


Winter 1-2009

# Exploring Classroom Management with Young Learners

Amin Ismail Abdullah

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# Exploring Classroom Management with Young Learners

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in  
Teaching degree at the SIT Graduate Institute.  
Brattleboro, Vermont

October 1, 2009

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This project by Amin I. Abdullah is accepted in its completed form.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Project Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

Project Reader \_\_\_\_\_

### Acknowledgements

This IPP is the final step in my effort to obtain a MAT, TESOL degree. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge and respectfully thank all those at SIT Graduate Institute who helped me achieve this goal. First and foremost, I extend immense gratitude to Marshall Brewer who was my reader. He worked just as hard as me and maybe in even harder in getting this paper complete. I can never thank him enough. Also thanks to my advisor, Leslie Turpin whose patient guidance guided this paper from beginning to end. The following is a list of other significant faculty and staff although this list is not exhaustive. Susan Barduhn, Michael Ireland, Sharon Swartz, Pat Moran, Alex Silverman, Sehoon Ahn, Minhee Kang, Tony Drapelick and Joyce Harris. I thank you all.

## Abstract

This paper explores the definition of classroom management and establishes the author's definition of classroom management and the underlying principles behind it. Thereafter, it examines some aspects of the author's system of classroom management, specifically, the classroom as a *Safe Space*, behavior management, the teacher as a facilitator and the classroom environment. Finally, the paper concludes with an appeal to educators to reflect on their own classroom management practices and offers resources for those wishing to further explore the subject.

## Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors

Young Learners  
Classroom Management  
Active Learning  
Student-centered  
Elementary School Teachers  
Teacher Attitudes  
Teacher Effectiveness  
Classroom Techniques  
Creative Teaching

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## **Introduction: Classroom Management**

### ***Think about it!***

*What does classroom management mean to you? Is there a difference between classroom management and discipline, or are they synonymous? Where do your classroom management practices come from? What are your core beliefs about teaching and learning, and how do they guide your classroom management practices?*

When I ask any teacher whether classroom management is important in the classroom, almost all teachers immediately reply that it is of the utmost of importance. When I then ask these same teachers what classroom management is, first of all, most are at a loss to find a definition and those who do find an answer do so in a very limiting and constricted manner, such as to refer to classroom management as discipline in the classroom. When I then ask that same group of teachers to explain their specific system of classroom management, most are completely at a loss. The reality is that most teachers do not actively think about classroom management though all will readily agree that it is important and an essential part of the teaching/learning\* milieu. Even those who do think about classroom management often equate it with discipline. It is for these reasons that I chose to write my IPP on classroom management. Even though I will share some of the components of my personal system of classroom management, I am more concerned that educators begin to look at their classroom management practices and begin to make conscious and more effective classroom management decisions.

## **Classroom Management**

What is classroom management? The reality is that there are multitudes of definitions of classroom management put forth by professionals. I will not look at them here, but we will examine a few in the conclusion of this paper where I will present a list of classroom management resources for those who want to look more into the subject. At this point, suffice it to say that most definitions of classroom management that I have come across focus on one aspect of classroom functioning such as, teacher-student relations, discipline or course

\* Throughout the paper, teaching and learning will be represented as teaching/learning as I firmly believe they always occur simultaneously. This belief is central to my classroom management system.

content. Harry K. Wong offers a definition which is more comprehensive. He says that classroom management is the practices and procedures that allow teachers to teach and students to learn. (2004) I take a slightly different view. I define it as the managing of all aspects of the classroom in such a way as to insure the maximizing of time to be used for teaching/learning. My definition focuses more on the construct of time and the importance of using it to facilitate teaching/learning. Time can only be used effectively if other essential aspects of the class are taken care of. For instance, if the teacher has effective behavior management in place, they will use less time in this area allowing more time to be used for teaching/learning. Likewise, if the students function autonomously, the teacher has to spend far less time doing many administrative actions the students can do themselves. Again, this saved time can be devoted to increased teaching/learning.

