
1

Revisiting Classroom Management With Fresh Eyes

The Cherokee parable of the two wolves has been verbally passed down for generations. The story goes something like this: A little boy tells his grandfather about a friend that has treated him badly, and the little boy expresses his anger. The grandfather says, “Like you, I’ve felt anger about how people have treated me instead of sorrow for what the person did.”

The little boy asks what he means. The grandfather explains: “Inside of me there are two wolves. One of the wolves is aggressive and controlling. The littlest thing sets off his temper. He tries to control other people, sometimes for no reason. The other wolf is peaceful, forgiving, and tries to create harmony. He doesn’t take offense at things, but instead tries to understand the reasons for unjustness in others. The two wolves are in constant battle with one another inside of me, since neither is powerful enough to destroy the other.”

When little boy asks, “But if they are of equal power, which wolf will win?” the grandfather replies, “The one I feed the most.”

This tale reminds us that we experience constant inner struggles when faced with situations in life and in our classrooms. We can choose to feed the peaceful wolf and come to situations with empathy

and caring, or we can choose to feed the controlling, aggressive wolf and respond to situations with temper and power.

Each morning when I get ready to start my classes, I have a vision for how I want them to function. I know what I consider acceptable conduct among my students, and I ensure that they have a shared understanding of the expectations. I always hope that class time is designed in ways that make students' experiences inclusive, interesting, and relevant so that they are eager to participate. All of these decisions, routines, and designs are my approach to classroom management. And as you no doubt know from your own experience, classroom management varies from teacher to teacher.

In my 20 years as a high school teacher and teacher educator, I have observed hundreds of classrooms in North America, and I've interviewed countless teachers and administrators in the course of my research projects to better understand issues of culture in schools. What I have found is that teachers (including me) feed different wolves in different situations, especially when it comes to managing their own classrooms.

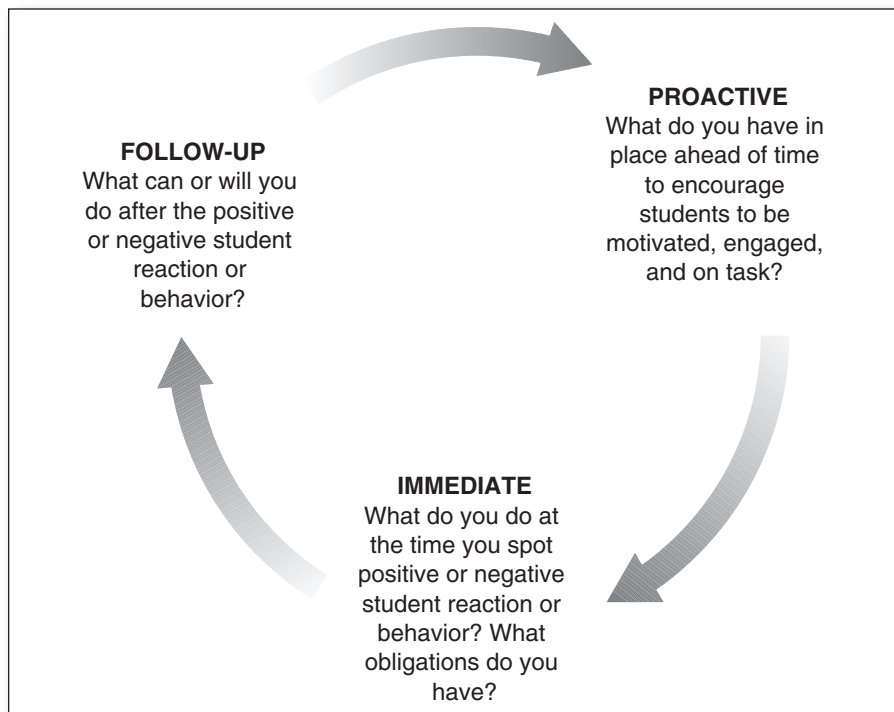
Teaching includes an important interpersonal aspect that requires awareness of the wolves described in the parable. Daily we ask ourselves, "What form or level of learning is called for by *this* topic, for *this* student, in *this* situation?" (Noddings, 2003, p. 244, emphasis added). When we interact with our students, we make choices about the nature of that interaction. In doing so, we are faced with difficult choices. As Paulo Freire stated, "Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly" (1970, p. 60). Choices seem easy when a student cooperates or conforms to our expectations. But when a student challenges us, misbehaves, or refuses to cooperate, we often find ourselves faced with a dilemma. That's a moment at which we have to choose. Do we frame the problem with empathy for the student, or do we face the situation from a place of anger and punishment? Do we look to the core of the problem, or do we react to the symptom manifested in a behavior?

