



Early Childhood Education Workshop

The Power of Mistakes: Creating a Positive CLASSroom Climate with Dr. Maleka Donaldson

Saturday, November 16, 2024



*Funding provided by Indian River County Children's
Services Advisory Committee and PNC*



Dr. Maleka Donaldson

Maleka Donaldson is a college professor, author, and educational researcher. She began her career as an early childhood teacher and later became a K-12 tutor, curriculum designer, and science specialist. Pursuing graduate studies at Harvard Graduate School of Education, she focused on human development and learning sciences while also taking on various teaching and research roles.



Her dissertation explored how Kindergarten teachers handle children's mistakes during instruction. Dr. Donaldson has received numerous fellowships and awards and has presented her work extensively. She has published articles in peer-reviewed journals and authored the book "From Oops to Aha: Portraits of Learning From Mistakes in Kindergarten" (2021), which analyzes teacher responses to mistakes in early childhood classrooms.

Currently, she is an Associate Professor of Education and Child Study at Smith College, teaching courses in learning sciences and elementary STEM methods.

For more information please visit: www.malekadonaldson.com

Agenda

- Greeting and Introductions
- Naming and Processing Our Current Mindsets about Mistakes
- *Mid-Morning Break*
- Diving into The Research on the Role of Mistakes in Learning
- *Working Lunch*
- Application Practice: Making Connections and Role Play Scenarios
- *Mid-Afternoon Break*
- Looking Forward: Developing Plans for Future Classroom Mistake Culture
- Closing & Wrap-Up

Greetings and Introductions

Naming and Processing Our Current Mindsets about Mistakes

Notes

Reflect

Do you see any patterns in each list?

Similarities and differences across the lists?

Any interesting observations in the contrast?

Interesting omissions from the lists?

Other thoughts?

Notes

Reflect on Your Context



What types of mistakes do you see in children's lives...

- at school?
- at home ?
- in other contexts?

Then consider:

- How do you see children respond to their own mistakes (i.e., actions, words, and emotions)?
- How do you respond to their mistakes? Why?

Notes

Popular Perspectives on Mistakes

Your Take

Your take?

- 1) "The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually afraid that you'll make one." Elbert Hubbard
- 2) "Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again." Nelson Mandela
- 3) "An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes possible in a narrow field." Niels Bohr
- 4) "Failure is instructive. The person who really thinks learns quite as much from his failures as from his successes." John Dewey
- 5) "If you have made mistakes, even serious ones, there is always another chance for you. What we call failure is not the falling down but the staying down." Mary Pickford

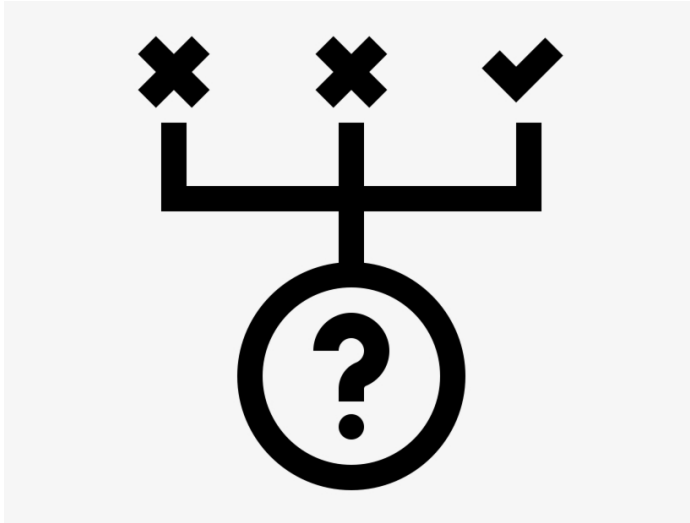
Think of a specific school-related situation/event that you have experienced or observed—as a learner or a teacher—that illustrates the quote [to be shared at your table]

🌸 Notes 🌸

Mid-Morning Break

Diving into The Research on the Role
of Mistakes in Learning

Students Need to Make Mistakes to Learn



Trial and error vs. errorless learning



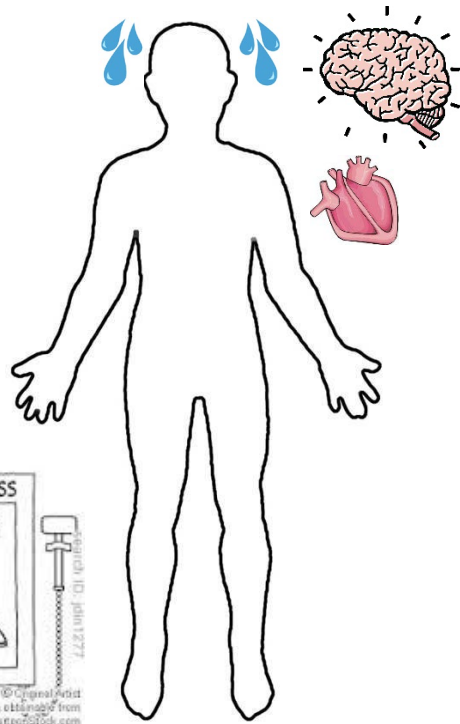
Corrective feedback helps learners to avoid errors



