8 Effective Classroom Practices
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Whether you teach in a school, forest, prairie, or garden it is helpful to know about and be able to use effective classroom practices. The "8 Effective Practices" outlined below are borrowed from the Missouri School-Wide Positive Behavior Support program (SW-PBS). For non-formal educators working with school groups, consider asking teachers if they participate in an SW-PBS or similar program and then ask them what their expectations and procedures are. Using them in your programs may minimize inappropriate behavior.

The philosophy that guides this approach is that students, for the most part, want positive attention from adults. However, if students don't understand what is expected, it increases the opportunities for them to mess up. This increases the times they get negative attention instead of positive attention, which increases their likelihood of seeking the negative attention because it is the only kind they are getting, or shutting down, and it goes downhill from there.

Instead of having students have to figure out on their own what your expectations are, you figure them out, write them down, post them, refer to them regularly, teach them and praise the students when they meet them. Most students will respond well and learn more, leaving you time to provide assistance to the students who need it more. Win Win!

8 Effective Practices

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1. Have Clear Expectations of the Students.
Think about how you want students to behave when you are teaching them. What are three to five global expectations you have? Here are some examples: respectful, ready, safe, responsible, thinking, attentive, helpful, problem solvers, learners, and so on. Write down and post your expectations in clear forceful positive language and post them were students can see them. Refer to them during teaching. For example: "River Rat students are Safe, Cooperative and Responsible!" or "Tree House students are learners, solvers and doers!".

If you teach with others in a school, park, nature center or similar environment, it is much more effective if you-as a group-discuss and agree on what your expectations are. Then you need to agree on the language and how it is presented. Again, expectations should be written down, posted and referred to regularly.

Consistency is very important in helping students learn what your expectations are and in reducing the number of times students behave inappropriately.

2. Procedures, Routines and Rules Based on Your Expectations
Here you get down to specifics. You need to have Observable, Measurable, Positively stated, Understandable, Always applicable (aka OMPUA) procedures for students to follow in all settings.

Think in detail about what takes place in a normal school day or in the course of a program at your park or facility. Picture how students should move from room to room or get off the bus, how they should behave at their desks or in the amphitheater, how they should go to the cafeteria, or behave on a hike, what they should do when they have a question, when they have to go to the bathroom, when they are handling animals or artifacts. Outline the procedure using OMPUA guidelines. Teach the procedure using Tell, Show, Practice. For example:

**Expectation:** Responsible  
**Procedure:** Cleaning up after lunch  
**Definition:** Cleaning up after lunch is when students dispose of all the remains of their lunch in the correct bins once they are done  
**Steps:**
1. when the teacher signals, stand up, look at where you were sitting and gather up the remains of lunch, wrappers, containers, peels and other stuff  
2. move quietly, keeping hands and feet (and your lunch remains) to yourself, to the recycling and trash bins  
3. put recyclables into the recycling bin and other stuff into the trash bin (this assumes you already taught them the difference between the two)  
4. afterwards, proceed quietly and quickly to the next station (back to where they were, an amphitheater or trailhead)

Encouragement strategies  
group praise or positive feedback - individual praise or feedback - time the transition and compare positively to other groups’ times - provide special activity they now have time for because they did it so well - provide a privilege
Discouragement strategies
have group go back and do over because they left stuff - let them know they have less time for special activities - have them reflect on how they could do better

It may be helpful to think about the times when things did not go smoothly. What instructions were given before hand? Did they follow OMPUA guidelines? Did you tell, show, practice?

You may think this is overkill, because everyone should know this stuff already. However, students come into learning situations with all kinds of backgrounds and a significant number may not have been in a situation where someone showed them how to take care of their own trash, or even that trash needed to be taken care of. Telling, showing and practicing how things are done at your facility will relieve a lot of anxiety and minimize the times that students behave inappropriately.

3. Encouraging Expected Behavior
To be effective, the ratio of positive attention to negative attention should be close to 4:1. Keep in mind what Ben Franklin is supposed to have said, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar".

Non-contingent attention - This does not depend on specific things the student does, but it does reinforce student feelings of trust and confidence in the teacher
- greeting - smiling - making conversation - sharing a task

Contingent attention - This happens after students have met expectations, including basic ones, like moving quietly and quickly to the next task. It is extremely important that contingent attention include social behavior as well as academic behavior.

