Proactive Classroom Management Tools That Increase Academic Engagement

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Active Supervision

Description. The teacher moves about the classroom and interacts with students to increase academic engagement and reduce behavior problems.

Procedure: In active supervision, the teacher travels through the classroom and:

- regularly scans the room for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.

- engages students in conversation, including providing behavioral reminders and prompts.

- teaches expected behaviors (if needed).

- praises examples of appropriate student behavior.

Tips for Use. Active supervision is best suited for small-group learning tasks or independent seatwork.

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Choice-Making

Description. The teacher provides the class or individual students with choice-opportunities when completing in-class academic tasks. Offering choice options to students can increase academic motivation and focus while reducing problem behaviors.

Procedure: The teacher identifies appropriate choice-opportunities that can be offered to students as they undertake particular academic tasks (e.g., small-group cooperative learning activities; independent seatwork). Some examples of choice include:

- **Alternative assignments**. Students choose an assignment from among two or more alternative, equivalent offerings.

- **Task sequence**. Students are directed to complete several tasks as part of the assignment--but can choose the sequence in which they do them.

- **Materials**. Students are assigned a task and allowed to choose the materials that they will use to complete it (e.g., being offered 5 books to choose from for a book report).

- **Collaboration**. Students can choose who they will work with to complete an assignment---or are offered to option of working with classmates or independently.

Tips for Use. Teachers can offer choice options to single students or an entire class. If offering a choice such as alternative assignment to a class, the instructor can have the group vote on which assignment to do. Also, if the teacher routinely makes several choice options available that any student can access for certain types of assignments (e.g., independent seatwork), the instructor may want to post those choice options for students to review as needed.

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Opportunities to Respond

Description. The teacher increases the rate at which students actively respond to instruction--resulting in improved academic performance and lower levels of problem behavior.

Procedure: The teacher structures lessons and student work assignments to allow a high rate of academic opportunities to respond (OTRs). OTRs can include instructional questions or commands delivered by the teacher, as well as tasks presented during group or independent work.

- For students receiving new instruction, an optimal rate of opportunities to respond is 4-6 times per minute, with at least 80% accuracy.

- For students engaged in independent practice, an optimal rate of opportunities to respond is 8-12 times per minute, with at least 90% accuracy.

Tips for Use. Preparation is needed before a teacher can increase OTRs and expect students to accelerate their rate of academic responding.

First, students should be fully prepared for assignments on which they are expected to respond at a high rate. Examples of preparation include pre-teaching difficult vocabulary, reviewing a key strategy to be used during the exercise, and activating prior knowledge of the topic. Second, for any worksheets to be completed independently, those work materials should be adjusted as needed to allow the student(s) to complete them without outside assistance. Such modifications might include definitions for challenging words, worked examples, and helpful tips for completing the assignment. Third, the instructor should gauge through direct observation or other forms of assessment whether students are responding correctly and make instructional adjustments as needed. Fourth, the teacher should maintain a rapid pace during instruction and provide groups of students with methods for collective responding, such as response cards, white boards, or choral responding.

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Planned Ignoring

Description. The teacher chooses to ignore minor behavioral infractions that do not negatively impact the classroom.

Procedure: The teacher identifies low-level misbehaviors (e.g., minor talking-out) that do not significantly distract other students or otherwise interfere with classroom routine. The teacher makes a commitment to ignore such behaviors and continue with instruction.

Tips for Use. Planned ignoring is useful for minor behavior problems-especially in situations where a teacher response to such modest misbehaviors would result in more time lost from instruction than can be justified. However, if the teacher finds that ignoring a student's behavior regularly results in escalation of that misbehavior, planned ignoring should be discontinued.

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Praise

Description. Teacher praise is performance feedback that includes verbal or non-verbal communication of teacher approval of student behavior. Praise is easy to implement and fits into the natural pattern of classroom communication (Hawkins & Heflin, 2011).

Procedure: Effective teacher praise consists of two elements: (1) a description of noteworthy student academic performance or general behavior, and (2) a signal of teacher approval (Brophy, 1981; Burnett, 2001). The power of praise in changing student behavior is that it both indicates teacher approval and informs the student about how the praised academic performance or behavior conforms to teacher expectations (Burnett, 2001). As with any potential classroom reinforcer, praise has the ability to improve student academic or behavioral performance—but only if the *student* finds it reinforcing (Akin-Little et al., 2004). Here are several suggestions for shaping praise to increase its effectiveness:

1. Describe noteworthy student behavior. Praise statements that lack a specific account of student behavior in observable terms are compromised—as they fail to give students performance feedback to guide their learning. For example, a praise statement such as *'Good job!'* is inadequate in itself because it lacks a behavioral

description (Hawkins & Heflin, 2011). However, such a statement becomes acceptable when expanded to include a behavioral element: *"You located eight strong source documents for your essay. Good job!"*

2. **Praise effort and accomplishment, not ability.** There is some evidence that praise statements about general ability can actually reduce student appetite for risk-taking (Burnett, 2001). Therefore, teachers should generally steer clear of praise that includes assumptions about global student ability (e.g., "*You are a really good math student!*"; "*I can tell from this essay that writing is no problem for you.*"). Praise should instead focus on specific examples of student effort or accomplishment (e.g*., "It's obvious from your grade that you worked hard to prepare for this math quiz. Great work!"*). When praise singles out exertion and work-products, it can help students to see a direct link between the effort that they invest in a task and improved academic or behavioral performance.

