

CLASSROOM AND LABORATORY MANAGEMENT

Students will not learn much if others in the class are disruptive or if they are confused about your expectations for behavior, classroom policies and/or procedures. Make sure you manage your classroom for students'—and your own—success. Your classroom management policy and procedures must comply with school administration parameters for appropriate action. Be certain to familiarize yourself with current school policies and procedures.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

1. Think through the actions you will take to maintain the classroom environment. Be ready to set expectations and consistently enforce them. Be aware of group roles that may influence your actions.
2. Write out your classroom expectations and procedures so you are clear on your intentions and can explain them to students.
3. You will need to establish your grading policies and procedures. See section “Assessment for Learning.” Be sure to communicate expectations about assessments, grading and record keeping. Be clear on your intentions and explain them to students.

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MANAGING STUDENT BEHAVIOR, SPACES, TIME, & MATERIALS

- **Set your standards early.**

Classroom control is established during the first day of the school year. Keep your expectations and policies simple, clear, and to a minimum. Set up the room to encourage positive engagement between students and yourself. The use of a seating arrangement can be leveraged to facilitate student collaboration and productive interaction. The efficient use of instructional time will be crucial in assisting students to achieve the established learning objectives. Using time on task strategies will assist in making your learning environment productive and enjoyable for both students and yourself.

- **Understanding learner behavior.**

Know the background of each student. Learn all you can about your students' previous school experiences (but do not let this information bias you). Check the backgrounds, meet with parents and investigate the home situation of habitual disciplinary offenders. After pursuing every available alternative to correct the situation, it may be necessary to refer students to the appropriate personnel.

- **Make your lesson interesting and varied.**

Employ a wide variety of teaching materials and methodologies that actively involve students. A lesson that does not actively facilitate student participation may invite behavioral problems. Consider the attention span of your students. Be overly prepared each class and start on the bell.

- **Make learning enjoyable and fun.**

Listen to your students and let them feel it is their classroom.

- **Emphasize the positive.**

Students who consistently experience negative classroom experiences tend to lose motivation to engage in positive classroom behavior. Give positive reinforcement to all students.

- **Empower students to learn.**

Use student-friendly approaches that get students involved in learning activities and keep them on task. This will reduce discipline problems.

- **Make your enforcement consequences quick, consistent, just, constructive and inevitable.**

Idle threats will soon result in challenges to your authority. Back your statements and policies with firm action. Students will be the first to realize when an instructor does not follow up with action.

- **Avoid group punishment.**

Instructors who enforce a consequence on an entire class for the poor actions of a few are inviting additional undesirable behaviors and resentment from students not responsible for the actions of others. Deal specifically with only the individuals involved.

- **Listen to your students and provide them the opportunity to take ownership in classroom activities.**

An appropriate sense of humor can often prevent negative confrontations.

MANAGING STUDENT BEHAVIOR, SPACES, TIME & MATERIALS

- **Do not humiliate students or use sarcasm.**
You can effectively encourage positive behavior without humiliating students in front of their peers. If students constantly experience sarcasm and personal affronts, they will eventually strike back to regain some self-respect. For some students, sarcasm and humiliation may carry over from their home environments.
- **Do not use grades as a threat.**
Instructors who threaten to lower academic grades as a means of enforcing discipline circumvent the purpose of grades. Grades are an earned reward for academic achievement. Undesirable classroom behavior is a separate concern.
- **Let students know you value them as contributors to the learning environment.**
Students must feel they are valued and respected by their instructor. It is important to maintain your professional role as an instructor.
- **Be friendly but not a friend.**
You are the instructor. Good instructors, like good parents, can transmit feelings of respect and value toward students even when enforcing consequences are necessary. Student collaboration involves communication so be sure to tolerate some noise and movement.
- **Involve parents of students who constantly engage in undesirable behaviors.**
In many cases, parents can provide useful insights into their children's behavior. Students may be carrying problems that originate at home to the classroom.
- **Do not assign extra school work as a negative consequence.**
Assigning homework as a negative consequence only encourages students to dislike the subject matter involved.
- **Keep a record of incidents omitted by recurrent offenders.**
Keep accurate notes of incidents of undesirable behavior. You cannot rely on memory alone to relate specific incidents of undesirable behavior to the student, administrator, parent or other appropriate personnel.
- **Cultivate your own special classroom and laboratory techniques.**
Because every instructor is different, classroom management techniques that work for one instructor may not work for another. Experiment with a variety of techniques and find what works for you.
- **Use the principal as a resource before problems get out of hand.**
Find out your principal's philosophy on student behavior and performance. The principal should serve as an instructional helper in dealing with classroom management challenges. This approach encourages implementation of preventive discipline. Too many instructors feel the principal's sole responsibility is to handle disciplinary problems.
- **Know yourself.**
Even the best instructors can not motivate others 100% of the time. Know your limitations and capabilities. Students will be the first to recognize instructors who misrepresent themselves. To augment your skills, use the expertise of students, parents and community members.

