Classroom Management

“Classroom management is the orderly presentation of learning activities and the minimizing and prevention of discipline problems and disruptions.”

-E. Stachowski

Over the years, educators and scholars alike have established many definitions of the term “classroom management.” According to Brophy and Putman, an optimal classroom management approach establishes the desired learning environment while simultaneously imposing the fewest restrictions. McClasin and Good add that effective classroom management also continually removes restrictions and external control as students develop more capacity for self-regulation (Good and Brophy, 1992).

Teachers that have successful classroom management skills must possess certain traits. The teacher should be friendly, mature and sincere. He or she should also have strength to deal fairly constructively with students, since this enables them to use a variety of techniques effectively. Teachers must be able to create and maintain a classroom environment that allows for student learning, developing clear expectations of student behavior and knowledgeable enough to know what to do when those expectations are not being met. Often the time and energy needed to deal with such problems requires extra time spend outside of the school setting, and those should be dealt with accordingly.

Successful classroom management includes attention to each of the following areas: the development and conveying of clear expectations within the classroom, rules and consequences, frequent and positive parent communication, the ability to understand
and motivate students, and organize the physical arrangement of the classroom in an effective manner. In terms of each of these components, grade level plays an important role. In this paper, the focus is on third grade.

**Classroom Expectations**

Part of maintaining a classroom environment is providing clear expectations. As a teacher, how should your expectations be established? Expectations must be reasonable, yet set high in terms of conduct and student achievement. The focus of expectations used in a classroom must be on learning as well as on producing fair and consistent rules and consequences. By creating expectations, the teacher creates an environment in which students know and follow the rules. Expectations will also help lay a foundation of respect and positive behavior in the classroom.

Teachers need to make a set of expectations in order to achieve successful classroom management. The following are some suggestions teachers can follow in order to make this possible. First of all, be fair and consistent at all times by following through with what is said. Mrs. Callahan quoted, “I have high expectations and I tell them [the students] that,” (Callahan, 2001). Provide a student-centered learning environment, at the same time working hard to become a role model for the students. Students are more susceptible to behave well once they observe the teacher fulfilling the desired behavior expected. Working hard to develop a positive home-school relationship is also very important (Zeiger, 2001).
There are several expectations and responsibilities that teachers must accept in order to ensure a successfully managed classroom. Employing behavior management strategies can help provide a safe, orderly and success oriented learning environment. Also, the teacher must implement an appropriate discipline plan, including expectations and consequences, consistent with school policy. In addition to this, the teacher must take responsibility for his or her own discipline plan. Maintaining the expectations that teachers set can be achieved by continually monitoring students, exercising prompt actions in order to prevent irresponsible behavior, and reasserting expectations to students (Verrier, 1998).

When students interfere with the teaching and learning process, and fail to meet the desired expectations, teachers can respond by dealing in a prompt, fair and consistent manner. Following through with consequences as well as avoiding inappropriate consequences are important to remember. There are two things that a teacher should never do. Teachers should never expect students to have the same achievement level and be the same as everyone else. All students will vary in their level of knowledge. A teacher should also never have exceedingly high expectations that are not realistic (Monsour, 2001). As a teacher, make sure that students adhere to school and classroom rules. Explain the expectations clearly and reinforce behavior frequently and regularly. Teachers and students must work together as a team to maintain a supportive, yet disciplined classroom atmosphere (Verrier, 1998).

In addition to expectations and responsibilities of the teacher, there are others placed on students. Students should be expected to obey all of the school rules. Students
should have input on school rules and ownership, and understand that behavior is a choice made by the individual, therefore accepting consequences is his or her responsibility (Monsour, 2001).

Rules and Consequences

The process of developing a set of classroom rules is very important. Chuck LaBounty suggests five “rules for rules.” These include:

1. Keep rules few (no more than five).
2. Express rules positively.
3. Post them where all can be seen.
4. Occasionally reward rule following.
5. Let students help decide rules, or try to involve them (Monsour, 2001).

