

Tips and Strategies for Engaging, Motivating, and Managing Students During MTP

BRINGING STUDENTS TO THE RUG

Motivate students by beginning Message Time Plus with a song or chant. Students can sing a song as they walk to the rug or sing as a class once they are all seated. Here is one MTP song both teachers and students enjoy:

<p>Message Time <i>Sung to the tune of "This Old Man"</i></p>
<p>Message Time, Message Time, Let's get together and write some lines. Letters, words, and punctuation too. Message Time is fun to do!</p>

SELECTING STUDENTS FOR SCAFFOLDING

All students should have an opportunity to experience scaffolding in a two-week period. Most teachers try to call 3-5 students for individual scaffolding opportunities each time they teach MTP.

To determine which students are coming to the board, consider these two options:

Option 1	Choose students to come to the board based on the elements that have been included in the message. For example, if a student needs to practice spelling words with vowel combinations and these are evident in the message; it makes sense for that student to come to the board.
Option 2	Plan the message to include elements that will help students you are choosing to scaffold that day. In this option, you are choosing students back when you are planning the content of the message.

Over time, you may want to try planning both ways and reflect on which way is more efficient and manageable.

CALLING STUDENTS TO THE BOARD

The goal of any management system is to ensure smooth routines and procedures. In calling students to the board for scaffolding, a management system will be helpful in order to ensure

that every child has a chance to come up to the board in a set time period. This eliminates anxiety and reduces the “When is it my turn? Pick me!” requests that may occur. This process is intended to build confidence and improve the reading and writing of all learners.

Here are some examples of systems that have proven helpful in managing scaffolding:

- **Craft sticks/popsicle sticks:** teachers write each student’s name on a craft stick. These sticks are all placed in a container (for example, an envelope, cup or small basket) labeled “Needs a Turn.” This container is placed on the side of the message time board, in full view of the class. The teacher selects a stick from this container and that student comes to the board. Even if you have pre-selected students for scaffolding, you can still use this system by simply pretending that your choice is random. The spontaneity of having their stick selected can be highly motivating for students. After a student has a turn being scaffolded, his/her craft stick is placed in a different container labeled “Had a Turn.” This container is also placed in full view of the students. Once every student has had a turn, all the sticks are returned to the “Needs a Turn” container and the process begins again. This system also ensures that no student misses a turn.
- **Index cards** – the fronts of these cards are either decorated by the students or teachers can attach photographs of the students. These cards are then used like the craft sticks in the example above, moving from “Needs a Turn” to “Had a Turn” once the students have been scaffolded. In addition, the back of the index card can provide you with room to jot down notes about what the students knew or learned during their scaffolding sessions. Feel free to pre-select students for scaffolding but keep this knowledge a surprise for your students – they will enjoy hearing their name called and feel as if they have won a lottery.

You can also choose the order students are coming up in a set amount of time in accordance to something you are learning. For example, if you are learning ABC order, call them up in that way. If you are focusing on words with short vowels, consonant blends, or words with more than syllable, call students whose names have these letters/patterns first. Calling students in a certain order allows them to know who comes next and for you to pre-plan a line of questioning.

In order for students to learn where to stand during scaffolding, create and laminate two large letter X’s. Place them on both sides of the MTP board and tape them to the floor as a visual for where both the teacher and the student can stand so that the board is not blocked and is easily seen by all. Instead of using an “X,” you can use cut-outs of feet as well.

You may also have one student “on deck,” which means that this student is waiting to be scaffolded after the current student at the board. The “on deck” student may be sitting in a special chair in view of the board and thinking about what s/he will find in the message.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS IN SCAFFOLDING

The more explicit and consistent you are with your routines, questions, and expectations the more prepared individual students will be when they come to the board for scaffolding.

While you are writing or reading the message with the class, suggest that they think about what they recognize and know so they will be prepared when they are called to the board. You may even consider pausing before you begin scaffolding and asking the entire class to think about what they would select if they were called to the board. In this way, every student is prepared.

Also, using familiar prompts or questions when individuals come to the board can be helpful. Be explicit so the students know what they should be thinking about or looking for. Here are some examples:

- “What is something you know in the message that you want to share with your friends?”
- “Can you find a letter, a word, or a mark of punctuation that you know?”
- “Point to something you know.”
- “Can you teach the class about something that you know in the message?”
- “It’s your turn to shine! What can you find?”

