

Classroom Management for Successful Instruction

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Introduction

In education, as in life, what gets the most focus will produce the most results. Education is the focus of many debates, from what kinds of tests we will use to assess student knowledge to implementing new standards. These topics definitely deserve attention. But in our zealous endeavors, sometimes we put the cart before the horse. In this case, the cart is the assessment and curriculum. The horse that is being left behind is classroom management. All of the best research-based instruction simply will not matter or make a difference if the teacher is unable to manage the behavior of the students in the classroom.

Many teachers have outstanding content knowledge but lack the management skills necessary to conduct a highly engaged and academically successful classroom. That is why I decided to focus this book on assisting teachers in developing their own classroom management style and practices.

Unfortunately, many university and school district teacher preparation programs have failed to coach teachers to effectively handle classroom management and discipline. However, when teachers do get the right kind of training, real changes can be made in the strategies they use for classroom curriculum instruction and in the organization of basic management approaches. This means more students will be engaged in their learning activities, which will translate to more teaching and learning occurring. In fact, I believe classroom management is so important that it should be viewed as an extension of the learning process.

As I began to put research and my experiences into the pages of this book, I initially had new teachers in mind. But the more I wrote, the more I realized that there were many seasoned teachers who also struggle with classroom management. This book contains multiple levels of application and reflection. The goal for this reflection is to identify the need for the most effective strategies that will result in reaching high student achievement.

The end of each chapter, as well as application activities throughout the chapters, will allow you to reflect on your current practices in specific topical areas. The final chapter will offer the opportunity to plan for a successful school year involving classroom management.

No one specific style of management is better than another because every teacher and every class of students is unique. What works for one may not always work for another. To get the most out of this book, I encourage you to be a reflective and honest responder when answering the questions posed. Don't be afraid to challenge your beliefs about classroom management. Try something new that piques your interest. Be a risk taker!

How you prepare and how you implement your classroom management will have a direct correlation to how well your students perform both socially and academically. At the end of this book is where you can use your knowledge to develop your own classroom management plan.

Besides parents, teachers have the greatest day-to-day impact on children. In order to teach them well, you need to first structure an environment that is conducive to learning. This book will assist in that endeavor.

How This Book Is Organized

The chapters in this book build on one another and present current research findings. The end of each chapter provides an opportunity to review and reflect on what you have learned and what it might mean in your own practice. **Chapter 1** asks the pertinent questions, “What is the difference between classroom management and classroom discipline?” and “Is there evidence of either one in my classroom?” The importance of establishing a positive learning environment is shared in **Chapter 2**. **Chapters 3** and **4** discuss how the physical and social environments of your classroom can enhance student behavior and academic performance to provide you with opportunities to design your classroom. **Chapter 5** examines tips for engaging students in their learning and keeping them on task. **Chapter 6** investigates everyday challenges with student behavior that can easily get you off track and how to properly handle these classroom disruptions. **Chapter 7** helps you understand what families may be experiencing with

their children in the home and how to communicate and work with them effectively. The benefits of collaboration with colleagues are explored in **Chapter 8**. Finally, **Chapter 9** helps you outline an effective overall classroom management strategy.

Figure 1.1 Classroom Environment Self-Assessment

Rate yourself within your current classroom by reading the statements below and labeling them with a **Y** (Yes) or an **N** (No).

- _____ I understand the different types of students I have and I take this into consideration when planning a lesson, an activity, or a field trip.
- _____ I clearly communicate my classroom management expectations to my students.
- _____ I follow through with consequences when classroom rules are broken.
- _____ My students know what to do when they finish an assignment.
- _____ My discipline is somewhat flexible according to the student.
- _____ I don't typically lose instructional time due to discipline problems.
- _____ I usually understand why a child is acting out or not doing his/her best.
- _____ I always address student problems in an appropriate and timely manner.
- _____ I use a variety of intervention methods.
- _____ I teach my students how to solve their problems independently.
- _____ My students are encouraged to work out their interpersonal problems without teacher help.
- _____ My students help other students deal with problems.
- _____ My students want to be in my class.
- _____ My students feel safe in my class.
- _____ I follow a systematic approach to classroom management.
- _____ I have a signal to get my students' immediate attention.

How many **Y** (Yes) answers do you have in the survey above? _____

Out of the total 16 responses, what is your percentage of maintaining a successful classroom environment? _____

of Y (Yes) answers = Your percentage (%)

Sample: 16 100%

Figure 1.2 Rate Your Teaching Responses Self-Assessment

For each of the following areas, circle the number on each scale that most accurately matches your response.