In a third grade classroom environment, eight and nine year old students are able to understand what is expected from them, and do follow many of the rules. The rules should be agreed on by everyone making the decision, be clearly understood, enforceable, consistent, positively and also defined in behavioral terms (Monsour, 2001). Students should be involved in determining the rules, but some schools decide on the rules before the start of the year. Miss Vlack quotes, “The rules were decided before school started and it was the school’s decision,” (Vlack, 2001). If this is the school’s policy, the students should still be informed of the rules and they should always be posted where they can see them. The following are suggested rules for a third grade class (See also Appendix A-1):
1. Respect all students, teachers and everyone’s property.
2. Listen to and follow all directions.
3. Turn in all homework assignments.
4. Try your hardest at all times.

In addition to defining a clear set of rules, it is equally important to establish consequences, to be implemented whenever rules are broken. Consequences, like rules, should be well understood, and agreed on by everyone. They should also relate to the behavior that is exhibited. Consequences should be delivered consistently, and without emotion or argument (Monsour, 2001). Miss Vlack, the third grade teacher at Greenwood Elementary in River Falls, shared her behavior plan. In her classroom, Miss Vlack uses a “rainbow chart and every student gets to have a star put underneath the chart,” (Vlack, 2001). The first consequence is a warning and the student has to put their star on the “yellow colored” part of the rainbow. The next consequence is a time out. The third consequence is signing a behavior plan, which is similar to a contract. (See Appendix A-3). The last consequence is a visit with the principal and a possible conference with the parents. At the end of the day, the entire chart is cleared. If there is a day where no one gets put on the chart, then Miss Vlack tallies up points for the entire class. At the end of the month, the students get to decide what kind of reward they want. Usually the reward is a party. The rainbow chart shows that Miss Vlack incorporates discipline and consequences in her classroom, but there are rewards for good behavior as well (Vlack, 2001).

Incorporating rules and consequences into the classroom and the entire school environment is known as Total School Discipline. In order to accomplish this, the entire school must work together to teach the child, to develop a positive climate and positive
discipline. It takes all of the adults working together as a team, from the teachers all the
way to the principal, because “school control begins with class control.” These
individuals must have a strong commitment to the procedures established within the
school. If teachers bend the rules, students are more than likely to break the rules.
Therefore, teachers have to be tough, but fair. If something is proving to be ineffective,
teachers should be flexible and creative enough to modify their approach. Knowing what
“to do next” is also important (Alderman, 2000).

Total School Discipline is a process, not a product. It is not based on a collection
of mandated rules and consequences. It is based on a vision, a climate, and a way of
persons interacting with one another. Parents are vital in achieving success. Informing
parents of the school vision and mission statement, as well as involving parents in the
rules and consequences is crucial (Alderman, 2000). Teachers should send out a
newsletter at the beginning of the year, which informs the parents of the school rules and
of the consequences. (See Appendix A-2).

The following are suggested consequences for a third grade class:

1. Warning
2. Time out
3. Behavior Plan
4. Principal
(See also Appendix A-2).

Managing student behavior is the driving force behind rules and consequences.
As stated earlier, it is important to stay positive since positive behavior prevents
misbehavior (Pearson, 2001). Logical consequences through assertive discipline is also
key in behavior management. It is important to first think about the approach that one is
going to take, whether it is reviewing the discipline policy or deciding the most effect
way to reach the student. Visualize possible changes that may have occurred, or that perhaps have been missed. Making expectations clear from the very beginning should help eliminate possible problems. Showing consistency, encouragement and respect helps delivery of consequences go smoothly also. Further suggestions include keeping students busy and challenged, in an attempt to keep their minds and bodies occupied at all times, and letting them know you care about them by listening to their suggestions (Pearson, 2001).

It is also important, as a teacher, to use contracts in the classroom. This sets a guideline for the student to follow in order to achieve a desired expectation. When developing a contract, there are certain guidelines to go by. First, introduce the concept of the contract. The contract should state how the student is expected to behave in school. Next, determine how you want the student to behave. Then, determine the teacher’s positive consequences at school. Along with that, the parent’s positive consequences at home must be developed. Once the positive consequences are stated, determine the teacher’s negative consequences at school and the parent’s negative consequences at home. Teachers need to use professional judgment when determining these negative consequences. The next step is to determine the length of the contract. Should it be one week, or two weeks, etc.? You should also consider the age of the student as well. Once the contract is written, review the terms of the contract and then sign the contract (Monsour, 2001). The people signing the contract should be the teacher, parent, and in most cases, the student as well.

