

CHAPTER

1 CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT: AN ESSENTIAL SKILL

The management of student behavior is essential for a successful educational experience of teachers and students. Without appropriate management of classroom behavior, the educational process of all students is interrupted, resulting in failure to achieve educational objectives, goals, and aims. Research by Berliner (1988) and Brophy and Good (1986) shows that time teachers take away from teaching to correct misbehaviors results in a lower rate of academic engagement in the classroom. From a student's perspective, effective classroom management must include clear behavioral norms and high academic expectations (Allen, 1986).

Poor classroom management skills can have an impact on teachers' well-being, as well. In 1981, the National Educational Association reported that more than one-third of surveyed in-service teachers said they would probably not go into teaching if they were again given the opportunity to decide. Two major reasons cited were negative student attitudes and discipline (Wolfgang and Glickman, 1986). The lack of appropriate classroom management techniques is probably to blame, at least in part, for the failure to retain teachers in the profession.

Classroom management is one of the three most needed skills among experienced high school physics teachers, according to the American Institute of Physics (AIP, 1996), with the other two being general teaching skills and problem-solving skills. Not surprisingly, written communication skills, skills associated with using sophisticated lab equipment, computer skills, as well as oral and advanced skills of mathematics are often considered secondary by physics teachers because these skills tend to be learned as part of the teacher preparation process. Unfortunately, classroom management is perhaps a more pressing skill, and while it might be addressed in the teacher education process, it can only be perfected through experience.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STYLES

Baumrind (1971) identified four parental management styles that have implications for teachers and with which all teachers should be familiar. These management styles are distinguished by the degree of social involvement and the degree of regulation exhibited by a teacher in a given setting. Teachers who exhibit high in-class involvement with students appear to enjoy working with students, actively engage them, regularly assess progress, and show ways to improve work. Those who exhibit low

Table 1.1

Classroom management styles as a function of teacher regulation of and involvement with students. After Baumrind (1971).

Teacher performance	High involvement with students	Low involvement with students
High degree of regulation	Authoritative	Authoritarian
Low degree of regulation	Indulgent	Permissive

involvement with students appear to have minimal interest in students' success, a discernible detachment from students, and little concern for students' social and intellectual growth. Teachers exhibit a high degree of regulation when they carefully manage student behaviors and a low degree of regulation when they seem not to care what students are doing. [Table 1.1](#) relates extremes on these dimensions to four teacher management styles.

Each management style is characterized by different levels of teacher involvement and classroom regulation.

Authoritative

An *authoritative* management style is characterized by a high degree of teacher involvement with students as well as a high degree of classroom regulation. Teacher performance is typified by the use of behavioral principles rather than rules, high expectations for appropriate behavior, clear statements about why certain behaviors are acceptable and others are not, and warm and caring student-teacher relationships. The authoritative style can result in students who are socially competent and individually responsible.

Authoritarian

An *authoritarian* management style is characterized by low teacher involvement with students, but a high degree of classroom regulation, even to the point of micromanagement. It is typified by numerous hard and fast behavioral rules, and students often see this management style as punitive and restrictive. Students have no say in classroom management, and teachers see students as having no need for explanations. The teacher's character is sometimes perceived as cold and aloof, or even unfriendly. The authoritarian style can result in students who are ineffective at social interaction, and somewhat inactive due to a fear of consequences.

Permissive

A *permissive* management style is characterized by low involvement of the teacher with students as well as a low degree of classroom regulation. This style is further characterized by an environment

that is nonpunitive, where there are few demands on students and a lot of freedom for the students to do as they please. The permissive style can result in students who are immature, show poor self-restraint, and exhibit poor leadership skills.

Indulgent

An *indulgent* management style is characterized by high teacher involvement with students but a low degree of classroom regulation. This style presents an environment where there are few if any, demands on the students, and the teacher actively supports students in their efforts to seek their own ends. Like the permissive style, the indulgent style can result in students who are immature, show poor self-restraint, and exhibit poor leadership skills.

These four teacher management styles represent pure forms. In reality, most teachers demonstrate a certain degree of inconsistency in their classroom management styles from day to day, hour to hour, and even student to student. They modify their practice in relation to the situation. As such, one can call mixtures of classroom management styles “ad hoc” or “idiosyncratic.” Unfortunately, this lack of consistency can negatively impact students, who come to view the teacher as unpredictable, unfair, or displaying favoritism towards some students. Further, teachers who display a management style that is considerably different from his or her colleagues in the same school are likely to engender some form of discord. When developing a management style, teachers must consider their own comfort level and personality type, student needs, school climate, and level of collegial and administrative support.

