

CLASSWIDE SYSTEMS TO CUE, SHAPE AND MODEL BEHAVIOR: STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS

by Diana Browning Wright

The goal of the following classwide systems is to provide the teacher opportunities to *shape, model and cue* behavior, ultimately achieving rapid classroom behavior change. These behavior support systems for whole groups of students rely on three principles: drawing attention to rule-following behavior, enlisting students as providers of reinforcement for their peers, and utilizing naturally occurring classroom activities and/or privileges contingently. These methods rapidly help teachers achieve a positive classroom environment because they facilitate meeting the common needs of students of all ages: “*power, freedom, fun, and a sense of belonging.*” When these four needs are amply met, difficult behaviors become much less prevalent and individual behavior support plans much less likely to be needed.

Rainbow Club¹

Each student in the class starts a time period (typically one week) with the first color of a six to eight color rainbow. This can be graphically presented in a wall chart or on a strip of paper posted on each student’s desk. As the week progresses, students earn additional colors. Teachers can hold up colors of the rainbow as they walk around the room as “cues” for rule following and task completion behaviors. During brief free time activities either at the end of the day or interspersed throughout the day, students may engage in activities for which they have earned eligibility. Having a special payoff at the end of the week can also be useful. Students themselves can suggest the highest status activities for each step in the rainbow and can participate in classroom meetings to establish where new activities fit in the hierarchy. Be ready to alter the system if it is found that the most highly desirable activities are listed below level 3.

Sample: Free Time Eligibility

1. **Red** free reading, notebook organizing, drawing at your seat, head start on homework
2. **Orange** all of **Red**, PLUS: board games, flashcard reviews in pairs, work on art project
3. **Yellow** all of **Red and Orange**, PLUS: checkers, mosaic work, feed animals, make a bulletin board design proposal
4. **Green** all of **Red, Orange, Yellow**, PLUS: chess, computer games
5. **Blue** all of **Red, Orange, Yellow, Green**, PLUS: office aide time, run errands for teacher, permission to eat food
6. **Violet** all of **Red, Orange, Yellow, Green**, PLUS: small group CD listening with headsets, dyad basketball (indoor trash can hoops), small group talking lying on the floor

Special Friday: Blue or Violet may use materials or watch a movie in the back of the classroom

Establish the Operating Rules

Tell the students: “*If you ask for a card, or ask me to look at your behavior, (i.e., nagging) you can not earn a color. Think about what good students do.*” The behaviors you are looking for should be prominently displayed in icons or words, or even on the students’ desks on small reminder cards. (See attached samples.) Use statements such as, *I will be watching with different behaviors in mind for each of you, because each of us has different behaviors we need to work on.*

¹The author has created this method as a positive alternative to a widely used punitive system in schools. In the punitive version, color cards are used as a response cost system whereby violations result in progressive consequences symbolized by movement from green to yellow to red.

Coaching the Student with Difficulties

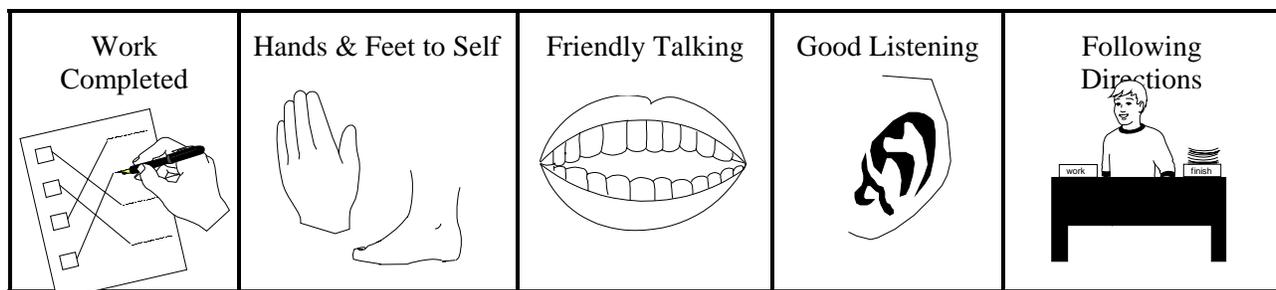
The most problematic students are the ones most in need of cuing with color cards, which become visual reminders of the need to follow rules. For example, take the student aside, confidentially inform him/her of the behavior(s) you will be looking for in the next 50 minute period, encouraging the student to show these behaviors. Walk around holding the array of color cards, looking questioningly toward the targeted student periodically.

