Creating Unimagined Futures by Sharing and Developing Excellence in Practice.

The Stone Soup Journal

CREATING UNIMAGINED FUTURES

stone soup ACADEMY

Welcome to The Stone Soup Journal, written by staff for staff.

This resource aims to share best practice across the academy, from SEND strategies, to Engagement Team advice to top tips from Teachers.

The hope is that staff use this platform to share their knowledge and skills with one another in order to create a valuable resource which staff are able to access in their own time.

I hope you enjoy this edition of this journal and are inspired to make your own contribution to the next one! Any feedback is also welcome.

Please find and enjoy the following articles (writers are detailed on the final page of the journal):

Should We Be Raising Aspirations in Students?

by Darrell Drummond

Abstract

Raising aspirations is both a moral and strategic imperative in education, particularly for disadvantaged students. High expectations do more than motivate; when embedded within coherent routines, relational pedagogy, and evidence-informed practice, they have the potential to transform outcomes. Effective aspiration-raising requires aligning high-quality teaching, targeted support, and inclusive structures to help students believe in their capacity to succeed. At Stone Soup, our approach emphasises knowing students individually, challenging them appropriately, and fostering confidence in their future possibilities.

What does the research say?

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2024) highlights that aspiration interventions alone have limited impact. However, when paired with high-quality teaching and targeted support, they can meaningfully improve student outcomes. Teacher expectations are pivotal: Rubie-Davies and Hattie (2024) show that classrooms guided by high expectations produce significantly better outcomes, as teachers' beliefs influence student identity, effort, and engagement. TNTP (2024) further notes that unconscious bias and deficit narratives can suppress aspirations, reinforcing the need for reflective, values-driven leadership.

Aspirations are socially constructed. Theobald (2018) argues that students' beliefs about their futures are shaped by adult modelling, peer norms, and visible examples of success. Fragmented routines or inconsistent expectations undermine this modelling. Consequently, embedding inclusive structures—such as goal-setting, relational language, and visible classroom routines—supports both pedagogical and pastoral aims.

Should We Be Raising Aspirations in Students?

Strategies to try

Teachers can implement various strategies to support and improve students' self-esteem:

- **Encouragement and Support** - All educators should be mindful of how they make students feel in the classroom, emphasizing that educational success goes beyond grades and includes effort, attitude, and perseverance.

- **Praise and Recognition** - Sincere, specific praise enhances students' sense of self-worth and willingness to take risks in learning.

- **Creating a Positive Classroom Environment** - Displaying exemplary work, maintaining achievement boards, and fostering a culture of encouragement can help students feel proud of their accomplishments.

- **Personalised Interaction** - Using students' names frequently reinforces their importance within the learning community.

- **Building Resilience** - Educators should model resilience, encouraging students to persist through challenges and develop a growth mindset.

- **Supportive Gestures** - Simple actions such as fist bumps and handshakes can create a welcoming atmosphere and foster a sense of belonging.

Impact

Raising aspirations supports students to develop confidence, motivation, and a sense of purpose. When expectations are consistently high and supported by relational pedagogy, students are more likely to engage fully, take risks, and persist through challenges.

Strategically embedded practices can improve attainment, engagement, and post-16 pathways while fostering a school culture where students feel known, valued, and empowered to imagine futures of purpose and contribution.

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Is There a Difference Between Raising Expectations Vs Aspirations?

Micha Davis

Abstract

Raising the aspirations of disadvantaged students is often seen as the silver bullet for closing the attainment gap. This viewpoint is deficit-based, putting the onus on the young people for not 'wanting it enough', lacking the 'correct' dreams for their futures. However, research has shown that aspirations do not differ greatly between students across the socioeconomic spectrum; rather their ability to realise them. Therefore, adopting a strengths-based approach that takes young peoples' individual talents and goals for the future seriously may be a better way to help students progress.

What does the research say?