This is when classroom management becomes an important part of our teaching practice. For most teachers, classroom management ranks as a top concern. You probably use the term *classroom management* to mean the practices, routines, and disciplinary structures you use to shape interactions and behavior with your students. Classroom management in its most traditional sense is the collection of "actions taken to create a productive, orderly learning environment" (Hoy & Weinstein 2006, p. 181) that can include discipline, socialization, physical environment, and teaching/learning strategies. It's worth noting at this point that while the term *classroom management* is used

as a catch-all phrase for concrete aspects of discipline, rewards, punishment, and engagement, its precise definition is more specific and has to do with the more abstract concept of learning environment.

Most teachers agree that classroom management must involve consideration and planning in advance (Ban, 1994). This rests on the belief that the surest road to strong classroom management is establishing a comprehensive system you can activate immediately when you observe various student reactions. In addition to the proactive planning, you probably decide how you will respond to individual situations at the moment they occur—for instance, what you'll do if a student interrupts you or talks out of turn. Finally, you probably consider how you will follow up on classroom management issues. This cyclical process is summarized in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Cycle of Classroom Management



REFLECTION

Does this cycle reflect the kinds of things you do in your classroom? Record the strategies that you currently use as proactive, immediate, and follow-up classroom management.

Either consciously or not, you probably have strategies in place for proactive, immediate, and follow-up actions. Notice, however, that the cycle represented in Figure 1.1 above is a bit different from some more conventional models of classroom management that focus only on negative behaviors and reactions. These more conventional models identify “misbehavior,” “transgressions,” and “disruptions” as the core of classroom management, with the goal of classroom management as correction of “bad” behavior—coming from the position that teachers expect bad behavior, and this becomes a priority. Instead, this book consciously addresses **both** positive and negative student responses to classroom activity. Rather than emphasize proactive measures to prevent behaviors, this book encourages you to consider proactive measures to encourage students’ engagement in the classroom. Both immediate responses and follow-ups address not only negative behaviors but also positive student contributions to the classroom community.

A focus on only “bad” behavior and reactions can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you assume that “bad” behavior is inevitable, you set up a situation in which you have to be controlling and hostile toward the students, assuming they will certainly make trouble. By reframing your thinking about classroom management to be equally concerned with engaged learning and constructive interaction, you’re promoting harmonious relationships through anticipation and planning for positive behavior.

Chapter 2 will help you make connections between cultural responsiveness and your classroom environment. Once you have explored how culture reflects and refracts the classroom environment, you will be more confident in coming to your own conclusions about classroom management in Chapter 3.

Let’s look at a few examples.

Miss Stoy, a Grade 5 teacher in a suburban school, was known for her smoothly functioning classroom. In fact, the local college of education regularly invites her in to speak to new teachers about her approach. Even though her school has limited technology available, her kids, as she calls them, look forward to coming to school. Her classroom is inviting, with table groupings of four students in the center of the room that change monthly. Her desk is at the back and has an inbox and an outbox. The front of the classroom has a sofa and lots of big cushions for students to use. The bulletin boards are brightly colored; one features a point system by which table groups can earn points for positive behavior. This earns them rewards

such as free time or extra visits to the library. Another bulletin board features 25 jobs, one for each student in the class. The jobs include filing, helping Miss Stoy bring things in from her car in the morning, various cleanup tasks, managing the class library, and other things. These jobs also change monthly so that students have varied tasks. At the beginning of each month, Miss Stoy changes the jobs and table groupings herself. Each day, Miss Stoy follows a routine in her lessons. After morning announcements, students look to the schedule on their desks. First, there are a few moments to share any news. Lessons always begin with something presented by the teacher; then students know they will be working on a project. Students know that the teacher-directed lesson means they need to listen, but during the project time, they can interact or have one-on-one time with Miss Stoy. They know to write their names on the board to avoid a line-up at her desk. Miss Stoy is proud that her classroom functions like a well-oiled machine, and students are always clear about what they should be doing. She does include punishments for misbehavior, which are clearly spelled out at the beginning of the school year, but she finds she doesn't have to use them often since, in her view, the table groups self-regulate their own behavior.

