

Self-Assessment & Action Plan

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Psychology 621

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Section A

Introduction

Within any given teaching and learning situation, the teacher like the learner, must leave the environment fully equipped with the knowledge that the relevant content has been stored in the long term memory bank; system two, which permanently stores a large amount of information. For this type of learning to be effective and rewarding, the teaching and learning environment should be so conducive to learning, that every child will comfortably learn, if not all, something from the content being imparted. After reflecting on my years as an educators and a supervisor, I now realize that it is our responsibility as educators, to ensure that the learners within our sphere of influence enjoy a comfortable relationship with us. This can be facilitated through various media, whether by: redirecting their mindset, providing positive feedback to them, increasing their trust in the teachers, fostering the development of grit within them or by imparting to them the importance of collaborative work ethics; the grouping of individuals to share ideas and make decisions.

ACTION RESEARCH

These five identified areas are of uttermost importance to me personally, as I honestly believe that the students' growth and development are fully hinged on successful implementation of all five aspects of school life.

Section B

Five Chosen Topics of Importance

1) Increasing the students' trust in the teachers of Grade Six.

This particular topic is significantly important to me, since if the students are not able to fully trust their respective teachers both in and out of the teaching and learning environment, then the learning process will be greatly stymied. As a supervisor of grade six, it is my responsibility to tactfully encourage and maintain an atmosphere of trust and good will among the entire grade six by being extremely confidential, and being honest with them about everything. As Hattie and Yates (2014, p. 30), have postulated in the book, *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn*, "When students perceive their teachers are highly supportive, students will associate question asking with positive aspects such as mastery goals, building their abilities, and with less focus on competition between students". I totally agree with that statement, as the more students are made to trust their teachers, is the more open they will be to gaining and retaining the knowledge being passed on in and out of the immediate classroom setting. Numerous studies, undertaken by Butler and reported by Hattie and Yates (2014) in *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn*, have shown that, "Students strongly value teachers they can trust to assist them when they are struggling with complex ideas" (p. 30).

ACTION RESEARCH

2) Using Praise to redirect the students' growth mindsets

As individuals, we are all attuned to the positive effects that praise can have on individuals both young and old alike. Even as adults, we are driven by praise given to us in a meaningful and genuine fashion. It has no less an impact of the learners within our immediate classrooms, as they too need to be praised for their efforts. Genuine, well-deserved praise, given in a timely manner will cause the learner to be more comfortable and determined to achieve better scores, thus changing his or her from a fixed one to a growth mindset. According to Dweck (2006), "In growth mindset the students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence". Praise is a powerful tool that if used properly by the respective teachers, will direct the learners' mindset. So very often we have those learners who have been demotivated by the adults in the homes or communities or even those within their immediate schools, and it is only the praise uttered in a timely manner that can cause them to see themselves as important individuals of society.

3) Developing grit within the students' in my Grade six class

As is postulated by Tough (2012) in *How Children Succeed*, Duckworth a psychologist, felt that Levin an educator, possessed some traits that could only be called grit. She described grit as, "A passionate commitment to a single mission and an unswerving dedication to achieve that mission" (p. 74). Like Duckworth, as cited in Tough, I concur that with grit, the learner is able to fully capitalize on the learning process in an active manner. Grit, Tough (p.103), further stated is that driving force and strength of character that enable the individual to forge ahead with zeal and determination. After learning

ACTION RESEARCH

about grit and closely examining the students in the grade six classes, I realize that they lack the tenacity and character strength needed to successfully complete a task.

As a result of this discovery, I would want to skillfully aid them in their acquisition of the appropriate character traits earnestly needed to become “smart gritty people”. Gritty people who are determined to achieve their set goals through perseverance, as I earnestly try to instill in them; the level of determination necessary to achieve success. It is imperative that the learners realize the fact that setbacks should not be a deterrent, but should rather be seen as a platform from which to soar to higher heights. With grit, they would undoubtedly understand the importance of not quitting, but endeavouring to always finish whatever they have started, because they would definitely realize that gritty individuals possess tenacity, that inner drive to always bring to completion any task that has been undertaken. My aspiration is to see a set of grade six students so smart and gritty, that no obstacle would prevent them from achieving their set goals in life.