### **Core Beliefs**

It is important to reflect upon the core beliefs that guide one's teaching/learning practices because these same core beliefs guide classroom management practices as well. My core beliefs concerning teaching are the following:

Students learn best

- when they feel safe, valued, respected and accepted.
- in teaching/learning environments in which they are co-constructors of all aspects of the teaching/learning milieu.
- when lessons are both communicative and experiential.
- through mutual cooperation and collaboration with each other.
- when their autonomy is facilitated and encouraged.

As such, the system of classroom management I adopt must reflect these core beliefs. This manifests itself in very specific ways in my classroom environment. First and foremost, students in my class quickly learn to take responsibility for the academic choices they make

and the ensuing consequences. Also, students quickly learn that they are each others' best resource which greatly increases the learning that takes place regularly and in many different ways. These core beliefs guide a very effective and powerful system of classroom management.

### **Classroom Atmosphere**

These core beliefs produce a very specific and intentional atmosphere in the classroom. In a classroom founded upon such core beliefs, there is no room for authoritarianism. I must necessarily respect my students. I cannot function as an autocrat. As such, the classroom environment becomes more familial in nature. My goal is that all classroom participants become valued to all other participants. This is important because such relaxed camaraderie relieves much of the tension that might be present in the absence of such camaraderie which gives more time for teaching/learning.

### **A Note to the Reader**

As mentioned before, classroom management covers all aspects of the teaching/learning milieu. All of the various aspects are very much connected and it is difficult at times to determine where one begins and the other ends. To examine a complete and comprehensive system of classroom management would take a good-sized book. Instead, I will present a few areas of classroom management that seem central to my entire system. I am writing these chapters so that they can stand alone. It is my intention that this paper can be used as a reference allowing readers to be able to read and use each specific chapter as a stand alone reference on that particular area of classroom management. At the same time, I will show how these specific aspects together create a comprehensive and interconnected system in my teaching. I offer this system not as *the* system for others, but as an example of how to approach classroom management as a system of interconnected elements whose links with one another are as important as their stand-alone properties.

As you read, you will notice an absence of referential notes to the theories of scholars to support the classroom management system I present here. This is because my system has evolved primarily from my experience in teaching in many environments and with many diverse student populations. As my intention here is primarily to get educators thinking more consciously about classroom management, I invite the researching of the practices and concepts I put forth here. I don't pretend that my system is original in every way. In fact, I am aware that the system I present is nothing more than a combination of many classroom components developed by others that have been around forever. Although I cannot credit them specifically, I would like to acknowledge and extend gratitude to all who in any way contributed to the ideas and concepts I present in this paper. I can only take credit for putting their ideas together to create a unique system of classroom management.

### **Organization**

Throughout the paper, I devote one chapter for each of the areas of classroom management. Chapter One is devoted to *Safe Space*. A *Safe Space* classroom is one in which all participants feel safe and secure at all times and under all circumstances. I explain how to establish the safety and trust associated with a *Safe Space* teaching/learning environment. I also show how *Safe Space* is the centerpiece of my classroom management system.

Chapter Two focuses on ways to establish effective behavior management in the classroom. This system has three tiers. The first tier involves the individual student. The second tier involves the small group (usually three to five students per group). Finally, the entire class is considered. The emphasis is on helping students first become accountable for their own actions and choices, but ultimately to be responsible to the class as a whole in maintaining a safe and trusting atmosphere.

Chapter Three focuses on the role of the teacher as facilitator in the classroom. I see the role of the teacher primarily as that of facilitator. He/she facilitates lessons and includes the students in all aspects of the teaching/learning process. The students should be involved in the planning of lessons as well as the assessment of learning. The teacher should also devise and implement systems to elicit feedback from students.

Chapter Four examines some of the environmental factors of classroom management. I will look at some of the effective elements necessary to maximize teaching/learning.

The final chapter, the conclusion, presents resources from other classroom management systems. It will include references to books and websites devoted to classroom management.

