Environment

Ecological Factors
- Physical Setting
- Routines, Procedures, Transitions
- Classroom Climate
- Rewards

Classroom Behavior Systems
- Responding to Problem Behavior
Introduction to Environmental Strategies

In education, the term setting is frequently used interchangeably with the word environment. As such, environmental or setting strategies within a classroom fall into two main categories: 1) ecological strategies and 2) behavior system strategies. This section of the Classroom Coaching Guide provides teachers with a brief overview of each of the categories, along with resources to assist in effectively implementing these strategies. Where applicable, the strategies are linked to the Classroom Systems items on the Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ).

- **Classroom Ecological Strategies** – The relationship between students and their environment (physical and social)
  a. Physical Setting/Classroom Arrangement*[^]
  b. Routines, Procedures and Schedules*[^] (BoQ 42-44)
  c. Classroom Climate/Social Environment*[^]

- **Classroom Behavior System Strategies**
  a. Acknowledging and Rewarding Appropriate Behavior* (BoQ 45, 46)
  b. Effectively Responding to Problem Behavior*[^] (BoQ 47,48)

1. **What are Classroom Ecological Strategies?**

Ecological strategies are those interventions which establish, maintain, and/or modify the classroom environment to optimize student learning, increase student academic engagement, promote effective social engagement and student-teacher interactions, and enhance teacher-family interactions. Ecological strategies include both the physical and social environments within the classroom and encompass three sub-categories: 1) physical setting or classroom arrangement, 2) routines, procedures and schedules, and 3) classroom climate.

**Why are Ecological Strategies Important?**

Research indicates that the most academically and behaviorally effective schools have established and maintain orderly physical and social environments with clear, high, expectations for everyone. The purpose of implementing effective classroom ecological strategies is to teach students the necessary skills to manage the physical and social demands within any classroom setting. It is important to note that the effectiveness of curricular and instructional strategies is highly influenced by a safe, cohesive, well-functioning physical and social classroom environment.

**When and How are Ecological Strategies Implemented?**

1. Prior to the first day of school, teachers should determine the most effective way to maximize the structure within their classroom and arrange the classroom physical environment accordingly.
2. Next, teachers need to think about what routines, procedures and/or schedules will need to be developed, taught and posted in order to establish and maintain an efficiently-run classroom.
3. Finally, teachers will need to determine how best to foster and sustain a positive atmosphere within their classroom by building trusting student-teacher and student-student relationships through open communication and supports. These three sub-categories are addressed in greater
detail below, but keep in mind, that each should be revisited throughout the school year and revised, as needed.

1a. Physical Setting/Classroom Arrangement*

The goal of this evidence-based classroom management strategy is to maximize structure within the classroom. This is accomplished by effectively organizing the physical items and space in the classroom including furniture, traffic flow, seating, centers, groups, and materials. Maximizing the physical structure of the classroom helps elicit appropriate behavior and, to the extent possible, decreases the potential for problem behavior by minimizing crowding, distractions and ensuring adequate supervision of all areas.

The physical arrangement of the classroom serves as a powerful setting event for providing students effective instruction and facilitates, or inhibits, positive teaching/learning interactions. As with other aspects of instruction, the physical arrangement of the classroom should reflect the diverse cultural and linguistic characteristics of the students and be consistent with specific learner needs (Kaser, 2010).

The physical arrangement of the classroom will vary based on the age of the students and the content being taught. In addition, special events or activities may require the teacher to review/revise the physical setting arrangements throughout the school year. Some possible guiding questions to help teachers optimize the physical environmental design within their classroom include:

1. Furniture Arrangement
   a. Is there easy traffic flow from desks to materials?
   b. Does the arrangement of desks, tables, chairs, etc. facilitate transitions?
   c. Are there designated areas for students and staff?
   d. Is there clear separation between independent work areas and workgroups?
   e. Are there predictable seating arrangements/assignments?
   f. Are there clear boundaries between instructional and non-instructional areas?

2. Adequate Supervision/Visibility
   a. Are there ‘blackout’ spots where students aren’t visible?
   b. Am I able to scan the room from any/all teaching areas?

3. Organization
   a. Are instructional materials easily accessible without causing disruptions?
   b. Are materials labeled, color-coded, etc., for ease of distribution?
   c. Are there specific areas to turn in assignments?
   d. Is there adequate space for students’ personal belongings?

