

## Structuring Classroom Experiences for Success

### *Proactive Management Strategies*

## Employing least-to-most intrusive tactics

### ***Understanding the problem***

Teachers need to become "behaviorally literate" to demonstrate skilled least-to-most intrusive decision making abilities. Teachers are well prepared in terms of content expertise; however they often lack behavioral literacy. To become behaviorally literate teachers need to learn to "read" and "interpret" students' behaviors in meaningful ways and structure their proactive and reactive approaches to management accordingly.

A number of unintended outcomes may occur when teachers do not employ least-to-most intrusive decision making. For example, some teachers avoid preventing or dealing with students' undesirable behaviors. This sends the message to students that they can behave in any manner they desire because there are no clearly stated expectations nor are there consistent rewards or consequences. On the other hand, teachers may respond to students' challenging behavior by overreacting intense emotion or imposing unreasonable classroom rules. These all-or-nothing types of responses are often a trap and tend to exacerbate difficult situations. In both cases, teachers and students feelings of failure are reinforced and thus more likely to continue to occur in the future, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to interrupt.

### ***A key to the solution***

In order to use least-to-most intrusive decision making, teachers must engage in self-evaluation and self-questioning coupled with systematic use of proactive and reactive approaches. Engaging in these processes helps teachers to use management strategies in a hierarchical or stepwise manner and avoid the all-or-nothing" trap. A planned and structured approach to intervention can also aid in creating of a classroom climate that is cooperative and reflective of mutual respect rather than one that is dominated by teacher control.

## Management Tips

**Step 1** Behavioral literacy begins with you -- the teacher. Engage in the process of self-evaluation and self-questioning. It may be helpful to use the following “door” scenario.

Ask yourself, *Which type of door best reflects my management style?*

The advantage of the sliding glass door is that it can be closed when necessary (i.e., when students bring guns or weapons to school).

There is no question that when students are endangering themselves or others, the most intrusive interventions need to be employed.

However, the sliding door can also be open

as necessary. The track that the door slides on allows it to be continually adjusted. This is analogous to least-to-most restrictive decision making. You need to be able to slide through the use of a series of management approaches in a structured manner. The goal is to be able to stay on track with your approaches and simultaneously adjust to students’ behavioral responses in an effective way.

### DOORS to Behavioral Literacy

#### Closed door

If you resemble the closed door, you are a no-nonsense disciplinarian. It’s your way or the highway!

#### Revolving door

If you resemble the revolving door, you have a tendency to use the same techniques repeatedly without much success.

#### Open door

If you resemble the open door, you tend to be too passive! You can be easily taken advantage of by students and are often perceived as a doormat!

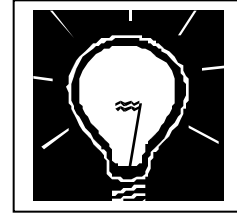
#### Sliding glass door

If you resemble the sliding glass door, you are strong and secure, yet, flexible. You adjust to the demands of the environment as needed.

**Step 2** Identify the most frequently occurring behaviors in your classes.

Make a list of those that drive you crazy. Reflect on your management style (step 1) and how it has influenced your approach to preventing and/or dealing with students’ challenging behaviors in the past. Were you effective some of the time, all of the time, or none of the time? What could you do differently? The last question is particularly important because the only behavior we can change is our own. We can blame students’ undesirable behaviors on their home environment or

their attitude. However, those are things we **can't** change. The only control we have is over our responses to students' challenging behavior. When we accept this idea, we are on our way to becoming behaviorally literate.



**Step 3** Consider whether or not problem behaviors are created by your approach to instruction. Can they be effectively addressed by changing the curriculum content or the instructional method? Are they attributable to students' performance deficits? For example, if you use a traditional lecture with question-and-answer discussions most of the time, students may be more likely to engage in undesirable behaviors. Reconfiguring this traditional approach to include **response cards**, **cooperative learning**, and **Think Pair Share** is one way to prevent

students' challenging behaviors and increase their prosocial and actively engaged academic behaviors. Thirty to 40 percent of challenging behavior can be eliminated by effective instruction. Teaching well represents a least intrusive option that must be considered early on in the decision-making process.

