

Module 1-Classroom Environment, Student Engagement and Commitment to Learning

CCT Performance Profile Indicator #4: Teachers promote student engagement, independence and interdependence in learning by facilitating a positive learning community and by fostering appropriate standards of behavior that support a productive learning environment for all students.

Professional Growth Goal: I will design, implement, and monitor a positive behavioral support system that will foster a productive and safe learning environment for my students. (Based on Indicator 4)

Initial Summary: I began teaching full time in an already established classroom in late January 2013. Assuming this position during this time of the school year presented unique challenges in regards to behavioral management. I noticed that rules were posted but students were unable to explain what the expectations for behavior were. My students' (both whole class and individual) behaviors were not consistently being reinforced or redirected. Due to this lack of consistency, students were often unable to participate and attend to lessons both in a whole group and small group setting.

My essential goal for this module was to create a positive behavior support system that would encourage my students to take responsibility for their behavior and learning. Entering my classroom in the middle of the school year (January) presented unique challenges in terms of behavioral management. The rules in the classroom were posted, however students had difficulty following the rules. Behaviors of almost the entire class of sixteen students were disruptive to both whole group and small group instruction. Interruptions (students getting up in the middle of a lesson, calling out, and asking to go to the bathroom) during lessons made teaching ineffective and almost impossible. When asked to work independently five students refused to complete their work and responded negatively to redirection and reminders to follow directions. Think Sheets (a consequence in the classroom) were ineffective because students had difficulty reflecting on their behavior. Out of the sixteen students in my class, eight boys and eight girls, eleven were able to adhere to class rules on an inconsistent basis. Five boys presented a challenge on an hourly basis and had difficulty following classroom rules. After attempting to enforce these predetermined rules for a few weeks, I realized that the rules were unsuccessful and were difficult for my students to understand and follow. How could I expect my students to behave if they did not understand my expectations?

I consulted a book I had utilized in graduate school and during my first year of teaching in Virginia, Tools for Teaching by Fred Jones. I learned several things. Jones believes that in order to produce responsible behavior in the classroom, teachers must have student cooperation. He suggests utilizing an incentive to motivate students to cooperate and work towards a common goal. This "incentive must teach the entire class to be responsible," (Jones, 2007). Jones calls this incentive Preferred Activity Time or PAT, an allowance of time set aside for a desired class activity. I wondered how I could use positive behavioral reinforcement such as preferred activity time to motivate my students to cooperate and take responsibility for their behavior.

After discussing my challenges with a special education teacher in my building and with her support, I developed a behavioral management system centered around a preferred activity time, which I named the Awesome Activity. I began by focusing on four main behaviors that I wanted to eliminate:

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calling out and talking during lessons (including screaming from two students on an almost hourly basis), roaming around the room with no purpose, refusal to complete work, and ignoring directions. I centered my rules around what I expected my students to be able to do: use a quiet voice, stay in their seats, complete their work, and follow directions. As Jones suggested, I worded these rules very simply, making sure my students would be able to name each one: I will complete my work, I will stay in my seat, I will use a quiet voice, and I will follow directions. I knew that for five of my students, those who presented challenges on an hourly basis, focusing on all of these rules at once would set them up for failure, so I chose to pick one or two to consistently reinforce to begin with. For one student, who had difficulty controlling his voice when he was frustrated and upset, I centered his daily goal around using a quiet voice. For another student, who was constantly getting up to move around the room, I focused on staying in his seat each day.

In developing this system, I also wanted to create a way for my students to keep track of their behavior throughout the day. I had successfully used a behavior chart with a few students in my third grade class in Virginia and felt that my second graders would benefit from being able to track their behavior throughout the day as well. I created a simple chart to put on each of my students' desks and devised a check sheet to record their behaviors the moment they were disruptive. Students could earn a plus or a minus for each 15-20 minute block (15 throughout the day) and needed to earn at least 12 out of 15 pluses to participate in the Awesome Activity (an activity taking place at the end of the day, every afternoon—similar to the preferred activity time Jones had suggested). At the end of the day, students would add up their pluses and minuses and then chart their behavior on a board I had designed just for this purpose. This chart allowed me to reinforce positive behaviors and give immediate consequences for those negative behaviors.

I met with my principal and the special education teacher and enlisted their support in putting my plan into action. I also removed the old set of rules from the bulletin board in my classroom and replaced them with the new simple ones. On the day I introduced my expectations for my students' behavior, my principal came into my classroom to express her support of the system to all of my students and expectation that they follow these rules. The special education teacher stopped the entire class in the hall and checked in with all of my students to see how they were doing on meeting their goal. In the weeks following implementation the "cheerleading" by both my principal and the special education teacher would prove to be powerful in reinforcing those positive behaviors. I also utilized the school wide social thinking curriculum that Bowers has adopted. Through this curriculum, students learn about expected and unexpected behaviors as well as problems (Unthinkables) that can get in the way of expected behavior. My students also learn how to defeat those "Unthinkables" when problems arise.