### **“Think About It!”**

Each chapter is preceded by several focus questions to help the reader think about key issues explored in that chapter. The purpose of these questions is intended to spark awareness in the reader rather than produce specific answers. I must confess that I do not feel that I am an exceptional teacher in any way. The system of classroom management I present here works very well for me...most of the time. Then there are those days where nothing I try works well. Also, the system I present is constantly evolving as I continue to teach in different settings and under different circumstances. What is important is that I use a system whereby I try something, reflect upon what I tried, derive lessons from the process, and make necessary adaptations in my practice and then start the process all over again. One of the primary focuses of the paper is to advise the reader to follow this same process in their teaching practice. Reflect, reflect, reflect. If educators develop this habit in their teaching practice, they will inevitably create a system of classroom management which is far better than the one I present here. In fact, it will be perfect because it will directly represent the teacher's core beliefs, experience and perspective.

## Safe Space

### ***Think about it!***

*How does safety in the classroom relate to teaching/learning? What do you do to create a safe environment in your class? How can you create a safe classroom environment in the absence of posted rules? In what way does a safe environment create advantages for teaching/learning?*

The concept of the classroom being a Safe Space is central to my system of classroom management. Safety is not referring to just physical safety, although physical safety is included. In a Safe Space classroom, all participants must be safe in all ways and at all times. The safety includes but is not limited to, being safe from emotional abuse, psychological abuse, physical abuse, ridicule, being belittled, excluded, and not being heard. It is best to establish the classroom as a Safe Space at the beginning of the year, but not on the first day. The class should first do ice-breakers designed to allow participants in the teaching/learning environment to become familiar with each other. These few days will also allow the teacher to get a feel for the collective culture of the classroom. The students will also have an opportunity to get an idea about where the teacher is coming from and what to expect in the class. If this important window of opportunity is missed at the beginning of the course, a Safe Space can still be established effectively later, but the procedures will vary slightly. Also, sufficient time should be allowed for the establishment of the class as a Safe Space. Ideally, one to three hours are needed, but in some cases, more time may be needed. In any case, however much time it takes, it is time well spent as the payoff in terms of classroom management is immensely immeasurable.

### **Definition**

It is important to differentiate between a Safe Space and a safe place. To regard the concept as a safe place places debilitating limitations on the concept. If it is referred to as a safe place, the focus will be placed more on the physical space of the classroom. That is, the classroom itself will be considered safe. Safe Space as I define it refers to all participants in

the teaching/learning environment no matter where they are at any given time. This is especially true for the regular participants (students and teachers), but also just as true for any visitors to the class and extends to special classes such as Art or P. E. The safety also extends to other areas of the teaching/learning environment such as the playground.

### **Phase One: Introduce Concept**

Many teachers may feel that their classroom is safe, but if the following steps are followed, there is potential to have an extremely safe, accepting and all-inclusive atmosphere within the teaching/learning environment. The first step is to introduce the concept of Safe Space to the students. This should be done by simply referring to the class as a Safe Space and expressing a desire to make the class truly safe. After introducing the concept, get students to agree that they do indeed wish the class to be a Safe Space. This should be done by referring to Safe Space in general terms and focusing on the benefits of teaching/learning in a Safe Space environment. This initial collective agreement to make the class a Safe Space is important and time should be spent to secure it before moving forward. In order for the concept of Safe Space to work, all or almost all participants must be invested in its success.

### **Phase Two: Collective Input**

After all participants are sufficiently interested in making the class a Safe Space, the teacher should then ask the students what the elements are that make a teaching/learning environment safe. Students may be reluctant to offer input, but patiently persist because with a little encouragement, they always come through. In fact, the teacher can learn a lot about the collective culture of the class by how they define Safe Space and what they consider safe and unsafe. As students give input, the teacher should write their input in two columns on the board. One column should be designated for things that should be done in a Safe Space, and one for those things that should not be done in a Safe Space. It is not necessary to label the two columns. As the students give input, the teacher should also give sincere input as well.