The use of consistent questions will support students as they come to the board for scaffolding.

Remember to be encouraging. Everyone has something to teach the rest of the class. If they need assistance in verbalizing what it is they found, you will be there to support them and help them do so. Provide help and support as needed by showing them the letter/word/punctuation somewhere else in the room or by providing a clue at the bottom of the MTP board.

ENGAGING THE CLASS DURING SCAFFOLDING

There are many ways that the class can participate and learn along with the student who is being scaffolded. If you feel the students on the rug require a task or activity to keep them

motivated or engaged, consider one of these below. However, when selecting a task, keep these important criteria in mind:

Criteria for Engaging the Class During Scaffolding
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep the task related and connected to the content, skill, or strategy the student at the board is working on – this task should not be considered “busy work” so you can work quietly with the student at the board. This task should be purposeful and further the learning of the whole group.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider varying the type of task you ask the class to do in order to appeal to the different learning styles of all the students in your class (visual, auditory, kinesthetic).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adapt the task to the needs of the whole group – extend or simplify the content of the scaffold to meet the needs of the majority of your students.

See the next page for examples of ways to engage the class.

Examples of ways you can engage the class while an individual is being scaffolded:

Type of Task	Example	Example of student scaffold at the board	Example of whole class engagement strategy	Example of adapting (simplifying or extending) to meet the needs of the class
Thinking	Listen and learn	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	Class listens and learns	
Thinking	Stop and think	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to think of words that rhyme with cat as well.	The teacher asks the class to think of two syllable words that rhyme with cat
Writing	Stop and jot or draw (in your notebook, on your dry erase board, etc.)	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to make a list of words that rhyme with cat on a dry erase board	The teacher asks the class to write words that rhyme with catch
Writing	Write your response in the air, on your partner's back or on the rug	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to think of words that rhyme with cat and write them in the air	The teacher asks the class to write the word cat in lower case and upper case letters on their partner's back.
Talking	Think/pair/share	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teachers asks the class to think of words that they know that rhyme with cat and then share with their partner	The teacher asks the class to think of other one-syllable words they know and share them with their partners
Talking	Whisper in your hand	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to whisper in their hands all the words they know that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to whisper in their hands the plural of the word cat

Talking	Echo choral read	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to repeat the list of words on the board that rhyme with cat	
Using their hands	Thumbs up/thumbs down	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to make a thumbs up or thumbs down signal if the word rhymes with cat	The teacher asks the class to give a thumbs up if anyone can think of a two-syllable word that rhymes with cat
Using their hands	Count on your fingers	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to count how many words they know that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to count how many words they see in the message that rhyme with cat
Using their hands	Point to a place in the room	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to point to a word in the room that rhymes with cat	The teacher asks the class to point to a word in the room that has a short "a" in it
Drama	Act it out	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to act out a word that rhymes with cat	The teacher asks the class to act out how a cat pounces
Props	Green dot/red dot on different sides of index cards	Teacher asks student to think of words that rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to hold up the green dot side of their index cards if the student's words rhyme with cat	The teacher asks the class to hold up their green dots if they can think of more words that begin with the hard "c" sound

CELEBRATING EFFORT AND ACHIEVEMENT

Because you have spent time building community, your class should be in the habit of encouraging and supporting each other in their individual learning processes. Some teachers ask their class to cheer at the end of each individual's scaffolding session to make this support explicit. The individual at the board can select the cheer he or she wants to hear. Or, other teachers wait until the end of MTP to cheer and have their class "encourager" select the cheer. Either way, cheers signal support, build students' engagement with MTP, and develop students' pride in their achievements.