Kathryn Brady, an author of Rules for School, suggests that "modeling can be used effectively...to convey the message that everyone is expected to carry out all everyday activities in a caring and respectful way," (Brady, Forton, Porter, and Wood, 2003). As I introduced each expectation to my students, I took the time to model what each should look like and then asked students to observe and model each desired behavior for the class. Giving students the chance to practice these behaviors helped them to understand my expectations and showed them what they needed to do to earn the

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Awesome Activity at the end of the day. Modeling these behaviors each day over the course of the next few weeks proved to be very beneficial.

Over the course of that first day, I consistently recorded my students' behaviors on my chart and updated the ones on their desks as soon as a rule was not followed. Four students in particular had difficulty using a quiet voice and staying in their seat quickly found themselves with multiple minuses. This instant reinforcement served as a reminder that I expected students to follow the rules, if not minuses would be given immediately. At the end of the day, it was time for our Awesome Activity. Each student tallied his or her pluses for the day and recorded their behavior on the chart. Four students did not meet the goal of at least 12 pluses for the day. While the rest of my students participated in a fun science experiment, those four students completed work that had not been finished earlier in the day. They were very upset that they could not participate and the special education teacher came in to check in with these students about their behavior and talked about ways that they could earn the Awesome Activity the next day. Each day over the next four weeks, I spent five to ten minutes, six times a day, modeling my expectations for my students' behaviors. I also relied on my coworkers to help reinforce consequences for those students whose behavior was particularly disruptive and unsafe to our learning environment. The special education teacher and I worked with my principal and other teachers in our school to create a protocol for one student in particular whose difficulty using a quiet voice when he was frustrated prevented me from effectively supporting the rest of my class. With my system and this protocol put into place I noticed my students' behavior improving greatly. Students had previously called out during lessons had learned to raise their hands when they wanted to share. Assignments were being completed with more care and thought and students were learning to gather all their materials at once and work in one space during a given time. Throughout the day positive behaviors were being reinforced immediately with a plus and each afternoon those same behaviors were being rewarded during the Awesome Activity time. Minuses were consistently given to those particular students having difficulty following those rules and three (out of five) of them became able to explain why they did not earn the Awesome Activity. The special education teacher agreed to check in with the two students who had difficulty explaining why they did not earn the Amazingly Awesome activity, on a daily basis. These check-ins would become an instrumental part of these two students' behavioral success over the next month.

After two weeks, I told my students that they were ready for the next step. I explained that they now needed to earn 13 out of 15 pluses each day to participate in the Awesome Activity. For a majority of my students, this new goal created a new incentive to work even harder to earn the activity time. After four total weeks of consistency, my class had transformed from a room of chaos and uncertainty, to a safe and caring learning environment where students were able to take responsibility for their behavior. Taking responsibility for their behavior not only created a safe and calmer classroom environment, it created an environment where students began to set goals for their own academic success. Noticing that many of my students were doing well, I modified my system again (after four weeks) and introduced the "Amazingly Awesome Activity". Students were now doing so well at keeping track of their behavior and following our class rules, that I was able to reduce our activity time to one day a week. In order to earn this Amazingly Awesome Activity, students needed to meet their behavior

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goal (13 out of 15) for 4 out of 5 days of the week. At first this was challenging for my group of five students, who were upset when they did not meet their goals for the week. Now, just one or two of these students miss their goal for any given week. They have learned to manage their behaviors and take responsibility for their success in class. At the beginning of my implementation, about 75% of my students met their goal each day to participate in the amazingly awesome activity. Currently, 93% of my students meet their goal each day. Just this week I have challenged my students to earn 14 out of 15 pluses each day. So far, just one student has not met this goal!

Through this experience I have gained an incredible amount of experience in behavioral management techniques. Taking over in the middle of the year does present unique challenges for behavioral management. I tried quite a few different strategies before finding one that truly worked for my students and helped them to take responsibility for their behavior. I have learned that not all strategies work for all classes, however consistency with whichever one you choose is essential to creating a safe and calm classroom environment. I found that taking the time to model expected behaviors and giving students a chance to practice is well worth the investment and giving students an exciting (and educational) goal/activity to work towards helps build cooperative relationships. My students have taken charge of their behavior. They encourage each other to follow the rules and take part in our learning. They clap for each other when they earn the Amazingly Awesome Activity and give gentle reminders to students who are having difficulty following the rules. Students now know that there are consequences for their actions. My own practice as a teacher has greatly improved. I learned that collaboration with colleagues can have an incredible impact on the success of any plan. Without my principal, the special education teacher, and my other colleagues I don't think implementation of my system would have been as successful. For me, addressing behaviors with students as soon as they begin has helped me to create a classroom environment where all of my students feel safe and accepted. There are no surprises because my students know my expectations and consequences for their actions. My classroom is now a safe and effective learning environment where students are now setting academic goals to reach. As I look forward to my next year of teaching, I know that I will utilize the behavioral management techniques I have learned this year to make my classroom a cooperative learning environment where students feel secure and respected.