



Boosting Engagement: The Power of Co-Participation and Differential Attention

Charting the Cs
Conference 2025:
*To Literacy and
Beyond*

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Cooperation
Communication
Collaboration

Agenda

Introductions

Co-Participation

- The “what” and “why” of co-participation
- When to use Co-Participation
- Model, Practice, (and feedback!)

Elements of Social Attention

- What are they?
- How to use them for good

Introductions

Erin Nelson MA, BCBA LBA

- School-Based+ Behavior Analysis
- 20-ish years in education
 - early childhood-college level
 - Support staff, para, substitute teacher, classroom teacher
 - Passion= increasing confidence and success through understanding



What is Co-Participation?

- Process of modeling a desired behavior, task, activity to engage our learner in what we'd like them to do
- “Becoming the student”
 - staff/adult does what the student should be doing
- Takes the place of verbal directives, redirection, repeating instructions

(Concept formulated and put forth by Wendy Selnes/Brih Design)



Who can Co-Participation Help?

Students who...

- Engage in a lot of refusal behaviors
- Have difficulty focusing
- Lack confidence
- Have difficulty initiating tasks
- Struggle with academic content
- Enjoy attention/want or seek out attention

Why Co-Participation?

- People (students) will more often follow what you DO more than what you SAY
- You become a visual support
- You also have the capability and potential to provide social attention (more on this later)
- Increase **Engagement** and **Follow Through**
- Para call-out story*

What does Co-Participation Look Like?

In the classroom

- Raising hand, looking at the speaker, attending to and participating in classroom activities
- having a duplicate copy of materials and working on them in close proximity to the student(s) needing support
 - talking through
 - “Oh, I’ve done something like this before. I think I remember. I have to...”
- Looking and acting like a “model” student

2- What does Co-Participation Look Like?

In Re-Regulation

- Staff participating in/modeling a coping/calming strategy
 - taking deep breaths
 - squishing putty in their hands, coloring, holding a stuffie, using a fidget, etc
 - *throwing a safe item in a safe way
 - *punching a safe item in a safe way (punching bag)
- Very few to NO words
 - Not asking questions
 - Not giving directions/requests

Co-Participation

What's involved

- Staff doing/participating in what they want the student(s) to do
 - class activity
 - worksheet/independent work
 - regulation/calming strategies
 - jobs, tasks, chores, etc
- Talking aloud to self/others about the task

What's not involved

- Asking a lot of questions
- Verbal directions, re-directions
- Saying things like, “no,” “don’t”, “you need to...” or “that’s not how...”

Is Co-Participation Cheating??

- Intent is to increase engagement
- Learning is occurring, even when student is not directly engaged
 - Student “L” in 2nd grade
- Grade on what is known to be independent
 - mark/specify items done on their own
 - alternative methods of assessment



Let's Practice

- I do
- We do
- You do
- Let's talk about it



When Could You Incorporate Co-Participation?

- Time/activity in your day
- Specific student
- Upcoming student project or task

- What materials would you need?
- Who would need to help/know about it?



Elements of Social Attention



- **Talking TO or ABOUT a person**
 - “What are you doing?”
 - “Benny has had a tough morning and made some not so great choices.”
- **Eye Contact**
 - looking directly at someone
 - looking at a task, speaker, ground
- **Physical Orientation, Proximity and Body Language**
 - Stance- face to face, side to side
 - gestures, facial expressions
 - touching, chasing, holding

Dialing in our Social Attention

We want to give MORE attention when students are doing something desired

- More positive verbalizations
- More eye contact
- More positive physical interactions (if student desires)



Co-Participation and Attention

- Focus our attention on the desired outcome vs the undesired behavior
- Can dial up or down how much social attention we provide based on their engagement/desired actions
- Our attention is so valuable!
- **Words are the *currency* of your attention**
 - What do you want to PAY for?
 - *Pay attention* and purchase to desired behaviors
 - *Pay attention* and purchase undesired behaviors

Questions, Comments, other discussion?





Thank you!

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