

GRIP

Gaining Responsivity by Inducing Perspective-taking



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Consortium “Perspective-taking by Teachers” coordinated by Hinke Endedijk, Leiden University

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Introduction

GRIP (in Dutch: [BeGRP](#)) is an accessible tool that helps teachers actively take the student's perspective during peer consultation with a colleague. Using a series of guiding questions, the teacher works through a structured process to develop multiple alternative explanations for a student's behavior and to explore possible alternative actions. Often, this leads to small new insights that result in small adjustments in how the teacher interacts with the student day to day — but these small adjustments can have a meaningful impact on student behavior.

General instruction

During peer consultation with a colleague, you as the teacher work through the steps outlined in the GRIP plan (see link below). You take the lead in the conversation, and your colleague plays a supporting role. As the supporter, your job is to help the teacher (the case presenter) uncover additional contextual information and consider different explanations for the student's behavior.

Each step includes guiding questions to help deepen the discussion. These questions are flexible — use them at your own discretion to support the process. Together, you look for alternative explanations and possible teacher actions. The entire process for one case typically takes around 30 minutes.

Here are a few tips for using the step-by-step plan effectively:

- The GRIP plan refers to several appendices. These can be found at the end of the manual.
- If you'd like to take notes during the conversation, a special notes form is available, see [Appendix A](#).
- The first time you use GRIP, we recommend going through the full step-by-step plan. If you've used it before, you may also use the summary version, see [GRIP Handout – Summary Version](#).
- For any intervention to be successful, it is essential that it is implemented systematically and that the outcomes are integrated into the existing student educational support structures — such as individual action plans or development plans (IEPs). For more on how to do this with GRIP, see [Appendix E](#).

Theoretical Background

In some classroom situations, teachers may feel unsure about how to respond or dissatisfied with how their interaction with a student played out. This is especially true in cases involving challenging or hard-to-understand behavior — such as oppositional, hyperactive, aggressive, or anxious behavior. Understanding what drives these behaviors is not always easy. Many teachers say they want to better understand what lies beneath a student’s behavior.

Reflecting on a situation with a colleague — in a calm moment — can be helpful, both in understanding the behavior and in recognizing your own role as a teacher. That’s exactly what GRIP is designed to support. In this kind of process, it helps to actively adopt the student’s perspective — especially when a colleague supports you by thinking along and asking thoughtful, critical questions.

Taking the student’s perspective means trying to understand their thoughts, feelings, and motivations. As a teacher, you probably do this regularly and often unconsciously. It helps you attune your approach to students’ needs. But the degree to which you’re able to do this can vary, especially when: You’re under time pressure, the situation is emotionally charged, or the situation is complex. That’s because perspective-taking isn’t automatic — it requires mental effort. GRIP helps support that effort by providing space for reflection, so you can develop alternative explanations and actions for difficult or unsatisfying situations.

Why is it sometimes hard to take the student’s perspective?

The ability to adopt someone else’s perspective depends on several factors, including time pressure and the complexity of the situation. In a typical classroom, teachers must respond quickly and manage many things at once. Under such stress, people tend to rely more on prior experiences (Gehlbach, 2004). In practice, this means you may respond based on how you’ve previously experienced similar situations, or your general impression of a student.

This “default mode” is an automatic and unconscious process. It can help you act quickly, but it also comes with pitfalls: 1) You may focus on negative information that confirms your existing view of the student, 2) You may attribute behavior to personal traits, without considering the context, and 3) You may rely on your own emotions without recognizing them as subjective (Brinkworth & Gehlbach, 2015). These pitfalls can lead to decisions based on assumptions that may not apply to the specific student or situation — like viewing everything through a “colored lens” of past experiences. The more pressure you’re under, the more likely you are to fall into these traps.

Why is perspective-taking harder with some students or in some moments?

Another key factor is your own emotional state. If you feel overwhelmed, upset, or out of control in a situation, it becomes harder to engage in the complex cognitive task of taking someone else’s perspective (Chang & Davis, 2009). This is particularly relevant for students with behavioral challenges — especially when the challenges are frequent or long-standing. In these cases, teachers may increasingly rely on automatic responses, which can maintain or even worsen the problem.

In short, our fast, automatic decision-making is helpful in high-pressure classroom environments — but it also increases the risk of missing what the student actually needs. This can lead to a negative feedback loop between your actions and the student’s behavior, where the teacher’s interpretation

doesn't match the student's experience, the student's behavior persists or escalates, and the teacher's sense of helplessness grows.

