



Be Proactive in Managing Classroom Behavior

ANDREA M. BABKIE

Classroom management is often one of the most challenging aspects of teaching, particularly for those new to the field. This article provides teachers with simple ideas to proactively manage behavior and the classroom in general rather than having to react after a problem occurs. Herein are tips for managing the instructional environment to increase positive academic and behavioral outcomes, as well as specifics about using behavioral techniques as preventive measures. Though designed primarily for teachers working at the elementary school level, the tips can be applied universally.

1

Clarify rules so that students fully understand your expectations from the beginning.

Make sure the rules are clear, simple, number no more than five, and are stated in a positive format. In other words, tell students what to do rather than what not to do. This allows for a focus on praise rather than on punishment.

2

Be consistent both in enforcing rules and in managing the classroom.

This allows students to feel comfortable knowing that your behavior and responses are predictable.

3

Make clear boundaries for acceptable student interactions with you and with peers.

Be sure to reinforce these boundaries on an ongoing basis so that students are certain about class expectations for interactions. Remember that you are not your students' friend; you are their teacher. Although you can be sympathetic and supportive, your primary role is to teach. Sometimes, especially with new teachers, boundaries become blurred, and this can lead to student uncertainty about classroom limits and an increased likelihood of potential management problems.

4

Use routines for all classroom activities so students know what to do at all times.

Where to put materials, when to transition, what the schedule is, and so on, should be familiar and routine to all students. Using routines allows students increased comfort levels.

5

Organize the classroom and materials in a way that avoids clutter and that allows

students to know where to find items and where to return them. For teachers, an organized classroom means less time searching for materials and more time instructing. Make sure to teach organizational skills as part of your daily routine.

6

Cue students as to what comes next. Teach them a set of cues you will use to let them know when you want a certain response. For example, you may use a cue (e.g., at the early elementary level, use clapping rhythms) to let students know the classroom volume level is getting too high.

7

Teach students transitioning skills. Essentially, teach students how to change from one activity to another and from one location to another. This goes back to the concept of having routines, but beyond that, it involves teaching a set of skills for students to use. This may be done in various ways, such as introducing a set of procedures and practicing those with students; teaching and reinforcing cues; or teaching specific strategies that by themselves can become one-word cues when mastered by students. Teach the **CHANGE** (Babkie, 2005) strategy to help students learn transitioning skills:

Collect my materials and put them away
Have ready what I need for the next activity
Always watch my teacher for cues to move
Now take my seat quietly
Get my materials out and ready for the next activity
Encourage my peers to get started

8

Teach cognitive strategies for student success in various academic and social environments. These strategies must be taught directly and practiced often. Teach students each part of the strategy by using demonstrating, prompting, and practicing techniques. Teach to mastery level and beyond, and make sure to include a rationale so students know why learning the strategy is useful or necessary. One example of such a strategy was just shown; another is **CREATE** (Babkie & Provost, 2002). Using such strategies not only provides guidelines for students but also decreases requests for teacher assistance or off-task behavior.

Writing: **CREATE**

Consider my options for writing
Reach a decision about my subject
Examine and list supporting details
Atract my audience with a topic sentence
Try to write at least three supporting details
Erase, revise, and correct my errors

9

Pace lessons on the basis of student needs and responses. If students are clearly struggling with a concept, it may be necessary to change the planned lesson and reteach in a different way. If students are demonstrating off-task behavior, consider either increasing or decreasing the pace, depending on the consistency and content of student responses.



10

Alter the workload for students' experiencing difficulty in completing their work rather than punishing them for lack of completion. Consider the purpose of the activity or worksheet and determine what constitutes demonstration of mastery. For example, is mastery completing 50 math problems or could 10 serve the same purpose? Allowing for such individualization based on student needs leads to more purposeful learning and also potentially alleviates confrontational and negative interactions between you and your students.

11

Ensure active engagement by making learning purposeful. Provide a rationale for real-world use, match the content taught to students' levels, consider students' interests in planning instruc-

tion, and plan activity-based instruction rather than worksheets or lectures. Students who are actively engaged are less likely to be off task and present management problems.



12

Encourage multiple means of responding by offering alternatives to pencil-and-paper tasks for demonstrating mastery. For example, students interested in art could create a drawing or other art-based response; others could use music, poetry, or technology in designing their responses. Again, evaluate the purpose of the instruction to determine what would constitute demonstration of mastery.

13

Evaluate the function of inappropriate and unacceptable behavior to determine how the behavior benefits the student. Does it serve as an escape from work? Does it gain attention? Knowing the reason why a behavior is maintained or continued helps you decide how to manage it. With that knowledge, you can then select positive alternate behaviors from the student's repertoire and reinforce those alternate behaviors to gain the student the same response achieved by the inappropriate behaviors. A number of sources provide a more detailed description of functional behavioral assessment (see the resources section at the end of this article).

14

Collect data or information to determine when the inappropriate/unacceptable behavior occurs (time of day, content areas), with whom (a particular teacher, another student, a group of students), and how often (daily, times per day) to establish possible triggers or antecedents for the behavior. Also collect data on what happens after the behavior occurs (the consequences a given behavior brings the student). Data collection helps you determine why the behavior is occurring and continuing. This knowledge will assist you in developing a plan to change the circumstances during which problem behavior occurs.

15

Use antecedent control by changing the environment and other variables you have identified in your analysis of the function of the behavior and your data collection. For example, if you have determined that a student misbehaves during math time, perhaps the content is too easy or too difficult; the surrounding students bother the target student; or the time of day is the problem. Deciding which variables can be changed and changing them allows you to handle the problem behavior by preventing it from happening rather than having to react after it has occurred.

16

Redirect students by prompting appropriate behavior using the cues and strategies previously noted, as well as intervening as soon as you see potential problems developing. If students are off task, for example, you can move quietly to where they are (proximity control) or provide information if they need assistance getting started or returning to work. Remember, when redirecting students, it is important to do so without embarrassing or calling attention to them.

17

Consider group dynamics when planning activities, organizing groups, and making seating arrangements; also identify potential bullying situations. In general, this helps you know who the leaders and the followers are in your classroom. Group dynamics influence the classroom climate on the basis of interactions of individuals or groups of students. Being aware of and influencing group dynamics helps you prevent potential problem situations and

allows you to create a climate in which all students feel comfortable.

18

Design contracts, if necessary, in which you and the student examine the behavior of concern and determine together how to change it. Contracts should specify not only what a student will do but also what you as the teacher will do to assist the student in meeting his or her goals. Many articles and books have been written on the subject of contracting (see the resources section at the end of this article).

19

Be respectful at all times toward students. Respect given leads to respect gained. For example, use quiet individual discussion with students but don't call out students on their misbehavior in front of the class, use appropriate language when speaking with students, avoid sarcasm, and speak to students at their physical level (e.g., crouching down rather than looming over). One way to analyze your level of respect is to consider how you wish to be treated and use that as a guideline in working with your students.

20

Ensure that students feel comfortable and capable and that they consider themselves contributing members of the classroom. By considering all of these tips, you will have made a good start toward this goal.

Persons interested in submitting material for *20 Ways To . . .* should contact Robin H. Lock, College of Education, Box 41071, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 76409-1701.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea M. Babkie, EdD, is an assistant professor of special education at the University of Hartford. Address: Andrea M. Babkie, 434 Beach Curve St., Lantana, FL 33462.

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