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Module 9 : Classroom Management

Classroom Management

Curriculum and lesson planning is an important part of helping your students find success, but you also need to handle a classroom to make sure you can carry out your plans. Classroom management is the biggest struggle for new teachers who are trying to figure out their style and do not yet have the tricks a veteran has. In this module, our focus will be on making you feel like a veteran before you enter the classroom so you can implement your plans and help your students excel. No one has perfect classroom management, but we will help you feel comfortable enough to control your classroom the way you see fit.

Module 9: Classroom Management

9.1 Setting expectations

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9.4 Choosing your battles

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9.1 Setting expectations

Students need structure to find success in school. That does not mean you have to be a disciplinarian who spends most of his or her time punishing students for small misbehaviors. It just means you need to be clear about your expectations for the class from the beginning, and carry out those expectations throughout the year. We will start by discussing some strategies you can use to set expectations for your class, then we will review some common expectations teachers have found success with.

9.1.1 How to set expectations

- More than anything, make sure you address classroom expectations on the first day to set the tone for the rest of the year. First impressions are important, and if you begin the year allowing behavior you do not want for the rest of the year, you are going to make things more difficult for yourself.



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- One method for setting classroom expectations that has met success is to use the first day of class to have the students work together to create the classroom expectations. Have your students get into small groups and discuss what they expect out of this class, what they expect from you, and what they expect from themselves and the other students. After 5-10 minutes, bring the class together and create a list that you narrow down into the final set of classroom expectations. Bringing your students to the process gives them the opportunity to see the importance of these expectations, stresses them, and gives the students the feeling they are in control. Now, when they break a class rule, they are breaking the very rules they helped develop.
- You can also draw the students into the activity by having them work together on a class pledge or class promise. This would work the same way, except the pledge or promise is more personal and less quantifiable. If you would like, you can take the class pledge and synthesize it into a list of classroom expectations so you have both.
- You can also take a more traditional route, and create the list of expectations on your own. If you do this, make sure they are posted already when the students walk into the classroom, and you take time to review them with the class. Students will notice them if they are posted on your wall, but won't take notice of them unless they are explicitly reviewed.

9.1.2 Common expectations for classrooms

Even if you ask your students to come up with the classroom expectations, you want to make sure they are going to be effective. As the students make suggestions and you generate the list, find subtle ways to steer the list toward what you were looking for. By doing this, you ensure the expectations are clear, and they encompass everything you think is important. Here are some expectations you should definitely make sure end up on your list:

- Be respectful of others: This is the most classic and universal expectation for you to set for your students. This is a great expectation because it encompasses so many things. It refers to students being respectful to the teacher, to other students, to the school, and to anyone who walks into the room. A respectful environment is more conducive to learning because students feel more comfortable to take risks, and are less likely to fear ridicule.
- Routines: We are not going to outline your routines here because you are going to come up with them on your own, but you should try to set up a routine for your students. It will save class time throughout the school year, make your lessons flow better, and engage the students more effectively. Here is an example of some routines you may want to outline for your students:
 - When the students come in, where do they get the daily paperwork? If you get your students into the habit of looking in a specific spot everyday when they walk in the door for any worksheets or paperwork, you will save time by not having to hand them out and take advantage of time you wouldn't have in the lesson i.e. the time they take walking to their seats.



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- Is there a routine or set of rules for when students can leave to go to the bathroom, and whether they need to tell you or not? This seems petty, but it can save you from a lot of interruptions from students not knowing if they can just leave or not.
- When you have class discussions, how do students participate? Do they raise their hands and wait to be called upon? Do they just speak out and respect each other enough to act civilly? Do you have a ball or other object that students can hold when it is their time to talk? These types of routines help students understand how they should act and what behavior is not conducive to a respectful classroom..
- **Responsibility:** All students need to display a modicum of responsibility for their learning, but the responsibilities for which you hold your students accountable are due to their age and your preference. Whatever you decide, you should be clear about the rules to ensure your students follow them from the start.

9.2 Respect

We discussed respect a little in the previous section, but it is so important to the way you will manage your classroom that it warrants its own section. Building an atmosphere based on mutual respect will help you avoid most problems new teachers face. Let's first discuss how respect manifests in your classroom.

9.2.1 Why is respect important?

Respect is a fairly small word that represents a lot, and can have many different manifestations in the classroom. Respect in the classroom does not just mean that students listen to the teacher; it is much more than that. There are three types of respect you need to facilitate in your classroom:

1. **Respect for the teacher:** This is the kind of respect people usually think about when you talk about respect in the classroom. While this is only one of three types, it is still extremely important. Part of discovering who you are as a teacher is discovering your teaching style. Some teachers demand specific behavior in their classrooms and hold students accountable for acting outside these guidelines, while others are more laid back in their style. Neither will work if the teacher has not gained the respect of his or her students. If the environment is too strict and students do not respect the teacher, they will lash out and be combative. If the environment is too laid back and students do not respect the teacher, they will walk all over him or her and not listen. Regardless of what your teaching style evolves into, your classroom environment has to be predicated upon respect.
2. **Respect for other students:** Besides direct lecturing, almost every teaching strategy requires students to interact with each other or take intellectual risks. If your students do not show respect for each other in the classroom, these strategies will not work. How can you expect a student to answer



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a question he or she is not sure of when other students in the class feel justified in disrespecting and ridiculing him or her? If you ever want to have class discussions, work in groups, have your students present, or do anything that involves students speaking out loud and taking a chance, you need to rely on the class treating each other with respect.