The *authoritative* approach is the best form of management style because it is the one most closely associated with desirable student behaviors (Baumrind, 1971), and teachers should use it to the greatest extent possible when working with students. An *authoritative* approach encourages independence of thought and action, is warm and nurturing, permits teacher control along with explanation, and allows students to express their opinions.

How then does one implement the authoritative management style? How does a teacher establish and then maintain a suitable classroom environment? We propose that the answer can be found in the *5F Method of Classroom Management* developed and promoted by the Physics Teacher Education Program at Illinois State University.

THE 5F METHOD OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

There are several systematic and age-appropriate approaches to classroom management, each with its own promoters, value systems, procedures, and learning methods. Approaches such as *Love and Logic* (Fay and Funk, 1995), *Discipline with Dignity* (Curwin, Mendler, and Mendler, 2008), *Tools for Teaching* (Jones, Jones, and Jones, 2007), *Positive Classroom Discipline* (Jones, 1987), *Assertive*

Discipline (Canter, 2010), *Discipline without Stress, Punishments or Rewards* (Marshall and Johnson, 2012), and *Response to Intervention* (Brown-Chidsey and Steege, 2010) tend to dominate the marketplace. While all these approaches are effective to greater or lesser degrees with different groups of students and different types of situations, no one approach will always work. Still, there are principles that unify these approaches.

These principles are embodied in the *5F Method of Classroom Management* and are based on years of experience by program instructors and graduates at Illinois State University, all of whom are experienced former or current in-service high school physics teachers. The five guiding principles are given by the phrase, “Be firm, fair, friendly, focused, and frugal.” These fundamental principles should provide teachers with the skill set needed for proper classroom management consistent with the desired authoritative style.

Firm

The first principle of the 5F Method is to be *firm* with students. Teachers must establish norms for classroom behavior and then enforce them in a consistent fashion, including the teacher’s classroom, as well as all school policies related to behavior. Classroom behavior should be based on principles—rather than inflexible rules—of three basic types: (1) respect for the teacher; (2) respect for the rights of others based on their need for an education, safety, ownership, and civil rights; and (3) respect for school and its property. Sometimes new teachers hear the old saying, “Don’t smile until Christmas,” and miss its point. This saying does not mean that teachers should not be friendly, warm, and nurturing until after Christmas. What it does mean is that if a teacher is going to establish and maintain classroom discipline, he or she must do so from the very beginning. It is easier to “lighten up” than to “double down” at some future time.

Fair

The second principle of the 5F Method is to be *fair* with students. Students are very sensitive to matters of fairness. Teachers should avoid any actions that might be perceived or construed by students as either favoritism or bias. Teachers who are fair concentrate on a few simple principles that have a number of potential corollaries that can be developed on a case-by-case basis. A few general principles (e.g., respect for others, respect for the school, respect for property) are easier to remember than a multitude of overly specific rules. A school year that begins with a clear expression and explanation of the guiding principles will help students understand what is expected of them. Students might also help formulate such simple policies, each with its own broader implications. Such an approach—asking the student to help judge if their actions or those of the teacher are perceived as “fair”—can make for a very positive start with a new class of students. Fair treatment of students under these principles for behavior includes consistent enforcement. Effective classroom managers follow through on their policies by consistently applying them to violations according to plan. This is

especially important at the beginning of the school year when some students will test the system to see what happens.

Friendly

Teachers who are *friendly* focus on relationships. They seek to understand students and provide necessary encouragement. Such teachers show students that they care when students behave acceptably and explain why misbehaviors are unacceptable (e.g., disruption of others' right to learn in a safe and caring environment). Friendly teachers show an understanding of unruly students who suffer from family discord (e.g., family problems, alcohol abuse, drug addiction, poverty, hunger, homelessness, as well as sexual, physical, and mental abuse), and the sometimes-resulting low self-esteem and emotional problems. Sometimes when teachers have private personal talks with disruptive students, they can help convert students from perceived enemies to allies. Students respond favorably to teachers who show genuine signs of friendliness. Being friendly, yet keeping a professional distance without crossing the line, is key.

Focused

Teachers who are *focused* do not waste students' time. Though some students do not mind wasting time, they prefer to do it on their own terms. Teachers must keep students constantly engaged if they are to minimize classroom disruptions. To do so, teachers should come to class every day prepared, get students to work promptly at the bell, and maintain momentum in a lesson. Students who are engaged in active learning (individual, small group, and whole-class processes) rarely have the time or inclination to exhibit disruptive behaviors. Teachers who come to class and then demonstrate a lack of direction invite disciplinary problems. Teachers must carefully plan a meaningful lesson that includes high expectations and good transitions from activity to activity.

