



4T's PRODUCTIONS
www.4ts.org

Classroom Management That Creates Harmony Instead of Hostility

Author: Kevin Mixon

"Thanks a lot, Marquis," his classmate whispered angrily. "Now we lost 10 minutes of free time because you were messing around. You're stupid. We hate you!" Sound familiar? Although many experts oppose punishment-and-reward systems, they are still used in almost every classroom. Teachers are often required to adopt a school-wide classroom-management system, or they may institute their own out of a need for structure. But given these realities, you can still incorporate classroom-management levers that are tied directly to learning goals and that reinforce expectations, rather than simply punishing so-called "bad" behavior. In doing so, you can foster inclusiveness rather than divisive competition in the classroom.

The first step towards doing this is to offer rewards that students will have to work towards *and* that are directly tied to learning goals. For instance, you might reward students for sustained, constructive work by letting them play a whole-class, non-competitive review game (such as "math baseball" or "Jeopardy") by which you can assess their learning at the end of a lesson. Fred Jones, in *Tools for Teaching*, recommends that we label these learning games as "Preferred Activity Time" or P.A.T. Try to select movement activities that stimulate the brain and provide welcome relief from sitting.

Also, be sure you structure the way students can earn P.A.T. to promote inclusiveness and *esprit de corps*. Here's an example of how not to do this: I used to start classes with four marbles. One marble would be subtracted for instances of general misbehavior by three or more students in the class (I had a different system for individual student misbehavior). If classes "lost all their marbles" they would lose a preferred activity, and the misbehaving students were ostracized for ruining it for everyone else.



4T's PRODUCTIONS
www.4ts.org

But I've learned better. My students must now *earn*, rather than lose, a prescribed number of marbles. Further, the way students earn marbles is individualized. For example, a challenging student may gain a marble for the group by not exhibiting outbursts for several minutes, while another student may gain a marble for assisting an English-language learner or exceptional student without prompting. Peers view both actions equally, as they have gained the same thing towards the desired activity. Challenging students are often offered "high fives" for earning a marble, rather than insults for failure.

Narrating Rather Than Praising

A second principle to creating a management system that builds cohesion is to avoid personal praise. "I like how Dayshaun is sitting quietly." "Good job, Maria, I love your singing." How often do we include how we feel about student work or behavior with our feedback? Walk down the halls of any school and you'll hear this all day long from even phenomenal teachers. I did it for so many years; it was—and still is—one of the toughest habits to break during instruction.

The problem is that qualifiers like "I like how ...," "I love that ...," and "good job..." turn otherwise instructive feedback into individual praise. Alfie Kohn and others cite much convincing research suggesting that teacher praise actually extinguishes motivation in students. They'll end up working for the reward (extrinsic motivation) instead of the the personal satisfaction of doing a task well (intrinsic motivation). And when you remove the reward, you'll remove the motivation to perform the task.



4T's PRODUCTIONS
www.4ts.org

Praise can also give the impression that the teacher has favorites, thus replacing whole-class harmony and inclusiveness with competition and resentment. Further, individual praise is not favored in some Native American and other cultures, in which the well being of the entire group is of primary concern. And particularly in under-served populations of middle school students and older, students who are praised might be teased for "sucking up to the teacher."

The research is consistent and compelling, however, on the positive effects of teacher feedback on student learning. That feedback just needs to be specific to the task so that it informs the particular student and others in the class without including how the teacher feels about it.

So, amend the examples above by taking out "I like ... " and stating simply that "Dayshaun is sitting quietly." And we can tell Maria that her "intonation during the second performance of the passage was more accurate than the first one." In this way, Maria is given feedback about pitch accuracy—as are others in the class—without the need for personal acclaim.

Lee Canter, in *Classroom Management for Academic Success*, describes a technique called "behavioral narration" for providing students with reminders and feedback without teacher praise during classroom routines and procedures. First, clearly describe the procedure, preferably posted in written form or icons if there are more than one or two steps. (Educator Michael Grinder recommends "going visual" with instruction whenever possible; adding pictures and icons to written instructions helps younger children, students with special needs, and English language learners.)



4T's PRODUCTIONS
www.4ts.org

As students physically move through each step (e.g., enter room quietly, sit at desks, etc.), identify students who are following directions without overt praise. For example, "Carlos and Alyssa are entering the room quietly" or "Leslie is sitting at her desk waiting for further instructions." Try to comment on every student every day to engender inclusiveness and avoid the perception of playing favorites.

Behavior narrations, by identifying expected behavior, serve to remind students of each step in the procedure and the precise way to perform it. These reminders aid all students, but are particularly helpful for students with behavior considerations such as ADHD because they provide concrete reminders without reprimand when these students struggle to remember routines or procedures.

We love our students and want to share when we are happy with their accomplishments. Fortunately, there are ample opportunities for these interactions, and they do much to build the rapport needed for learning. However, let's not kill desired behaviors with our kindness.

So be on the lookout for substantive learning games and other activities students enjoy and will want to work towards. And while teaching, provide instructive, constructive feedback that guides and motivates students to learn rather than to seek extrinsic rewards from the teacher. These two approaches will help you create harmony rather than hostility in your classroom.