When looking at the effectiveness of aspiration raising interventions, the Education Endowment Fund found that "much underachievement results not from low aspiration but from a gap between aspirations and the knowledge, skills, and characteristics required to achieve them." So students often have the motivation to do well and achieve ambitions, but lack the tools to realise them. Another study by Harris and Waller found "that there is not a 'problem' with young people's aspirations, but rather that they expect to achieve markedly lower outcomes than they desire". This means raising aspirations in isolation is of course not effective and instead must be combined with giving young people the tools and building self-efficacy (belief that they can complete a task) to help them expect more from themselves and their futures. Raising aspirations cannot happen in a vacuum; it must go hand in hand with fostering achievement and confidence, enabling students to genuinely believe in and pursue the futures they envision.

Is There a Difference Between Raising Expectations Vs Aspirations?

Strategies to try

1. Broaden Horizons

Expose students to a wide range of pathways through trips, guest speakers, and mentoring. Invite role models from similar backgrounds who demonstrate success through multiple routes - academic, vocational, and creative. This helps students to see that achievement wears many faces and is within reach for people like them.

2. Build Self-Efficacy

Create frequent opportunities for students to experience success. Set small, achievable goals and celebrate each milestone. Offer specific, constructive feedback that focuses on effort and progress, not just outcomes. Encourage reflection on strengths so that students internalise a sense of competence and control.

3. Bridge Aspirations and Attainment

Make the journey to success explicit. Teach the steps, skills, and qualifications required for different careers or ambitions. Use goal-setting sessions, action plans, and regular check-ins to help students track progress. Embed study skills, organisation, and problem-solving into daily learning so they develop the habits needed for long-term success.

4. Create a Culture of Success and Belonging

Celebrate every form of achievement - academic, creative, or practical - to ensure students feel seen and valued. Represent diversity in displays, resources, and leadership so that students recognise themselves in the school's success stories. Give young people meaningful voice and agency within school life to strengthen belonging and ownership.

Possible Impact

Shifting from raising aspirations to raising expectations reframes how we see and support our students. By focusing on self-belief, access, and consistent scaffolding, we help students close the gap between what they want and what they think is possible. This approach nurtures confidence, independence, and ambition grounded in reality. Over time, it builds a culture where success feels attainable—and expected - for every learner, regardless of background.

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How Can We Unlock Students' Creativity and Imagination?

by Khia Lewis-Todd

Abstract

Encouraging students' imagination and creativity is essential for fostering engagement, independent thinking, and transferable skills. Developing creativity helps students persevere, innovate, and build resilience (Creation Station, 2022). When embedded across the curriculum, creative learning supports self-directed learning, allowing students to take ownership of their educational experiences and apply skills in multiple contexts. Creativity is not limited to the arts; it enhances problem-solving, collaboration, and confidence across subjects, preparing students for a dynamic and evolving world.

What does the research say?

Research demonstrates that creativity and imagination support the development of key skills, including adaptability and problem-solving. By thinking creatively, students are better able to navigate new situations and generate innovative solutions. Creativity also strengthens collaboration: "Creativity enhances the ability to think outside of the box, integrating diverse perspectives and generating new ideas, leading to more effective collaboration with others" (The British School of Barcelona, 2024). Additionally, engaging in creative tasks builds confidence in students' ideas, fosters initiative, and encourages ownership of learning.

How Can We Unlock Students' Creativity and Imagination?

Strategies to try

1. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Use questions that allow multiple answers or interpretations. This encourages students to express their thoughts, explore gaps in understanding, and develop deeper comprehension of the subject, while validating curiosity and critical thinking.

2. Reward Creativity

Provide positive reinforcement when students demonstrate originality or take risks in their thinking. Recognition can be verbal, visual, or through displays of work, motivating students to explore and develop their imagination further.

3. Encourage Curiosity

Foster a culture of inquiry by encouraging discussion, active listening, exploring interesting materials, and documenting ideas. Curiosity-driven learning promotes engagement, initiative, and a willingness to experiment with new approaches.

