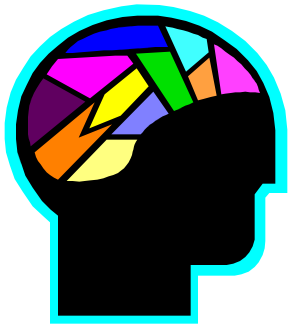
Structuring Classroom Experiences for Success

Proactive Management Strategies



Maintaining an appropriate instructional pace

Understanding the problem

… and Goldilocks said, ***This chair is too hard … but this chair is too soft …***

Such is the problem with the pace of a lesson. Instruction that moves along too slowly will likely result in bored students who quickly lose attention. When student become bored, they are often easily distracted and begin to misbehave. Likewise, when instruction moves along too quickly, many student fail to understand what you are teaching, experience failure and frustration, become discouraged, and subsequently begin misbehaving.

One of the keys to successful instruction is finding the "sweet spot" between moving too quickly versus too slowly. When teachers do not provide an appropriate instructional pace, disruptive behaviors are increased, thinking skills are disrupted, and academic progress is thwarted. Students' cooperative behaviors are diminished because they feel unchallenged or defeated. Self-esteem is damaged and students often engage in undesirable behaviors as a compensatory strategy.

A key to the solution

The momentum of the instructional activity is important for facilitating high rates of engaged student behavior. Balancing the momentum during instructional activities helps students collect and organize information in productive ways. It also aids in establishing harmonious classroom environment.

When teachers vary the pace and rhythm of instruction, they are providing covert instructional and behavioral support that is responsive to a wide range of student needs and abilities. They are also modeling important life skills such as flexibility, organization, and caring.

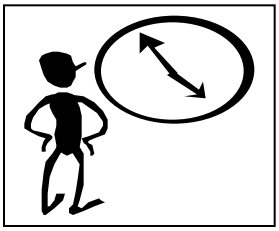
Management Tips

Step 1 Reflect on the instructional goals and objectives of the lesson. Prior to beginning instruction, review what you want students to learn as a result of the lesson or unit. Limit the focus of an instructional activity to one or two objectives that are specific, measurable, and observable. For example …

Objective 1: Provide 3-5 examples of how DNA replication and cell division has impacted society in the past 10 years.

Objective 2: Predict how our knowledge of DNA replication and cell division may continue to influence our society in the new millennium by citing 3-5 significant implications.

Step 2 Determine the time parameters for the instructional activity by asking yourself how much time is available. Consider whether your instructional goals and objectives are achievable within those parameters. It is important to remember that open-ended activities, such as cooperative learning, require more time than closed-ended activities like traditional lecture.



Step 3 Formulate a plan or schedule that delineates the timing for each instructional activity. This plan should reflect how much time you anticipate spending on each component of the lesson. Remember, it is an estimate. Part of the plan should be allotted for students' think time. Reviewing the number and types of instructional and behavioral demands required could help you determine how much "think time" will be necessary.

For example …
Total time: 55 minutes

Beginning of the lesson - Review what students already know about DNA replication and cell division using response cards (approximately 10 minutes)
Give students 30-60 seconds of think time before asking them to display their response cards.

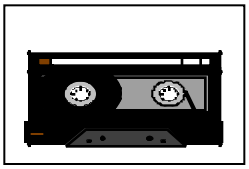
During the lesson – Students will use a cooperative learning activity to construct a timeline of important DNA replication and cell division events that have occurred in the past 10 years ***(approximately 35 minutes)***
Monitor groups and assign roles & responsibilities.

End of the lesson – Students will use a Think Pair Share activity to predict how our past, present, and future knowledge of DNA replication and cell division will impact our society in the new millennium (***approximately 10 minutes).***
Provide students with 3-5 minutes for thinking time, 2-3 minutes for exchanging responses with a partner, and 2-3 minutes for selected pairs to share thoughts with the large group.

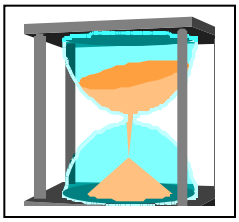
Step 4 Implement the plan during the lesson. As the lesson unfolds, you will need to monitor and adjust your timing to be responsive to students' needs. Carefully gauge students' reactions to instruction. Are they bewildered, bored, or unresponsive? If so, then you need to switch gears quickly to modify the pace or rhythm of the lesson.

Jazzing It Up

1. Use an audio or videotape to determine whether your instructional pace is appropriate. Pay close attention to your speech patterns. Do you need to use more inflection to draw students into the activity? Do you need to use slow and careful speech to ensure students' understanding? Do you need to pick up the pace of your speech to maintain students' attention?

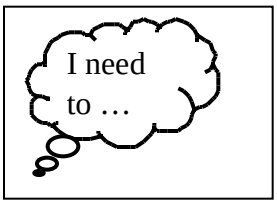


2. Use time-keeping devices such as egg timers or kitchen timers as signals to stay within the time parameters allotted for each activity within the lesson. If you prefer a more subtle approach, recruit students to monitor the time and signal you at designated points within the instructional activity.



3. Conference with students individually to create signals that will be used to prompt participation. For example, some students may experience auditory processing difficulties. While other students are formulating an answer, these students are still processing the question. In order to increase their participation, discuss the problem and generate a solution. For example, you can use proximity to move closer to the student's desk when you are going to pose a question that you would like him or her to answer. Repeating the question can also help to ensure adequate processing time.

4. Use self-talk to regulate your instructional pace. For example, ***I know I am talking too fast. Students don't seem to be able to keep up with the note-taking. I need to take a deep breath and use slow and careful speech. I also need to restate big ideas 3-5 times to stress their importance.***



5. Consider alternatives to ensure a smooth flow and brisk instructional pace. For example, if students are required to take a lot of notes, the rhythm may become slow and laborious. One solution is to provide a skeletal outline. A skeletal outline is a fill-in-the-blanks approach to note-

taking. This alternative can increase students' comprehension of the content and help to achieve instructional momentum that is appropriately motivating.

What's Next?

Additional tactics you can use to make positive or desired student behavior(s) happen include

Warmly providing assistance

Using proximity

Using remembering cues about expectations

Using redirection

Providing encouragement

Maintaining format flexibility

Conducting smooth-sailing transitions