

Classroom and Behavior Management 101

“No amount of dedication, lesson planning, or content knowledge is sufficient to compensate for ineffective classroom and behavior management techniques that result in discordant learning environments,” says former teacher and school founder Matthew Kraft in this helpful *Kappan* article. “Effective teaching and learning can take place only in a harmonious learning environment.” To help move from discipline ringmaster to learning conductor, Kraft suggests five classroom management techniques and five behavioral management techniques:

- *Classroom management #1: Good curriculum* – “There’s no substitute for teaching a rigorous curriculum that’s relevant to students’ lives and actively engages students in their own learning,” says Kraft. “Despite common assumptions about the immature and impulsive nature of students, more often than not, they’re making very calculated, rational choices to act inappropriately. Students are off-task when they don’t perceive any benefit from on-task behavior.”

- *Classroom management #2: Nonnegotiable rules* – Kraft believes that a short list of classroom rules should be laid down unilaterally by the teacher. In his own classroom, there were two rules: (a) Don’t interrupt the speaker, and (b) Don’t use inappropriate language.

- *Classroom management #3: Clear expectations* – Students are often flummoxed as they move from one teacher’s expectations to another. “Students might be rewarded for interjecting ideas during history class while they’re reprimanded in math for speaking without being called on,” says Kraft. “They may be encouraged to get out of their seats in art class while they’re prohibited from leaving their seats in English.” Kraft believes there are three basic types of classroom activity, each with its own expectations:

- Direct instruction – Students stay at their desks, pay attention to the teacher, raise their hands before speaking, and speak one at a time.
- Working time – Students can get out of their seats, should direct their attention to their collective work, can speak freely, and can work with each other.
- Individual silent time- Students remain in their seats, direct their attention to their own work, should not speak out, and should work individually.

Kraft suggests telling students explicitly at the beginning of each lesson segment exactly which mode they’re in and what the expectations are.

- *Classroom management #4: Smooth transitions* – Transitions can be ragged and lead to problems. They are best managed by “Do Now” assignments at the beginning of each class, clear routines, and assigning students jobs.

- *Classroom management #5: Getting attention* – “One of the simplest but most commonly cited frustrations among teachers is that they can’t get their classes to quiet down,” says Kraft. He suggests three techniques: (a) Ask for students’ attention and wait – in other words, don’t talk while students are talking; (b) Use a zero-noise device like a rain stick or chime; and (c) If things are out of control, raise your voice with a serious

tone. “If you rarely shout, this is extremely effective because it startles students,” says Kraft. “But be careful not to abuse it, or it loses its impact.”

He then turns to behavior management. “Fundamentally,” he says, “all behavior is a form of communication. Students are often unable to communicate or are uncomfortable expressing their feelings, so they act out.” Here are his suggestions for preventing and dealing with this:

- *Behavior management #1: Behavior modification systems* – This is the teacher’s way of communicating to students when their behavior is inappropriate. Kraft’s system was to give a citizenship grade, with all student’s grade reset to an A at the beginning of each class. He would then lower individual grades if a student used profanity, socialized during silent time, talked over someone, etc. Citizenship grades were factored into students’ overall grades.

- *Behavior management #2: Avoiding public confrontations* – “Students will go to great lengths to avoid being embarrassed in front of their peers,” says Kraft. “When students are publicly reprimanded, they often feel disrespected and respond by drawing teachers into arguments to bolster their image.” Kraft suggests reprimanding students in silent or low-key ways, including physical proximity, hand signals, facial expressions, or indirect prompts such as, “Do you need anything to get started?”

- *Behavior management #3: Private conversations* – Inevitably, some students will challenge the teacher, and Kraft says the best strategy is to talk to the student away from his or her peers. In these conversations, it’s important to listen to the student first and make sure, if there is a reprimand, that the student understands the logic behind it, signing a contract if necessary.

- *Behavior management #4: Overcome the discipline myth* – What’s the myth? That teachers love to get students in trouble. “Remind students daily that you’re a teacher because you want to help them achieve their goals,” says Kraft, “not because you want to police them in the classroom.”

- *Behavior management #5: Communicating about moods* – Students should feel able to give you a heads-up if they are feeling poorly, and the teacher can model this by disclosing occasionally about feeling tired or frustrated. “When students learn to communicate about their moods, they’re offering precious information that teachers can use to prevent conflicts,” says Kraft. “Allowing an irritated student to work individually instead of in a group or to skip a turn at reading aloud is far better than forcing them into a situation that will likely cause them to act out.”

“From Ringmaster to Conductor” by Matthew Kraft in *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 2010 (Vol. 91, #7, p. 44-47), <http://www.pdkintl.org>.