

Signature Assignment: Classroom Management

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Routines, Rules, and Relationships

Success or failure in the area of classroom management largely determines the success or failure of student learning. Thus, it is key to give plenty of thought and planning to how one's classroom will be handled. Routines, the procedures to carry out the routines, and the rules followed throughout the learning process are all pieces of a teacher's plan for classroom management. My vision for each has been built upon what I have learned through research and through the observation of several teachers.

Classroom Routines

When observing Mr. Wong, a high school AP Calculus teacher, I saw some of the best routines in place. His students know to come directly to their seats with minimal talking and immediately begin the daily quiz of four questions based on the lesson from the previous day. After the students are done, they go up in randomly assigned pairs to do the problems on the board. Once all the problems are done, they take turns explaining the problem to the rest of the class. This way, Mr. Wong can see who gets it and can, at the same time, offer help and clarity to those who didn't get it. Similarly, after he teaches the new lesson, he has new pairs go up and do most of the homework problems together on the board as well. This is another moment to check for understanding and provide additional support for the students. Each of his class periods moves seamlessly through each portion of the time they have with him because the routines are so established. There is no wasted time or confusion on what is supposed to be happening. I would love to have this level of control in the classroom, where I hardly have to remind students of what they should be doing at any moment throughout the day. Efficiency is key to a positive learning environment, so that is what I will strive for.

Expanding upon these concepts, I will implement the following routines in my own classroom. First, when entering the classroom, students will be greeted at the door and will be expected to be seated and working on the quick write or opening question on the board by the time the morning song ends. This helps establish trusting and positive relationships, the importance of which will be discussed below, and it reminds both the students and the teacher that class begins the moment the first student walks in the room. I will then take attendance by calling each student's name in a random order. When their name is called, they are to stand and respond with a greeting and their answer to the quick write or opening question. This will promote classroom unity, trust, and comfort as well as provide an opportunity to see where each student is mentally and emotionally at the very beginning of the day. In other words, it provides an opportunity for me to take stock of the energy of the class. It also gives the students daily practice in oral presentation and communication.

It is crucial to have routines because “deficiencies in the areas of setting rules, establishing routines, monitoring, and creating a praise-and-reward structure clearly had a negative effect on the overall management and organization of the classroom” (Borich, 2007, p. 112). However, when considering these things, it is also important to be willing, as a teacher, to “change in response to unproductive expectations, routines, and procedures” (Borich, 2007, p. 71). Having bad routines is no better than having none at all. It is even important to remember that routines that work for one class might not work the next year with a new group of students. Flexibility is key as a teacher, but so is planning. Balancing keeping structure and refining said structure is the goal in routines, as well as in procedures and rules, as discussed below.

Classroom Procedures

The routines are more overarching goals of what should happen daily, but it is in the procedures that these routines fail or succeed. In Mr. Wong's class, the procedures are clear. You bring your paper of work up to the board with you when you do the problem. If you are not doing the problem on the board, you are either waiting quietly, or quietly helping a peer understand a question they missed. When Mr. Wong is teaching the new material, eyes are on him and minds are focused.

In my own classroom, I will likely use a bell on my desk as an attention grabber. When the bell is rung, students will need to silently have both hands folded on their desk and their eyes facing the teacher. When teaching new material, I will keep stints of direct instruction short and students will not have to take notes or work on filling in blanks on a worksheet while I teach. They will be expected to keep their minds fully focused on what I am showing, and then they will have the opportunity to practice or write things down as needed. I would do this because I prefer to see the students' faces and eyes as I teach since it makes it so much easier to tell more specifically when they do or do not get something I'm teaching. Lastly, at the end of the day, when it is time to leave the classroom, students will be allowed to pack their things and line up at the door after the teacher's alarm sounds giving the two minute warning, and not before. This gives me time to make the important closing comments for the day. After all, "Closing comments should...serve a double purpose, not only ending the lesson but also keeping students actively engaged in the lesson until its very end by reviewing, summarizing, or highlighting its most important points" (Borich, 2007, p. 89). These are just a sampling of the procedures that would need to be in my classroom, but they are enough to get started with in the first few days of school. They can always be added to or adjusted as needed.

