

Strategies for creating an orderly classroom

Negotiate class rules

Consider the following when negotiating class rules:

- **Make class rules consistent with school rules**
- **Involve students: Students' age level will impact on the level of student involvement**
- **Identify appropriate behaviours and translate them into positively phrased rules**
- **Focus on important behaviour**
- **Keep the number to a minimum (4-6)**
- **Keep the wording simple and short**
- **Address behaviours that can be observed:** This avoids misinterpretation and there is no grey area as to whether the behaviour did or did not occur.
- **Display the rules and consequences prominently:** Once the class has developed its list of rules, they should be displayed as a reminder to those of what has been agreed to.

Identify the consequences for appropriate behaviour

Recognise and quickly respond to appropriate behaviour. This quick action encourages students to display the desired behaviour more often. Be aware that some students may need to be reinforced quietly or non-verbally to prevent embarrassment in front of peers.

There are a range of rewards that can be used, often determined by the age of the students and what the students value. Rewards can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Teachers can encourage students to acknowledge, reflect on and value their own achievements.

Rewards may also include:

- **Social rewards** such as written expressions, verbal or nonverbal facial expressions, etc.
- **Activities and privileges** such as permission to participate in a desired activity
- **Tangible rewards** such as certificates, awards, etc.

Identify the consequences for non-compliance

Consider the following information about negative consequences:

The consequences for inappropriate behaviour need to be directly and logically related to the misbehaviour. Logical consequences usually require students to make right of what they have done wrong. Examples of consequences include loss of privileges, time-out, detention, contacting parents, etc. Ideally there would be a small number of negative consequences that should be sequentially administered.

Teachers should take care to ensure that the consequences are not psychologically or physically harmful to the students.

Explicitly teach, model, demonstrate, practice and review the rules

Follow the following guidelines when teaching and reviewing class rules:

- **Explicitly teach the rules:** Explain, model, demonstrate as you would for any subject matter content.
- **Discuss reasons for the rule:** Students are more likely to follow a rule if they understand the rationale behind it.
- **Clarify acceptable and unacceptable behaviour:** Provide examples of behaviours that make or break each rule. This will help clarify expectations.
- **Review positive and negative consequences:** Appropriate decisions are rewarded; inappropriate decisions are not. Discuss specific consequences that will be used.
- **Display rules where appropriate:** If the rules are to be displayed in the classroom, they need to be in a prominent place.

Consistently uphold agreed classroom rules

Consider the following information about upholding classroom rules:

- **Provide a warning:** This gives the students time and space to correct the misbehavior without suffering a consequence. If the warning is not heeded, immediately invoke the consequence.
- **Be consistent, insistent and persistent:** Linson (2012) believes inconsistency is one of the most common teacher mistakes. It's also among the most detrimental. Every time a rule is broken, and it is let it go, it sends the message that you don't really mean what you say.
- **Avoid arguing with students about consequences:** Linson (2014) gives the following advice about arguing with students. Calmly, almost robotically, deliver your consequence and then immediately turn back to what you were doing before. You know they broke a rule, so there is no reason for you to argue. They know they broke a rule, so there is no (honest) reason for them to argue. Thus, no other communication needs to be exchanged. Now, if in the rare case a student follows you and attempts to argue, it's okay to repeat yourself one time.
- **Stick to the negotiated consequences:** Rules, consequences and procedures should be taught, modeled, and practiced, fair to all students and not create resentment, friction, and hard feelings between the teacher and students. A student in need of specific behavioral accommodations detailed in an Individual Education Plan (IEP), might be the exception.
- **Apply the consequences fairly to all students:** Every student who disrupts the classroom and stops the teacher from teaching suffers the same consequence, as do students who fail to achieve quality and quantity expectations. By telling the students at the beginning of the school year what the consequences will be, teachers ensure that all students know what to expect in the classroom.

Develop a set of standards for quality and quantity of work

Students should have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in terms of the quantity and quality of work produced. Involve students in setting personal long and short term academic goals based on syllabus expectations. Setting clear expectations at the beginning of the year and steadfastly sticking to them has been shown to improve task engagement and learning.

Consider the following when developing standards for quality and quantity of work:

- Show examples that demonstrate your expectations
- At the beginning of each lesson indicate what needs to be completed by the end of the lesson
- Make it clear to students how they are responsible for the academic work that they do
- Ask older students to set a goal for themselves each week/fortnight/month to improve the quality and quantity of their work
- Establish rewards for quality and quantity of work produced
- Explicitly state the criteria required for tasks to be completed
- Show students how their work is worthwhile and how it is connected to things that are important to them, including other learning and interests.
- Offer encouragement that tells students specifically what it is that they are doing that is worthwhile and good encourages effort.

Develop procedures and routines for reoccurring events

Timesaving value can get lost in reminding, reteaching, and repeating routines and procedures over and over again.

Linson (2012) suggests the following to teach routines:

- **Model how to:** Show the students what you want them to do. Make it simple and straightforward, but highly detailed. As appropriate to the age of the students, play the part of a student and act out each step.
- **Model how not:** Model how not to perform the routine. Have fun with it. Exaggerating poor behaviour makes the strategy more effective because it underscores the absurdity of misbehaving in the classroom.
- **Go live:** As soon as possible, have the students perform the routine as a regular part of the school day/lesson. Again, you want them to get used to the feeling of success, of doing things the right way.

Canter (1996) recommends a three-step cycle for teaching routines:

1. Teach routines for whenever students need to follow certain directions

Don't assume that students know how they are expected to behave. Establish specific directions for each activity during the day – whole class seat work, small-group work, transitions between activities, and so on. For each situation determine the exact behaviours expected of students.

Once the specific behaviours for each situation have been determined, students must be taught how to follow the directions. To do this:

- state the directions and, with younger students, write the behaviours on the board or on a flip chart
- model the behaviours
- ask the students restate the directions
- question the students to make sure they understand the directions
- immediately engage the students in the activity to make sure that they understand the directions.

2. After teaching the specific directions, use *positive repetition* to reinforce the students when they follow the directions

This is especially important at the primary level. Typically, teachers give directions to the students and then focus attention only on those students who do *not* obey. For example, "Justin, you didn't go back to your seat." Instead, teachers should focus on those students who do follow the directions, rephrasing the original directions as a positive comment. For example, "Jason went back to his seat and got right to work."

3. If a student is still misbehaving after a teacher has taught specific directions and has used positive repetition, only then should the teacher use negative consequences.

As a general rule, the teacher should not administer a negative consequence to a student until s/he has reinforced at least two students for the appropriate behaviour. Effective teachers are always positive first. Focusing on negative behaviour teaches students that negative behaviour gets attention, that the teacher is a negative person, and that the classroom is a negative place.

References

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