

Regulating Impulsive Reactions When Writing

Modules:	<i>Health and well-being</i>
Topic:	<i>Regulating impulsive reactions when writing</i>
Title:	<i>Immediate or delayed response: Learning to regulate one's impulses in the digital context</i>
Target group:	<i>Middle and high school</i>
Starting Point:	<i>Students often write content in the digital context immediately and impulsively, forgetting they are addressing people with emotions (even with anonymous accounts). It is often not considered or even known that what is written in the digital context is unchangeable and accessible forever. Therefore, what is said, especially in written form, should be reflected upon again and checked for constructiveness before publication. It is not always beneficial to react immediately to (negative) messages.</i>
Aim:	<i>Students develop a sense of how to interact with others in the digital context in a considerate way and what rules need to be followed. They are also aware of the irrevocability in the digital context and therefore act reflectively and thoughtfully. The students learn that sometimes it can be better not to react immediately to a message.</i>
Implementation:	<i>The exercise can be used in class and as homework.</i>
Estimated Duration:	<i>1-2 lessons</i>

More detailed content and instructions:

In this exercise, students receive a frustrating message in a thought experiment. The aim is to see how they react to it.

In class:

The teacher presents the students with a frustrating message from an anonymous person, which they received on Instagram (thought experiment). Before showing the message, it is important to explicitly warn students that it is an offensive, hurtful message, but that it is purely fictional. Students should try to empathise with such a situation, but they should not feel personally attacked or hurt by it. This message could read as follows:

Alternative 1:

Yesterday I saw you at school again and wondered how you can walk around so ugly. The clothes you always wear are from another time and my eyes hurt when I look at you. I wanted you to know that.

Now take just 30 seconds to reply to this message.

Alternative 2:

You're so stupid, you really can't get anything right. You don't even get the easiest things in English. I don't want to be in a group with you anyway, you're so bad!

Now take just 30 seconds to reply to this message.

1. The students have only 30 seconds to answer this message in writing.
2. When the time is up, they have 5 minutes to distance themselves from it. Thus, there will be a short break of 5 minutes in which something else can be done in class (e.g., collect homework or similar).
3. Then the students are again asked to write down how they would now respond to the message. Is there a difference between the immediate response and the delayed response?
The second answer can also be discussed and written together with another person.
4. Let the students think about it and reflect together in the classroom. Students' impressions can be shared.
5. Ask the students what else they would do if they received such a message and how they would deal with it.

As homework:

1. Give the students the message and tell them to set a timer at home for 30 seconds to respond to the message.
2. Afterwards, they should leave their desk for 5 minutes and do something else.
3. Then they have to go back to the task and write another response to the message. In order to control the task a bit better, it would also be possible to send the message to students in the afternoon via teams/email, so that the students do not read the message earlier and already think about how to answer it. In addition, a time frame could be set for when the answer has to be uploaded at the latest.

When the students have finished, they should answer the following questions in writing:

- How did you feel when you read the message for the first time?
- What was your intention when you first wrote a response?
- How did you feel re-reading the message after the 5-minute break?
- What was your intention when you wrote a response the second time?
- Was there a difference between the first and the second message you wrote?
- What do you think is the best thing to do when you receive a message like this?

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS:

- **CAUTION:** It is important to consider which texts are appropriate or perhaps too emotional for this specific class. No student should feel offended by the text. This task should only be done with classes in which the teacher can judge well whether someone would feel offended by it.
- If students' answers are shared with the class, it is important to maintain anonymity and not, for example, simply read out individuals' answers, but only read them out anonymously. If the exercise is used in the classroom, students' answers could be collected anonymously.
- **ALTERNATIVE:** It would also be possible not to answer the same message twice, but to answer one message immediately impulsively, and to answer a second message after 5 minutes.
- As homework, the exercise can be more difficult to do because the process is not well controlled.
- If the task is set as homework, it can be helpful to discuss it afterwards in the classroom so that students can reflect on the experience.
- Responding with a partner or as a group could also lead to less impulsive responses. Seeking help, or discussing a message with others can then also be discussed as a potential coping strategy when faced with negative messages.