

# Teaching and Learning – 5 minutes

...over a hot brew!

Research, Resilience, and Reflection

Issue 40:



## 1. Long term memory



"Want to hear something scary? This is the third time this week I've gotten off the bus and still remember what I learned."

## 2. Teaching Techniques: Precise Praise

**What is it:** Positive reinforcement is a critical tool, but only if it is used strategically. Be strategic with your positive comments – praise only when expectations have been exceeded. Avoid reinforcing/encouraging mediocrity or even poor standards (know your students).

**Why do it:**

- Encourage exactly what you want to see more of to get what is needed.
- Teaching a student to make the right decisions – that can then become habitual.

**What does it look/sound like:**

- Reinforce Actions, Not Traits: Reinforce behaviours as specifically as possible and focus on actions that students can choose to do. A child can't decide to be "smart" but a child can decide to "work hard and persevere."

- Targeted: Offer objective aligned praise
- Tone: Use a positive tone (sarcasm is deadly) and be intentional – do not give 'empty' disingenuous statements (see below)

- Differentiate Acknowledgement from Praise: Acknowledge when expectations have been met ("Thank you for being ready on time"; "I see that we're ready on time.") Praise when expectations have been exceeded ("I love that some people going back and revising even though I didn't ask you to.") Praising when expectations have simply been met can undercut those expectations.

- Modulate and vary your delivery: Generally, privacy is beneficial with critical feedback (as private as possible; as public as necessary). Pay attention to volume and degree of privacy and vary your delivery. Be emotionally intelligent.

- Use Objective Driven Praise: You can (and should) reinforce not only behavioural and social actions but academic ones as well. ("I see people carefully lining up the decimal place as they work.") Note: This implies that positive reinforcement is something you can strategically plan for.

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- Genuine Positives: Students discount insincere praise and often read it as an indication that their work is inferior. Balance positive reinforcement with constructive criticism. Be honest and candid.

## 3. Student Teacher Relationships

Doug Lemov reflecting on successful teacher-student relationships within a classroom:

"One of the primary reasons you came to love or admire or connect with that teacher was probably what he or she did in those days before there was any connection. His or her ability to help you learn and understand and maybe achieve a goal was one of the things that built that relationship - at least if the relationship was substantive rather than superficial. You knew they cared because they caused you to learn – they cared, true, but they cared first and foremost about your learning. You connected through content.

If you didn't learn much, if they didn't teach you well, you may have liked them in a sense but your relationship was incomplete. Competence as a teacher is a driver of enduring connections with students. A teacher who would place more value on showing caring without ensuring learning would have done you a disservice. It would have been an act of egotism. And you would have come to resent that.

In some cases they (students) will want to be close to us (teachers) and have a stronger connection. In some cases they won't. In all cases it will be our job to teach.

In summary:

- 1) Building relationships with people we teach (or learn from) is an iterative process. The one causes the other which causes the one which causes the other. Trying to build relationships without teaching is a dead end street.
- 2) There are a wide variety of viable and productive classroom relationships. Not every student wants to be close to every teacher but every student needs to learn from their teacher and know that they care about his or her achievement.
- 3) If we use the imperative of relationship building as a reason not to spend our time focused on the effectiveness of our teaching we are less likely to succeed at either teaching or building meaningful relationships with students.
- 4) Making students feel safe successful and known in the classroom is a good proxy for what ultimately drives positive relationships."

## 4. To ponder...

"Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better" [P.Riley]

