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Classroom Dynamics: Practical Strategies for Addressing Off-Task Behavior and Creating Positive Classrooms

By Glen Pearsall

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Classroom Dynamics: Practical Strategies for Addressing Off-Task Behavior and Creating Positive Classrooms* by Glen Pearsall. In three parts, *Classroom Dynamics* offers an in-depth, action-oriented look at off-task student behaviors; explicating strategies, exploring root causes of behaviors, and describing ways to create environments that help to prevent off-task behaviors before they occur.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

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Chapter 1

Using Low-Key Interventions

1. Why is the capability to address everyday low-level off-task behavior an important skill, and how can doing so be prerequisite to addressing more extreme behaviors?
2. What are the three important types of low-level intervention strategies that this chapter discusses?
3. Describe some of the strategies within each of the three categories of low-level interventions. In what scenarios can you imagine applying one or more of them in your classroom?
4. From ignoring certain misbehaviors to using precise, minimalist body language to send a microsignal, how does employing first the subtlest of low-level interventions inform the concepts behind using low-level intervention strategies?

Chapter 2

Giving Explicit Instructions

1. How can *intervention scripts* be beneficial in mitigating off-task behaviors?
2. Why is concision important when giving students instructions, and how might words and body language work together to effectively deliver a concise request or statement to a student?
3. While a quick microcommand like *inappropriate time* might risk sounding dismissive of student's concerns, how does later follow-up help ensure these kinds of microcommands are effective and considerate of student concerns? Additionally, could a microcommand paired with appropriate follow-up help teach self-regulation—how?
4. What role does student participation play in the effective functioning of *agreement prompts*?

Chapter 3

Pivoting

1. How can anticipating students' resistant behaviors help you respond when the behaviors actually occur? How might you practice your responses to these behaviors to build your skills?
2. What are the four types of *pivots*? Describe them.
3. Can you recall a time a student used one of the four common methods of highjacking a conversation with you? What did the student say and do? What did you say and do in response? If you didn't respond with a pivot at the time, what pivot might you have used—what might you say and do if you could go back to that moment?
4. Why is acknowledging students' feelings and experiences an important part of responding to their resistant behavior?

Chapter 4

Talking It Out

1. Describe the three forms of *foregrounding choice*. What is an example scenario of how you might use one of these forms? What would you say and do in your scenario?
2. A key to being successful with focusing on choice with students is being assertive while avoiding being authoritarian. Particularly in *directed choice*, what pitfall into authoritarianism is especially important to avoid?
3. How does “talking it out” help students develop reflective capabilities and recognize their own patterns of behavior? What strategies does Pearsall offer to facilitate this kind of talking?
4. How is restorative justice different from simple punishment? Outline how one might employ restorative justice among students and explain how the practice helps students develop the ability to reflect on their actions.

Chapter 5

Seeking Support

1. What are some of the reasons it can be difficult to seek help in addressing a student's challenging behaviors, and why is it so important to do so despite the difficulty?
2. What guiding principles does Pearsall suggest following in the practice of asking for help?
3. Imagine you have a student in one of your classes who repeatedly resists your instruction and interrupts class. Imagine that, when you push back, this student even goes so far as to attempt to undermine and humiliate you in front of the rest of the class. You feel shaken emotionally but decide you need to ask your colleagues for help. When describing the situation, what guidelines do you want to keep in mind to both avoid pitfalls and get the help you need?
4. Define *external attribution* and how it can interfere with making a situation in your classroom better.

Chapter 6

Discerning the Purpose of Off-Task Behavior

1. Rather than expecting students to explain why they behaved in a certain way, who should answer questions about the reasons for student behavior?
2. Pearsall reminds readers that all behavior, even negative, has a function. What are the five basic functions that he outlines in this chapter?
3. How might empathy play a common role as part of your response to each of the five behavior functions? What might your empathic response look like to one or more of the five functions?
4. What is the *ABC model*? Describe how you would use it in the classroom. What are its advantages?

Chapter 7

Tailoring Interventions for Individual Student Needs

1. At the beginning of this chapter, Pearsall discusses the dangers “in looking at students through the lens of their ‘condition.’” What are these dangers, and at the same time, in what ways can broad categorizations be useful?
2. How does Pearsall suggest approaching the duality inherent in using categorization as a tool to assess students’ needs?
3. After examining research related to students’ challenging behavior, what questions outlined in the chapter can you ask yourself to help articulate your next steps in responding to the behavior?
4. How can you use the ABC model to analyze, hypothesize, and respond to student behaviors?

Chapter 8

Setting Up Transitions and Procedures

1. Why are school-day transitions of significance when you seek to understand and address student behavior?
2. What questions might you ask yourself to help you identify the inflection points in your classroom or daily teaching practices?
3. How does the *chunking* strategy offer teachers a way to clarify for students what they expect them to do and how to do it?
4. Describe the four routines that Pearsall recommends all teachers master. What is the purpose of each routine?

Chapter 9

Establishing Student Engagement

1. How does Pearsall define genuine engagement? What does engagement look like in your classroom?
2. After reading about the three drivers of motivation, *challenge*, *choice*, and *purpose*, how do you imagine you might employ them in a particular situation in your classroom?
3. How do learning environment and culture influence engagement?
4. What is the *connect, extend, challenge* protocol? When and how would you use the protocol during teaching?

Chapter 10

Enhancing Student Engagement

1. Think about a student with whom you've had a contentious relationship filled with tense interactions—is it your resulting instinct to interact less or more with this student? How and why can interacting more with such a student help make the relationship a better one? What can you imagine saying and doing in this situation to make these interactions positive ones for the student?
2. What does it mean to get to know your students as whole people, and to let them see you as a person as well? How can you learn about your students' lives and share about your own while maintaining boundaries that respect their privacy and yours?
3. Pearsall discusses three forms of *priming* as tools to engage students in learning. What are these three forms? Give an example of each.
4. Describe the time-on-task tool and the engagement sampling tool. How do they differ? In what circumstances would you use each?