

Participation and Engagement

Profile: According to learners with WS they like going to school, they are aware of areas of the curriculum they like and activities they dislike. They can also name areas with which they need help. They generally seek to please their teacher and revel in praise. Like all other learners, they want to participate and engage in areas in which they are successful and those they like. Activities that are challenging and which they dislike are likely to pose a challenge for their participation and engagement. Specific aspects of the WS profile support high participation and engagement, particularly sociability and memory. Other aspects such as IQ, distractibility, emotionality, anxiety and defiance can impede their participation and engagement. The strategies used in all these areas are also relevant here.

Strategies:

- Ensure you differentiate adequately in all curriculum areas. This cannot be emphasised enough. Relevant, realistic programmes for all subjects, taught by you the teacher and differentiated by you the teacher. Simply teaching a lesson and telling her at the end she only has to draw a picture rather than answer fifteen questions is not adequate differentiation if she has a general learning difficulty. Plan differentiated outcomes.
- Have high expectations of participation.
- Praise and reward participation in activities, particularly those which the learner finds challenging. Encourage her regularly, smile, let her know your pleasure at her engagement and praise her very frequently to keep her engaged. Prevention rather than cure!
- Set realistic time-frames for when the learner will attend to tasks but demand her attention for that time-frame (this may only be three minutes at a time, but you can build up every few days or weeks).
- Use a reward system to keep her on task.
- Reduce sensory overload, particularly those of an auditory nature.
- Reiterate class rules using large visuals and get her to repeat them: quiet hands, quiet feet etc. This can be settling and get the learner ready to pay attention.
- Allow for very regular movement breaks (good for all learners ... this is done in all schools in Korea!) or allow her to take a break to go to e.g. the library corner for a few minutes.
- Use the learner's special interests to enhance engagement in the task.
- Tap the table as a reminder to focus on a task (this works for all learners!).
- Use drama and role-play as often as possible as an approach across the curriculum as the sense of the dramatic often appeals greatly to the learner with WS.
- Avoid over use of a SNA to keep the learner focused. This can lead to poor self-regulation.

- The SNA should not be the learner's partner for pair work. Where possible the SNA should sit behind the learner rather than beside her where there can be a learned helplessness. Avoid the 'velcro model' of SNA support.

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