(B. Bartow, Retired Agriscience Instructor, personal communication, Alpena, MI.)

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL LEARNERS

Early adolescents are interested in learning, full of energy and ready to conquer the world, given the chance. They may also be distracted, unkind, and apathetic. Given the tremendous changes middle-grade students experience as they move from childhood to adolescence, their range of emotions and behaviors is understandable.

Within three to four years, most middle-grade students* go through more changes than at any period other than the first year of life, including —

- **physical changes:** puberty, rapid physical growth, metabolic changes;
- **emotional changes:** new anxieties about physical appearance, self-definition, societal issues and their own futures;
- **social changes:** increased importance of peer relationships, emerging independence from family, strong needs for acceptance and recognition;
- **cognitive changes:** from strictly concrete to more abstract thinking—an ability to think in terms of “what could be” and not only in terms of “what is” or “what was.”

During these years of great transition, middle-grade students are also asked to begin to identify a career choice, acquire the knowledge they will need for high school and accept increasingly responsible roles in the family, school, and community. Agricultural education and FFA involvement can help middle-grade students through the maze of occupational, school and social demands.

*Middle-grade students are those in sixth through eighth grades. Students in grades five and nine are sometimes also included. Students in grades seven and above may join the National FFA Organization.

Source: Honeycutt, M., Roberts, G. (1996). *A Guide for Middle School Agricultural Science Teachers (Revised 2009 ed.)* [E-book]. National FFA Organization. Retrieved August 26, 2022, from <https://alabamaffa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/A-Guide-For-Middle-School-Agriculture-Science-Teachers.pdf>

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE GRADE STUDENTS

“Characteristics of Middle Grade Students,” Caught in the Middle (1989). Sacramento:

California Department of Education, pages 144-148.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Middle Grade Students:

1. Display a wide range of individual intellectual development as their minds experience transition from the concrete-manipulatory stage to the capacity for abstract thought. This transition ultimately makes possible:
 - Propositional thought
 - Consideration of ideas contrary to fact
 - Reasoning with hypotheses involving two or more variables
 - Appreciation for the elegance of mathematical logic expressed in symbols
 - Insight into the nuances of poetic metaphor and musical notation.
 - Analysis of the power of a political ideology
 - Ability to project thought into the future, to anticipate, and to formulate goals
 - Insight into the sources of previously unquestioned attitudes, behaviors, and values
 - Interpretation of larger concepts and generalizations of traditional wisdom
 - expressed through sayings, axioms, and aphorisms
2. Are intensely curious
3. Prefer active over passive learning experiences; favor interaction with peers during learning activities.
4. Exhibit a strong willingness to learn things they consider to be useful; enjoy using skills to solve real life problems.
5. Are egocentric; argue to convince others; exhibit independent, critical thought.
6. Consider academic goals as a secondary level of priority; personal social concerns dominate thoughts and activities.
7. Experience the phenomenon of metacognition - the ability to know what one knows and does not know.
8. Are intellectually at-risk; face decisions that have the potential to affect major academic values with lifelong consequences.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Middle Grade Students:

1. Experience accelerated physical development marked by increases in weight, height, heart size, lung capacity, and muscular strength;
2. Mature at varying rates of speed. Girls tend to be taller than boys for the first two years of early adolescence and are ordinarily more physically developed than boys;
3. Experience bone growth faster than muscle development; uneven muscle/bone development results in lack of coordination and awkwardness; bones may lack protection of covering muscles and supporting tendons;

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE GRADE STUDENTS

TIPS

4. Reflect a wide range of individual differences which begin to appear in prepubertal and pubertal stages of development. Boys tend to lag behind girls. There are marked individual differences in physical development for boys and girls. The greatest variability in physiological development and size occurs at about age thirteen;
5. Experience biological development five years sooner than adolescents of the last century; the average age of menarche has dropped from seventeen to twelve years of age;
6. Face responsibility for sexual behavior before full emotional and social maturity has occurred;
7. Show changes in body contour including temporarily large noses, protruding ears, long arms; have posture problems;
8. Are often disturbed by body changes:
 - Girls are anxious about physical changes that accompany sexual maturation;
 - Boys are anxious about receding chins, cowlicks, dimples, and changes in their voices;
9. Experience fluctuations in basal metabolism which can cause extreme restlessness at times and equally extreme listlessness at other moments;
10. Have ravenous appetites and peculiar tastes; may overtax digestive system with large quantities of improper foods;
11. Lack physical health; have poor levels of endurance, strength, and flexibility; as a group are fatter and unhealthier;
12. Are physically at-risk; major causes of death are homicide, suicide, accident, and leukemia.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Are often erratic and inconsistent in their behavior; anxiety and fear are contrasted with periods of bravado; feelings shift between superiority and inferiority;
2. Have chemical and hormonal imbalances which often trigger emotions that are frightening and poorly understood; may regress to more childish behavior patterns at this point;
3. Are easily offended and are sensitive to criticism of personal shortcomings;
4. Tend to exaggerate simple occurrences and believe that personal problems, experiences, and feelings are unique to themselves;
5. Are moody, restless; often feel self-conscious and alienated; lack self-esteem; are introspective;
6. Are searching for adult identity and acceptance even in the midst of intense peer group relationships;
7. Are vulnerable to naive opinions, one-sided arguments;
8. Are searching to form a conscious sense of individual uniqueness "Who am I?";
9. Have emerging sense of humor based on increased intellectual ability to see abstract relationships; appreciate the "double entendre";
10. Are basically optimistic, hopeful;
11. Are psychologically at-risk; at no other point in human development is an individual likely to encounter so much diversity in relation to oneself and others.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE GRADE STUDENTS