3. Respect for themselves: Just as much as you need your students to treat each other with respect, you need students to have respect for themselves. You do not have ultimate control over this, but you can do everything you can to constantly encourage them to respect themselves. This means being encouraging of students sharing, and offering students positive reinforcement for contributing to the class.

If you can find a way to facilitate all three types of respect, you will accomplish much more with your students.

9.2.2 How to facilitate respect

Creating a classroom environment that has foundations in mutual respect does not mean you can never have fun. If done properly, it will give you the opportunity to have more fun in the classroom because you will know your students can handle it and still get their work done and progress as students. Here are some tips on how to provide that safe and enjoyable community classroom for your students:

- Your classroom needs to be built on mutual respect, so discuss respect on the first day and stress it throughout the year. Let the students know they have your respect, and you require them to show you respect. Students will have a harder time being disrespectful to teachers who have shown them respect.
- This sounds obvious, but needs to be said: follow your own rules and treat your students with respect. Do not make them feel dumb for an answer that is wrong, and lead by example. If a student is off the mark with an answer or comment (in terms of being correct, not in terms of being disrespectful), look for their train of thought and give them credit for where they went with the answer, while letting them down easy. Students will look to you to model the behavior you are looking for from them, so be a good classroom role model.
- Whenever you are doing an activity that will require students to step out of their comfort zone, make mutual respect a spoken goal. If necessary, attach a grade to it. Students need to be reminded constantly about how they should act, so when you need them to show respect to each other, it is worth it to take a few minutes to go over it. If you are doing an activity that requires students to critique each other, model the behavior first to show them what constructive criticism looks like.
- Handle disrespectful behavior severely. Even if you have a lenient classroom where students feel free to express themselves, make disrespect the thing you draw a line in the sand about. If you have discussed respect, and the students are aware how they should act, treat disrespectful behavior seriously, and implement real and meaningful consequences for disrespectful actions.



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- Do not be afraid to bring parents and administrators in to your plans for a respectful classroom. Disrespectful behavior should be accompanied by both punishment and by contact home. Students will often make rash decisions and not worry about the in-school consequences, but if your students know they will also face consequences at home, they are more likely to think about their actions.

9.3 Accountability

While most discussions of classroom management focus on managing classroom behavior, accountability is an important aspect you can control in many other areas of your class. It is a pretty simple idea: set expectations for your students and hold them to those expectations. Why is it, then, that so many teachers have problems holding their students accountable? Here are some possible reasons:

9.3.1 Why is accountability so hard?

Why is it hard for teachers to hold students accountable sometimes? If we all admit it is important, why isn't it second nature?

- Holding students accountable requires a confrontation. While teachers know student behavior will be better if they hold the students accountable, that does not make putting their foot down any easier. While instinct tells you the right thing to do when a student acts inappropriately is to punish him or her accordingly, it can be hard to actually do it because you know it will often end in an argument.
- When you are trying to build an atmosphere of mutual respect, it can be difficult to know when you are overreacting, and when you aren't being strict enough. If a student clearly acts inappropriately, it may be easy to punish him or her immediately. What happens, though, when the student toes the line of inappropriate? At what point do you act, and at what point do you let it go? This can be a very difficult decision.
- If you come down too hard on students, it could encourage more inappropriate behavior rather than appropriate behavior. If students feel they are being punished unfairly, they are more likely to act out in defiance.
- Some students are terrible at dealing with confrontation, and it can be easier to let their behavior go. While this might be a good strategy with some students as long as they are not being disrespectful and are getting their work done, it could have a negative effect on the class environment. Students do not like it when they are held to stricter standards than their classmates, so if you make too many concessions, you end up either making concessions for the entire class or upsetting the students acting appropriately.
- Confrontations are stressful, and it is easier to let something go or pretend you didn't see or hear it rather than make an issue of it.



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- Every student has a different story, and when you know one of your students is going through a tough time or has a less than satisfactory home life, you feel compassion toward him or her and want to cut him or her some slack.
- No one strives to be the mean teacher, and as much as you want to believe that you don't care what your students think about you, you will care.

9.3.2 How do you keep vigilant?

With all these reasons to let things go, how do you remain vigilant? We all agree the right way to act is to punish inappropriate behavior with a reasonable teacher response, but how do you make it easier, less stressful, and less disruptive? There is no easy answer, but here is a strategy that might make things a little easier for you:

It's not me; it's you: Think about it, most of the concerns listed in the previous section stem from being the enforcer as the teacher. So, the best way to make things easier on you is to remind the students they are controlling their behavior. Instead of being the enforcer, be upset they have done this to themselves, and upset they will have to face a punishment. This shift in attitude mentally shifts the confrontation and makes the student realize their actions are causing their problems. Of course, this only works if you have clear rules of conduct for their behavior already in place.

