

INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH ADHD & HYPERACTIVITY

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RATIONALE

During student teaching, I had the opportunity to work closely with a student diagnosed with ADHD. They were bright, curious, and full of joy, but they also struggled with focus, self-regulation, and navigating peer relationships. I attempted several interventions such as movement breaks, proximity support, and visual cues but often found myself unsure of whether I was truly meeting their needs. Despite my efforts, I often felt unprepared, and that feeling stuck with me.

This experience made me reflect deeply on my role as a teacher and my responsibility to support every student, especially those whose needs may not be fully understood or easily addressed in a general education setting. My struggle to effectively support this student, paired with my strong desire to foster a classroom where all learners feel seen, supported, and successful, became the driving force behind this inquiry. I want to build a toolkit of strategies that not only improves academic and behavioral outcomes for students with ADHD or hyperactivity, but also helps create a more inclusive, responsive, and engaging environment for all children in my future classrooms.

TPEP ALIGNMENT

Criterion 3: Recognizing individual student learning needs and developing strategies to address those needs.

Descriptor: Differentiation; the teacher acquires and uses specific knowledge about students' cultural, individual, intellectual and social development and uses that knowledge to adjust their practice by employing strategies that advance student learning. Student growth data must be a substantial factor utilizing the OSPI approved student growth rubrics.

This inquiry aligns with **Criterion 3** by identifying effective strategies to support diverse learning needs, particularly for students with ADHD or hyperactivity.

Criterion 5: Fostering and managing a safe, positive learning environment.

Descriptor: Learning environment; the teacher fosters and manages a safe and inclusive learning environment that takes into account: physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being of students.

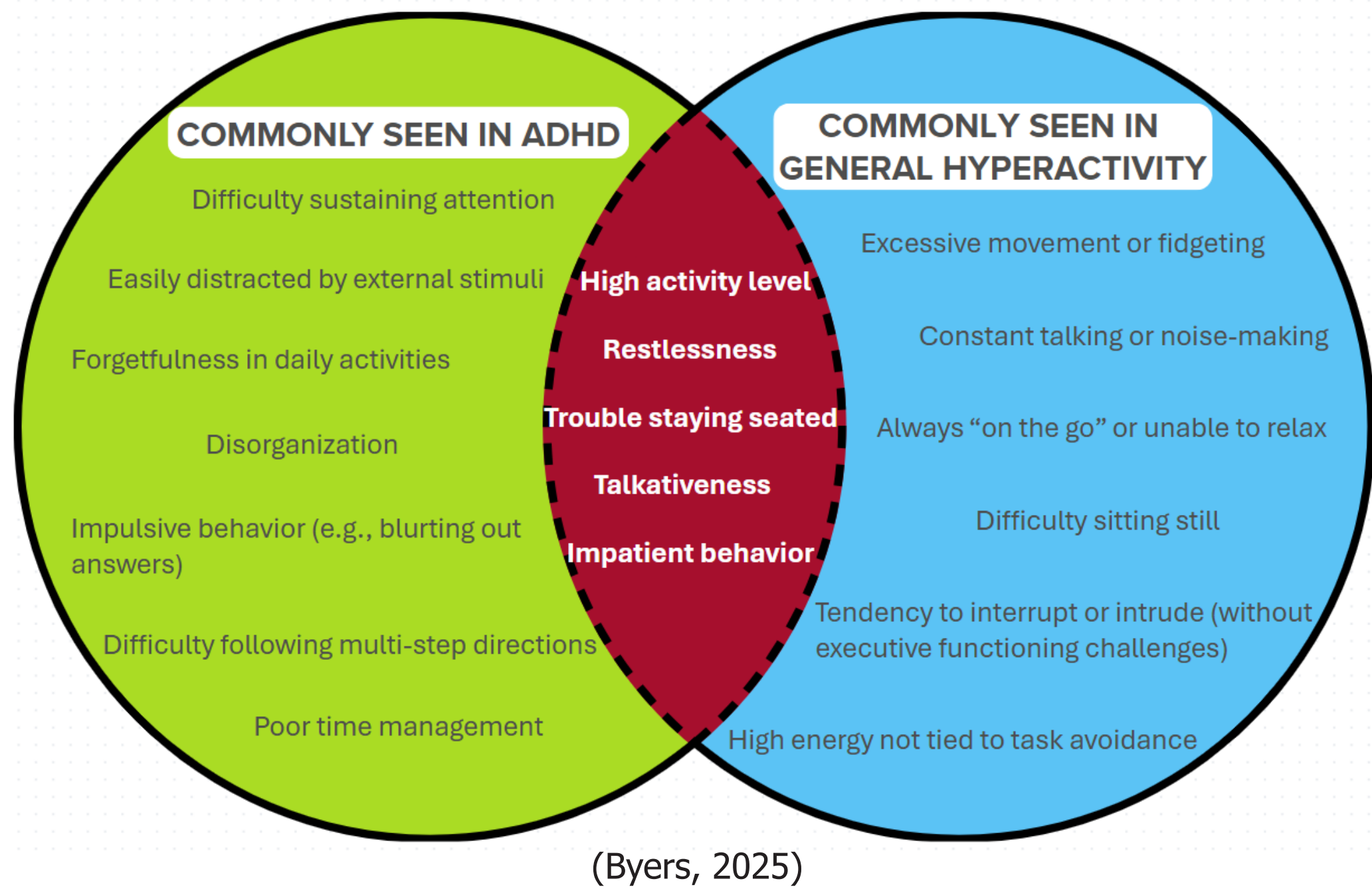
This inquiry supports **Criterion 5** by promoting a classroom environment that is structured, inclusive, and conducive to positive behavior and engagement.

