

What We Know About Managing Classrooms ¹⁴

Effective classroom management must move beyond the control of behaviors. Future research needs to describe how to create supportive learning environments in schools that face complex and changing needs.

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For the last 15 years Gallup polls have reported the public's belief that the answer to many school problems is improved discipline. Among practitioners, particularly new teachers, classroom management and discipline remain their number one concerns (Veenman 1984).

Not surprisingly, the response in education research has been to expand our knowledge of what effective classroom managers do and how they do it. As a result of a broadened definition of classroom management, today's research moves away from a focus on controlling students' behavior and looks instead at teacher actions to create, implement, and maintain a classroom environment that supports learning (Johnson and Brooks 1979; see Brophy 1983, and Doyle 1986, for comprehensive reviews).

Our purpose is to review the evolution in research on classroom management, to investigate how this knowledge translates into real experiences for teachers, and to suggest directions for further exploration.

Reviews of Research

Studies about time. "The association of learning with time is among the most consistent that education research reveals" (Walberg 1988, p. 84). Past research (Karweit 1988) indicates that:

- The amount of time students spend learning the curriculum varies from school to school.
- Even under the best of circumstances, half or less of the school day is used for instruction.
- The amount of instructional time

spent is often associated with student achievement.

Although policymakers use these findings to support extending the school day, Walberg (1988) suggests that increases in productive time must accompany increases in allocated time.

While the amount of time available imposes outer limits on what can be accomplished, the key issue is really *how* time is used. Effective classroom management conserves instruction time by planning activities and tasks to fit the learning materials; by setting and conveying both procedural and academic expectations (constructing and teaching lessons on "going-to-school skills"); and by appropriately sequencing, pacing, monitoring, and

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providing feedback for student work (Emmer, Evertson, and Anderson 1980; Evertson and Emmer 1982).

Research indicates however, that teachers must be aware of and make visible what students are actually learning because students may seem involved in tasks without engaging in

the content. Bloome, Puro, and Theodorou (1989) refer to this as "procedural display" and "mock participation" when students and teachers engage in activities without being involved in the content substance.

Group management strategies. Kounin (1970), reaffirmed by Gump (1982), identified several strategies that teachers use to elicit high levels of work involvement and low levels of misbehavior:

- *Withitness* — communicating awareness of student behavior;
- *Overlapping* — doing more than one thing at once;
- *Smoothness and momentum* — moving in and out of activities smoothly with appropriately paced and sequenced instruction; and
- *Group alerting* — keeping all students attentive in a whole-group focus.

Lessons that engage students. Certain class activities also elicit varying degrees of student engagement (Gump 1982). For example, Kounin (1970) found highest student engagement (85 percent) during recitation and lowest (65 percent) during seatwork. Other studies emphasize these findings, adding that:

- frequent seatwork results in lower on-task behavior (Anderson 1984);
- alternating cycles of two shorter segments each of content development and seatwork maintain higher student involvement than single longer sequences (Evertson 1982); and
- student engaged rates during seatwork differ among teachers, while engaged rates during recitation are similar (Edenhardt-Pepe, Hudgins, and Miller 1981).

Recitation remains the dominant instruction method probably because it is an easier way to keep students involved, looks orderly, and seems

equivalent to learning. Also, transitions required in more complex formats can result in lost time (Arlin 1979).

Teachers must recognize both academic and social dimensions of classroom tasks. For example, students have to interpret not only what they are to learn, but how they are to participate. Teachers need to make clear their expectations and procedures for student participation, for example, how to answer questions or bid for a turn (Green and Smith 1983; Weade and Evertson 1988).

Assignments with varying cognitive and procedural complexity have consequences for classroom management. Generally, more intellectually demanding academic work and activities in which students create products or encounter novel problems require complex management decisions (Bossert 1979), which demonstrates the interrelated nature of classroom management and the curriculum (Doyle and Carter 1984).

Classroom communication. Studies about classroom communication — verbal and nonverbal ways that norms, rules, and expectations are signaled — show how both students and teachers actively mediate and construct the learning environment. See Erickson (1986) and Green and Smith (1983) for reviews. Studies identify what students need to understand and to participate in lessons and how teachers orchestrate that participation. Some ritualistic activities, such as passing out papers, require little understanding. However, nonritualistic activities require students to "read" the requirements correctly or risk negative evaluations of their behavior and abilities (Green and Harker 1982). A close look at how class activities evolve reveals the need for a classroom management system that is visible,

established, monitored, modified, refined, and reestablished.

Teachers' managerial decisions. Expert teachers are influenced by a rich store of information that allows them to judge what are typical and nontypical classroom scenes (Carter 1990). They see classrooms as "moving systems" and make managerial decisions based on their percep-

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tions of how well students are working within those systems. These teachers interpret and act on cues from students that signal students' involvement — or lack of it — in academic tasks (Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Stein, and Berliner 1988).

Beginning the year. Kounin (1970) suggested that it is not so much what teachers do to stop misbehavior that characterizes effective group management, but how they prevent problems in the first place. In response, several studies investigated how effective managers began their school year, and discovered that in both elementary and secondary classrooms the start of school is crucial to effective management (Emmer et al. 1980; Evertson

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and Emmer 1982). Teachers whose students demonstrated high on-task rates and academic achievement implemented a systematic approach toward classroom management at the beginning of the school year. They began the year by:

- preparing and planning classroom rules and procedures in advance;

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- communicating their expectations clearly;
- establishing routines and procedures, and teaching them along with expectations for appropriate performance;
- systematically monitoring student academic work and behavior; and
- providing feedback about academic performance and behavior.