1. My requests to students are

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ambiguous								Clear	

2. My requests to the students are phrased

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Negatively								Positively	

3. When I want student compliance, I usually use

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Questions								Direct requests	

4. When I make a request, I usually use a

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Loud voice								Quiet voice	

5. My state of mind when I respond to student behavior is

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Emotional								Calm	

6. After a request, I usually

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Immediately go on to something else								Watch for compliance	

7. I require compliance in (mark the number of seconds)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Add up the points for each response above:

63–70: You have *an exceptional ability* to respond to the varying conditions of daily classroom situations.

56–62: Your score indicates *very good teacher responses* as you meet the challenges involved in each day.

49–55: You have shown *a fair ability* to calmly address classroom issues.

42–48: Your score highlights the areas in which you might *need improvement*.

1–41: Your total shows that there are various areas in which you might *need guidance and coaching* in order to establish a positive environment of classroom management.

Taking the Time to Reflect

The next step to classroom management is to examine the information you have just gathered when rating your management practices. The reflective practice is an active process, meaning it is ongoing, continuous learning (York-Barr et al. 2006). Our goal is to practice effective reflection that leads to authentic positive transformation. To be the most effective, we need to question the goals and values that guide our work, the context in which we teach, and our assumptions. Only then will this type of reflection truly help us in our classrooms.



Think about the results from the self-assessment. What are your strengths? What areas can be improved?

This process of being a reflective practitioner is important for all teachers, not just those who are new or struggling. The very best educators practice reflective, deliberate thinking so that they can consistently improve their practices. Educators can gain new and deeper insights that lead to actions that improve teaching and learning processes to benefit their students (York-Barr et al. 2006). The teacher needs to decide what is reasonable and helpful while planning future experiences. It's only through reflection that one can gauge actions in order to further the goal of being a more professional educator. At its very core, it is about taking that thoughtful problem-solving disposition and applying it toward one's teaching.

Chapter 7

Communicating and Working with Families

Have you heard the popular saying, the power of one can be great, but the power of many is better? The power of a teacher to change students' lives is great. We can all affect our students in powerful and positive ways. But we don't have to do it alone. The parents and guardians of these students can be our partners in building a great learning experience for every child.

All parents bring with them different views surrounding the issues of involvement in the education of their child, parental influence in how the classroom is managed, and ideas concerning the best ways to address behavioral matters. This can be due to various factors such as their personal experiences in school, their understanding or assumptions of what goes on in the classroom or at school, and their cultural beliefs about the role of educators. Excellent communication skills are essential for a successful teacher in establishing a good rapport with parents and guardians. These skills can enlist the help of families in order to teach students to make responsible decisions and contribute to the overall goal of a positive learning environment. The process of recruiting the support of families can take a good deal of effort and time, but it is well worth it! “The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing; families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life” (Henderson and Mapp 2002, 7). Parents know their children best and usually believe their child is unique and special. It’s normal for any parent to feel this way and advocate for their child’s rights. If we, as teachers, can build alliances with parents that validate their concerns and contributions, these connections will directly relate to improvements in student achievement (Henderson and Mapp 2002).

The way to start is to make a strong positive first impression by clearly communicating with parents at the very beginning of the school year. This will go a long way toward setting the tone for the school year. Tell families that you want to establish partnerships with them so that their children can have a successful year in your class. Explain your classroom management system so they understand how your class is being operated. Answer their questions and concerns and assure them that your goal is to help each student succeed this year. All parents will appreciate it and most likely be supportive of you as a teacher.



How do you establish rapport with parents?

Ways of Communicating with Families

Try to have at least three different methods of communication, such as a phone call, an email, and a note home. It is important that the first three communications in a school year with parents or guardians be positive. By doing this, they are more likely to be receptive to the teacher's communication if a call or note needs to go home expressing concerns about a negative behavior.

It is also important that communication is accessible to parents. It is always helpful to send translated notes for those parents who speak and read languages other than English. This creates a welcoming climate for the second-language-speaking families.

The first step toward effective parental communication is to evaluate the types of communication currently in place. Then, the teacher should evaluate what each form of communication accomplishes for the parents. For example, when sending a note home to explain a specific behavior incident, is it handwritten or is it a form that includes spaces for all of the pertinent information to be shared? Then, reflect on whether further modes of communication are necessary. Figure 7.1 outlines various ideas for communicating with parents.

Figure 7.1 Ideas for Communicating with Families

- phone calls before or after school
- text messages
- class newsletters
- weekly or monthly calendars
- emails
- notes
- in-person discussions before or after school
- conferences
- home visits
- class website
- open house
- report cards
- progress reports



What methods do you use to communicate with parents and guardians?

As you consider the most effective ways to communicate with parents and guardians, consider how the various forms of communication can accomplish the objectives listed in Figure 7.2. Although not every form of communication can accomplish all of these objectives at once, when you look at your methods of communication comprehensively, each item in Figure 7.2 should be addressed in some way.

