

# What Every Teacher Should Know In Order to Positively Support Student Behavior

By Diana Browning Wright

*Effective classroom management that supports the development of positive behaviors requires the same degree of skill as running a major corporation. That is, knowledge of services and products as well as skills in organization, motivation, delegation, and problem solving are a must. In the author's experience training teachers and consultants, very few have received sufficient training to understand positive support and to be able to establish effective classroom management. Teachers often are unaware that to achieve academic excellence, especially with at-risk students, "organizing the classroom for success" is as important as understanding curriculum scope and sequence and each individual student's learning needs. Consultants often lose sight of the fact that the root cause of difficult behavior is often a classroom that does not yet sufficiently support positive behaviors, especially for students with fragile coping skills, due to missing organizational and teaching skill components. What began as an individual student referral to the consultant may often be best conceptualized as a lack of environmental support for alternative positive behaviors in that student. Whole environment evaluation and remediation should occur prior to developing a large number of individual behavior support plans in a given classroom. Administrators often are at a loss as to where to begin in assisting teachers in improving outcomes when a variety of problems are observed. New teachers are often expected to "pick up" these skills through trial and error, with little instruction or assistance. A systematic review of existing classroom climate and subsequent focused assistance in skill development is required.*

*In the author's experience both teaching and consulting, successful teachers utilize effective methods, in the areas listed below, that result in classwide positive behavioral support, reducing the amount of time spent dealing with disruptions and therefore, reducing the loss of learning time. A new teacher, or a teacher "re-tooling" to meet the needs of today's children or coping with a particularly challenging group dynamic, needs to develop techniques and strategies in the areas below. Opportunities to receive on-going assistance from teacher-colleagues and support staff to increase skills in all nine areas are critical when success for an individual student has not yet been achieved. Prior to initiating any intrusive individual student behavior support plans, consider whether systematic teacher assistance in particular areas will result in better classroom organization and structure, often alleviating an individual student's problem. Teachers often welcome a classwide focus that can improve the performance of all students and eliminate the need for more intrusive, time-intensive, individualized behavior interventions when students with problem behaviors are present.<sup>1</sup>*

## ***This guide can be used:***

- ⇒ *to identify classrooms which are exemplary in addressing specific identified areas for future videotaping or for later visitations as part of teacher training efforts or as a guide for development of training materials*
  
- ⇒ *as a guide for self-review to determine inservice and support needs, or for use in focusing an observation period on key components for later constructive feedback from supervisors, peers or consultants*

# A Guide to What Every Teacher Should Know In Order to Positively Support Student Behavior

*Diana Browning Wright, M.S.*

- 1. **Dividing Attention: *This Basic Skill Is A Foundation for All Classroom Operations***
  - A. How to be aware of what is going on in all parts of the room
  - B. How to do more than one thing at a time
  
- 2. **Transitions: *Lost Control Will Result in Significantly Reduced Learning Time***
  - A. How to smoothly transition between activities without delays and confusion
  - B. How to move students, materials, and furniture quickly and quietly for different activities
  
- 3. **Lesson Structuring: *The Learning Sessions Require Supported Environment in Terms of Time, Space, Materials, and Interactions***
  - A. How to begin and end each lesson smoothly
  - B. How to gain and maintain attention, redirecting and diffusing disruptions
  - C. How to help students maintain organized materials
  - D. How to clearly communicate directions for homework or independent follow-up
  
- 4. **Movement: *Environmental Support Requires Portability***
  - A. How to teach while moving throughout the classroom
  - B. Arranging the room optimally for interactions desired during an activity
  - C. How to move as a group from place to place around the school (to and from recess; lunch; restrooms; assemblies; other teacher's rooms)
  
- 5. **Establishing Independence and Responsibility: *Students' Needs for Empowerment (A Sense of Power and Personal Ownership in Achieving Outcomes), Freedom Must Be Met In Acceptable Ways, or Unacceptable Ways Will Be Found***
  - A. Providing a multitude of choices within lessons and free time
  - B. Establishing jobs and chores and overseeing completion with minimally intrusive techniques
  - C. Using back-up activities, centers, and independent and cooperative on-going activities
  - D. Teaching, monitoring, reinforcing the organization of possessions, notebooks, calendars, individual papers, and assignments (rather than simply expecting and evaluating success or failure)
  
- 6. **Establishing and Teaching Rule-following Behaviors That are Developmentally Appropriate: *Continuously Drawing Attention to Rule-following Positively Supports Those Behaviors***
  - A. Establishing and maintaining specific rules for specific activities
  - B. Attaining general standards of interaction with minimally intrusive rules (e.g., hands/feet to self; friendly talking; work completion)
  - C. Using pacing techniques to increase on-task behaviors

- 7. Shaping, Modeling and Cueing behaviors: *Behavior Support Must Be On-going and Meet the Students' Needs for Belonging and Fun***
  - A. How and when to use verbal praise effectively
  - B. Establishing contingent access to desired activities to motivate students
  - C. Effectively using peers--both to cue and praise behavior
  - D. Implementing small group and whole class “challenges” and competitions
  - E. Utilizing “unconditional positive regard” in shaping behavior
  - F. Effective use of non-verbal cues to alter escalating behavior and cue alternatives
  
- 8. Problem-solving When a Student (or Group of Students) Have Broken Rules: *Maintaining the Students' Sense of Belonging and Skillfully Using “Mistakes As Opportunities to Learn” Results In New Learning***
  - A. Deescalating and redirecting students with fragile coping systems who are not currently rule-following using “time away” options, as well as verbal interactions that avoid power-struggles
  - B. How to debrief after a misbehavior and help the student identify positive replacement behaviors to use in later similar situations that are developmentally appropriate, realistic, and meet the student’s needs effectively
  - C. Utilizing classroom meetings and group discussions to solve classroom behavior difficulties
  
- 9. Improving an Individual Student’s Behavior: *Individualized Support Benefits From Both Communication Enhancement and a Focused Attention on Environmental Supports and the Teaching of New Behaviors***
  - A. Using enhanced home/school communication such as phone calls, daily report cards, behavior contracts; how to use mentorship programs with a designated “mentor” receiving the communication
  - B. Teaching alternative positive replacement behaviors that are realistic and developmentally appropriate; how to cue, model, role-play, shape, and monitor process
  - C. Individualized environmental structuring, pacing, scheduling, reinforcement, structuring activities through individualized closure activities

<sup>1</sup>The reader is referred to two outstanding sources for improving classroom organization and teacher skills from which some of the areas above were drawn, the first for all ages, the later for K-6: Paine, S.C., Radicchi, J., Rosellini, L.C., Deutchman, L., Darch, C.B. *Structuring your classroom for academic success*. Champaign, Ill.: Research Press, 1983. Witt, J., LaFleur, L., Naquin, G., Gilbertson, D. *Teaching effective classroom routines*. Longmont,CO.: Sopris West, 1999.