3. **Match the method of praise delivery to student preferences.** Teachers can deliver praise in a variety of ways and contexts. For example, an instructor may choose to praise a student in front of a class or work group or may instead deliver that praise in a private conversation or as written feedback on the student's assignment. When possible, the teacher should determine and abide by a student's preferences for receiving individual praise. It is worth noting that, while most students in elementary grades may easily accept public praise, evidence suggests that middle and high-school students actually prefer private praise (Burnett, 2001). So, when in doubt with older students, deliver praise in private rather than in public.

Tips for Use. Praise is a powerful motivating tool because it allows the teacher to selectively encourage different aspects of behavior or work production based on the individual student's needs. For example, the teacher may seek to boost a student's academic performance by praising effort, accuracy, or speed on an assignment. Or the teacher may focus on increasing student responsibility by praising that student for attaining self-selected academic goals. The table below presents examples of praise-statements, with each linked to a different student outcome goal:

Praise: Goal	Example
Academic effort. Praise can motivate students in the beginning stages of learning, by focusing on indicators of student effort (e.g., 'seat-time') rather than on product (Daly et al., 2007).	• "*Today in class, you wrote non-stop through the entire writing period. I appreciate your hard work.*"
Academic accuracy. Praise can encourage students in the acquisition stage of learning by praising improvements in *accuracy* of responding (Haring et al., 1978).	• *"This week you were able to correctly define 15 of 20 biology terms. That is up from 8 last week. Terrific progress!"*
Academic fluency. When the student has progressed beyond the acquisition stage, an appropriate next goal may be fluency--the speed of accurate responding (Haring et al., 1978). Teacher praise can motivate the student to become more efficient on the academic task by targeting gains in fluency (a combination of accuracy and speed of responding).	• *"You were able to compute 36 correct digits in two minutes on today's math time drill worksheet. That's 4 digits more than earlier this week--impressive!"*
Academic quality. When the student's completed assignment clearly meets or exceeds quality standards (e.g., writing rubric),	• *"This essay is well-written. I can see that you defined a specific audience*

praise focuses on the excellence of the work.	*for the piece and had a clear purpose in mind as you were writing."*
Goal-setting. A motivating strategy that promotes student responsibility is to have a reluctant learner set a performance goal before undertaking an academic task and then to report out at the conclusion of the task about whether the goal was reached. The student is praised for successfully attaining the goal.	• *"At the start of class, you set the goal of writing an outline for your paper. And I can see that you actually completed the outline. Good job!"*
Risk-taking. Students may be reluctant to show ignorance or make mistakes in class. To counter this natural reluctance, praise for risk-taking celebrates students' good-faith attempts to answer teacher questions or participate in discussion--even when the response is incorrect or otherwise falls short of the mark.	• *"Thanks for your response, Mark. Even though your initial answer was incorrect, it forced us to think through several ways to solve this math problem. Mistakes are a powerful way to learn!"*

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Pre-Correction

Description. The teacher heads off a problem behavior by proactively prompting or reminding student(s) to show appropriate behaviors.

Procedure: Just before a time, situation or setting when problem behaviors are most likely to occur, the teacher 'pre-corrects' by using any of several strategies to remind student(s) of appropriate behavioral expectations. Among strategies, the teacher can:

• provide a verbal prompt (e.g., having the student restate a classroom rule or describe an appropriate behavior).

• provide a non-verbal prompt (e.g., silently pointing to posted classroom rule).

• give student(s) a chance to practice appropriate behaviors.

• remind student(s) of reinforcers that they can earn for engaging in appropriate behaviors.

Tips for Use. Pre-correction is most useful in preventing low-level, predictable misbehaviors or errors.

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Response Effort

Description. The teacher increases student engagement through any method that reduces the apparent difficulty ('response effort') of an academic task - so long as that method does not hold the student to a lesser academic standard than classmates.

Procedure: Here are examples of teacher strategies that lower response effort while maintaining grade-appropriate work expectations:

• **Start assigned readings in class**. Whenever a challenging text is assigned for independent reading (e.g., as homework), the teacher (or perhaps a skilled student reader) reads the first few paragraphs of the assigned reading aloud while the class follows along silently in their own texts. Students are then directed to read the remainder of the text on their own.

