

Focused Observation Guide: Classroom Management Strategies--Beginning the Year Activities *[Links to VI. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

Observe: What do teachers do to ensure a positive and orderly start for a new year?

Arrange to observe teachers during the first weeks of school. As you observe, focus on any socialization or getting started activities that help the students feel comfortable in their new environment; know the expectations, rules, and procedures; and learn the instructional routines, etc. Focus in on how the room looks and is arranged, what the teacher says and does, the amount of time used for specific activities, any indications of prior planning that make for a smooth beginning. Effectively managed classrooms, free from disruptions and with opportunities for students to meet both academic and social needs, have a positive impact on student achievement.

Analyze/Apply: Planning for classroom management is a major factor in preventing student misbehavior. Effective teachers decide on and employ specific strategies to ensure an orderly and positive start to the new year. If management is not going well after the school year has begun, it may be possible to have a “new beginning” at an appropriate point--at the beginning of the week, after a long weekend, after a holiday, etc. Teachers can use the following checklist in developing “new beginning” plans. Check off each item as strategies are identified.

Initial Socialization Activities

- Welcome students.
- Provide opportunities for students to get to know each other.
- Provide opportunities for students to get to know the teacher.
- Share information about the school and classroom.
- Develop and/or communicate and model norms for student-student and student-teacher interactions.
- Give overview of the year and describe normal daily schedule.
- Communicate expectations for students and for the teacher.

Getting Started Activities

- Review assessment data about student performance.
- Allocate appropriate time to teach and practice rules and procedures.
- Arrange for beginning-of-the-year activities (seat and locker assignments, book and materials distribution, fees, information getting, etc.).
- Prepare and distribute a letter to parents include optimistic outlook for the year, important goals, significant events, behavioral and homework expectations, etc.
- Initiate positive incentive system.
- Initiate monitoring practices.
- Make a positive phone call home to the parents to introduce yourself and express interest in working with the child, etc.

Instructional Activities

- Greet the students daily as they enter the classroom.
- Design whole-group activities.
- Prepare academic assignments at appropriate level of challenge.
- Prepare “extra” or supplementary activities (to fill any available time).
- Introduce procedures as necessary.
- Communicate grading standards.
- Allow time for interaction with individual students.

Adapted From Bellon, J.J., Bellon, E.C., & Blank, M.A. (1992). *Teaching from a Research Knowledge Base*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Focused Observation Guide: Classroom Management Strategies--Classroom Rules

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Observe: What rules appear to be in effect? Recording information about student and teacher behavior (statements or actions) related to rules will help answer the question. For example, rules may be posted, or students may be reminded of the rules as classroom activities progress. Assess the extent to which the rules and expectations seem to be realistic in terms of the students' characteristics (e.g., age, developmental level, special needs). It may be helpful to determine whether students were involved in developing the rules as a means to assess students' understanding of and commitment to them. If possible, determine the degree of consistency between classroom and schoolwide rules and expectations.

Analyze/Apply: Classroom management systems must be based on teacher and student needs and take into account students' levels of maturity and socioeconomic needs. Developing rules, routines, and consequences for behavior are critical beginning-of-the-year management activities. Effective teachers establish (or guide their students in establishing) appropriate rules for student behavior. They begin by listing their expectations for student behavior so that any rules that are developed will be consistent with their own expectations. Collaborating *with* students is one way to help promote student ownership of the classroom environment. Teachers generally find that the collaboration results in rules that are similar to the ones they would have developed alone. The added benefit is that the collaborative rules are much more meaningful to the students. Rules should be based on appropriate expectations, have clear purposes, and state in positive terms how students are to behave.

Adapted From Bellon, J.J., Bellon, E.C., & Blank, M.A. (1992). *Teaching from a Research Knowledge Base*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Focused Observation Guide: Classroom Management Strategies--Classroom Climate

[Links to VI. Learning Environment B. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]

Observe: What observable teacher and student behaviors contribute to the classroom climate?

Examples discovered through observations could include the use of humor, encouragement, courtesy, supportive teacher-student interactions, sarcasm and constructive criticism. In addition, teacher statements showing concern for student needs and descriptions of student-student interactions could provide relevant information. It is also helpful to note the time the statements were made, the events before and after the statements, the names of the targeted students, and behaviors that reflect the climate. Sarcasm is never an appropriate response.

Analyze/Apply: Effective teachers work to develop a positive classroom climate with cooperative working relationships which serve to prevent many behavioral problems. Teachers should begin by describing the classroom climate he or she desires for their classroom. Hopefully, classrooms have been observed that have the type of climate that is highly desirable in terms of students' behavior and motivation to learn. Identify those key qualities that reflect an orderly, but motivating classroom climate. Decide what steps should be taken to develop a similar environment.

