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PRAISE for Students with Behavioral
Challenges

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PRAISE for Students with Behavioral Challenges

by Beth Ackerman

The challenges of classroom management can cause teachers, as well as administrators, much distress. Though a great deal of advice is available on behavior management, the sheer volume of information may be overwhelming—adding to an educator's angst.

After years of working with children and adolescents with behavior problems, this practitioner developed an easy-to-remember acronym for techniques in classroom management. The acronym **PRAISE** can assist educators in planning, organizing, and evaluating successful behavior management. Being **P**roactive, using **R**einforcements, **A**ssessing and analyzing the **I**ntent of misbehavior, being **S**incere, and **E**mpowering students are the keys to a positive and structured classroom environment (See Table 1).

Table 1. PRAISE

P	roactive
R	einforcements
A	ssessing and analyzing behavior
I	ntent of misbehavior
S	incerity, and
E	mpowering students

The acronym serves as a quick guide to the appropriate steps in helping a student with challenging behavioral problems. The guide is not intended to be an exhaustive review. Further research, study, and practice will strengthen the success of these ideologies and their application.

Proactive

Proactive (the "P" in PRAISE) behavior management is the primary

"The acronym PRAISE is a simple way to plan, organize, and evaluate successful behavior management."

means of preventing negative behaviors. Teachers can head off behavior problems by preparing to avoid situations that might encourage them.

The proactive teacher creates a fun, innovative, and exciting learning environment, while maintaining structure and standards. This includes arranging the classroom appropriately, posting rules as well as classroom rewards and consequences, clearly defining expectations, and fostering a positive and structured environment (Wong and Wong 1998). Many students disrupt class and are sent to the principal's office simply because their classroom is not an enjoyable place for them to be or because they do not clearly understand what the teacher expects from them. As a former principal, this practitioner knows that this number is higher than might be expected. The classroom must be an atmosphere where students feel safe and experience success.

With forethought, some classroom behavior problems can be prevented. Some common sources of problems are hyperactive students sitting next to a window or near a computer where they can be easily distracted or students who do get along sitting close together. Another common mistake in elementary class-

rooms is the arrangement of desks in groups where some students have their backs to the teacher. Careful consideration of the arrangement of the classroom should include not just where students sit in relation to other students, but also students' proximity to the teacher, location of distractions, and students' view of class instruction (Emmer et al. 2003).

Another important component of being proactive is for a teacher to find the balance between being well-liked and well-respected by students. In an effort to be well-liked, novice teachers—particularly at the secondary level—may befriend students. While doing so, they may not have gained the necessary respect from students.

Teacher planning for instruction is another element of being proactive. In addition to being fun, creative, and innovative, the curriculum needs to be appropriately challenging. Students may demonstrate acting-out behavior because

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of boredom, when instruction has no direction or lessons are too easy. Similarly, other students may act out because of frustration with work that is too difficult. Further study of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson 1999) could aid a teacher in providing a variety of instruction for students.

Reinforcements

Reinforcements (the “R” in PRAISE) must be used to maintain discipline. A teacher can implement many types of positive and negative reinforcements, including eye contact, a detention, a pat on the back, or a contingency contract.

When deciding which reinforcement to use, a teacher always should first try the least restrictive option for gaining control. For example, a teacher was observed dealing with a student who was talking out of turn. Without having previously addressed the problem, she warned, “One more time, and I’m sending you to the office.” As this teacher discovered, administrators do not appreciate this approach. Gaining the support of an administrator is easier after exhausting possible actions in the classroom.

Additionally, effective teachers employ more positive reinforcements than negative ones; doing so helps maintain a fun and positive classroom atmosphere. Teachers should not fear positive or negative reinforcements; when implemented correctly, these techniques work well.

Though most teachers already know and use the classroom management techniques presented up to this point, the importance of these steps cannot be minimized. These techniques are the foundation to any effective behavior management plan, and most students respond well to them. When these approaches fail to address the student with behavioral problems such as chronic classroom disruptions or disrespect, additional steps—which build on the first two—are necessary.

Assessing and Analyzing Behavior

To determine how to handle a particular behavioral challenge, a teacher must **Assess** (the “A” in PRAISE) the situations in which misbehavior occurs. The focus should be on particular situations in the classroom—not on the causes of the behavior, such as environmental, biomedical, sociological, or congenital (Bandura 1997). Behavior that occurs over time is the topic for another discussion and further research.

