

## A Practical Guide to Education Chapter 4

### HOW CHILDREN LEARN AND BEHAVE

Teaching requires not only knowledge of the subject, but also knowledge of how best the learners will learn. It is important to remember that a six year old does not think or learn in the same way as a sixteen year old. They are at different levels of physical development. They are also at different levels of cognitive and emotional development. Many classes will include children of different ages, even though they may all be in the same grade. The teacher must be aware of the differences between children in their class, and utilize different teaching approaches and class management techniques in helping them to learn well.

**4.1 How children learn** This section summarizes some characteristics of children in different age groups: (1) young children from 6 to 10 years of age; and (2) adolescents from 11 to 18 years of age.

**The Young Child (6 - 10 years of age)** Learning should begin with the child's experiences, with what the child already knows. When children come to school, they have already acquired some knowledge - they know a language, they know how to relate to members of their own family, and they know quite a lot about society and the world around them. The teacher can determine what knowledge and skills the children have already developed and then build on that. For example, you can encourage the children to speak about their lives and draw on what they already know.

At this age children are able to think logically about concrete problems. They are becoming more comfortable working with symbols, such as numbers and letters, although they still need many opportunities to work with real materials and objects. For example, they can more easily learn to count when they have leaves or stones to count, rather than doing it in an abstract way - in their heads or by writing numbers. Children in this age range need a great deal of practice before they can master a skill, and this practice has to be spaced over a long period. You should provide many different opportunities for children to practice and utilize knowledge and skills that have been introduced.

Play is very important to young school-age children. They like to play games with rules, such as sports or card games. If given the opportunity, they like drama and role-play. Their play is often gender-segregated, which to some extent may reflect different interests of boys and girls (Mitchell, 1992). Young children often model themselves on adults around them. They see the teacher as their role model because of their daily contact. Therefore, it is important that the teacher provide positive modeling of behavior, knowledge, and skills. For example, use of corporal

punishment by the teacher will often lead children to imitate this type of behavior with other children.

**PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:** Some ways to organize lessons for young children

21. Have a lot of materials for children to use in the learning process. Children can collect some of these materials themselves, and these can be kept in the classroom. Readily available materials include sticks, stones, leaves, plants, and pictures.

22. Provide a variety of ways for the children to express what they have learned. Some effective, practical, and entertaining forms of expression include role playing, drama, and games (for more information see section 4.2 of this chapter).

23. Children learn better by seeing and doing than only by being told. Instead of telling them a fact, find ways in which they can see these facts for themselves. For example, you can organize visits to nearby places, such as farms, forests, and rivers; or introduce project work, such as interviewing others and recording these interviews, finding out information from books, and exploring issues in small groups.

**The Adolescent (11 - 18)** You may have older children in primary school, many of them adolescents. Remember that children of different ages have different interests and also think in different ways, so the teacher will have to teach the older children rather differently from the younger children. Adolescents are no longer tied to concrete reasoning about objects. They can begin abstract thought, and their skills in scientific reasoning increase. Data can be organized by classifying and corresponding. The results of these operations facilitate the students' logical thinking. Students can now reason hypothetically and enjoy "if-then" types of problems.

During this stage learners tend to question and criticize more than younger children. They may not accept authority very easily and will be more influenced by children of their own age, such as their friends and peer group. They are more likely to be disruptive in class than younger children. At the same time, they may be able to learn much more quickly and in more abstract ways than the younger children.

If possible, these older children should be placed in classes with their age mates. However, where this is not possible and where a teacher may find 6 year olds in the same class as 15 year olds or even 18 year olds, it is wise to divide the class into smaller groups, with older children sometimes working together, and at other times placing more advanced and sympathetic older children as leaders for groups of younger children. Making older children compete with younger children, particularly older girls competing with younger boys or older boys competing with younger girls, may be discouraging and intimidating to both the older and the younger child.

**PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:** Some ways to organize lessons for teenagers

- Teenagers have different interests from young children. Find out what these interests are and utilize them in your teaching. For example, teenagers will be more interested in what they will do as adults, either in their careers or in their

social relationships. They are often more interested in expressing their personalities through their habits or language. Utilize these interests in your lessons.

- Teenagers would like to be more independent, to do things for themselves, to learn on their own, and to be more responsible for themselves and their learning. Use their wish to be more independent to enable them to learn better. For example, let them find out information for themselves through interviews, reading, and research on their own. Let them do more project work. Let them apply their knowledge and skills to the reality around them, such as by drawing maps of their home, school, and surroundings.

**4.2 Classroom discipline and management** In the discussion in section 4.1 about how children learn, suggestions were made for how teachers should model learning behavior and how best young and adolescent children learn knowledge and skills. In this section, we take a more psychological perspective in discussing child development and how that development affects behavior. We will look at why discipline and management are so important to children's well-being, and will provide concrete suggestions for positive ways to discipline and manage children.

Discipline is what you say and do to teach an individual child acceptable behavior and guide him or her to practice that behavior. Discipline is not simply punishment. Management includes techniques that teachers use to guide the behavior of a group of children. Discipline and management will help you meet three important goals:

- Keeping children physically safe. Young children are impulsive. They often move and respond without thinking of the consequences of their actions. Older children can also get carried away when playing and endanger other students and themselves.
- Promoting children's sense of self. As they define themselves as separate people, children test limits. You are there to help set limits when necessary and allow children to feel safe. Knowing that you are there to insist on some limitations will lessen children's fears of losing control and encourage them to explore their independence.
- Teaching children to develop self-control. This process takes a long time, and through it the child learns beliefs, values, and a sense of right and wrong. Over time, children will no longer need to be reminded to behave "correctly," because they will act on their own belief as to what is the right thing to do. Self-control is important for two reasons in particular: (1) people with self-control feel good, confident and proud of themselves; and (2) people with self-control are more responsible members of a group - at the same time as they voice their own opinions and beliefs, they respect those of others.