Effective Use for Students with Difficulties

Remember: The program emphasis is on coaching a particular student on the specific behaviors he/she may want to perfect in order to advance a level in the next observation period, not on revoking status earned. One can, however, occasionally lower the student's status as a result of misbehavior, but continual threats and demotions will not likely achieve desired results. Consider warning the student privately that he/she is at risk if improvement is not shown in the next work period. Then, if necessary, non-emotionally change the card to a lower status, and provide encouragement about the prospect of re-earning the level in the next one or two work periods. Your goal is to be able to use the color cards as non-verbal cues that signify a whole range of expected behaviors you are looking for, and to have all or nearly all students at Blue or Violet by the last free-time session of the week. Even your best behaving, most rule following students should be striving to attain Violet. As a general rule, no student should arrive at Violet before mid-point in your eligibility period. Also, if at the end of the eligibility period (e.g., the week) the most difficult students have not advanced to at least level 4 or 5, your system is not motivating the most needy. Consider appointing coaches to help these students advance during designated classwork periods. Alternatively, focus your efforts on actively coaching the student with difficulties on which specific behavior he/she should aim to exhibit in the next work period, then be sure to catch the student doing the desired behavior and advance him/her a level for that behavior. Be sure that the taste of success happens frequently for all students or you will have students who believe they cannot be successful and therefore will sabotage the system.

Variation

If some student or group of students requires more frequent attention and reinforcement, consider an additional pacing/closure system. Place a small index card with lines that form five divisions on the student's desk. Using a marking pen, place a mark in each division progressively as you circulate around the room observing desired behaviors. When the student has five clearly visible marks, the card is completed and can be exchanged for the next color he/she is working towards attaining.



"Slot Machine" Game²

Older students are often very responsive to opportunities for "taking a chance or taking a risk" as a reinforcer. This element is emphasized in a classroom-wide game.

Tickets are given frequently to students, paired with the appropriate social praise that specifically states which desired behavior earned the ticket and why. (e.g., "You raised your hand to say that, Josh, and waited until I could break to call on you. That really helps me keep the class focused.") One half of a two-segment ticket is given to the student and the other half is kept for the up-coming drawing. These tickets can be easily made, or are available inexpensively through many theater supply stores, teacher supply outlets and catalog companies. When the selected time comes for a drawing (e.g., last 7 minutes of class), 4-5 different ticket numbers are pulled in turn. Each student with a winning ticket comes individually up to the front of the class for his/her moment of glory, choosing one of 4 to 6 upside down numbered cups on a table. Inside each of the numbered cups the teacher has placed a small strip of paper with a written description of the earned reinforcer. Potential reinforcers can be identified by students, then Xeroxed in list form. The list is then cut into strips with one reinforcer described on each coupon. Students must stay focused on the drawing because if their number is called and they need to come up to select a cup, they will not want to select one that has been already drawn. Initially the drawing should be held frequently, such as once per period. Potential reinforcers are only limited by the creativity of the teachers and students. A variety of privileges and contingent access to desired activities is suggested, as well as inexpensive tangibles. It is the opportunity to take a risk by selecting the cup that is most often the truly reinforcing element, not the quality of the earned privilege. Some commonly used reinforcers might include:

- * free hamburger at McDonald's or other fast food restaurants (usually available at no cost to educators if the educator requests certificates for academic incentives)
- * no penalty for one forgotten homework assignment
- * a pencil, or no-cost pencil borrowing privileges
- * right to be the first out the door for recess
- * permission to leave class briefly for a drink of water
- * do only odd-numbered math problems for homework
- * 5 minutes free time with a friend of your choice
- * 5 extra bonus points on a test of your choice
- * no penalty for leaving class to retrieve forgotten items
- * exchange seats with anyone for a particular work period
- * drink of water anytime
- * opportunity to be first out the door when bell rings

The class does not know which potential reinforcer from the longer menu will be placed under the cups. As each student is called to choose a cup, fewer and fewer cups with a reinforcer under them will remain. One cup can include a "gong" such as "Sorry, try again another day". This option would not typically be included for children under junior high age however. Older students usually find the opportunity to succeed at drawing a cup that does not contain the gong especially reinforcing, while younger children often find the "gong" a punisher. Students with fragile coping systems or low frustration tolerance or emotional disturbance may also not find the gong reinforcing.