What can you do — and what can a colleague offer?

The goal of GRIP is to work together with a colleague — through a reflective and inquiry-based approach — to gradually gain deeper insight into the student's behavior. This is an inquiry-based dialogue, in which the step-by-step plan serves as a guiding structure. Importantly, it is not a checklist that automatically leads to a solution.

Actively taking the student's perspective — imagining what they may think and feel — helps you move beyond your own perceptions and emotions. Doing this in a calm moment, with no time pressure, is key. A second pair of eyes can help you recognize how your assumptions color your interpretation, generate new hypotheses about why the interaction was difficult, and explore what might be maintaining the pattern. With this mindset, you and your colleague take a step back and look at the case together. The teacher leads the process, step by step.

As the colleague, you play an important role — not just as emotional support, but also by helping uncover patterns and blind spots, generate alternative explanations, and brainstorm new approaches. You support the teacher with an inquisitive, reflective, and encouraging attitude. You give the teacher space to be vulnerable, but also ask open-ended, probing questions that might uncover perspectives the teacher hadn't yet considered. Open-ended questions are key; avoid closed or suggestive ones. To guide your inquiry, you can use the GRIP supporting questions.

What are the benefits?

Understanding “hard-to-read” behavior — and discovering what works for a particular student — takes time. Change often comes in small steps. Most problems are not resolved all at once. But even small insights and small changes can provide meaningful entry points. So it's important to value these small moments when evaluating progress in follow-up sessions — and to explore how to apply them more broadly.

Also: even explanations that later turn out to be inaccurate still add value. With your reflective, inquiry-based mindset, they help you narrow your focus and explore new directions.

GRIP Step-by-Step Plan



Step 1: Sketch the Situation (2 minutes)

Describing the situation step by step helps clarify exactly what happened.

Think of a concrete, real, and recent situation from the past week in which you found it difficult to deal with a student's behavior, the behavior of a student surprised you, or you were dissatisfied with how you handled the situation afterward. It could be a situation where you'd like to make a change or try a different approach.

Briefly describe to your colleague what the situation was, making clear who was involved and what happened.

As the supporter, you show understanding and acknowledge your colleague's emotions. You also help the case presenter to focus on a specific situation and keep track of time.

Example:

"It happened today during math. J. threw his book on the floor, and P. threw the book back. J. hit P. I then sent J. out of the classroom. J. stayed upset for a long time and couldn't continue with the math lesson."



Step 2: Retell the Situation from the Student's Perspective (5 minutes)

In this step, you try to place yourself in the student's shoes and switch to the student's perspective. Describing a situation from someone else's perspective using the first person ("I") makes it easier to let go of your own interpretations and emotions. This allows you to interpret the situation less through your own perception and instead imagine what the student might have experienced.

Think about what the student may have been thinking and feeling in this situation. Try to actively step into the student's position. Describe the situation again, in as much detail as possible, step by step, but now as if you are the student — using "I". Your colleague should be able to visualize the situation like a film.

The goal is not to know exactly what was going on in the student's mind, but to explore what might have been going on.

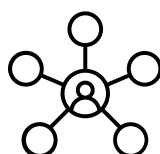
As the supporter, help your colleague switch to the student's perspective by encouraging the use of the "I" form and asking questions such as "imagine you are..."

Example:

"We were doing math and I didn't understand any of it. I shouted that I didn't get it at all. I got angry and threw my book on the ground. P., who was sitting next to me, threw the book back. Then I got really angry and I hit him. The teacher saw it and told me to leave the classroom. That was unfair because P. got to stay. At least now I didn't have to do math anymore."

Supporting questions:

- As the student, what did you feel in this situation? ("I felt...")
- As the student, what emotions did you experience? ("I was...")
- As the student, what were you thinking? ("I thought...")
- As the student, what did you want to achieve with your behavior? ("I wanted...")
- As the student, why did you want that? ("Because I...")
- What happened next?
- What did the teacher do?
- How did you think/feel/react after the teacher said or did that? ("I...")



Step 3: Clarify the Context (10 minutes)

A student's behavior does not stand alone but is closely tied to the situation or context. Focusing on situational factors can offer insights into what preceded the behavior and can provide clues for explanations (Step 4) and alternative actions (Step 5).