This is important as co-construction is extremely important in effective classroom management as will be discussed more in the chapter on the teacher as facilitator.

### **Phase Three: Address Respect**

Students will almost always include respect as one of the elements of a Safe Space class, but in case the students do not include it, the teacher should be sure to do so. This is because respect is the center of a Safe Space class. All items on the two lists should be discussed, but respect should be given special emphasis. Start by asking the students to define respect. They usually start by expressing that students should respect the teacher but this may vary depending on the class. Remind students that they should also respect other students as well. Thereafter focus on the importance of respecting the physical environment and sanctity of the entire teaching/learning environment. Students should also be reminded to respect themselves and always carry themselves with dignity and respect. Finally students should be reminded that the teacher must also respect the students. This is extremely important because students need to feel totally accepted and valued in order to learn best. Starting a course by committing to respect students establishes an atmosphere in which students are likely to be more open and more receptive to the teaching/learning taking place. This is because such an atmosphere greatly reduces students' affective filter which prevents students from taking in information from lessons. I find that students are usually surprised initially by this different approach but they tend to respond very positively.

### **Phase Four: Shared Understanding**

As mentioned above, if possible, all items on the list should be discussed at length openly within the class. Emphasis should be placed on allowing *students* to define exactly what each item means and why it is important. The purpose is to attain a collective shared understanding of each item. This is especially important because it is this shared understanding that will act as the main regulator of behavior in the future. There is never a



pat set of rules displayed and referred to in a Safe Space classroom. This shared understanding of what is safe and what is unsafe provides students with the means to check their behavior as well as how to interpret the actions and behaviors of others including the teacher.

At this point, it should be established how instances of unsafe behavior will be approached in the class. The procedure is simple. Anytime a participant notices something that he/she regards as unsafe, they need only mention, "That is unsafe." Teacher and student must commit that when this statement is uttered, the offending behavior, action or speech will cease and desist immediately. Note that in a mono-cultural class, discussion and analysis of the offending action is not necessary and is in fact discouraged. This is because the students are already familiar with the norms, values and mores of the culture so understanding comes easier among students. On the other hand, in multi-cultural classes, it might be necessary to stop the class and discuss unsafe behaviors so that students are aware of why the offending behavior is unsafe. In either case, when a Safe Space is properly established, unsafe or unwanted behaviors are marginalized and not allowed to interfere with the teaching/learning taking place in the class. The teacher should have students role-play several examples including those in which the teacher does something unsafe so that the procedure is firmly established.

### **Phase Five: Class Contract**

Next, introduce the concept of a contract to students. Place emphasis on the sanctity of a contract and the importance of one honoring any contract they enter into. Inform students that since everyone agrees that the class should a be a Safe Space, both teacher(s) and students will now enter into a contract which means we will all be committed to making the class a Safe Space. Thereafter the teacher should sign the contract as well as each student. The contract can take any form the teacher and/or students decide. I usually use a

large poster board where I trace my right hand in the center of the poster, and sign my name in the center of my hand print with colored markers. I then allow each student to do the same creating a very colorful poster contract. When I have multiple classes where an individual poster for each class is not feasible, we would just sign our names on a sheet of paper with various colored markers, and then glue the individual contracts on a poster with each class's name clearly and brightly portrayed. Once all participants have signed the contract, it should be posted in a highly conspicuous place in the class and left up for the entire year. After the contract has been displayed, the lists about what is safe and unsafe should be erased from the board.

