

11/16/14

Mentor Transcript: Elementary (Lesson Management, Unfocused Children)

wendyc(P)	Hi All. I have few hours this weekend so I am digging in to more questions.
(Q)	How do I best manage the lessons, the ones give, the ones I need to give and those I should give?
wendyc(P)	HA! The answer to this is the Holy Grail of elementary teaching. And to be sure there are many different ways to accomplish this. So be sure to consider my answer as only one way to do it.
wendyc(P)	To start you need a good record keeping system. I know that a lot of people use Records Express or Montessori Workspace. We used Montessori Workspace for a long time and it was a good fit for us for several years. We recently had a program written specifically for us. But you need to be able to keep track of who has had which lessons. The most obvious reason is that you have a professional responsibility to maintain a professional record for each student.
wendyc(P)	But more importantly for you on a day to day basis is that this record keeping system will give you the trust and freedom NOT to give all of the same age group the same lessons. We are often drawn to do this for our convenience because it is easier to keep track of. All of the 1st graders got the function of the leaf. Check...I can mark that off my list. But the problem with this is that it does not create a rich environment of interesting work. Secondly it creates a bottleneck of need for the same material.
wendyc(P)	So a record keeping system for yourself is absolutely critical. If possible it will be one that allows you to search for any child who had not had a particular lesson. This allows you at any time to go back and make sure that you gave everyone in 1st grade a

	particular lesson without having to keep twenty little post it notes all over your desk.
wendyc(P)	This record keeping system, if it has a broad display that allows you to see a lot of the lessons at once, can also be a guide to you about what lessons you need to put on your agenda. Is there an area you that seems to be blank? Then you know it is time for geometry lessons, or whatever it might be. Is there a particular child who seems to have far fewer lessons than his peers. This will also guide your next choices.
wendyc(P)	Once you have considered the broad picture of content areas, particular students, and what you need to do next, I would recommend a paper that has columns for the five days of the week or even a traditional monthly calendar.
wendyc(P)	<p>Using this, make a general plan for what lessons you will be giving that week. I gave 3- 5 lessons on Monday, 3-5 on Tuesday, and then Wednesday and Thursday were always follow up days for the lessons that had been given on Monday and Tuesday. After some time teaching, I realized that each time I introduced something to the students, if I wanted to create a strong work ethic in the class, I had to tell the students that we would meet again two days later so they could show me what they had learned.</p> <p>This creates the expectation that lessons presented should get follow up. This was true for all lessons that were part of curriculum that students of that particular age were required to learn. Other lessons I would present and simply ask who had enough interest to want to explore more and meet again later in the week.</p>
wendyc(P)	We also created a document that had what the bare required minimum of particular skills in writing, math, science, and literature that we felt each student needed to know. We were extremely disciplined about keeping these lists very concise, just what HAD to be known. By doing this, we had much more freedom to be relieved from the feeling that we were not teaching enough and much more confident that we could spend time on the children's interests rather than our own agenda.
	Redirecting students who are lacking in focus: what is the best

(Q)	way to make sure that they are learning and expanding their focus?
wendyc(P)	There are several aspects to this responsibility. All of them, however, are related to observation. There are a small group of students who learn quite well, but do not appear at a glance to be focused. Careful observation will reveal what is really happening with any particular child.
wendyc(P)	Other children need more limited freedom. For some children the freedom to move around the environment without any guidance can be too much. They can't get settled down to a work and constantly like butterflies touching down briefly at each table before moving on to the next. These children often just need guidance to make a solid choice, work near the teacher, and have direct instruction that they should remain seated until the work they have chosen is completed. They don't necessarily need this support all day, but rather several times throughout the day in order to get engaged in productive learning.
wendyc(P)	I will also return to the last week's transcripts regarding the practical life aspect of the elementary work. This is often where the deep concentration is built. So be sure to include them with you when you are caring for the environment. When the job is real, the students are present.
wendyc(P)	<p>As for assuring that they are learning, I spent time recently with the Head of School at Post Oak, John Long, and he said something that really stuck with me, probably because I was guilty of it myself for so long.</p> <p>John mentioned that oftentimes elementary teachers are so excited by the materials that they move consistently through the lessons without ever really noticing that the children have not absorbed the basic concepts. One way to combat this is to begin all lessons with a review of what came before. And if we take math for an example, I always asked students who felt secure with the concepts from the previous lesson. If they did, I wrote some problems on the board and the students work through them. They either got them right or wrong. If they got them wrong we would explore how they made the judgment that they were secure with the subject so that the next time they came they</p>

	<p>would know what they know.</p> <p>In addition, I have encouraged our elementary teachers to start writing probing questions at the end of the lessons in their math albums. For example, once students know how to multiply fractions, I would ask them if a number gets larger when multiplied by a fraction. Oftentimes they will answer that the product is larger because that is what always happened when multiplying whole numbers.</p>
wendyc(P)	<p>That is all for this week.</p> <p>Dates and sessions for elementary have been finalized. Registration will open as soon as I get primary sessions settled.</p> <p>July 30, 31 Bill Robertson - Elementary Science August 1 Wendy Calise - Elem Class Management August 2, 3, 4 Mike Waski - Advanced Elementary Math</p>