4. Showcase Student Work

Create environments that display students' creative achievements. Visual representation of work around classrooms or communal spaces not only celebrates success but inspires peers, reinforces the value of creativity, and builds a sense of pride and belonging.
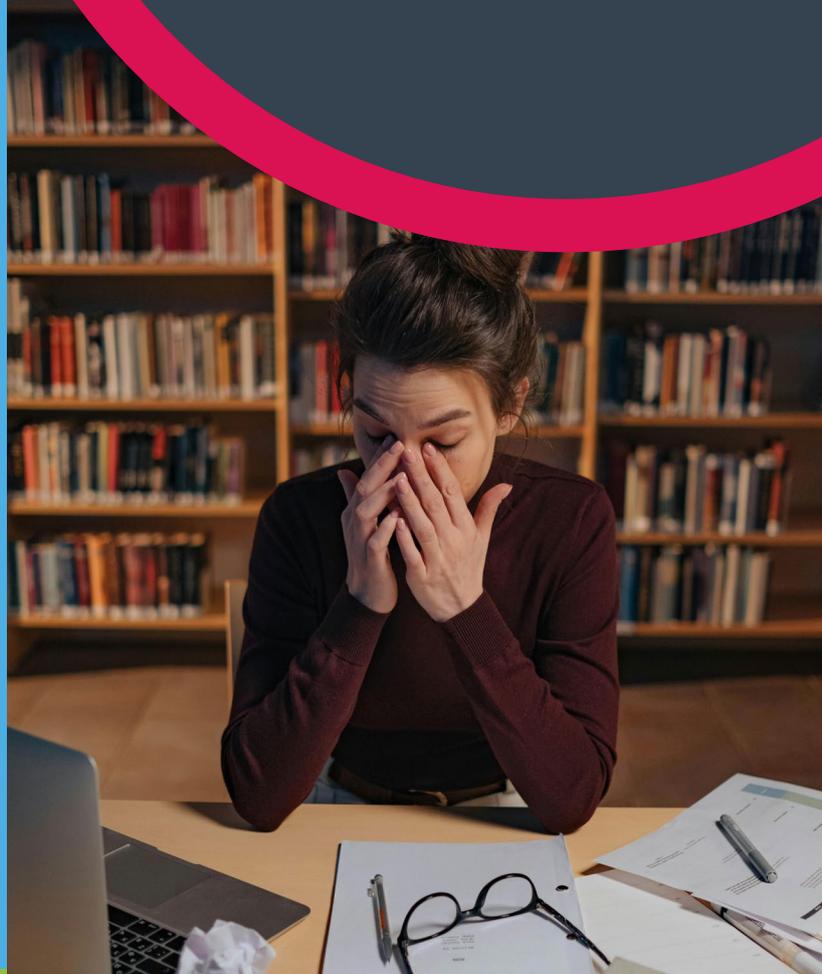
Possible Impact

Embedding creativity across the curriculum can positively impact students both mentally and emotionally. A creative environment encourages self-expression, confidence, and resilience, allowing students to explore ideas, problem-solve, and take ownership of their learning. It supports collaboration, enhances motivation, and cultivates skills that are transferable beyond the classroom, ultimately preparing students for future challenges and opportunities.

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How can we effectively use AI in schools?

by Younes Henini

Abstract

AI in Alternative Provision (AP) can personalise learning, reduce workload, and strengthen safeguarding when ethically governed. Prioritising accessibility, targeted tutoring, and administrative automation through small pilot programs with staff training and student voice helps ensure equitable impact, protects data, and strengthens relationships. AI should supplement, not replace, the human connection central to AP, acting as a scaffold for differentiation, engagement, and early intervention alongside trauma-informed, relational practice.

What does the research say?

Evidence indicates that AI tutoring and feedback can improve attainment when implemented effectively (Ma et al., 2014; Kulik & Fletcher, 2016). National guidance recommends a cautious, human-in-the-loop approach to reduce staff workload while maintaining accessibility, supported by robust safeguards and GDPR-compliant data management (Department for Education, 2024). Without equitable access and sound pedagogy, educational technology risks widening disadvantage. Best practice includes clear objectives, staff training, secure data handling, and iterative evaluation. International research further emphasises human-centred, ethical deployment, transparency, and trauma-informed oversight as critical in AP contexts (Miao et al., 2021; Holmes et al., 2022).