### **Safe Space vs. Rules (Do's and Don'ts)**

Let us now examine the contrasts between the Safe Space contract and the more commonly used Do's and Don'ts of classroom rules. One will notice that there is no reference to a set of rules to be posted and even the list of what is safe and unsafe is erased from the board after each item has been discussed and understood by all participants. Rules are finite in that one can only refer to them as they appear written. What happens when a student does something that is not specifically referred to in the set of rules? What happens with the student who is constantly challenging the rules? What happens when circumstances that initially required a rule change so that the rule is no longer relevant as written? In these cases, a teacher might find the rules a hindrance that takes away time that could be used for teaching/learning. In a Safe Space class, the system evolves with the class because what is safe for one person may be unsafe for another. In spite of that and because of that, there is a collective agreement that if someone thinks something is unsafe, that action, behavior or speech must stop immediately. In this way, the participants are able to summarily address the disruptive behavior without drawing undue attention to it. There are usually many instances of unsafe behavior in the beginning until students get to know each other and get used to the

system. Thereafter, the instances keep decreasing until there is hardly ever an instance of unsafe behavior in the classroom. This is not the case with rules. Students may adapt to the rules and become consistent in not breaking them, but there will continue to be instances of disruptive behavior throughout the year that is inadequately addressed by the rules. For these reasons, I believe a Safe Space is much more effective than a ruled based system in freeing time that can be used for teaching/learning making it an effective classroom management tool.

## **Behavior Management**

### ***Think About It!***

*What type of behavior do you recognize more in your classroom? How do you address inappropriate behavior in your classroom? Are you in the habit of punishing students for inappropriate behavior? What system do you use to deal with disciplinary issues in your classroom? What is the general structure of all student behavior in your classroom?*

Behavior management is another important area of classroom management to consider. For many educators, behavior management is synonymous with discipline or the management of disruptive behavior in the classroom. There is a good reason for this. In many classrooms, the following scenario prevails. I have found that in most classrooms, the majority of students will be average and generally compliant with classroom rules and they usually get passing grades. They are rarely disruptive. Then there are the “high-achievers” who are also rarely disruptive although extreme boredom could lead to some disruptive behavior. Finally, there are the “low-achievers” who can be very disruptive. The source of the disruptive behavior varies greatly and may include a genuine inability to learn, a troubled life outside of class or a learning style incompatible with the teacher’s style of teaching. So the teacher may teach primarily to the average students, provide some supplemental work to the “high-achievers” and spend a large amount of time managing the disruptive behavior of the “low-achievers” while at the same time trying to get them to learn. This illustration is not representative of every classroom. Actual classroom conditions may vary greatly from class to class. The information in this chapter is intended to be used by any and all educators. Therefore, it is important to read with an eye to extract what is relevant and useful to you in your particular teaching/learning situation.

### **The Individual and the Community**

Classroom behavior can be managed in such a way that there is minimal disruptive behavior and much more time can be devoted to teaching/learning. This management can

also be achieved without ever punishing the student. The key is to create a classroom atmosphere in which positive and productive behaviors are highlighted while disruptive behaviors are marginalized. Having a Safe Space class helps in this regard, but there is much more that can be done. The key is to deemphasize the individual student in classroom behavioral matters while maintaining the value of each individual student, and help all students develop a greater sense of community in which they cooperate and collaborate as they learn. There are many benefits to this group approach to teaching/learning. Most students are much less likely to become disruptive when part of a group setting. This is because students usually develop a sense of responsibility towards the group. (I will discuss ways to build this sense of responsibility shortly.) Students are also able to support each other as they learn and this is very helpful.

### **The Three Tiers**

The students of the class should be organized into a three tier system. The first level is the individual student. The next level would be pairs or small groups. The final tier is the entire class. Each tier should be adequately addressed by the teacher. There are many ways of organizing the students and I have used many methods over the years. How the teacher ultimately organizes students depends on many factors including the number of students, degree of homogeneity, and variation in academic levels among students. In this chapter, I will outline a generic method of organization while addressing some of the major areas of importance.

Even though I propose a three tier system of student organization, I fully acknowledge that each individual student is extremely important and a teacher must be attentive to each and every student in the class. I will address student-teacher relations in the chapter on teacher as facilitator. All students must be made to feel secure and accepted regardless of academic ability or behavioral manifestations. In this regard, the teacher must be fair and

consistent in all discipline procedures. All students should be made aware of exactly what to expect and all students should be treated equally. Organizationally, each student should be assigned a number. This number will be used for many things including motivational efforts. There is no big deal about choosing the number. Personally, I usually just use the number next to the student's name on the roster.