Error can aid later retrieval

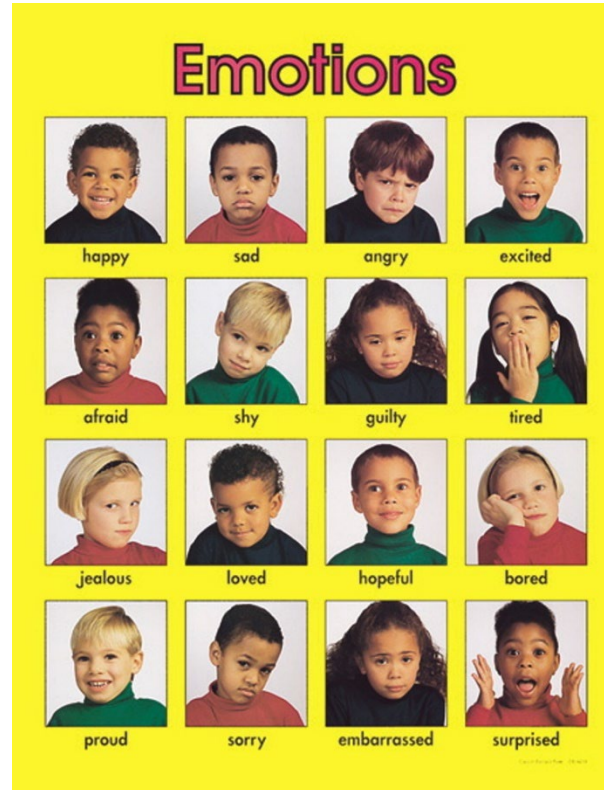
Sources: Clare & Jones, 2008; Finn & Metcalfe, 2010; Huesler & Metcalfe, 2012; Kang, et al, 2011; Kornell, Hays & Bjork, 2009; Pashler, Rohrer, Cepeda, & Carpenter, 2007

People Experience Mistakes at Many Levels



Physiologically

References: Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997 ; Gehring et al., 1993; Hajcak, McDonald & Simons, 2004; Holroyd & Coles, 2002; Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Tomaka, Blascovich, Kelsey, & Leitten, 1993



Emotionally

References: Frederickson, 2001; Jamieson, Mendes, Blackstock, & Schmader, 2010; Kuppens., Oravecz, & Tuerlinck, 2010:



In context

References: Bray, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Donaldson, 2020; Hiebert et al., 1997; Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003; Stipek et al., 1998

Risk-Taking: Framing Mistakes and Ability



Mistakes as a barrier
Fixed mindset

VS.



Mistakes as a pathway
Growth mindset

Classroom & Mistakes



- Adult-child interactions construct cultural meaning (Santagata, 2004)
- Error climate (Steuer, et al., 2013) or error culture (Oser, 2005)
- Mistakes as “springboards for inquiry” (Borasi, 1994)
- Social culture in classroom (Bray, 2011; Hiebert et al., 1997; Stipek et al., 1998)

Teacher Mistake-Handling Expertise

Anchored in student-teacher interactions

Beyond content-level expertise needed to identify errors

Entails:

- Interpreting student errors and formulating clear responses (Bray, 2011)
- Representing different approaches in responses (Schleppenbach et al., 2007)
- Knowing when to move on (Ball, 1993)
- Advance planning for mistakes (Meyer, 1986; Borko & Livingston, 1989; Schleppenbach et al., 2007; Bray, 2011)

Teacher Responses Matter!