As the teacher (case presenter), you try in this step to gain a better understanding of the situation's context — still from the perspective of the student (using "I"). In the discussion, explore as many relevant context factors as possible. Consider the role of other students, the activity at the time, and your own role as teacher. Clues for contextual factors can also be found by identifying exceptions — situations where the behavior did not occur or was less intense.

Note: It's not necessary to know which factors were definitively at play. The aim is to explore and consider various contextual factors. You don't have to keep speaking in the first person here — it's fine to start with the student's viewpoint but then reflect together from your role as teacher.

As the supporter, help the case presenter maintain an investigative stance. Ask questions about possible factors that may not yet have been explored. Use the categories of supporting questions to help clarify both the immediate and broader context.

Supporting questions:

The activity:

- What were you (as the student) doing? (“I...”)
- What type of activity was this (free time / transition / structured activity; instruction / independent work)?
- What time of day was it?
- What happened immediately before the incident?
- Did you understand the instruction?
- Was the task at an appropriate level, or too easy/too hard?

Other students:

- Who else was present during the situation?
- What did the other students say or do?

Teacher:

- What did the teacher or other adults say or do?
- What aspects of this situation — such as what was said or done — made your response or behavior worse or better?

Exceptions (moments when the behavior does not occur):

- Are there situations where you (as a student) do not show this behavior?
- What’s different in those situations?

Broader (social) context:

- Cultural background (e.g., avoiding eye contact as a sign of respect)
- Social status in the class (e.g., being excluded, popular, friendships)
- Group dynamics (e.g., students trigger each other)
- Other factors (e.g., home situation, lack of sleep)



Step 4: Generate Alternative Explanations (10 minutes)

Steps 4 and 5 are from your own teacher perspective.

The student perspective (Step 2) and situational factors (Step 3) provide starting points for generating alternative explanations. Considering alternative explanations helps reduce the tendency to interpret behavior only through previous experiences with the student or with other students showing similar behavior.

- Together with your colleague, formulate at least three possible explanations for the student’s behavior in this situation. These explanations don’t all have to be equally plausible — the goal is to explore multiple possibilities and avoid jumping to conclusions.

Supporting questions:

- What role might ... (a factor from Step 3) ... have played in the student's behavior?
- Follow-up: What else could explain this?

b. Number the top three most likely explanations from most to least likely. Discuss your choice of the most likely explanation.

Supporting questions:

- Why do you think this explanation is the most likely?
- Do you think this explanation aligns with what others (parents, other teachers) think?
- Were there things discussed that contradict this explanation?



Step 5: Test Alternative Explanations (5 minutes)

In this step, you translate your (most plausible) explanation(s) into a practical way of testing them. This might include adjusting your pedagogical or instructional approach (see [Appendix B](#)), conducting an observation ([Appendix C](#)), or directly checking with the student ([Appendix D](#)).

Together, decide what you will do in the coming week to test whether your explanations holds up. This could include:

- Implementing a pedagogical/instructional adjustment
- Conducting an observation
- Briefly checking with the student
- Asking parents

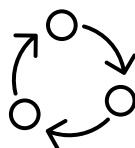
See Appendices B, C, and D for tips on these methods.

Supporting questions:

- What do you plan to do differently?
- Why this approach?
- How will the student or a colleague notice your change?
- When will you check your explanation with the student or parents?
- What will you ask them?
- How can you tell whether your action had an effect?
- How will you observe this?
- Follow-up: What else?

Actions:

- ✓ Write down your plan (e.g., in an existing student support plan or development plan)
- ✓ Schedule an evaluation meeting one week later



Step 6: Evaluation (= Step 0 for session 2 and beyond) (5 minutes)

Evaluation is an essential part of the cyclical process. Here, you reflect on the results of testing your explanations or trying alternative approaches. Change takes time, so it's unlikely that a situation will be fully resolved. Still, you may begin to see progress in understanding the student's behavior or in responding more effectively to it.

Focus on small signs of progress and how you might apply these insights more broadly. This evaluation may also serve as the starting point for a new diagnostic cycle using the step-by-step plan.

- a. Recap: Briefly review what you did to test your explanations. Which explanations did you test? How did you test it? Did it go well or would you like your colleague to think along?
- b. Together, discuss what insights this yielded — about the student's behavior and about how you as a teacher can respond better to the student's needs. Focus on small steps forward.