As far as groups and pairs are concerned, there are several variations possible. Firstly, students should be permanently placed in small groups which will function together throughout the duration of the course. These groups will learn to work together and support each other throughout the year. Even though the students will work in other groups and in pairs, this main group will act as an anchor for the student. Students in these permanent groups become very close and supportive of each other. Care should be taken to insure variety within the groups. There should be at least one high and one low achiever in each group. There should also be one outspoken and one subdued person in each group. The point is to put as much variety in the group as possible.

Some ways the small group supports its members is as follows: Students call each other to get missed homework assignments. Students share school supplies. Students also remind each other to behave appropriately in class. Since students will be in these permanent groups the duration of the course, care should be taken to insure each group is ideally suited to be together. This may take a few weeks of adjustment. Throughout the year the students will work in other temporary, short-term groups and pairs as they engage in class work. Such short-term groups and pairs will be organized according to the needs at the time the group or pair is formed.

### **The Star Charts**

Now let us turn to ways to use this three tiered system to motivate students and minimize disruptive behavior. The star chart is the most effective at all three tiers. A star

chart is one on which are posted star-shaped stickers representing some achievement, great or small. Young learners are usually particularly fond of stickers and especially star shaped stickers, so this is usually an excellent way of motivating them. Let's turn first to how this can be used with individual students. As mentioned earlier, each student has been assigned a number. A large poster chart should be made with each student's number only. Thereafter, anytime a student does something noteworthy in the class, they will be allowed to place a star on their area of the poster. At first the teacher primarily decides what is noteworthy, but as time goes on, students also speak out about what is noteworthy behavior from students. I have found that in most classes, students also point out noteworthy behavior from the teacher, sometimes insisting that the teacher also be included in the star system. This placement of a star on the chart by a student can take place at any time during the class and should not disrupt the teaching/learning taking place. Students should be trained from the beginning that when they are allowed to place a star on the chart, they should do so quietly and quickly. It is a simple process and simple procedure, but highly meaningful to the students. Note that student's actual names should not be written on the poster. This is important because ultimately there will be some students who get many stars while some students get few stars. If only the student's number is used, it provides some degree of anonymity which prevents both arrogance stemming from receiving many stars or sadness from receiving few stars. Also, the teacher should make an effort to insure that every student receives at least a few stars so that there is no student without any stars at all.

This individual star chart can be used in so many effective ways that it is impossible to list them all here. How it is used is limited only by the imagination and resourcefulness of the teacher. I use it mostly for encouraging acceptable student behavior. As mentioned in the chapter on Safe Space, disruptive behavior is marginalized, but through the star chart, acceptable behavior is acknowledged, encouraged and rewarded by all participants in the

teaching/learning environment. Students may also earn stars by any behavior which is considered outstanding. Low achievers may also earn stars for making effort or improving. There can be a rewarding of prizes periodically to the students with the most stars, but this is not absolutely necessary for the system to work. Also, both the marginalizing of disruptive behavior and highlighting of acceptable behavior takes place in such a way that almost no time is taken away from teaching/learning. This proves to be a highly effective system of classroom management.

At the group level, the star chart is just as effective in building acceptable group behavior. I usually couple the star chart with some kind of tactile item to make it work better. For instance, I might give each student three small interlocking blocks at the beginning of the year which they keep on their desks at all times. The students are instructed that if they make any disruptive behavior, they must take one of their blocks and place in a basket that sits on my desk. But the students are in a group of about four students and they are instructed that at the end the day, if their group collectively has not lost more than say five blocks, they get to put a star for their group on the group star chart. Each group will have a space for stars on the chart. I set a prize or goal for the group that earns a certain amount of stars first or who has the most stars by a certain time. As time goes on, I gradually reduce the number of blocks the group can lose until finally, all groups have all blocks at the end of the day, which translates to acceptable group behavior which in turn translates to acceptable individual behavior. Once I combined group efforts with class efforts by specifying that once a certain number of stars accumulated on the group star chart including all groups, the class would be able to get a class pet. That was a particularly difficult class but by combining both the group and class efforts, I was able to get order in the class fairly quickly because they all worked towards getting the class pet. Another time, I coupled the group star chart with marbles. I kept a bowl of marbles on my desk and an empty small jar. Instead of a group putting a star



when earned, they would put a marble in the jar. When the jar was full, the class earned some reward.