Verbal responses

Non-verbal

- Gestures
- Facial expressions
- Eye gaze

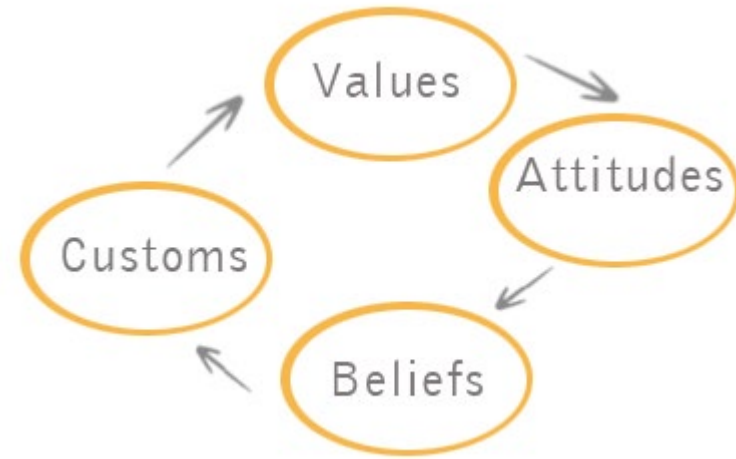
Actions

Rules

Rewards and consequences



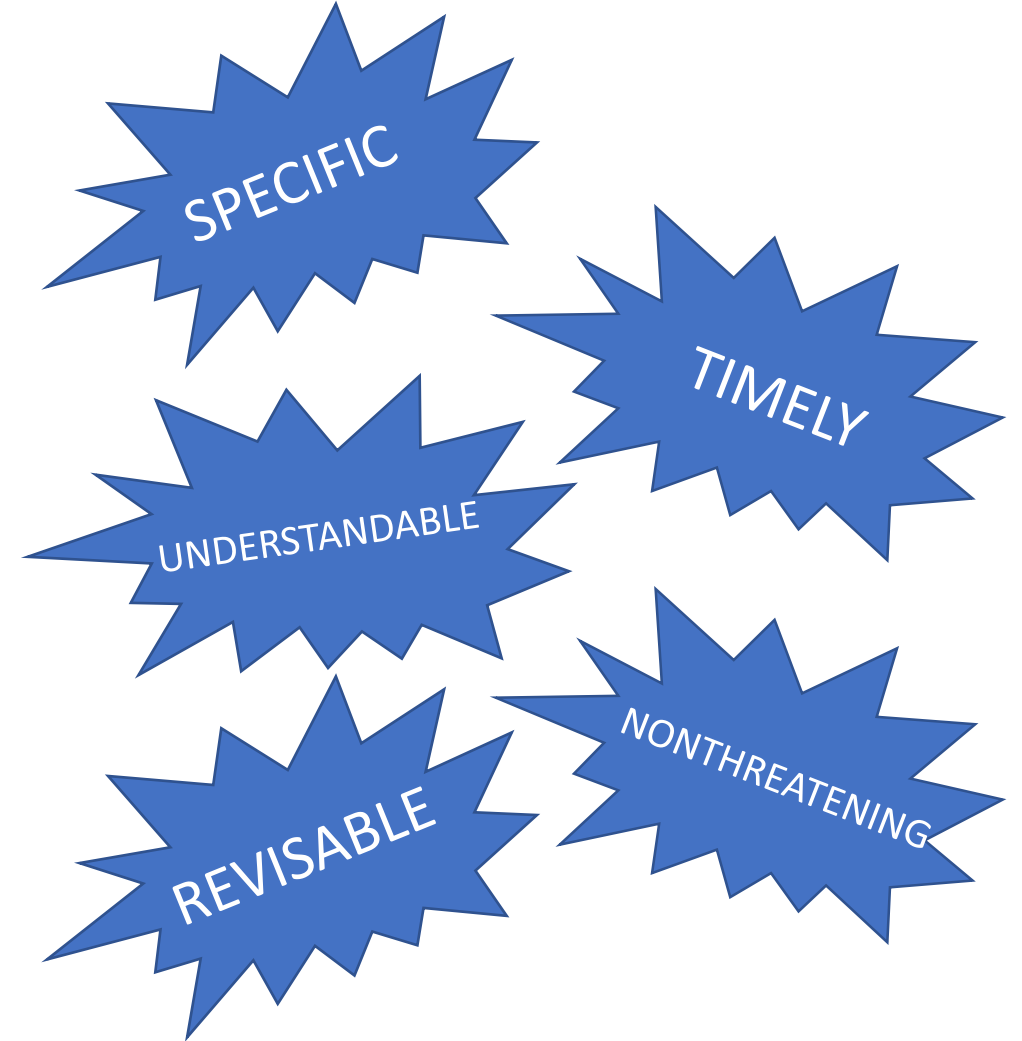
Contributes to a localized culture about mistakes and feedback that reflects:



Making Feedback Useful



Feedback *can* facilitate learning...