Figure 7.2 Objectives of Teacher Communications with Families

Communication should help parents/guardians to:

- express expectations about their child's education
- feel invited and welcome at the school
- understand their child's academic and behavioral progress
- share insight into their child's home study styles with the teacher
- discuss their child's interests and behavior issues with the teacher
- understand what concepts their child is learning
- understand how they can help their child learn more at school
- understand their role in helping their child with homework
- initiate contact with the teacher if they have questions or concerns
- become involved in volunteering at the school
- extend learning concepts through home activities
- discuss future academic possibilities
- understand the avenues for the child to reach certain academic goals, such as graduation or college
- understand the various opportunities for involvement available at the school

(Adapted from Henderson and Mapp 2002, 22)

Phone Calls

When teachers better understand parents' and guardians' beliefs about themselves and their child, they can use that information to create successful communication when they call home. Begin by making positive phone calls. Teachers should tell parents how well their child is doing and what they appreciate about that child. If a call is for negative behavior, keep the focus on the behavior, not the student. Always mix in some positive feedback, too. If the teacher has already sent a detailed account of the classroom management plan at the beginning of the year for the parent to sign, then the phone call home will serve as a reminder to the parent of the agreement made between teacher, student, and parent. The parent can then focus the conversation with their child on the rule that has been broken. In some cases, it is best for the teacher to send a note ahead of time to let them know that they would like to talk about an incident at school. Before

calling the parent, talk to all of the parties involved in the incident and write down any facts gathered ahead of time. It is important that the parent sees the teacher as a partner in solving problems, not an adversary. Plan ahead of time on how to initiate the conversation. Some strong examples on how to begin a conversation with parents are:

- “I appreciate being able to speak with you.”
- “Thank you for all of your help,”
- “You’ve done a wonderful job with Johnny.”
- “We had an incident at school and I wanted to let you know about it.”

Parents might not understand the teacher’s expectations of their involvement in solving the problem. Therefore, it is important to be clear about any required action on their part or if the phone call is to just to keep them informed.

Take a deep breath and relax when calling a parent. You, as the teacher, are the parent’s agent inside the classroom and both of you are working together for the child’s good. Always be prepared to provide ideas for solving a problem at school if the need arises. Parents appreciate when teachers inform them when they see a situation improving. Choose one of the forms of communication listed in Figure 7.1 to update the families on the student’s progress. Finally, always thank the parent for working together to make the necessary changes.

It can become very difficult to remember which issues arose for which students. A sample communication log is shown in Figure 7.3. A full size version can be found in Appendix B. This is helpful for documenting any communication the teacher has with the parents of a student.

Figure 7.3 Phone Communication Log

Phone Communication Log

Student's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian's Name(s): _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Date	Subject	Concerning	Response/Action	Follow-Up Information

Parent Conferences

Parent conferences can be intimidating for new and veteran teachers alike. Do not worry about parents asking difficult questions and feeling put on the spot. Teachers should reinforce the message that they are there to help their child succeed to his or her fullest and that they are on the same “side” as the parents. Open and frequent communication throughout the school year will help parents stay abreast of specifics that are happening in the classroom. This regular communication will allow parents to reinforce the importance of learning objectives (Goodwin and Hubbell 2013). This in turn will reduce surprises at parent conferences since the teacher has been keeping families in the loop.

Ideally, the first communication with parents should come before the official parent conference. Parents are vital to a student’s success, so try to get them involved early with invitations to the classroom, notes of praise, or other forms of communication. Teachers may want to send home a letter listing the points that will be covered in the scheduled conference so that parents will be informed and prepared. As teachers make a schedule for parent conferences, flexibility is important. Parents’ involvement is shaped by their perceptions of their own skills and abilities, and their experiences with feeling welcome and invited to be involved at the school (Henderson and Mapp 2002). Teachers may also need to schedule translators for parents

Strategies for Successful Parent Conferences

Directions: Rate yourself on a scale of 1–5 in each area, where “1” is an area of growth and “5” means this is something you already do.

Area	Score (1–5)	Comments
<p>Clarity I say exactly what I mean and check to be sure that I am understood.</p>		
<p>Professionalism I am friendly, yet businesslike. I never discuss others negatively or compare one child with another.</p>		
<p>Positive Attitude I build up the adult’s ability to parent and the child’s capability to learn.</p>		
<p>Documentation I plan ahead so that I have work samples to back up what I have said.</p>		
<p>Assertiveness I come across as being in charge of the meeting with clear ideas of how to improve any situation.</p>		
<p>Flexibility I am able to change my mind when corrected and able to come up with alternate plans.</p>		
<p>Inclusion Whenever possible, I include the child when I am discussing future plans that include him/her.</p>		
<p>Knowledge I understand my curriculum and am able to present it in layman’s terms. I also know several strategies for working toward the student’s future growth.</p>		