Strategies to try

1. Teaching & Learning

Adaptive learning platforms, such as Century and Seneca, provide scaffolded challenge, allowing students to progress at their own pace while targeting gaps in understanding. Speech-to-text and text-to-speech tools support students with dyslexia, ADHD, or processing difficulties, enabling them to access and produce written content more independently. AI writing support can be used to build literacy confidence, offering suggestions while safeguarding against over-reliance. Multimodal content conversion (text to audio, visual, or quizzes) enhances engagement, and real-time translation ensures English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners can participate fully.

How can we effectively use AI in schools?

2. Behaviour & Emotional Regulation

Daily AI-driven well-being check-ins can highlight early concerns, while predictive behaviour analytics identify trends in attendance or engagement that may indicate emerging difficulties. Gamified self-regulation tools, such as adaptive mindfulness or breathing exercises, encourage students to develop coping strategies independently and in a structured way.

3. Staff Workload Reduction

AI can automate administrative tasks such as lesson planning, schemes of work, and differentiated resources linked to EHCP targets, freeing staff time for direct student interaction. Data dashboards summarise attendance, progress, and behaviour patterns, enabling quicker and more informed decision-making. AI-assisted marking and feedback in writing and maths can increase efficiency while maintaining pedagogical quality.

4. Safeguarding & Support

On-device monitoring can flag indicators of self-harm, bullying, or grooming, allowing timely intervention. AI-generated parental summaries, including translated updates, improve communication and transparency. Early-risk mapping using AI identifies students at risk of attendance dips or exclusion, enabling targeted support.

5. Enrichment & Engagement

Virtual mentors can offer personalised career guidance, while AI-driven creative arts tools allow students to explore music, art, and storytelling in innovative ways. VR and AR experiences provide immersive learning opportunities, particularly in settings where traditional classrooms are challenging.

Possible Impact

Using AI in AP can improve access and inclusion, particularly for SEND and EAL students, while enhancing motivation, achievement, and confidence. Staff workload is reduced, allowing more time to build relationships. Safeguarding becomes more proactive, and parent partnerships are strengthened through clear, translated communications. Organisationally, AI supports better EHCP outcomes, improved qualifications, and stronger post-16 destinations.

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How Can We Implement Montessori in Music Teaching?

by Paolo Iannattone

Abstract

At the start of this school year, elements of the Montessori method were introduced into music teaching. While often associated with early years, Montessori principles—independence, accountability, and respect for the learner—translate effectively to secondary and alternative provision. In the music classroom, they nurture creativity, technical skill, and responsibility. Structured choice, personalised pathways, and collaborative routines help students develop autonomy and resilience, aligning closely with the goals of Stone Soup Academy.

What does the research say?

Montessori's educational philosophy emphasises independence, intrinsic motivation, and learning through structured environments (Montessori, 1964; Lillard, 2017). Research demonstrates that learner-centred, choice-driven approaches can enhance engagement, problem-solving, and self-efficacy (Standing, 1998). Applied to music, these principles support creativity while encouraging accountability, collaboration, and technical skill development. Effective Montessori-based practice balances freedom with structure, guiding students to make decisions that are both meaningful and aligned to curriculum goals.

How Can We Implement Montessori in Music Teaching?

Strategies to try

1. Prepared Environment

Design the classroom to encourage independent engagement. In music technology, this includes workstations equipped with resources that reduce dependence on the teacher. Examples include troubleshooting guides for Logic Pro or curated reference materials. Lessons can be structured into four stages—Learn, Create, Analyse, Submit - providing a personalised learning pathway that students can navigate autonomously.

2. Structured Choice

Offer students options linked to curriculum objectives, such as creating an eight-bar beat, resampling audio, or analysing a reference track. Each choice leads to an assessed outcome, giving students ownership while ensuring accountability. Structured choice reduces resistance, builds responsibility, and reinforces the connection between decision-making and outcomes.

