

Reinventing Education

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Dear Naomi and Juliet,

Thank you for creating a safe space for me to learn from everyone's experiences and allowing me to create an assignment that has a useful outcome for me.

The seminars highlighted to me a real need for teachers to build healthy and nurturing relationships with their students that support and encourage students in their learning. Research has shown that in order to build these relationships, positive praise is an important tool to use. As such, and as I am going to be a trainee maths teacher next year, I used this assignment to understand how I can give quality praise.

Without this assignment, I would not have examined the best way to give praise for me and I would not have been able to identify potential pitfalls that I might experience as a result of my 'preoccupied' attachment type. This assignment has given me the opportunity to identify how often I should give praise and the type of praise I should use as well as how I can implement it. I have come up with a method to track the way I give praise in order to make sure that I am exhibiting 'secure' attachment behaviours and not 'preoccupied' ones.

Best Wishes,

Charlotte

Praise can be a powerful tool when properly implemented; it can improve students' motivation and attitude towards learning as well as encourage students to exhibit positive behaviours required for learning, such as good listening skills (Morin 2018). Rawson (1992) noted that children that received praise enjoyed learning much more; children were much more likely to stay behind after the lesson to ask further questions which shows a high level of voluntary engagement with the learning material. Praise can also help to build good student-teacher bonds as students appreciate that the teacher has noticed and valued the effort of the student (Plevin 2016). As students behave better for teachers that they like, the bond improves even further as the teacher notices this improvement in behaviour and administers further praise (Plevin 2016). Negative feedback can undermine the confidence of students while praise can encourage and support students to reach their potential (Morin 2018). Thus, praise is an important tool to use. In fact, praise has been proven to be one of the top five most effective teaching strategies (Epstein et al. 2008). However, research also shows that teachers do not use praise often enough to support students (Hawkins & Heflin 2011).

In this paper, I will firstly explain the four attachment types that teachers can develop with their students. Identifying which attachment type I am predisposed to is helpful as it allows me to identify any potential pitfalls that may occur in giving praise and preemptively put measures in place to overcome them. I will, secondly, outline the quantity and type of praise that should be given as well as how this praise can be successfully implemented. Thirdly, I will present a chart that I intend to use as a teacher to track the way in which I give praise in order to make sure that I successfully implement it.

Attachment Types

Riley (2019) identifies four types of attachment: (1) secure, (2) dismissing, (3) fearful and (4) preoccupied.

Secure Individuals that develop secure attachments have a nuanced view of themselves and others; they are happy to be dependent on others and to have others depend on them. They deem themselves to be lovable and expect others to be 'accepting and responsive' to them. They are also likely to be more inquisitive and curious about the world and things around them. 'In the classroom, a secure teacher focuses on the understanding of her students'. There is a mutual dependence between the students and the teacher and if the teacher is 'let down by a student' it is seen as anomaly and not the norm. The teacher sees this as

a learning opportunity to improve her teaching skills and examines how she can better deliver information or improve the quality of communication with the student so that the student has a greater comprehension and thus, greater 'pleasure from the learning experiences'.

Dismissing A dismissing individual is largely self-reliant and consequently finds interdependence difficult. They are less in touch with their emotions which means that they often are not able to spot certain needs in others and are viewed by others as emotionally unavailable. The dismissing teacher always watches over students that they deem to be 'bad' and will always catch them behaving badly and fail to recognise any positive efforts of the 'bad' students. The teacher is emotionally distant from their students. The students notice this distance and tend to react by trying to close the gap between the student and the teacher. The teacher, scared of intimacy, does not typically react well and will attempt to guard the emotional distance.

Preoccupied A preoccupied individual does not feel as worthy as an individual with a secure attachment type but they still maintain a positive view of others. Preoccupied individuals only feel worthy if they are 'accepted and trusted by a valued other.' This is problematic for these individuals as they only feel secure around valued others and thus, become preoccupied with 'gaining the acceptance of others'. As they remain focused on the opinions of others, they are not as inquisitive about the world around them, but rather how valued others perceive it. The preoccupied teacher is inconsistent with their treatment, favoring some students over others. The teacher will do their utmost not to lose favour with valued students which leads to over-involvement with favoured students.

Fearful Fearful individuals 'feel unworthy of love' and worry that others have negative views of them. In order to shield themselves from these concerns, fearful individuals choose to avoid close contact with others in order to protect themselves from the rejection that they perceive inherent in becoming close to others. Fearful teachers may feel inadequate compared to fellow teachers and are scared that others will find out about their perceived in-adequateness. They worry that if others find out, they would treat the fearful teacher negatively. The fearful teacher is largely vulnerable to others' expectations and, because they lack confidence in themselves, find it difficult to manage demands of others that are at-odds to theirs. However, if the teacher feels that they have a strong support network around them, they feel much more secure in their ability and thus have more confidence. As such, they feel much more at ease in the classroom and are

able to free up time that would have been spent worrying and spend more time engaging with the students.

