
Classroom Management

Fourth-grade teacher Steve Ames is about to conduct a science lesson on earthquakes. Having just placed their chairs in a semicircle in the center of the room, his students are not yet settled as they chat with their neighbors, their reading books closed in their laps. Steve places his chair in the center of the students and as he sits, he raises one finger. In seconds the students are silent, turning in their seats to face him. Steve raises a second finger, and the students open their books to the assigned pages. He asks the students to describe an earthquake. Several students raise their hands and Steve calls on each, listening intently and nodding approvingly as they each give their definition of an earthquake. When one student responds to another of Steve's questions without raising his hand, another student quietly reminds the outspoken student to wait his turn.

Is this scene merely a teacher's dream? No. It is a description of a typical lesson in Steve Ames's classroom. How does he do it? Steve Ames has a classroom management plan.

His classes were not always so organized. It once took too much time to get students to come to order, to pay attention. Too often, they were distracted by the antics of their fellow students or they wrote each other notes instead of doing their class work. When they did pay attention, they were reluctant to contribute to class discussions. But now the students are attentive and engaged in the lesson; often they work in teams to teach each other the lesson. They don't have time to get into trouble. They have accepted responsibility for the classroom environment, and they are not about to break the rules Steve asked them to create.

OVERVIEW OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Nearly every teacher agrees that classroom management is an important aspect of successful teaching. Fewer agree on how to achieve it, and even fewer claim the concept of classroom management is operating in their own classrooms.

Classroom management and discipline, terms often used interchangeably, are not synonymous. Teachers asked to define classroom management in one word have given the following responses: discipline, control, and consequences. Discipline was always the first word they chose. In the last few years, however, teachers have responded with the following words: organization, control, positive climate, and incentives. In effect, discipline has become a much smaller part of the term classroom management. Classroom management is much more than any one of these words or the sum of all these words (Charles, 1992; Wolfgang, 1995).

Classroom management means how the teacher works, how the class works, how the teacher and students work together, and how teaching and learning happen. For students, classroom management means having some control in how the class operates and understanding clearly the way the teacher and students are to interact with each other. For both teachers and students, classroom management is not a condition but a process.

Classroom Management: Gift or Skill?

Many teachers, especially beginning teachers, cite classroom management as an ever-present concern (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Veenman, 1984). A meta-analysis of the past 50 years of classroom research identified classroom management as the most important factor, even above student aptitude, affecting student learning (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). But contrary to popular belief, classroom management is not a gift bestowed upon some teachers. While it's true that some teachers adapt to classroom management techniques easily, making it look to their colleagues like they possess some innate talent, classroom management is a skill—a skill that can be taught like any other, and, most importantly, a skill that like any other must be practiced to achieve proficiency.

Although much has been written about classroom management, teachers have not been taught comprehensive, practical methods of improving classroom management, and little emphasis has been placed on “helping teachers understand the issues in effective classroom management and the relationship among various strategies” (Jones & Jones, 2004, p. 1).

Many teachers try classroom management ideas and strategies, tossing them spontaneously and inconsistently into the classroom, then become discouraged when the classroom they hope for does not materialize. Effective classroom management does require specific skills such as planning, organizing, and reflecting as well as an aptitude for teamwork and perseverance. It requires a great deal of commitment initially, then a willingness to adjust one's thinking and actions as one learns what works and what does not work.

But teachers cannot implement a definition. When teachers see that classroom management is a process—a process they can follow, learn, and implement in their own classrooms—they understand that they can tailor the process to match their specific skills and needs. In other words, they can set themselves up for success, not failure. In addition, they recognize that the process is ongoing. Just as teachers change with experience and attempt to meet the changing needs of their students, so their classroom management plan must adapt as well.

CREATING A CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PLAN

A classroom management plan (CMP) is not only a means of organizing a classroom. The plan gives structure to everything that goes on in the classroom—from the seating arrangement to the lessons to the grading of homework assignments to the relationships among classmates. As an antenna eliminates static, improving television reception, so a CMP eliminates distractions and allows teachers to focus on teaching and students to focus on learning. Because teachers and students alike know exactly what to expect in the classroom, the plan fosters a sense of community, of everyone working toward the same goal.

There is no magic formula for creating a CMP. In fact, while all teachers may have similar components in their CMPs, no two plans will be the same. That is because to be effective, a CMP must reflect a teacher's personality and teaching style. It will work precisely because the teacher feels comfortable with it. The purpose of this book, *Planning Classroom Management*, is to guide teachers in the preparation of a CMP. The text takes teachers through the process of creating a personal CMP, a process that has proved effective with preservice and practicing teachers.

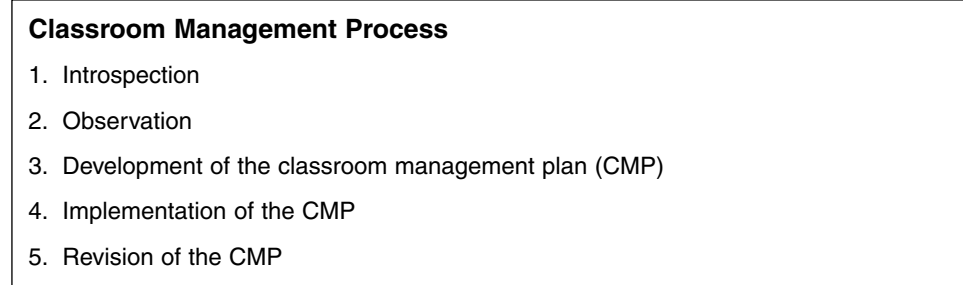
The Classroom Management Process

The five steps of the classroom management process are covered in Chapters 3 through 7. The classroom management process is as follows: introspection (Chapter 3), classroom observation (Chapter 4), development of the CMP (Chapter 5), implementation of the CMP (Chapter 6), and revision of the CMP (Chapter 7).

In brief, the first step, introspection, asks teachers to identify and bridge the gap between their personal self and their teaching self. The second step, classroom observation, requires observing other teachers and being able to identify specific management structures and strategies that make a class work. The third step is the initial development of the CMP. The fourth step, implementation of the plan in the classroom, prepares teachers to teach the CMP. The final step has teachers revise the plan for more classroom management effectiveness. The steps are shown in Figure 1.1.

It's important to note that teachers could simply fill out the CMP template (see Figure 5.1 in Chapter 5) and believe they have a plan for classroom

Figure 1.1



management. But it is the *process* that helps teachers improve their classroom management skills, not the answers to the CMP questions. For through the process, teachers internalize the responses. Through the process, teachers face their strengths and weaknesses as educators, learn to evaluate objectively their teaching effectiveness, and, perhaps most importantly, come to understand that as they grow and change, so must the CMP. The very act of completing the process makes a teacher a better teacher.