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- What are the key differences between ADHD and general hyperactivity, and how do these distinctions inform classroom support?
- Which classroom practices best support engagement and self-regulation in students with ADHD or general hyperactivity?
- How can teachers intentionally foster strong peer relationships for students with ADHD or hyperactivity?
- What impact does an inclusive classroom environment have on both the academic and social outcomes for students with ADHD or hyperactivity?

ADHD & HYPERACTIVITY: ARE THEY THE SAME?

In short, no. While hyperactivity is a visible behavior, ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) is a broader neurodevelopmental condition. **Not all hyperactive students have ADHD, and not all students with ADHD are hyperactive.**



PRACTICES FOR ENGAGEMENT & SELF-REGULATION

Students with ADHD or general hyperactivity benefit most from strategies that align with how their brains work. The following classroom practices are supported by research as effective, inclusive, and easy to implement:

- **Consistent Routines**
Reduce anxiety and cognitive overload by creating predictability (Werb, 2019).
- **Chunking Tasks**
Presents information in smaller steps to support working memory and focus (Werb, 2019).
- **Movement Breaks**
Provide physical outlets to help regulate energy and re-engage attention (Werb, 2019).
- **Clear Expectations**
Minimizes confusion and boosts engagement (Kang, 2023).
- **Student Choice**
Supports autonomy and motivation by offering structured options (Kang, 2023).
- **Regular, Strength-Based Feedback**
Reinforces positive behaviors and builds confidence (Kang, 2023).
- **Low-Intensity Reinforcement**
Games like "Caught Being Good" increase on-task behavior through positive attention (Alkahtani, 2023).

CAUGHT BEING GOOD

The **"Caught Being Good Game"** is a low-intensity, high-impact management strategy that encourages on-task behavior through positive reinforcement. Students earn points or praise when they're "caught" following expectations. Students with ADHD show **improved behavior and increased academic engagement** when this strategy is used consistently (Alkahtani, 2023).