Personal Reflection

I personally identify with the ‘preoccupied’ attachment type. In order to achieve the best relationship between myself and my students where both parties feel valued, it is important to rewire my attachment behaviour to become more closely aligned with a ‘secure’ one. In order to do this, I will need to recognise that certain unfavorable behaviours will arise when forming bonds with my students which come from having a ‘preoccupied’ attachment disposition. It will be important to recognise these behaviours as they happen and try, in the moment, to rewire my behaviour to display a ‘secure’ attachment. This will require work on my behalf to make sure that I am consistently exhibiting ‘secure’ attachment behaviours and thus, it is important that while I work to do this, I have a strategy to rely on that will help me exhibit ‘secure’ attachment behaviours when giving praise and encouragement to students.

Quantity, Type and Implementation of Praise

The first factor to consider when giving praise to students is the ratio of praise to criticism.¹ As humans, we have an innate negative bias which leads us feel negative emotions much more powerfully than positive ones (Cacioppo et al. 2014). As humans, we also recall negative emotions much more easily than positive ones and tend to dwell on them for a longer duration (Cacioppo et al. 2014). As such, students will remember criticism much more powerfully and more easily than praise. If students receive an unfavourable ratio of criticism to praise, it can lead them to view the classroom as a negative environment. Thus, it is highly important, when it comes to teaching, to place an emphasis on positive praise so that students remember the learning space as a wholly positive one. While it may seem that this would be easy, the Knobe effect states that it is easier to criticize rather than to praise (Feltz 2007). Thus, a sustained effort needs to be made to achieve a favourable positive to negative ratio.

¹By criticism, I mean correcting a child’s behaviour or work in a negative way, for instance ‘Student X stop talking to Student Y’

Flora (2000) found that the most ideal ratio is five positive interactions for every one negative interaction.² However, there are potential problems with this 5:1 ratio. Sabey et al. (2019) argue that if the 5:1 ratio is used without additional guidance, it can lead to unfair treatment amongst students as throughout the lesson the teacher could have positive interactions with a handful of children and all of the negative interactions with the same child. This would exemplify ‘preoccupied’ attachment behaviour as the teacher is not distributing praise equally amongst the students. Plevin (2016) notes that each and every student is worthy of praise as there will be a small achievement that each student has made. For instance, for some pupils using basic mathematical notation will be problematic and thus should receive praise when properly used. However, it would not be appropriate to administer this praise to students that routinely use proper mathematical notation. Therefore, it is possible to distribute praise equally amongst students if the teacher identifies progress on an individual basis rather than recognising just those that are academically performing the best. Sabey et al. (2019) also note that this rule is based on the behaviour of the teacher and not the students. If the teacher has two negative interactions, they may lower the bar with the praise in order to quickly administer the 10 praises they need to be in ratio. I propose to use this 5:1 ratio and adapt it to overcome the potential problems outlined by Sabey et al. (2019).

The second factor to consider is the quality of the praise. Dweck (2008) identifies that not all praise is equal; praising effort over ability has much more of an impact. Dweck (2008) found that students that were praised for their ability did not want to complete further learning tasks as they were afraid that further tasks would expose their flaws and ‘call into question their talent’. However, out of those that were praised for effort, 90 percent wanted new challenging tasks to complete. When further challenging tasks were given to both sets of students, which students did not do well on, those praised for ability saw themselves as failures. Dweck (2008) notes that ‘if success had meant that they were intelligent, less than success meant that they were deficient’. However, those that were praised on effort simply applied more effort in the face of adversity and did not see it as a failure. In fact, those that were praised on effort loved the more challenging problems and most said that the hard questions were more fun. Dweck (2008) compared the performance of students before and after praise and found that the performance of students praised on ability fell dramatically, even

²By negative interaction, I mean correcting a child’s behaviour in a negative way, for instance ‘Student X stop talking to Student Y’

when presented with easier questions, as they had lost faith in their ability. Dweck (2008) identifies that ability based praise gives students a fixed mindset. This can be problematic as when teachers 'give their children a fixed mindset ideal, they are asking children to fit into the mould of the brilliant, talented child or be deemed unworthy. There is no room for error. And no room for children's individuality - their interests, their quirks, their desires and values' (Dweck 2008). However, effort based praise gives students a growth mindset which gives them 'something to strive for'. It gives 'children room to grow into full human beings that will make a contribution to a society in a way that excites them' (Dweck 2008). Thus, it is clear that there should be an emphasis on effort based praise over ability based praise.

Finally, the third factor to consider is the implementation of praise. Alongside direct praise, Plevin (2016) outlines four ways in which praise can be given: (1) proximity praise, (2) written praise, (3) phone calls home and (4) student generated praise.

