

Strategies for Communicating High Expectations to Students
December 15, 2004
TIP # 4

RESPONSE OPPORTUNITIES
WAIT TIME

Categories of Periods of Silence

Last month we shared 4 of the 8 categories of wait/think time with you. This month's tip includes the remaining four categories. Recall that there are eight categories of "wait/think" time named either according to the place they occur or by the primary function they perform during conversations and discussions. These categories are subsumed by the overarching concept of time to think, process information, and respond.

5) Teacher Pause-Time

Teacher pause-time is characterized by a 3 or more second period of uninterrupted silence that teachers deliberately take to consider what just took place, what the present situation is, and what their next statements or behaviors could and should be. One example of when the 3 seconds or longer of reflective thought would be beneficial for the teacher--and eventually students--after a student has asked a question that requires more than an immediate, short recall answer. Other examples are when students have asked for further clarifications, clearer explanations, or better examples than those already provided.

(6) Within-Teacher Presentation Pause-Time

Within-teacher presentation pause-time occurs during lecture presentations or other extended information input periods, when teachers deliberately stop the flow of information and give students 3 or more seconds of uninterrupted silence to process the just-presented information. These pauses allow students time to consolidate their thinking, with no request of them to follow with a public response. In effect, this period of silence provides students uninterrupted time to momentarily consider the information of the teacher's presentation in smaller, "bite-sized" chunks, rather than all at once.

(7) Student Task-Completion Work-Time

Student task-completion work-time occurs when a period of 3-5 seconds; several (e.g. 15, 20, 30, or 90) seconds; or 2 or more minutes of uninterrupted silence is provided for students to remain on-task. This period allows students to complete a short or lengthy academic task that demands their undivided attention. Each period of uninterrupted silence should be appropriate to the length of time students need to complete the particular task.

(8) Impact Pause-Time.

Impact pause-time occurs when the most dramatic way to focus attention at a given time is to provide a period of uninterrupted silence. Impact pause-time may continue for less than 3 seconds or far longer periods, up through several minutes, depending upon the time needed for targeted cognitive or affective impacts. One example of a desired result

is creation of a particular mood or affective environment, such as when sudden silence may generate a feeling or mood of anticipation, expectation, drama, suspense, or uncertainty. Another example is providing time for students to consider and internally respond to a rhetorical question before continuing with additional information or activity.

Skillful Use of Wait Time

The 3 second period of uninterrupted silence is a minimal amount of time unless the teacher has sound reasons to reduce this time. There are few instructionally sound reasons for not allowing at least 3 seconds of silence. The teacher should deliberately and consistently wait in silence for 3-5 seconds or longer at particular times, described above. Further, the teacher should ensure that all students also preserve the disturbance-free silence so that both the students and teacher can consider and process relevant information and then act accordingly. When these behaviors occur, the teacher can claim to be skilled at using wait time. The skillful use of wait time contributes significantly to improved teaching and learning in the classroom.

Look for next month's tip which will focus on higher level questioning.