3. Accountability and Reflection

Implement tools like work-trackers where students record progress, including screenshots or exported audio files. Uploading completed work to a shared folder creates a visible cycle of planning, action, and reflection, helping students develop organisational and self-evaluation skills.

4. Collaboration and Respect

Foster teamwork through rotating roles in recording sessions—Sound Engineer, Artist, Producer. Shared responsibility encourages collaboration, respect for shared resources, and development of professional skills. Classroom routines, such as coiling cables, archiving on Google Drive, and providing peer feedback, reinforce collaboration and technical proficiency.

5. Balancing Freedom and Structure

Apply frameworks that guide student creativity while maintaining clear expectations. This balance allows learners to make artistic choices, problem-solve, and manage their time, developing resilience and independence that extend beyond the classroom and into creative industries.

Possible Impact

Implementing Montessori in music teaching promotes independence, creativity, and personal responsibility. Students are empowered to take ownership of their learning, develop problem-solving skills, and collaborate effectively. Structured choice and reflection improve engagement, technical ability, and self-evaluation, while classroom routines support professional habits. Overall, this approach fosters student confidence, resilience, and preparedness for both educational and creative pathways.

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How Can We Understand and Reduce NEETs in Alternative Provision?

by Jordan Senior

Abstract

Supporting students at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is a central priority within alternative provision. These young people often face complex barriers, including disadvantage, disrupted education, or mental health challenges, which can make sustained engagement with education or employment difficult. Reducing NEET outcomes requires a holistic, proactive approach—one that integrates early guidance, flexible pathways, and strong relationships with employers and support services. Our role is to equip students with not only qualifications, but confidence, purpose, and belief in their future potential.

What does the research say?

Recent UK data shows that NEET rates have risen steadily since 2021, reaching their highest level since 2014 by September 2025. Research consistently identifies disadvantaged backgrounds, certain ethnic minority groups, and students with SEND or complex needs as being at greater risk (DfE, 2025).

Long-term NEET status has profound consequences: reduced lifetime earnings, increased unemployment, and higher risks of poor physical and mental health (Prince's Trust, 2024). However, early and sustained intervention—particularly from ages 14–18—significantly improves outcomes. Studies show that consistent mentoring, work experience, and personalised guidance can re-engage students and prevent post-16 dropout (Education Endowment Foundation, 2023).

How Can We Understand and Reduce NEETs in Alternative Provision?

Strategies to try

1. Early Intervention and Guidance

Provide structured careers advice, mentoring, and individual transition plans from age 14. This ensures every young person understands their post-16 options and feels supported in making informed, realistic, and motivating choices.

2. Stronger Employer Links

Develop partnerships with local employers, colleges, and training providers to offer work placements, apprenticeships, and career talks. Real-world experiences help students see relevance in their learning and inspire ambition beyond the classroom.

3. Targeted Support for Vulnerable Learners

Tailor interventions for those most at risk - such as students with SEND, financial barriers, or mental health concerns. Support might include one-to-one coaching, bursaries, counselling, or flexible study options that reduce the risk of disengagement.

4. Promoting Alternative Routes

Expand access to vocational courses, traineeships, and practical learning opportunities. For many students in AP, success and motivation thrive in hands-on, skills-based environments where achievement feels tangible and relevant.

5. Embedding Aspirational Culture

Use success stories, alumni visits, and visible celebration of post-16 achievements to normalise progression. Embedding aspiration into the school ethos reinforces that every student has a future worth investing in.

Possible Impact

When these strategies are embedded, students experience greater security, opportunity, and optimism about their futures. Access to diverse pathways, such as apprenticeships and vocational training, opens doors that might otherwise remain closed. Early guidance helps to alleviate anxiety around transitions, building confidence and self-direction. Students begin to see value in their skills and aspirations, fostering independence and resilience.