To assess why a student is misbehaving in the classroom, a teacher must collect information. What is the misbehavior? When is it happening? Who is present when the misbehavior takes place? What happens before it occurs? What happens after the misbehavior?

To be helpful, the answers to these questions must be specific, not abstract. For example, instead of labeling the attitude—a student is disrespectful—name the specific behavior—the student is rolling his or her eyes. A simple ABC chart (such as the one shown in Table 2) can be useful in analyzing behavior: the antecedent of the behavior; the behavior itself; and the consequence following the behavior (Walker, Shea, and Bauer 2004). From this specific information, a teacher can develop a plan of action.

Table 2. Analyzing Behavior

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
During teacher instruction of math lesson	Speaking out of turn	Ignored the student
During math individual work time	Talking without permission	Gave a warning
During reading orally	Asking inappropriate question	Answered the question

Intent of Misbehavior

Identifying the **Intent** (the “I” in PRAISE) of a student’s misbehav-

ior is another piece of information necessary for developing a specific intervention plan. Like babies communicate through crying, students communicate through their behaviors. A student with chronic behavior problems is communicating a need. Often, the student doesn’t know or understand what he or she is attempting to communicate. Students misbehave for many reasons, and it is vital that a teacher understands the reason for the action before reacting.

Four main reasons explain why students misbehave: attention, power, revenge, and inadequacy (Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper 1998). A classic situation is one of a student who is trying to receive attention and has learned how to receive it in a negative manner. After determining that the intent of misbehavior is to receive attention, a teacher should give the student attention for wanted behaviors, while ignoring unwanted ones.

A power struggle between a teacher and a student is another common reason for misbehavior. When intervening, a teacher should be careful to not be too personally invested in the discipline of the student. In this case, a teacher should gain additional support from an administrator or parent.

Revenge may be part of a cycle following a teacher’s reaction to a

student’s misbehavior. For example, a student may have a bad attitude or retaliate after returning from deten-

tion or suspension, or the day after receiving a report card. In these instances, a teacher should avoid feeling hurt or using punishment as another form of retaliation against the student.

Misbehavior that occurs during academic time—such as a student talking without permission during individual work time (see Table 2)—may indicate that a student feels inadequate. If the teacher responds with negative consequences, rather than giving the student an opportunity to experience success, the teacher is reinforcing the student's feeling of inadequacy.

Building a trusting relationship and finding areas of common interest can assist the teacher in these intentions of misbehavior. Further research and experience can assist a novice teacher in determining intent of behavior.

Sincerity

A critical element in dealing with any behavioral challenge is for the teacher to approach the student with **Sincerity** (the "S" in PRAISE). Any successful behavior management plan requires compassion for the needs and esteem of the student.

While seeking to meet the needs of an individual child, the teacher and administrator must demonstrate love and forgiveness. The student must feel that the teacher wants what is best for him or her.

Teachers sometimes get too personally involved in a difficult situation or become more concerned with meeting their own immediate need of gaining control rather than acting in the student's best interest. In difficult situations, teachers can find themselves in "win-lose" battles in which a student is punished or a teacher feels wronged. The ideal outcome is

"win-win," where both the student and teacher achieve their desired results.

Empowering Students

Perhaps the most important element in meeting behavioral challenges is to **Empower** (the "E" in PRAISE) the student to manage his or her own behavior. The goal of any behavior management plan is for the student to learn how to demonstrate the appropriate behavior without assistance.

Keep in mind that a teacher's expectation of what is normal and appropriate conduct may be unfamiliar to the student with a behavioral issue. When asked to behave in a particular way, the student must learn a new behavior that may seem abnormal to him or her.

To empower a student to self-manage behavior, the teacher must involve the student in his or her behavioral plan. Allowing the student to give his or her own reinforcements will encourage independent control of behavioral issues.

Closing Thoughts

Being **Proactive**, using **Reinforcements**, **Assessing** and analyzing the **Intent** of misbehavior, being **Sincere**, and **Empowering** students are keys to any successful behavior plan. The acronym **PRAISE** is a simple way to plan, organize, and evaluate successful behavior management. ■

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