**Step 4** Develop a plan for preventing and reacting to disruptive

#### MINIMALLY INTRUSIVE

**Step 1:** Review expectations, rewards, and consequences or the classroom creed prior to instruction. Check for students' understanding in concrete ways.

**Step 2:** Provide for smooth-sailing transitions.

**Step 3:** Ensure opportunities for ongoing active student engagement in the instructional activity. Do they have opportunities to talk in an organized way. For example, increase the use of cooperative learning or Think Pair Share activities.

**Step 4:** Frequently reward students who are quiet.

**Step 5:** Verbally redirect students who are talking. For example, *You need to be actively listening, focused, and participating.*

**Step 6:** After three positively stated redirections or warnings, students who are talking do not earn a plus on their goal card for that specific interval of time.

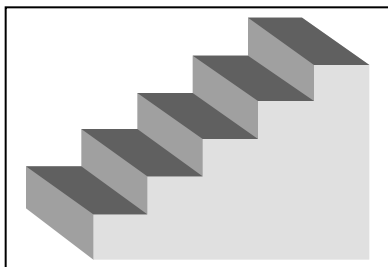
**Step 7:** Encourage students who did not earn points to actively listen, stay focused, and participate to earn points for the next time increment.

**Step 8:** Remind students that points are accumulated daily and can be exchanged for weekly or monthly privileges.

**Step 9:** Conference with the student individually. Guide the student in the process of goal setting and generate a way to evaluate his or her progress. For example, self-monitoring may be used.

#### MORE INTRUSIVE

student behaviors on a daily basis. The plan should reflect least-to-most intrusive decision making. For example, if students' talking is driving you crazy, your plan might look like this.



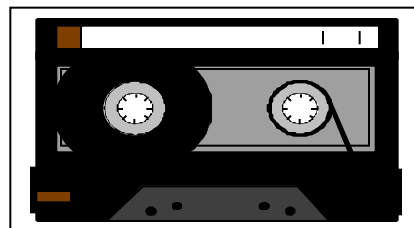
The hierarchical or stepwise nature of this plan allows the teacher to move through a continuum of strategies. Begin with strategies that are subtle and preventative and move towards the use of those that are more apparent and reactive. The progression should be incremental and systematic, rather than extreme and

haphazard. This organization provides a consistent and neutral approach to behavioral decision making and subverts the likelihood of emotionally charged interactions that are neither an efficient nor effective use of teacher time.

### ***Jazzing It Up***

1. Involve students in the decision-making process to the greatest extent possible. Shared teacher and student decision making is essential for creating a sense of ownership and investment in the process. The approach also teaches adolescents how to make decisions in a structured and thoughtful manner.

2. Audiotape your classes. This is beneficial for a number of reasons. It may help you to determine which type of “door” your management style reflects. The audiotape can also be used to guide you in determining how accurately you are implementing your plan.



3. Be prepared to be consistent! Students will “test” you. The plan is only as valuable as you make it. Many teachers develop excellent plans, but fail to implement them according to their design. The square root of behavioral literacy is you! The more consistent you are, the more likely you are to experience success.
4. Revise your plan as needed. Classroom dynamics change over time because students' behavior is not static. The key to success lies in implementing systematic rather than haphazard changes to your plan. Implement your plan for at least 21 days or 4 school weeks before making any substantive changes to it.

## ***What's Next?***

Least-to-most intrusive decision making is one approach to making the positive or desired student behavior(s) happen. Additional proactive strategies include

- Communicating clear expectations
- Engaging students actively
- Ensuring smooth sailing transitions
- Using social and other natural rewards
- Using classwide management systems

Management Tool Box

Management Basics