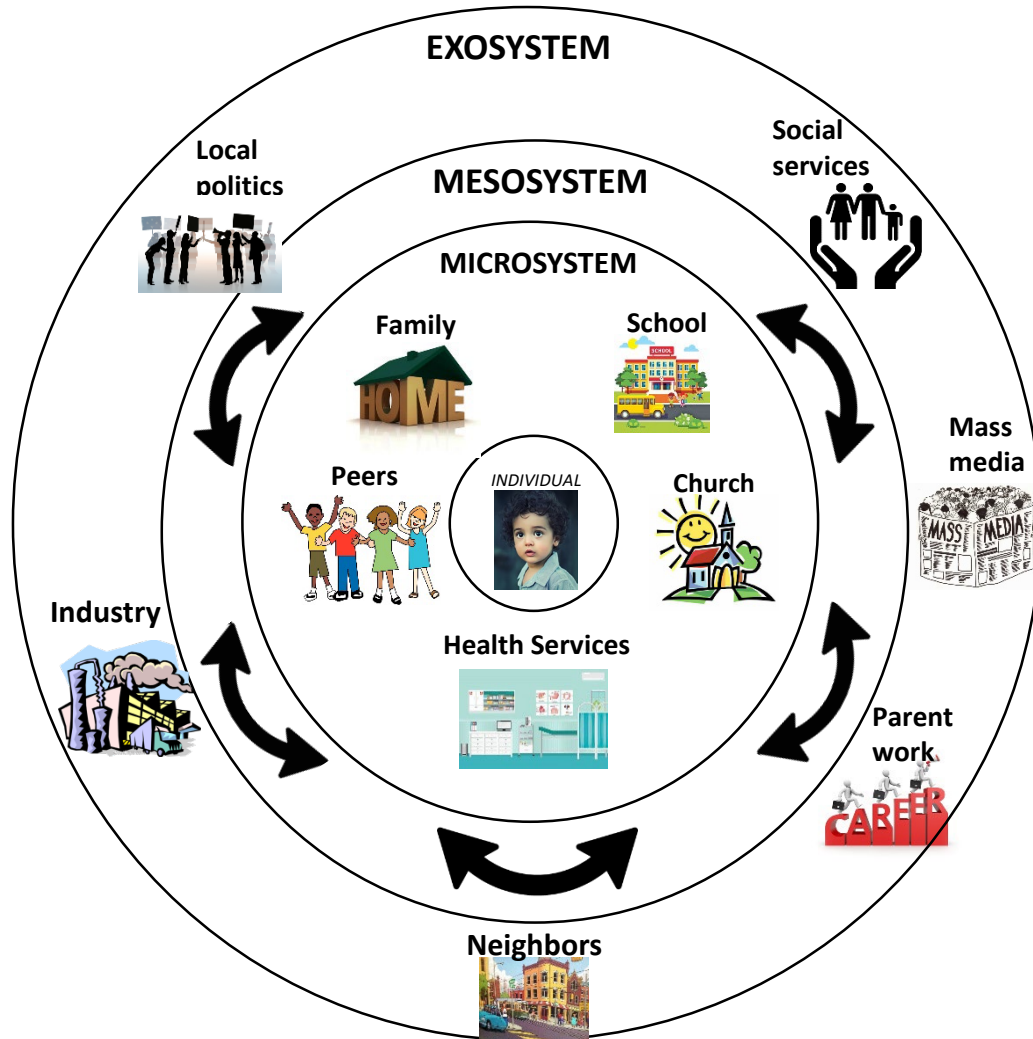


...but how it is given matters.

Reference: Clare & Jones, 2008; Finn & Metcalfe, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Huelser & Metcalfe, 2012; Kang, et al, 2011; Kornell, Hays & Bjork, 2009; Pashler, Rohrer, Cepeda, & Carpenter, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2016

Context Matters

Context-Specific Factors Shape Learning Experiences



Development is anchored in ecology

- Surroundings shape learning
- Social dynamics and relationships with teachers and peers play key role

Notes

Teacher Perspectives on Learning from Mistakes in Context

A Few Things I've Learned from Kindergarten

Goal of the Study (Donaldson, 2019)

Research Question

What are some of the characteristics of teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices regarding how they respond to student mistakes in the classroom?

Harnessing the power of fantastic attempts: Kindergarten teacher perspectives on student mistakes

Maleka Donaldson 

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ABSTRACT

Now, more than ever, American students at all grade levels face intense pressure to increase academic performance—including kindergarteners. Given that prior research has well established that mistakes and corrective feedback are key elements of the learning endeavor, it is critical to closely examine teachers' mistake-related experiences within the current educational context. The author reports on an interview study of 25 public school kindergarten teachers, who articulate in their own words how they perceive and respond to student mistakes in practice. Five central themes drawn from thematic analysis reflect commonly reported ways that teachers strive to respond to mistakes in their real-world classrooms: differentiating responses to the learner, building a positive classroom culture, facilitating student self-correction, adjusting instruction, and considering outside factors. The author concludes with a discussion connecting these themes to existing research and considering implications for research, policy, and classroom teaching.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEYWORDS

Teacher-student interactions; mistakes; kindergarten; teacher interviews

Each year, about 4 million American children enroll in kindergarten (Davis & Bauman, 2013). These young minds enter an educational system increasingly characterized by the pursuit of scholastic mastery. The standards historically characteristic of upper grades have now entered kindergarten classrooms in what has been dubbed an “accountability shovedown” (Goldstein, 2007; Hatch, 2002). Embedded in explicit goals to increase kindergarten student achievement and raise test scores is the implicit goal to decrease the number of mistakes students make on highly challenging content. Despite the fact that the developmental needs of five- and six-year-old children have not changed in the past century (Guddemi et al., 2012), expectations for their flawlessly executed academic performance have surged to an all-time high. Today's kindergarteners are expected to meet over 90 standards (Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, & Almon, 2015) and the demands placed on them far exceed those of first-grade students 15 years ago (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). This means that now, more than ever, kindergarten teachers must manage students' cognitive, social, and emotional needs during the transition to elementary school, while also ensuring that they reach mandatory benchmarks (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Graue, Ryan, Nocera, Northey, & Wilinski, 2017; Main, 2012).

Regardless of the push for teachers to eliminate student errors and ensure that children can demonstrate mastery on standardized assessments, research in cognitive science, neuroscience, and psychology has well established the important role of mistakes in learning. Without the opportunity to practice, make mistakes, and receive high-quality

corrective feedback, students cannot learn new things (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Metcalfe & Kornell, 2007). While there are a number of controlled studies that offer insights into the impact of errors on learning, there is a paucity of research literature that specifically investigates student mistake-making in real-world educational environments (Heemsoth & Heinze, 2014) and the relational aspects of learning and teaching (McDonald, Bowman, & Brayko, 2013). Also, few researchers have explored how or if laboratory findings employing mostly young adult participants translate into classroom learning experiences with young children (Huesler & Metcalfe, 2012).

Given how important mistakes are for learning, there is a clear need for a nuanced understanding of real-world, mistake-related teacher-student interactions and classroom culture. This is especially true in the early grades, when student attitudes about school and learning are first being shaped, and the “fear of failure” has not yet set in (Conroy, Coatsworth, & Kaye, 2007; McClelland, 1958). A kindergarten student's level of flexibility, persistence to complete tasks, and independence as a learner are predictive of fifth-grade academic achievement (Claessens, Duncan, & Engel, 2009). At the same time, presenting learners with overly challenging tasks may undermine academic motivation (Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012; Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013) and may be experienced by students as demoralizing (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015).

As we consider the desired academic outcomes for U.S. kindergarteners, it is critical to weigh the implications of how teachers approach instruction, particularly as it

Findings from Donaldson, 2019

A few key ways U.S. Kindergarten teachers respond to mistakes in their classrooms

-  1 Differentiating responses to the learner
-  2 Building a positive classroom culture
-  3 Facilitating student self-correction
-  4 Adjusting instruction
-  5 Considering outside influences

Differentiating Responses to the Learner



- Acknowledge kids have different needs
- “It depends”: adapt their responses to the student(s), context of response and/or the type of mistake
- Set individualized goals, tailored to each child
- Many types of student characteristics considered
 - Personality/temperament, sensitivity, ability level, home life, developmental level

How is it gonna make them feel to be told, ‘No, this isn't correct’, versus ‘Let's try that again’, or ‘Oh, I think you counted too fast.’ Again, knowing their temperament and what's gonna support them to continue to feel good about themselves and continue to want to try and figure that out.”

“Mistakes are on such a continuum for me with every student. What's a mistake for one kid is not a mistake for another kid. It's like a fantastic attempt for another kid.”



Building a Positive Classroom Culture

- Want students to feel good/positive about making mistakes
- Attention to mistake talk
 - Build them up
 - Affirm successes and what was done well
 - Praise and confidence building
 - Positive talk
 - Shield from negative sentiments
 - Keep things light
 - Avoid making feel bad
- Convey clear, flexible expectations
- Model own mistakes
- Peer supports

“You learn best by teaching. So once a child has mastered, say, recognizing numbers one to 20, well, I have another seven kids in my room that haven't mastered that yet. ... And they work with each other, they help each other, they teach each other. So it's not one teacher in the room; 19 kids, 19 teachers.”