- **Exhibit preferred adult behaviors (social behavior).** These convey caring, warmth, concern and respect for students
  - proximity - listening - eye contact - pleasant voice - smiles - touch - use of student's name

- **Provide positive feedback. This should:**
  - be specific, describe the behavior you are praising
  - provide a rationale, why it is important
  - can include a positive consequence
  - be sincere and age appropriate
  - be contingent, only given when students display the appropriate behavior
  - be immediate, it as soon as possible after the behavior is displayed
  - be frequent when you are trying to establish the behavior
  - can be intermittent and unpredictable after behavior is established

Tangible re-enforcers. These can be used to enhance the effect of positive attention. They include things like tickets, stickers, stars, certificates or similar items. They can be given at the same time positive feedback is given, or positive behaviors can be tracked to earn a specific level of achievement at the end of the program, day, week, month or year. The value of the reward may be less important than its signifying recognition of the good behavior.

4. Discouraging Inappropriate Behavior
One of the most ineffective ways to get students to behave is to verbally scold or punish them in front of their peers. Instead, inappropriate behavior should be thought of as a teaching opportunity.

Once expectations, procedures and encouragement have been thought through, it is time to think about what steps to take when a student misbehaves. There needs to be a continuum of responses for the full range of behaviors that might potentially occur.

**Identify Inappropriate Behaviors** - Start by listing the most serious behaviors from most to least serious

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Behaviors that affect safety</th>
<th>2. Behaviors that disrupt class but are not unsafe</th>
<th>3. Behaviors that interfere with individual students’ learning but don’t affect anyone else</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>weapons possession or turning a tool into a weapon</td>
<td>abusive language</td>
<td>truancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fighting or assault</td>
<td>acting out or clowning around</td>
<td>leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possession of controlled substance</td>
<td>defiance of instructor</td>
<td>non-compliance with instructions or not on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theft or vandalism</td>
<td>bothering other students</td>
<td>chronic behaviors</td>
</tr>
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**Identify Who Handles It** - Decide where you, or where your facility will draw the line between you handling the behavior alone to interventions that require additional staff, parents, administrators and so on. It is important for everyone to be on the same page about which student behaviors require a particular intervention.

1. Behaviors that affect safety – Most likely students who would do this are not at your facility, but just in case, have a plan for their immediate safe removal by school or facility staff. Ideally the school will have a policy for dealing with the child or youth. You can find more detail in this source - http://pbismissouri.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/C6-Discour_Inapp_Behavior.pdf?9d7bd4
2. Behaviors that disrupt the class but are not unsafe – See below, but have a plan for safe removal if intervention does not work.
3. Behaviors that interfere with the individual student’s learning – See below
Managing minor misbehavior
- **proximity control**, stand next to student, but in a positive, supportive, non-menacing way
- **touch** control, gently touching shoulder or back of chair to help student regain control
- **signal or non-verbal cue**, eye contact, hand gesture, hand clap, throat clearing, finger snap, all indicating awareness of the behavior and readiness to intervene if the student cannot regain control (they want to be back in control, your job is to help them)
- **Ignore/Attend/Praise**, ignore the misbehaving student, briefly, specifically and sincerely praise an appropriately behaving student in proximity to the misbehaving student

More direct intervention (done in the order presented, always use student's name, be kind, sincere, private)
- **re-direct**, brief, specific, **private** restatement of the desired behavior, what you want them to do, not why, be sure and follow up with praise if they comply - while private is good, alone is not, always be within site of other staff or students
- **re-teach**, label the behavior or skill you want them to demonstrate, show them how to do it (if need be) and pause to give them time to comply, follow that by brief, specific and sincere praise
- **provide choice** - offer two choices, the behavior you want or a less desirable behavior, like having to do the activity later, perhaps during recess, pause to give the student time to comply, then praise them if they choose wisely
- **student conference**, for when the behavior is more frequent or intense, this is a lengthier re-teaching (tell, show, practice) that states the behavior you are not getting, what you need them to do and why and then re-teaching, asking them how you can help them and then asking the student for a commitment

Additional consequences should be
- **NOT warnings**, misbehaviors should automatically lead to consequences
- **NOT punitive** (don't take privileges away)
- **educational**, like a different way to learn the material, perhaps less interactive and more rote
- **mildly aversive**, requiring more effort from the student, like copying out a passage
- **consistent**, this is more important than the size of the consequence
- **fitting** to the student and the circumstance
- **logical**, see educational above, the goal is for the student to learn something, a logical consequence is a different way to learn

5. Active Supervision
Active supervision involves continuously monitoring student behavior and engagement to reinforce your expectations, provide support and encouragement to students and to create a positive environment for learning. There are three characteristics of active supervision.

