Teaching expectations, routines and classroom procedures: Practices for effective classroom management
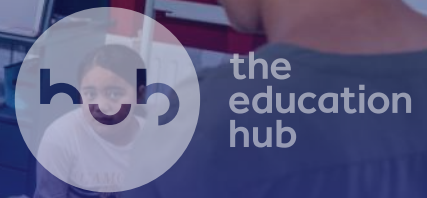
In order for students and teachers to achieve maximum benefit from the learning experience, it is critical to create a positive classroom culture based on a vision for educational success. Teachers can prevent many occurrences of problem behaviour and minimise disruptions by establishing a common language for expected behaviour, co-developed with teacher-student involvement and implemented with ongoing explicit instruction. It is important to teach these in the same manner that academic content is taught by using explicit instruction, examples of what to do and what not to do, practice opportunities, and ongoing prompts for appropriate behaviour for preventing problem behaviours and enhancing learning in the classroom. **The purpose of this guide is to describe an evidence-based classroom practice to address behavioural skill deficits by teaching behavioural expectations as part of an effective classroom management system** to promote learning.

What does it mean to teach expectations, routines and procedures?

Expectations provide a common language for behaviour across all students and adults, preventing misassumptions and thus behavioural errors in the classroom. Describing these expectations by establishing well-defined classroom routines with procedures provides structure and helps students to be engaged with instructional tasks[1]. Simply posting classroom expectations is not enough to create behaviour change - **students must be taught the desired skill** in order to address the skill deficit. When explicitly teaching and reinforcing consistently across time, the likelihood of task engagement and academic achievement increases[2]. Below is a summary of the five steps needed to establish and teach the expectations, routines and procedures within the classroom[3].

Expectations should be observable, measurable, positively stated, understandable, always applicable, and consistently upheld. Expectations are broadly stated to apply to all people (students and adults) across all settings including all activities. They should be stated in understandable terms that are aligned to the development and culture of the classroom: for example, 'Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe'

Identify routines and procedures that are essential for success in the classroom. Routines to consider include arrival and dismissal, transitions between activities, accessing help, turning in work, handing out materials, what to do after work is completed, making up missed work, and so on. Consider whether there are differences in expected work behaviours during large group, independent, or small group instruction.

Involve students in defining expectations within the established classroom routines. Have students first confirm the routines for understanding, then have them discuss and describe what each expectation means for them during each routine (what these behaviours are and how they look). They should reflect what students are supposed to do rather than what they should not do (for example, 'walk' rather than 'don't run', 'quiet voice' rather than 'don't yell', and so on). Including student voice along with teacher assistance will help in defining the specific classroom procedures, and this team approach builds teacher-student relationships, inspires ownership, and creates a positive classroom climate. Some examples of positive expectations include:

- 'Being respectful means using inclusive language'
- 'Being responsible means having all materials ready at the start of class'
- 'Being safe means keeping hands and feet to self during transitions'

Teach the expectations, routines and procedures using examples and non-examples, modelling, and opportunities for students to practise and receive feedback from both the teacher and peers.

- Develop engaging lessons to teach the expectations, routines and procedures. Remember to focus on what they are supposed to do such as 'Hands to self' instead of 'Don't touch'.

- Regularly refer to expectations when interacting with students (for example, during prompts, specific praise and correcting inappropriate behaviour) and modelling the behaviour

- Continue to check for understanding, practice the expected behaviours, and prompt/pre-correct to enhance a classroom climate of success

Obtain student commitment to support expectations. Have students sign a document such as an oath, pledge, or contract to confirm understanding, establish importance and assist in accountability, and remind students of commitment for ongoing performance feedback.

It is ideal when school leadership supports and endorses a school-wide system that establishes consistent practices within and across classrooms for a cohesive approach to learning that benefits all.

References

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