Here is a list of student-friendly cheers that you can teach your students and display in your room:

Cheer	Description
Kiss your Brain	Kiss your fingertips and tap them to your head
Truck Driver Cheer	Hold your arm up and pull it down like you are asking a truck driver to honk
Hip Hip Hooray	Place your right hand on your right hip and say "hip"; then place your left hand on your left hip and say "hip"; then move your hips in a circle while saying "hooray"
Round of Applause	Clap your hands while making a circle in the air
Silent Cheer	Raise your arms up and move them back and forth while your mouth is open as if you are screaming but without making any sound
Fan-tastic	Act like you are spraying a bottle of Fantastic – then make a wiping motion and say "fantastic" while wiping
Angel clap	Hook your thumbs together and flap your fingers
Clam clap	Clap your fingers to thumbs like a clam shell
Marshmallow Clap	Cup both hands as if you have a marshmallow between them and clap without your hands touching

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What if a student points to a letter, word, or mark of punctuation that they may recognize but cannot verbalize?

Initially, particularly in PreK/K, this may happen in MTP. The first step is to guide and support them to be able to verbalize what they found in the same way you would if they were unable to answer a scaffolding question. You may need to show them this letter/word/mark of punctuation somewhere in the room, provide reminders of where they have seen it before (a classmate's name, for example), write clues on the bottom of the board, or help to sound out the word so they can blend the sounds together. It will almost seem like you are giving the student the answer, but this is ok and actually crucial to ensure a successful experience. As time goes on, this should happen less and less.

What if certain students continue to find the same things in the message or find things that are below their level at this point in the year?

You need to talk to them about your expectation that they do their personal best and locate something in the message that is connected to something they have recently learned or discovered. Motivate them to take a risk and challenge themselves. Explain that we all have an important role of teaching each other something new. Depending on the situation, this may be best done in an individual conference with the student if you feel they are doing this for attention or other reasons. Or, you can say it as they arrive at the board, "You have been doing such a great job finding periods in our message. I see something here though that we just talked about in your reading group last week ...(provide another clue)...can you find that?" You could also consider switching to close framed questions (Can you find ___?) for that particular student so you can ensure they are locating something on their level.

What if I have some students who are nervous to perform in front of the class?

Do whatever you can to encourage those students and assure them that you and their peers are there to support them and guide them when they are up at the board. Explain that they have something to teach the class too! You may need to highlight a shy student in some way by putting his name into the message or complimenting him for all that he has learned in front of his peers. Again, you'd be surprised at how little this occurs during MTP. The process itself naturally motivates students and makes them excited about learning. Over time they will all look forward to teaching the class something and highlighting what they know.

What if the other students call out the answers during Step 6?

Again, this is something that you may have to explicitly talk to the students about, but it should rarely happen if you have spent time building and maintaining a community of learners. "When Anna is up at the board we need to respect Anna's personal best and give her time to find what she can in the message. Just like Anna respects all of you when you are up at the board, everyone deserves a chance to find their own answers without them being called out by their

classmates. Let's look at 'Our Promise to Each Other' that we wrote in the beginning of the year to remind us of ways that we respect each other."

What if I can't think of an appropriate scaffold for a student who is up at the board?

Most importantly, don't be too hard on yourself. Scaffolding learners in their ZPD is hard work and will get easier over time. After the experience, write down what happened and reflect upon how it can go better the next day. If you don't have another adult in the classroom to take notes about scaffolding experiences, keep post-it notes or a clipboard by your message board so you can jot down notes during or right after the student is at the board. Simply recording the name and what they found will jog your memory at the end of the day and remind you of the other questions you asked this student.

It is crucial that you rely on student assessments (formal or informal) to give you the information you need about that learner. If someone were to ask you about a student's literacy strengths and needs, you should be so familiar with them that you can say them off the top of your head. The more familiar you become with these strengths and needs, the better equipped you will be to meet that student's needs in multiple settings, during MTP, guided reading instruction, and individual reading and writing conferences.

Need help? Keep short notes about the students at the board. These could be kept on the back of their index cards (the letter sounds they are working on, the sight words they are learning to read and spell, the areas of literacy that is a goal, such as fluency) or on post-notes or a clipboard. There should be just enough information to trigger your memory about what it is you are working on with this individual student. These notes can help you think of immediate scaffolds. *(See section on MTP and Record Keeping for more ideas on record keeping).*

How can I grow in my ability to scaffold students?

By differentiating scaffolds for students based on the type of the learners they are (visual, auditory, or kinesthetic), their ability levels, and the area of literacy instruction you are working on as a class or with an individual student.