1b. Routines, Procedures and Schedules* (BoQ 42-44)

Another evidence-based classroom management strategy is to develop, teach and post classroom routines, procedures and schedules, aligned with the school’s Tier 1 expectations. This strategy helps to maximize the structure within the classroom by providing students with clear, concrete behavioral guidelines regarding what is expected of them throughout the day.
Routines and procedures that occur repeatedly throughout the day, such as transitions, or ones that appear problematic should be identified as soon as possible at the beginning of the school year. As with the Tier 1 expectations and rules, these identified routines and procedures are systematically taught to the students until they are mastered. In addition, students are reinforced for following the procedures and routines, which are re-taught, as needed, throughout the school year. Developing and maintaining effective procedures, routines and schedules are imperative to maintain optimal learning conditions, including minimizing disruptions and maximizing Academic Engagement Time (AET).

Guidelines for developing, teaching and maintaining effective classroom routines, procedures and schedules:
1. Align with Tier 1 expectations
2. Post and regularly review
3. Explicitly teach and model
   a. Provide examples and non-examples
   b. Check for student understanding
   c. Provide opportunities for student to practice
   d. Provide performance feedback
4. Prompt/cue regularly
5. Acknowledge success
6. Collect data to evaluate adherence

Examples of Routines and/or Procedures
1. Transitioning from activity to activity, in/out of the classroom, etc.
2. Turning in assignments, materials, homework
3. Gaining adult attention
4. Asking for assistance
5. Working in small groups, whole group instruction, independent seatwork
6. Taking care of individual needs (bathroom, sharpen pencil, getting materials, etc.)

1c. Classroom Climate*^

Schoolwide PBS implementation has been associated with improved systems outcomes including improved school climate and organizational health. It has also been linked with improved student outcomes, such as the degree to which students are actively engaged and invested in the learning process (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Horner et al., 2009). Although the systemic-level impact of implementing PBS has been demonstrated, emphasis must be placed on effective teaching and behavior management, overall relationships and positive interactions between educators and students in the classroom (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009).

The ‘climate’ of any organization is reflective of the ‘social health’ of that particular environment. When looking specifically at classroom climate, the focus is on the relationship between the students and adults and between the students and their peers. These relationships include the degree to which there is open communication and interaction, the level of support and trust felt by those in the classroom, and how positive the overall atmosphere is within the setting. Classroom climate “is measured by asking teacher and students to explain what it feels like to be teaching and learning in a
particular school/classroom, and asking families to describe their perceptions and sense of being welcome- or not” (Doll, B., 2010). Social health and specifically teacher-student relationships are most important for academic achievement. Student relationships are also important for students’ well-being and feeling safe at school.

Types of Classroom Relationships
1. Teacher-Student
   a. Facilitates student learning and school connectedness
   b. Example video of teacher support and student-identified teacher behaviors conveying high levels of support:
      http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/13561445/strengthen-the-core-teacher-support-for-happy-students
2. Student-Student
   a. Establish positive peer relationships to address bullying
      i. Teach negotiation, mediation, and consensus decision-making processes and skills to resolve inter-peer conflicts
   b. Cooperative learning activities provide social and academic benefits
      i. One student assisting another student (behavioral, academic and/or social)
      ii. All students receive and provide tutoring, fostering a sense of community
3. Family-Teacher
   a. Positive communication between educators and families
   c. Process for regular home-school communication

Ways to establish and maintain positive student-teacher relationships
1. Implement effective classroom management strategies
2. Communicate high expectations and confidence for student success
3. Reinforce and acknowledge success
4. Ensure students experience success and celebrate!
5. Provide models of success with whom students can identify
6. Show genuine interest in students’ lives
7. Build fun into the daily routine (humor, learning games, enjoyable activities)
8. Implement developmentally appropriate and responsive communication methods
9. Curriculum and instruction accommodates individual preferences, abilities, and needs
10. Help students set high goals for themselves to master knowledge and skills versus competitive goals
11. Teach and model the problem-solving process to students to address conflict
12. Include students in problem-solving classroom issues
13. Establish ways to identify and address bullying, peer aggression and intimidation
14. Establish responsive lines of communication with families

2. What are Classroom Behavior System Strategies?
Behavior management systems are those processes and procedures implemented in the classroom which reflect the school’s Tier 1 expectations and are coupled with pre-planned strategies and interventions. Effective classroom management strategies assist all students, across all grade-levels and incorporate family input and support, leading to enhanced communication and classroom climate. Two effective evidence-based classroom behavior system strategies are 1) rewarding and/or acknowledging students for engaging in appropriate or desired behaviors (BoQ 45-46), and 2) developing effective responses to inappropriate behavior (BoQ 47-48).

Why are Behavior Strategies Important?

Research indicates that evidence-based behavior strategies, implemented with fidelity, result in positive student outcomes in the classroom. (Simonsen, Myers, DeLuca, 2010; Christenson, Reschly, Appleton, et.al. 2008; Trussell, 2008).

