travel and commuting

Sleep
Meals
Sports and exercise
Relaxation and downtime.

Family responsibilities
Hobbies and interests
Social activities
Screen time



Once students have completed the first diagram, get them to consider the following questions:

- How much time do you have to use myself?
- How much of my day is spent on compulsory activities?
- How much time is spent on activities I choose freely?
- How much sleep do I get?
- How regularly do I eat meals?
- How do I take care of my physical and mental wellbeing?
- Am I satisfied with how my time is currently divided?



Using the **second** Clock Diagram, ask students to draw how they would ideally like to spend their time.

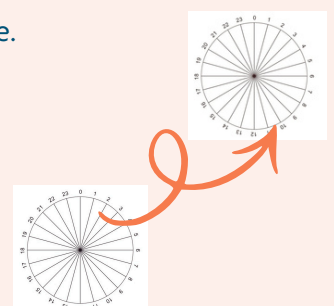
Encourage them to think realistically while also considering what changes might improve their wellbeing and balance.

Explain that downtime is an important part of wellbeing and that everyone needs opportunities to rest, recharge, and simply do nothing from time to time.



Invite the students to compare their current and ideal time schedule. Ask them to identify:

- What is already working well?
- What would they like to change?
- Which changes feel realistic?
- What small adjustments could they make immediately?





Students may discuss their clock diagrams with a partner, a small group, tutor or teacher. The focus should be on self-awareness and identifying manageable changes rather than creating a perfect schedule.



Student Reflection Questions

- What surprised you about how you currently spend your time?
- Do you have enough time to rest and relax?
- Are there activities that take more time than you expected?
- What changes would improve your wellbeing?
- What is one realistic adjustment you could make this week?

Teacher / Mentor Reflection Questions

- Are students aware of how they spend their time?
- Are there common sources of pressure emerging across the group?
- Do students recognise the importance of sleep, wellbeing, and downtime?
- Are there opportunities for follow-up discussions about workload, stress, or study habits?

Motivation Staircase (Finland)



Objective: Motivation | Goal Setting | Self-Efficacy | Future Planning.



Suitable for: Individual students, tutor groups, mentoring sessions, guidance classes, transition support programmes.



When to use: Goal-setting activities, career guidance sessions, study skills programmes, mentoring conversations, conversations with students at risk of disengagement.



Time required: 20 – 30 minutes

Purpose

Students often have aspirations and ambitions but may find it difficult to identify the practical steps needed to achieve them. Large goals can sometimes feel overwhelming, leading students to lose motivation or become unsure where to begin.

The Motivation staircase helps students break down a goal into manageable steps and recognising the strengths and resources they have available to them to make progress and achieve their goals. By focusing on small, achievable steps, students build confidence, develop a sense of control, and strengthen their belief that success is possible.

How it works



Ask the student to think about something they would like to achieve and ask them to write this goal at the top of the page. This goal may be academic, personal, social, or future-oriented. This helps the student connect to their goal in a wider sense of purpose and motivation.

Examples of goals could include:

- Improve my grade in math
- Complete an important project
- Become more confident speaking in class
- Improve my attendance
- Explore a future career path



Ask the student to reflect on the following questions in relation to their goal:

What motivates me?

Encourage them to write down the reasons why achieving this goal matters to them.



Ask the student to consider their **strengths and resources** through these questions:

- What strengths do I already have?
- What skills can help me achieve this goal?
- Who can support me?
- What resources are available to me?



Ask the student to consider the **benefits of the goal** by exploring questions such as:

- What benefits will achieving this goal bring to me?
- What benefit will it bring to others?



Students **draw a staircase with six steps** (or use a template).
Working from the bottom upwards, they complete each step.



Step 1 – First action

What is the first thing I need to do?

Step 2 – Next action

What will I do after that?

Step 3 – Following action

What is the next step in my journey?

