Teaching Procedures to Preschool Children

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When we look at behavior instruction, we can divide it into four components:

⇒ **Content**: What are we going to teach?

⇒ **A Positive Environment**: How are we going to create a place where students are receptive to learning?

⇒ **Monitoring**: How are we going to determine how well students are learning the content we are teaching them?

⇒ **Modification**: If students aren’t learning, how are we going to change what we do to support them and help them learn?

This presentation is about **Content**: What are we going to teach? Some of our content includes prosocial behaviors or “friendly skills” found in programs like RECAP. Research tells us that we also need to teach students other school and classroom rules and procedures. When teachers identify this content, they can draw a grid that looks like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School rules** are unified within the district like the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Code of Conduct. They address the prevention of dangerous situations. An example is: *Leave all sharp objects and guns at home.*

**Classroom rules** are unified across teachers within a building. They address the prevention of classroom disruptions that keep students from learning. An example is: *Follow all teacher directions promptly.*

**School procedures** are the routines we expect students to follow while they are in our building. An example is: *Walking in the Hall.* School procedures differ from school to school depending on what administrators, teachers, and staff consider important routines that keep the school running smoothly.
Classroom procedures are the routines that a teacher expects students to follow in her particular classroom. An example is: Morning Arrival. Classroom procedures differ from classroom to classroom depending on what teachers and assistants consider important routines that keep the classroom running smoothly.

Research indicates that it is helpful for school administrators, teachers, and assistants to write down school and classroom rules and procedures so everyone is clear and unified regarding: What is the content we will be teaching for behavior instruction?

When we teach a student to read, we break up a sentence into words, words into sounds, and use direct instruction to teach children how to read using those sounds and words. No matter how old students are, it is considered best practice and the approach that works. Research tells us that when we teach behavior, we do the same thing. We break the school day into procedures and we break those procedures into the discrete behaviors that we need to teach. To use the analogy of teaching literacy again, if we have a student who is struggling to read, we repeatedly provide direct instruction with lots of practice time for the child and plenty of reinforcement when he or she reads correctly or correction when he or she doesn’t. Research tells us that in behavior instruction we do the same thing. We repeatedly provide direct instruction in one discrete behavior at a time providing lots of practice time for the child and lots of reinforcement or correction to support learning.

Our research has helped us answer an important question that many preschool teachers often ask: How do we teach our children the procedures that will keep them on task; that will motivate them to follow teacher directions? To help, we studied six typical preschool procedures and created lessons and lesson plans for each one.

For the lesson, we created a chart of key features (see example). We identified expected behaviors or “Steps to Success” in column #1. Then we identified rules that might apply to these behaviors in column #2. Finally, in column #3, we recorded specific behavior praise a teacher would provide when a child demonstrated an expected behavior that was part of the classroom procedure.
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Lesson
Participating in Morning Arrival

Key Features
(example)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps to Success (Expected Behavior)</th>
<th>Rule (Student says…)</th>
<th>Specific Praise (Teacher says…) [use with the student’s name]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greet your teacher by saying Hello or Good Morning.</td>
<td>Did I show respect toward my teacher?</td>
<td>Thank you for greeting me when you entered the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hang up your coat.</td>
<td>Did I follow the teacher's directions?</td>
<td>Thank you for hanging up your coat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove your folder from your back pack and place it in the crate marked Folders.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I really like the way you placed your folder so nicely in the crate. That helps keep our room organized, doesn’t it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once a teacher has broken down procedures into discrete, expected behaviors providing praise and supportive feedback is easy. For instance, a teacher can say: *Bobby, thank you for greeting me when you entered the classroom* or *Bobby, Thank you for greeting me when you entered the classroom. That really shows me respect.* Without the praise it becomes supportive feedback and sounds like this: *I see Bobby following procedures, coming right in and greeting me, really showing me respect.* This is how we teach behavior not only to the child being recognized but also to all children who hear what the teacher is saying.

We have also developed lesson plans (see below) to give teachers an idea of how they can teach their procedures. Each lesson plan is very much like a lesson plan for literacy with theme, focus or goal, grade level, and objectives. The objectives are the expected behaviors that the teacher will see when students are successfully following a procedure. The lesson plan also offers whole group lessons describing how expected behaviors can be taught and some creative ideas for teaching so that the children will learn them faster and remember them better.
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There is much content in behavior instruction that can be taught to students and we can do it in an organized way just as we teach literacy. We don’t always have to set a special time aside for teaching behavior. We can integrate it into our academic instruction and other activities.