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Focused Observation Guide: Classroom Management Strategies---Preventive Management

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Observe: *What preventive management strategies do teachers use?* Effective teachers use specific management skills and strategies to prevent student misbehavior. They know that it is harder to deal with misbehavior after it occurs. Preventive actions are those that communicate behavioral expectations, such as the use of rule reminders, verbal and nonverbal cues, physical arrangements, teacher movement, and structuring techniques are examples of preventive management strategies. Observation notes could include descriptions of teacher-student interactions, teacher efforts to stay on-task, and teacher attention to student concerns. Preventive actions also include teacher modeling.

Analyze/Apply: Identify any preventive management strategies observed. Identify any additional preventive strategies that will help avoid or minimize problems. Think about your approaches to planning, classroom organization, and instructional management to gain insights into strategies to help prevent future classroom management problems.

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Focused Observation Guide: Classroom Management Strategies--Communication Patterns

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Observe: *What are the dominant verbal and nonverbal patterns of communication in classrooms?* The ways in which teachers regularly communicate with students is a powerful influence on how students respond and behave. Note important communication patterns as you observe. Verbal and nonverbal actions such as the following should be listed:

- Using judgmental terms
- Nagging or pleading
- Berating or verbally abusing a student in front of other students
- Using “we” statements
- Using humor
- Using individual student names
- Acknowledging students’ accomplishments, concerns, or interests
- Using courtesy
- Using sarcasm
- Modeling appropriate listening skills
- Using supportive body language

Analyze/Apply: Some teachers are expert communicators with their students. From your notes, identify appropriate and effective communication patterns the teacher uses in interacting with the students. Use the observation data to decide which communication patterns seemed to promote positive student attitudes and responses and which interfered with effective teacher-student interactions. Identify communication strategies that will promote rapport and positive interpersonal relationships. An additional suggestion is to tape record a lesson periodically, and, in reviewing the tape, identify positive (and any negative) communication patterns.

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Focused Observation Guide: Classroom Management Strategies--Classroom Routines

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Observe: *What routines seem to facilitate the management process?* Look for consistent student behaviors that require little or no teacher direction--as indicators of established classroom routines. Procedures and routines should facilitate independent work behavior and assure the best use of allocated time. Examples are student behaviors during transitions after finishing an activity, when students get help from the teacher or another student, when they get and use instructional materials or turn in papers without interrupting the work of others.

Analyze/Apply: From your notes, identify any routines that appeared to help the teacher facilitate effective instructional and management processes. Identify other potentially sound routines to use at other critical points in the instructional process. Decide how to incorporate and monitor the effect of the routines. It may be also be helpful to identify any modifications to existing routines.

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Focused Observation Guide: Classroom Management Strategies-- Student Responsibility

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Observe: What indicators show that students work independently in a responsible manner?

Describe students' opportunities to interact, move around the room, and work cooperatively with others. Note teacher comments that encourage or discourage independent behavior. Also note whether students comply with teacher requests. You may also observe examples of noncompliance, nonengagement, and lack of self-control. Observe students demonstrating self-regulated behaviors and whether leadership roles have been delegated to the students. The appropriate use of rubrics or quality criteria would also be an indication of self-regulation. Information describing the behavior of the students, individually or collectively, will indicate the extent of their leadership responsibilities.

Analyze/Apply: Identify specific strategies observed that appeared to help the students use responsible, independent work behaviors. Enumerate all examples of independent student behavior that were observed. Identify strategies that are intended to promote responsible behavior. A resource for instructional strategies to use to teach, reinforce, and monitor these desired behaviors in students is *Dimensions of Learning, Teacher's Manual* from ASCD. It provides definitions of self-regulated behaviors and could be used as a guide.

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Focused Observation Guide: Classroom Management Strategies--Physical Arrangement

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Observe: *What physical arrangements are seen in classrooms?* Observe and diagram the physical arrangement of several classrooms. Try to map a variety of room arrangements. If students are not present, sit in several areas of the room to understand how they will perceive the classroom structure. Include in your diagram the location of the pencil sharpener, materials storage, teacher and student desks, and designated instructional areas. If students are present, develop a classroom map of student movement.

Analyze/Apply: Effective teachers design the classroom so that it works well for the usual instructional arrangements and transition times. They know that the physical arrangement of the room has a significant effect on student behavior. From your observations, identify several ideas that seemed to work well and could work in your own classroom. Also identify some adjustments that could be made in the physical arrangement of the classroom observed so that it would be more conducive to learning. Collaborating with other teachers and visiting their rooms are ways to identify many other good possibilities.

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