Step 4 – Intermediate goal

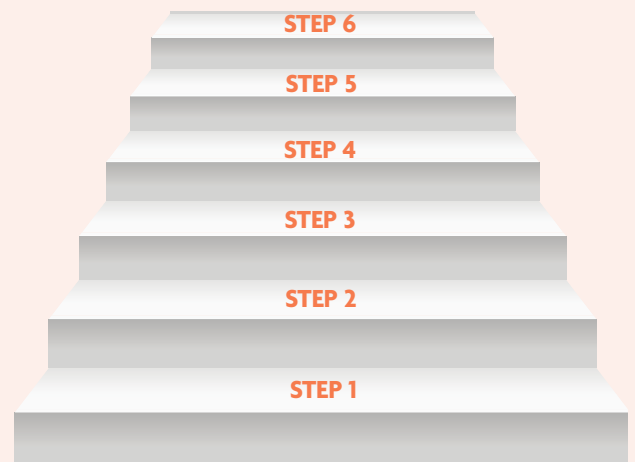
What important milestone will show me that I am making progress?

Step 5 – Motivation and Belief

What helps me stay motivated?
What strengthens my belief that I can achieve this goal?

Step 6 – Final Step

What will achieving my goals look like?



Invite students to review their staircase and consider what step they can begin today?
Students may choose to discuss the staircase with a partner, tutor, mentor, or teacher.

Meaningful Learning & Classroom Engagement

Why it matters?

Students are more likely to engage when learning feels purposeful, relevant, and achievable. Clear expectations, structured lessons, supportive feedback, and opportunities for active participation can all contribute to stronger engagement.

The Engaging Minds findings highlighted the importance of creating learning environments where students understand what they are expected to do, why they are doing it, and how they can succeed.

Even small adjustments to classroom routines and teaching practices can help increase focus, participation, and confidence. The Danish examples in this section demonstrate how practical classroom strategies can support student engagement by creating structure, reducing uncertainty, and encouraging active involvement in learning.



Practical Tools

Lesson Clarity Checklists (Denmark)



Objective: Engaging lessons | Student engagement | Setting expectations



Suitable for: Classroom teachers, whole-class teaching



When to use: At the beginning, during, or end of a lesson to support structure, clarity, and student understanding.



Time required: 2 – 5 minutes

Purpose

Lesson Clarity Checklists help students understand what they are expected to learn, what activities they will complete, and what successful participation looks like. Providing clear structure can reduce uncertainty, support student confidence, and help students stay focused and engaged throughout a lesson.

How it works



Teachers provide a simple overview of:

- Lesson objectives
- Activities students will complete
- Materials or resources required
- Expected outcomes or success criteria
- Key tasks to be completed before the end of the lesson

The checklist can be presented verbally, on the board, or as a handout

Why it works



Students are more likely to engage when they understand what is expected of them and how learning activities connect to lesson goals. Clear structure helps reduce confusion, supports self-regulation, and enables students to participate more confidently in classroom activities.

Handwritten Reflection Journal (Denmark)



Objective: Engaging lessons | Student engagement | Student Reflection



Suitable for: Students and Teachers



When to use: At the end of a lesson, project, or learning sequence.



Time required: 5 – 10 minutes

Purpose

The Handwritten Reflection Journal encourages students to pause, reflect on their learning, and engage more actively with their own progress. The approach also creates opportunities for meaningful teacher feedback and dialogue.

How it works



Students maintain a handwritten notebook or journal where they regularly reflect on:

- What they learned
- What they found challenging
- Questions they still have
- Areas where they would like more support
- Their progress towards learning goals

Teachers periodically review the journals and provide feedback.

Why it works



Teachers reported that students were more likely to complete reflective tasks when they were handwritten rather than completed digitally. The approach emerged alongside broader efforts to reduce screen use and increase the use of physical learning materials.

Teachers observed that students often demonstrated increased motivation when they knew their reflections would be reviewed and acknowledged. The process also encouraged students to take greater ownership of their learning and provided teachers with additional insight into student understanding and engagement.

Student Digital Technology Use Policy (Denmark)



Objective: Designing Engaging Learning Experiences, Student Agency, Voice and Participation



Suitable for: Teachers, school leaders, tutors, and student support teams



When to use: As part of a whole-school classroom approach to managing digital technology in the classroom and supporting focused learning environments



Time required: Ongoing classroom and school-wide practice

Purpose

The Structured Screen Policy aims to reduce digital distractions and create learning environments that support concentration, participation, and meaningful engagement. The approach recognises that digital technologies are valuable educational tools, but that their constant presence can also interrupt attention, reduce participation, and contribute to fragmented learning experiences.