Over time, this approach can help narrow the attainment and opportunity gap for disadvantaged learners, reduce the likelihood of students becoming NEET, and create lasting improvements in wellbeing, employability, and life satisfaction.

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Why Do We Need To Understand Sensory Processing in the Classroom?

by Michelle Bramhall

Abstract

Sensory processing refers to how our bodies receive and interpret information through the senses. For most learners, this process happens automatically, allowing them to respond appropriately to the environment. However, for some, the brain can over or under-react to sensory input, affecting attention, regulation, and participation in learning. Understanding how different sensory systems work - and how to create a "sensory smart" classroom - can help staff better support learners' engagement, comfort, and wellbeing.

What does the research say?

Sensory processing involves eight key systems:

- The five familiar senses - touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing.

- Three lesser-known senses:

- Interoception (awareness of internal sensations like hunger or temperature).

- Proprioception (body awareness and position)

- Vestibular (balance and spatial orientation).

When these systems are well-regulated, learners can stay focused and calm. When they are not, students may appear distracted, withdrawn, overly energetic, or anxious - often misinterpreted as behavioural issues.

According to Winnie Dunn's Sensory Processing Framework, learners may fit into one or more of the following sensory profiles:

- Sensory Sensitive – hyper-aware of input but passive in managing it.

- Low Registration – under-aware of input, needing stronger sensory cues.

- Sensory Avoiding – hypersensitive and actively avoiding stimuli.

- Sensory Seeking – hyposensitive, seeking additional input to regulate.

Recognising these patterns helps educators differentiate between behavioural and sensory responses, adapting classroom strategies accordingly.

Why Do We Need To Understand Sensory Processing in the Classroom?

Strategies to try

1. For Sensory Sensitive Learners (hyper-alert, easily overwhelmed)

Sensory sensitive learners often react strongly to sounds, lights, and touch. Position them away from busy doorways, windows, or bright displays to reduce distractions. Offer calming tools such as weighted blankets, fidget toys, or stress balls to help regulate sensory input. Ear defenders can reduce auditory overload, while a dedicated "calm corner" allows learners to self-regulate when feeling overwhelmed. Encourage deep breathing, chewing, or sipping through a straw to promote calm and focus.

2. For Learners with Low Registration (under-reactive to sensory input)

These learners may appear disengaged or slow to respond because they need stronger sensory input to notice and process information. Use bright visuals, clear cues, and active movement to capture attention. Incorporate regular movement breaks - jumping, pushing, or stretching—to maintain alertness. Seating near stimulating peers or visual displays can help sustain focus, while tools like Movin' Sit cushions or therabands provide subtle movement and sensory feedback during seated tasks.

3. For Sensory Avoiding Learners (actively minimise sensory input)

Learners who avoid sensory input may withdraw, isolate, or refuse certain activities due to overload. Provide clear explanations for environmental noises or unexpected changes to reduce anxiety. Offer flexible grouping options or quieter spaces for independent work. Gradually increase exposure to challenging stimuli at a pace that feels safe and predictable. Support comfort through tools like ear defenders, calming scents, or familiar sensory items to create a sense of control and stability.

4. For Sensory Seeking Learners (actively seek input)

These learners crave sensory stimulation and often move, touch, or fidget to stay engaged. Channel this energy through purposeful movement - such as delivering resources, brief exercise breaks, or hands-on tasks. Set clear boundaries to prevent overstimulation (e.g. "10 star jumps, then back to work"). Use proprioceptive tools like weighted items, therabands, or Movin' Sit cushions to meet sensory needs safely. Encourage participation in active, tactile learning that uses their energy productively while maintaining focus.

Possible Impact

A sensory-aware classroom helps reduce anxiety, improve focus, and foster inclusion. Learners can better self-regulate, engage meaningfully in lessons, and develop independence in managing their own needs.

Over time, this approach can lead to improved emotional wellbeing, greater participation, and stronger academic outcomes — creating a calmer, more responsive learning environment for all.