Supporting questions:

Evaluate insights:

- What did the student do that confirmed or contradicted your explanation(s)?
- What do you now understand better about the student's needs?
- Did you change your approach at certain moments? If so, what and why?
- What did that change lead to?
- How has the student responded? What's going a bit better?
- Can this insight be applied more broadly?

If changing your approach didn't work:

- What's preventing it?
- What do you need?
- What could help you?

Evaluate explanations:

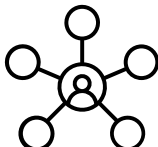
- Was your testing method appropriate?
- Do you want to try another way to test it?
- If the explanation no longer seems valid, is there another one you want to explore?
- What makes this new explanation seem more likely?
- How would you test it?

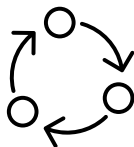
- c. Has a similar or new situation with this student occurred recently?
→ Go back to Step 1 to analyze the new situation.

GRIP Handout - Teacher (Case Presenter)

General Instructions:

- You as a teacher, initiate each step.
- Together, maintain an inquisitive stance.
- Pay attention to small insights and incremental progress.

Step 1: Sketch the situation (2 minutes)	
Think of a concrete, real, and recent <u>situation</u> from the past week in which you found it difficult to deal with a student's behavior, in which a student's behavior surprised you, or in which you were dissatisfied with your own response afterward. It might be a situation where you'd like to make a change or try something new. Briefly describe the situation to your colleague so it's clear <u>who</u> was involved and <u>what</u> happened.	 Own perspective
Step 2: Retell the situation from the student's perspective (5 minutes)	
Put yourself in the student's shoes. Think about what the student may have been thinking and feeling in that moment. The goal is not to know exactly what was going on in the student's mind, but to explore what <i>might</i> have been going on. Describe the situation again, step by step, in as much detail as possible — but now as if you are the student, using the first person ("I"). Make sure your colleague can visualize the situation like a short film.	 From the student's perspective "I"-form
Step 3: Clarify the context (10 minutes)	
Help your colleague gain insight into the <u>context</u> of the situation — still, where possible, from the student's perspective (using "I"). Together, explore factors like the role of <u>other students</u>, the <u>activity</u> at the time, and your own role as <u>teacher</u>. You can also look for <u>exceptions</u> — moments where the behavior didn't occur or was less intense. Begin from the "I"-perspective, but you may also reflect from your own teacher role.	 Situational factors Broader context
Step 4: Generate alternative explanations (10 minutes)	
Together with your colleague, use your insights from Step 2 and Step 3 to come up with at least three possible explanations for the student's behavior in this situation. These explanations don't all have to be equally likely — the most important thing is to consider multiple possibilities and avoid jumping into conclusions. Then rank the three most likely explanations from most to least plausible. Discuss why you believe the top explanation is the most likely.	 Three explanations Order of likelihood
Step 5: Test alternative explanations (5 minutes)	

Together, decide what you will do in the coming week to test whether the (most likely) explanation(s) could be correct. This might include trying a different pedagogical or instructional approach, conducting an observation, checking with the student, or asking parents. See Appendices B, C, and D for tips on how to carry out this step.	 Pedagogical/ Instructional adjustment Observation Checking
Step 6: Evaluation (= Step 0 for session 2 and beyond) (5 minutes)	
Which explanation(s) did you test? How did you test it (e.g., through actions, observation, or checking with the student)? Did it work well, or do you need more/better/different input? What insight did you gain into the student's behavior and into how you, as the teacher, can respond more effectively? Pay attention to small steps in the right direction — do more of what works. Has a similar or new situation occurred with this student over the past week? Go back to Step 1 to analyze the new situation.	 What was tested Conclusion New situation

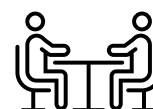
GRIP Handout - Colleague (Questioner)

General instructions:

- The teacher (case presenter) initiates each step.
- Adopt an inquisitive, reflective, and encouraging stance.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Pay attention to small insights and incremental progress.

Step 1: Sketch the situation (2 minutes)

As the supporting colleague, show understanding and acknowledge your colleague's feelings. Help the case presenter to focus on a specific situation and to monitor the time.



Step 2: Retell the situation from the student's perspective (5 minutes)

Help your colleague to shift into the student's perspective. Encourage the use of the first-person "I" when describing the situation from the student's point of view. Ask questions like "Imagine that you are..."



Supporting questions:

As the student, what did you feel in this situation? ("I felt...")

