

Behavior Management in Selected Students Causing Verbal Disruption

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**INTRODUCTION**

During the fall semester of the 2014-2015 school year, I student taught in a middle school science classroom. I taught three periods of 7<sup>th</sup> grade life science classes. This was my first time in charge of classroom management, and there was a lot to learn. I always knew that consistency was key, but it wasn't until I had to put it into action, that I really understood what my students needed from me.

**PROBLEM**

At Syringa middle school, in Mrs. Ferro's life science classes, I taught 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> period. There were two classes that brought up challenges for me. The 4<sup>th</sup> period was comprised of English language learners and low level math students. The 7<sup>th</sup> period class was the largest, with 31 students. Both periods contained an element that required different levels of attention to the students; a different and more challenged academic background, and a significantly larger class size. One thing in common with the two was that they both contained a highly disruptive student.

Some disruptions may be less severe, like sleeping in class, being tardy, or talking among peers. However, they can also be more severe, such as cheating or verbal abuse (Harrell, 69). Each class has a student that tends to be off-task, outspoken, and pulls the attention of the students away from me, the teacher. If this disruptive behavior isn't managed, the disruption could become more severe. Without addressing the disruptive student behavior, it also becomes more difficult to meet the instructional load of the classroom (Emmer & Stough).

My idea of a successful use of class time is when all the students are very active and dynamic. I create a dynamic classroom by switching from activities where the student's attention is on me, to where the individual is redirected towards peers, or themselves. Having quick transitions between one activity to the other is essential. In my troubled classes, I spent a lot of valuable class time waiting for whole class attention. When said distracting student becomes off-task it often drags down the surrounding individuals, thus transition time between the activities became too long where I would have liked to use class time more efficiently. I want for the class to be able to transition between activities without getting distracted by peers about things unrelated to class.

#### CLASSROOM A

In my 4<sup>th</sup> period the 'distracter' is a boy, who I will refer to as Mark. Mark always has something up his sleeve. Some days he enters the class talking with four or more other students. As he finds his seat, the students at his desk group will try to get him on task. I always started class with a warm-up question and the students have 5 minutes to get ready to answer it. One student at his group has made it her role to constantly remind him of what he needs to be doing. He will loudly respond to directions by commenting about things that have happened during his day. At times I am left waiting minutes after their 5 minute timer has gone off for the class to finish their bell work and redirect their attention to me. I needed Mark to get his work done on his own and be ready when the buzzer goes off.

I have tried talking to him before he enters class about having good behavior, and he has responded well. I even once caught him attempting to refocus his group back on the task. The next day I showed my appreciation for his behavior in class by saying, "You did an awesome job yesterday in class! Keep it up" as he was entering the classroom. However after a few days his behavior goes back to what it was before.

The class time that is invested into getting the class back on task is hurting how well the students are connecting with the material in class. While the whole class period cannot be compared to another class period, I need to be able to go through the material for the students who aren't struggling.

## CLASSROOM B

In my 7<sup>th</sup> period class, the 'distracter' is another boy who I will refer to as 'Kyle'. I can usually tell if Kyle is going to cause a lot of trouble or not during the period by how he walks into the classroom. If he is dragging his feet and trying to strike up conversation with everyone around him, he is going to be talking to the kids around him all period. If he walks in normally, he might be more reasonable in the classroom. While he does bring a lot of excitement and energy to the class, it would be better if the energy was directed to daily tasks rather than to creating distractions.

It has gotten to a point with both of these students that I am excited when they aren't in class. If they aren't there, I will be able to get through the material more efficiently and the other kids will also be more focused. I was losing my patience with them, and as I reflected on in my lessons, I found myself being inconsistent with them and letting bad behavior slide by ignoring it.

## SOLUTION

I developed a behavior management plan that works with the individual to decrease disruptive behavior. There are four sections to this plan. The plan involves strikes, consequences, recording behavior, and rewarding behavior.

The first is giving three strikes (see Appendix A). Students needed a visual cue that told them that what they were doing was not acceptable (Implementing Self Regulation...). I needed a way to address their behavior without distracting from my lesson, so I placed a slip of paper with

an 'X' on it, which was placed on their desk when they would either talk over others, or get up from their chair. If I was giving directions to the whole class and the student with which I am working with stands up to sharpen his pencil as I am giving instructions I would place an 'X' on his desk. As the students receive more 'X's, the consequences became more severe.

