

Classroom Management

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In our book, *Research Into Practice: Implementing Effective Teaching Strategies*, Alan Hofmeister and I placed the Classroom Management chapter at the end for a good reason. The chapters on planning, time management, teaching functions, academic feedback, and academic monitoring all precede the chapter on classroom management in order to emphasize that effective teaching strategies designed to promote learning are the best way to facilitate classroom order. When students are actively and successfully engaged, they have less of a need to inappropriately seek attention or avoid difficult tasks. To ensure that students are actively engaged and experiencing success, teachers must:

- maintain appropriate curriculum and instructional pacing,
- check for pre-requisite skills and review daily,
- clearly present new content and provide guided and independent practice, and
- conduct weekly and monthly reviews.

The goal of a positive, structured, classroom management system should not be to control student behavior or reduce misbehavior. Rather, the goal of a well-designed and well-implemented classroom management plan is to maintain an environment in which effective and efficient instruction can be maximized.

Setting Rules

Setting rules and establishing contingencies ensures productive interactions between teaching procedures and student behavior. It is critical to communicate to students that the teacher has a serious commitment to learning and thus a high commitment to maintaining an environment conducive to learning. Establishing a set of rules serves as an advanced organizer with regard to expected behavior for students.

As a guide, give students four to five general classroom rules stated in terms of desired behaviors which contribute to the learning environment. The literature suggests that it is unwise to let the students establish these rules. You may also need to develop a short set of rules for the different environments the students will encounter during the day, such as on the playground, working in small groups, and transitioning. As you develop the rules, include a brief rationale for each of them. For example, the reason for *raising your hand to talk* is that during formal classes it saves time and prevents confusion. Also, it makes it easier for everyone to listen and learn.

Remember to share your room rules with parents and administrators and ask them for their support.

Teaching Behavioral Expectations

Contrary to traditional beliefs, teaching behavioral expectations is not a waste of time. Teach behavioral expectations in the same way that you teach instructional concepts, i.e., by presenting and reviewing the concepts, as well as providing guided and independent practice. Remember that knowing what to do and



actually doing it can be two different things—students need practice. In the long run, you will save time. Take transitions between classes as an example. If you teach students the way to move in an orderly fashion between classes, you will decrease the time that it takes to do so.

Teaching behavioral expectations also helps children learn how to be accepted in social settings. Teaching students classroom rules is the first step in teaching group social skills. When students understand, respect and follow the rules, they develop self-discipline and determination. Thus a positive climate is established where learning can occur. Students need to develop skills that provide them with positive appropriate alternatives for getting their needs met.

Establishing and Delivering Contingencies

Establishing contingencies for when students follow rules as well as for when they do not, is equally critical in establishing a proactive classroom management system that supports effective instruction. Define problem behaviors such as “talking during seatwork,” and also define the complementary desired behavior such as, “working quietly.” Pre-define the consequences for problem behavior and appropriate behavior and inform the students. Make certain that the consequences are reasonable and can be easily and quickly carried out.

Students must receive powerful, high probability reinforcers (more than just verbal praise) for following expected behaviors. This does not mean that you must provide costly, tangible rewards but it does mean that you carefully determine what is meaningful to each particular group of students be it free-time, computer-time, or inexpensive tangible rewards. Focus on increasing appropriate behavior and inappropriate behavior will decrease.

Most schools have a handbook with rules and negative consequences for breaking those rules. An effective classroom manager will document the same information but also include pre-planned positive contingencies. Doing so facilitates an increase in appropriate behavior and makes it easier to deal with inappropriate behavior quickly and in a business-like manner. A business-like manner is one where the rules are appropriate, documented, and understood, and consequences are well-planned and performance-based. Managing classroom behavior in this manner seeks to avoid personal confrontations and focuses on the behavior and serves to preserve a child's self-esteem. This will also permit you to spend a higher percent of your time on instruction rather than being distracted by misbehavior.

Both reward (positive) and cost (negative) consequences or contingencies need to be developmentally appropriate. That means there may be different contingencies for a first grader and a sixth grader. The mantra I used with my self-contained students with emotional disturbance was "fair but not always equal." Post the rules and enforce the contingencies.

