

TEACHER HANDBOOK

B3 | BEHAVIOUR: INSTRUCTIONS

WATCH



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READ | EVIDENCE SUMMARY

TEACHING CHALLENGE

For Ms Silva, the most challenging pupil behaviour occurs during 'transition' parts of her lessons - for example, when she moves from giving an exposition to asking her pupils to do some independent work. At these times they often take a while to settle, and sometimes even do the wrong things. She also finds herself having to repeat her instructions multiple times which can take up valuable learning time. How can Ms Silva best manage these transitions to help her pupils get on with their learning quickly and independently?

KEY IDEA

Setting high expectations and providing clear instructions are powerful ways to foster good behaviour and create an effective learning environment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Mr Ms Silva can improve pupil behaviour and learning by understanding that: Routines can create a positive and motivating climate in the classroom.

- > Holding and communicating high teacher expectations can improve pupil behaviour.
- > Effective instructions can both prevent problems occurring and reinforce desired behaviours.
- > Delivering effective instructions involves a concise 'what' and a clear 'how'.
- > Checking that pupils understand instructions before letting them start increases the chances of success.

TEACHER EXPECTATIONS MATTER

Setting and communicating clear expectations has a strong influence on pupil behaviour (Murdock-Perreira & Sedlacek, 2018). For example, conveying low expectations can generate a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' where pupils end up behaving according to the expectations we have set, rather than what they are capable of (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010). Sometimes teachers can communicate low expectations without realising. This can happen when we ask certain pupils more questions than others, or when we permit pupils to call out when they shouldn't.

To mitigate this, Ms Silva should be intentional about holding and communicating high expectations for her pupils. This means:

- > Continually assuming that all her pupils are capable of behaving well and making progress in their learning.
- > Relentlessly communicating to pupils that she knows they are capable and that she expects nothing less than exemplary behaviour and learning from them.
- > Regularly providing clarity to her class about the kind of classroom culture that she values.

CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS CAN MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE

Giving instructions is a great opportunity to embed high expectations into your lesson. Delivering instructions effectively can help make lesson transitions go smoothly and foster a purposeful and effective learning environment (IES, 2008). Effective instructions can reduce challenging behaviour, reinforce desirable behaviour, and make the classroom more structured and predictable for pupils (Kern & Clemens, 2007). For example, directing pupils to sit in a seating plan and giving them clear instructions for how to begin the starter activity increases the chances of an orderly entrance and successful start to the lesson.

Instructions are powerful because they act as a reference point that pupils use as a guide for what to do and how to do it. However, giving effective instructions is not always easy to do well. In particular, there are two features of how pupils think that can thwart our efforts:

- > **Limited working memory:** People can only think about so many things at once. If we give our pupils too many instructions to hold in their heads, it is likely that they will be unable to retain any of them.
- > **Forgetting:** People forget things. This is especially true when instructions are overly lengthy or for unfamiliar classroom activities (Gathercole et al., 2006).

Both of these situations are exacerbated by the mental demands of the classroom. During our lessons, we often ask pupils to both hold instructions in their heads and

think hard about lesson content - for example, when we expect pupils to remember our instructions for conducting a paired discussion while also considering complex questions about Caesar's invasion of Britain. To make it feasible for our pupils to meet high expectations, we must make sure our instructions are easy to understand and put into practice.

ISSUING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Bearing in mind the above features of how pupils think, classroom instructions are likely to be more effective when they are:

- > **Stepped:** The best instructions are broken down into a clear sequence of manageable steps (Gathercole et al., 2006).
- > **Brief:** They include as few steps as possible and get straight to the point, especially when giving instructions for new or unfamiliar activities. If you are struggling to achieve a low number of steps, it may be worth looking at making the task itself less complex.
- > **Visible:** Displaying instructions in addition to communicating them verbally means that pupils won't have to remember them while also thinking about the lesson content.
- > **Checked:** Pupils can easily misunderstand initial instructions. Checking that pupils have understood the steps before letting them get on with the task can increase the chances that they do the right thing (Rosenshine, 2012). This also increases the chances of them remembering the instructions.
- > **Supported:** Consistent language and non-verbal actions for common classroom directions also make them more likely to be memorable.

NUANCES AND CAVEATS

It is important to think about how we communicate instructions. Timing, tone of voice and how we model instructions can all make a difference to how well they are taken on board. Providing clear instructions is beneficial to all pupils but it can be especially important for younger pupils, those with Special Educational Needs and those with lower working memory capacity (Gathercole et al., 2006).

CHECK

Answer the questions below to check your understanding of the evidence summary. Answers are available at the bottom of the 'Reflect' section.

1. Clear instructions support high expectations because...

a.) They support in creating a purposeful and effective learning environment.

b.) They are easy to script.

c.) They make it more likely pupils will respond to instruction, as working memory is less likely to be overloaded.

2. What factors should a teacher consider when giving instructions?

a.) That they are displayed.

b.) How brief they are.

c.) How stepped they are.

d.) That they make it clear the teacher is watching for naughty behaviour.

3. Which pupils are effective instructions helpful for?

a.) Only pupils with SEND.

b.) Younger pupils.

c.) Only older pupils.

d.) All pupils.

e.) Pupils with lower working memory capacity.

FURTHER READING

Gathercole, S., (2008) The Psychologist. bit.ly/ecf-ga

REFLECT

A REMINDER OF THE KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Ms Silva can improve pupil behaviour and learning by understanding that:

- > Holding and communicating high teacher expectations can improve pupil behaviour.
- > Effective instructions can both prevent problems occurring and reinforce desired behaviours.
- > Delivering effective instructions involves a concise 'what' and a clear 'how'.
- > Checking that pupils understand instructions before letting them start increases the chances of success.

1. What did you see in this module that you already do or have seen in other classrooms?

2. What do you feel is the gap between your current practice and what you have seen in this module?

3. Which of the 'key takeaways' do you need to focus on? Where and when might you try to apply them to your teaching?

REFERENCES

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- IES (2008). Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom. bit.ly/ecf-ies
- Kern, L., & Clemens, N. H. (2007). Antecedent strategies to promote appropriate classroom behavior. Psychology in Schools, 44, 65-75.
- Murdock-Perriera, L. A., & Sedlacek, Q. C. (2018). Questioning Pygmalion in the twenty-first century: the formation, transmission, and attributional influence of teacher expectancies. Social Psychology of Education, 21(3), 691-707.
- Rosenshine, B. (2012). Principles of Instruction: Research-based strategies that all teachers should know. American Educator, 12-20. [Bit.ly/ecf-ros](http://bit.ly/ecf-ros)
- Tsiplakides, I. & Keramida, A. (2010). The relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement in the teaching of English as a foreign language. English Language Teaching, 3(2), 22-26. [Bit.ly/ecf-tsi](http://bit.ly/ecf-tsi)

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. a, c
2. a, b, c
3. b, d, e