Classroom Rules

In the carrying out of the routines through the procedures, all the classroom rules will also need to be followed. My rules will be simple and easy to remember and will also be posted in a clear place in the room. They will be as follows:

Together, we are going to LEARN by...

- Listening carefully
- Encouraging everyone
- Asking appropriate questions
- Respecting others and the classroom
- Neatly caring for the classroom

While these rules are easy to remember and are rather broad, they are detailed enough to avoid the misunderstanding of what is expected. All other expected behaviors are either sub-behaviors of those listed above or are spelled out in the classroom procedures like those shared above.

My research of what classroom rules are best supported my decision of what to include in my own list. For instance, in a study, it was found that...

“The poorer managers, like the better managers, had rules, but they presented and followed up on the rules differently. In some cases, the rules were vague: ‘Be in the right place at the right time.’ In other cases, they were introduced casually without discussion, leaving it unclear to most children when and where a rule applied” (Borich, 2007, p. 111).

Communication involves clarity and repetition and both will be essential and common in my classroom, as will be discussed further below.

Positive Learning Environment

My classroom will be a place where everyone, including all the students, the teacher, and the potential substitutes, know exactly what is expected. Routine is key, but it will not become a place where creativity and unique circumstances cannot ever change routine. However, whenever the routine is shifted from, it will be known in advance and/or an immense amount of grace will

be shown to those not tracking with what is going on. Respect and grace will be expected of all and will lead to strong relationships between students and teacher that encourage an open yet professional learning environment. If any of the above rules or procedures are not positively contributing to this kind of environment, they will need to be changed or dropped. I don't imagine that my current plan for classroom management will be exactly what I use after a few years of teaching. However, I do know that what I use will always be clearly stated and the reason for everything will also be clearly stated. It is this transparency, honesty, and respect that will foster the positive learning environment needed for the class as a whole to succeed. After all, it is the goal of creating a positive learning environment that drives teachers to create routines, rules, and procedures.

With this in mind, I would say that the biggest piece of the environment I want to have in my classroom is communication. If students know what is expected and know what will happen if ever they fall short of expectations, then we can move forward with this understanding and not have to waste time finding solutions to confrontations or testing each other's boundaries. Solutions and boundaries are already set and known, and even agreed upon, by all in the room. By "agreed upon," I mean that I would like to have all students brainstorm ideas of how they should treat each other, me, and the classroom at the beginning of the year and then show them the rules before having them all sign something saying they will do their best to follow the rules. "An important way to positively influence peer groups in your classroom is to conduct group discussions of class norms, describing what class members should and should not do to be socially acceptable, what you expect of them, and what they should expect of each other" (Borich, 2007, p. 57).

Positive Relationships

Having mutual respect amongst students and between the teacher and each student as a key piece of the rules and procedures in the class will be crucial in creating the positive relationships. First, relationships amongst students are huge in how well they will learn. For instance, “students are more likely to engage, feel connected, and succeed when they have a positive, supportive relationship with their teachers, making this commitment to the students is critical to achieving effective classroom management for all students” (Marzano, R., Marzano, J., & Pickering, D., 2003). I always learned best from the teachers I liked and respected most. I want to earn the respect of my students by showing that I have an excellent understanding of what I am teaching, by giving them respect as individuals, and by proving to them that I want them to learn for their own sake, not for mine. I believe this is what will lead to the positive relationships needed to have a good classroom environment.

One huge piece to having positive teacher-student interactions is by, as a teacher, giving them positive praise and positive correction, like Mrs. Flores did in her intervention math class for freshmen. She asked for lots of observations, ideas, and answers from her students and always gave praise where it was due. She thanked them for contributing and when she did need to correct misconceptions, she did so positively and focused on the good in what they said. It is important to make sure that, as a teacher, you are honest in your feedback of students, but it is important to leave students encouraged and built up rather than deflated or embarrassed.

