

The Teacher's Pocket Guide for Effective Classroom Management

Second Edition

by

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Baltimore • London • Sydney

Excerpted from The Teacher's Pocket Guide for Effective Classroom Management, Second Edition
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Brookes Publishing | www.brookespublishing.com | 1-800-638-3775

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So Who Is This Guy?

Tim Knoster, Ed.D., is a professor and chairperson of the Department of Exceptionality Programs in the College of Education at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Knoster, in collaboration with colleagues, established the McDowell Institute for Teacher Excellence in Positive Behavior Support at Bloomsburg University in 2012, which emphasizes the translation of research on positive behavior intervention and support into practical application for practice by teachers in schools. In addition, Dr. Knoster has served as executive director of the international Association for Positive Behavior Support (APBS) since its inception in 2003. Dr. Knoster (or Tim, as he prefers) has been involved with preservice and in-service teacher training since the mid-1980s. He has worn many hats throughout his career, including that of classroom teacher, director of student support services and special education, and principal investigator on federal projects focused on classroom and student-centered behavior intervention and support. Specifically relevant to this book, Dr. Knoster has extensive experience in providing professional development for classroom teachers throughout the United States and Canada and has been the recipient of various awards for his endeavors in this regard. He has extensively published manuscripts, training materials, and other practitioner-oriented resources concerning the linkages among research, policy, and practice in the classroom. Dr. Knoster has an uncanny ability to help teachers interpret the research literature on behavioral matters in



a way that enables them to translate that same research into practical strategies and approaches in their classrooms. Along these same lines, Dr. Knoster has a national reputation of being a dynamic advocate, leader, and presenter concerning classroom management and student-centered behavior intervention and support.

So How Do I Prevent Problem Behavior in My Classroom?

Your perspective, whether limited to your classroom or considered more broadly in life, directly affects how you interpret the events in your daily life. Developing perspective is a funny thing because it is a highly personalized experience and, much like art, interpreted by the eye of the beholder. Mark Twain has been credited with saying, “It ain’t what you don’t know that will get you in trouble, it’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.” Simply stated, a terminal degree of certainty is a dangerous thing to have about anything, most specifically about human behavior. The reality is that you will be unable to prevent inappropriate behavior from ever occurring in your classroom—unless either each of your students is Mother Teresa or your classroom has no students. Rather, what you can do is establish a few basic operating procedures that will enhance the learning environment in a way that can dramatically reduce the likelihood of both nuisance and problem behaviors.

Nuisance behaviors are those that in and of themselves are essentially inconsequential, such as a student’s appearing fidgety and calling out to get your attention as opposed to raising his or her hand. It is often inconsequential behavior that should be ignored that, however,

historically (or perhaps hysterically) has been known to get strong adverse reactions from teachers.

Yet problem behavior must be immediately stopped, and the student must be redirected to act in a more appropriate manner. For example, a student who is taking materials from another student must be told by the teacher, “Stop taking John’s book and answer sheet. I want you to open your own book and do your work on your own.” Perspective—*your* perspective to be specific—comes into play in understanding that inappropriate behaviors are not always equal and, realistically, you will never be able to control all student behavior. This may seem like an odd statement from someone providing guidance on classroom management, but it is an important concept to understand because it can dramatically affect your perspective and subsequent approach to classroom management.

One of my personal pet peeves with regard to classroom (behavior) management comes from the term *management*, which has become commonplace in the field.

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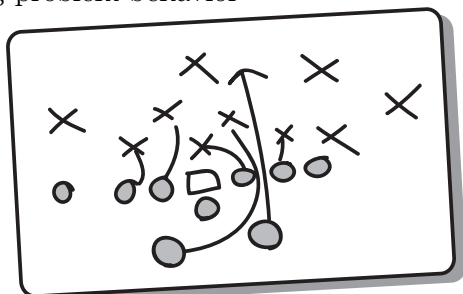
The very term implies this false notion of control in that it suggests that you will manage your students as if they were collectively nothing more than raw material to be organized within your classroom. I don’t know about you, but I know I have enough difficulty managing my own

behavior (especially on tough days), let alone managing anyone else’s behavior. Now, having said this, there are things that you can manage that will help you have a direct positive effect on your students’ behavior. The nature of these things that you can control (or at least greatly influence) ironically has less to do with your students’ behavior and more to do with how you act or do not act daily in your classroom. I think a more accurate descriptor for classroom management is “Teacher Self-Management of

Instructional Practice in Group Settings,” but this title is far too long and will understandably not catch on in the field. So I will use the term *classroom management* for simplicity’s sake. Having said this, the important thing to keep in mind is not so much the term but the idea I am trying to communicate.