As the student, what emotions did you experience? ("I was...")

As the student, what were you thinking? ("I thought...")

As the student, what did you want to achieve with your behavior? ("I wanted...")

As the student, why did you want that? ("Because I...")

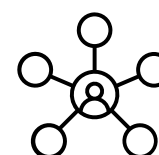
What happened next?

What did the teacher do?

How did you think/feel/react after the teacher said or did that? ("I...")

Step 3: Clarify the context (10 minutes)

Support your colleague in exploring and clarifying contextual factors. Use supporting questions from various categories to uncover both the immediate and broader context. Start with the student's perspective, but reflecting together from the teacher's point of view is also possible.



Supporting questions:

The activity:

What were you (as the student) doing? ("I...")

What type of activity was this (free time / transition / structured activity; instruction / independent work)?

What time of day was it?

What happened immediately before the incident?

Did you understand the instruction?

Was the task at an appropriate level, or too easy/too hard?

Other students:

Who else was present during the situation?

What did the other students say or do?

Teacher:

What did the teacher or other adults say or do?
What aspects of this situation — such as what was said or done — made your response or behavior worse or better?

Exceptions (moments when the behavior does not occur):

Are there situations where you (as a student) do not show this behavior?

What's different in those situations?

Broader (social) context:

Cultural background (e.g., avoiding eye contact as a sign of respect)

Social status in the class (e.g., being excluded, popular, friendships)

Group dynamics (e.g., students trigger each other)

Other factors (e.g., home situation, lack of sleep)

Step 4: Generate alternative explanations (10 minutes)

Support your colleague in thinking of possible alternative explanations and help select the most plausible one.



Supporting questions explanation:

What role might ... (a factor from Step 3) ... have played in the student's behavior?

Follow-up: What else could explain this?

Supporting questions order of likelihood:

Why do you think this explanation is the most likely?

Do you think this explanation aligns with what others (parents, other teachers) think?

Were there things discussed that contradict this explanation?

Step 5: Test alternative explanations (5 minutes)

Help your colleague brainstorm how to concretely test the most plausible explanation.



Supporting questions:

What do you plan to do differently?

Why this approach?

How will the student or a colleague notice your change?

When will you check your explanation with the student or parents?

What will you ask them?

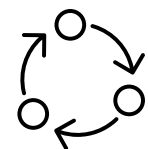
How can you tell whether your action had an effect?

How will you observe this?

Follow-up: What else?

Step 6: Evaluation (= Step 0 in session 2 and beyond) (5 minutes)

Reflect together on what insights the past weeks have brought. Help your colleague focus on small steps of progress. Consider what is working and how to build on it. You may also explore a new situation.



Supporting questions:

Evaluate insights:

What did the student do that confirmed or contradicted your explanation(s)?

What do you now understand better about the student's needs?

Did you change your approach at certain moments? If so, what and why?

What did that change lead to?

How has the student responded? What's going a bit better?

Can this insight be applied more broadly?

If changing your approach didn't work:

What's preventing it?

What do you need?

What could help you?

Evaluate explanations:

Was your testing method appropriate?

Do you want to try another way to test it?

If the explanation no longer seems valid, is there another one you want to explore?

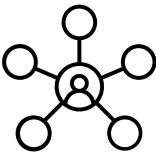
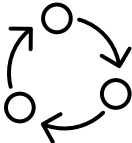
What makes this new explanation seem more likely?

How would you test it?

GRIP Handout – Summary Version

This handout can be used to support the step-by-step process. Suggestions for supporting questions are provided in the full version of the GRIP steps.

General instructions: The teacher begins each step. Adopt an inquisitive stance. Ask open-ended questions. Pay attention to small insights and incremental progress..

Step 1: Sketch the situation (2 minutes)		
☐ Own perspective		• Supportive role • Understanding and acknowledge feelings
Step 2: Retell the situation from the student's perspective (5 minutes)		
☐ From the student's perspective ☐ "I"-vorm		• Feelings of the student • Emotions of the student • Thoughts of the student • Intentions of the student • Motives of the student
Step 3: Clarify the context (10 minutes)		
☐ Situational factors ☐ Broader context		• Activity • Other students • Teacher • Exceptions • Broader (social) context of the student
Step 4: Generate alternative explanations (10 minutes)		
☐ Three explanations ☐ Order of likelihood		• Generate alternative explanations • Ranking explanations
Step 5: Test alternative explanations (5 minutes)		
☐ Pedagogical/ instructional approach ☐ Observation ☐ Checking with the student		• What do you want to do (differently)? • How will you observe? • What will you check directly with the student? • Formulate concrete actions • Take notes • Plan a follow-up evaluation in 1 week
Step 6: Evaluation (= Step 0 session 2 and beyond) (5 minutes)		
☐ What was tested ☐ Insights ☐ New situation		• Evaluation tested explanations • Focus on small but meaningful signs of progress • Consider how to expand what works • Evt. select a new situation