“I would make a mistake, I failed at something right in front of them and I would say, ‘Ugh, I can't do this. Can you help me do it? Oh, I didn't do... Did the ceiling fall in? No, I didn't know how to do that. Wow, I feel good I can do that now.’ That was what I think with my kids. So it was always, let's feel good about it”

Facilitating Student Self-Correction



- Give opportunities to figure out for selves
- Teaching strategies to check work
 - Independently
 - Guiding of teacher through process
 - Asking open questions

So they're having to go back, they have checklists "Okay did I include a topic? Did I include a main character or did I list my opinion?" So they have ownership with the checklist."

"We mostly focus on how they did it, so we ask them to tell us how you figured it out, and sometimes when kids are going through that, they'll come up with the wrong answer, and then when they go through it again and explain it to us, they get the correct answer."

Adjusting Instruction



- Take responsibility for student mistakes
 - Consider flaws in teaching
 - Diagnose root cause of error
 - Adjust to meet student need
- One-on-one discussion
- Take a break
- Reteach

“I'll give them more one-on-one to be like, ‘Let's go through it together to figure out which part is getting tricky.’”

“What I can do to better explain this? So I have to look at my approach, where did I go wrong? What's my part in this? ...[for] any kind of lesson, why did it bomb? I have to assess myself. Was I not ready? Were they not ready?”

Considering Outside Influences



- District/administration
 - Standards
 - Assessments
- Parents/families
- Support teachers

“I try and think like if a kid is really sensitive about falling apart 'cause they make a mistake, are they getting a lot of grief at home...You gotta think of the whole picture.”

“Kids these days have a lot of stress on them. For getting things right and doing so much better than previous generations which kindergartens really can't do. So I feel like those kind of outside factors help force me to deal with errors in a different way than 10 years ago people might've dealt with them.”

What Steps Can Teachers Take in Classrooms?



Key themes:

-  Offer differentiated responses to mistakes
-  Build a positive, community-focused mistake culture
-  Promote and facilitate self-correction
-  Make adjustments to instruction
-  Manage outside influences

#1: Be reflective

- Consider your own expectations about mistakes
- Expectations of self as learner
- Observe your own responses to student mistakes (journaling)

#2: Be deliberate in messaging

- “I expect mistakes”
- Face mistakes directly, in real time
- Consider ways to mitigate psychological pressures from school, district, families

#3: Make the learning process the goal of school work

- Emphasize learning and trying rather than (perfect) performance
- Individual learning trajectory and expectations

...What About Within a Single
Classroom?...

Findings from Donaldson, 2019

A few key ways U.S. Kindergarten teachers respond to mistakes in their classrooms



Differentiating responses to the learner



Building a positive classroom culture



Facilitating student self-correction



Adjusting instruction



Considering outside influences

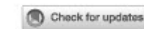
Goal of the Study (Donaldson, 2023)

Research Question

How does the teacher individualize mistake responses?

- More specifically, what practices does the teacher employ to tailor responses to children's mistakes during instruction?

How do these approaches vary by individual child?



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Welcome to the oops club!: Varied patterns of mistake responses in a veteran teacher's classroom

Maleka Donaldson*

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This study explores the range of distinct mistake responses that one veteran public school teacher employs with her class of 20 Kindergarten students during daily learning and teaching. Relying on more than 60 h of classroom observations and using a grounded theory approach, a micro-level, qualitative analysis of the teacher's responses to each child's mistakes was conducted, attending to words and actions during instructional interactions captured in fieldnotes and video recordings. Data analysis of observed teaching practices revealed five distinct patterns that the teacher used to help children correct academic and/or behavioral mistakes. The amount and type of teacher involvement ranged from little engagement with mistakes for students who rarely made any, to heavy-handed supports for children who routinely struggled to obtain right answers.

KEYWORDS

young children, teacher response, individualized instruction, error correction, qualitative research, teacher-student relationship, mistake

Introduction

Research has borne out time and again that mistakes and feedback are expected and necessary components of learning and teaching (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Winstone et al., 2017). While engaged in learning activities, students ideally should develop and hold positive beliefs about errors because it encourages more adaptive responses to mistakes (Tulis et al., 2018). When it comes to fostering these beliefs, children construct their conceptions of failure and mistakes in the context of moment-to-moment instructional interactions (DeLiema, 2017). This means that we want classroom teachers to promote eager and engaged student participation in new learning challenges and to support intellectual risk-taking. Teachers should strive to foster growth mindsets in which their students are resilient in the face of failures and view effort as a means of improving their abilities (Dweck, 2006). Because children's attitudes toward learning are shaped by the attitudes of people in their social worlds (Vygotsky, 1980), the nature of teacher feedback about children's mistakes is of critical importance. Children's perceptions of feedback can shape their affective and motivational responses to mistakes (Zentall and Morris, 2010); so, to the fullest extent possible, teachers should make every effort to encourage positive perspectives of errors and feedback among children.