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How can we support students with ADHD and tourettes through movement?

by Channan Cross

Audience
Teachers,
In Class Support,
Engagement,
Students

Abstract

Students with ADHD and/or tics often struggle to remain still and focused during the school day. While traditional classroom expectations tend to prioritize stillness and quiet, research shows that movement can actually help students with ADHD regulate attention and enhance their learning. Similarly, students with tic disorders may benefit from movement opportunities that reduce the urge to suppress their tics. Teachers play a vital role in creating classroom environments that are responsive to these needs. By embedding movement and practical elements into lessons, schools can better engage these students and improve their educational experiences.

What does the research say?

Research shows that students with ADHD often concentrate better when they are allowed to move. For example, one study found that children with ADHD who moved more during tasks actually performed better than those who moved less (Sarver et al., 2015). This challenges the assumption that movement equals distraction. Instead, it supports the idea that physical activity – whether small (like fidgeting) or structured (like walking tasks) – helps students regulate attention and cognitive control.

Other studies have found that embedding movement into classroom routines and lesson content improves engagement and reduces disruptive behavior for students with ADHD (Mulrine et al., 2011). The evidence also suggests that students with tic disorders may benefit from access to low-key movement opportunities without drawing attention to their tics (Stern, 2018). These adjustments can help reduce anxiety and the pressure to suppress tics in the classroom.

Strategies to try

If you are a teacher / in class support, supporting students with ADHD or tics, you may want to try the following:

- Use micro-movement breaks. Plan short, structured breaks between learning tasks. These could include stretching, marching on the spot, or a quick walk-and-talk activity. These brief movements help reset attention and reduce restlessness.

- Incorporate movement into lesson content. Design tasks that require students to move between stations, stand while discussing, or act out parts of a topic. For example, students might rotate

How can we support students with ADHD and tourettes through movement?

between poster stations in a gallery walk, act out parts of a story, or physically demonstrate a science process.

• Offer flexible seating or movement tools. Provide options like fidgets, or stress balls. These allow students to move while remaining engaged with the task.

• Build movement prompts into lessons. Include moments where students are cued to stretch, change positions, or engage in a physical learning task. This helps normalize movement and keeps energy levels steady.

• If you are a member of engagement supporting a child with ADHD or tics, you may want to try the following:

• Encourage regular movement throughout the day. Help the student to find safe and acceptable ways to stay physically active on movement breaks or during unstructured times, which can improve focus during lessons.

• Support the student in understanding their needs. Talk with the student about how movement helps them feel focused and calm.

Help them identify what works best, such as short walks, fidgets, or physical routines.

• Support the student during transitions by providing short motor tasks. Giving these students a quick purposeful task in the corridor supports these students in channelling movement.

Possible Impact

By helping students with ADHD and tics integrate movement into their daily routines, we not only support their academic performance but also build their self-awareness and independence. These strategies can foster self-regulation skills that remain valuable beyond school – in the workplace, at university, and in everyday life. Creating a classroom culture that values physical movement as part of learning benefits not just students with additional needs, but often the whole class.

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How Can We Manage Stress at Work?

by Oliver Sillito

Abstract

Stress is a natural part of working life and can arise from deadlines, challenging tasks, or concerns about student progress. While stress affects everyone differently, recognising its impact and employing practical strategies can help staff manage emotions, maintain perspective, and sustain well-being. This guide outlines approaches I use to cope with stress, emphasising reflection, gradual progress, and the temporary nature of emotions.

What does the research say?

Stress in educational settings can affect decision-making, focus, and job satisfaction. Research shows that strategies promoting reflection, emotional regulation, and peer support improve resilience and well-being. Recognising gradual impact, maintaining perspective, and using structured coping strategies can reduce burnout and increase effectiveness (Kyriacou, 2001; Education Support, 2023). Creating routines that support staff self-care and emotional awareness benefits both educators and students by maintaining consistency and relational stability.

How Can We Manage Stress at Work?