² The author is indebted to G. Roy Mayer, Ph.D., Project Director of Constructive Discipline, an E.S.E.A. Innovative-Developmental Grant 1983, for initial descriptions of this system.

Ground rules are established so that students understand that tickets are not given to students who request them. The teacher silently holds up a ticket as a cue for rule following behaviors. The students come to understand that tickets will be given intermittently and that no one can predict when they will be given. Students then realize they should increase their appropriate behaviors to increase the likelihood of being "caught" doing the appropriate behavior. Frequently the class enjoys the activity as a whole and there is the laughter and social recognition for the person engaged in choosing the cup that might otherwise occur in a more negative manner. This activity gives students a sense of belonging to a group, having some *fun*, gaining some *power*, e.g., a privilege, and gaining some degree of *freedom*, e.g., to use the reinforcer when desired. It is important for teachers to assure all students periodically receive tickets or negative results can occur. Once the class has developed a strong interest in the game, often drawings can be held as infrequently as weekly and still maintain the desired positive behaviors. Be sure to fade down to less frequent drawings slowly, however, in order to keep student motivation high.

The teacher can selectively reinforce each student for the particular behaviors that the specific student most needs to develop. For one student it might be arriving on time, for another very shy student speaking out in class might be the behavior most desired. It is important for many students to gain tickets prior to each drawing. To facilitate this process, some teachers have used a student or adult aide who has been trained to distribute the tickets with teacher cues. The teacher might signal, "Ticket," then verbally announce "John is following directions" which provides the cue for the aide to walk over to give the ticket. Alternatively, the teacher might ask the aide to give 15 tickets or so throughout the lesson for "good listening during group instruction" or whatever a particular goal might be for the day.

Variations and Expansions

A rule can be instituted that further enhances the reinforcing quality of this system: The "winner" must retain the paper "coupon" to be cashed in when desired. Some students use their coupons at the first available time, while other students find simply storing up reinforcers satisfying. Having the student write his/her name on the back of the slip to avoid difficulties if it is either a lost or stolen is suggested for some groups of students with problem behaviors. Occasionally, a few students may even be observed giving their winning slips to others as a gift. This suggests that the coupon now is allowing the student to gain social recognition for his/her generosity. If the student enjoys the recognition, he/she will likely strive to earn more coupons in the future.

Frequency of giving tickets for appropriate behaviors can be varied independently of how frequent the drawings are held. Each student may have anywhere from one to ten or more tickets as he or she waits to hear the lucky numbers. Also, by watching students' reactions to the game and then asking them which reinforcers are enjoyed the most, it will be possible to identify the most potentially powerful reinforcers. It is possible to have students save their tickets from session to session, thereby increasing the students' perceptions that they may be a winner, or the teacher may elect to start with new tickets each session.

Some teachers find adding a class-wide consequence to be very effective. This can be done by having the slip of paper state the consequence such as: "Congratulations. You have won a Friday popcorn party for your class to be redeemed in the week of your choice." In this way social recognition/empowerment is earned for the student holding this coupon who must decide when to use it. Alternatively, some teachers have found that having a cumulative reward is helpful. For example, as soon as 400 tickets are earned by the class as a whole, the whole class will have a "good behavior" group surprise.

As with all effective classwide behavior programs, on-going modifications will be necessary to assure that the existing program meets the needs of the individual students and that the reinforcement needs of each student is identified.

Examples

This program has been successfully implemented in a variety of settings for a variety of purposes.