Teachers enact specific instructional strategies when students make mistakes in the classroom, which can include—whether intentionally or unintentionally—a range of responses (e.g., Champagne, 2019; Donaldson, 2021). Also, how students receive and react to feedback plays a key role in how they learn (Winstone et al., 2017). Teachers often attempt to tailor their instruction to each learner, so they can address the particular needs of individual students (Donaldson, 2019a). With that in mind, we would expect that teachers do not uniformly respond

Findings from Donaldson, 2023

Five distinctive child-level patterns of teacher mistake responses were observed during classroom instruction:

- 1) Confirm as Correct
- 2) Scaffold and Send
- 3) Affirm and Support
- 4) Redirect Behaviors
- 5) Combination

1) Confirm as Correct



- Almost no mistakes
- Quick, matter-of-fact checks of work
- Models for others
 - Reminders
 - “You could be me!”

2) Scaffold and Send



- Brief check ins
 - Before
 - Along the way
- Various levels of scaffolding
 - Repeat directions
 - Hint
 - Tell answer
- Send to self-correct independently
 - Reminder of what to fix



3) Affirm and Support



- Frequent affirmation
- Multiple chances to attempt with clues
- Positive
- Lengthier exchanges



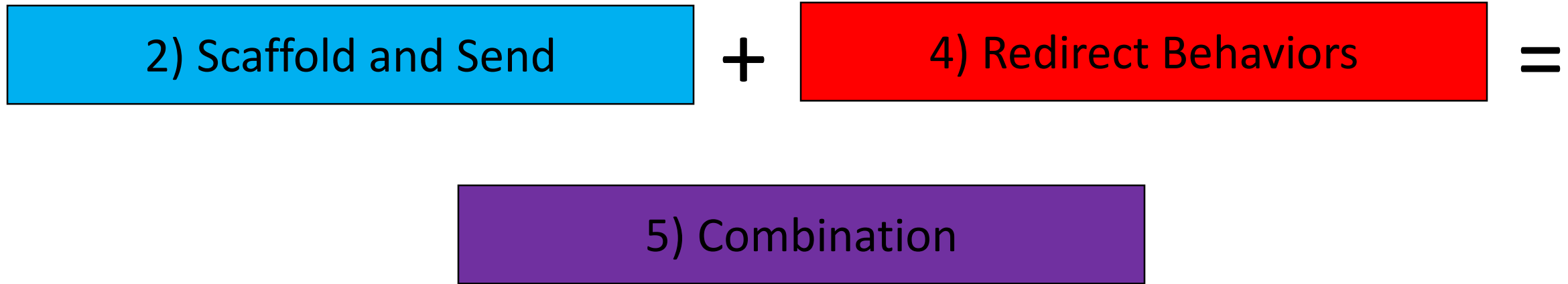
4) Redirect Behaviors



- Constant call outs
- Firm tone
- Help recenter
 - Focus tools
 - Take a break from group

5) Combination

(academic support and behavior management)



- Academic-related feedback (like a little more hands-on *Scaffold and Send*)
- *Redirect Behaviors* if off-task
- Not many mistake-related interactions overall (one exception)

What Steps Can Teachers Take in Classrooms?



Key themes:

1) Confirm as Correct

2) Scaffold and Send

3) Affirm and Support

4) Redirect Behaviors

5) Combination

#4: Adapt teaching to variations in student needs

- Not all children need exactly the same responses to mistakes
- Notice where extra time, attention, or engagement are warranted

#5: Notice if you are “stuck in a rut” in your interaction with an individual child

- Ask yourself
 - Does each child in the classroom receive feedback on both academics and behaviors?
 - Do you want or need to adjust patterns of interaction with particular students?
- Look to your ongoing observations (journaling) of your own practice for data points

#6: Turn to trusted colleagues to gain perspective on your practice

- Bring anecdotes and pedagogical challenges from your teaching to process with a mentor, peer teacher, or in a PLC
- Step outside of the moment



Working Lunch

Videos: Framing Mistakes in Practice

Application Practice

Making Connections and Role Play Scenarios

Notes

Building A Mistake Culture

Considerations for Practice from Fellow Early Childhood Teachers

1) Differentiating responses to the learner

Building a positive classroom culture

2) Attending to “mistake talk” in the classroom

3) Conveying clear, yet flexible, expectations

4) Modeling adaptive responses to mistakes

5) Supporting mistake-related peer interactions

6) Facilitating student self-correction

Adjusting instruction

7) Evaluating their own teaching

8) Engaging in one-on-one discussions

9) Offering students a break

Considering outside factors

10) Demands of school and/or district leadership

11) Home and family influences.

