



Managing Elementary School Classrooms Effectively with Class-Wide Function-Related Intervention Teams

Explore a group contingency format that promotes prosocial student behavior

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Effective classroom management can be one of the more daunting responsibilities of a new or struggling teacher. For elementary school administrators assisting teachers who are struggling to effectively manage their students' classroom behavior, it is nice to know that there are validated practices to choose from. In *TEPSA Leader*, Boquet et al. (2024) described how to implement the Good Behavior Game (GBG; Barrish et al., 1969). In this article, we highlight a similar classroom management system known as Class-Wide Function-Related Intervention Teams (CW-FIT; Wills et al., 2010). Both the GBG and CW-FIT use a group contingency format to promote prosocial student behavior and reduce disruptive student behavior. Importantly, CW-FIT has been shown to increase use of effective teaching behaviors.

CW-FIT: A Definition and Rationale

Group contingencies are practices that reward teams of students for appropriate displays of expected classroom behavior (Ryan & Mooney, 2024). The CW-FIT system is a multilevel group contingency intervention used to address common functions of problem behavior (Wills et al., 2010). It has the teacher reinforcing the appropriate behavior of students who are divided in

three to six teams, with the teacher awarding points based on each group's performance and using behavior-specific praise while doing so (Wills et al., 2022).

The CW-FIT system provides a simple, yet practical evidence-based practice that shapes desired behaviors in an enticing manner. Placing students into teams to evaluate behavior has a two-fold purpose: to use a group-wide behavior monitoring system that prevents individual students from feeling targeted, while also creating a competitive environment that motivates students to continue on-task and non-disruptive behaviors. With this practice, students can develop self-regulation strategies that place them in control of their behaviors, allowing them to become a part of the overall classroom management system.

CW-FIT: Empirical Support in the Elementary Grades

Federal education law requires use of research-validated practices by educators to the extent practicable. A What Works Clearinghouse (2023) brief detailing CW-FIT research indicated that there was strong evidence that the classwide system improved student behavior and promising evidence to indicate

the intervention improved teacher practice related to improving student behavior. Table 1 highlights relevant specifics related to CW-FIT research for elementary grade students (kindergarten through grade 5). Across the three studies highlighted, improvements in on-task student performance were noted for students without disabilities. For students considered at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders, increases in on-task performance and decreases in disruptive behaviors were noted for all 21 students observed during the first baseline and CW-FIT conditions. In Wills et al. (2022), 9 of 10 students also showed respective increases and decreases during a replication.

CW-FIT: Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

The CW-FIT system includes the following key components: (a) reminding students of classroom rules and social skills, (b) organizing students into teams based on their seating arrangements, (c) awarding points to teams every 2–5 minutes based on their adherence to classroom rules and social skills, (d) providing rewards to teams that reach a predetermined point goal, and (e) offering frequent, behavior-specific praise to acknowledge and reinforce positive behavior. Although CW-FIT is designed as a class-wide intervention, individualized strategies (such as self-management tools and help cards) can be implemented simultaneously for students who do not respond sufficiently to the broader intervention (Willis, et al., 2022).

Step 1: Training and Preparation

Start by familiarizing yourself and the teacher with whom you are working with CW-FIT's principles and components. Professional development and training sessions may be necessary to understand the goals, components, and teacher actions to implement CW-FIT. A great resource for administrators and teachers is www.cwfit.ku.edu (Willis, et al., 2022).

After learning about the intervention, prepare materials. Gather necessary materials such as visual aids, point cards, and reward systems. Visual aids and posters are used to display classroom rules and skills. The key social skills and classroom rules are placed on posters with clear, step-by-step instructions. A team chart is used to track team points earned throughout the class period. An interval timer set to beep every 2 to 5 minutes reminds the teacher to check on the students and award points.

A token or point system is used to reinforce positive behavior. Rewards can be tangible or non-tangible. Tangible rewards can include small prizes like candy, pencils, or schoolwide/class-wide positive tickets. Non-tangible rewards can include extra recess time, a

2-minute dance party, talk time, or allowing students to work with their shoes off. Progress and effectiveness are determined through use of behavior tracking sheets. Student feedback forms can be used to provide actionable information to students. As an alternative to paper tracking systems, a digital point tracking system (e.g., ClassDojo) can be used as a classroom management app or software to digitally track points, rewards, and behavior data.