Rather than removing technology from the classroom, the policy seeks to ensure that digital tools are used intentionally and only when they provide clear pedagogical value.

How it works



The approach involved implementing a school-wide policy to manage digital devices during classes.

The key elements of this policy include

Mobile Phone Management

At the beginning of each lesson, students place their phones in designated classroom phone boxes. This helps reduce interruptions caused by notifications, messaging applications, and social media.

Purposeful Use of Digital Devices

Laptops and computers remain closed at the beginning of lessons unless they are required for a specific learning activity. This encourages students to begin lessons with their attention focused on the teacher, their classmates, and the learning objectives.

Balancing Digital and Analogue Learning

Teachers are encouraged to incorporate a range of non-digital learning activities, including:

- Group discussions
- Collaborative problem solving
- Handwritten exercises
- Reflective classroom dialogue

This creates a balance between digital and analogue approaches to learning and promotes active participation and interpersonal interaction.



Effective implementation requires for the screen policy to be accompanied by professional development initiatives that support teachers in creating engaging learning environments.

This includes

Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction

Teachers use the QTI to:

- Gather structured feedback on student-teacher interactions
- Reflect on how their teaching practices influenced engagement, communication, and motivation.

(Also see QTI section under Factor 3)

Peer Observation

Teachers observe each other's classes and discuss approaches to:

- Effective integration of digital tools
- Encouraging student participation
- Supporting focused learning environments
- Strengthening classroom management practices

These opportunities encourage professional reflection and the sharing of effective teaching strategies.

Why it works



Research suggests that frequent digital interruptions can reduce students' ability to maintain attention during learning. By reducing distractions and establishing clear expectations around technology use, schools can support greater focus and participation.

The reported results were that classrooms become more focused, and classes increasingly relied on dialogue, collaboration, and student interaction.

The digital technology policy implementation in combination with teacher professional learning support highlights how intentional technology management can support engagement, motivation, and ultimately retention.

Future Pathways and Aspirations

Why it matters?

Understanding how current learning relates to future goals can increase motivation, strengthen persistence, and helps students see value in their educational journey.

The Swedish contribution highlighted the importance on mentoring, guidance, entrepreneurship education, and future-focused learning experiences that help students explore possibilities and develop confidence in their future pathways.

Helping students identify their strengths, interests, and ambition can strengthen both engagement and long-term educational success.

The Engaging Minds findings highlight the importance of trusted relationships, belonging, confidence, and future orientation as protective factors against disengagement.

Inclusive mentoring addresses these factors simultaneously by providing students with a supportive adult relationship, opportunities for reflection, encouragement to participate, and guidance in exploring future aspirations. By helping students feel seen, heard, and supported, mentoring can strengthen engagement, wellbeing, and motivation.



Practical Tools

Inclusive Mentoring for Future Readiness



Objective: Future Pathways and Aspirations | Student Confidence | Personal Development



Suitable for: Teachers, mentors, tutors, guidance counsellors, and student support teams



When to use: Career guidance activities, transition planning, personal development programmes, mentoring programmes, future pathways and aspiration-building initiatives



Time required: Ongoing mentoring relationship

Purpose

The **Advancing Inclusive Mentorship (AIM)** project developed an inclusive mentoring framework designed to support students' personal, academic, and professional development. The framework aims to strengthen student engagement by creating supportive mentoring relationships that help students build confidence, develop self-awareness, explore future obstacles to participation and success.

The approach recognises that students have diverse experiences, strengths, needs, and ambitions. Through structured mentoring conversations, mentors help students reflect on their goals, identify opportunities, navigate challenges, and develop the confidence needed to progress in education and beyond.

How it works



What is Inclusive Mentoring?

Inclusive mentoring is based on the principle that every student should have access to supportive relationships that help them feel valued, listened to, and capable of achieving their goals.