Every classroom should have a set of expectations, rules and consequences. Teachers should project positive regard for students, set clear but flexible limits, project
expectations for responsible behavior, be consistent with rule enforcement, and be a model to show students the desired behaviors expected. Students also need to be involved in creating the rules, understanding the rules as well as taking ownership in them. If teachers, students and parents work together as a team and everyone is cooperative with one another, then the classroom will be a fun, yet disciplined learning environment with successful classroom management.

**Parent Communication**

Parent communication is essential to successful classroom management, and there are several reasons why educators should establish and maintain consistent communication with the parents of their students. According to Robert Fulghum, “The quality of education depends more on what’s going on at home than at school,” (Excellence). In other words, a teacher must recognize that a child’s life at home directly affects their academic performance at school. Making the connection between the two, then, is vital for teachers if they want to enhance their student’s education. Another reason is that parents are the most influential people in a child’s life and have the most one-on-one time with the child. It is for this reason that parents should help in their child’s education, and offer disciplinary help as well (Canter, 1991).

Unfortunately, some parents find communication with their children’s teachers difficult. Sometimes it is for the simple reason that parents just don’t know how to get involved. Only twenty five percent of parents say that their child’s teacher has told them what they can do to help their child in school. Of those who were told, eighty five
percent helped and were more than willing to commit fifteen or more minutes a day (Canter, 1991). Another factor that limits parent involvement is lack of time. Of all employed parents, sixty six percent said they don’t have enough time for their kids. This includes such things like helping with homework, attending school events and parent-teacher conferences. Because of this, teachers need to be flexible when scheduling, and should be willing to make home visits. There might also be parents out there who have had bad school experiences themselves. Perhaps parents have a poor view of school due to something that may have happened in their own education (Monsour, 2001). If this proves to be the case, then teachers must try to show the parents that their views are incorrect. In doing so, Mrs. Callahan suggests, “you just have to understand parents,” (Callahan, 2001).

Cultural differences also provide a barrier to parent involvement. Teachers will not always be able to speak the family’s language. Families may also have different views on the importance of school and the parent’s role in education (Monsour, 2001).

A final barrier to lack of parent involvement is due to a lack of basic needs. If a person’s primary needs are not being met, such as they are struggling to find a place to live or food to eat, they can’t very well focus on their higher needs. This is outlined in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Monsour, 2001).

There are several things a teacher can do to establish communication with the parents of their students. At the beginning of the school year, it is a good idea to send out a welcome letter (see Appendix B-1). After the year has begun, start making positive phone calls home to parents. When doing this, start by describing the positive behavior that has occurred. Share with the parents how you felt about the behavior, and then finish
by asking the parents to tell their child about the phone call (Canter, 1991). Aside from phone calls home reporting positive behavior, another important thing to communicate with parents is homework (see Appendix B-5, B-6). Having children return their homework with their parent’s signature on it is a good idea. Include a parent-teacher memo line where both can state their homework concerns, and follow up with these concerns by sending home positive homework notes to parents (Canter, 1991). Miss Kate Nolte, a first grade teacher at West Elementary, sends a daily folder home with her students with this purpose in mind (Nolte, 2001). Another suggestion is to send home notes when children are absent, letting them know what was done while they were gone (see Appendix B-6). Weekly newsletters also give parents a clear picture as to what is going on in the classroom (see Appendix B-2). Thank you notes home also reaffirm the fact that you as a teacher appreciate the parent taking an interest in their child’s education. In her interview, Miss Vlack stated, “I always invite parents to go on field trips and they are always invited to lunch and plays,” (Vlack, 2001). This opens up communication between parents and the teacher.

