

Critical Management Skills for Structuring the Learning Environment

INTASC Standard #3: Learning Environments

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 12-1 Describe three ways to monitor student behavior.
- 12-2 Outline the variables to consider when planning for arranging the room.
- 12-3 Justify the importance of logistical planning.
- 12-4 Explain effective methods of managing transitions.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

12-1 MONITORING STUDENT BEHAVIOR

- 12-1a How to Monitor
- 12-1b Monitoring Situations
- 12-1c Responding to Diversity when Monitoring Student Behavior
- 12-1d The Challenging Class and Monitoring Student Behavior

12-2 ARRANGING THE ROOM

- 12-2a Considerations in Room Arrangement
- 12-2b Responding to Diversity when Arranging the Room
- 12-2c The Challenging Class and Arranging the Room

12-3 PLANNING FOR LOGISTICS

- 12-3a Importance of Logistical Planning
- 12-3b Planning for Teacher Equipment and Materials

12-3c Planning for Student Equipment and Materials

12-3d Planning for Setup, Cleanup, and Using Assistants

12-3e Responding to Diversity when Planning Logistics

12-3f The Challenging Class and Planning Logistics

12-4 MANAGING TRANSITIONS

12-4a Types of Transitions

12-4b Teaching Transitions

12-4c Advance Preparation for Transitions

12-4d Just Before the Transition

12-4e During the Transition

12-4f Don't Be Part of the Problem

12-4g Responding to Diversity when Managing Transitions

12-4h The Challenging Class and Managing Transitions



Introduction

Critical management skills are applied in all lessons and activities and are meant to help students behave in ways conducive to learning. Planning for behavior management needs to be an integral part of lesson and activity planning; it's just as important as the decisions made about content and instructional methods. Taking this proactive approach to classroom management will help prevent behavior problems and give students the best opportunity to immerse themselves in the interesting, relevant, well-taught lesson or activity you intend to present.

In this chapter, we continue the discussion of critical management skills begun in the previous chapter. We will focus on *critical management skills that structure the learning environment*: monitoring student behavior, arranging the

room, planning for logistics, and managing transitions (see Figure 12.1). These four critical management skills will be described in detail, and suggestions for responding to diversity and planning for a challenging class will be included. Many of the suggestions can also be used for differentiation of management strategies and as part of RTI or PBS interventions for small groups and individuals who need a more structured environment.

Reread Teachers in Action 11.1, which describes the poster-making activity Mrs. Bean is planning for her class. Then, as you read this chapter, think about how Mrs. Bean could use additional critical management skills to support appropriate behavior during her planned activity.

12-1 Monitoring Student Behavior

The fourth critical management skill for teachers is **monitoring student behavior** (see Figure 12.2). This is also called *active supervision* (McIntosh et al. 2004) or “withitness” (Kounin 1970). Monitoring lets you know what’s going on in all parts of the classroom (or other environment) with all of your students. Monitoring communicates that you’re on top of things. It works wonders in preventing and stopping misbehavior,

increasing engagement in learning, helping you notice appropriate behavior, and ensuring safety (see Chapter 7 for information on monitoring student learning).

12-1a How to Monitor

You can monitor student behavior by **scanning**, **listening**, and **moving around**. All of these techniques will help you be aware of what’s happening throughout the classroom.

