

Initial Summary

Upon becoming the permanent classroom teacher in November, I implemented a point system that I call Soaring High. I began by having the students create a list of classroom expectations that they felt was necessary to follow. Each student has a point sheet on their desk. They start out with two warnings and fifteen points each day. If they show inappropriate behavior as suggested by the classroom expectations then they lose their two warnings first, and then a point each time after. They also earn points for positive behavior. If students lose more than 5 points, they have to give five minutes of reflection time.

Since I began Soaring High, there are still many disruptions in the classroom. During a fifteen minute period I had 19 disruptions from students. The majority of these disruptions were made by Nate, Ronda, and Jen (not real names). These three students typically trigger distractions in the classroom.

Nate is a student who continuously blurts out answers or inappropriate comments while I am trying to teach. He also socializes during inappropriate times. Ronda has a difficult time focusing on her work. She constantly shouts out "I don't get it" if she sees an assignment that looks too hard, even before I get a chance to explain it. She also blurts out inappropriate things while I am teaching. Finally, Jen also has limited control of her actions. She will shout out my name several times without raising her hand and/or will also walk up to the front of the classroom to ask a question while I am teaching. She frequently socializes with the other students at her table. Jen also gets easily frustrated if she does not understand an assignment. Overall, all three students are extremely disruptive, which interferes with my teaching and the students' ability to learn.

At this point I am frustrated with the lack of respect and self-control that these students have. It is difficult for other students to focus and stay on task if Nate, Ronda, and Jen are not following classroom expectations. This makes teaching difficult because I have to constantly discipline students throughout the day.

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After reflecting and having conversations with my mentor on the dynamics of my class, I realized that some of my students still need to develop social competence. I expect students to be respectful of each other's learning. They should wait until they are called on to ask a question or participate. I also expect students to focus on the lesson and try their personal best during independent practice. There are crucial periods of time where it is important for me to teach, or for the students to focus on their work, but some students have a tendency to shout out across the room even when they are not called on. These students often grow frustrated extremely fast if they don't understand the lesson immediately. This is a distraction to the rest of the class, and it impacts the other students' learning.

When I looked at Indicator 3 of the performance profile, I found that I have been able to articulate classroom expectations for social skills to the class. I have been using a point system to encourage students to become more responsible individuals. Although the point system has worked for many students, there are still some who have not made much progress with their behavior. I know the point system has been successful because five students have "graduated"

since I started implementing it in November. This means that they are meeting all classroom expectations and no longer need to have a point sheet. For those students having a difficult time achieving classroom expectations for social skills, I am aware that I should be using other proactive strategies with them to address individual needs. As a result, I was able to research appropriate strategies to help these students with self-control.

The first resource that I examined for information about improving student behavior and self-control was a book called *Classroom Management: Simplified* by Elizabeth Breaux. This resource was very useful in helping me employ strategies that minimize classroom disruptions during learning time. Breaux discusses the importance of clearly explaining to the students what it means to be quiet as well as the appropriate times to talk and not talk during class. Breaux also explains that it is crucial for teachers to make their students aware of all classroom expectations, specifically regarding communication; otherwise, they will not know what is expected of them. This resource helped me realize I needed to develop a working definition of quiet and incorporate some noise-management strategies to use in the classroom in addition to the quiet signal.

Through my research, I learned I needed to teach my students expectations for appropriate levels of noise in the classroom. Currently, if the students are getting too loud and I need them to quiet down, my strategy is to put my hand in the air and give the peace sign, which is the quiet signal for our classroom. Sometimes it takes the students a long time to even realize that I am standing there with my hand up. Unfortunately, students will continue to shout out, especially Nate, Ronda, and Jen. I decided I was going to introduce some of the noise-management strategies suggested by Breaux. I would begin by teaching them the expectations for acceptable noise levels in the class, including when it is or is not appropriate to talk during learning time, the level of noise that is allowed, and how to use a visual aid and signals for assistance. Breaux gave an example of a visual aid to use as a noise-management strategy while she discussed a teacher she observed. "While performing an observation in the classroom of a new teacher, I observed what I thought was one of the most clever noise-management strategies I've ever witnessed. Hanging from the ceiling in front of the classroom was an antique traffic light" (Breaux, 2005). Breaux explains that each color on the traffic light represents a different level of noise. She also suggests that using a traffic light made out of construction paper with the same colors is just as effective as a real traffic light. I believe that the visual aid will be a key component of the noise-management system because it will help the students know the level of noise that is expected of them *before* each lesson. It will also be posted in front of the classroom for everyone to see so that it can act as a constant reminder to the students.

