

Teaching and Learning – 5 minutes

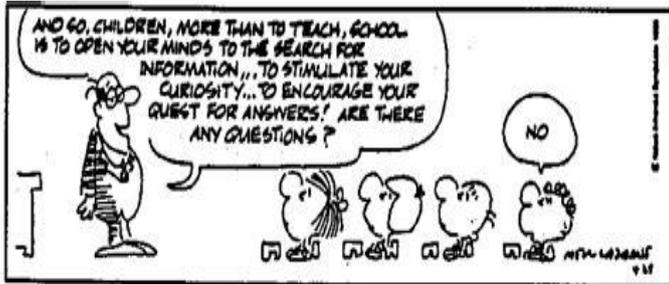
...over a hot brew!

Research, Resilience, and Reflection

Issue 34:



1. In Pictures:



2. Proact not react: Prevention is better than cure!

During research by Allday & Pakurar (2007) ‘on-task behaviour’ during the first 10 minutes of a lesson was monitored. They found that teacher greetings produced increases in students’ ‘on-task behaviour’ from a mean of 45% in baseline observations, to a mean of 72% during the intervention phase. Further research, by Cook, Fiat & Larson (2018), has confirmed the earlier results. In this larger second study, when teachers started a lesson by welcoming students at the door, academic engagement increased by 20 percentage points and disruptive behaviour decreased by 9 percentage points—potentially adding “an additional hour of engagement over the course of a five-hour instructional day,” according to the researchers.

The teachers employed in the study used pre-corrective statement reminders of what to do at the start of class such as, “Spend the next few minutes reviewing what we covered yesterday”; “start the task that’s on the board”. If a student had struggled with their behaviour the previous day, the teachers were instructed to give a positive message to encourage them to improve.

The study authors conclude, “The results from this study suggest that teachers who spend time on the front end to implement strategies such as the ‘positive greetings at the door’ will eventually save more time on the back end by spending less time reacting to problem behaviour and more time on instruction.”

3. Teaching Strategy: What to do

What is it: What to Do is a simple technique, involving giving directions in a format that clearly describes what you want in concrete terms—as opposed to giving instructions in vague and

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confusing terms, or telling students what not to do. In schools, we may issue a lot of vague, inefficient, and unclear commands, even without realizing it: “Don’t get distracted.” “Stop that.” “That behaviour was inappropriate.” They force students to guess at what you want them to do. This grey area leaves the door open to inaccurate interpretations, making it harder for students to do as you’ve asked, both now and in the future. Clarity is king!

Why do it: It allows you to distinguish between lack of understanding from defiance by making commands specific enough that they can’t be deliberately misinterpreted, and helpful enough that they explain away any grey areas. If you ask Student ‘A’ to pay attention, sit up, or get on task, and they do not, it is crucial that you know whether they cannot or will not. How you respond depends entirely on what the root of the problem is. Confusing incompetence and defiance can have damaging consequences for all. What to Do can also improve your relationships with students. It socializes teachers to reflect on the quality of our directions before we proceed with other behaviour management approaches.

What does it look like? What to Do directions should have the following four characteristics:

Specific. Effective directions outline manageable and precise actions that students can take. For example, instead of advising a student to “pay attention,” you might advise them to put their pencil on their desk or keep their eyes on the speaker.

Concrete. Effective directions involve, clear, actionable tasks that students know how to execute. If you tell a student to put their feet under their desk rather than to “stop fooling around,” you have given a tangible direction that they know how to follow. Concrete directions require no prior knowledge.

Sequential. Effective directions should describe a sequence of concrete, specific actions. In the case of the student who needs help paying attention, you might request him, to “put your feet under your desk, put your pencil down, and put your eyes on me.”

Observable. It is hard for us to monitor a student’s degree of paying attention accurately. In contrast, it is easy for us to monitor whether their legs are under their desk. As a consequence it is much harder for a student to say, “But my legs are under my desk” when they aren’t.

4. To ponder...

“Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.”

[Margaret Mead]