Figure 12.1 Critical Management Skills

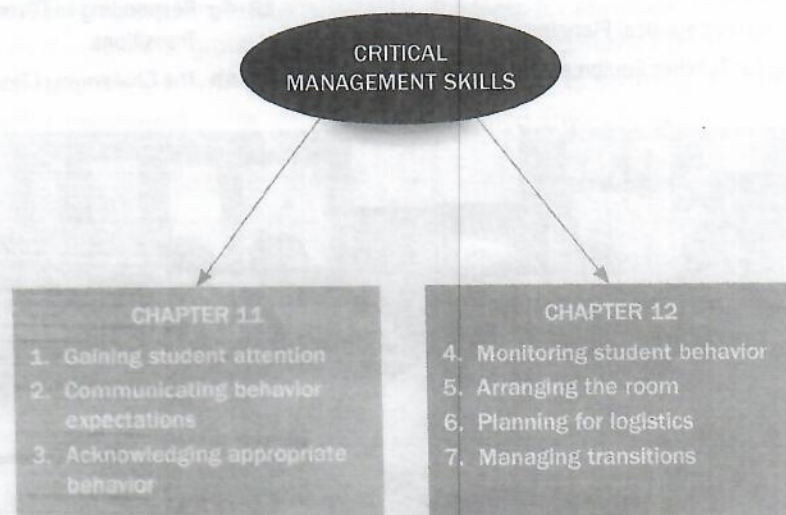
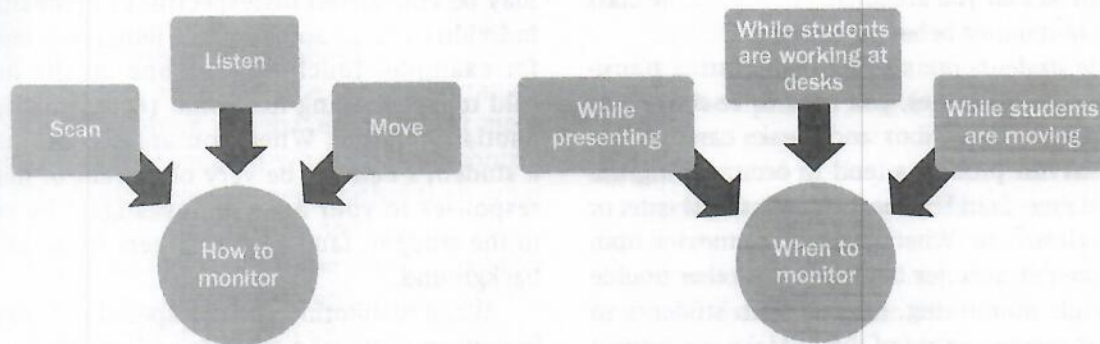


Figure 12.2 Monitoring Student Behavior

Scanning means looking around the room, moving your eyes and head, looking at everyone, and making eye contact. It's easy to make the mistake of just looking at the students right in front of you or only looking at the students who appear interested.

Listening carefully will also allow you to monitor student behavior. Train your ears to notice changes in sounds in the classroom. These could be gasps or giggles or a sudden silence. Get a reputation for having eyes in the back of your head.

Moving around the classroom, in addition to scanning and listening, will be a big help in monitoring student behavior. Walk around the perimeter of the classroom and between desks and tables; stand in various places. Your proximity helps prevent behavior problems and allows you to stop inappropriate behavior without disrupting the lesson. Walking over to stand next to a student while you are teaching will help him attend to the lesson.

12-1b Monitoring Situations

How you monitor behavior will depend on what's going on in the classroom. For example, are you presenting? Are the students doing seatwork? Are the students moving around? Each of these circumstances requires different monitoring considerations.

While you are presenting to the class, visually scan the whole group frequently. Avoid having your back to the class for too long, such as when you are writing on the board. Take care not to be tied to your desk, stool, or projector, but rather present from various spots in the room. When you are reading to the class, stop often to scan, and try walking around as you read. Consider these tips for making monitoring behavior easier during teacher presentations:

- Arrange the room so you can see everyone.
- Arrange the room so you can move around easily.
- Do any needed writing on the board in advance.
- Use a projector or document camera.

While students are working at their desks independently or in groups, moving around to check in with them is especially important. Think about whether to stand behind or in front of individuals as you help them, remembering to position yourself so you can easily and frequently look up to scan the rest of the class (see Photo 12.1). The same is true when you briefly join cooperative learning groups. If you are working with a small group while the rest of the class works independently, be sure to have



Photo 12.1 It is important to position yourself to scan the rest of the class when working with individuals or groups.

the small group sit with their backs to the class and facing you so that you are facing the rest of the class and able to monitor behavior.

While students are moving (e.g., during transitions, centers, free time), you need to be moving as well. Supervise transitions and breaks carefully because behavior problems tend to occur during unstructured time. Stand by the door as students enter or leave the classroom. When students are moving from center to center, scan for bottlenecks or other trouble spots. While monitoring, interact with students so they know you are aware of them. Make eye contact with students, smile at appropriate behavior or frown at inappropriate behavior, and use other nonverbal signals. Interact with students verbally: encourage, remind, redirect, express appreciation, acknowledge appropriate behavior, and connect personally.