The second part of the plan involved assigning consequences to their disruptive behavior. I wrote a sheet for the individual to choose what consequence they wanted (see appendix b). The sheet may be taped into the individual's binder or handed in to the teacher at the end of the period. The consequences should gradually increase in severity to decrease the likelihood of the student disrupting the class.

The consequences could, if needed, be changed depending on the individual, but shouldn't be changed once explained to the student. In the version I used, the first strike was a freebie. The second was three different versions of a 'time-out', either outside of the classroom, in back of the classroom standing, or at another seat with their head down. I used multiple consequences because my lead teacher, Melyssa Ferro, told me to give the student a choice in what consequence they get so that they feel like they have an option (M. Ferro, personal communication, November 11, 2014). The third strike has two parts. First, is sitting in the short seat. If the student reaches strike three they are required to sit in a short seat at the front of the classroom with a clip board for the rest of the class period. The individual also owes me their lunch to discuss the next step to take.

The third part of the behavior plan is an idea from a research paper and an RTI meeting for Mark. During the RTI meeting, the principal, Shea Swan, asked the teachers for documentation of Mark's behavior. Mr. Swan recommended me to keep track of his behavior for the school to keep records of changes in behavior for implementing plans in the future (S. Swan, personal communication, December 9, 2014). I found that behavior became better when the student

recognized and took ownership in their behavior. "Self-monitoring has consistently produced outcomes of improved academic performance and classroom behavior" (Coleman & Webber, 106). It is this part of the behavior plan that incorporates self-monitoring to change behavior to what the teacher finds acceptable.

To measure their behavior, I created a graph sheet for the student to record how many strikes they received during the period (see appendix c). I would hand them their sheet at the beginning of the period and they would give me their sheet at the end of the period with the graph filled out.

The final part of the plan is positive feedback. If they have three days during the week where they don't reach the third strike, they are able to choose a reward. On Friday, they would tell me the reward they choose and on Monday, I would give them that reward. I chose to separate it over the weekend, so that the student would come back from being gone and be quickly reminded of what happens when they behave. They are able to choose from writing the bell work question that starts the class on Monday, to get a free homework pass, or getting 5 minutes of free time for the whole class. To keep the student motivated they would be encouraged by receiving the positive outcome and praise (Implementing Self Regulation...).

The most important part of the plan is being consistent. The power that I have as the teacher is to give the strikes and they must understand what behavior gives them a strike. When the behavior plan is first introduced to the students, it is also important to make sure they seem motivated by the rewards and understand the consequences. While there seems to be many steps to the management, my job was to give them X's for incorrect behavior and make sure that they choose their consequence.

## RESULTS

As I went through the behavior management plan, I wrote a reflection after each week. This three week session ended with the start of winter break. It was a good time to work on behavior because the students were very comfortable with me and they were becoming excited about a break from school.

### *WEEK ONE*

I introduced the plan on Tuesday so they had a shortened week to adjust to the new plan. They were both motivated by the rewards and seemed to understand when they were going to receive strikes. I told them that if they left their seat or talked over others, I would give them a strike. The first day worked really well and they didn't receive any strikes. Mark consistently got one strike each day for the rest of the week and Kyle didn't receive any strikes until Friday when he received two. Mark would give me his behavior chart and strikes at the end of the period and Kyle decided to tape his behavior chart in the back of his binder and show me before he left the classroom.

I am pleased so far with the results. Both boys are better in the classroom and talked over others less. Reflecting back I realized I was much too relaxed when assigning strikes, often not doing it if they were out of their seat. If I want their behavior to improve, I need to give out strikes as soon as they are out of their seat. To add to the whole classroom behavior, I need to increase the amount of positive reinforcement I give to the students. I don't want the rest of the students to feel left out because I am giving so much attention to the bad behavior in class.