Another piece of positive relationships between a teacher and his/her students is the respect that is shown in being culturally responsive. As Borich argues, “The principles of culturally responsive classroom management each tap into the teacher’s ability and investment in building positive teacher-student relationships” (Borich, 2007, p. 73). A part of this is both

knowing my own cultural background and knowing the cultural backgrounds of my students (Borich, 2007). By having an understanding of both, I can ensure that the intended meaning of my actions in response to their behaviors is the meaning they glean from receiving said action. Being culturally responsive is a responsibility of every teacher, and it is one that provides benefits in both relationships and in classroom management. Thus, it is worth the effort to teach this way.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through research and observation, I have formulated a tentative plan for how I will use routines, procedures, and rules to create a positive learning environment and foster positive relationships so that teaching and learning are efficient and successful. Respect and communication are foundational for this plan and will stay as the focus of my classroom management philosophy regardless of how the particulars might change.

Discipline, Intervention, Restoration, and Environment

Having a strong, refined classroom management plan that creates a positive learning environment is arguably the most important aspect of being an effective teacher. In fact, “beginning teachers consistently rate classroom discipline as among their most urgent concerns” (Borich & Blanchette, 2021, p. 103). Beyond rules, routines, and procedures, classroom management includes plans for a discipline policy, positive interventions and supports, restorative and conflict resolution practices, and for how the classroom layout and design will impact the environment. My vision for each of these are influenced by my research and observations as well as by my own beliefs.

Classroom Discipline Policy

When observing Dr. Kane's 6th grade classroom, she shared with me some documents she uses for classroom management. One was her behavior plan. The goal at her school that guides this policy is for students to "Be Safe, Responsible, and Respectful." The six steps that will be done sequentially but based upon the severity of the behavior in the event of a situation are as follows; verbal prompting, redirecting, behavior reflection sheet, student call to parent from the classroom, teacher/parent telephone conference, student/parent/teacher school site conference, and conference with administrator or para-educator. It is nice if bad behaviors can be prevented, but "effective management of serious behaviors with complex origins will require a complimentary combination of appropriate consequences and support" (Borich & Blanchette, 2021, p. 103). Students learn individual responsibility by receiving the consequences of their actions. This is a hard, but crucial lesson and saving them from it does more harm than good. With all this in mind, I plan to follow a similar set of steps in my own classroom. Only slight differences might be necessary based on school policies and the grade level I am teaching.

Grace, however, is a beautiful part of life and should be reflected in classroom management in addition to the justice plans such as these bring. Dr. Kane makes clear that her plan is based on the ideas that everyone makes mistakes, that bad choices should not affect the entire day, and that students need to learn to deal with their own mistakes. When you teach social-emotional skills and develop that area of intelligence in students, disciplinary problems decrease (Borich & Blanchette, 2021). It only makes sense then to use disciplinary situations to teach that which will prevent a repetition of the same problem.

Positive Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS), while it does not ignore negative behaviors, chooses to focus on the positive behaviors and reinforces those by rewarding through

word, action, or even tangible rewards (Borich & Blanchette, 2021). This helps students correct their own behavior as they seek the pleasure of recognition or reward for behaving well. There is also a piece of it that is preventative because it asks teachers to pay attention to the antecedents who lead the behaviors and work to intervene in those moments to stop bad behaviors from ever coming up.

In my own classroom, there are several ways in which I intend to prevent negative behaviors through positive interventions and support. For example, I will use proximity to draw back the attention and correct the behaviors of my students as typically just being near the student is enough of a reminder to refocus them (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). There will be some students who will need this intervention more than others. Furthermore, I will use small activities to break up learning and providing opportunities for movement can also be helpful in refreshing and refocusing students (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). I will also use positive, direct consequences for listening and growth in behavior, amongst special education students as well as general ed students, as a way to encourage good behavior without relying on fear or avoidance of negative consequences (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). There are of course reasons to use the discipline policy as discussed above, but I will be doing what I can to prevent circumstances requiring taking those steps.

Restorative Practices

When the aforementioned preventative steps fail, it is necessary to have a way to restore students to good standing following a negative interaction or behavioral situation. Dr. Kane has what I believe to be a great way to do this. She has what she calls a behavior reflection log in which students fill in blanks and check off boxes telling the teacher and a parent, both of whom will sign the log, about why what they did was wrong, what they will do, and what they need.

