

10/25/14

Mentor Transcript: Primary (Children Who are Not Working)

wendyc(A)	Welcome back everyone. Great to be with you again. Sorry it took so long for me to get back to business. Crazy-busy start to the year. Summer Institute plans are underway. Dates: July 30 - August 4. I don't have primary sessions ironed out yet, but I will shortly.
R(Q)	Hi MTIPS family! I'm so glad to tryout the new format and certainly appreciate the disappearance of "self time" from the weeknights. I was mourning that I would have to miss the chats because of my Wednesday commitment to take a painting class for stress relief.
R(Q)	<p>I have a few questions, but the first is likely the biggest. I have a few wanderers who really seem to have a difficult time making a choice, even a limited choice of a couple current interesting works, and who really struggle to work to completion once they make a choice. I find myself either following after them to try to assist in engaging them or constantly interrupted by the while I am giving lessons to other children ("Miss R, can I put this away now? I wrote two words with moveable alphabet. Miss R, Miss R, Miss R)</p> <p>They'll sometimes make a choice, take it out, and as soon as my back is turned, put it away without even attempting it, and this is the case both with works that are a challenge and works that are simple for them. I've reached a point that I feel a bit overwhelmed by them disrupting the work of others while wandering and also with the interruptions to my lessons because they are losing focus on their own works (if they have work out at all). A fellow parent of an easily distracted/challenging child (I say that with huge love and respect for both the parent and the child) mentioned that an OT friend recommended a pictorial list</p>

	<p>of the morning routine to help her child become independent in getting ready each day without needing constant badgering and direction from mom. It took more than a whole summer using the list to see any progress, but routine, and mom is doing a lot less nagging to get ready each day.</p>
wendyc(A)	<p>Well, this is one of our greatest challenges as teachers. How do we get these wanderers attached to work. And that is at the heart of our responsibility. We are the link between the child and the material. My recommendation is that you start to devote a much greater amount of your time during the class day to working with children on work which has already been presented.</p> <p>Many children need our presence long after the initial lesson before they can become independently attached to the work. But this can be hard for us because we don't get to check anything new off of our list when we work with children who have already had a particular lesson. And this can feel like we are not making the progress we need to be making. But there is not shortcut for these little ones who are not attached.</p> <p>But I would also recommend that you use elementary mentors for these students as well. They can be the ones who sit beside a primary child who cannot wash a table from beginning to end without someone there to keep directing and bringing out points of interest.</p> <p>Many of our elementary students are paired up with a particular primary child and spend ten to twenty minutes EVERY DAY with that child, either helping him over an academic hump, or helping stay engaged through an entire work cycle, or even learning how to interact with other children if that is what the need is. But the elementary children need to have mentoring in what is expected. And your assistant should also share this responsibility.</p>
wendyc(A)	<p>And finally, particularly in the primary class, remember that children are absorbing all kinds of knowledge without our awareness.</p>
R (Q)	<p>After some hesitation, I decided to try work lists to help the children independently direct themselves - two of the wanderers</p>

	<p>are at almost identical places in their work, so I made several lists that offer a wide variety of the "needs daily practice" stuff and fun things that they are already on their way to mastering, along with outdoor activities interspersed. My concerns are that they will become dependent on the lists to choose and complete work; and how/when will they transition to a more independent flow again?</p>
wendyc(A)	<p>Certainly valid concerns. I always have mixed emotions about work lists. I think that our ultimate goal is to try to get these children to feel a sense of purpose/engagement and a sense of urgency, but also to simply assure that they are learning some of the basic skills that they are in the sensitive period to learn.</p> <p>My experience is that the work list does nothing really to achieve a sense of purpose. This relies more on the practical life, helping others, and grace and courtesy work of the classroom. It is making a genuine contribution to the community that is the only thing that calls to children to engage in earnest at the start. This rarely comes through academic work.</p> <p>If a child comes from a home in which his contribution has already been in need and cultivated, then his attachment to academic work comes quite naturally. But if this has not been the case, then you have to devote your resources to creating opportunities for this in the classroom setting. And your most precious resources in the classroom are your time and attention.</p> <p>So I am not opposed to giving older children a list of works that need their attention regularly in order to try to keep the academic learning moving forward. But we must recognize this as very inferior to actual engagement/free choice, which I think that we all do. In some ways, the list is really for us so that we can remember what to direct them to when we are in the midst of the day and notice them wandering around. It is not something that is inspirational at all to them. We just need to be honest with ourselves about this, and we need to recognize that a list of work, even used to keep children on an academic trajectory, has a VERY short shelf life. It is simply one of many constructs you are using to balance your academic responsibility with what you</p>

	know is better practice for engagement. Miss R, on to your next question next week.
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