

Promising Practices in Classroom Management Training

Our report, *Training our future teachers: Classroom management*, reveals tremendous inconsistencies in the preparation teacher candidates receive in classroom management. Some teacher prep programs' practices emerged as stronger and more likely to adequately equip teachers with the skills to manage their future classrooms.

Read more below about these promising practices to ready teacher candidates in classroom management.

1. Teach teacher candidates to use praise to “catch students being good.”

Train teacher candidates in how to effectively employ verbal praise (e.g., “Good job taking your seat quickly, Jordan”) or provide other forms of positive reinforcement, like awarding points to individuals or groups of students that can be used toward some kind of treat, tangible or otherwise.

Using praise effectively can be more challenging than one might think. Teacher candidates must learn to make praise *contingent* on appropriate behavior, *specific* (the behavior earning praise has to be clearly identified), and *contextualized* (praise should be given sparingly for behavior that a teacher knows a student would do anyway, for example). Giving praise to students for *no* reason (e.g., to help their “self-esteem”) can actually diminish student motivation. Teacher prep programs need to teach candidates how to use this strategy effectively and need to ensure that teacher candidates practice this skill until it becomes a habit.

Why it works:

Praising or providing other positive reinforcement when students follow the rules can make the recognized student want to continue this good behavior and will encourage other students to follow the rules so that they get positive attention, too.

Bright Spot in teaching use of praise.

Teacher candidates at Hunter College of The City University of New York are asked to view a video of their own teaching and count the number of positive as well as negative statements made to see if positive statements outweigh the negative.

2. Teach all of the Big Five and give opportunities to practice and demonstrate understanding.

The “Big Five” strategies — rules, routines, praise, misbehavior, and engagement — are the ones with the strongest research support and should be the first steps to managing a classroom that teacher candidates learn. Instructional courses should teach all of these strategies and reinforce these strategies through both paper and pencil assignments (e.g., writing a classroom management plan or developing classroom procedures) and through live practice (either through simulations with other teacher candidates or in a real classroom).

Why it works:

Classroom management strategies are most needed in times of high stress — when a student is being defiant, for example, or when the classroom has gotten out of control. Teacher candidates should not just learn about strategies to handle these situations by reading about them in a book or writing up a plan — they should also repeatedly practice addressing these challenges so that when the management situation arises in their own classroom, they can respond almost by instinct with the appropriate strategy.

Bright Spots in teaching the Big Five, with some assignments demonstrating understanding.

Western Washington University’s undergraduate secondary program has several instructional courses that incorporate classroom management, as well as associated practica courses. One course, Secondary School Methods, devotes more than half of its time to specific classroom management topics, including classroom norms, building student-teacher relationships, altering unproductive student behavior and establishing routines. The course also incorporates both in-class role-playing activities and fieldwork (involving co-teaching a lesson and filming it), which give teacher candidates opportunities to practice management strategies.

3. Use clinical experience to target specific areas of classroom management.

When asking teacher candidates to observe classrooms, give them specific instructions about what to observe. For example, how does the teacher teach and reinforce rules? What routines does the teacher have in place? Teacher candidates could even evaluate their cooperating teacher using the same observation forms on which they themselves will later be reviewed.

For clinical teaching experiences, ask the teacher candidate to teach a routine that will ease the lesson, or ask the cooperating teacher to provide detailed feedback on a teacher candidate’s classroom management. It can be even better to videotape a lesson so that the teacher candidate can watch herself in action later.



Why it works:

Classrooms are always full of action. Asking a teacher candidate for a general observation does not guarantee that the teacher candidate will focus on any one thing. Structuring a teacher candidate's observations means that the candidate is more likely to pick up on the specific classroom management strategies he's been learning about.

Ensuring that a teacher candidate gets experience and feedback with classroom management early on helps that teacher candidate master the strategies sooner. Using a video of the teacher candidate's lesson can help the teacher candidate match feedback with specific actions he took in the lesson.

Bright Spot in smart uses of clinical experiences.

At Great Basin College in Nevada, the “capstone seminar” accompanying student teaching requires multiple observations and reflections related to classroom management, each with a specific goal. At one point, teacher candidates reflect on a targeted observation of a lead teacher's procedures and routines (to accompany reading of the text *The First Days of School*). Later, teacher candidates analyze their own ability to manage their classroom, using a checklist from a text entitled *Qualities of Effective Teachers*. And there's considerable practice. Teacher candidates videotape themselves teaching and assess themselves on classroom management-related issues like maintaining an appropriate pace to instruction to ensure student engagement.

4. Align instruction and feedback on the Big Five.

Teacher prep programs should ensure that teacher candidates learn the classroom management strategies that they will ultimately be expected to perform in student teaching. Any strategy that appears on a student teaching observation/evaluation form should have already been taught and practiced in earlier coursework.

Why it works:

Teachers know not to give a big test on something students haven't learned. Similarly, teacher prep programs should make sure that any skill on which student teachers are being assessed is something they've already learned in instructional coursework.

Bright Spots in aligning instruction and student teaching.

In the University of Virginia's graduate secondary and graduate elementary programs, every strategy strongly supported by research has at least a lecture or assignment (and often both) addressing it. Furthermore, four of the Big Five are included in the student teaching observation/evaluation instruments for each program.

5. Think strategically about when and how to teach classroom management.

Programs address classroom management in different ways. Some devote an entire course to classroom management while others incorporate management topics in other courses (e.g., education psychology or methods). A few programs claim to “embed” classroom management topics across courses, especially in clinical coursework. While any of these approaches could conceivably work, it is important that the program makes a strategic decision about when and how to teach classroom management, and ensures that this topic receives the sustained focus it requires. Relying largely on clinical coursework may leave too much about training in classroom management to chance: if an instructor doesn’t practice a certain strategy, or if a specific challenge doesn’t arise in a student teaching classroom, then teacher candidates may never learn some of the critical classroom management strategies.

Why it works:

Just as teachers plan out a logical sequence of instruction and practice for any course they teach, so too should teacher prep programs plan a logical sequence for instruction on classroom management. This instruction may take place in a single course or spread across multiple courses, so long as programs ensure adequate instruction and practice, culminating in feedback in student teaching.

Bright Spots in addressing classroom management in different course structures.

Eastern Illinois University’s undergraduate elementary program addresses all of the Big Five in lectures, offers a pencil-and-paper assignment (designing a classroom discipline plan) and provides opportunities for practice in fieldwork contained within one instructional course.

Minot State University’s undergraduate elementary program infuses classroom management instruction across four courses — one focused on classroom management and three that incorporate this topic among others. Between lectures and assignments across the four instructional courses, teacher candidates learn about or have assignments on each of the Big Five and have fieldwork that allows for practice.