

Teaching Behavior & Social Skills

Lesson Plan

Date: 8-2012

Student(s): Created for students in an elementary math group of 18 students from grades 4-5.

Students in this group have been observed to make proximity errors, including:

- moving uncomfortably close to others* during conversation, or standing too close to others.
- touching* others when it is not socially appropriate to do so (putting an arm around an acquaintance's shoulders, poking, hugging, a 'friendly' punch in the arm)

Step 1: Identify the expected behavior and describe it in observable terms.

Teacher will discriminate between 'intimate', 'personal', 'social', and 'public' proximity, providing examples of each.

Students will observe personal space bubbles, and will maintain a socially accepted distance from peers in the classroom.

Students will identify the proximity appropriate for a selection of given social situations.

Students will demonstrate and observe appropriate use of 'personal' and 'social' space bubbles in school settings.

Step 2: Rationale for Teaching the Rule

Proximity errors have been observed in several settings: on the playground, in the cafeteria, and in the classroom. The most common proximity errors observed were:

- moving uncomfortably close to others* during conversation, or standing too close to others.
- touching others* when it is not socially appropriate to do so.

An understanding of social norms for proximity is advantageous, and can increase social acceptance in many circumstances. People often find proximity errors to be offputting, and they can impact a person's ability to work with others or develop social relationships.

Social norms for physical proximity exist in every culture. Students coming to the US from another country may find that these norms are different than home. Explicit teaching of proximity norms is especially useful for students from different cultural backgrounds.

Step 3: Link to students' background knowledge

Introduce the idea of personal space bubbles.

Activate prior knowledge by giving some familiar examples of personal space in action. Ex:

“Young children often have difficulty with personal space. They haven’t learned about it yet, and they don’t have very good boundaries with other people. Often they will grab your leg or arm and hold on until they have your attention. A little kid who is ‘in your space’ might be annoying, but we understand that they haven’t learned about personal space yet.

What if a kid your age acted like this?

Imagine how you would feel if a classmate grabbed your arm or leg and held on until you gave them attention.

What if your teacher did this to get your attention in class?”

“Imagine what it feels like to be standing in line with a lot of people. It’s summer, and you’re waiting to order a snow cone, but the kid behind you in line is standing uncomfortably close to you, and doesn’t seem to notice. You try to give him more space, but he doesn’t get the hint, and moves forward in line as you do.

What does it feel like to have someone standing too close?

Would it change how you feel if you were having a conversation with the boy while you waited in line?

Would it change how you feel if the boy is a friend of yours? “

Step 4: Identify a Range of Examples	
<u>Positive Examples of the Expected Behavior</u>	<u>Negative Teaching Examples</u>
<p>Positive examples of 'intimate' space (<i>touching- <18"</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mother holding her child • A girl hugging her grandmother • A boy kissing his mom on the cheek • A girl tickling her baby brother to make him laugh • A parent wiping dirt off of your face • A man kissing his wife goodbye at the airport • A high school girl giving her little sister a piggyback ride <p>Positive examples of 'personal' space (<i>18"-4'</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a short story with a classmate • Talking with your friends on the playground • Eating lunch with classmates • Talking to a friend in line to go to music • Talking to your teacher about your homework • Asking someone to move out of your way so you can get your backpack <p>Positive examples of 'social' space (<i>4'-8'</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are introducing yourself to a group of kids at your new school • You go to a job interview, and greet the person who is interviewing you with a handshake. During the interview you stay about 5 feet away as you talk • Standing about 4 feet away from the person in front of you in line for P.E. • On a camping trip, a boy learns how to build a fire from his troop leader <p>Positive examples of 'public' space (<i>8' +</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You go to the theater to watch a play (This is the distance between the actors and you) • You go to watch the president give a speech. (This is the distance between the president and you) 	<p>Non-examples of 'intimate' space:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going to a job interview and hugging the person who is interviewing you • You notice that a stranger has dirt on his face, and you wipe it off with your fingers • A woman checking out at the supermarket leans in to whisper a question into the ear of the cashier <p>Non-examples of 'personal' space:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During a conversation with a stranger in line at 7-11, you notice that the stranger is only about a foot away, even though there is a lot of room in line • A man is meeting his cousin's new wife for the first time. Throughout the visit, he keeps his distance to about 8 feet away to show respect. <p>Non-examples of 'social' space:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are sitting 7 feet away from your closest friends at lunch, even though there is a lot of free space at the table. <p>Non-examples of 'public' space:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You go to your friend's birthday party, and stay at least 50' away from the birthday girl.

