

Introduction

Few things are more frustrating for a classroom teacher than to be standing in front of her or his class trying to give directions or teach a lesson while students are talking or calling out. Imagine Ms. Lopez, a new sixth-grade science teacher at Hawthorne Elementary School who is eager to begin a new unit with her class about vertebrates. In the summer she had gone to a workshop about how to make science lessons more interactive and exciting, and she is looking forward to starting the new unit. She walks to the front of the class, expects that students will quiet down, and commences to explain the introductory activity. Although some students have stopped talking and looked up at the teacher, several students in the back have continued conversations about weekend plans with their friends. Ms. Lopez is becoming frustrated because it appears that no one is listening. The quiet students are becoming impatient because they can't hear the teacher. The noisy students, unaware that their attention is needed, are oblivious that they are missing important instructions. What did Ms. Lopez do wrong? How could she have gotten all her students' attention, quieted the talking, and begun her lesson without feeling frustrated?

When students disrupt a class by making distracting noises, talking at inappropriate times, or blurting out answers, teachers cannot teach effectively, and students miss important information. Teaching students when and how to refrain from talking, making noises, or calling out is an important instructional component that is often overlooked. The necessary skills to quiet a class should be in every teacher's repertoire. This booklet is designed to help teachers manage students' talking and maintain acceptable noise levels in their classrooms, and to implement effective rules for talking in other areas of the school.

Part I of this booklet describes when talking is acceptable and when quiet is necessary. Suggestions are given for teaching students how to ask permission to talk and how to use appropriate voice levels. Part II discusses how to establish and teach rules for talking or noise-making in settings other than the classroom. For example, the type of

talking allowed in the hallways between classes is different from the type of talking allowed in the cafeteria during lunch or in the auditorium during an assembly. Part III describes classwide interventions to reduce disruptive talking or noisemaking in the classroom. These are simple techniques teachers can use to maintain acceptable noise levels in the classroom and curtail inappropriate talking. Finally, Part IV discusses individual interventions that can be used to discourage disruptive talking or noisemaking with students who may not respond to more general interventions.

PART I: Establishing General Guidelines for Talking

When Talking Is Acceptable and When Quiet Is Necessary

Humans are social creatures. It is no surprise, then, that students are eager to socialize and talk during school. The key, however, is to teach students about when talking is acceptable and what volume level is appropriate. In Mr. Frank's 10th-grade social studies class, students know that when they are working in small groups they are expected to talk in working voices. Indoor voices are acceptable for students giving presentations. Silence is expected when Mr. Frank speaks to the class or independent seatwork is required.

At the beginning of the year, Mr. Frank taught his students that "working voices" means talking in a whisper so that only the person next to you can hear. "Indoor voices" are a little louder so that a larger group can hear. "Silence" means absolutely no talking or noisemaking. Mr. Frank also has a large poster of a traffic signal in his classroom that serves as a visual reminder to the students to be aware of the volume of their voices. Each light color signifies the voice level that is appropriate for the activity: A red signal means "silence," yellow means "working