Frugal

To say that teachers should be *frugal* means that they should use only the lowest level of authority necessary to redirect student misbehaviors. Using measured responses to various classroom behavior problems helps teachers to avoid needlessly escalating situations, and helps result in win-win situations. Teachers should avoid power struggles. They should maintain their reserves, allowing them to have additional options should classroom management problems escalate. Using a low-keyed approach when responding to misbehaviors in association with being firm, fair, friendly, and focused, allows the teacher to demonstrate an authoritative form of classroom management. If a student is argumentative in class, the teacher should defer the discussion to another time and location. Doing so will help a teacher avoid lose-lose situations and confrontations in front of other students. Measured responses will gain the support of students and might even result in a degree of peer pressure for improved behavior by the offending student's classmates.

PROACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE

The goal of the *5F Method of Classroom Management* is for the teacher to be proactive, not reactive. The rule of thumb for all versions of classroom management is that the best way to deal with student behavioral problems is to prevent them altogether. The next best way is to address them as soon as they show up, not waiting for them to get out of hand.

There is an arsenal of approaches that can be used for proactive classroom management. The following are a number of pointers relating to what teachers can do to proactively communicate with students, parents/guardians/caretakers, and school administrators about the teachers' expectations for student behavior.

Students

It is important for teachers to realize that students who feel a sense of respect toward the teacher, or who are motivated, interested in, and engaged with the subject matter, rarely display significant behavior problems. As such, teachers have a prime responsibility to create an environment that promotes good behavior by meeting their needs.

When most students misbehave, they typically do not do so with malicious intent. They are merely acting out their frustrations. When this occurs, it is time for the teacher to carefully consider the above and other possible causes for the misbehavior. In some cases, misbehavior occurs when a teacher is unprepared and indecisive, students are confused, in over their heads, or not being adequately challenged. Perhaps the teacher is subjecting the students to the tyranny of low expectations, causing the lesson to drag on and boring the students. Perhaps the teacher is not fair. Some students act out when they are falling behind. It is important for the teacher to take all necessary measures to provide systematic assistance to students who are having learning difficulties and are therefore disinterested and disengaged. The *Response to Intervention* (Brown-Chidsey and Steege, 2010) approach to education suggests a variety of avenues for dealing with such students. Response to Intervention seeks to prevent academic failure through early intervention founded on a multi-level prevention system that includes universal screening, progress monitoring, research-based instructional interventions, and data-based decision making. Response to Intervention employs a school-wide implementation system, but individual teachers still can make use of some of these practices.

Parents/guardians

It is best to initiate a positive home contact very early in the school year so that it can be positive and unrelated to their child's behavior, but especially if a teacher predicts that he or she will need to talk with the parent(s) or other responsible adults about misbehavior later. Start the year by getting the

parents/guardians on your side. Parents and guardians will usually be understanding if you remind them that you are on their—and their child’s—side.

Use email to your advantage. It is quick, confidential (as opposed to leaving a very public message on the family answering machine that can be erased by a student coming home early!), and provides a written record of interaction that provides evidence for Response to Intervention, counselors, and administrators. In addition, using email helps both teachers and parents to avoid playing phone tag. When having an interactive discussion is important, phone calls are totally appropriate. However, unexpected phone calls home can lead to heated exchanges rather than well-thought-out responses.

Use parent-teacher conferences (in person or via conference calls with appropriate personnel) to address specific and more challenging cases. Typically, teachers will want to minimize the use of parent-teacher conferences because these can be very time-consuming. When a teacher is responsible for some 125 students over the course of a day, phone calls and parent-teacher conferences should be done selectively on an as-needed basis.

When talking or meeting with parents/guardians, begin on a positive note. Start with a bit of small talk over refreshments and get them to respect you as a professional. Then, move ahead in a positive fashion: “We both agree that what we want for your child is a good education. Let’s see what we can do to ensure that your son or daughter gets what we all desire.”

It is best to mention and then inquire about the cause of any misbehavior first, and then provide documentation of misbehaviors if necessary. Avoid being accusatory. Use a matter-of-fact approach, and deal with the disruptions in a detached and professional manner. A notebook with dates, times, and incidents can be helpful in explaining to parents/guardians why and what sort of behavior is occurring, and what is needed to manage the problem.

Teachers who are new and inexperienced in interacting with parents and/or guardians face-to-face might want to contact a guidance counselor, dean of students, or assistant principal immediately after the occurrence of a major discipline problem, and before contacting the parents. In all likelihood, they already will have had some parental contact and can give some insight into what the teacher will encounter on the call home, as well as what motivates the student. It can also be helpful to find out if the behavior occurs across all courses, or if there might be a personality conflict. It is not unreasonable, and is perhaps advisable, to invite another teaching professional to attend the meetings with parents or other guardians as a neutral third-party and mediator, especially if the teacher lacks prior experience in this area.