In classrooms with this sort of system, there are improved student task engagement, less inappropriate behavior, smoother transitions between activities, and generally higher academic performance (Emmer et al. 1980; Evertson and Emmer 1982).

Handling misbehavior. Of course, a carefully planned management system will not, by itself, stop all misbehavior, but teachers can usually handle it unobtrusively with techniques such as physical proximity or eye contact. More serious misbehavior may require more direct intervention. Because punishment neither teaches desirable

behavior nor instills a desire to behave, it is perhaps best used as part of a planned response to repeated misbehavior. However, the success of intervention depends on orderly structures being in place. Well-understood norms and expectations for behavior must have previously existed (Doyle 1990).

The same holds true for discipline programs such as Teacher Effectiveness Training, Reality Therapy, and Assertive Discipline. These systems provide methods for dealing with threats to classroom order, but Emmer and Ausikker (1990) found that none adequately addresses the complex preventive and supportive functions necessary for effective management and discipline. They contend that these systems “[fail] to address the day-to-day classroom management skills needed to engage students in productive activities and to prevent minor problems from becoming major ones” (p. 146). Their analysis of 36 studies supports the need to establish a comprehensive system of management and organization early in the year.

The continuing exploration of behavior modification techniques, especially in special education, is shifting from teacher control to student self-monitoring and self-control. Teachers who apply Meichenbaum’s (1977) ideas by using a combination of modeling and self-verbalization help aggressive students control anger, deal with frustration, and respond to errors with problem-solving efforts. In addition, as Doug and Lynn Fuchs and their colleagues at Peabody College, Vanderbilt, have found, a combination of goal-setting and self-recording techniques help at-risk students improve their behavior and academics and reduce special service referrals (Fuchs et al. 1990).

Highlights of Research on Classroom Management

Research on classroom management must change focus to meet the complex needs of creating and maintaining an environment that supports all aspects of learning.

A review of past research, reinforced by field studies, confirms certain elements as basic to effective classroom management. Teachers who are effective managers:

- use time as effectively as possible;
- implement group strategies with high levels of involvement and low levels of misbehavior;
- choose lesson formats and academic tasks conducive to high student engagement;
- communicate clearly rules of participation;
- prevent problems by implementing a system at the beginning of the school year.

Future research needs to:

- define the impact of the school and community cultures on teacher efforts;
- ensure that the substance of what is being taught is adequate;
- define effective management techniques to fit the need for classroom management that encourages more problem solving and less routinized academic tasks.

Educating Teachers in Classroom Management

While early studies provided generic information about classroom characteristics and teacher actions that produce order and student involvement, conceptual frames were needed to help teachers orchestrate these

principles in the fast pace of a classroom.

Subsequent field studies supported the concept of establishing a classroom management system at the beginning of the school year. Teachers in the experimental groups not only used significantly more management strategies and procedures than comparison groups, but also their students exhibited higher task engagement, less inappropriate behavior, and higher academic success (Evertson, Emmer, Sanford, and Clements 1983; Emmer, Sanford, Clements, and Martin 1983; Evertson 1985; 1989).

These findings provide evidence that research findings can and do influence teacher decisions about management practices (Evertson et al., 1983; Evertson 1985, 1989; Putnam and Barnes 1984).

However, this is not the whole story. Learning to teach is a complex enterprise that requires practice in problem-solving more than acquisition of rote skills (Brophy 1988; Evertson 1987). To achieve that end, educators at Peabody College, Vanderbilt, are using videodisc technology to design problem-solving contexts requiring managerial decisions. See also Richardson (1990) for work on ways to use research as a base for teacher preparation.

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Future Inquiry

As recent research indicates, three topics should be central to the future study of classroom management and discipline: school level discipline and classroom management; quality of academic tasks; and classroom management in different contexts.

School discipline and classroom management. Although not included in this review, abundant literature documents how school-level discipline influences classroom management (Moles 1990). The view presented is that the school and community cultures affect the values and decisions teachers make in their management systems. In other words, teachers' management decisions that are not supported at the school and community levels lose credibility with students.

Quality of academic tasks. Good management and organization must focus more on the content and substance of what is being managed and less on the look of engagement. Whereas good classroom management is necessary for learning, it does not stand alone. Recent research has identified classrooms with high levels of student engagement, but meager academic content, resulting in low levels of learning (Weade and Evertson 1988).

Classroom management in different contexts. The current climate of school reform clearly calls for teaching problem-solving and higher order thinking skills, integrating learning experiences within and across subject areas, and implementing multiple tasks (Resnick 1987). Enacting these changes requires new methods of organization and management (Cohen and Lotan 1990; Marshall in press). Most classroom management studies have looked at classrooms with routinized, predictable academic tasks and activi-

ties. Little research has examined different instructional contexts, for example, whole language settings or process writing, and the managerial decisions required (Edelsky, Draper, and Smith 1983).

All in all, future research needs to address these questions: How can classroom management and organiza-

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tion support students' substantive learning? And what is the nature and quality of the learning that is supported? □

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