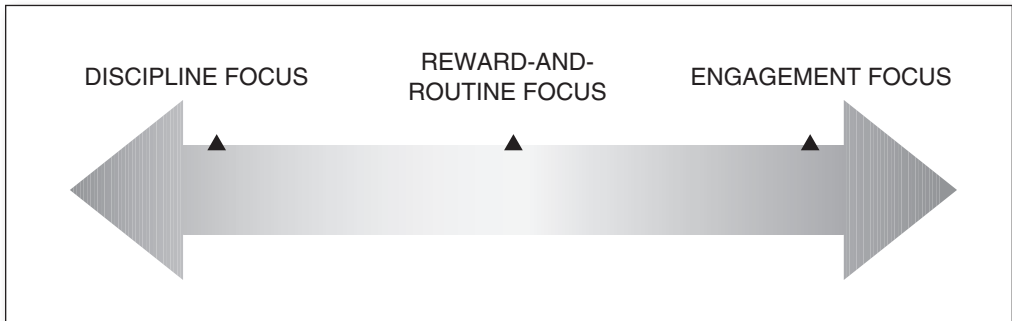
Mr. Arthur is a Grade 8 teacher in an urban school, and his classroom is part of a cyber arts program. His classroom is large, and most of the wall space is filled with student artwork. He also displays student work in the hallways outside the class and in front of the office. Mr. Arthur believes that the way his students learn is central to his classroom management plan: If they are engaged, they are motivated and on task. He feels that routines are important, so he organizes the school year with recurring types of assignments interspersed with larger projects. This allows his students to practice the same format of assignments regularly to help them succeed. He doesn't like the idea of extrinsic rewards, so he feels that he has to make class work especially interesting so that his students feel motivated by learning itself. To do this, he allows student choice in assignments so that they can select topics or articles that reflect what is important to them while meeting curriculum goals. He makes sure that his students use technology to help their learning by maintaining a class website with important event dates and assignments, and students can hand in their work online if they prefer. He gives students chances to collaborate online. He also believes that to engage the students, he has to let them take charge of their learning—and sometimes it's difficult for him to hold back, keep quiet, and let the students take charge of learning by figuring things out for themselves. Mr. Arthur finds that his classroom management strategy leads to a vibrant classroom in which students own their learning and play a very active role in making decisions by collaborating with each other and their teacher.

Mr. Lin is a high school business teacher, and his specialty is teaching senior-level accounting courses in a school that is known for its high achievement on math and literacy tests. His classroom is organized in neat rows. At the beginning of each class, students take their seats, and Mr. Lin projects the previous day's homework on the SmartBoard. He calls on students to come up to the front and solve the accounting problems, and he guides the class in helping to correct errors. Once the homework is taken up, he demonstrates the day's new concept on the SmartBoard, and students then can spend the remainder of the period working on applying the new concept to problems from the textbook. Mr. Lin feels he has high academic and behavioral expectations, so he takes time at the beginning of each semester to articulate the rules and expectations to the class. Students know that failing to do their homework or disrupting the class will lead to a call home or a trip to the office if the problem behavior is sustained. They first receive a verbal warning, and the discipline can be escalated from there.

These examples highlight three very different approaches to organizing classrooms and establishing a plan for classroom management. It isn't a matter of right and wrong; instead, each of the teachers described here comes to classroom management with a particular orientation. They have developed sets of practices and strategies that support that orientation, and these will shift and evolve as these teachers progress in their careers. Sometimes the shifts will be a result of new information, other times as a result of reflective practice, and other times they will be to better serve a new group of learners. But as the examples illustrate, there are many approaches to managing a class, as you've no doubt observed and experienced. To make sense of these differences, it helps to think of classroom management as a spectrum, with many points that define a teacher's orientation toward maintaining learning environments (see Figure 1.2). Teachers, sometimes deliberately, sometimes without conscious consideration, place themselves somewhere along the range of these approaches.

Each of the three positions in Figure 1.2 represents teacher orientations to classroom management. The **discipline focus** sits on one extreme of the spectrum. The discipline focus embodies an authoritarian approach to student-teacher relations. It relies on lists of teacher-created rules, corresponding consequences for breaking rules, and a control-based approach to the learning environment. The **reward-and-routine focus** positioned in the middle of the spectrum implies use of positive reinforcements rather than discipline, though it still relies largely on teacher control, albeit through a combination of strategies. The **engagement focus** is founded on the understanding that if students are engaged in meaningful and relevant learning

Figure 1.2 Classroom Management Spectrum



activities attuned to their individual and cultural needs, issues of “misbehavior” disappear as the students are fully committed to classroom activity. If misbehavior is eliminated, then teachers no longer need to rely on control, punishments, and consequences. This is a brief overview; the details of each of the three approaches are defined in detail in Chapter 3.

All three of the orientations are legitimate and have their place. Teachers come to their orientations through a complex combination of prior experience, education, and experience. Your task as a professional is to critically assess the various orientations and strategies within them and to decide for yourself what is most appropriate for *your* teaching style, *your* goals, and *your* individual students.

REFLECTION

Reflect on the spectrum. Where do Miss Stoy, Mr. Arthur, and Mr. Lin (from the earlier examples) sit on the spectrum? What led you to classify them this way?

Based on what you know about it so far, situate yourself on the spectrum and identify what factors (beliefs, experiences, and education) led you to have that orientation.