To introduce the traffic light, I delivered a lesson to the students about the expectations of purposeful noise in the classroom. I started off by explaining to them that there may have been confusion on the expectations of noise, and when it is appropriate to talk and/or not to talk during class. Before I even showed the students the traffic light, I had them brainstorm examples of when it is appropriate to talk, and when it is not appropriate to talk. I wanted them to come up with the examples so that they would feel responsible for creating the expectations. It was important for them to gain a sense of ownership. Once the students finished brainstorming, I showed them the traffic light. I explained to them that it will be posted in the front of the classroom from now until the end of the school year.

Before I explained what each color represented on this visual aid for managing noise, I asked the students what they thought each color meant. Most of their suggestions were accurate. The red circle would signal no talking, the yellow circle would signal quiet or whisper talking and the green circle would mean that they could talk at a level appropriate for learning. Under no circumstances would yelling be allowed in class. Then I had students model what each level should sound like so that everyone knew what was to be expected. We also thought of examples of situations when the magnet would be on the various colors. For example, the magnet would be on red during mini lessons because students should raise their hand and wait to be called on if they want to participate, instead of shouting out answers or comments. Also, the magnet would be on yellow during literacy work stations because students are encouraged to work together in cooperative learning groups during this time. I reminded students that yellow means a noise level conducive to learning, but never disruptive.

The traffic light did not have as significant of an impact as I had anticipated. Before I implemented the traffic light as a visual aid, I counted 19 disruptions in 15 minutes while students were completing their morning work. After three days I counted 15 distractions in 15 minutes. I was hoping for more so I read another resource called *Classroom Management that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Every Teacher* by Robert J. Marzano. Marzano explains the importance of using classroom meetings to teach students responsibility. This made me realize that I should incorporate a morning meeting into our daily routine and use it as a tool to reinforce the noise-management strategies.

I noticed a greater improvement in the students' behavior after a week of using the traffic light in conjunction with daily morning meetings. I took another tally of disruptions during the time students were unpacking and doing morning work. In fifteen minutes I had only 5 disruptions from students. I have learned that my students need constant reminders of the classroom expectations. They benefit the most from having daily morning meetings. I tested this theory by skipping a morning meeting for one day, and I found that the disruptions increased. I have learned that I have to stay consistent with the students by having morning meetings everyday to review the classroom expectations of noise, which includes a daily review of the significance of the traffic light. The students have learned the difference between whispering and talking at appropriate noise levels. They have also learned what the traffic light represents, and how to use it as a visual aid to signal time for purposeful talk or silence. They have demonstrated their learning through the conversations we have during our morning meetings. I call on different students everyday to share their understanding of the expectations, as well as to reinforce the noise-management strategies. The decrease in the amount of disruptions is the real indication that students understand the expectations and have learned to apply the various noise-management strategies.

Disruptions are still being made by Nate, Ronda, and Jen, but they are occurring as a result of disagreements with other students. I asked the school Social Worker if I could observe her while she teaches the PATHS program to the class. PATHS stands for Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies. It is a program that helps reduce behavioral problems by focusing on social and emotional strategies according to *PATHS: An Introduction to the Curriculum* by Carol A. Kusche, Ph.D. and Mark T. Greenberg, Ph.D.. Throughout the various stages of the PATHS

program, my students will learn how to talk themselves through a difficult situation. They will be able to identify the problem, come up with possible solutions to the problem, and carry out the solution that works best for them to solve the problem. The reason why I asked the Social Worker into the class to teach PATHS is because Nate, Ronda, and Jen lack some of the necessary social skills to help them interact positively with other students. I have learned that Nate's interruptions occur when he is trying to seek attention, or when he has to cooperate with other students in a group setting. Ronda's interruptions occur because she does not view herself as being smart, so she tries to compensate by bossing other students around. Finally, I have noticed that Jen's interruptions occur when she gets frustrated with the work.