Developing a classroom management plan can appear daunting from the onset. I mean, there are so many things to take into account and plan for, and then you have to think about differentiation, adaptation, and possible modification to address unique student needs. The process of organizing the necessary resources to meet the unique needs of students who require varying levels of interventions and supports can be greatly facilitated through schoolwide adoption of MTSS/PBIS. However, whether your school is a PBIS school or school with a more traditional approach to addressing student behavioral issues, the need to provide an array of interventions and supports will be present. Although there are various aspects to consider when designing a game plan for your classroom, it helps keep things simple. For example, classroom management can be viewed as having two main themes: prevention and intervention. Understandably, it is easy to become preoccupied with searching for the illusive answer to the question “What do I do when a student does X?” Although you will need a set of standard operating procedures to efficiently and safely redirect inappropriate student behavior, the primary emphasis in effective classroom management is preventing problem behavior

in the first place. A simple way to think about this is as follows: If you consider all the time that you will invest in managing student behavior in your classroom, a minimum of



80% of that behavior management time should be invested in preventative approaches. This so-called 80–20 split

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(80% prevention to 20% intervention) is generally accepted within the professional literature and is borne out daily within effective classrooms. Having noted this proportional weighting of your invested time in behavior manage-

ment, there are precise tactics of teaching, or principles of practice, that are relevant to both prevention of as well as intervention with inappropriate student behavior. In particular, three specific preventative principles of practice serve as the foundation for effective classroom management that is within your immediate control as a classroom teacher. These three principles of practice are equally relevant whether you are teaching in a PBIS school or a more traditional school setting. Regardless of the type of classroom you operate (e.g., elementary, secondary, general, or special education), the following principles of practice are relevant for you:

1. Rapport
2. Clear expectations
3. Reinforcement of expected behavior

These three approaches, when viewed in sum and in concert with one another, may best be visualized as a three-legged stool of prevention in which each component is somewhat interdependent on the presence of the other two components in order to bear the full weight of student behavior in your classroom.

The importance of establishing rapport with your students is (for the most part) a universally accepted

understanding in our schools today. Oddly enough, however, many teachers struggle daily with establishing rapport with all their students, especially those who appear difficult to reach. In other words, we have somewhat of an understanding as teachers regarding the importance of connecting with our students, but as a field, we are somewhat limited in our understanding of time-efficient, systematic practices that we can use to establish rapport. Thinking of your personal experiences in your classroom, you most likely have established rapport with those students with whom you are most comfortable. More often than not, these are the kids who provide you with a lot of reinforcement and are least likely to develop problem behavior over time. As such, you likely would describe these kids as your favorites. To be clear, and for the record, you are a person first and a professional second. Therefore, you will have favorites, and acknowledging this reality is an important first step to establishing rapport with your students who are more difficult to reach. In our personal lives, we get to choose those with whom we hang out and, to varying extents, those whom we choose to avoid. As teachers, however, we don't have the luxury or right to pick and choose those with whom we will successfully establish rapport within our classrooms.

You will likely find yourself naturally gravitating toward your "favorite" students (those kids who provide you with a lot of positive reinforcement), as this is human nature. I mean, after all, we all would rather hang out with others who make us feel good. The professional challenge is to 1) understand this aspect of human nature and 2) reach out and connect with those students who appear more distant from you in

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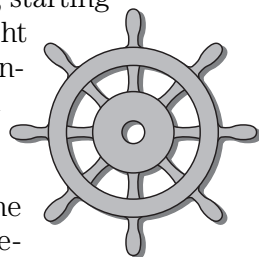


terms of your personal comfort. Therefore, it is important to have a few time-efficient methods in your teacher “bag of tricks” that can help you establish a conducive level of rapport with each of your students—not just the ones toward whom you naturally gravitate. When it comes to effective teaching and rapport, the bottom line is that most kids don’t care what you know as a teacher until they know that you really care about them as people (Albert, 1996). As such, it is helpful to regularly put into practice some simple rapport-building techniques that will help each of your students increasingly understand that you really do care about him or her on a personal level. If you are anything like most teachers that I know, you are a nurturing, fun-loving, and approachable person, but for a number of reasons, not all your students will see you in this light (at least not right away, and especially not those students who may appear to be most at risk to develop problem behavior). I will describe these rapport-building strategies in greater detail in Chapter 4, as they should prove helpful to you in reaching out and sufficiently connecting with all the kids in your classroom. Establishing a classroom environment conducive to learning (and developing rapport with each of your students) is enhanced by establishing a clear set of behavioral (social performance) expectations. In other words, rapport becomes a byproduct of your collective endeavors within the classroom, and although some teaching strategies can help you establish rapport, the effect of these tactics is greatly enhanced when used in tandem with clear social-performance expectations. Establishing (and teaching) clear and explicit performance expectations is a foundation in schools implementing PBIS. So if you are a teacher in a PBIS school you may likely have already experienced (at least to some degree) associated positive effects with your students beyond simple reduction in

problem behavior through improved teacher–student interactions and relationships on many fronts, including academic achievement. However, establishing clear and precise behavioral expectations is equally relevant for you, as well, if you happen to be teaching in a more traditional school setting. Establishing expectations is all about developing a set of cultural norms within your classroom and ultimately about fostering social competence in all your students. To be clear, I am not talking about simply creating a list of rules or a list of “thou shalt nots.” Rather, what I am referring to is identifying three to five broad expectations