Step 2: Program Introduction

To introduce the intervention to the students, first explain the system. To do this clearly explain the goals of CW-FIT, the expectations, and how the reward system works. Communication of the importance of teamwork and positive behavior is essential. Explain the CW-FIT program to students, focusing on the purpose of teaching classroom rules and appropriate behaviors. Emphasize that students will work in teams to earn points and rewards by following these rules. Start with a statement like, "Each day you are expected to follow the classroom rules. You will be placed into teams and for each (insert chosen time interval) I will reward you if you are following the rules as a team. Your only task is to follow the rules."

Next, teach social skills. Implement a structured teaching approach to define each skill clearly, model the skill for the students, and conduct role-playing activities where the teacher and students, as well as peers, practice the skill with feedback. After teaching the skills, practice one skill per day until all have been taught and before each class period, briefly review the skills and steps (pre-correct) with the students. As stated above, if CW-FIT is being implemented school-wide, use a pre-scripted direct instruction model.

Focus on specific skills like following instructions, asking for help, and accepting feedback. Use role-playing and modeling to demonstrate these behaviors. Identify and teach three key social skills: (a) how to appropriately get the teacher's attention, (b) how to follow directions the first time, and (c) how to ignore inappropriate behaviors. When social skill instruction has been completed, display each skill on a poster (see Step 1).

Step 3: Program Implementation

Assign students to teams based on their seating arrangements (rows or clusters) to facilitate easy monitoring and collaboration. To form teams, divide the class into small teams of 2 to 5 students into 3 to 6 teams. Teams earn points for demonstrating positive behaviors, which contributes to their collective success. Set the behavioral goals based on the skills taught in Step 2. Define clear, observable, and measurable goals.

Table 1*Review of CW-FIT Research Elements for Elementary School Students*

Study	Participants	Settings	Target	Outcomes
Kamps et al. (2011)	107 GE students in Grades K, 1, 4, & 5; 8 students considered at risk for EBD in Grades 4-5	6 math or reading/literacy classes in 3 schools	On-task behavior for classes & at-risk students; disruptive behavior for at-risk students	On-task class behavior improved from $M = 43.60\%$ (range 20.1%-86.7%) baseline to $M = 79.7\%$ (58.9%-98.2%) CW-FIT On-task at-risk students $M = 54.4\%$ (24.3%-74.3%) baseline to $M = 83.6\%$ (66%-96.1%) CW-FIT Disruptive at-risk students $M = 18.2$ (10.5-25.8) baseline; $M = 5.7$ (3.1-9.5) CW-FIT
Wills et al. (2014)	All GE students in K; 3 students considered at risk for EBD	3 class periods, with spelling and writing, math, and science or social studies	On-task behavior for classes & at-risk students; disruptive behavior for at-risk students	On-task class behavior improved from $M = 65\%$ (spelling/writing), $M = 58\%$ (math), and $M = 58\%$ (science or social studies) baseline to $M = 94\%$ (spelling/writing), $M = 92\%$ (math), and $M = 97\%$ (science or social studies) CW-FIT On-task at-risk for Student 1 $M = 65\%$ (0%-93%) baseline to $M = 95\%$ (79%-100%) CW-FIT; Student 2 $M = 29\%$ (0%-58%) baseline to $M = 86\%$ CW-FIT; Student 3 $M = 88\%$ (83%-93%) to $M = 97\%$ (90%-100%) Disruptive at-risk for Student 1 $M = 2.2$ (0.8-4.3) baseline to $M = 1.2$ (0.1-4.2) CW-FIT; Student 2 $M = 5.1$ (2.2-8.1) baseline to $M = 1.5$ (0.6-3.6) CW-FIT; Student 3 $M = 2.1$ (0.5-3.1) to $M = 0.1$ (0-0.4)
Wills et al. (2022)	GE students with class sizes ranging from 19-26; grades 1-4 represented; 10 students considered at risk for EBD	9 classes (6 math & 3 ELA) in 3 schools;	On-task behavior for classes & at-risk students; disruptive behavior for at-risk students	On-task class behavior improved from $M = 46.80\%$ (range 19.38%-73.13%) baseline to $M = 77.04\%$ (54.59%-95.79%) CW-FIT; 2 nd baseline $M = 50.65\%$ (19.17%-78.75%); 2 nd CW-FIT $M = 74.17\%$ (37.89%-91.50%) On-task at-risk students $M = 52.66\%$ (9.00%-97.52%) baseline to $M = 82.50\%$ (32.44%-100%) CW-FIT; 2 nd baseline $M = 53.74\%$ (0%-97.78%); 2 nd CW-FIT $M = 88.40\%$ (49.89%-100%) Disruptive at-risk students $M = 14.00$ (0-41) baseline; $M = 4.73$ (0-11.53) CW-FIT; $M = 14.95$ (0-42.91) 2 nd baseline; $M = 4.22$ (0-25) 2 nd CW-FIT