Active teacher monitoring is an indispensable management skill. Build it into every lesson and activity. Notice how it is related to other critical management skills: Careful room arrangement makes monitoring easier, monitoring is an important part of managing transitions, and monitoring will help you in noticing and acknowledging appropriate behavior. Remember Mrs. Bean and the poster-making activity described in Teachers in Action 11.1? Now read about Mrs. Bean's ideas for monitoring behavior during her activity in Teachers in Action 12.1.

TEACHERS IN ACTION 12.1: MRS. BEAN'S PLAN FOR MONITORING BEHAVIOR

How to monitor behavior in this activity: Walk around the classroom as students work on their posters, and check in with each student frequently; position myself to see the rest of the class as I talk with individuals.

Reasoning: My proximity will help prevent misbehavior; scanning the whole class allows me to notice problems before they escalate.

How else could Mrs. Bean monitor behavior?

12-1c Responding to Diversity when Monitoring Student Behavior

Be sensitive to cultural differences as you interact with students through signals, gestures, touch, voice, and so on (Seattle Public School District Bilingual Instructional Assistants n.d.). Gesturing

with your fingers (as in signaling "Come here") may be considered disrespectful or demeaning by individuals from Somali and Vietnamese cultures, for example. Touching someone on the head is said to be insulting in Oromo (East African) and Laotian cultures. When you are unfamiliar with a student's culture, be very observant of negative responses to your actions. Investigate by talking to the student, family, or to others from the same background.

When monitoring, make a special note to check in with students who struggle with starting or completing tasks, have difficulty working with peers, have trouble dealing with frustration, and so on (see Teaching Plan 1 in the Appendix for an example). When you notice student moods or problems early, you can often prevent unfinished work, fights, or meltdowns. In the RTI and PBS approaches, close monitoring of individuals is often an important component of interventions at the secondary or tertiary prevention levels (tiers 2 and 3).

12-1d The Challenging Class and Monitoring Student Behavior

Careful monitoring is essential with the challenging class. Make a special effort to do your own class preparation in advance so that you are available to monitor student behavior. Be sure to position yourself to supervise transitions. Do more moving around the classroom. Ask yourself whether there are certain methods or activities that are more challenging for students (e.g., independent seatwork, group work, using new materials) and ramp up your monitoring at those times. Good monitoring will help you notice and deal with problems before they escalate or spread. For example, you'll want to notice and intervene when Lilah and Andrew begin arguing over the ownership of a pencil, before it turns into a fight. If you are monitoring carefully, you'll notice when Junior begins building a tower with math manipulatives and can intervene before the idea spreads to others and before the tower crashes to the floor, disrupting the lesson.

Prompt the class to self-monitor and to help each other manage themselves. You might say something like, "Think about where you are and what you're doing. Refocus if needed and carry on," or "Check with your partner or table group. Does anyone need help in getting to work?" Such comments provide important reminders for productive behavior.

12-2 Arranging the Room

The fifth critical management skill is **arranging the room** to support appropriate behavior (Sprick et al. 1998; Evertson et al. 2006). The physical arrangement of the classroom can make it easier or more difficult to learn. Focus on what you can control about the physical environment, rather than what you can't control. There may be nothing you can do about the size of the room or the furniture you've been given, but you probably can change how the room is arranged for a lesson or activity. Using a checklist such as Teacher Checklist 12.1 can help you plan. Each of the items in the checklist will be discussed further.

TEACHER CHECKLIST 12.1: ROOM ARRANGEMENT

- ✓ Am I planning a room arrangement that will allow me to see all students?
- ✓ Am I planning a room arrangement that will allow students to see (me, each other, the board or screen, the materials, etc.)?
- ✓ Am I planning a room arrangement that will minimize distractions for students?
- ✓ Am I planning a room arrangement that will allow me to move near each student?
- ✓ Am I planning a room arrangement that will allow students to move around without disturbing others?
- ✓ Am I planning a desk arrangement to match the instructional methods I'll be using?
- ✓ Am I planning for efficient changes in desk arrangement (if needed)?
- ✓ Am I planning seating arrangements to match individual needs?
- ✓ Am I planning seating arrangements to facilitate the inclusion of all students?



