

Course: Surviving your rookie year of teaching: 3 key ideas & high leverage techniques

Assignment 1: consistency reset

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Step 1: Identify and describe a classroom routine

The context this assignment is operating in is that of a physics class in the second year of the pre-university track of secondary education in the Netherlands. The school is relatively small for Dutch standards (around 700 students) and is situated in a large city in the Western part of the country. The class consists of 29 students who are predominant of Dutch origin with an equal boy/girl distribution. Students in this class are on average thirteen years old. The social economic background of the students is just above average.

The recurring routine happens at the end of the lessons (usually during the last fifteen minutes) when students have to work for themselves (without collaboration) on a set of problems after the instruction by the teacher. I (the teacher) am strolling up and down the classroom to see if students are working. Before being allowed to collaborate with each other (ie ask each other questions about one of the problems) the students have to work for themselves for the first 10 minutes in silence. It is believed by me this important as students have to learn to solve problems for themselves without relying on others. Furthermore, this routine requires them to really think about the problem instead of asking everything to their fellow students and/or the teacher if they do not know the answer directly. After these ten minutes students are allowed to quietly confer with each other if they have a problem (while still working on the problem). However, after around five minutes into the activity students usually start to confer with each other instead of remaining silent for another five minutes. Most of the conversation at this time is related to the subject. However it is clear this is not always the case (ie the subject changes to plans for the upcoming weekend). This routine occurs independent of the day of the week (classes are taught on Tuesday and Thursday).

Step 2: Develop a vision

In an ideal situation students are working independently on the given set of problems. They do so in silence for 10 minutes. After these 10 minutes they continue working in silence and, if needed, consult the teacher or one of the students next to them while keeping noise to a minimum. When collaboration takes place the topic of the discussion is related to the subject (physics).

Step 3: Communicating the vision to students

Before students start to work independently they will be instructed on the following part of the lesson in which they have to work for themselves on a set of problems. This will be done as follows: *“Now, you are going to work independently so take out your workbooks and something to write with. (Pause to make the action happen). The next ten minutes you will be solving problem X to Y (fill in numbers of the problems) on page A to B (insert page numbers) on your own (write problem number + pages on the whiteboard). While working on the problems you remain silent. This allows for everyone to really*

concentrate on the problems. You have to work on these problems independently so you can find the solution for yourself. This is important as I need to see if you understand the topic we've discussed earlier this lesson. If you need help you can refer to page C to D (insert page numbers) of the textbook where everything I just explained is covered (write page numbers on the whiteboard). If this does not help you just go on with the next problem. There will be some time to ask questions to your neighbor after the ten minutes are over. Start working silently now.

(After 10 minutes have passed) You worked on the problem set for ten minutes in silence. Continue to work on your problems but now you can ask your neighbor or me for help, if needed. Ask your neighbor first to help you before asking me. When you are discussing the problem, keep the noise level to a minimum so others can remain working concentrated. Also, talk only about the problems. If your neighbor can't help you you can ask me. Raise your hand and I will come to you. Again, keep noise to a minimum so we won't disturb your fellow students. I can only help one student at any given time so continue with the other problems if I am helping someone else instead of keeping your hand raised. After I have helped someone you can raise your hand again"

Step 4: providing reminders and consequences

The expectations for the student will be positively reinforced by me standing in front of the class while the students are working. I will be standing straight with hands on the hips to show dominance over the class. Also I will survey the room with my eyes (while remaining in front of the class) to spot any disturbances. If students are conferring during the first ten minutes (when they have to be silent) they will first be named directly after they started making noise combined with a look in the direction of the student. This will be done in a strict tone of voice. If this is not enough or the negative behavior appears again they are named again. However, this time it will be accompanied with the phrase "*Be silent so we all can concentrate on the problems*" as well as pointing to them. If the negative behavior happens a third time they will be directed to sit at a separate desk in front of the class for the remainder of the class. During the second part (when they are allowed to ask questions to each other and the teacher) a similar routine will be followed. However, the phrase that accompanies the name of the student that makes too much noise for the second will be different. Instead of "*Be silent so we all can concentrate on the problems*", the phrase will be "*Keep the volume as low as possible so we all can concentrate on the problems*". If it is noticed discussions are off-topic (ie not about physics) the respective students will be reminded to change the topic to the subject. This will be done by a similar three step process. Positive reinforcements will be given halfway (after 5 minutes) and at the end of the independent working time. This will be done by telling them this ("*You have already been working in silent for 5 minutes. Remain doing so for another 5 minutes.*").

Practicing of the routine will take place during two moments. First, the posture and the corrective actions will be practiced in front of mirror. This will include the gestures and phrases of the previous paragraph and will be done for ten minutes each day before going to school. Secondly, this will also be practiced at the end of the day in an empty classroom for a similar period of time.