TEACHING BEHAVIOR LESSON PLAN FOR PROXIMITY

Step 5: Practice/Role Playing Activities	
<u>Model</u> Expected Behavior -> <u>Lead</u> Student through Behavior > <u>Test</u> Student	
<p>Model Present the Personal Reaction Bubbles presentation, and review the four space bubbles: public, social, personal, and intimate. Give a few positive examples and non-examples (<i>see above</i>) for each of the four space bubbles. Use a measuring tape and student volunteers to demonstrate each of the distances given. (This is also a nice review of radius and measurement.)</p> <p>Lead Give positive examples of the four space bubbles and have students identify the appropriate bubble for the situation. Use think-pair-share for the first set, and choral response for the rest.</p> <p>Test On the playground blacktop, or on butcher paper, draw concentric space bubbles.* Be sure to include a space for the child to stand, and account for this space as you measure outward; draw footprints in the center of the circles. Have partner 'a' stand in the center of the circles. The teacher gives scenarios, and the pair of students decide which bubble to use. Partner 'b' stands in the bubble, facing partner 'a'.</p> <p>*This could also be a geometry review of circles, and students could measure and draw the circles in pairs. Tie sidewalk chalk to yarn, and measure each radius given. Cut yarn to this length. One partner holds down the end of the yarn in one place on the canvas. The other partner draws a circle using the yarn as a compass.</p>	
Step 6: Responding to Behavior in Classroom & Role Play	
<u>Reinforcement</u> for Expected Behavior	<u>Corrective Feedback</u> for Misbehavior
<p>Observe and praise when students are using appropriately sized space bubbles in class.</p> <p>Intermittently 'pause' group work to see how well students are observing the laws of space bubbles. Graph class results, with a group incentive for improvement as needed.</p> <p>Natural consequences; others will respond positively to the student's improved social boundaries.</p>	<p>Identify the desired space bubble, give the student opportunity to practice at this proximity range.</p> <p>Related social skills include: greetings, voice volume control, and addressing physical violence.</p>
<p>**Move from Continuous to Intermittent Reinforcement as student gains fluency</p>	

Step 6: Prompt/Remind/Preteach Expected Behavior in Classroom

Before group work, remind students that 18", or an arm length away, is where their personal space bubble ends. Have students determine the appropriate space bubble to use before starting an activity with peers. Ask students to self-monitor the amount of space they give their group members.

Reference space bubbles prior to group activities. Prepare students for activities requiring students to enter each others' space bubbles (games requiring hand-holding, tag...) by explaining the circumstances under which you might enter their space bubble. Or use social bubbles to help students anticipate behavior expectations in unusual environments: field trips to the theater, assembly, guest speakers, and so on.

Reflection

Here's a favorite piece of advice from a mentor teacher: "Use statistics and solid numbers to back up your message. They don't even have to be real. Over twelve years of schooling 24% of all students will injure themselves by leaning too far back in their chair. See, I just made that up, and the kids are going to believe me."

While I don't really agree, I found it an interesting approach. In my own teaching, I often bring real real-world data to my students. From my experience, I can say that students are often more interested and invested in a topic when they know that they are learning what the 'experts' say. There is great value in using real artifacts from experts in various content domains. (And it probably shouldn't be faked.)

In teaching, there are many ties to the fields of sociology and psychology. Behaviorism is training, with the carrot and stick of positive and negative reinforcement. Developmental and cognitive psychology, and social learning theories have guided us in our attempts to educate efficiently and more humanely.

More than that, schools are bringing together students from many cultures, often with differing social norms. Students are at a great advantage if they are taught the skills needed to succeed in our society. With proximity and social norms around conversation, there is research and data available to outline the different social norms in various cultures.

There are at least two reasons to allowing students to try out these 'space bubbles' and experience talking to someone at the distances suggested in a sociological theory.

TEACHING BEHAVIOR LESSON PLAN FOR PROXIMITY

First: students are social thinkers, and this activity allows them to be more scientific social thinkers... sociologists. Using expert materials allows students to feel like the concept of 'expert' is more tangible, and more achievable. When students can interact with accessible expert materials, they bring their own knowledge to the table, make their own observations, and build academic confidence.

Second: students are practicing (research-based) social skills. Practicing social skills like proximity reinforces its use. Practice is often the missing piece in social skills lessons. Other related areas, volume of voice, eye contact, body language, sarcasm, and other social cues often require direct instruction, and successful *practice*.

Proximity applies in every social situation. School requires some ability to adapt and generalize proximity norms. In the larger community, other norms may apply as well. If students are privvy to the idea of 'space bubbles' they will be able to apply their knowledge to the many different social situations they encounter as they live their lives. Having a memorable reference point like 'an arms length away' will allow students to at least have a clear boundary for social interactions. This can prevent some social errors and lead to more acceptance from peers.