MISCONCEPTIONS AND GOALS OF Classroom Management

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For too long, classroom management strategies have been simplified into clichéd phrases such as “Develop a bag of tricks” or “Don’t smile until Christmas.” But thanks to a new book by Tracey Garrett, you can gain an accurate understanding of the goals of classroom management and the tasks involved in this multifaceted process.

Garrett encourages teachers to start by confronting many commonly held misconceptions about classroom management. In this excerpt from Effective Classroom Management—The Essentials, Garrett identifies key questions to ask so you can run a classroom that positively influences student achievement—and has you smiling all year long.

Confronting Misconceptions

Misconception #1: Classroom management is synonymous with discipline.

Consider your answer to the following question: What is the first word that comes to mind when you hear the term classroom management? Teachers typically answer with words such as control, order, and discipline. The idea that classroom management is mainly about discipline is a misconception that can actually interfere with effective teaching. In fact, according to education professors and researchers Carol Weinstein

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and Carolyn Evertson, effective managers organize their classrooms so that they avoid most behavior problems and therefore do not have to worry about discipline very often. While discipline is certainly an important component of classroom management, it is not the only component.

Misconception #2: Effective classroom management results in a quiet classroom.

When asked to describe what an effectively managed classroom looks like, teachers often include images of a quiet and orderly classroom. However, a productive learning environment can often be noisy because learning is not a passive activity. Learning requires talking, sharing, discovering, experimenting, and questioning, all of which can create noise.

Misconception #3: An effective classroom management plan relies on rewards and punishments.

Many teachers have developed the faulty notion that an effective classroom management plan relies on rewards and punishments. Therefore, they approach classroom management in a behavioristic manner through the implementation of externally controlled behavioral incentive reward systems (e.g., sticker charts, marble jars, token economies, classroom stores, prize bins). Unfortunately, the use of extrinsic rewards interferes with students’ intrinsic motivation. Teachers who are effective classroom managers often find little need for a reward-based behavioral incentive program.

Understanding the Goals of Effective Classroom Management

After eliminating these common misconceptions, the next step in becoming an effective classroom manager is to develop an understanding of the overall goals of classroom management. Sometimes, teachers believe that the goal of classroom management is to keep their classes under “control” and maintain a well-behaved classroom.

It is true that effective classroom managers succeed at creating a well-behaved classroom. However, Weinstein and Evertson explain that classroom management has two goals: creating an environment for academic learning and creating an environment for social-emotional learning. Academic learning refers to learning content speci-
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ified in state content standards (learning to read and write; learning to reason; learning science, math, and social studies; and so on.) Social-emotional learning promotes growth in social skills and the ability to express emotions maturely. Classrooms are well managed only if the teacher has created environments that promote both kinds of learning.

Defining Effective Classroom Management

If classroom management is not exclusively any of the ideas discussed above, what is it? The following model of classroom management provides another framework to help teachers understand and deconstruct the complexities of classroom management.

This model depicts classroom management as a process consisting of five key areas: organizing the physical design of the classroom, establishing rules and routines, developing caring relationships, implementing engaging and effective instruction, and addressing discipline issues. Strategically and purposefully addressing each of these areas helps teachers create and maintain an environment conducive to learning. Use the questions below to guide you as you develop your own management plan.

Teaching Context

How you answer the questions under the other areas may be determined by your teaching assignment, so it's important to start with the basics.

1. What grade level and subject(s) will you teach?
2. What type of student population will you be working with?
3. What particular developmental, social, or academic needs are prevalent in the population that you will teach?
4. What are the unique characteristics of the community in which you will be teaching?

Organizing the Physical Design of the Classroom

The physical design includes how the classroom is laid out, where the students' and teacher's desks are, where learning centers and materials are located, where heavily used items such as pencil sharpeners are, and so on.

1. What type of atmosphere are you trying to create in your classroom?
2. What type of furniture or equipment is necessary to accomplish your goal?
3. How will you decorate your classroom?
4. What will you display on the bulletin boards?

5. What kinds of physical constraints will impact the planning of your physical space (e.g., Internet connections, outlets, built-in furniture).

6. How will you arrange students’ desks and why?

7. Where will you locate your teacher’s desk and why?

8. How will you ensure that the physical design of the classroom is culturally responsive?

Establishing Rules and Routines

Teachers must establish class rules and routines (such as handing back papers and taking attendance) to keep the class activities running with as little disruption and loss of time as possible.

1. What process will you use to develop your classroom rules?

2. Will they be teacher- or student-generated? Why?

3. How will you accomplish essential class-running tasks such as lunch count, attendance, using the bathroom, sharpening pencils, getting supplies, etc.?

Developing Relationships

Effective classroom managers develop caring, supportive relationships with students and parents and promote supportive relations among students.

1. What specific strategies will you use to develop caring relationships between you and your students?

2. What specific strategies will you use to develop a sense of community among the students?

3. What strategies will you use to foster positive, cooperative, and supportive relationships with your students’ parents?

Implementing Engaging and Motivating Instruction

Effective managers develop instruction that engages learners, and they carefully plan their instruction so that each learning activity is well organized and runs smoothly.

1. How do you plan to motivate and engage students?

2. What are some examples of relevant academic content that you plan to incorporate into your lessons?

3. What areas, topics, or subjects do you think will be more challenging with respect to motivating your students?

4. What type of system will you use to record work and provide feedback about student progress?

Addressing Discipline

Discipline revolves around teacher actions focused on pre-
venting and responding to students’ misbehavior. Discipline does not only mean punishment, nor does it only mean the actions that teachers take after misbehavior occurs. Discipline also includes teacher actions that prevent misbehavior.

1. How are you going to deal with minor misbehavior in your classroom?

2. How will you address more serious misbehavior in your classroom?

3. What types of consequences will you utilize?

4. Will you use behavior modification plans? Why or why not?

As the model illustrates, four of the five components of classroom management (physical design, rules and routines, relationships, and engaging instruction) are aimed at preventing misbehavior rather than responding to it. The fifth component, discipline, includes both actions designed to prevent misbehavior and actions that respond to it. It is crucial for teachers to understand that most of their management activities are directed at preventing misbehavior, rather than responding to it. The more skilled a teacher is at preventing behavior problems (implementing the prevention components), the fewer problems will arise.

It is also important to note that this representation does not imply that each section of the model is equally important. Although each component is an important part of the entire process of classroom management, teachers will emphasize different parts of the model depending on many factors such as their philosophical beliefs, teaching contexts, and students’ personalities.

While these questions and points of reflection do not provide an exhaustive list, they provide a good start for developing a plan that will help you create and maintain an effective learning environment.

"After we learn the alphabet, are we going to learn how to text?"
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