School administrators

School administrators can be a great help in managing student behavior. If you do not know how to deal with a particular behavioral problem, seek the administrator’s advice rather than merely sending an unruly student to the administrator for discipline. However, teachers should be sparing in

requesting an administrator's direct intervention. One of the roles of a teacher is to maintain classroom discipline. A teacher running to a school administrator with classroom management problems every time they occur will not be appreciated, and doing so frequently might damage a teacher's reputation with students in the long run.

THE FIRST DAYS OF CLASS

The goal of the first days of class is to establish norms for expected classroom performance in an effort to head off any behavior problems. The goal of the remainder of the semester or year is to maintain the discipline established during the first week. Perhaps the worst way to start out a new school year is to ploddingly go through the syllabus or a set of rules and regulations (although exceptions must be made for legal and safety guidelines). Teachers who want to curry favor with their students often start the school year with some sort of engaging activity. Doing something that will get students out of their seats and active pays a dividend. It will come as a surprise to some students that teachers can be fun and that the subject matter can be interesting. For instance, consider starting out with a lab activity that requires students to gather information by examining various examples of interesting physics phenomena. Setting up a simple multi-station lab and moving students from station to station will provide an opportunity for the students to get to know the teacher as someone who cares about them as individuals as well as their education. This is also a great time to initiate discussions of classroom climate setting, explaining the benefits of cooperative learning strategies and establishing interdependence as the basis for learning.

Keep in mind that teachers with reputations for effective classroom management report a “honeymoon period” for the first few weeks of school when students are responsive to a teacher's requests. As students become more comfortable with each other and with the teacher, they might begin to test limits. However, some students will notice a new teacher's inexperience and attempt to take advantage of it right away. In either case, some students tend to become more disruptive as the school year progresses, for a number of reasons. Until students learn how a teacher will react in certain situations, there is bound to be a degree of misbehavior in certain students. Every teacher goes through this testing period until such time as students come to know the teacher's limits either through firsthand or vicarious experiences.

Here are additional pointers for the first days of class that will help the student or new teacher to establish norms for expected classroom behavior.

Confidence

Project an image of confidence:

- Your physical appearance is important in making first impressions. It shapes, to some extent, the future respect students will show toward you. Teachers should conform to the school dress code.

Young teachers might benefit from more formal wear, without appearing “over the top” or out-of-touch. Typical business casual dress for teaching might include pressed slacks with shirt and tie for men, and knee-length dresses or slacks with a blouse that covers arms for women. Teachers should avoid flip-flops, T-shirts, tank tops, and other very casual clothing.

- Let your body language work for you. Avoid projecting an image of fear by hiding behind notes, lectern, or desk. Move out among the students. Move behind rowdy students, subtly ensuring that they know you are aware of their behavior.
- Cultivate the power of your voice and the ability to use it to stress important points. A soft or monotonous voice tends to convey the impression that the speaker is a weak or listless person.
- Vary voice and vocal actions. Speak loudly enough for students to hear, enunciate clearly, and avoid a monotone approach. Speaking softly can also have a dramatic effect; however, this will work only for students who can hear what the teacher is saying.
- Exhibit enthusiasm for the subject matter with voice and mannerisms. A dynamic teacher conveys the impression that he or she has latent power.
- Begin class immediately at the bell.
- Over-plan your lesson. Be prepared for those situations in which students accomplish their tasks in less time than was anticipated. Running out of things for students to do before the class period is over is an invitation for misbehavior.
- Dismiss the students at the end of the period. Do not permit students just to get up and walk out while you are in the middle of a sentence, and the bell rings.

Expectations

Convey explicit expectations for behavior:

- Directly address rules for appropriate behavior. Ask students to generate specifics based on the following principles: (1) respect for the teacher; (2) respect for the rights of others based on their need for education, safety, ownership, and civil rights; and (3) respect for the school and its property.
- Insist that students show respect toward you in how they address you. They should address you as “Mr.” or “Ms.” or “Mrs.,” followed by your last name, or an alternative title that is appropriate to the region (e.g., “Ma’am” or “Sir”).
- Do not allow students to play electronic games, read, listen to music, sleep, or do other course work in class. These can be signs of disrespect for the teacher, but might also suggest that students are not adequately challenged in your class.
- Incentivize good behavior. Tie appropriate classroom behavior and accomplishments to long-term class goals. This will help to generate the teamwork and peer pressure some students need to succeed.