Professional Resource Download

12-2a Considerations in Room Arrangement

As you think about the room arrangement for a particular lesson or activity, you'll want to consider your perspective, the students' perspectives, and the instructional methods you'll be using.

Consider your needs as the teacher and classroom manager as you think about room arrangement. You'll want to make sure that the room is arranged so that you'll be able to see all of the students. When you are able to see each student, you will notice if they appear to be paying attention, understanding, and participating. You will notice both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. You'll be able to communicate with each student through eye contact and nonverbal signals (such as a thumbs-up or a head shake). Arrange the room so the students closest to you don't block your view of students farther away. Avoid putting display boards or other equipment in places that impair your ability to see all students.

In addition, you'll want to arrange the room so that you can move around easily and get close to each student (see Photo 12.2). If the room is set up so that you can walk near all students and all parts of the room, you'll be able to prevent or intervene in behavior problems early. You may also need to reach students quickly for safety reasons, such as if a student is having a seizure, is choking, or is about to tip over her chair or the projector.

Consider the students' perspectives as you plan room arrangement. Set up the room so that the students can see you, each other, the board, the screen, the materials, or whatever else you'll be using. If students can't see, they'll miss learning opportunities, they'll tune out, or they'll find something else to do. Eliminate major distractions when possible; for example, place desks facing away

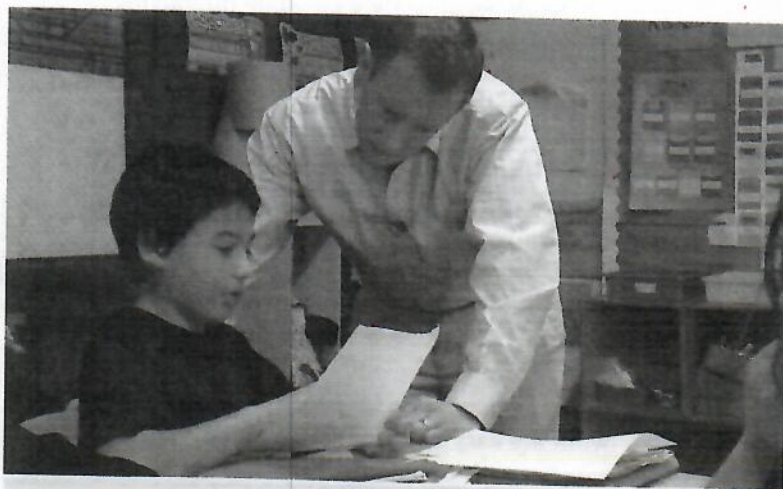


Photo 12.2 Arrange the classroom so you can easily check in with each student.

Summary

In this chapter, we discussed four critical management skills for structuring the learning environment that teachers need to develop: monitoring student behavior, arranging the room, planning for logistics, and managing transitions. Additionally, suggestions for responding to diversity and planning for the

challenging class were included. Teachers need to apply these skills in lessons and activities and make management planning for lessons/activities as important as instructional planning. Look at Chapter 8 for more ideas for using critical management skills when planning for partner and small-group work.

Key Terms & Definitions

Arranging the room: Positioning desks and other furniture and equipment in the classroom to support learning and appropriate student behavior.

Logistics: The practical organizing needed to make a complex activity successful.

Monitoring student behavior: Actively supervising by scanning, listening, and moving around the classroom in order to be aware of what is happening.

Preferential seating: Putting a student's chair/desk in a place that makes it easier for her/him to see, hear, or interact.

Scanning: Systematically looking around the classroom in order to see what each student is doing.

Transition: The process of switching from one thing to another, including movement from place to place and changes in activity.

Portfolio Pointers

- Use teaching videos of complex lessons to show your proficiency at managing the learning environment to keep students engaged through careful room arrangement, monitoring of student behavior, planning logistics, and directing transitions. (InTASC Standard 3: Learning Environments)
- In planning documents, draw attention to the ways you establish a safe and productive learning environment through efficient organizational structures for room arrangement, logistics, and transitions. (InTASC Standard 3: Learning Environments)