Forgiveness is not only good for the recipient of it, it is especially good for the giver of it (Leaf, 2018). Because, as a Christian, I believe that forgiveness is so important, I hope to use a system very much like Dr. Kane's. I'll have something for them to fill out to make amends and move forward having been, in a sense, washed of the wrong they did, so that learning can resume without shame or baggage.

Conflict Resolution Practices

When the negative behavior involves conflict between students, rather than simply being a teacher to student situation, it is necessary to heal and restore those horizontal relationships as well as restore them to the class through a behavior reflection log. This is where conflict resolution practices come into play. At Bethany Christian Elementary School, where I substitute teach, they have a school-wide plan for this that has seven steps as follows. First, a conversation should happen one on one, where both look eye to eye, speak with kindness, listen with compassion, and respond in love. If this doesn't solve it, then you can ask for help to resolve the conflict. Teachers have the responsibility to encourage, and when necessary, facilitate conflict resolution (Borich & Blanchette, 2021). I would love to have this exact plan in my classroom someday, not just because it is effective and simple, but because it is biblically based. It is how Jesus teaches us to resolve disagreements and conflicts and so I believe it to be best.

Creating a Welcoming and Safe Environment

Within the first second of walking into a classroom, a student makes judgments about the teacher, the class, and even the value of school in general. It is important to create, then, a classroom that will insight positive judgments from your students. "A classroom must strive to be nurturing for all learners who will arrive with a variety of visible and invisible differences" (Borich & Blanchette, 2021, p. 71). In part because of this, I will seek to keep my classroom

clean and organized with fun and encouraging or even helpful posters and such on the walls and boards. Student work will be posted in the room as well to encourage a healthy pride in students for their work well done and to help them feel a sense of ownership over the classroom that is theirs as well. Dr. Kane, from the beginning of the school year, stresses to her students that the classroom is not hers, but theirs collectively, and I wish to stress the same.

Another aspect of creating a positive classroom environment is creating an effective classroom layout. In Mrs. Snider's kindergarten class, she has an aide who helps her so she has the desks facing forward in paired columns and then has two tables in the back, ready to be used by herself or the aide as necessary. In my own classroom, I plan to have single rows or desks that are easily moved into different configurations. I would like my desk in the front of the room and a table with several chairs in the back so that I can take groups or individuals aside for intervention as necessary. After all, there will likely be a need for some differentiation in learning environment, instructional materials, instructional methods, and evaluation as students with different needs and abilities will all be in the same classroom (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). A flexible classroom layout and even a changeable classroom layout can really help with these things. Also, I would like to put the pencil sharpener and other such tools like chromebook chargers, etc. in the back so that students can get what they need within my view and without distracting their peers.

Conclusion

Through my research and observations, my vision for these areas of classroom management are clear. However, it is really through my faith and through how I believe the world works that I have developed the finer balance within these topics. I believe that every student is valuable, that everyone has a sinful nature, and that it is my responsibility to guide

students to honorable living and to represent justice and mercy in a godly way. If any of these pieces were missing, my plan would look very different. I also believe, of course, that I am flawed and that I will fail in my execution of these plans. Thus, I will need to hold myself in the same balance of high expectations and ready forgiveness that I do my students.

Philosophies to Support Learners with Diverse Needs

Each individual student will be coming into my classroom with a unique culture, background, educational experience, gifts, and needs. It is my job as the teacher to learn all I can about my students and use that knowledge in a way that brings out the best in each child and helps them grow and learn the most. There are many aspects to this, but it begins with learning about each student's culture and funds of knowledge, supporting students with varying strengths and weaknesses, and developing a grading policy that takes these things into account.