4) Promoting collaborative work ethics among the students of my Grade Six class

As the popular Jamaican song says, “No man is an island, no man stands alone, for we need one another”. This need for each other is not only necessary in our social environment but more so in our educational settings. The learner who decides to work alone will be a failing student, as there are going to be times when the thoughts and interjections of his or her peers will be that word or phrase needed to successfully complete a given task. Sometimes in our classroom settings we find students who are uncooperative and selfish. These students will begin the term achieving high scores, but

ACTION RESEARCH

as the school year progresses, they begin to lag behind because the magnitude of assignment given has become unbearable for them to manage alone.

Promoting collaborative work ethics among the students is an important practice that I think every teacher should adopt. After all, it is as we work together and share our thoughts that we begin to gain additional knowledge and those concepts that were once incomprehensible begin to take form in our brains. Also, peer tutoring is an excellent tool to ably assist some learners, since their peers will impart the information in a much simpler language than that being used by the teacher. Collaborative work, according to Hattie and Yates (2014), shows that, “When group members are pulling together, and pooling their knowledge, they can overcome some of the natural problems associated with limited working memory accessibility that prevent individuals, from learning as we solve problems”, as each individual will learn from another group member.

5) Encouraging Positive Feedback among a Group of Grade Six Students

What is feedback, and why is it so important? According to the *Oxford Essential English Dictionary*, (2011), feedback is that information that is given to the supplier by the user about a particular product. Within the classroom setting, feedback is the information given to the students by the teacher with regards to the different aspects of their school life. Feedback can either be devastating or extremely uplifting to the moral of an individual. I concur with Hattie and Yates (2014), that when individuals receive appropriate feedback, it empowers them to modify their behaviour and invariably raise their self-esteem, as they now realize that persons genuinely care about them and want to see them succeed. Further to that, they have said that, “Receiving feedback enables the

ACTION RESEARCH

learner to close a critical gap, specifically the gap between current status and a more desirable level of achievement” (p. 66). As the learner receives these feedbacks, they begin to realize that they have the ability to achieve more and so with determination they begin to work harder at every given task.

On numerous occasions I have observed that instead of giving the students positive feedback to bring them closer to a well-defined goal according to Hattie et al, the teachers criticize them with embarrassing words. I have noticed on a number of occasions how devastating negative feedback can be for a learner. The teachers, who get upset with a student for misrepresenting a content that was taught, drive fear into the learner and instead of erecting a bridge of motivation it builds a barrier of despondence and disregard for learning.

Section C

Topic Area of Change/ Improvement

There are a number of areas as identified earlier that I would want to introduce change or improvement in, but the one of most significance to me is that of encouraging positive feedback to the students in grade six. As is postulated by Hattie and Yates (2014, p. 67), “Feedback is powerful when it is focused on providing them information about where to next”. Why tell the learners they have done the given task incorrectly if they are not guided into how to do it correctly? Without guidance to go forward, the learners would still be unaware of what is expected of them and learning would not have taken place. I concur, that positive feedback works, especially in the cases where the goals are accurately communicated to the learners and the feedback is undertaken in a realistic

ACTION RESEARCH

manner. I further concur that as London (2003) has said, “Meaningful feedback is central to performance”. This I believe is of paramount importance as feedback given in a positive way: guides, motivates, and reinforces effective behavioural patterns and further reduces the practice of infective behaviours.

As an educator and supervisor of grade six, I have observed that feedback has not been used in a positive way by us as teachers. We have been saying too many demeaning things to them and have been calling them unpleasant names instead of encouraging their efforts. As a result of my study of advanced educational psychology, I have now come to realize the harm that our actions must have caused those students who are entrusted in our care. My objective here is to, as a collaborative group of educators, endeavour to provide those positive feedbacks that portray the level of respect we have for our students. We should be patient and adhere to the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. Too many times as educators, we belittle, ridicule, disparage and use demeaning words to our students whenever they make mistakes, instead of encouraging a can-do attitude in them. As a result of this uncomfortable way that we have been treating the students, I want us as educators to realize that as London further postulates and I agree that, “As the students’ self-efficacy increased, their goals for future test performance increase”.

ACTION RESEARCH

How will I effect the desired changes, who will be the persons involved and when will these changes take place?