Strategies to try

1. The Circle Strategy

When something upsets or frustrates you, draw a large circle to represent the emotional intensity. Redraw the circle after an hour, then after four hours, a day, and a week. If the circle diminishes over time, the reaction was likely temporary. If it remains unchanged, it may indicate a genuine issue requiring attention. This method helps distinguish between fleeting emotional responses and actionable concerns.

2. Trust the Process

Progress with students - and in teaching itself - is gradual. Daily interactions, care, and consistency accumulate over time, even if immediate results are not visible. Reflecting on long-term growth, much like observing a child's development, reinforces patience and reduces frustration.

3. Everything Passes

Stressful moments, like all emotions, are temporary. Focusing on small joys, acts of kindness, or moments of connection can provide perspective and calm. Recognising the transience of emotions encourages resilience and helps maintain a positive outlook.

4. Seek and Offer Support

Asking for help when needed and offering support to colleagues strengthens relational bonds and creates a culture of shared responsibility. Peer support and collaboration are effective ways to manage work-related stress and maintain well-being

Possible Impact

Implementing these strategies can improve emotional regulation, reduce workplace frustration, and foster resilience. The Circle Strategy promotes perspective and identifies genuine concerns, while trusting the process encourages patience and recognition of long-term impact. Embracing the principle that everything passes enhances well-being, positivity, and engagement. Overall, these approaches help staff maintain focus, sustain relationships with students, and approach challenges with a growth mindset.
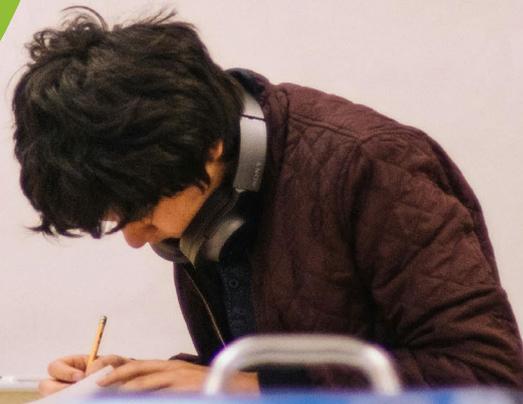
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How Can Observation Be Impactful?

by Stephen Thompson

Abstract

At Stone Soup Academy, observation is used as a key reflective tool to identify best practice, evaluate strategies, and drive meaningful improvement. Observations are most effective when carried out with context in mind—understanding that a single snapshot may not represent everyday practice. Different forms of structured observation, such as time sampling, event sampling, and duration sampling, provide valuable insights into learning, behaviour, and engagement.

Time sampling helps analyse concentration and working memory, highlighting how long students can sustain focus during tasks. Event sampling is useful when exploring behaviours or areas of need that share specific, recurring features. Duration sampling tracks how long individuals engage in various tasks, offering insight into executive functioning and attention regulation. Together, these approaches help practitioners move beyond assumption to evidence-informed reflection.

What does the research say?

Observation has long been recognised as a powerful, evidence-based method in education, providing rich, qualitative data that complements formal assessment. Researchers such as Hobart et al. (2009) and Sharman et al. (2007) emphasise that well-structured observation enables educators to identify learning patterns, adapt strategies, and personalise support. When conducted systematically, observation produces nuanced insights that go beyond test scores—revealing how students think, behave, and interact across different contexts.

How Can Observation Be Impactful?

Strategies to try

Observe a lesson: Focus on learner engagement, transitions, and teacher-student interactions.

Observe the wider environment: Look at learning behaviour outside lessons—corridors, breaks, or enrichment sessions—to gain a broader understanding of consistency and wellbeing.

Observe a specific student: Track their behaviour, engagement, or focus at different points in the day or week to build a complete picture of needs and strengths.

Possible Impact

Implementing structured observation promotes deeper reflection on both personal and collective teaching practice, encouraging educators to critically evaluate what works and why. It fosters the development and sharing of effective strategies, creating a collaborative environment where professional growth is continuous. Observations also provide focused insights into student behaviour, engagement, and barriers to learning, helping staff make more informed decisions. Ultimately, this process strengthens a culture of professional curiosity and evidence-based improvement across the academy.

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