

Shaping Positive and Trauma-Sensitive Interactions

Background

The ways in which teachers shape their intentional interactions with students are of the utmost importance. Whether a student is receiving your individual attention at a given time, or you are addressing the class as a whole, the children/youth are always aware of their surroundings and the behaviours being displayed (particularly by the teacher).

As students spend 6.5 hours per day in school, the physical structure (school) and those within it are influential aspects in their lives. There are often significant and positive impacts on both educators and students when educators are able to model and provide students with prosocial habits and coping skills in addition to the necessary academic skills.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theories posit that children/adolescents develop an array of skills and behavioural patterns simply by watching the “modeling” of others, particularly those adults around them. Due to the long hours spent in school, educators/staff are extremely important to the students' social and cognitive development. Thus, modeling behaviour acts as a positive and effective way for teachers to develop students' social competencies alongside their academics. Positive behaviours from teachers may be modeled through communication skills (the ability to express oneself), the use of formal language (manners), social etiquette, and physical boundaries, but may also extend to other skills outside of teaching/learning the curriculum.



Practical Suggestions

- Be intentionally gracious in the classroom. It is important to be thankful for actions/words received from students.
- Promote graciousness among students. When a student does something positive for another quietly notice it: “Wow Jeremy, that was so nice of you to do for Karim.”
- Model acts of caring. Use compassionate language regularly and challenge students to not use negative self-talk.
- Apologize often. Show that giving and receiving apologies is an appropriate way to handle situations.
- Make use of formal language and shift tone in circumstances intended to be humorous.
- Regularly praise the class, as a group and with individual students.
- Avoid delivering criticism in front of the class.
- Take into account your interactions with your colleagues in and around the school. Students observe and learn from these types of interactions.
- Only speak of your fellow colleagues and other students with positivity.
- Be attentive to social and cultural practices.

Educators could ask these questions when trying to understand and interpret the behaviours they model around their students:

- How do I present myself?
- Am I modeling positive behaviours when solving conflicts?
- Am I modeling the behaviours I hope my students display in similar situations?
- Am I communicating in a tone showing warmth and respect?
- Am I separating the behaviour from the student?



For all references and more information please see the full report.