

## Five Levels of Support for Barometer Children

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every student was independent following the 10 Steps to Independence instruction? "Ahh, yes," we think as our minds momentarily float in that pleasant day dream. The truth is, the daily routine we are embroiled in provides us with rich opportunities to practice patience and provide support to that one child (or possibly few children) who will not be successful without additional practice and scaffolding. It is worth our effort! At the end of the year, we often say "Ahh, yes." for real when we see the growth and progress that our most challenging students have made.

The specific steps we take to scaffold Barometer Children are outlined below. If you are interested in trying them out in your own classroom, we have included a condensed look at the Five Levels of support in a downloadable form following the article.

When first launching Daily 5, if the same student or students are responsible for the break in stamina for three to five days in a row...we identify them as the barometer child and move into action. The first level of support and most important, is our own reflection of the process. It would be easy to blame our students for lack of stamina, but if we have skipped any of the ten steps, then the failure is more rightfully placed on our shoulders. Teachers of older students are often tempted to skip the incorrect and correct modeling portions of the 10 Steps to Independence, yet upon reflection may discover that their students did indeed need to see the expectations clearly. Another thing that we may discover upon reflection is that we have been engaging with the barometer child, instead of staying out of their way. These students often find attention for negative behavior as valuable as attention for positive, and we don't want to get caught up in that cycle. Before we move on to the other levels of support, we make sure that the short stamina elicited by the class is not a result of our action or inaction. A trusted colleague who is willing to observe can often help you see the issue at hand.

If need be, we move to level two, Group Dynamics. We ask the barometer child to join us at recess so they can practice the behaviors on the I chart and be successful. Some teachers think we are being insensitive by verbally announcing that we noticed a certain child was having trouble with one of the behaviors on the I chart. It is critical to note that when we make this verbal statement, it is done with the utmost respect and with a very kind tone of voice. The reason we say it out loud is not so much for the barometer child, but for whole group dynamics. There are often kids in the group who are frustrated with the barometer child and will step in to take care of the situation (usually

unkindly) while we purposefully stay out of the way. We never want this behavior to escalate as it can set a negative tone for the rest of the year in our classrooms.

When the barometer child stays in from recess to practice, that is truly what they do, practice- but only for two or three minutes (goodness -- they are typically the students who need to be outside the most!). We have them tell us why they are there, and if necessary, we'll share that they are there to practice the behaviors of independence for Read to Self (or other Daily). We then set them up and move out of their way and let them practice on their own. At the end of a few minutes, we stop them and review what they just did and let them know that we are certain they will be able to be successful tomorrow and if they are not, we will practice again at recess.

This level of support helps us determine if a child is having behavior challenges because they are attention seekers or if their behaviors are more organic (something they are unable to control).

We typically continue to keep kids in from recess for three to four days if necessary, watching to see if this level of support helps change their behavior. If we see absolutely no change, we know that we need to go to the next level of support.

The next level of support for barometer children is Level 3--In Class Modifications. Once we have determined that the student is needing more support that level 2 provides, we move into offering a variety in-class modifications.

We begin by gathering tools which we have found will help students learn to become independent: a basket of square yards of different textures of fabric, sand timers of varying lengths; Kinesthetic materials the student enjoys (ex: play dough, a small bag of pattern blocks, legos or other manipulatives).

First we have the student choose a piece of fabric to sit on that feels good to them. By providing a visual and physical location to sit, highly kinesthetic and distracted children are much more likely to stay in one spot. We may place part of it against a wall so children have a surface to lean against as well.

Next, we talk with the student about reading the whole time. Since the barometer child is not able to focus and sustain reading for more than about one minute at a time, we gives the child her second tool, a one minute sand timer, which gives the visual cue of how long she must push herself to read without stopping. Thirdly, we give her a one of the manipulatives, ideally something the child enjoys or has shown interest in. We teach the barometer child that she will read until the sand runs out, flip the timer over, play with the manipulative until the sand runs out, flip the timer, read again, etc. The

manipulatives provide a kinesthetic, but quiet break for the child, and she gets back to reading after a minute, practicing the behaviors correctly.

Once the barometer child has mastered this time goal, we introduce a second timer, which is about one or two minutes longer. We mark the new timer with a "B" for "book" while the original, shorter timer, continues to be the manipulative timer. We practice with the student as she flips over the "B" timer while she reads, and then uses the other timer while she takes her brain break. The student continues to practice with the timers until we see she is able to sustain independence with the new, longer timer. Then we substitute the "B" timer for an even longer timer. By slowly increasing the length of time the barometer child is reading, interspersed with kinesthetic brain breaks, they are able to build stamina at a pace that works best for them.

It is not uncommon for other children to want to have a piece of fabric or manipulatives as well. We explain that these are simply tools, and while anyone is welcome to use a square of fabric, the other tools are reserved for people who have a different plan to help them reach their goals.

We've found that once their stamina is developed, these children outgrow their need for the items and willingly give them up. It is always our desire to have children be able to participate in Daily 5 without tools, so we work individually with each child to find the best time for that.

There will be times when our most challenging students will need extra support from us, even after they have moved away from using the tools. We call this 4th level of support In class Gradual Release of Modifications. Simply stated, this method involves 'sandwiching' a quick touch-base with a child in between each small guided group and individual conferences. Once we have completed a small guided group, we quietly walk by the barometer child and do a quick check-in, asking them how it's going, offering a word of encouragement or a bit of support. This is done on the way to our first individual conference. At the end of the first conference, we swing by our barometer child again, doing a touch-base similar to above. We continue this process during the whole round of Daily 5.

The act of sandwiching a quick touch-base in between small group and individual instruction gives the child just enough support to help them be considerably more successful than they would be if we expected them to do a complete round of Daily 5 independently. Level 4 Support for our Barometer children is just one of the reasons we no longer sit at a table or on the floor and call students over to us. We use that

'walking to my next conference' time to respectfully offer proactive support to our most at-risk students.

In conjunction with Level 4 -- In Class Gradual Release of Modification, we may have to add our last Level of support for our barometer children, Level 5-Whole School Support. Often we find that our barometer child has made wonderful growth, yet there are days which are still challenging for this child to make it through one full round of Daily 5, let alone 3 rounds! This is when we rely on the support of friends and colleagues.

We begin this Whole School Support by sharing a photo and introducing our barometer child to the rest of the staff so they can become partners with us. We then ask another staff member or two to be our direct partner.

During Level 4 'sandwiching' support for our barometer child, if she communicates to us that she doesn't think she can make it the rest of the round we ask her to do a 'walkabout' and run some errands for us. We have prearranged with our direct partners that our barometer child will periodically be coming to their room to deliver some books. We have the books in a stack with our direct partner's name and room number on them. The student's job is to deliver the books and then return to class to re-join Daily 5 after this walk about break.

The reason we may need to introduce the barometer child to the rest of the staff is two-fold: 1) we want them to know the child has our permission to be out and about delivering books and 2) we want to surround sound this child with comments such as: 'Wow, thanks so much for delivering those books, what's your plan when you go back in your room?'

Working together as a team and surrounding our barometer children with adults who support them is one of the greatest gifts we can give our most at risk students.