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<tr>
<th>Decreased</th>
<th>Increased</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Problem behavior</td>
<td>1. Academic engagement</td>
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<td>2. Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs)</td>
<td>2. Socially appropriate behaviors</td>
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<td>3. Administrative or Crisis Intervention</td>
<td>3. Positive classroom climate</td>
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<td>4. ESE or intensive support services</td>
<td>4. Opportunities to achieve proficiency</td>
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When and How are Behavior Strategies Implemented?

As with ecological strategies, teachers should develop a process for acknowledging/rewarding students for engaging in appropriate behaviors, along with a hierarchy of effective responses to inappropriate behavior prior to the first day of school. The specifics regarding when and how to implement each of these strategies are outlined in greater detail below.

2a. Acknowledging and Rewarding Appropriate Behavior* (BoQ 45,46)

Establishing and maintaining an effective process for acknowledging and rewarding students for engaging in appropriate behavior serves as a excellent teaching tool. It provides immediate feedback to students regarding their behavior and elicits the repetition of those behaviors that contribute to increased academic engagement. In addition, acknowledging desired behaviors fosters a positive climate and enhances student-teacher relationships.

Guidelines for developing and implementing an effective reward process:

1. Align classroom rewards with the school’s Tier 1 expectations
2. Teach the system to the students, clarifying what behaviors will be acknowledged
3. Clarify that all behaviors will not be acknowledged and that solicitations will not be rewarded
4. Reward frequently in the beginning and immediately after the display of desired behavior
5. Reward contingent on the demonstration of desired behavior
6. Avoid long delays between the demonstration of the desired behavior and the reward
7. Reward more often in problematic situations or areas
8. Refrain from threatening the loss of rewards and/or taking away earned items
9. Maintain a minimum ratio of 4:1 positive to neutral/corrective comments
10. Keep it simple
Guidelines for acknowledging and rewarding desired behaviors

1. Name the behavior and expectation observed
2. Provide specific positive verbal/social acknowledgment
   a. “Rachel, I like how you are actively listening. Your body is quiet and still and your eyes are on me.”
   b. “Johnny, thank you for being responsible by being on time to class.”
3. Avoid non-specific praise
   a. “Good job.”
   b. “Way to go, Tom.”
4. Reward students immediately following the demonstration of the desired behavior

When developing a classroom system for acknowledging appropriate behavior be sure to include a family component. Determine ways families might be acknowledged/rewarded for supporting their children’s education such as ensuring 1) homework is completed, 2) students are on time to school, 3) student have all necessary materials, or 4) care-giver attendance at parent/teacher conferences.

Types of Rewards and Examples

1. Social Activities: Time with friends, school dance, class party, verbal praise, free access to school events or staff-student activities, teacher assistant
2. Sensory: Lights, sound, temperature, setting
3. Escape: ‘1-Minute’ ticket, homework pass, library or computer lab pass
4. Tangible: Edibles, tokens, praise notes, pencils, stickers, T-shirts, notebook

2b. Effectively Responding to Problem Behavior*^ (BoQ 47,48)

Developing and implementing effective responses to inappropriate behavior is another evidence-based strategy for effective classroom management. When determining effective responses to problem behavior in the classroom, it is important to first determine the definition of ‘behavior’. Behavior is anything someone says or does. Specifically, behavior comprises those words and/or actions that a student demonstrates and can, therefore, be observed and measured. In addition, all behavior serves a specific purpose or function and results in a desired outcome for the individual. All behavior is learned, so all behaviors are amenable to change or modification.

Functions of Behavior
The first step in developing the most effective responses to problem behaviors is to think about the function or purpose of a student’s behavior. Teachers must determine ‘why’ (function) a student is engaging in a specific disruptive behavior so as not to unintentionally reinforce that behavior. There are only two functions for any behavior:

1. Get or Obtain
   a. Peer/Adult Attention
   b. Object/Item, Activity/Event/Task
   c. Sensory Stimulation
2. Escape or Avoid
   a. Peer/Adult Attention
   b. Object/Item, Activity/Event/Task
   c. Sensory Stimulation
Example
A student repeatedly calls out during math. The teacher provides multiple reminders to the student to raise his hand; yet, he continues to call out. Eventually, the teacher tells him to ‘flip his card’. The student complies, but the disruptive behavior continues. Finally, in frustration, the teacher sends the student to the office. If the student engaged in calling out in order to escape (why/function) math, the teacher just rewarded his disruptive behavior by sending him to the office. He has indeed escaped the undesired activity. *(If you have questions regarding functions of behavior or would like more information on this topic, please speak with your PBS coaching facilitator.)*

In order to develop the most effective responses to problem behavior, the teacher must think about the specific consequences/responses that will be applied toward various disruptive and/or inappropriate behaviors. This takes pre-planning on the part of the teacher, but is well worth the investment.