Address misbehavior

Strategically decide when and how to address misbehavior:

- Do not talk over group noise. Get their attention before continuing, but don't raise your voice. Use signs that can have a calming effect, such as hand clapping, counting down on the fingers of one hand, or talking very lightly.
- Deal with misbehavior as soon as possible, but perhaps reserving the consequences until later. Attentive students hate to waste time or have it wasted for them by disruptive students. If students are running a game on the teacher, the good students realize it and may grow to resent the teacher and/or the course.
- Address minor infractions that merit discussion with a student after class. To do otherwise might be disruptive to the class.
- Do not ignore misbehaviors that significantly affect the class. Treat serious violations of your rules immediately, even if it means interrupting your own sentence. However, do not give a student who would take advantage of this guideline the power to disrupt whatever you are doing.
- Be patient, and don't express frustration or anger unless you do so intentionally. Sometimes it is good for students to see a teacher who is "angry" and how teachers appropriately deal with their emotions. Realize that some students will take longer than others to learn limits in your classroom, but do not allow your emotions to influence the consequences of misbehavior.

ONGOING MANAGEMENT: NINE ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR THE LOVE AND LOGIC CLASSROOM

Ongoing management of student behavior throughout the rest of the year is often a great challenge to new teachers and can be a source of persistent anxiety. It might be helpful to teachers to remember that while they can do their best to construct a positive environment that invites good behavior, they cannot fully control how students will respond.

Teachers who come from communities external to those of the student population might find themselves particularly uncomfortable when not knowing the school or community culture or norms. In these cases, effective management often means taking some time to seriously reflect on the general perceptions that the teacher holds toward the students. A teacher's assumptions about the students' norms, values, and social and cultural capital can be sources of implicit bias and can impact how a teacher interprets and responds to student behavior.

When developing an effective management strategy, it is important to recognize your own perceptions of students—and to compare your own perceptions to those of other effective teachers in the school. Management of students can have a strong "Pygmalion Effect"—students might behave very well for teachers who think highly of them, and poorly for teachers who do not see their potential.

Likewise, teachers who expect the best out of students who historically display poor behavior can be taken for quite a ride, as the teacher is perceived as unaware.

Generally speaking, most students are rational beings who often need guidance and limits when learning to make appropriate choices, and it is on this foundation that The Love and Logic Institute (<https://www.loveandlogic.com/>) has created a set of nine principles for managing student behavior. These principles are very effective when dealing with *specific* instances of student misbehavior and lead to an overall, more positive classroom atmosphere. These principles, which are listed and explained in the following paragraphs, place the responsibility in the hands of the students and relieve teachers of both the guilt and the fear that can come with student management.

1. Neutralizing student arguing

Students who misbehave will often try to argue their way out of trouble—particularly sly students will try to gain control by engaging the teacher in a word war. Students can use argumentation to intimidate the teacher or to get the teacher to justify his or her position. Effective teachers avoid this power struggle. The discussion about consequences to misbehavior can take place at a set time when both parties have had time to consider their positions, and any student attempts to engage in a debate can be neutralized by the teacher going “brain dead.” Refusing to argue with a student does not give students the ammunition they want. Using catchphrases such as, “I respect you too much to argue” could help show students that the teacher cares about the student while avoiding further debate.

2. Delayed consequences

One of the tactics students use to intimidate teachers is to demand to know the consequence for their actions “right here and right now.” Neither teachers nor students can make good decisions in the midst of an emotional response. Delaying consequences allows students to anticipate potential consequences, and gives the teacher time to think clearly, consult colleagues and administrators, and plan a response. Using catchphrases such as, “We’ll talk about this later—don’t worry” shuts down opportunity for discussion (and, in all likelihood, the student *will* worry!)

3. Empathy

One of the most frustrating parts of student management for new teachers is how emotionally charged a disagreement can be. Both students and teachers often experience a “fight or flight” response when engaged in a heated discussion. Teachers can avoid this by demonstrating sincere empathy for the student and his or her situation. When teachers express their sadness for a student, students often come on board and live up to their consequences. Teachers must be cautious and ensure that their empathy is truly sincere. Remarks that appear to be made in jest or with sarcasm will only inflame a student’s anger. Teachers can use catchphrases such as, “Oh, no! What a bummer. If I had made that choice, I’d be pretty upset too.”

4. The recovery process

Teachers and students need time to cool down, and process following misbehavior, and the class needs to continue on undisrupted. Students might need a supervised place to go following a disruptive action in class. This place should not be perceived as related to punishment, but a space for recuperation. Depending upon the classroom and school policies, students might be sent to an adjoining teacher's classroom (having first discussed this policy with the other teacher), a designated "cooldown" room set aside for students with social-emotional disorders, a student services office, or to the dean's office. The student should be allowed time to reflect on his or her actions privately or to speak about it with another adult.