The mentor's role is not to provide answers or solve problems for students. Instead, mentors support students to:

- Reflect on their strengths and interests
- Build confidence and self-belief
- Set realistic goals
- Explore future opportunities
- Develop problem-solving skills
- Navigate challenges and setbacks
- Strengthen their sense of belonging and participation

Core Principles of the AIM Inclusive Mentoring Framework

Principle	Description	Mentor Activity	Student Impact
Building Trusting Relationships	Effective mentoring begins with establishing trust and psychological safety.	Mentors create opportunities for open and respectful conversations by: • Listening actively • Showing genuine interest • Maintaining confidentiality where appropriate • Demonstrating empathy and understanding • Encouraging student voice	Students are more likely to seek support and discuss challenges when they feel safe and respected.
Focus on Strengths	Rather than concentrating on problems or deficits, mentors help students recognise and build upon their existing strengths.	Mentoring questions may include: • What are you proud of? • What do you enjoy doing? • What are your strengths? • What skills have helped you overcome challenges in the past?	Recognising strengths can increase confidence and motivation.
Encourage Reflection and Goal Setting	Mentors support students to think about their aspirations and identify realistic steps towards achieving them.	Topics may include: • Academic goals • Personal development goals • Future education pathways • Career aspirations • Leadership opportunities	Students are encouraged to develop ownership of their goals and identify actions they can take to achieve them.
Promote Inclusion and Belonging	The framework emphasises the importance of ensuring that all students feel included, respected, and connected.	Mentors encourage students to: • Participate in school activities • Develop positive peer relationships • Access available supports • Build connections within the school community	This can help strengthen engagement and school connectedness.
Support Future Readiness	Mentoring conversations helps students explore future opportunities and develop the confidence to pursue them.	Discussions may include: • Career interests • Entrepreneurship • Education pathways • Work-related skills • Personal aspirations	Helping students connect current learning to future possibilities can strengthen motivation and persistence.

Example Mentoring Conversation Prompts

Getting to Know the Student

What are you most interested in now?

What do you enjoy most about school?

What are you proud of achieving?

Exploring Strengths

What do you think you do well?

What strengths do other people see in you?

When do you feel most confident?

Looking Ahead

What would you like to achieve this year?

What opportunities would you like to explore?

What are your hopes for the future?

Overcoming Challenges

What challenges are you facing now?

What support would help?

What small steps could you take next?

Supporting Tools and Activities



As part of the AIM project, mentors may use additional resources to help students explore future opportunities and develop confidence in their abilities.

These include:

AIM Readiness Tool

A self-assessment tool that helps students reflect on their strengths, interests, and readiness to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities.

Innovation and Entrepreneurship Week

A programme of activities that allows students to engage with innovation challenges, explore future pathways, and develop entrepreneurial thinking through practical experiences.

Why it works



Students are more likely to engage with learning and persist through challenges when they can see a meaningful connection between their current experiences and their future aspirations.

Inclusive mentoring provides students with a trusted relationship in which they can explore their strengths, interests, goals, and concerns in a supportive environment.

By focusing on strengths, encouraging reflection, and helping students identify realistic pathways forward, mentoring can increase confidence, self-efficacy, and motivation.

The emphasis on belonging, inclusion, and future readiness also helps students develop a stronger sense of purpose and direction, which are important factors in engagement, wellbeing, and long-term educational success.



Early Identification and Responsive Support

Why it matters

Student disengagement rarely happens overnight. More often, it develops gradually through a combination of academic, social, emotional, behavioural, and attendance-related factors. Minor changes in participation, motivation, attendance, wellbeing, or academic performance can be early indicators that a student may require additional support.

The Engaging Minds findings highlight the importance of identifying these signals early and responding before challenges become significant barriers to engagement, learning, and retention. Effective support therefore requires schools to establish processes that enable staff to recognise concerns, share information, and coordinate timely interventions.

Early identification is most effective when schools combine professional judgement with information gathered from multiple sources, including attendance patterns, academic progress, teacher observations, wellbeing concerns, and student feedback. Equally important is having structures in place that ensure students receive appropriate support once concerns have been identified.

The examples in this section demonstrate how schools can use monitoring systems, professional collaboration, and structured support processes to identify students who may be at risk of disengagement and provide timely, targeted support.



Practical Tools

Athena Tracker (Ireland)



Objective: Early identification of Potential Disengagement Through Monitoring Data



Suitable for: School leaders, year/form heads, guidance counsellors, student support teams, teachers



When to use: Throughout the academic year part of ongoing academic monitoring and student support processes



Time required: Ongoing monitoring and review throughout the school year

Purpose

Athena Tracker is an academic monitoring system used to identify students whose performance may be falling below their demonstrated potential. The system helps schools recognise possible early indicators of disengagement by comparing student performance against expected achievement levels.

