



## TREP CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Chronic exposure to community violence and the resulting loss of safety affects all aspects of children’s functioning: cognitive development, emotion and behavior regulation, attachment, and self-concept. In the classroom traumatization can show up as inability to remain seated, noncompliance, lack of focus and motivation, forgetting information previously mastered, and other challenging behaviors.

Trauma responsive educators understand that these are not disciplinary issues, and instead recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma, proactively teach positive behaviors, and actively resist actions that re-traumatize children and youth.

Because managing a classroom of students coping with high levels of traumatic stress can seem overwhelming, these research-to-practice briefs are a dedicated space to ensure that educators serving students living in high crime neighborhoods are equipped with trauma responsive educational practices.

### Using Proactive Strategies to Create Supportive Classrooms

Students exhibiting challenging behaviors can be intimidating: no teacher wants behavioral issues to interrupt their class. However, research has shown that classrooms often fail to encourage appropriate behaviors and may even inadvertently promote the undesired behavior instead of offering extra support for these students. This research to practice brief will discuss two classroom management techniques that support students with behavioral issues: praise and opportunity to respond (OTR).

#### The “Problem Students”

Students who present behavioral challenges are often stigmatized in the classroom as the

“problem students”. This negative stigma is evident in the teacher’s interactions with these students relative to their peers. Research has shown these teacher-student interactions are more likely to range from neutral to negative. Data collected also found evidence that teachers directed a higher rate of command statements towards students identified as “problem students” than other students that were not classified as “problem students.” Additionally, more attention is typically given for inappropriate classroom behavior than for appropriate behavior. This can be noted in the fact that inappropriate student behavior is predictive of teacher reprimands but appropriate

behavior is not predictive of teacher praise. These factors compound over time and only serve to perpetuate the negative behavior trends of the student and reinforce the teacher perceptions that may lead to labeling her or him as a “problem student”. Students identified as having behavioral problems may cause teacher apprehension and a fear of triggering disruptive behaviors leading the teacher to engage less with the student for the sake of maintaining stability in the classroom. Unfortunately, teacher disengagement may result in the student’s disengagement.

### **Moving Towards Proactive Strategies**

Punitive responses towards students considered “problem students” may seem to be the easiest to turn to for the sake of avoiding disruptions. However, there are strategies that can be applied to help students with behavior problems. **Proactive strategies**, which focus on preventing challenging behaviors, instead of reactive strategies are recommended in order to establish a classroom environment that supports and encourages appropriate student behavior and even minimizes the need for the use of reactive strategies. Proactive strategies foster a more positive relationship between educator and student because the teachers are bringing attention to positive behaviors rather than combatting negativity and if a student is then later reprimanded for a negative behavior, the teacher can refer to the pre-established classroom norms and expectations. Two key strategies that employ this method are the consistent use of **verbal praise** and the increased **opportunity for students to respond** appropriately to instructional questions and commands.

#### **Verbal Praise**

One way teachers can create a supportive classroom environment is through the consistent use of verbal praise. Praise can be given for many reasons, including following directions, displaying engagement in instruction, on-task

behavior, correct answers, or work accuracy or completion. Praise should be tailored to the specific student, taking into account factors like their age and skill level. For example, a teacher may respond to a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student by saying, “Brittany, I noticed you had your eyes focused in your book for the entire independent reading period. Excellent work!” It is important to recognize that not all students respond in the same way to praise, and students with a long history of behavioral issues may even react adversely. Recognizing each student as an

“...the inappropriate behaviors of students who were at a high risk for aggression were predictive of teacher reprimands; however, no student behaviors—including appropriately complying with teacher commands were predictive of teacher praise...”

individual allows for the praise to lead into meaningful student-teacher interactions that improve the classroom atmosphere as well as individual student experiences. For students who may not be accustomed to public praise, praise given privately may help mitigate adverse reactions which also helps strengthen student-teacher relationships. Finally, to implement the most effective praise, teachers should explicitly link the praise to the behavior they want to increase, providing feedback on the appropriateness of the behavior.

#### **Opportunity to Respond (OTR)**

Another effective method to create a supportive classroom environment is by allowing more opportunities for students to respond correctly. OTR is most successful when students are given the relevant information and the curriculum is modified to best suit the students’

learning styles. Some guidelines for OTR include eliciting four to six responses per minute for new material and eight to twelve responses per minute for review material. Although these guidelines may appear to be an unattainable amount for some teachers, simply starting by making a conscious effort to give each student more OTR will begin to make a difference in the classroom environment. Some examples of OTR are:

1. Soliciting choral or group responses that can even be cued with a signal as a regular practice
2. Involving partner talk with a think/pair/share response
3. Asking for a physical gesture such as a thumbs-up/thumbs-down or even stand up/sit down as a response

Further, with proper training and practice, teachers can establish this as a classroom norm. Finally, OTR not only improves behavior by increasing engagement and decreasing disruption, it also benefits academic outcomes by increasing the amount of correct academic responses produced by individual students.

### **Strategies in Practice**

The two aforementioned strategies can be incorporated at any time into a teacher's existing classroom management plan. Teachers should take time to set personal goals around student praise and OTR. Administrators should make

sure these strategies are being employed by their teachers and offer support where necessary. Teachers can self-evaluate as they work, taking note of what types of praise work best with different students to increase positive behaviors. Teachers, as well as administrators, can make use of some simple methods in order to track teacher praise and OTR within the classroom and set goals. One simple and inexpensive way to is to record the teacher for 15 minutes each day and tally the number of praises awarded during the recorded period. These numbers should then be graphed over the course of a week to see how levels of praise increase or decrease. This method can help teachers become aware of their own classroom management and provides them with a clear marker from which to create goals. This method can be employed again later in the school year so as to mark progress in these goals.

### **Conclusion**

There are many ways to create a more supportive classroom environment for students with behavioral issues. Teachers should use meaningful praise and increase the opportunities for students to engage with the material being presented instead of furthering a cycle of negative interactions. These methods can be incorporated into a teacher's current methods and have been proven to be highly effective and inexpensive.

### **Adapted From:**

Partin, T. C. M., Robertson, R. E., Maggin, D. M., Oliver, R. M., & Wehby, J. H. (2009). Using teacher praise and opportunities to respond to promote appropriate student behavior. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 54(3), 172-178.