Conferences, both regularly scheduled and problem solving, are a great way to maintain parent communication. Before meeting with parents, it is important to first document what you are going to say, so the conference runs smoothly and efficiently. The following is a guideline for how to conduct a parent-teacher conference:

1. Begin by sharing some unique qualities that the student possesses.
2. Update parents on how the child is doing.
3. Discuss strengths and weaknesses both academically and socially.
4. Discuss academic and social goals.
5. Get parental input.
6. Ask about any concerns or issues the parent may want to address.
7. End the conference on a positive note.  
(Monsour, 2001)

If a particular student is having difficulty academically, socially, or behaviorally, a problem solving conference may become necessary. Like a regularly scheduled conference, a teacher should first write down what it is they want to say. The following is a guideline for how to conduct a problem solving parent-teacher conference:

1. Begin with a statement of concern to update the parents on the situation.
2. Describe and document what has happened and what you have done.
3. Get parental input on the problem and their ideas for a possible solution.
4. Describe what you as a teacher will do, and what the parents must do at home.
5. Tell parents you will follow up with them and when.
6. Re-cap or summarize the conference.
7. Express confidence that the problem can be worked out.  
(Monsour, 2001)

When conducting a conference, avoid using jargon or technical language, keep it simple (Effective). Also, avoid rushing solutions or giving advice, as some parents may feel threatened (A Guide to Working with Parents, 1992). If teachers are well prepared for conferences and have documented what they want to cover with parents, they will know not to bring up topics just as parents are preparing to leave, because this may start new conversation and get them off schedule.

Communication between educators and the parents or guardians of their students is essential. Through communicating the student’s progress in the classroom to the parents, as well as getting parental input about the student, academic performance can be enhanced. Positive communication is best, and can be developed through the use of notes home, phone calls, letters and parent-teacher conferences.
Motivation

“Motivation is a hypothetical construct used to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of goal-oriented behavior,” (Good & Brophy, 1995). There are many theories and views surrounding motivation, and no single method is going to be effective one hundred percent of the time. The best a teacher can do is have a balanced knowledge of these views, and be able to adapt with different groups and individual students as best as possible.

Many of the theories of motivation encompass similar concepts. Generally, there are two types of motivation, one that is driven by personal satisfaction of mastering the material and the other by the reward or benefit that results. Lepper and Hodell cited two kinds of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is caused by outside factors, such as a reward, whereas intrinsic motivation stems from the student’s own desire to learn and master the material. This is similar to Nicholls’ Task vs. Ego involvement, where a task involved student has genuine interest in the material and an ego-centered student learns it for the sheer benefit of passing an exam or being able to “show-off” that knowledge (Nicholls, 1984). At the third grade level, Mrs. Callahan adds, “kids are internally motivated and just want to please [others],” (Callahan, 2001).

It would be desirable for all students to be motivated by the simple desire for knowledge, but this is simply not always the case. However, an attempt can be made to nurture it within students. According to Good and Brophy, “Although intrinsic motivational strategies should increase student’s enjoyment of classroom activities, they
will not increase the student’s motivation to learn the content or skills being taught,” (pp. 411). Another factor in motivation seems to involve a student’s self-concept, or what they perceive as the reasons for their success or failure. Weiner’s breakdown of this element is the “locus of control,” which goes from stable to unstable, and internal to external. Basically, these determine where the blame for a certain outcome is placed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STABLE</th>
<th>UNSTABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERNAL</td>
<td>personal ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>personal effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTERNAL</td>
<td>difficulty of the material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sheer luck/fate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Covington’s analysis of motivation encompasses similar ideas, but in this case placement of blame is used more as a “tool” to avoid feeling like a failure. Therefore, on one hand the student may study hard and do well, but primarily out of fear they will fail. On the other hand, they may not study at all, but they won’t count the failure as their own since they actively chose not to put forth the effort. The logic is that it’s better to not study at all than to study and still fail (Covington, 1984).

It is important for students to see that they what they put in; through their own effort they have control over their learning. They need to perceive that they are not “stupid” or incapable of understanding the subject matter.