Using Culture and Funds of Knowledge in a Traditional Setting

The classroom is more than just a room. It is a third party, physical place where students of many cultures and home and educational experiences come together to learn (Hammond, 2015). The room can put students at ease and make them feel at home and ready to engage, or it can do quite the opposite and distance the students from a desire to learn. The decorations and posters, etc. in the classroom reflect our values as teachers, so it is important for us to put serious thought into what we display. Perhaps the first things teachers think to put up are educational materials like a number line or a poster of the alphabet or common formulas. These are important, of course, but in my classroom, I want to put up posters and signs I make rather than purchase so that they can flow cohesively and give a calming and clear aesthetic and don't overload the student's minds (Coleman, 2018). I also want to put on display students' own work to help encourage and motivate them by giving them a good sense of pride in their work. To

incorporate various cultures, I can decorate for a wide-range of holidays and I can post artwork and pictures of heroes from many cultures. When I know the particular funds of knowledge and cultures of my students, I can pay closer attention to those cultures that are represented amongst the children. In addition to all of this, however, I plan to put up many patriotic and unifying posters and items as well. While each student is different, all will have certain things in common, one of which being a student in America. Universal morals and common goals unify the class and all can feel connected to that. I don't want students to think that they can only enjoy the items and posters in the room that come from their parents' culture, I want them to discover what their own culture is as a member of a class of students from many walks of life.

More important than what artifacts we put up in our classrooms, however, is the social emotional tone we set up (Hammond, 2015). That is why artifacts have to be chosen for this purpose and not for the purpose of checking off some list of cultural representation. By honoring many cultures and student backgrounds, I hope to give students the freedom to enjoy many cultures and celebrate the fact that, as Americans, they can identify with the melting pot of all the cultures my artifacts are from.

Using Culture and Funds of Knowledge in an Online Setting

The artifacts of a classroom are displayed quite differently in an online setting, and it takes a different tack to create the best social emotional tone as well. Virtual classrooms allow a teacher to still "decorate" a room for the students and give them opportunities to explore various "artifacts." One way to promote a positive ethos in an online class is to start each day by reading or watching a common, inspirational or impactful poem or verse, or in the case of a private school, prayer (Hammond, 2015). These can provide an opportunity to relay a moral or unifying

message as well as expose children to various artists and cultural proverbs. This practice can, of course, also be done in a traditional setting, but it may be particularly useful in the online setting.

Supporting Gifted Students

There are many who believe it is sufficient to simply give gifted students more work in order to keep them busy. However, true differentiation requires a teacher to give their gifted students more challenging work, not just more work (Edu, 2019). In fact, many students can feel as if they are punished for being smart if they have to do more than their peers. They would much rather have the same amount of work at a more appropriate level. Having been accelerated in math beginning in Kindergarten, I can attest to this. I appreciated being able to still get my math work done in a short time and enjoy the fact that I was good at it while still being appropriately challenged. If I had been held back and just asked to do double the number of problems, I would have hated math and found it boring. Since this was not the case, I find math exciting and intriguing.

I hope to follow a similar plan based on similar principles with my own gifted students. I want to use student choice whenever possible as it is a great way to ensure that gifted students are being challenged without feeling like they are being punished (Edu, 2019). This then loops back to the funds of knowledge. Based on a student's individual interests and background and particular area of gifting, I will have them dive deeper into and explore more about particular topics.

I also hope to be a voice for acceleration programs at my school. For some time, I have loved the idea of teaching an accelerated math class for middle schoolers who are at the highschool level. Even if the system just looks like students moving classrooms to higher grades

during the math hour, I want to do my part to ensure that students are being given the education they need.

Supporting Educationally Disadvantaged Students

Differentiation is the key in simultaneously supporting all sub-groups of students. It can be found in the differentiation of the learning environment, of the instructional means, of the instructional methods, or of the evaluation (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). The learning environment can be changed by simply moving to another part of the room that is set up in a different way, or it can mean having the child go to an intervention classroom for parts of the day. One thing I hope to do is to set up my classroom with distinct areas. The main focus will be on the student desks and whiteboard which will host most learning, but I hope to have a kidney table in the back for times when I need to give extra attention to those students who have not received the educational help they have needed along the path of education they took before coming to me. I also hope to have an area with a couple of more comfortable seats and maybe a couple of separate desks where I can send students to work individually when they need to focus on something in order to catch up.