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toward which you will foster growth and progress with each of your students on an ongoing basis (e.g., “Be Respectful,” “Be Responsible,” “Be Safe”). Now you may be thinking, “This is too simple. I mean, it can’t be that simple, can it?” Well, although there is more operational detail regarding expectations that you will need to address, starting at such a basic level steers you in the right direction. As the Roman philosopher Seneca noted, “If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.” Simply stated, you want to be sure that you are sailing in a direction that has some promising land ahead, instead of large icebergs to strike. Focusing your students’ attention toward what you want them to do (instead of what you don’t want them to do) is one of the most important first steps you can take.



Your second step is to focus attention on more operationally defining these three to five expectations across important settings (and routines) throughout your given

classroom day, thus creating not only a road map for behavior for your students but also a radar system for you to use in terms of reinforcing your students as they demonstrate appropriate behavior per your expectations. Establishing three to five broadly stated expectations (and subsequently defining these expectations across settings and routines with your students) also creates a healthy degree of predictability that helps your students realize that they can influence or have some degree of power over their own personal degree of success in your classroom (also known

You want to be sure that you are sailing in a direction that has some promising land ahead, instead of large icebergs to strike.

as locus of control). Steps and procedures to use to engage your students in the process of establishing behavioral expectations for your classroom are provided in Chapter 5.

Reinforcement is the third principle of practice in this three-legged stool of preventative approaches to classroom

management. Look, we all know that we can attract more bees with honey or more ants with sugar. What I mean to say is that the best way to help students develop appropriate behavior is by being clear on expected behavior and, as the saying goes, “catching them being good.” I know, I

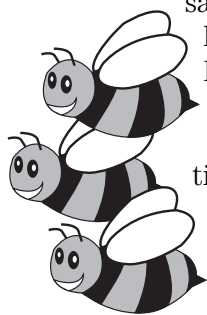
know, this is not a novel concept, but I never said

I was going to share new, earth-shattering ideas with you. What I did say—even promise—was that I would help you develop a new perspective about classroom management that enables

you to bring together (in full force) the basic aspects of prevention that will help you increasingly become a more effective educator. Simply

stated, reinforcement serves as one of the three cornerstones of prevention (well, if you can have cornerstones associated with a three-legged stool).

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Aristotle has been attributed with saying, “We are what we repeatedly do, therefore excellence is not an act—but a habit.” Let me expand a bit on this notion: Each of us is going to form habits, and our habits, good or bad, develop over time in association with what we are reinforced for doing. Whether it is the habit of kindness or of rudeness, the principle of reinforcement (along with other factors) is in play. Instructionally, your goal becomes to help your students develop behavioral habits that are consistent with the social competencies you wish to see in your classroom. Ironically, you will help your students develop these positive habits as a direct result of your development of positive teaching habits that reflect these preventative approaches I am describing in this book. To this end, reinforcing your students for performing expected behavior should increasingly become the norm in your classroom. In addition, it is important to understand that there are various forms of reinforcement and that not all reinforcement procedures—and most certainly not all potential reinforcers used by you as a teacher—will be equal. As such, it is important to understand the nature of positive and negative reinforcement and to further appreciate that what is actually reinforcing is (much like interpreting a work of art) in the eyes of the beholder (or the one being reinforced). Make no mistake about it: Both positive and negative reinforcement are just that—forms of reinforcement to increase the likelihood of future recurrence of desired behavior. Positive reinforcement, however, is the bull’s-eye, as you will see in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Reinforcing your students for performing expected behavior should increasingly become the norm in your classroom.

Rapport, expectations, and reinforcement serve as three principles of practice in prevention of student problem

behavior in your classroom. This is not to suggest that teaching practices such as active supervision of your students, conducting seamless transitions between activities in your classroom, or checking regularly for student understanding are unimportant—on the contrary, they are important. What I am suggesting, however, is that rapport, expectations, and reinforcement are the primary building blocks of effective classroom management. Each of these three principles of practice is important in its own right; however, the whole is worth far more than the sum of its parts. Regardless of the type of school setting in which you find yourself teaching, these preventative principles of practice should prove helpful to you with your students. These preventative approaches are consistent with universal level (Tier 1) approaches if you are teaching in a PBIS school. These same universal level approaches are, as well, equally applicable if you are teaching in a more traditional school setting. Given that, let's turn our attention to each of these principles of practice and, in turn, focus on specific teaching strategies along these same lines.