

PBL in practice

High expectations and students with complex needs

When teachers hold high expectations for students there is a positive impact on student achievement, behaviour, motivation, self-esteem and attendance. Developing a culture of high expectations involves challenging and engaging students, providing appropriate curriculum differentiation and building rapport.

This PBL in practice paper outlines the importance of having high expectations for all students, especially students with complex needs, and provides practical strategies for incorporating high expectations within the PBL framework.

References

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Why are high expectations important?

High expectations are related to higher achievement for all students at all stages of education. Having high expectations is important for all students, no matter their background or socio-economic status.

An association exists between high expectations and positive behaviour, improved motivation, enhanced self-esteem, higher levels of attendance, academic success and improved rates of school completion.

A prevention focused multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework, such as PBL, offers practical guidelines to schools for provision of universal, targeted and individualised supports according to identified needs.

The PBL framework supports teachers to demonstrate high expectations by focusing on:

- positive relationships
- explicit teaching of expectations
- provision of acknowledgement and constructive feedback
- showing interest and care for student well-being
- differentiation of teaching and learning.

All students need to be continuously challenged in order to learn. Challenging and engaging students helps them to develop skills and competencies which will enable them to be successful at school and beyond. To create a high expectation environment, it is important to provide an appropriate and challenging curriculum where students achieve academic success.

High expectations and PBL

Building a positive school culture and climate through PBL allows each student to receive the appropriate supports to build skills essential to later achievement. Appropriate supports can help reduce the stress which may result from some of the challenges facing students outside of school, thereby improving social-emotional and cognitive self-regulation. Schools which meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students promote increased student engagement and achievement.

Research indicates that positive school climate is particularly important for schools serving communities with a high incidence of complex needs. Having a positive school culture and environment helps to mitigate or overcome many of the negative effects associated with disadvantage. The PBL framework can help schools to take a positive strengths-based, inclusive and instructional approach to discipline, thus avoiding reliance on exclusionary disciplinary practices.

Not all students will be familiar with the norms and expectations of schools. It is therefore important to explicitly teach school expectations while not devaluing home or community values. A culturally-responsive approach seeks to understand and include all students and to integrate community customs and values into curriculum, instruction and the school environment.





Practical strategies for teachers

1. Know and respect your students

Actively seek to understand student experiences and welcome student contributions to learning.

2. Provide flexibility and choice while maintaining standards

Understand that students may have multiple commitments outside of school and offer options for participation and work completion.

3. Make expectations clear

Explain expectations in language that is easy to understand and provide examples and non-examples.

4. Provide scaffolding

Use a range of supports, such as rubrics and graphic organisers to help students engage and be successful with academic tasks. Use language that is clear and easy to understand.

5. Be approachable

Let students know they can ask you for help and teach them how to ask for help in positive ways.

6. Reflect on your teaching

Seek feedback from students and peers on your teaching practice and look for ways to continuously improve.