



Why You Shouldn't Redirect Misbehavior

By Michael Linsin

It's standard practice.

You catch a student in the act of misbehavior and you move in to redirect them.

You physically intervene. You stop them in their tracks.

You lean down, explain what they did wrong, and then guide them down the proper path.

It seems like the right thing to do. It makes sense. It satisfies your instinct.

It offers the validation of witnessing with your own eyes the student behaving correctly, immediately proving that they can indeed fulfill your expectations.

Besides, you've seen teacher after teacher doing the same thing.

So what's not to like?

Well, because it's done while the student *is in the act of misbehavior*, it encourages an argumentative response. It encourages an attempt to explain away and justify the misbehavior. It encourages a debate on the merits of the expectation itself.

You see, whenever you try to stop misbehavior while it's occurring, you increase the likelihood of a confrontation — particularly with difficult students. You incite a defensive reaction and create friction between you and the student.

You also run the risk of [losing your cool](#). After all, it's an interruption of your teaching.

It's only natural to simmer and steam under the surface. It's only natural to narrow your eyes, wag your finger, and voice your displeasure at having to yet again drop what you're doing to redirect a wayward student.

But the biggest problem with the strategy is that it's ineffective. It does a poor job of dissuading similar misbehavior from happening in the future — especially if like so many teachers, you find yourself redirecting one student after the other.

The chief reason for this is that redirection doesn't allow your students to reflect on their mistakes. It doesn't allow them to ponder for themselves what they did wrong and what they could have done differently.

When you spell it out for them, you eliminate the thoughtful rethinking of their actions. You lessen the likelihood of them accepting responsibility and increase the likelihood of creating animosity between you.

The upshot is that they're much more likely to repeat the misbehavior.

So what should you do? How should you handle it?

It's best to [let the misbehavior play out](#), to continue with whatever you're doing while keeping an eye on the student. Only when they have finished the misbehavior, or stopped and noticed you observing them, should you approach and deliver your consequence.

"You have a warning because you broke rule number two and left your seat without permission."

The calm clarity of the message, combined with your quick exit from the scene, causes the student to *automatically* contemplate their violation of class rules. It removes their instinct to argue, deny, or point the finger elsewhere.

It causes them to take responsibility for their actions.

The best part, though, is that there is no confrontation, no resentment, and no added disruption to your teaching. You're able to keep your cool, curb future misbehavior, and safeguard your relationship with the student.

All in a matter of seconds.

So instead of redirecting, instead of jumping headlong into the stressful fray, girded for battle, simply abide by the promise you made to your students.

And follow [your classroom management plan](#) as it's written.