In an effort to encourage the student’s to motivate themselves, it is important to establish a classroom environment that is comfortable, and focuses on cooperation and equality. Also, avoid a competitive atmosphere, as it encourages ego-involvement (Nicholls, 1984). Try to use tasks that allow students to work together and that are
presented in a way with which they can relate, such as having students develop their own math problems. This creates problems the student’s can relate to easily, and feel that they are helping each other to learn together rather than competing against one another.

Dividing the student’s into “ability groups” or giving them a “rank” of some kind, is a practice that should be avoided. Encouragement and praise should be something that is dealt out carefully. An above-average student should be recognized, yet not elevated about the rest of the class.

Reward systems are helpful tools for encouraging motivation, but should not be used excessively. Try to avoid them unless it becomes a necessity for a student. Even if this is the case, it is important to continue encouraging intrinsic motivation. In some cases, it may be the only thing that works. These are generally special needs students would require special attention.

The concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy is especially important for a teacher to be aware of, as it requires that they monitor themselves as well as their students. Teachers must be sure they are not subconsciously expressing certain biases that may hinder a student’s progress, implying that a student is a low-achiever only reinforces a negative self concept in the student, and can start a cycle that is debilitating to the student’s progress (Monsour, 2001).

One suggestion for maintaining student motivation is to establish a concrete grading system that is easy to understand and adhere to. Also, assignments should be moderately challenging, but not so much that they cause the student to become overly frustrated. As a teacher, appearing positive and enthusiastic about activities will also improve student motivation.
Encouraging motivation is really a trial-and-error, rethink-and-adapt situation when it comes down to it. What works for one student may not be as effective with another. Of course, some students are simply going to find certain subject matter more difficult than others, but that doesn’t mean it is less important to encourage that student to realize their full potential. Understanding the ways in which students are motivated to learn is a key aspect to successful classroom management.

**Physical Arrangement of the Classroom**

Another important aspect of classroom management is the physical arrangement of the classroom itself. Carefully laying out the physical environment of your classroom is the first step in the prevention of problems, since physical settings influence student behavior (Brophy, 443). When doing so, it is important to keep in mind that the arrangement and organization of the classroom should support the teacher’s philosophy and teaching. It should also be appropriate for the specific grade level (Routman, 1994). The physical setting sends messages to the students about authority, ownership, and suggests interaction. The room should be arranged in a way that accurately portrays the teacher’s educational philosophy and ensures that students can move around in a productive manner.

There are several different ways in which a teacher can arrange the seating, depending of course, on the resources available. Rows, clusters of approximately four desks—otherwise known as “pods,” and circular arrangements are common (see Appendix D-1, D-2). More recently, teachers have begun to replace desks with tables, in an effort
to promote more social learning. Doing so also provides greater flexibility, yet does
require the use of separate storage facilities to accommodate student books and material
(see Appendix D-3).

Although there isn’t much a teacher can do to affect the size of the class they are
given, there are still ways that individual attention to students can be maximized.
Utilizing parent volunteers, as well as teacher aids is a good idea. At times when this is
possible, have them lead or supervise small group work. Good and Brophy highlight
some benefits of small group work:

1. Instruction can be geared to the specific needs of the group.
2. Teacher can more easily monitor what is going on, and therefore provide
corrective feedback immediately.
3. Shy students may feel more comfortable.
4. Students stay on task.
5. Students may feel more responsible for completing tasks in small groups since
   others are depending on their work.
   (pp. 444)

Space utilization is also key when dealing with classroom arrangement. In open
classrooms, the use of partitions and increased space for individual work may improve
student productivity and decrease classroom management problems.

Ideally, the classroom should display the student’s work throughout the room,
books should be everywhere, there should be space for exploration, learning centers, a
classroom library and should be full of “attractive, purposeful print,” (Routman, 1994).
Conclusion

Classroom management is a significant factor to the success of a classroom. It establishes the learning environment so that optimal success is achieved. This is done through areas such as classroom expectations, rules and consequences, parent communication, motivation and the physical arrangement of the classroom. With these factors in mind, a teacher can best prepare students, both emotionally, intellectually and socially; creating an environment were students can receive the best education.
Bibliography


