

Conference paper from Teacher Christian Fellowship of NSW : ATTENTION DIFFICULTIES

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Rudolf Dreikurs wrote about the need for teachers to have “withit-ness”. By this he meant having a feel for the many layers of interaction in a classroom, understanding how students were progressing with set tasks and ensuring that issues were addressed quickly so that they could not escalate into a crisis situation.

In order to develop a sense of “withit-ness” teachers need to have information on a wide range of issues surrounding student behaviour. This includes:

- Academic strengths and weaknesses of students
- How the students respond to universal classroom strategies and structures such as the class rules and specific targeted programs
- Difficulties with social skills in terms of knowledge of the skills, performance of the skills or fluency of social skill use
- Individual needs such as the student’s sense of belonging, self-concept and external factors that may impact on interactions in the classroom such as any specific medical needs, safety or well-being needs
- What functions his/her current behaviour fulfils and what are alternative behaviours, which could help the students to meet his/her needs.

As an example a student who has difficulties with attention may have a specific diagnosis of ADHD, be in a fluent home environment, see himself/herself as a poor performer academically and worthless, have difficulties with literacy and may not have yet developed skills in self-management, problem-solving etc. In order to address such a wide range of needs a range of strategies may need to be employed:

- Curriculum adaptations
- Instructional modifications
- Environmental accommodations
- Behavioural support
- Peer support, peer mediation, peer tutoring
- Flexible scheduling
- Social skills instruction integrated into the curriculum
- Active communication
- Flexible programming, increase or decrease restrictiveness
- Alternative disciplinary responses
- Concrete and frequent feedback about appropriateness of behaviour
- Determining the function of misbehaviour and substituting more appropriate behaviours
- Use techniques that address social isolation - peer tutoring, co-operative learning groups
- Moving from reactive rule-breaking school discipline to a proactive teaching model.
- Establishing classroom routine, communicating behavioural expectations, limiting noninstructional activities, controlling student transitions, identifying the required behaviours and preparing students to engage in these behaviours.
- After analysing factors which impact on the students’ ability to pay attention, the workshop will focus in particular on strategies which help teachers to manage students with ADHD.
- Keep work periods short
- Reduce delays, externalize time
- Externalize important information
- Externalize motivation (think win/win)
- Externalize problem-solving (play)
- Use immediate feedback
- Increase accountability to others
- Use more salient and artificial rewards
- Change rewards periodically
- Act, don’t yak
- Keep your sense of humour

- Use rewards before punishment
- Anticipate problem settings - make a plan
- Keep a sense of priorities
- Maintain a sense of perspective
- Practice forgiveness - of the student and yourself.

In order to be effective in working with students with attention problems, remember to consider all of the factors that are needed to manage complex change:

Vision + Skill + Incentives + Resources + Action Plan = **Change**

_____ + Skill + Incentives + Resources + Action Plan = **Confusion**

Vision + _____ + Incentives + Resources + Action Plan = **Anxiety**

Vision + Skill + _____ + Resources + Action Plan = **Resistance**

Vision + Skill + Incentives + _____ + Action Plan = **Frustration**

Vision + Skill + Incentives + Resources + _____ = **Treadmill**