Appendix A: Steps 1 – 6: Checklist and Notes Form

COVER SHEET

Situation Checklist

A suitable situation meets the following criteria:

- ✓ The case presenter would have preferred the situation to go differently.
- ✓ The case presenter was involved throughout (or during a large part of) the situation.

EVALUATION FORM (Follow-up Session)

Step 0 (session 2 and beyond): Evaluation (5 minutes)

Use this space to note insights related to the evaluation of tested explanations and the actions agreed upon in the previous session.

NOTES FORM

Step 1: Sketch the situation (2 minutes)

Note who was involved and what happened during the situation with the student.

Step 2: Retell the situation from the student's perspective (5 minutes)

Note the possible perspective of the student in the situation.

Step 3: Clarify the context (10 minutes)

Note direct and broader contextual factors that may have played a role in the behavior of the student in the situation.

Step 4: Generate alternative explanations (10 minutes)

Note the various possible alternative explanations.

Step 5: Test alternative explanations (5 minuten)

Note how the alternative explanations will be tested (action plan)

Agreements

- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...

Appendix B: Step 5: Alternative Pedagogical or Instructional Actions

If you want to test whether your explanation for the student's behavior is accurate, you can do so by changing your actions and observing whether this leads to different behavior from the student.

It's important to make the adjustments in your approach as concrete as possible. The adjustments also need to be feasible. Prefer trying a new approach consistently at a specific moment each day (e.g. during one specific lesson), rather than applying it throughout the entire day.

Apply the new approach for at least one week before evaluating what has improved. Coordinate the details of your approach with your teaching partner, if applicable.

Of course, the actions you try should closely align with the explanations you are testing.

For example:

- *If you're testing whether restlessness is caused by overly long verbal instruction, then your alternative action should aim to shorten instruction time for this student (prevention).*
- *If you're testing whether a student's anger is being reinforced by conflict in the teacher-student relationship, then your approach should focus on reducing corrections and increasing positive attention for this student (alternative response).*

Appendix B Alternative Action

Assignment alternative action: Determine as concretely as possible which pedagogical and instructional approach you want to use to test your hypothesis. Ideally, the alternative actions should closely align with the explanation you want to test.

Decide at which moment during the day you will implement this.

Example:

A teacher is struggling with R., who calls out during independent work when he needs help and regularly walks around the classroom. Corrections have had little effect. The teacher notices that she feels irritated by this behavior.

She formulates several hypotheses: R. might be insecure about the work and seeks attention; he may not fully understand the rules; or perhaps independent work lasts too long for him.

She decides the most plausible hypothesis is that R. is feeling insecure, and chooses to test that one.

Alternative action plan

The teacher decides to apply the following approach daily during language lessons:

- Use a fixed walking route so R. knows when the teacher will pass by.
- Remind R. of this agreement before each language lesson.
- Compliment R. during the walk-around for exercises he was able to complete independently.
- Acknowledge his effort when he is working independently (e.g., make eye contact and give a thumbs-up).
- If R. walks around, gently and neutrally direct him back to his seat and say when you will come help him: "Go back to your seat, I'll help X first and then it's your turn."

Teacher's evaluation: At first, there was no immediate effect. After a week, the teacher noticed a decrease in R.'s calling out and walking around. She also saw that R. was proud when he managed to complete something independently — he beamed at compliments. R. became increasingly able to wait his turn. The teacher noticed she felt less irritated, which improved the teacher-student relationship.

She concludes that her hypothesis — that R.'s behaviour stemmed from insecurity — was likely correct

Alternative Action - Template

Which explanation are you testing?

Alternative Action

What is your planned approach?

When will you implement this?

What conclusion can you draw about the explanation you tested?

Appendix C: Step 5: Conducting an Observation

Conducting a behavior observation can be a useful way to test your hypotheses about the explanations for a student's behavior. Observations can help clarify what preceded the behavior or which factors may have influenced the behavior in a particular situation.