FOSTERING STRONG PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Students with ADHD or hyperactivity often struggle with social challenges, including peer rejection and difficulty maintaining friendships due to impulsivity or difficulty with emotional regulation. Teachers can play a powerful role in supporting these students by intentionally shaping a classroom culture that values inclusion, empathy, and teamwork. The following strategies help build a stronger sense of belonging and improve peer relationships for students with ADHD or hyperactive tendencies:

- **Integrate Social Emotional Learning (SEL) throughout the day**
Helps all students develop empathy, emotional awareness, and communication skills—crucial for improving peer interactions (Elias & Schwab, 2004).
- **Teach Whole-Class Social Skills**
Practice friendship-building, turn-taking, and managing emotions using real-life scenarios to promote empathy and inclusion.
- **Use Structured Cooperative Learning**
Group roles and shared academic goals give students with ADHD positive opportunities for peer collaboration, reducing exclusion (Hoza, 2007).
- **Incorporate Peer-Mediated Supports**
Teach peers to model positive social interactions and provide support with conversations, games, or resolving conflicts (Kavale & Mostert, 2004).
- **Leverage Class-Wide Games**
Encourages teamwork and reinforces group behavioral expectations, helping students feel supported and valued by peers (Alkahtani, 2023).



AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

An inclusive classroom is one in which **all students**—regardless of ability—**feel a genuine sense of belonging, are supported in meaningful ways, and are encouraged to engage socially and academically.** For students with ADHD or hyperactivity, inclusive practices can significantly improve both learning outcomes and peer relationships. Strategies such as **Universal Design for Learning (UDL), structured routines, visual supports, and differentiated instruction** help accommodate attention and executive functioning challenges while promoting student engagement (Basham et al., 2020; Werb, 2019). Socially, inclusive environments reduce stigma by **normalizing neurodiversity and teaching empathy** through social-emotional learning (SEL) and cooperative learning structures (Mikami et al., 2013; Greenway et al., 2023). These classrooms create a culture where **diverse learning styles are valued and students feel safe taking risks** and participating fully. When students with ADHD feel accepted and supported, they are more likely to build positive peer connections, persist in academic tasks, and develop stronger self-efficacy. In this way, inclusive classrooms benefit not only students with ADHD or hyperactivity, but the entire learning community.

TOOLS

Supporting students with ADHD or hyperactivity requires a flexible toolkit that addresses attention, regulation, and executive functioning. When tools are thoughtfully introduced and matched to individual needs, they can significantly improve engagement and reduce disruptive behaviors.

Physical Tools

- **Flexible Seating** (e.g., wobble stools, standing desks)
Provides a safe outlet for physical movement, which helps students manage excess energy and sustain attention (Bolinger et al., 2021; Desbrow, 2021).
- **Fidgets**
Subtle, hands-on regulation tools that help maintain attention when used appropriately (Desbrow, 2021).
- **Timers**
Help students visualize how long tasks will take, improving focus and transition readiness (Bolinger et al., 2021).
- **Visual Schedules**
Reduce anxiety by increasing predictability and supporting routine transitions (Bolinger et al., 2021).
- **Visual Charts** (e.g., transition cue cards, calm down chart)
Assist students in managing daily routines and calming strategies (Bolinger et al., 2021).

Virtual Tools

- **ClassDojo**
Encourages positive behavior through visual reinforcement and classroom points (Bolinger et al., 2021; Desbrow, 2021).
- **GoNoodle**
Provides structured movement breaks to reset focus and energy levels (Desbrow, 2021).
- **Seesaw / Google Classroom**
Supports student autonomy by allowing work at individual pace with multi-modal instructions (Bolinger et al., 2021).
- **Executive Function Applications (e.g., Choiceworks)**
Supports planning, organization, and task completion (Bolinger et al., 2021).

ACTION

Through this inquiry, I've reimaged what my future classroom can—and should—look like: a space where students with ADHD or hyperactivity are not just accommodated, but truly understood, supported, and valued. This means building predictable routines like visual schedules and movement breaks, using flexible seating, and making expectations visible and accessible to all learners. I will prioritize relationships, design lessons with collaboration and choice, and use tools like the "Caught Being Good Game" to reinforce prosocial behavior. Most importantly, I will listen—to students, to families, and to colleagues—so that support is consistent and connected across settings. This inquiry has shown me that inclusive education is a daily commitment to equity, empathy, and believing that every student deserves to thrive.



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