Note. CW-FIT = Class-wide function-related intervention teams. GE = general education. ELA = English language arts. EBD = emotional and behavioral disorders.

For example, “Raise your hand before speaking” or “Stay on task during independent work.” Use the visual aids to remind students of expectations and steps.

Next, set the timer for regular intervals. During the intervention period, set a timer to beep every 2 to 5 minutes, depending on the students’ ability to stay on task without disruptions. The interval should be chosen to reinforce positive behavior before disruptions occur. When the timer beeps, assess each team to see if all members are engaged in appropriate behaviors (e.g., using CW-FIT skills, staying on-task). Award a point on the team chart for each team that meets the criteria and provide specific praise to reinforce their positive behavior. Offer ongoing, specific praise to recognize and reinforce desired behaviors, helping students understand exactly what they are doing well. To maintain consistent reinforcement, continue to provide frequent, behavior-specific praise throughout the class period, reinforcing the use of CW-FIT skills and appropriate behaviors. Adjust goals and rewards as needed to maintain student engagement and motivation.

Conclude the class period with rewards. At the end of the class period, tally the points for each team. Teams that meet or exceed the predetermined goal (usually about 80% of the total possible points) will receive a reward. Rewards can be tangible (e.g., candy, pencil, schoolwide/class-wide positive ticket) or non-tangible (e.g., 2-minute dance party, talk time, work with shoes off), based on decisions made by the teacher and students (see Step 1).

Step 4: Program Adaptations and Adjustments

As in all interventions, monitoring progress is critical to obtaining desired results. Regularly assess the effectiveness of CW-FIT by tracking student behavior and team points. Adjust the intervention as needed. Changes might include altering team compositions or modifying the reward system. If students are unresponsive to the CW-FIT intervention, a change in intensity and individualization can be made. Although CW-FIT is designed as a class-wide intervention, individualized strategies such as self-management tools and help cards can be implemented simultaneously for students who do not respond sufficiently to the broader intervention (see Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation). One way to individualize the intervention is to create self-management tools such as checklists that they can use to self-monitor their behavior. Another way to support students struggling during the transition to CW-FIT is to design help cards students can raise when they need assistance or feel overwhelmed.

A help card is a simple, discreet card that a student can use to signal to the teacher that they need help without disrupting the class or drawing attention to themselves. Use of the help card allows the student to request assistance. That is, when a student feels overwhelmed, confused, or needs support, they can place the help card on their desk or hold it up to quietly signal the teacher. Upon seeing the help card, the teacher or classroom aide can approach the student and provide necessary assistance such as answering a question, offering encouragement, or helping the student refocus.

Step 5: Engage Parents and Caregivers

Create a line of communication with parents about the intervention. Share successes and areas for improvement with parents. Keep parents informed about the program and their child’s progress so that parents can reinforce behaviors at home. Provide information to parents that suggests ways to reinforce positive behaviors at home, such as using similar social skills language or a reward system.

CW-FIT: Tips for Teachers

There may be challenges or challengers to CW-FIT implementation. Here are three challenges and potential solutions. One, some students may resist the new system. Consistent application of the rules and regular reinforcement will help students adjust. Two, uneven team dynamics can cause tension and conflict. Teams may have varying levels of behavior. Consider rotating team members periodically to balance strengths and weaknesses. Three, it may become difficult to maintain engagement. To keep students motivated, vary the types of rewards and introduce new social skills to learn over time.

AUTHORS

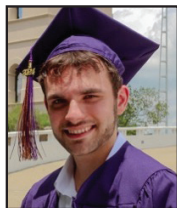


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