Proximity Praise Plevin (2016) notes that 'proximity praise relies on a ripple effect where the positive feelings bestowed on individual students spread or ripple around the room'. Other students will realise that if they too begin to behave in a similar way, they will also receive positive attention and praise. If one student is not following the rules outlined by the community, praise can be given to the two students either side of this student. The student in the middle will be aware of the positive attention that his neighbours are getting and it is likely that he will start acting in the same way in order to attract positive attention too. This is an important tool as, here, rather than bringing the classroom down with negativity the desired result has been achieved through positivity. Thus, using proximity praise can limit the number of times that a teacher uses criticism and increases the amount of times praise is used, helping the teacher to keep within the 5:1 ratio and helping to frame the classroom as a positive environment.

Written Praise Plevin (2016) notes that placing personalised notes in students' books can strengthen bonds and initiate communication with students that do not like talking face to face. On these notes, the teacher can congratulate students on an achievement. These private exchanges convey the message that you care about them and value them. In order to make sure this exhibits the 'secure' attachment type, and not the 'preoccupied' one, it is important to keep a record of who written praise is given to so that it is not seen as a method of favouritism. Furthermore, in order to exhibit the 'secure' attachment type where students

can depend on teachers, it is important to build on this method and ensure that the students can reach out to the teacher. It may be that certain students do not feel comfortable talking to the teacher in front of other students. Before books are handed in, if students feel that they would like to share something with me, they can write a note to me to communicate how they are feeling and make me aware of any potential difficulties they may be having. It is important to understand any difficulties a student is having in order to minimise unnecessary criticism. Some teachers may see that certain students are not putting effort into their work or are not exhibiting positive behaviours conducive to learning and criticise them for it. However, there may be a genuine reason for a child's lack of engagement, for instance if a student is not engaging in the class material, they may feel that the work is too easy and is not stimulating enough. Understanding why a student is not engaging with the classroom material is important as the teacher can act pro-actively and adapt to the situation to meet their needs rather than to simply criticise the child.

Calls Home Similar to written praise, phone calls home are also highly important as it shows that you have taken the extra time to value the child's effort.

Student Generated Praise Student generated praise is a great way to get students to give positive affirmations to each other. After pieces of group work, members can take turns to write down positive comments about the work of their group members. This may make children more motivated to work well together and to put in more effort if they know that, at the end of each group work, there will be positive feedback forms.

In order to build a 'secure' attachment type, it is important that the teacher feels confident in themselves and their teaching ability (Riley 2019). The negative bias makes this difficult, as teachers find it easier to focus on the negative rather than the positive. In a classroom with thirty students where the majority of the class is engaging well, the negative bias means that the teacher will focus on the two students that are chatting amongst themselves at the back of the classroom. In order to move to a 'secure' attachment type it is important to re-frame the way that the teacher thinks and evaluates their lesson. Jennings (2018) identifies a key strategy to re-frame this bias. After each lesson, you should encourage students to note down good things that happened in each lesson on a poster. This could be things that they feel other students

have done well or things that the teacher has done well. Jennings (2018) found that this helps to focus on the positive as well as encourage pro-social behaviour that leads to a stronger sense of community.

Checklist

As previously mentioned, it is important to keep track of who has received praise in order to ensure that students are receiving encouragement equally. This system of tracking praise should allow me to quickly and easily keep note so that it does not take away any more than one or two minutes away from the lesson time.

Direct praise and proximity praise will be tracked through a green dot next to a student's name (Figure 1). They will receive one green dot per praise given. Written praise and phone calls home, as they are a higher level of praise, will have a different annotations (Figure 1). There will be an unlimited amount of praise given in lessons as it is important to recognise each student who has put in effort and has made an advancement to their own learning. However, written praise and phone calls home will both be given to 10 students across all of my classes as rewards to strive for through effort.

Although I hope to stay away from criticism as much as possible and aim to encourage good behaviour through praise, the Knobe effect states that it is easier to criticise than give praise. Therefore, it is important to make sure that I am aware of how much I give criticism and try to keep it to a minimum. Criticism will be tracked through a red dot (Figure 1).

Keeping track of praise and criticism will allow me to have an overall ratio of positive to negative interactions but also to have the ratio of positive to negative interactions with each student. This will allow me to exhibit a 'secure' attachment type and not a 'preoccupied' one as I will be able to monitor who praise is given to and make sure that it is given to everyone in the class equally. In the first week of teaching, I will set a baseline ratio of positive to negative interactions and focus on slowly improving this in the following weeks. I will use the 5:1 ratio as a guide, not an absolute rule. This will stop praise being administered where unnecessary.

	Notation
Direct Praise and Proximity Praise	•
Criticism	•
Written Praise	W
Call Home	C

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