



Series II - Step 3 - Principles of Positive Restructuring

Understanding the 20 Principles of Positive Restructuring

Adapted from the book, *Creating Confident Children in the Classroom: The Use of Positive Restructuring*.

Pierangelo/Giuliani: Research Press

Introduction

Developing a sense of confidence will be crucial right from the start. Children with disabilities all too often lack a sense of confidence in their academic ability. Further, this lack of confidence may have a direct affect on their perception, cooperation, willingness to try etc. Children with low confidence tend to be more rigid, more sensitive, over-reactive, more insecure, and more vulnerable. How do teachers expect children with low self-confidence to absorb anything, when most of their energy is going into self-protection? Therefore, you may want to consider the concept of Positive Restructuring.

Creating a classroom environment to ensure successful experiences is referred to as Positive Restructuring. There is no doubt that Positive Restructuring requires a great deal of work. However, the long term effects and benefits greatly outweigh any amount of work. Why would any teacher not want to guarantee success and develop a child's overall sense of confidence? As educators, we have an obligation to question any teaching style that frustrates children, makes them feel like failures, reinforces their inadequacy, promotes negative self worth, exposes them to ego deflating experiences, and promotes teacher "ego" at the expense of student failure (belittling students in front of others).

There are 20 principles involved in Positive Restructuring that need to be conveyed to students and parents right from the start of the school year:

- 1. Empowerment:** Empowerment says, “It is not as important to use power, as it is to know we have it when we need it. Providing a student with educational tools e.g. calculator, dictionary that he/she can turn to at a time of doubt can enhance one’s feelings of security.
- 2. Hope:** Hope is the genuine belief that we have a direct affect on the outcome of a situation. When a student feels hopeless he/she feel powerless. By having hope, students will tend to take more risks and chances because they believe they can succeed.
- 3. Resiliency:** The student’s ability to bounce back from an unsuccessful experience. For example a student with high resiliency who fails a test would be more willing to look at the factors as to why he/she may have failed rather than giving up.
- 4. Security:** A classroom is a child’s second home. As a teacher, it is your responsibility to create the warmest and comforting environment so that the children in your classroom can work to their potential without worry.
- 5. Recognition:** Everyone needs to be validated. This need is normally provided by parents. However, teachers are second to parents in the child’s desire to please and attain validation for performance and effort. Validation provides motivation and incentive to continue working. A lack of recognition and validation inhibits desire since the belief is that “no one cares what I do anyway.”
- 6. A Sense of Completion:** The feeling one gets from a completion of a task is crucial to the development of confidence. Confidence is reinforced by the belief that one’s behavior will for the most part play a crucial role in leading to completion of some task, project etc. In Positive Restructuring this sense of completion is enhanced by control over the assigned work to ensure success.
- 7. Develop Decision Making Skills:** You will need to teach your students the concepts of delay before making decisions so that they learn to consider all possible consequences. Many times children with learning disabilities act impulsively and add to their problematic situation with poor judgment and a lack of awareness of consequences.
- 8. A Sense of Accomplishment:** You will need to provide tasks that every child will be able to finish with a feeling of success. Do not be afraid to limit the assignments, or the level of difficulty in favor of a sense of completion. Once confidence is developed, the student will have more motivation if you offer more lengthy assignments with a different level of difficulty.
- 9. A Sense of Initiation without fear:** Children who are more confident will be more willing to ask questions and clarify issues with the teacher thereby preventing problems or failures. Providing an atmosphere of acceptance, tolerance, and reassurance will allow children to approach without fear or concern.
- 10. An enjoyment of school:** Children who feel more confident will look forward to coming to school. Keep in mind that success breeds success and everyone likes being in a place that reinforces their feelings of self worth.