There are several ways to conduct behavior observations. This appendix outlines two options:

- 1. The ABC chart, or functional behavior analysis.*
- 2. Observing exceptions, with a focus on situations where things go better.*

Both methods offer structured ways to observe and analyze. The ABC chart is used to analyze a difficult situation with a student. In contrast, observing exceptions focuses on moments when things go well, to identify what might work in more challenging moments. This latter approach is especially helpful when you notice that your view of the student is becoming increasingly negatively tinted.

Appendix C.1. ABC Chart

Observation task: In an ABC chart, you describe the sequence of events in terms of:

A – Antecedent (What happened before the behavior?)

B – Behavior (What did the student do?)

C – Consequence (What happened afterward?)

The consequence often becomes the new antecedent, prompting a new behavior. This helps identify patterns that may contribute to the emergence, maintenance, or escalation of the behavior.

It's best to fill in the ABC chart during or shortly after a new incident with the student, depending on what's feasible in the moment.

Example:

A teacher wants to test as explanation whether an angry correction and physical intervention by adults when a student is misbehaving contributes to aggressive reactions from a student. She conducts an observation during gym class.

Antecedent (A)	Behavior (B)	Consequence (C)
During gym, students are supposed to sit on the benches, but J. is walking around restlessly.	Shouts: No, I will not sit down!	The gym teacher angrily says J. must sit down now or go to the changing room.
The gym teacher angrily says J. must sit down now or go to the changing room.	J. becomes angry and kicks the mats and the equipment in the gym.	The teacher walks over and tries to escort J. to the changing room.
The teacher walks over and tries to escort J. to the changing room.	J. resists and kicks the gym teacher in the calves.	J. is carried out of the gym by two adults out.
J. is carried out of the gym by two adults out.	J. is upset, screams, and tries to kick and bite.	

Teacher's evaluation: The angry approach and physical intervention seem to escalate J.'s aggression. This supports the hypothesis that the response contributes to the behaviour

ABC chart - Template

Which explanation are you testing?

Antecedent (A)	Behavior (B)	Consequence (C)

What conclusions can you draw about the explanation you tested?

Appendix C.2 Observing Exceptions

Observation task: In this task, you look for situations where the student’s challenging behavior was absent or less frequent, and identify what was different in those situations.

Observe at least three moments during the coming week when the behavior did not or barely occurred. Answer the observation questions as soon as possible after each situation, and note your findings. Afterward, analyze the three observations for insights that might help in more difficult situations.

Observation questions:

- What went well?
- What contributed to things going well?
- What was different about the situation that made the behavior less likely or absent?
 - o Did you do anything differently?
 - o Were the circumstances different?

Example 1:

A teacher wonders whether F.’s resistance during spelling tests is caused by performance anxiety. She observes exceptions when things go better.

Exception 1

During a peer-assisted spelling task, F. participates well. She accepts help from her classmate.

Teacher evaluation: Working with a peer might feel less confronting for F.

Example 2:

A teacher wants to know whether angry reactions from adults contribute to a student’s aggression. She observes exceptions when the student responds more calmly.

Exception 1

After recess, P. pushes a classmate. I calmly say: “P., go sit at your desk. I’ll check in with you in a moment.” P. walks away angrily, but does go to his seat. I usually raise my voice in these moments, and P. can really stay caught up in his anger. My calm response now seemed to help P. regulate his anger more quickly, allowing for a later conversation.

Teacher evaluation: A calm approach and giving him space helped P. to calm down.

Observing Exceptions - Template

Which explanation are you testing?

Exception 1

Note your insights using the observation questions:

Exception 2

Note your insights using the observation questions:

Exception 3

Note your insights using the observation questions:

What conclusions can you draw based on the three observations about the explanation you tested?

Appendix D: Checking with the student

Checking your (most plausible) explanation directly with the student can be a helpful way to test your hypothesis.

The goal of this action is to briefly (within 3 minutes) share your explanation with the student in a way that also leaves room for other possibilities. You do this by naming the emotion or feeling you observed in the student, and then offering 2 or 3 possible explanations, one of which is your working hypothesis. Discuss these options in terms of "Some kids/students.... Other kids/students..."

