



Wait Time

Key Takeaways and Ideas to Think About

In the video, the teacher asks a question and does not receive an immediate response from the child. Instead of probing for a response, the teacher allows the child to continue to explore the materials. Why do you think the teacher did not interfere with the child as he continued exploring?

Teachers who are experienced with inquiry learning know that part of inquiry is allowing children to investigate at their own pace and in their own way. Carefully observing a child's inquiry can provide a window into what the child knows and understands about a concept. Teachers can use this observational time to consider additional comments or questions they may pose to scaffold information to expand the child's understanding of the science concept.

The amount of time needed to wait for a response from a child can vary. This depends not only on the child but also on the type of question asked. Consider the benefits of waiting longer than 1 second for a child to respond to a question.

Children of the same age can be at different stages of development. Some children process thoughts quickly, and others need more time to think about their response to a question. In addition, questions that require recall information may take considerably less time to process than questions that require critical thinking. For instance, in the video, the teacher asked what happened to the water as the child was squeezing it from the pipette onto the coffee filter. This type of question required less time for the child to process. In a subsequent investigation, the teacher asked a child to predict what might happen to water dripped onto a sheet of plastic bubble wrap. This type of question requires more thought and may take longer for a child to process the question, think about what might indeed happen, and then formulate her response.

Learning to use wait time can be difficult for teachers because it seems to slow the pace of an activity, takes time to implement, and feels uncomfortable. However, wait time is a strategy that is important in supporting children's learning and is well worth the investment. Reflect on adding wait time to your classroom practice.

Learning to use wait time has shown positive effects on both student and teacher behavior. Teachers who consciously engage in wait time report that they are using more high-level, probing questions to scaffold children's learning. This has resulted in positive student outcomes, including children becoming more actively engaged and responding with richer, more complex answers. When used intentionally, wait time supports children's learning and development. Children feel more successful, which builds their confidence, resulting in positive effects on behavior and promoting achievement.