5. Developing positive teacher/student relationships

Students are much less likely to misbehave for teachers who they perceive understand and care about them. Use climate-setting activities for students to build positive rapport with the teacher and with one another. Teachers can use "one-sentence interventions" to build positive relationships. One-sentence interventions are nonjudgmental statements that teachers can make with students to start a discussion or even just show a teacher notices them and cares, such as, "I noticed you like to doodle," or, "It looks like we have the same color shirt on today." Teachers can aim to make a personal connection with each student by using a one-sentence intervention with each student once a week. In all likelihood, students will take that one-sentence intervention and turn it into a deeper and more meaningful conversation.

6. Setting limits with enforceable statements

Help students understand limitations by using enforceable statements. Enforceable statements are those actions whose consequences are within a teacher's direct control; for example, "Papers received on time will be scored for full credit." A score is something over which a teacher has direct control. In contrast, "Turn in your papers on time" is an unenforceable statement. While a teacher might ask students to turn in their papers on time, they cannot force students to do so. Likewise, teachers can replace unenforceable statements such as "Sit in your assigned seats!" with an enforceable statement such as, "I will mark you present if you are in your assigned seat; I will mark you absent if your chair is empty."

7. Using choices to prevent power struggles

Allow students some choice in how the class is run. Students feel respected when teachers address their interests, emotions, and needs through the lessons. Providing choices prevents students from always thinking that any way is better than the "teacher's way." Turn demands and threats into choices. For example, if a student misbehaves during a lab activity, instead of directly

reprimanding the student, a teacher could ask, “Would you like behave appropriately and stay in the lab to earn full credit, or do you feel the need to step out of the lab today and spend the remainder of the class in the student services office?” Of course, choices are not always appropriate, such as when a student engages in gross misconduct when two equally viable choices are not available and acceptable to the teacher, or when a student refuses to make decisions (in which case, the teacher should make the decision for the student). In general, however, offering choices to students both distracts students from the power struggle, and gives them some semblance of control over their outcome.

8. Quick and easy preventative interventions

Teachers use a variety of quick and easy interventions to prevent or bring an end to behavior problems. The following are just a few examples: (a) use proximity and personal space to convey a sense of authority; (b) arrange the room and create seating arrangements that promote positive interactions; (c) privately address minor infractions with students by whispering phrases (e.g., “Is there something you’d like to share with me?”) or by leaving sticky notes on their desk (e.g., “Let’s talk after class.”); and (d) explicitly reminding students about class expectations. Make them clear and concise (e.g., Don’t say, “You’re too loud. Quiet down.” Say, “Please do not talk.” or “If the group next to you can hear you, then you are too loud.”). See “Levels of disciplinary action” later in this chapter for more ideas.

9. Guiding students to own and solve their problems

When properly managed, students’ misbehavior can become even more of a problem for the student than for the teacher. Teachers should not feel burdened with the task of endlessly imagining consequences to a myriad of situations, and doling out punishments that perfectly fit the crime. Rather, students should be as involved as possible in solving their own problems, even those associated with their own behavior. Teachers can help students to learn to own and solve their own problems by following these basic steps: (a) Be empathetic, (b) Hand the problem over to the student in a caring way, (c) Ask permission to share some solutions and provide choices, (d) Help students evaluate potential consequences, (e) Allow the student to solve or not solve the problem. Teachers can intervene with students who refuse to solve the problem on their own by providing an appropriate solution or consequence.

Example

Consider the following possible realistic classroom situation. A student uses an unpermitted piece of paper with information to cheat on a test. The teacher notices the cheating in the middle of the test and quietly approaches the student. The teacher removes the paper while whispering, “Let’s talk about this after class.” The student resumes testing, and no one in the class is disturbed.

After the class, the student and teacher discuss it. The teacher empathizes by stating, “This is such a bummer. I really feel bad about this situation, and it makes me feel horribly uncomfortable to have to discuss this. What do you plan to do?” The student begins to argue in an attempt to make a defense—the student feels the course is unreasonably challenging and claims not to be the only one resorting to cheating. However, the teacher stops the argumentation short and asks the student for suggestions on how to handle the situation, including getting the help and support necessary not to feel compelled to cheat on future tests and to improve his or her course grade overall (and that the world has not come to an end). The teacher reminds the student that there is a school policy that states that students who cheat will earn a “0” on the assignment. However, the student still has some choices to make, such as how parents will be contacted (e.g., “Would you like to call them right now? Or would you like me to do it for you?”). The teacher can conclude by sharing a sense of hope and finality to the situation—once the consequences are dealt with, “We don’t need to talk about this again. Let’s move on.”

Using this approach does not necessarily make students feel better or guarantee that the outcome will be a calm and collected student, but it does provide teachers with the skills to maintain authority in upsetting situations. Such an approach to solving problems also helps students to recognize the consequences of their actions, the power they have to right their own wrongs as much as possible and to make better decisions in the future.