How the Approach Works



Athena Tracker generates an expected achievement profile for students and highlights instances where performance falls below this level. Teachers use this information alongside their professional knowledge of students to identify those who may benefit from additional support.

The information can also be used to support student-teacher conversations about progress, strengths, challenges, and future goals. These conversations encourage reflection, target setting, and student ownership of learning.

Why it works



Students who are beginning to disengage do not always display obvious signs of difficulty. Monitoring performance relative to potential can provide an important early indicator that additional support may be required. When combined with professional judgement and supportive conversations, the approach helps schools intervene before difficulties become more significant.

Practice Example



Athena Tracker is used within St. Joseph's Secondary School, Rush, Ireland, as part of a broader approach to identifying students who may require additional academic or personal support.

Student Support Team (Ireland)



Objective: Coordinated Early Intervention and Student Support



Suitable for: School Leaders, Guidance Counsellors, Wellbeing Teams, Homes School Community Liaison Coordinators, Special Education Teachers, Student Support Personnel



When to use: As part of a regular whole-school process for identifying, discussing, and responding to student needs



Time required: Regular meetings throughout the school year (e.g. weekly or fortnightly)

Purpose

The Student Support Team provides a structured process for identifying, discussing, and responding to concerns relating to student engagement, wellbeing, attendance, behaviour, and academic progress.

How the Approach Works



The Student Support Team meets regularly to review students who may require additional support. Information from teachers, attendance records, academic monitoring systems, guidance staff, wellbeing supports, and parent communication is considered to develop a holistic understanding of student needs.



The team works together to identify concerns, coordinate interventions, and monitor student progress over time.

Supports may include:

- Academic mentoring
- Guidance support
- Attendance interventions
- Wellbeing supports
- Parent engagement
- Referral to additional school or community services

Why it works



Disengagement is often influenced by multiple factors and may not be visible through a single indicator. By bringing together information from various sources, Student Support Teams help schools identify patterns, coordinate responses, and provide timely support before concerns escalate.

The approach moves schools from reactive intervention towards proactive and preventative support.

Practice Example



At St. Josephs Secondary School, Rush, the Student Support Team meets weekly to discuss students who may need additional support. The team brings together information from multiple sources to coordinate interventions and ensure that students receive timely and appropriate support.

Personalised Learning Pathways & Mentoring Support (Sweden)



Objective: Early identification and Responsive Support



Suitable for: School leaders, teachers, mentors, guidance counsellors, student support teams



When to use: Support students who experience academic difficulties with choice, Offer a re-engagement path to students who are disengaged or at risk of disengagement



Time required: Ongoing support throughout the school year

Purpose

The Structured Re-Engagement Pathway aims to help students reconnect with education when they are at risk of disengagement, or leaving school early. Rather than focusing on a single intervention, the approach combines personalised planning, mentoring, practical learning experiences, and coordinated support to address the underlying factors contributing to disengagement.

The approach recognises that students disengage for different reasons and therefore require different forms of support.

1. Identify the Barrier to Engagement

Schools first identify the primary factors affecting a student's participation and progress.

Common barriers may include:

Risk Factor	Possible Support Strategy
Academic difficulties	Individualised learning plans
Low motivation and disengagement	Project-based and vocational learning
Lack of confidence following school failure	Mentoring and counselling
Social or emotional challenges	Collaboration with welfare and support services
Poor attendance	Monitoring and early intervention

2. Develop a Personalised Learning Plan

Teachers, guidance counsellors, and students work together to create an individual learning plan.

The plan identifies:

- Student strengths
- Academic gaps
- Future aspirations
- Support needs
- Realistic progression goals

The aim is to create a pathway towards continued education, vocational learning, or employment.

3. Assign a Mentor

Each student is assigned a mentor who acts as a consistent point of contact throughout the support process.

Regular meetings allow mentors to:

- Monitor attendance and participation
- Review progress
- Identify emerging concerns
- Adapt support where required
- Encourage students to remain connected to learning

4. Reconnect Learning with Real-World Goals

Students are offered opportunities to connect learning with practical and future-focused experiences.