During my observations, the Social Worker started off by reviewing the classroom rules that the students had created during one of the first lessons. Then she had the students complete group work that required them to assign jobs and duties to each other. They also had to work as a team. During the first lesson I noticed that it was very difficult for the students to assign roles fairly to each other. There was a lot of arguing, and Nate even had to be removed from his group to take a five minute break. As part of the lesson, the Social Worker taught the class different strategies to use in order to help students assign roles in the groups. For example, Nate's group was arguing because everyone wanted to be the "writer." The Social Worker had the students pick a number from one to ten. The person that got the closest number got to be the writer. The strategies that the Social Worker taught the class carried over to the second lesson that I observed. I saw an improvement in the behavior of the class as a whole, especially with Nate. There were hardly any disagreements. A couple of the groups were using the strategies that the Social Worker taught them to help assign jobs while they were in teams. They were even coming up with new strategies on their own. Based on the observations, I learned that allowing the students to create the rules helps them to gain a sense of responsibility for following them. I also learned that my students need to be equipped with strategies that will help them be successful when working with each other to avoid conflict.

As a result of the Social Worker coming in to the class to teach the PATHS program, the students have learned to interact with each other in a more positive way. They have learned different strategies for settling disagreements. Many of the disagreements between students arise during group work because someone is either feeling left out, or they are not doing the job they wanted to do. The students are learning how to consider one another's feelings and make sure everyone is equally involved. As the PATHS program continues, the students will learn more strategies to help them through difficult situations with peers.

Over the past few months I have seen an improvement in the behavior with the class as a whole, as well as a decrease in the amount of distractions. I noticed a decrease of interruptions within a week of introducing the visual model for noise management along with daily morning meetings. The number of distractions went from 19 in 15 minutes, to 5 in 15 minutes. Not only was there an immediate improvement, but the class maintained the appropriate behavior to keep the distractions limited. I saw even more positive changes in the students' behavior once they began learning the PATHS program. They have been able to interact more positively with each other, especially in cooperative learning groups.

With regards to the three students I have been focusing on, I am now aware that there are different reasons for their negative behaviors. These reasons go deeper than just understanding the classroom expectations. I have learned that Nate's interruptions occur when he is trying to seek attention, or when he has to cooperate with other students in a group setting. He is still working on attention seeking, but he has made progress with working in groups. He is able to communicate more positively to the students in his group. Ronda's interruptions occur because she does not view herself as being smart so she tries to make up for it by bossing other students around. I have arranged the seating in the classroom so that Ronda is sitting with a group of students who are positive influences, as well as non-argumentative. Finally, I noticed that Jen's interruptions occur when she becomes frustrated with her work. I make sure to pull Jen, as well as Ronda, into small groups to give them additional one-on-one support during math and reading to minimize their frustration with the new subject matter.

During this module, I focused on providing explicit instruction about social skills to students to develop social competence. Students have become more engaged in their work because they are able to use the different strategies to avoid distractions, whether they're from noise or interactions with other students. I have also seen more students offer help to others who are having a difficult time on an assignment. They are able to do this without being distracting to the other students at their table because they now know how to monitor their noise level. As a result, I am able to teach lessons in a more efficient amount of time, allowing me the flexibility to help students during independent practice.

It is evident that student behavior has improved as a result of the changes I made, so I will continue to focus on making improvements as a teacher. I have realized that I need to be more attentive to the needs of my students. For example, if I notice that Ronda is becoming defiant after I have taught a lesson, it could be because she still does not understand the information. I need to communicate with her and ask if she needs additional help instead of assuming she is trying to avoid her work. I also need to give positive verbal feedback more often to all of my students, especially Jen. She has really matured over the past couple of months, but she reacts positively when I make an effort to tell her how great she is doing. Finally, I need to continue teaching my students strategies to use while working in cooperative groups. Nate has really benefited from this. All of the students have become more successful and engaged in group work because they are learning how to interact positively.