I would differentiate the instructional means and methods by providing those students in need of each with things like multiplication tables, sentence frames, word banks, and calculators. Finding and providing different levels of reading materials is key as well (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). I would also like to offer my students optional tutoring at lunchtime so that I can guarantee that I am doing all I can to give my students the help that they need, especially if they are willing to work hard. I would hate for a student to want to improve but to be held back because I won't give them what they require. Lastly, I plan to differentiate evaluation by adjusting the time allotted, the means of communication (ie, writing, speaking, demonstrating,

etc.), and the amount of guidance the students receive during evaluation. For instance, rather than giving every student the same 20 multiple choice questions, I may need to make accommodations for some students like reading aloud some questions, offering the option to write a couple paragraphs or sentences, or even having a conversation with a student asking questions orally.

Grading Philosophy

Even though differentiation in all the areas discussed above is becoming more and more common, the way that teachers grade and the scale that they use largely stays the same. The 0-100% scale is used across the board. There are arguments that this is not the best grading scale when it comes to giving students equal and appropriate chances to succeed. For instance, if a student misses an assignment or test or just doesn't understand one whole topic, then even if they score wonderfully on other assignments or fully grasps other topics, their grade will still be really low and it will harm them emotionally as well as put their grade in a hole that is nearly impossible to get it out of.

However, there are still many positives that have kept this system in use for so long. To start, though it is perhaps not an excellent reason, it is what everyone understands and is familiar with. Whether or not it would be best in the long run, changing grading at all levels of schooling would likely take decades. Beyond this though, using a numerical system helps provide teachers some support against upset parents or students. Numbers are disputed less often, though they are realistically just as disputable in cases of more subjective grading. Furthermore, it allows for measurable goals to be made. If you lost the percentages and just kept the letter grade, then students wouldn't get the motivation from seeing that they are really close to going up or down a letter. It gives students a chance to compare their own grades and see their improvement where a

score of “excellent” or “adequate” would just allow them to compare to each other or think that they are stagnant in their learning.

One could argue that the negatives still outweigh the positives in this grading system, but there are some great math manipulation strategies that can solve many of its issues. First, the weight that you give to different assignments or areas of an assignment, perhaps chosen based on students’ strengths, can drastically change the total grade (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). Also, dropping the lowest scores in each area can keep one missing assignment or bombed test from keeping a student from redeeming their grade. For example, let us say I have my students write an essay every month. If I gave a total score that was not broken down through a rubric and every student kept every score, then a student who receives scores of 80%, 0%, 75%, and 90% on the first four will have a total grade of 61.25%, a low F. However, if I break the score down and give more weight to either content or grammar and spelling, depending on what I have said is the focus and depending on what the strengths of my students are, and then I also weight the papers so that the best one is worth 40%, the second is worth 30%, the third is worth 20%, and the worst is worth 10%, then the same student would have a total grade of 75%, a passing C.

It may be a controversial one, but it is my opinion that the biggest problems of the traditional grading scale come from the fact that most teachers do not have the math skills to use it the way it should be used. I’ve experienced and seen many cases of teachers not understanding weighted grading and misusing it to the detriment of their students. Perhaps there is a way to grade without relying so much upon math, but math hasn’t failed me yet, and, as mentioned above, it still affords many positives like giving measurable goals and thorough feedback.

Conclusion

To be effective, education cannot look the same for every single student. As a teacher, it will be a constant struggle to balance feasibility and efficiency with individualization and differentiation. Through the practices and principles discussed above, it will be possible for me to succeed in finding this balance in my own classroom, even though that balance will change every time I encounter a new group of students. It won't be easy, but it is a challenge I feel prepared and excited to take.

Conclusion

Classroom management is a surprisingly broad term and there are so many details to address when creating a plan for it. Procedure, rules, routines, restoration, environment, layout, culture, grading, and individual needs all have to be thought through carefully. By doing the research and planning in advance, I have prepared myself more fully to enter a classroom of my own. Once I do, the process of refining my classroom management plan begins, and it doesn't stop until I retire, because there are always things that can be improved for the sake of the students with whom I am entrusted and to whom I am dedicating my career.

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