Remember that every child is an individual and that the children in your class will be at different levels of development, even if they are the same age. Here are guidelines and suggestions for teachers to meet the goals above:

- **Match your expectations of behavior to children's developmental level.** Young school-age children, for example, are fairly capable of self-control. They understand why there are rules and they can begin to generate their own rules. As they develop mentally, they will show aggression more verbally than physically. They will call each other names, and they need your help to learn that this behavior is hurtful and unacceptable.
- **Show children respect even though you may not approve of their behavior.** Be careful not to attack children's self-esteem. You should focus your disapproval on the behavior, not on the child.
- **Provide a routine.** Children respond very well to routine activities, such as singing a morning song to start the day and to signal lunchtime. Also, remember to explain to children what is going to happen next, for children find it unsettling to be in transition or without limits. For example, you might say, "After this activity, we will play a game."
- **Offer alternatives.** Be flexible with your lesson plans, for behavioral problems often arise when children are bored or find tasks too difficult. If the children are having difficulty with an exercise, be ready to alter it or offer a different exercise, rather than forcing the children to continue. Help children understand others feelings. Recognizing how their behavior makes others feel will help children begin to learn to control their own behavior. Young children have not developed the skill of perception, so the teacher might have to point out that, "your friend is upset because you hit him" or "she is angry because you won't let her play with you."
- **Involve the entire class in problem solving.** If there is a problem affecting the whole class, ask students to brainstorm ways to solve it. Brainstorming means letting everyone suggest solutions without discounting any, and the teacher should keep track of the suggestions. When they run out of suggestions, go through the list and eliminate suggestions by giving good reasons why they will not work. If the children do not come up with any reasonable solutions, you can offer solutions as well. This encourages teamwork and creativity in problem-solving.
- **Acknowledge children's positive behavior.** A smile or comment of encouragement will go a long way toward promoting desirable behavior. For example, "I like the way you two cooperated to decide who was going to draw first."
- **Encourage children to talk about their feelings and frustrations.** Listen to what children's words and actions tell you about their feelings. They may need your help in finding words to name their feelings. Help them to explain to other children that they are feeling angry, sad, frustrated, excited, etc.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** A joke, a silly song, or a funny face can give everyone a much-needed sense of perspective when things get tense.
- **Be aware that who you are can influence your expectations and responses to children's behavior.** Your own childhood experiences, your personality, and your beliefs and values influence how you treat children. It is especially important for young children that the norms you set for the learning space are appropriate and not just a repetition of how you were raised.

- **Communicate your philosophy about discipline and management to parents.** It is extremely important that children do not receive strongly conflicting messages from the various caregivers in their lives. The teacher must work with the parents to develop mutually acceptable management techniques, while recognizing that the management needs in the learning space tend to be unique as they must always encourage learning. You may want to hold regular meetings with parents to discuss behavior and discipline, and you may encourage parents to adopt your behaviors, such as treating children with respect even when you disapprove of their behavior.

### **PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS** Complaint Box

A traditional complaint box with a slot in the top can help you to stay on task with your teaching since students can complain all they want without taking up your time in doing so (they might even get some writing exercise in the process). Read through them at the end of the day; the important ones are kept to be dealt with as you see fit (hopefully you've been able to see and deal with hitting and other physical things immediately). The more insignificant ones are usually ignored since the student already achieved what they were needing to do: just get something off their chest. In those cases they likely forgot all about it by the time you read about it.

From: [Http://www.teachnet.com/manage.html](http://www.teachnet.com/manage.html)

**Guidelines for handling class disturbances** There are a number of general guidelines which many teachers have found to be effective (Hoover, 1987). However, there is no fixed procedure in class disturbance.

- **Disturbing conversation.** Sometimes such a disturbance can be ignored. If it threatens to spread, the teacher can move to the area of disturbance. He/she may offer to help students get started on an assignment. If the teacher is talking to the entire group, a pause or a question to one of the disturbing students can effectively solve the problem. Although some teachers are quick to separate students who disturb, this is often an inadvisable procedure. The practice may create resentment and serve to spread the problem to other parts of the room.
- **Over-dependence of one child on another.** This is a problem which usually will work itself out. The students sometimes need each other until wider social acceptance is possible. Wider social acceptance is encouraged through emphasis on group work.
- **Hostility between individuals and/or groups.** Talk with each of the participants individually. Try to find the cause prior to any drastic attempts at reformation.
- **Cheating.** Cheating may occur as a result of overemphasis on grades or the establishment of unrealistic standards. For example, if the task is too hard for the students, s/he will be forced to meet the requirement.
- **Temper tantrum.** When a child in the classroom has a temper tantrum, everyone in the classroom should avoid giving the child an audience. The teacher may need to remove the child from the classroom so that other children will not give him an audience. The teacher may find out what caused the child

to have a temper tantrum and then try to help the child to see his/her behavior in a different way. This may prevent it from happening again.

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