Guidelines for Developing Effective Responses
1. Review/assess the current classroom management system using the Classroom Assistance Tool (CAT)
2. Determine, in advance, a hierarchy of consequences for specific behaviors
3. Pre-planned hierarchy prevents over-reaction to inappropriate behavior
4. Use natural and logical consequences as often as possible
5. Decreases time and attention spent on inappropriate behavior
6. Match the intensity of the consequence to the severity of behavior
7. Always consider the function of the student’s inappropriate behavior and align consequences with function
8. Teach the hierarchy of consequences to the students to ensure understanding.
   a. Example: If a student engages in behaviors ‘X’, ‘Y’, or ‘Z’, s/he will receive consequence ‘A’, ‘B’, or ‘C’
9. Apply consequences consistently across students and situations based on hierarchy
   a. Decreases exclusionary practices that encourage further problem behavior
10. Provide opportunities for student to learn and practice appropriate alternative behaviors
11. Provide hierarchy of consequences to families to enhance communication and understanding of classroom expectations

Hierarchy of Effective Responses to Problem Behaviors
1. Prompt/cue desired behavior
2. Redirect to task
3. Eye contact and/or proximity
4. Re-teach rules and expectations
5. Actively engage student in the teaching process
6. Provide choices
7. Reinforce positive behaviors by peers around the student
8. Planned ignoring
9. Peer mediation
10. Failure to earn a privilege
11. Rearrange physical environment (seating, distracting objects/items)
12. Cool-Off pass
13. Conference with student
14. Conference with parent
15. Restitution/Apology

**Delivering Effective Responses to Problem Behavior**

It is critical to remember that students are going to engage in problem behaviors from time to time no matter how proactive and effective the behavior management system is within the classroom. Therefore, when disruptive behaviors occur, how a teacher responds is extremely important. Some guidelines for effectively responding to inappropriate behavior are outlined below. Teachers should practice these strategies in advance to ensure effective implementation when needed. Without practice, the tendency is to engage reactive responses in the ‘heat’ of the situation.

**Guidelines for Delivering Effective Responses**

1. Remain calm and be objective, even if it feels personal
2. Respond in a timely manner
3. Respond immediately when possible and appropriate to do so
4. Consider ‘wait time’ between request or directive and follow through
5. Address the student in private
   a. Especially important if the student is engaging in problem behavior to get attention
6. Name the problem behavior by telling the student exactly what behavior was inappropriate or did not meet the expectations
7. State the expected behavior that was not met
8. Model expected behavior
9. Have student demonstrate expected behavior and provide acknowledgement
10. Provide consequences based on pre-planned hierarchy

**Example**

“Susan, you were late to class and did not have your book or homework with you. That is not being a responsible student. Tomorrow you need to be in your seat when the bells rings and have all your materials with you when you arrive.”

**Tracking/Monitoring Responses to Problem Behavior**

Part of an effective classroom management system is the teacher’s ability to track and monitor problem behaviors. Classroom tracking forms, also referred to as Minor forms or Behavior Tracking forms, are used to gather meaningful information for data-based problem-solving. Behaviors should be tracked using this tool after basic classroom management strategies prove to be ineffective in changing the problem behavior.

**Classroom Tracking Forms as Tools for Data-Based Problem-Solving**

1. Determine patterns of behavior within the classroom
2. Document impact on academic engaged time
3. Document disciplinary interventions
4. Outline student responses to interventions
5. Generate intervention strategies
6. Means of communication with student and family members

Classroom tracking forms help answer the following questions:
1. What problem behaviors occur most often in the classroom?
2. When and where do problem behaviors occur the most?
3. When and where do problem behaviors occur the least?
4. Which students are involved in problem behaviors most often?
5. What expectations, rules, procedures need to be taught or re-taught?
6. What expectations (desired behaviors) need to be reinforced more often?
7. What is the possible function of the problem behavior?
8. What interventions have been used to address the problem behaviors?
9. Were the interventions effective?

Preventing Escalation of Problem Behaviors
1. Carefully consider adult actions and/or words used to support students who are, or may be about to, engage in problem behaviors
2. Verbal Tone, Volume, Cadence, Proximity
   a. Be empathetic and understanding
   b. Avoid impatience and anger
   c. Use typical or lower volume
   d. Maintain even rhythms
   e. Maintain appropriate physical proximity
3. Empathetic Listening
   a. Provide undivided attention
   b. Use active listening skills
   c. Make eye contact, nod head
   d. Allow for silence
   e. Listen for hidden/indirect message(s)
4. Refer to district crisis prevention training for specific deescalation strategies

Note.
* Marzano, Marzano, Pickering: Classroom Management that Works, 2009