### *WEEK 2*

This week I worked on giving strikes when the student was out of his seat. I told them at the start of the week what I was doing, so they were aware of what behavior I was looking for. I was having a difficult time the week before with not giving strikes when the students were getting out of their seats, so I focused on this which made the number of strikes for the week increase. The

two students started to become used to receiving a strike and were less worried about it. On Friday, Mark got up to three strikes and he wrote an apology letter to the class. When I sent him to the back of the classroom, he started the letter "Hi class" and used the rest of the time to walk around the lab table making faces at the rest of the class. As he left the classroom he left his strike slip on the back lab table and slipped out with the rest of the class.

I really regret not having the time to talk to him one-on-one. I have seen him capable of working in the classroom and don't understand why he is resisting so much. Mrs. Ferro told me that she noticed over the years that the students who don't understand act out and disrupt the class so that they don't look dumb in front of their peers. He is "playing dumb" by saying that he doesn't know how to do something. When I can work with him one-on-one, he is very capable and picks up the concepts quickly.

Kyle was out of his seat a lot, but when I gave him his strikes he would remember to go back. On Wednesday, he received two strikes, and chose to stand outside and the whole time, where he was making faces into the classroom. I gave him extra time so that I could get the class working. He didn't change his behavior and when I talked to him outside, he wasn't really listening and kept looking around. The class period ended before I he could do anything else. The behavior management ended there because he missed the last two days of the week.

### WEEK 3

This was the final week I was with the class. Instruction was a little different because we did a review game, testing for two days, and we had a school-wide game day. There was less instruction and we tried to review the questions on the test. The lesson was a lot more engaging for the students and I made a rule that the group earned points against them if they talked outside of the allotted talking time. The whole class was really excited about the competition between their groups. This was reflected by the good behavior in following the rules.

A problem that came up during this week was in class A, my 4<sup>th</sup> period. During the review game, the class teamed up against Mark's group and by the end of the period it was evident that the class was just as frustrated with how he acts in class as I was. I didn't know what to do now that it was the whole class that was against one student. The community of the classroom felt like it fell apart a little because Mark was being singled out. What I learned from that day was that if a behavior problem arises, it was important to deal with the behavior as soon as it is unacceptable or the community in the classroom would fall apart quickly.

This week included a review game, testing, and a school-wide game which created a different setting making Mark and Kyle cause less problems in class. Mark was very engaged in class, but would be overly enthusiastic about the game being played and I had to start a rule that a point was being taken away if anyone in that group talks out of turn. Kyle, on the other hand, was very involved in the competition and helped his team out even though at times they didn't trust what he knew.

## **CONCLUSION**

For class instruction, the behavior monitoring worked for the first week and began to fall apart. I found that as soon as I was being inconsistent, the individuals would begin to act out again. I needed to be consistent about checking with the individuals before they left the classroom. This would show them that it matters and would give me another chance to reaffirm what they are doing right and wrong. If I didn't check their charts at the end of the period, they wouldn't mark down the number of strikes.

This management plan had many parts to it and involved additional effort from me to check and recheck the individual's behavior. The management plan worked in the beginning but because I was inconsistent, during the second week the plan began to fall apart. I found myself not



following through with the consequences and as soon as I was inconsistent, the behavior became worse.

My situation mimicked the IY TCM intervention which worked with teachers who have disruptive students in class (Reinke, et.al., 75). As the teachers approach a behavior problem in class, they talk to their coach to learn different ways of handling the behavior. My lead teacher, Melyssa Ferro, and mentor, Kevin Talbert, acted as my coaches and gave me ideas on how I can improve my classroom management in how I present myself and projects. My lead teacher would model how she would react to her 7<sup>th</sup> graders as a few became disruptive. Before the three weeks I changed an incentive by suggestion from Melyssa. I interacted with the students differently as I received feedback from my mentor and lead teacher. I moved around the classroom more, I would stop class and stare down a student, and I worked on creating more engaged lessons. These things changed the student's behavior along with my management plan.

The biggest takeaway for me was to be consistent with the students. When students begin to test my boundaries, I must set the consequence right then and there. Otherwise, the individual will continue to push the boundaries and have control over me and the class.