This being said, the one presumption upon which these principles lie is that students are “logical”—and not all students are. Students with particular disabilities or social-emotional deficits might not have the reasoning skills required to contemplate consequences objectively. In these cases, social service workers and case managers usually have a set of guidelines or behavior plans that can help teachers assess the most appropriate management plan.

DOCUMENTING STUDENT MISBEHAVIOR

Having records of serious or persistent misbehavior is very important for supporting interaction with students’ parents and guardians, case managers, or other administrators (particularly in the case of removal from class activities, detentions, suspensions, and expulsions). Even minor infractions can become significant problems in the classroom when they are habitual. Often, these types of behaviors are the hardest to document because they frequently occur and in the midst of many other classroom activities. As a result, it can be difficult for a teacher to make a record of it. Some teachers opt to keep a clipboard nearby with the list of student names and use a private checkmark or symbol system to denote positive and negative behaviors, use free mobile or web apps to keep digital notes, or even keep brief journal entries at the end of a class period or at the end of the day. The goal of these systems is ultimately to identify trends and create supporting documentation when evidence is necessary.

LEVELS OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION

When deploying a minimum-authority reaction, teachers need to be aware of the levels of disciplinary action that are available to them and how they work. As mentioned previously, one of the five fundamental principles of the *5F Method of Classroom Management* is, “Always use the minimum amount of authority necessary to achieve an end.” The following list represents a gradual escalation of disciplinary action from low to high. The following sequence presented here is not absolute, merely suggestive.

Teacher-assigned discipline

The following actions are commonly available to teachers with little to no consultation with school authorities required for their use:

Nonverbal responses

Using body language can be an effective way to manage student behaviors. For instance, moving around the classroom, giving “the teacher look,” or approaching the personal space of offending students is a good way for teachers to let students know that their attention is warranted. Wagging one’s head, frowning, pointing to work, or motioning students to get back on task can all be effective. Some teachers use nonverbal cues to avoid being confrontational, such as, “When I stand in this location, I want everyone’s attention,” or “When I hold up my hand, stop speaking, and hold up yours, so I know you are listening.”

Verbal responses

Teachers should handle minor violations of classroom guidelines with responses that are minimally disruptive to the lesson. When a teacher must correct serious or ongoing student misbehavior, they should do so privately by informal counseling. Such an approach helps students save face, and helps to remove the “stage setting” for misbehavior. Some students like to perform for others; removing the audience removes the motivation to do so.

Formal counseling

More formal counseling during office hours or at the end of the day tends to allow teachers time to get to the root of a problem. These private conferences should include the following elements: antecedent, behavior, consequences, and documentation.

- *Antecedent.* It is best to first find out what encourages unacceptable behaviors and then attack the root of the problem rather than the behavior itself. Treat the cause, not merely the symptom, by asking the student questions about themselves that might be related to the behavior. State your personal feelings using the word “I.” Avoid using the word “you” or its variants because the

student might feel as though the teacher's words are accusatory. For example, "I'm disappointed with this behavior. Such behavior disrupts the class, and prevents others from learning" is preferable to "You are a real disappointment. Your behavior disrupts the class, and you prevent others from learning." Though the difference is subtle, such approaches can and do make a difference in what students hear and how students respond.

- *Behavior.* If necessary, explain why the behavior is unacceptable. Allow the student to explain any problems they may be having. Concentrate on the student's agenda by using open-ended questions, confirmatory paraphrasing, and leading questions. Show empathy, provide support and give reasonable approval if possible. Explain that you are trying to keep the student from getting into deeper trouble. Indicate that you may have to draw others into the discussion if things continue as they are or get worse. Explain that you don't hold any grudges, and ask the student what they must do to correct the situation, which situations to avoid, and how they can make amends. (Some teachers will have students fill out a small form to "verbalize" this if they can't do so by actually talking. Concentrate on problem-solving—not punishment—by using problem-solving inquiry and coming to a shared decision if possible.)
- *Consequences.* Help the student to understand that actions have consequences. Do mention that consequences come with continuing disruptive behavior, but avoid being specific, so as to be able to modify the consequence as appropriate. If possible, give students options with regard to their consequences, but ensure that consequences are equally disagreeable to the student and serve the same purpose. Never threaten consequences that cannot be carried out.
- *Documentation.* If appropriate, arrange for a written agreement—a behavior contract—that describes both unacceptable and expected student behavior, and includes possible, but not specific, consequences. Take your time when you do so. Provide positive reinforcements thereafter.

Detention

Some schools use detention—a punishment that involves staying after school or even coming into school on Saturdays. Detention can be an effective deterrent if it is carefully supervised, and the students would much prefer to be doing something else during detention time. However, this form of punishment can embitter students, especially if they have family obligations, jobs, and other real-world responsibilities. Whenever possible, detention should entail having the student do something useful and productive to give back to their class, such as preparing lab equipment. Detention can be an opportunity for students and their teachers to get to know one another.