Star charts can be used other ways as well. For instance, at the class level stars can be used on a class star chart. One way of doing this is to place a poster next to the Safe Space contract and stars placed on that are earned by the class. If I notice all students are on task, I may ask a student to place a star on the class star chart. Also, if the class makes a transition from one lesson to another swiftly and orderly, the class gets a star. This is highly effective at the beginning of the course and becomes gradually less important as the class settles into a routine of productive, responsive behavior, but this star chart is an excellent way to build this desired behavior from the class.

### **Discipline**

Thus far, we have looked at ways to create the most ideal behavior in the classroom. If all that I have presented concerning behavior management is executed adequately, there are still likely to be instances of unacceptable behavior in the classroom. It is to be expected when teaching young learners. Yes, there is still room for and often a need for discipline even in a Safe Space class. When discipline is called for, it must be humane. Teachers should not punish students because the student has made them angry. If a teacher becomes angered by a student's behavior, they should not deal with the student right away. I sometimes count to ten or even twenty before addressing the behavior and student. If possible, it might be best to postpone dealing with the student at all until the teacher has a chance to calm down. This is extremely important because students should not be left feeling they are being punished or controlled. I define discipline as helping students learn to regulate their own behavior, including the reasoning involved in the process. Following this line of reasoning, every disciplinary event should attempt to bring the student closer to this goal of self regulation. The disciplinary system I propose has four steps.

1. remedial intervention if necessary
2. insure the student understands clearly why the behavior is inappropriate
3. elicit from the student alternative choices he/she could have made prior to the inappropriate behavior
4. help the student develop a plan for more appropriate behavior in the future

By remedial intervention, I mean that the teacher should immediately address any untoward effects of the inappropriate behavior. For instance, if the behavior endangers another student, the teacher should act immediately to restore safe conditions. The safety of the student becomes the top priority at that point. Another example is if the inappropriate behavior results in destruction of property, again the teacher must take immediate take action to halt the behavior. One final example is if the behavior disrupts or threatens to disrupt teaching/learning. In all these cases, the teacher's first priority is to restore order. Thereafter, the teacher will move on to step two. In the absence of any emergency effect requiring remedial intervention, the teacher should move directly to step two.

Step two is crucial in the process because it is at this step that the student clearly understands why the offending behavior is inappropriate. As educators, we often assume that our young students know what is appropriate and inappropriate if for no other reason than because we told them at an earlier time. Such is not the case. Regardless of how many times they may have been told, some students just don't grasp the inappropriateness of certain behaviors. There are many reasons for this inability to understand, not the least of which is cultural differences between the student's home/culture, and the environment/culture of the classroom. What is inappropriate in the classroom may be totally acceptable at home. Therefore, the teacher must take time to help the student understand why a behavior is inappropriate within the classroom setting. This can be done in several ways. Firstly, if possible, draw support from the student's core group. Many times, if the student's cohorts

explain why the behavior is inappropriate, it is easier for the student to understand quicker and without any bad feelings. Another option is for the teacher to meet with the student one-on-one to help her/him understand. Another option is to discuss the offending behavior with the entire class. This is especially helpful with behaviors that several or many of the students in the class may be having difficulty with. Regardless of the method used, once the teacher is sure the student understands why the behavior is inappropriate, the teacher and student should move on to step three.

Step three requires the student to reflect on the behavior with the focus being what the student could have done differently to achieve a better outcome. This process of reflection has many benefits and the most important is helping the student to connect his/her behavior with the consequences of such behavior. Through this reflection, the student gets practice in making choices that will bring acceptable consequences, which almost always leads the student to step four which is to make plans for preventing the offending behavior from occurring in the future.