Examples include:

- Workplace visits
- Short internships
- Collaborative projects with local organisations
- Vocational learning opportunities

These experiences help students see the relevance of education and strengthen motivation to continue learning.

5. Monitor Progress and Adjust Support

Student progress is reviewed regularly through ongoing communication between teachers, mentors, guidance counsellors, and support staff.

As confidence, attendance, and academic performance improve, students can transition towards national programmes, vocational education pathways, or employment opportunities.

Why it works



Many students who disengage from education have experienced repeated academic difficulties, low confidence, or a lack of connection between school and their future aspirations.

The Fyrisskolan approach, discussed in more detail in the Engaging Minds Handbook demonstrates that re-engagement requires more than academic support alone. By combining personalised learning plans, mentoring, practical learning experiences, and coordinated support, schools can help students rebuild confidence, improve attendance, strengthen motivation, and reconnect with learning.

Importantly, the approach focuses on creating pathways back into education rather than viewing disengagement as an endpoint.

Whole-School culture and Systems for Engagement

Why it matters

The examples presented throughout this teacher resource demonstrate that student engagement and retention are influenced by a range of interconnected factors, including belonging, relationships, participation, wellbeing, motivation, future aspirations, and access to support. While individual activities and interventions can make an important contribution, the Engaging Minds findings suggest that the most effective approaches occur when these practices are embedded within a wider whole-school culture that prioritises engagement, inclusion, and student success.

Schools that successfully support engagement and retention typically move beyond isolated initiatives and instead develop coordinated systems that ensure students are known, supported, and connected throughout their educational journey. These systems help schools identify emerging concerns, strengthen relationships, coordinate interventions, engage families, and create multiple opportunities for students to participate and succeed.

A whole-school approach recognises that engagement is a shared responsibility. Teachers, school leaders, guidance staff, mentors, families, and community partners all contribute to creating an environment where students feel valued, supported, and motivated to remain engaged in learning.



Whole-school practice examples overview

The examples of practical tools in table 1 illustrate how schools can combine mentoring, family engagement, student support processes, monitoring systems, and structured relationships to create a comprehensive network of support around students. It highlights examples that combine multiple activities into a single approach that is implemented at a whole-school level.

Table 1: Overview of Whole-School Practice Examples

Practice	Purpose	How the Approach Works	Why It Works
Home School Community Liaison (HSCL)	To strengthen collaboration between the school, families, and community services in support of student engagement and success.	The HSCL coordinator acts as a bridge between home and school, facilitating communication, supporting attendance initiatives, organising parent workshops and activities, and connecting families with relevant community services and supports.	Students benefit when schools and families work together. Strong home-school relationships support attendance, wellbeing, engagement, and retention while helping schools respond more effectively to emerging concerns.
Student Support Team	To coordinate a whole-school response to student wellbeing, engagement, attendance, behavioural, and academic concerns.	A multidisciplinary team meets regularly to review student needs, share information, coordinate interventions, and monitor progress. Information from teachers, support staff, families, and monitoring systems is considered to build a holistic understanding of each student.	Bringing together different perspectives enables schools to identify concerns earlier and provide coordinated support. The approach moves schools from reactive intervention towards proactive and preventative support.
Athena Tracker	To support the early identification of students who may be at risk of disengagement through academic monitoring.	Student performance is compared against expected achievement profiles to identify underperformance relative to potential. This information is used to inform student support discussions, mentoring conversations, target setting, and intervention planning.	Academic performance can provide an important early indicator of disengagement. Combining monitoring data with professional judgement helps schools respond before difficulties become more significant.