Parent/guardian contact

Consult with parents or guardians if you have a student who is unruly. Ask for information about the situation before becoming accusatory. Parents can become defensive if a teacher doesn't inquire into the situation first. Bring their attention to the matter and ask for their support. Be certain to show documentation of student conduct if appropriate. Refer to information about dealing with parents/guardians presented previously in this chapter.

Removal from class activities

As a last resort, when requests for proper behavior fail, simply removing the student from classroom activities might reduce or eliminate unwanted behaviors. Place the student in a location where the student can be more carefully supervised and benefit from other educational interventions. In severe instances, students might need to be entirely removed from a course.

School-assigned discipline

The following actions are typically reserved to a dean of students or assistant principal and are governed on the basis of pre-determined school policy.

Specialized programs

Some disruptive students need specialized programs. The procedures will usually start with a teacher recommendation to student services, school counselors, or guidance officers. A school typically will have procedures in place for such an intervention, which might include testing for special needs.

Suspensions and expulsions

A suspension is a temporary ban from school attendance, while expulsion is a permanent ban. These disciplinary responses tell the student and their parents/guardians that the behavior problem is very serious. Suspension and expulsion might be necessary if the educational process is to continue, and for the educational benefit or safety of others.

IF PROBLEMS ARISE... (AND THEY WILL)

If you are a teacher, there is one certainty: classroom management problems will one day arise no matter in which school or which course you are teaching. The following are a series of general suggestions for dealing with problems if they arise.

Know your rights

Keep in mind that teachers have educational responsibilities that imply certain rights. Teachers are responsible for student learning and safety; therefore, nearly anything taking place in the classroom that interferes with the educational process is subject to control by the teacher. Teachers and students need to understand that the classroom is not a democracy and that teachers have obligations that give them certain powers. If in doubt about these rights, teachers should consult school administration.

Know your limitations

The powers coming from educational responsibilities do not exist without limit. No teacher has a right to infringe upon legally ordained civil rights of students. Teachers should always confer with school

administration about their responsibilities and rights as teachers, and to what extent applicable school, state, and federal laws abridge those rights.

Know with whom to confer

No teacher will have all the answers to every classroom management problem that will arise, especially novice teachers. New teachers should always seek the advice of more experienced teachers, departmental chairpersons, or school administrators when in doubt. Consider having a colleague stand just outside of the classroom or come in for observation to provide assistance if needed. Consider attending some research-based professional development programs offered in the area of classroom management. Keep in mind that teachers can learn the art of classroom management, but that each teacher and student group will have different needs.

Know to whom to refer

There are a number of people in the typical school setting that can help teachers manage “unmanageable” classroom difficulties. These typically include department chairpersons, counselors, deans of students, assistant principals, and even school healthcare workers. Get to know these people, as they might well be able to help in difficult situations.

Don’t be surprised

Be careful not to expect good or bad behavior on the basis of students’ academic performance, home life, peers, or physical appearance.

Don’t take it personally

It is difficult to deal with students who constantly make excuses, lie, or breach trust. Recognize that this behavior often stems from underlying issues that might be unrelated to the teacher or the class.

Expression emotion with purpose

Teachers can share honest emotions with their students, and it is good for students to see how people should handle their emotions. A teacher should never lash out or unload consequences in the heat of the moment, but legitimate frustration/anger is fine to show when students know the situation is serious. Emotional, unrestrained outbursts from teachers can earn the ire of students, and teachers who exhibit rash behavior become a “mark.” That is, when students know that they can get to a teacher, they might well use this knowledge to the teacher’s disadvantage.

SOMETIMES IT IS THE TEACHER’S FAULT

Sometimes classroom management problems are a teacher’s fault, and sometimes a teacher needs to change his or her classroom management philosophy, logistical approach, or even personal

tendencies. The key here is that teachers should try different approaches until something works. A teacher having difficulties should realize, “There’s always tomorrow.” Students are resilient and will generally be flexible and forgiving to teachers who show the same generosity toward them. Sometimes teachers are overly harsh, embarrass students, or inadvertently create negative environments that fuel bad behavior. Teachers should never hesitate to apologize to students for their mistakes, before working to rebuild their relationships with students and regain their trust.

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS...

What works with one group or one student will not necessarily work with the next student or group of students. What works for one teacher might not work for another. There are simply no hard and fast rules that say, “Do this, and it will work every time.” Managing rooms full of students is a skill that takes time to develop, and even the best teachers sometimes have problems that they can’t solve. Don’t get discouraged if you fail to maintain ideal classroom behaviors from the outset. Focus on the positive, do your best, don’t give up, and don’t let students’ misbehavior get to you.

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