- **Junior high "basic skills" math class:** to increase homework completion and volunteering in class
- **High school remedial history class:** to increase homework completion and class attendance
- **After-school tutoring program:** to increase both tutor and tutee coming on time, and for successful use of both listening skills (tutee) and reinforcing skills (tutor)
- **A 6th grade class during sustained silent reading period:** to increase reading a book continuously to completion, maintaining silence, quickly beginning to read, and other desired individual behaviors

Golden Nugget Club

The teacher spray-paints a large quantity of small rocks with gold paint. During Golden Nugget Time, the teacher walks around, holding small rocks in her/his hand, which are the cue for rule following behavior. The teacher silently hands a rock to students who are following some rule he/she observes. At the end of the golden nugget time, each student with a nugget stands up. The student then attempts to guess the rule he/she was following when the nugget was given. If the teacher decides that the guess was correct, the student gains another nugget. (Note: It is not necessary to keep track of why the nugget was given; the teacher can decide on the spur of the moment whether the behavior the student names is the one the teacher had targeted.) If the other students make validating comments such as, Way to go, Steve!, the student is authorized to place the nugget(s) in a small box at the front of the room. Some teachers encourage the other students to give the nugget-earner high-fives on his/her way to and from the box. If the student is earning praise from the group, a sense of belonging is enhanced and social prestige, *power* is earned, often powerful reinforcement for many students. When the box is full, the class as a whole earns something special, which the teacher has frequently advertised as the payoff.

Consider whole class pay-off activities, some of which the teacher would have done non-contingently anyway, such as: an art lesson, extended library time, extra in-class free-time, a craft activity, use of school carnival game materials typically stored away on campus, a field trip, extra recess, longer recess time, a popcorn party, video access, and so forth.

Variations

Any cumulative, visually observable item could be used by creative teachers for this system, such as: colored fall leaves to completely cover a tree; Styrofoam popcorn to fill a large box made in the shape of a movie popcorn bag, pretend money to fill a bank; small balls to fill an enclosed basketball hoop, a tagboard pizza with places to adhere the sticker pepperoni and so forth.

Keys to Success

Be sure that praise is given from students, not just from the teacher. Use the item as a non-verbal cue, i.e., hold it up and look around expectantly. Frequently give the item to a student with difficult behaviors at the moment he/she is doing something correctly; you are shaping behavior. Not only are you recognizing the student for his/her success, the student will also be getting social recognition from peers for rule-following behaviors when, later, he/she attempts to name the behavior that was being followed. Have a short list of rules prominently displayed in the room or at the students' desks from which the student can guess.

Team Basketball Competition

Announce that basketball quarter is beginning. Announce that as coach, there are certain behaviors you hope to see in the quarter: List 3-5 rules, desired behaviors, outcomes, etc. Walk around the room, stopping at work groups of 4-8 students. Quietly whisper which student at the table is following a rule. If the other students whisper back a group validation, "Way to go, Steve", "Thanks, John" or an equivalent statement likely to enhance a sense of *belonging*, then the teacher quietly places the small ball he/she is carrying in the bucket or small box on the table. Be sure that each table is continually earning balls, i.e., keep up the competitive element. Hold up the ball (**cue**) as you look around for the table group and student you wish to reinforce. This can be accomplished while the teacher is correcting work or assisting students as long as movement around the room is occurring frequently. Alternatively, an adult or student aide who has been coached on the procedure can distribute the balls while the teacher is busy helping students with seatwork. At the end of the basketball quarter, have each team count their balls. The top two teams then select one team member to represent the team. He/she then comes to the front of the room for a free throw play-off competition. Standing behind a line, both students attempt in turn to make baskets in the trashcan basket. Have the remainder of the students in the room count each shot out loud, "11111, 222222, 333333," etc. This keeps the focus of the whole group for this brief process. Typically, it is not necessary to provide any further reinforcer. Some teachers of elementary age students, at the end of the free throws, have each of the winning team members give a high five to the losing team members, then return to their seat. High school teachers do not find this necessary or desirable. Teachers can choose to keep score of which team has the most points from day to day, if desired. It is important to assure that different students have opportunities to represent their group for free throws over time, and that the teacher makes sure the winning teams are varied from day to day. Also, be sure to have enough balls so that teams have at least 6 and up to 12 balls each.

Variations

Teachers have used small balls (nerf-ball soft 1" diameter are ideal), as well as crunched up pieces of paper. A small net laundry bag can be used to contain the balls by the dispensing party as he/she moves around the room, eliminating the need to continually return to a desk to get more balls.