11. The belief that every child is capable of being successful: Students need to start believing from the start that they are all capable of success in some or all areas of school. What prevents many students from this belief is the amount, type, and level of work that is presented to them, coupled with the definition of “success” used by many educators. When “success” is defined as a group comparison, i.e. tests, SAT’s etc., then failure will always occur. Why do schools need failure by some students? What purpose to the system is really served by students’ failing grades? Other than a reduction of confidence, setting them off from other students who scored higher, feelings of inadequacy, parental anger and frustration, resentment, avoidance, there is nothing served. The belief that children learn by failure is really a tragedy to the educational system. Schools really practice what we call triage education that is the belief that one has to accept a certain amount of “casualties by failure.” Do we really believe that society would tolerate a medical system of a hospital that suffered 25% death rate? There would be a public outcry and immediate change. But no such outcry exists in today’s schools. You must decide within yourself whether or not you believe that all students are capable of succeeding in school, and if not, why? Schools tend to accept failure and point to unmotivated or trouble youth as the cause. We believe that we need to look at the delivery system used by schools. Don’t always look at the high death rate in a hospital as an indication of how unhealthy people are getting, the real problem may be the delivery system of medical attention.

12. The belief that every child has potential that may not have been exhibited up to this point: It is not realistic to believe that all schools provide the opportunity for all children to express their true potential. The only thing that schools may offer is the opportunity for some to exhibit their academic potential, limited sports potential through gym activities, creative ability in a few areas i.e. art, music, and that is about it. The areas of potential may include but are not limited to the following:

- Creative
- Intellectual
- Recreational
- Physical
- Academic
- Sports
- Social

Schools need to explore every area possible to see where a child’s true potential may lie. It is true that potential may not appear until certain ages, however, it is never too early to start exploring. Potential is an area that adds to a child’s identity both in and out of school.

Through the use of interest inventories geared to potential, discussion, interviews with students and parents, observation and so on, the teacher needs to develop a mentality that believes that everything good about a child does not always happen in school.

13. Confidence is the necessary foundation for feeling good about yourself and your ability: Building a house on top of water is not as reliable as one built on land. Children have to be taught that building confidence is a process that develops from successful experiences and not overnight.

14. There is definite hope even though the student may not have felt successful up to this point: Failure forces children into closets labeled failure or inadequate. Coaxing a child out of this “closet” is not easy but can occur with recognition of the difficulty he/she has faced, coupled with the hope of change. Children who lack confidence in schools tend to “cocoon, that is pull in within themselves.

15. That you, the teacher, are in charge and know what you are doing: Conveying a strong leadership message to children will provide the structure that someone knows how to get the most out of them. Being a good lifeguard is a crucial step in having children feel secure and confident.

16. It will not take forever to build confidence: Children need to be informed that there is a light at the end of a tunnel and that if they work with you, they will see results within 30 days.

17. Once you have confidence, you will be motivated to try other experiences: Success breeds success. A child who lacks confidence will have a very small safety zone, the area in which he/she feels adequate or comfortable. However, small safety zones also carry along the following:

- unwillingness to try new experiences
- giving up easily
- rigidity
- low frustration tolerances
- lack of new experiences
- self doubt
- boredom
- social isolation
- loneliness
- avoidance
- lack of tolerance for others
- and many more

Have a discussion on what life would be like living in a closet versus outdoors. The limitations of a small safety zone and the excitement of increasing the zone need to be presented.

18. There are reasons for not feeling confident: Children need to understand how inadequacy and a lack of confidence occurs. They need to know that it does not just appear, that it is a process, just like regaining confidence. A discussion about why children lose confidence needs to be discussed. Some examples may include:

- school failure
- socially unpopular
- family issues
- physical limitations
- few feelings of success
- no one to believe in them
- lack of recognition

19. All children will not become confident at the same time but that does not mean it cannot happen: Children will need to know that like growing, confidence grows in individuals at different rates. Therefore it is important for them to realize that some children will gain confidence more quickly, but that does not mean they will not. Reaching confidence is not a competition, but a process that can exist in all children.

20. Feeling confident and good about yourself are always better than feeling inadequate: Children who lack confidence and feelings of inadequacy learn to function in a state of unnaturalness. This may be a long-standing issue for some children. They have to learn that feeling good about yourself in any way is always better than feeling inadequate, even if it is the only feeling they know.

Teaching children who lack confidence that feeling good is a better place to be, may be like convincing a feral child that there is more to life than the forest. They have no frame of reference but with work, will begin to feel the results of confidence, a more natural state for the human condition.