• **Begin challenging homework in class**. When assigned challenging homework, students are paired off or divided into groups and given a brief amount of class time to begin the homework together, develop a plan for completing the homework, formulate questions about the homework, or engage in other activities that will create the necessary momentum to motivate students then to complete the work independently.

• **Chunk' assignments**. The teacher breaks a larger student assignment into smaller 'chunks'. The teacher provides the student with performance feedback and praise for each completed 'chunk' of assigned work.

- Select a peer or adult to start the student on assignments. If a student finds it difficult to get organized and begin independent seatwork activities, a supportive peer or adult in the classroom can get the student organized and started on the assignment.

- Provide a formal work plan. In preparation for more complex assignments such as research papers, the teacher gives the student an outline of a work plan for completing those assignments. The plan breaks a larger assignment into appropriate sub-steps (e.g., 'find five research articles for the paper', 'summarize key information from research articles into notes', etc.). For each sub-step, the plan provides (1) an estimate of the minimum amount of 'seat time' required to complete it and (2) sets a calendar-date deadline for completion. The teacher then touches base with the student at least weekly to ensure that the student is staying current with the work plan. (TIP: Over time, the teacher can transfer increasing responsibility for generating work plans to the student.)

Tips for Use. Before using response effort, the teacher should always first verify that the student possesses the necessary academic skills to complete the assignment.

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Scheduled Attention

Description. The teacher provides the student with brief doses of positive attention on a fixed-time schedule ('non-contingent attention').

Procedure: Here are the steps to prepare and use scheduled attention:

1. Choose when to use scheduled attention. The teacher selects one or more times during the class period or school day when the scheduled-attention intervention is to be used (e.g., independent seatwork, small-group activities) because the student is most likely to display off-task or problem behaviors.

2. Decide how frequently to provide positive attention. The teacher decides how frequently to provide positive attention in the form of a fixed-time schedule (e.g., 2-minute intervals, 5-minute intervals). One strategy to determine an appropriate interval for providing attention is to estimate how long the student typically remains on-task or behaving appropriately in the *absence* of teacher attention. The teacher then may adopt a schedule for providing attention that is slightly shorter than this baseline level. If, for example, a student is found to work independently for an average of 4 minutes before making attention-seeking noises, the teacher may select a fixed-time interval of 3 minutes for providing positive attention.

3. Select a method for timing the fixed intervals. The teacher chooses a timing option to provide an alert whenever an interval has expired and the student is to receive positive attention. Examples of timing solutions include watching the clock or using a mechanical kitchen timer or smart phone timer application set on vibrate. NOTE: Teachers with access to a device that can play MP3 (electronic audio) files can download a 'beep-tape'

with fixed-time tones at a range of intervals that can serve as an ideal signal for scheduled attention. Those free beep-tapes and instructions for use can be accessed at:*http://www.interventioncentral.org/free-audio-monitoring-tapes*

4. **Provide scheduled attention.** Whenever the scheduled-attention intervention is in use, the teacher observes the student's behavior at the conclusion of each fixed interval. If the student is displaying appropriate behavior, the teacher approaches and provides brief positive attention (e.g., praise, high-five, question about how the student is doing, encouragement). If instead the student is engaged in inappropriate or problem behavior, the teacher chooses either(1) to ignore the behavior altogether and continue with instruction or (2) to briefly redirect the student to task in neutral fashion (e.g., "No talking") and with a minimum of attention.

Tips for Use. Scheduled attention works best if the teacher makes an effort to provide positive attention on a fixed-interval schedule and minimizes attention to the student outside of that schedule. Of course, whenever the student misbehaves, the teacher can intervene to redirect or impose appropriate disciplinary consequences. However, the instructor should also take care to minimize the amount of adult attention during episodes of misbehavior to avoid reinforcing this conduct.

References

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Verbal Commands

Description. When the teacher needs to have students follow a command in timely manner, the instructor structures the directive as an effective 'alpha' command. The format of this command increases the probability of student compliance.

Procedure: Effective teacher commands to groups or individual students:

- are brief.

- use simple, clear language.

- direct student(s) to perform a specific task.

- contain no more than one verb (e.g., "Clear your desks", "Underline two key details in the paragraph").

- are given one at a time, followed by a 5-second wait period.

- are stated in a positive or neutral tone of voice.

- use active phrasing (e.g."Clean up your work area") in place of passive phrasing (e.g., "The work area needs to be cleaned up") or LET'S statements (e.g., "Let's clean up the work area").

Tips for Use. Verbal commands are most effective when used sparingly. Teachers can reduce reliance on commands by training students to automatically follow predictable classroom procedures and routines or by giving students self-monitoring checklists to guide them through all steps of a cognitive strategy or task.

References

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