Moving - This involves repositioning yourself around the classroom or educational setting on a continual basis. You should avoid staying in one place for any length of time, even when lecturing and even when the students are doing individual work. You should be moving around, establishing a positive and supportive presence and nipping inappropriate behavior in the bud.

Scanning - This involves frequently and intentionally scanning the room to assess what students are doing and how engaged they are in their academic activities. This should be done whether you are lecturing, working with small groups or moving around the room as recommended in the previous section.

Interacting - This involved interacting in positive ways with the students to establish their trust. You should practice the preferred adult behaviors listed in 3 above:
  - proximity  - listening  - eye contact  - pleasant voice  - smiles  - touch  - use of student's name

6. Providing Opportunities to Respond (OTR)
The more time students spend in active learning situations like writing, answering questions or reading out loud, instead of passive situations like listening, the more they learn. How much time should be given opportunities to respond (OTR)? Commonly it is recommended that teachers only spend about 50% of their time on presentation and use the rest for OTR.

OTR strategies -
Verbal responses to questions
  - **individual questioning** - call on students randomly, pull names from a hat, ask a different student to re-state an answer given by a student, or add to an answer
  - **choral responses** - used to review, teach new material, morning drill or lesson summary - questions should have only one right answer, there should be wait time after the prompt, use a clear signal to tell students it is time to chime in, keep pace lively, provide immediate feedback on group response

Wait time - ask question, count to 5 slowly, call on someone
Non-verbal responses - students write answers, use response cards or respond with clickers or similar technology, provide and discuss the right answer
Guided notes - teacher prepared handouts with places for students to fill in key information
7. Changing Sequence or Offering Choice
Sometimes students just don’t want to do the activities as presented, even if they are capable of handling the work. Sequencing and offering choices are ways to engage students in the academic work and to help keep them away from mischief.

Activity Sequencing
• **Task Interspersal** - This involves mixing in easier tasks with more difficult ones. Easier tasks may include review of material already learned, or familiar readings or problems. More difficult tasks include learning completely new material, doing more challenging reading or problems, or tackling a big project. Interspersed items should be things students have truly mastered. A ratio of 1 mastered to 3 new tasks seems to work.
• **Behavior Momentum** - This involves starting with easy tasks and gradually making the tasks more difficult. The positive feedback gained from the early success with the tasks will help carry students through the initial difficulties of the newer or more challenging tasks. The easy tasks do not need to be related to the difficult task.

Choice - Choice can be incorporated into tasks, assignments and activities in a number of ways
• **Type of Activity** - Within the limits set by time and resources, let students decide which steps of an activity to work on first.
• **Materials Used** - Think about whether the assignment can be done with pencil and paper, a computer, or some other approach.
• **Whom to Work With** - This can be tricky, so it is helpful to know your students well before allowing them this option.
• **Where to Work** – This may be relatively easy to implement depending on how your space is organized.
• **What to do Next** - Be sure you have the resources and materials you need if lots of students choose the same "next" activity.

8. Reducing Task Difficulty
From the student’s perspective, school is a lot of demanding work, some of which they may not be prepared for. Feeling stupid can be a major contributor to misbehavior. So it is important to find where the student is and set a task they can be successful at so they can proceed through tasks to complete what they need to. Below are strategies for making tasks initially easier and then for helping students with fluency and mastery of tasks.

**Assignment Length or Time**
shorten the assignment so the student can demonstrate mastery with fewer items - highlight the problems the student needs to solve, so s/he is not distracted by other items - shorten work periods and have other assignments in-between - provide physical breaks for difficult assignments - provide alternative times for students to work on the assignment

**Response Mode**
choice between written or oral response - allow students to dictate answers to someone - create guided notes for a written assignment - allow students to tape record answers - allow other creative modes of responding, pictures, dioramas, etc.

**Reading**
include illustrations - highlight or underline important words or text - create guided notes - provide text on tape so students can read along as they listen - assign a partner to help (the partner can benefit from showing and helping the other student)

**Increased Instruction or Practice**
arrange for additional brief instruction using *modeling-guided practice-independent practice* - arrange for a peer tutor to help with practicing - use partner work to build fluency with flash cards - use real life examples for application and use for building mastery

*touch – The best places are the upper arm, elbow and forearm from the front or side, very gently! Occasionally the top of the shoulder, but the back of a chair is better. Students who don’t have control of their emotions can easily misunderstand the gesture. High-Fives and Fist-Bumps are great for encouragement and praise. Probably best to stay away from hugging unless you know student really well.*