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Middle Grade Students:

1. Experience often traumatic conflicts due to conflicting loyalties to peer groups and family;
2. Refer to peers as sources for standards and models of behavior; media heroes and heroines are also singularly important in shaping both behavior and fashion;
3. May be rebellious towards parents but still strongly dependent on parental values; want to make own choices, but the authority of the family is a critical factor in ultimate decisions;
4. Are impacted by high level of mobility in society; may become anxious and disoriented when peer group ties are broken because of family relocation to other communities;
5. Are often confused and frightened by new school settings which are large and impersonal;
6. Act out unusual or drastic behavior at times; may be aggressive, daring, boisterous, argumentative;
7. Are fiercely loyal to peer group values; sometimes cruel or insensitive to those outside the peer group;
8. Want to know and feel that significant adults, including parents and teachers, love and accept them; need frequent affirmation;
9. Sense negative impact of adolescent behaviors on parents and teachers; realize thin edge between tolerance and rejection; feelings of adult rejection drive the adolescent into the relatively secure social environment of the peer group;
10. Strive to define sex role characteristics; search to establish positive social relationships with members of the same and opposite sex;
11. Experience low risk-trust relationships with adults who show lack of sensitivity to adolescent characteristics and needs;

12. Challenge authority figures; test limits of acceptable behavior;
13. Are socially at-risk; adult values are largely shaped conceptually during adolescence; negative interactions with peers, parents, and teachers may compromise ideals and commitments.

MORAL AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT

Middle Grade Students:

1. Are essentially idealistic; have a strong sense of fairness in human relationships;
2. Experience thoughts and feelings of awe and wonder related to their expanding intellectual and emotional awareness;
3. Ask large, unanswerable questions about the meaning of life; do not expect absolute answers but are turned off by trivial adult responses;
4. Are reflective, analytical, and introspective about their thoughts and feelings;
5. Confront hard moral and ethical questions for which they are unprepared to cope;
6. Are at-risk in the development of moral and ethical choices and behaviors; primary dependency on the influences of home and church for moral and ethical development seriously compromises adolescents for whom these resources are absent; adolescents want to explore the moral and ethical issues which are confronted in the curriculum, in the media, and in the daily interactions they experience in their families and peer groups.

USEFUL REMINDERS ABOUT SECONDARY STUDENTS

Consider these insights when you wonder why students are often bored and resist learning and authority.

- Students sit in class six to seven hours a day with little time for social interaction between classes.
- Students experience good and bad teaching. Some instructors are not prepared and/or do not know how to deliver their material. Often students cannot see the relevance of what they are learning.
- Students experience positive and negative attitudes on the part of teachers.
- Students experience good and bad home environments that affect their ability to cope.
- Many students have poor self-images and are insecure because they have never received positive reinforcement.
- Some teachers give only negative reinforcement instead of emphasizing the positive things students do.
- Many students are frustrated and have anxieties about life and whether they are actually kids or grown-ups.
- Students spend a lot of time in an electronically medicated world.
- Students have helicopter and bulldozer parents.
- Some students have emotional or physical problems that are not being addressed.
- Students must put up with the moods and quirks of each of their teachers.
- Students are constantly comparing themselves with others, in person and on social media.
- The classroom environment may not be conducive or inviting to learning.

Source: B. Heath-Camp, personal communication

CLASSROOM RULES AND PROCEDURES

- How will I start class?
- How will I take attendance?
- What is my definition of "tardy?" What will the consequence be?
- What is the procedure for leaving the room during class?
- What is the procedure for handling classroom materials and equipment?
- What are the rules for team work? How will teams be formed?
- How will late work be handled?
- How will make-up assignments be given?
- How will completed work be turned in?
- How will completed/graded work be returned?
- How will cell phones be handled?
- What are the expectations of technology?