Using Evidence to Spot “Good” Classroom Management

Researchers, teachers and school administrators agree about the importance of good classroom management for successful learning. But how does that get defined? As Walter Doyle (2009) points out,

“classrooms are complex systems of individuals and groups, curriculum and personal agendas, aspirations and affiliations” (p. 157). Because of this uniqueness and the subjective nature, defining and spotting good classroom management poses a dilemma in itself.

On one hand, there is the empirical side: evidence, statistics, and research that point to what makes for effective classroom management. We can look to published studies, data, practices of our colleagues, anecdotes, and our experience. While all of these empirical sources of evidence offer glimpses of effectiveness, they only represent what has been tried and studied and what criteria the researcher judged as evidence of effectiveness.

On the other hand, there is the issue of personal preference based on style, culture, and experience. A national report revealed that principals and vice principals had highly subjective beliefs about what a well-managed classroom looks like. Their responses ranged from silent classrooms in which all students were on task to loud and vibrant classrooms in which all students were actively participating through movement and voice (Portelli et al., 2010). Similarly, teachers’ preferences and habitual practices vary. In other words, the criteria by which individuals measure a well-managed classroom differ from person to person based on a set of beliefs and expectations. What one principal or teacher thinks is a “good” and well-functioning classroom may be the opposite of the opinion of the educator next door!

Perceptions aside, most educators will agree that minimizing disruptions is an important part of classroom management. But what works best? Geoff Petty (2006) synthesized a number of studies in order to answer this question (see Table 1.1). Rules, punishments, rewards, and student–teacher relationships had the least effect on decreasing disruptions. Mental set had the most significant influence. This speaks to the importance of relying on a multitude of strategies and consciously looking to what approaches best fit with your own teaching style and pedagogical goals.

In reviewing Geoff Petty’s work, it is important to remember that his research measured decreases in disruptiveness, which is only one aspect of classroom management. More importantly, how a teacher defines disruption and how (un)important disruptions may be given the teacher’s or community’s cultural norms varies. And fewer classroom disruptions do not necessarily mean higher levels of engagement in learning.

Also consider that Geoff Petty has isolated a limited set of “interventions.” Thousands of possible strategies exist along the spectrum

Table 1.1 Evidence of Effectiveness of Classroom Management Strategies in Decreasing Disruptions

Strategy Used	Average Effect Size	Decrease in Number of Disruptions
<p>Rules and procedures</p> <p>In the more successful studies, rules are negotiated between students and teachers ($n = 626$, 10 studies).</p>	0.76	28%
<p>Teacher–student relationships</p> <p>These studies looked at teachers’ attempts to build rapport and mutual respect between teacher and student ($n = 1,110$, 4 studies).</p>	0.87	31%
<p>Disciplinary interventions</p> <p>These studies looked at punishments and rewards ($n = 3,332$, 68 studies).</p>	0.91	32%
<p>Mental set</p> <p>These studies looked at teachers’ attempts to increase self-awareness and to consciously control thoughts and feelings when responding to a disruption ($n = 502$, 5 studies).</p>	1.3	40%

Source: Adapted from Petty, 2006.

of classroom management, ranging from discipline to student engagement, and you may have tried many of them in your own professional journey. Research available to date only assesses a handful of those. On top of that, what actually gets studied is limited to researchers’ orientations and priorities of funding bodies—and this, some researchers argue, seriously limits the possibilities for new and progressive ideas to be taken seriously (Biesta, 2010).

All of this is to say that how you approach classroom management has substantive moral, ethical, political, and social implications (Butchart & McEwan, 1997). The limits of research, the types of social interaction and diversity in your classroom, and your classroom choices must all be considered when you try to define what works. This brings us to the implications of classroom management choices. Education and classroom management are negotiable social interactions (Pane, 2010); they are highly individual and variable depending

on who is involved in the learning process and how they make sense of their relationships with others. When most teachers judge “good” classroom management, they think of it in terms of ends such as number of disruptions, time on task, how well students follow instructions, and so on. This was the case in the national report mentioned earlier, in which principals did not agree on any one end.

Think about what the goal of classroom management is for you. Is it a more efficient classroom so that the teacher gets through the necessary curriculum content? Is it authority and control so that the teacher maintains power over the class at all times? Does a well-managed classroom mean a silent group of students independently working, or does it mean focused chaos, with all students engaged in vibrant discussion and moving around?

These are questions that any teacher must consider, and there’s no objectively correct answer. This book invites you to think about your own beliefs, teaching style, preferences, and values within the context of culturally diverse classrooms. By doing so, you can make the conscious effort to move to intelligent practice of classroom management.

The next chapter will introduce you to cultural responsiveness with an eye to how it relates to classroom management. You will have an opportunity to reflect on it and then apply it in Chapter 3 to situate yourself on the classroom management spectrum.

REFLECTION

Make a list of “look fors” you would use to assess classroom management if you were to observe a classroom. Identify the basis (beliefs, experience, prior education) that led you to prioritize those look fors.