- As much as you may feel bad when you are doling out punishments, remember that you are doing nothing wrong, and have done nothing wrong. You are not the one who misbehaved or acted inappropriately; they are. Put the burden back on the student, and watch how many of them begin to check their own behavior.
- When a student gets in trouble, your attitude and behavior should reflect the following ideas:
 - The student is the person who chose to break a classroom rule.
 - The student is the person who had the choice in this situation, not you.
 - You are forced to punish the student because of the rules you all set at the beginning of the year.
 - This is going to help your students, so let go of your guilt
- When a student misbehaves, treat it like you are on their side and upset they will now have to face a punishment. This makes the process seem like both of you are experiencing the punishment, and you are beholden to the rules. The rules become the enforcer, not the teacher. "Oh no, Billy. That's the third time you had your phone out, now you have to get detention."
- Notice how this shift in attitude helps you keep your students accountable without making you feel the guilt you usually would. You will see this is actually easier than letting behaviors go and seeing your classroom slowly de-evolve and break down.
- Students will begin to take more responsibility for their actions. They will realize it is their behavior, not the teacher, that is causing them to face punishments. This shift will help you create the classroom environment you want without making you be the bad person or the disciplinarian.



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9.4 Choosing your battles

With everything we said about holding students accountable and creating a classroom environment based on respect, and having control over your classroom, it is still important that you choose your battles. At the end of the day, your goal as a teacher is to help your students find success, and that can't happen if you are kicking your students out for every little infraction. This is especially true in the case of a volatile student. This does not mean you should let him or her get away with anything that threatens the environment in your classroom, you just need to decide what behaviors are worth the fight, and what behaviors are not. Here are some things to consider when working with a child who is prone to confrontation:

- What is causing this behavior? A lot of times, the answer to this simple question will tell you how to act. If the student just has a problem dealing with a confrontation, then you can correct his or her behavior by quietly approaching it in a way that does not make a scene. If the student needs to speak to someone when he or she is having a tough time, it might be smart to have a routine set up so that he or she can see a counselor or school psychologist when he or she feels an outburst coming.
- With volatile students, try to focus your attention on prevention rather than reaction. Get used to seeing the signs of a problem, and try to head them off before it gets to the point where you have to impose a punishment or start a confrontation. Quietly approaching a student when he or she seems to be having a bad day shows you care, and might compel the students to take control of his or her behavior.
- While students do not like it when someone gets different treatment than someone else, you need to remember that fair and equal are two different things. Just as you need to differentiate your instruction to account for students who struggle with a skill, you need to differentiate your management for students who have difficulty behaving.
- Talk to the student. Ask him or her what triggers outbursts and how you can best approach him or her in a time of stress. Often, the student will know what will help. When he or she does not, work together to come up with a set of rules and routines that hold the student accountable while giving him or her breathing room.
- Enlist the help of other students, with the consent of the volatile student, of course. Does the student have a friend who can help calm him or her down in stressful situations? If so, you can deflate tensions by giving the friend a signal to step in so you do not have to start a confrontation every time the volatile student acts out. That being said, the friend is a student also, who does not deserve to bear all the weight of his or her friend. Use the friend as a resource, rather than a crutch, to bear the weight of the disciplinary actions you should be imparting.



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9.5 Unique strategies

While the best strategy for creating a positive classroom environment involves everything we discussed so far in this module, sometimes you need to employ fresh tactics to encourage positive behavior. Here are some unique strategies that can help you take the confrontation out of classroom management.

- **Countdown:** There are many strategies like this, but essentially the countdown involves having some sort of signal to the class that they need to calm down. If you do this properly, you can get students to modify behavior without saying a word. When they get out of hand, simply start the timer and let the students regulate themselves.
- **Commercial break:** If you have a very loud or social group, set up a routine where students are rewarded for positive and diligent behavior with a commercial break, or a period of time during which they can break from work to walk around and talk to friends socially. You will need to regulate the time for the commercial break carefully and keep it short (2 minutes is probably best since that is the traditional length of commercial breaks).
- **Buddy system:** Pair your students up and hold them accountable for each other. If one of the partners missed the directions, the other is there to explain. If one of the partners is acting up, the other is there to deflate the situation. Handle problems with one of the students as problems with the pair to keep them linked in both reward and punishment. This will not work, however, if one student is not compliant and always causing the problems.
- **Number your students:** Of course you want your students to feel like individuals, not just numbers on a sheet to you, but assigning each student a number can be helpful. When you need them to act quickly, either getting into groups, presenting ideas, or other behaviors like this, save time by calling out numbers. "We're going to have a debate; all the even numbers get on one side of the room, and the odd numbers get on the other side." This will cut down on the wasted time of organizing students, and will promote compliance and a classroom harmony.
- **Tight schedule:** Building up a tight routine can help you encourage diligent behavior. If you create a routine of bell work and exit slips, your students know they need to begin working immediately as class begins, and they know they are accountable for something before they leave. This may seem very simplistic, but it sets a class routine and promotes appropriate behavior. Students know they need to do this everyday, and come ready to work.

[Link to Exam](#)