Source: *“Harnessing the Power of Fantastic Attempts”* (Donaldson, 2019)

Notes

Story Swap and Idea Generation

Collective Consideration of Putting into Practice

Notes



What factors (e.g., resources, norms, relationships, structures) have facilitated these practices?

What factors have hindered these practices?

What can you do in the future to carve a path for them?



Role Playing Exercise

Notes

Mid-Afternoon Break

Looking Forward

Developing Plans for Future Classroom Mistake Culture

Give Children the Chance to Take Risks and Make Mistakes



You can provide a scaffold for learning, but the child builds understanding for him or herself through trying it out.

Build Children's Comfort with Making Mistakes

Give more time for children to try on their own



Let the work stand



Pay attention to language around mistakes

You have never done this before and I've been doing this since I was your age!

If you want to get better, you'll have to keep practicing. My guess is you will make mistakes along the way. That's the point of practice!

What a great oops! Kids your age mix that up all of the time. With practice, you'll get it!

This is really hard...I expect mistakes on this!

I love how hard you have been working on this. Great effort!

Brainstorm and Plan



Opportunity to think through ideas for your teaching context

- Particular mistake-related **challenges** you face on a daily basis
- **Outcomes** you hope to promote
- Ideas about how to make them happen – **concrete “experiments”** to try [inspired by our discussions today]

Identify and develop

- Three concrete ideas to try out within the next week
- Two long term goals to work toward in the coming months
- One guiding principle about mistakes and learning that you want to carry forward

	Challenge	Intended Outcomes	Concrete Strategy/Experiment
1			
2			

	Challenge	Intended Outcomes	Concrete Strategy/Experiment
3			
4			

Goals

1

2



Principle

Cross-Pollination of Ideas

Share Your Plans at Your Tables!



Notes

Closing & Wrap-Up

Remember as You Go Forward...



- Mistakes and feedback play a critical role in learning.
- Teachers can and should be intentional in developing a positive and supportive local culture of mistakes.
- Context matters, and teachers should consider the whole picture as they determine how best to cultivate adaptive framing of mistakes in their classroom setting.

Coaching for Early Educators



Collaborate with an experienced educator

Build

Build on your strengths as a teacher or director

Work

Work towards your classroom or school goals

Strengthen

Strengthen relationships with staff and parents

Implement

Implement ideas from professional development workshops

Contact A Coach To Get Started!

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Amanda Gooch is an Educator with 14 years of teaching experience. In addition to a Bachelor's degree in Child Psychology and a Master's degree in Teaching from the University of South Florida, she holds her Florida Childcare Professional Credential Certificate and her Educator Certificate from the State of Florida Department of Education. Amanda has completed her Infant, Toddler, Pre-K, CLASS Observer certification through Teachstone and holds her University of Florida Lastinger Center for Early Learning Coaching Certificate. She believes that all children and educators are capable of success, no exceptions!



Todd W. Morrow received a Master of Science in Elementary Education and an Education Specialist degree in Leadership and Supervision both from Florida International University. Todd served as a teacher, assistant principal, and elementary school principal for 24 years in the Miami-Dade County School District. After relocating his family, he joined the Martin County School District where he served as a principal for six years. During his tenure he built strong community support and a lasting record of school-wide academic achievement. Todd Morrow has been recognized as a Principal of the Year by Citizen's Crime Watch of Miami-Dade County and as Principal of the Year by City Year. Todd is a certified CLASS Pre-K Observer and is working with Childcare Resources as an Early Childhood Education Coach assisting childcare providers throughout Indian River County. In addition to providing coaching to teachers and directors, Todd is pleased to offer Community of Practice for early childhood educators.

COACHING



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- Classrooms for students 6 weeks through 5 years
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- Full-day program with breakfast, lunch, and a snack included



Family Wellness Resources

- All students are assessed twice each year to ensure they're reaching developmental milestones
- Physical, Occupational, and Speech therapies are available at all sites
- On-site early childhood mental health services



Family Support

- Parent education meetings on early childhood education and development
- Case management resources and referrals

Household Income Eligibility for Tuition Assistance

Number in Household	Household Income		
2	\$30,660	-	\$42,924
3	\$38,730	-	\$54,222
4	\$46,800	-	\$65,520
5	\$54,870	-	\$76,818
6	\$62,940	-	\$88,116



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Join us for our last Professional Development Workshop of
the 2024-2025 Academic Year!

Last chance to win the workshop raffle and prizes!

Participants who have attended all four workshops have a
chance to win the grand workshop raffle!





Thank you for Attending



Childcare Resources Mission:

*To evaluate and promote the highest quality early
childhood development and education in Indian
River County, focusing on economically challenged
children and families.*