Table 1: Overview of Whole-School Practice Examples

Practice	Purpose	How the Approach Works	Why It Works
Form Teacher System	To provide every student with a consistent adult point of contact who supports their wellbeing, progress, and participation in school life.	Form teachers maintain regular contact with students, monitor wellbeing and academic progress, facilitate communication between home and school, and guide students towards appropriate supports when required.	Regular contact with a trusted adult strengthens relationships and school connectedness. It also ensures that concerns can be identified and addressed before they become engagement barriers.
Peer Tutor System	To support students' transition into school life and strengthen peer relationships, belonging, and participation.	Older students are trained to support younger students through orientation activities, social events, informal mentoring, and ongoing peer support. The programme creates opportunities for both leadership and connection across year groups.	Positive peer relationships are a key protective factor against disengagement. Peer tutors help students feel welcomed, connected, and supported while contributing to a positive school culture.
Inclusive Mentoring Framework	To support students in exploring their strengths, aspirations, future opportunities, and personal development through mentoring relationships.	Mentors use structured conversations and reflective activities to help students identify strengths, explore interests, set goals, and consider future educational, career, and entrepreneurial pathways.	Students are more likely to remain engaged when they can connect learning to future aspirations. Mentoring helps build confidence, self-awareness, motivation, and future readiness.
Student Pathways and Re-engagement Support	To help students who are at risk of disengagement remain connected to education through personalised support and flexible learning pathways.	Individual learning plans, mentoring, practical learning opportunities, and coordinated support are used to respond to students' academic, social and wellbeing needs. Support is adapted as students progress towards educational or vocational goals.	Flexible pathways recognise that students face different barriers to engagement. By providing targeting support and meaningful learning opportunities, schools can help rebuild confidence, improve motivation, and engagement with education.

Taken together, these practices illustrate how schools can move beyond isolated interventions and create coordinated systems that support student engagement and retention. While each approach addresses a different aspect of student experience, they share a common goal: ensuring that students are known, supported, connected, and able to access help when needed.

The examples demonstrate that effective engagement and retention strategies are most successful when they combine strong relationships, structured support systems, family engagement, mentoring, monitoring, and collaborative professional practice. Collectively, these approaches create a school culture where engagement is actively nurtured and every student has opportunities to participate, succeed, and thrive.



Connecting Activities and Practice to Protective Factors

Some of the examples presented in this handbook demonstrate that student engagement and retention are influenced by a range of interconnected protective factors, including belonging, relationships, participation, wellbeing, meaningful learning, future aspirations, and timely support.

While each activity has been grouped according to its primary contribution, many support multiple aspects of protection. For example, the Student SWOT Analysis supports both student agency and future aspirations. For the purposes of this teacher resource, activities have been grouped according to their primary contribution, while recognising that effective engagement practices often support multiple dimensions of student engagement and retention simultaneously.



Table 2 provides an overview of the practical tools and approaches included in this teacher resource and how they align with the eight protective factors identified through the Engaging Minds project.

Table 2: Overview of Practical Tools to Promote Engagement and Retention Linked to Protective Factor

Protective Factor	Activities and Practices
1. Belonging and School Connectedness	Similarities and Differences; Compliment Your Partner; Yarn Circle Discussions; Peer Tutor System
2. Relationships and Support Networks	Form Teacher System; Home School Community Liaison; Inclusive Mentoring Framework
3. Student Agency, Voice and Participation	Green, Yellow–Red Response Cards; Structured Study Questions; Student SWOT Analysis; QTI Teacher Reflection Practice
4. Wellbeing, Motivation and Resilience	Clock Diagram Time Audit; Student Support Team
5. Designing Engaging Learning Experiences	Clear Lesson Agendas; Structured Study Questions; Handwritten Notetaking and Reflection; Digital Tools Policy
6. Future Pathways and Aspirations	Motivation Staircase; Student SWOT Analysis; Inclusive Mentoring Framework; Personalised Learning Pathways
7. Early Identification and Responsive Support	Athena Tracker; Student Support Team
8. Whole-School Culture and Systems for Engagement	Home School Community Liaison; Student Support Team; Athena Tracker; Form Teacher System; Peer Tutor System; Personalised Learning Pathways



A Final Word of Encouragement



The Engaging Minds project has shown that improving student engagement does not require a single transformative programme or a perfect solution.

More often, it is the result of many small actions, strong relationships, supportive systems, and meaningful opportunities that work together to help students feel seen, valued, and supported.

The examples in this teacher resource demonstrate that schools across Europe are already finding creative and effective ways to strengthen engagement and reduce the risk of disengagement.

While every school context is different, the underlying message is consistent: positive relationships, a sense of belonging, meaningful participation, and supportive pathways matter.

We encourage you to view this resource not as a checklist to be completed, but as a collection of ideas and approaches that can be adapted to your own students, classrooms, and wider school community.

Even small changes, implemented consistently and supported across the school, can make a meaningful difference.

Every interaction matters. Every relationship matters. Every student matters.