Important:

*When checking with the student, do **not** revisit what happened or focus on what the student did. Bringing attention back to the behavior can feel like a reprimand, especially if the student feels they are being judged or blamed.*

Also, open-ended questions about the behavior can be too difficult for students to answer, and they may steer the conversation back toward the negative behavior — which can reinforce it, especially if the student is more accustomed to receiving attention for negative behavior than for positive behavior.

*By instead focusing on the emotion or feeling and offering a **multiple-choice format**, you show the student that you're trying to understand their experience — and it makes it easier for them to respond.*

Creating some distance can also help: referring to "some kids" or "other students" when offering the options makes the conversation feel safer and less confrontational.

Appendix D Checking with the Student

Checking with the student task:

Check an explanation by naming a feeling or emotion you observed in the student, and offering 2 or 3 possible explanations — including the one you find most plausible. Present the options using phrasing like: “Some kids/students... Other kids/students...”

Keep the conversation brief — no more than 3 minutes.

Show the student that you’ve heard their answer, and let them know that you’ll follow up on it.

Example 1:

A teacher wants to check an explanation with a student who got very angry during a math lesson.

Checking with the student

Emotion named: Anger

Possible explanations offered:

- The student was distracted by others (most plausible)
- The student found the assignment difficult

Teacher’s question:

“I noticed you were really angry during math yesterday. Is that right?”

Some kids/students get angry when others are bothering them.

Other kids/students get angry when they find the work difficult.

What was it for you?”

Example 2:

A teacher wants to check an explanation with a student who didn’t want to join a group activity.

Checking with the student

Emotion named: Not feeling like joining

Possible explanations offered:

- The student didn’t like the game
- The group was too overwhelming (most plausible)

Teacher’s question:

“I saw that you didn’t really feel like joining the activity yesterday. Is that right?”

Some students feel that way when they don’t like the game.

Others feel that way when it’s too crowded or busy in the group.

What was it for you?”

Checking with the student - Template

Which explanation are you testing?

Checking with the student

What emotion or feeling will you name?

What explanations will you offer?

What conclusions can you draw about the explanation you tested?

Appendix E Integrating GRIP into the Educational Support Structure

For an intervention to be effective, it's important that it is implemented in a structured way and that the outcomes are embedded within existing educational support structures, such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or student development plans.

Within the regulative cycle

A helpful tool for organizing structured action is the regulative cycle (van Strien, 1986). Many education professionals are familiar with this model through data-informed decision-making or response-to-intervention (RTI) frameworks. The regulative cycle includes the following phases: Problem identification → Analysis → Planning → Action → Evaluation.

GRIP provides practical tools to support this cycle:

- Identification: It begins with a specific problem: a concrete situation involving a student.
- Analysis: During a peer consultation, the teacher works through Steps 1–4 to analyze the situation and generate explanations.
- Planning: Then, in Step 5, the teacher formulates action plans based on those explanations.
- Action: The actions are implemented in the classroom over the next 1–2 weeks.
- Evaluation: In Step 6, a follow-up conversation is held to evaluate the effects of those actions and gather new insights. This evaluation often leads naturally into a new diagnostic cycle, because the teacher's actions will have generated new information about the student and the situation.

Example:

Identification: M. teaches a 2nd grade class. One of her students, Tom, regularly shows restless and disruptive behavior. So far, strategies such as changing seat arrangement and offering a clear daily structure have not helped much. M. decides to bring Tom's case to a GRIP peer consultation.

Analysis: During the session, several possible explanations emerge. Tom's behavior seems to increase during longer periods of independent work, and it's unclear whether he knows how to ask for help—he tends to call out in class. M. also wonders if lack of sleep plays a role.

Planning: Based on these insights, M. chooses to focus on Tom's ability to ask for help. She decides to give him a help card that he can place on his desk when he has a question. They will practice this routine together.

Action: Over the next week, she implements this plan.

Evaluation: In the follow-up session, she evaluates the approach and the explanation. She notes that Tom calls out less often, but still has trouble concentrating during long work periods.

Identification: She uses this observation to define a new problem statement for the next session, that is, concentration during long work periods.



Within the educational support structure

In addition to using GRIP within the regulative cycle, we strongly recommend embedding the results into the school's educational support system.

For example:

- Hypotheses about possible explanations for student behavior can be recorded in the working file using the notes form.
- Alternative instructional strategies that have been tried and evaluated can be documented in existing IEPs or development plans.

This way, strategies that prove effective for a student can become part of their documented educational needs, making them easier to share with colleagues and sustain over time.