Step 1

London (2003) has caused me to realize that, “Support mechanisms are needed to ensure that feedback is understood and used to set goals for improvement”. With this knowledge, I want to speedily effect the changes necessary to foster an atmosphere of care and trust within the classroom and the home environment, with a view to establish an environment that conforms to the students’ cognitive processing capabilities. First I would want to redirect the parents and assistant teacher’s attitude to low achievers by encouraging them to carefully and timely use praise for any attempt that they would give in response to a task. As postulated by Hattie and Yates (2014, p.67), “Praise makes people happier; it can steer you towards wanting to do certain things”. For this task to be beneficial, it has to be done within the second week of September. The persons involved would include: the administrators, the Guidance Counselor, the parents and the two teachers within the classrooms, as they are the ones whose behaviour will have an impact on the learners on a daily basis. White and Jones (2000) said “In the positive feedback condition, the teacher responds only to the appropriate behaviours while ignoring inappropriate behaviours”. Bearing this statement in mind, I would encourage everyone to practice giving positive feedback, by using phrases like: “You have done a good job so far, or this is a good start.” This is what I would ask the administrators and Guidance Counselor to help me with, as together we sensitize and guide my assistant and the parents in order to effect the desired change. While doing this, the inappropriate

ACTION RESEARCH

behaviours would not all be ignored, but they would not be highlighted more than those that are appropriate.

Step 2

According to Nauert (2010), “Children learn by imitating adults”, which means that whenever a desired behaviour is modeled, then the results can be more far reaching. This is so, because children in general like to copy everything that an adult does, so modeling would be an ideal activity to use with them. Therefore, at the beginning of October, as the teachers begin to fully grasp the significance of positive feedback, they would be encouraged to model the behaviour for the parents. As Hattie and Yates (2014, p.73), have argued, “When using modeling to encourage observational learning, teachers will deliberately show progressive steps, and ensure that observers have ample opportunity to assimilate information gradually”. Parents would be invited to stay in a class of low achievers for a day and the teacher would use terms like: “You have really made an effort to do the assignment”. This activity would be repeated in a forum where the teachers, parents, and the students are present. Specific teachers would be asked to speak with the students individually, using encouraging terms like: “I like the fact that you have gone out to find the information for the Science research and you have discovered some very important points”. As this is being done, careful note will be taken of the student’s response in each session.

Having accomplished this projected activity, a mentorship programme would be introduced just before the mid- term break to further encourage this behavioural pattern. Both parents and teachers would be encouraged to choose and mentor two students

ACTION RESEARCH

during the break from school. They would communicate with the students either on the school's WhatsApp page or with the use of the general phone circle that the school has for all teachers, parents and students. Parents and teachers would be fully involved in this activity as they practice the art of sharing positive feedback with the students on a daily basis. This activity would be undertaken so as not to break the trend with the students during the break.

Step 3

At the end of the term, there would be a total of four shared sessions where different individuals who were involved in the feedback activities would openly share their personal views on what was done. There would be an open session of questions and answers among all the persons involved in the programme, so that collaboratively each will learn from the responses or examples shared by others. They would say what they have gained from the activities, and how they felt as they shared with each other.

According to Henderlong, J., and Lepper, M. R. (2002), in the article entitled, *The effects of praise on children's intrinsic motivation: a review and synthesis*. "Positive feedback occurs when change propagates through a system to produce more change in the same direction". As a result of this, I would be interested to find out how the feedback given by the different teachers have been working to effect the desired change necessary to improve the students' academic performance.

ACTION RESEARCH

Step 4

Evaluation

Agrawal, M. (2004) stated that, “Evaluation plays a pivotal role in developing what the learners learn and what the teachers teach”. Hattie and Timperley (2007) believed:

When students have the metacognitive skills of self-assessment, they can evaluate their levels of understanding, their effort and strategies used on tasks, the attributions and opinion of others about their performance, and their improvement in relation to their goals and expectations.

Therefore, it would be very interesting to learn from the students involved, through role playing and other elements of drama of at least three of the sessions that they have been involved in throughout the term. They would be encouraged to say how they have benefitted from the term’s activities. Not only that, but the parents would be encouraged to give a verbal synopsis of the activities that they have used and benefits that they have gleamed from their personal involvement in the programme.

The teachers would also be asked to present a report in written form with separate vertical columns showing dates, activities, persons involved and evaluation of each activity. Their report would also state the names of the students who were involved in each activity, the specific activity that was done, and how they responded, so that the successes and pitfalls can be clearly identified to inform future decisions. At a later date, the administrators, teachers, and parents from other grades would be invited to a general evaluation forum, so that they can be sensitized as to the importance of positive feedback to learning. They would be given a chance to ask questions or share their views

ACTION RESEARCH

throughout this session. All of this evaluation session would be undertaken in order for the organizer to give an overall report of the term's activities in written form to the administrators, so that the data can be used for the planning and implementation of future activities pertaining to the use of positive feedback.

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