“Appendix A”



“Appendix B”

## **1 strike**

☞ Warning

## **2 strikes**

☞ 3 minute hall

☞ 3 minute back-of-room

☞ 3 minute head down

## **3 strikes (parent contact)**

☞ Sit in the short seat, spend lunch with me to discuss next step

## **Rewards**

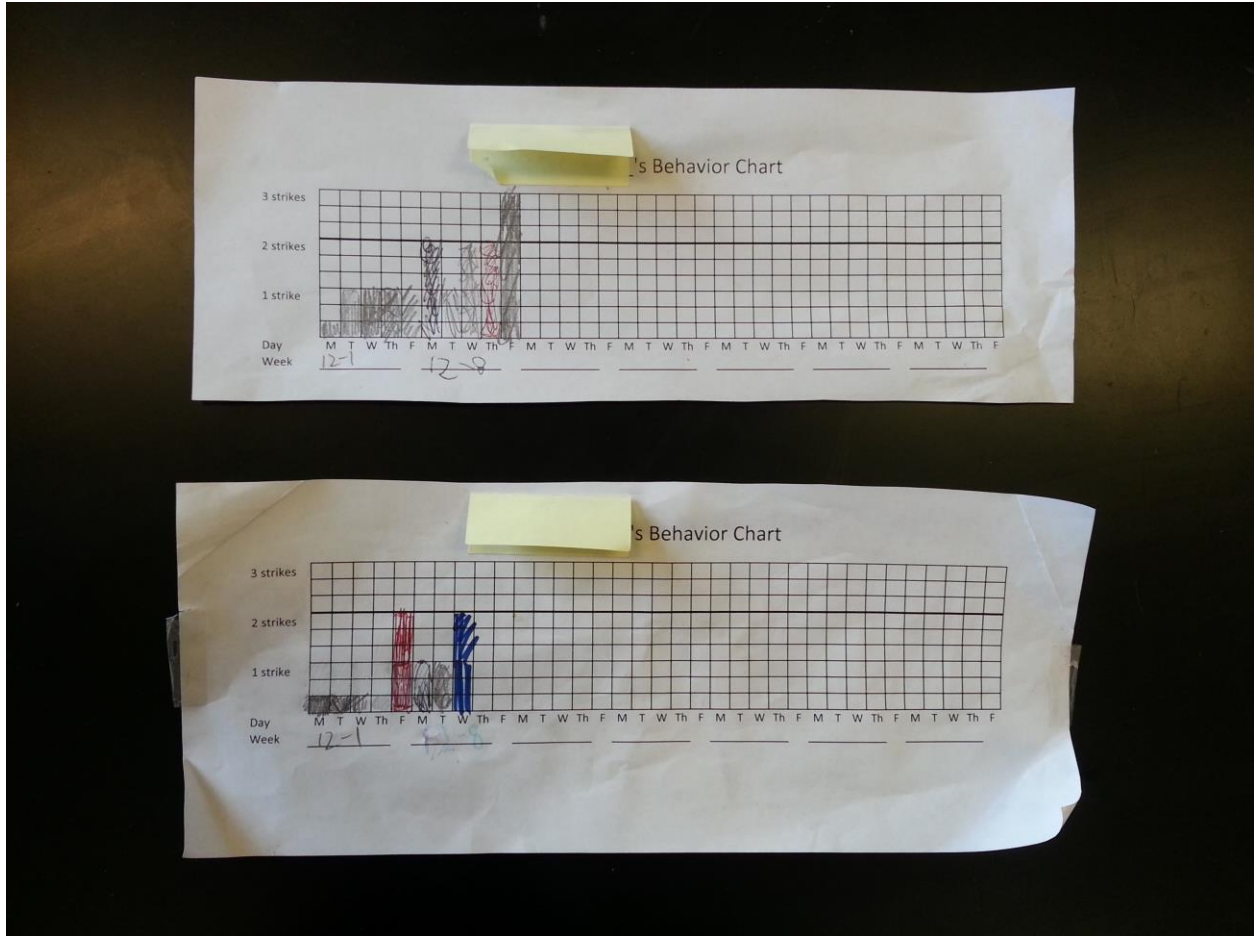
1 week with 3 days under the gray line choose one:

☞ No homework pass

☞ Write the bell work

☞ 5 min ‘free-time’ exit

“Appendix C”



## References

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