You must be ready to act immediately when rules are broken. To establish credibility, the teacher must be viewed as an effective manager. When a student misbehaves, deliver the pre-planned contingency and restate the rule or the desired behavior, i.e., "Next time remember to stay in your seat." Be prepared to interact with the student in appropriate ways:

- Provide corrective feedback in a quiet private manner that allows students to maintain their dignity.
- Don't make threats about inappropriate behavior and intended consequences, "if you do that one more time you will lose your points."
- Avoid personal confrontations, invitations, and pleading like "How many times have I told you to stay in your seat? Please do it for me." The problem with getting personal control over a child's behavior is that it will not generalize to other people and other settings.

Predicting Misbehavior

Although effective instruction focuses on increasing appropriate behavior, part of the planning and implementation of a classroom management system is anticipating who will misbehave and when. For example, it is likely that higher ability students will be tempted to misbehave near the end of instructional segments because they are "bored," while lower ability students are more likely to be off task during the middle of an instructional segment because they are frustrated. If this is what you anticipate, you may plan to increase your vigilance during those times and tasks or to provide small group or individualized instruction for that material.

Monitoring Student Behavior

Monitoring student behavior is an important piece of any classroom management system. Your physical placement in the classroom is critical for effectively observing student behavior. Some sample monitoring strategies your classroom management system should include are:

- Don't get stuck in your chair behind your desk. Monitor [student] behavior by walking around (MBWA).
- Make timely contacts with students focused on keeping them on-task.
- Structure your schedule so that you are actively monitoring student behavior during transition times.
- Schedule your personal breaks or class preparation at other times during the school day.
- Watch how groups operate, observe individual student conduct and track the pace, rhythm, and duration of classroom events. This data will help you to decide if instructional events are appropriate for the developmental level of the students. For example, two 15-minute seatwork sessions might be more appropriate for younger students than one 30-minute seatwork session.

Plan to collect and use data to determine whether the interventions you are using are working. You will need two types of data— implementation data and results data. Implementation data will help you to determine if you are consistently executing the contingencies as designed and results data will help you to

know whether an inappropriate behavior is decreasing or an inappropriate behavior is increasing.

Sample Classroom Management Ideas

This section will introduce some ideas for strategies to include in your classroom management system.

Administrative rules and procedures.

- Develop a fixed seating arrangement so that attendance can be taken quickly.
- Establish routines for assigning, checking, and collecting work.
- Review and return independent work (homework) daily.
- Establish specific consequences for failing to complete and turn in assignments on time.
- Communicate with students and parents immediately if a student misses assignments.
- Provide procedures and space for storing student's personal belongings. In many cases, it is better if those personal belongings are stored somewhere other than in the student's desk.
- Establish written procedures and activities for the first week of school as well as for new students who enter the class during the school year.

Student movement rules and procedures.

- Place desks in a layout that facilitates movement about the room. Make sure, for example, that students can easily get to the pencil sharpener, storage area, doorway, and small group presentation areas.
- Establish rules and consequences for walking quietly about the room.
- Manage the number of students moving about the room at any one time

Unobtrusive signals.

Unobtrusive signals help you maintain the pace while providing the least invasive approach to dealing with behavior problems. The key to using unobtrusive signals is to quickly terminate an utterance or action without interrupting the lesson. Gently but firmly, nip it in the bud.

- Stand close to a student's desk.
- Make eye contact.
- Point to the student's worksheet.
- Make brief commands or requests, "Wait," "My turn," "Mary's turn," "Stop."

Winding up and winding down.

Plan winding up and winding down activities as interventions to get students on task and prepare them for transitions.

- A good wind-up activity for the beginning of a class is a three-minute timing on math facts.
- A good wind-down activity is a large group review session.

Ignoring when appropriate.

Ignoring inappropriate behavior is the best first strategy for dealing with inappropriate behavior whenever it is feasible to do so. Ignore the behavior when: (a) the problem is not likely to escalate, (b) the problem is a minor deviation of a rule, (c) handling the problem would seriously interrupt the flow of the lesson, and (d) other students are not involved.

Remember that matching interventions to behaviors begins with a least-to-most invasive approach. For additional information on classroom behavioral interventions, I recommend that the reader refer to the Least Restrictive Behavior Interventions (LRBI) manual as well as other readily-available USOE resources.

In Conclusion

Set rules, post them in your classroom, actively teach students the behavioral expectations, and consistently provide established contingencies in a business-like manner. When you do so, students will quickly learn there is no place for inappropriate and disruptive behavior and you will create a positive climate where students can make desired progress. Leaving no child behind academically requires that we provide effective instruction and positive classroom management. ■