As one reads this paper, it may seem to be a long and drawn out process. In fact, such is not the case at all. Although it may initially take time as the students become accustomed to the process, after it has become an established classroom practice, it takes very little time away from teaching/learning. Also, since the classroom is collectively oriented, the students eventually go through this among themselves without the help of the teacher, especially in the core groups.

As I conclude this chapter, I remind the reader that the components of classroom management are connected and interdependent. Although the behavior management system proposed here has the potential to work in any classroom, it works best in a Safe Space classroom. This is because these two components of classroom management complement each other. Safe Space provides the safety for students to safely learn how to regulate their

own behavior. At the same time, the system of behavior management proposed here is extremely safe for students and is free of punishment which fits very well in a Safe Space classroom.

## Teacher as Facilitator

### *Think About It!*

*What is the teacher's role in the classroom? Is your classroom student-centered or teacher-centered? Out of the total teaching/learning time in your classroom, what percentage do you spend talking or lecturing? What is the nature of your relationship with each of your students? What is the nature of your relationship with your class as a whole?*

“Good morning class. I am your teacher and I expect everyone to listen to what I say. I am an expert in my subject and if you listen carefully to my lectures, you can learn a lot. Are there any questions?” Though slightly exaggerated, this is the general attitude of many teachers in the traditional teacher-centered classroom. I have found that many teachers present themselves as experts ready and willing to share their knowledge with their students. The students are expected to humbly accept what the teacher has to offer. The teacher usually spends a lot of time lecturing the students. The students who are motivated may learn a lot. Likewise, those students inclined toward this style of teaching may also benefit. But those students needing to engage more with the content of a class may not get as much benefit, although they may pass the class. I refer to actual learning which includes a deeper understanding of the lessons taught, the ability to recall information when needed, and the ability to integrate learning in novel and practical situations. In a traditional teacher-centered classroom, there may little actual learning going on, and a lot of memorization. I am not speaking of memorization as if it has no place in an effective classroom but I don't think memorization alone is enough for all students to learn. Most likely, the teacher will not notice this absence of actual learning and there is a good chance that those supervising her/him won't notice either. If students are successfully passing exams, the teacher will most likely be regarded as a skilled and successful teacher.

“Good morning students. This morning we are going to learn about this subject. Let's start by hearing what you already know about this subject. Can anyone share with us what they know about this subject?” This is a typical statement from a teacher who teaches

in a student centered classroom. Students are respected and valued by the teacher. Also, in the student centered classroom the teacher values what the students bring with them into the classroom. Typically, lessons start from and incorporate the knowledge students bring with them. In other words, all lessons start from and take into account what the student already knows. The student is viewed as an essential component of the teaching/learning process. In fact, the teacher functions primarily as a facilitator in a student centered classroom. In other words, the teacher structures lessons and creates an atmosphere where students are allowed to discover concepts on their own with minimal teacher input.

### **Establishing the teacher-student relationship**

The student-teacher relationship is of primal importance. Stated concisely, the teacher must develop a productive working relationship with each student. This working relationship has to be built systematically. The first step in this process is to try to learn each student's name. Thereafter, the teacher addresses students by their name when speaking to them or about them. This may seem like a small thing, but it goes a long way in making students feel acknowledged and valued. When students feel valued, it helps them become more inclined to participate in the class which is extremely important in a student centered classroom. Along with learning students' names, the teacher should also allow the students genuine access. The teacher should take an interest in the students and show concern for students as whole persons. This does not mean becoming overly involved in the personal affairs of the students, but it does mean that the teacher need not be so professional that they appear distant and unapproachable. In a student-centered classroom the teacher allows students to approach him/her more freely. In other words, students are able to ask questions outside of the lesson which is very helpful for students who might be too shy to ask questions in front of the rest of the class. Also, teachers make themselves available to speak with

students personally as long such conversations do not cross the line. I have not seen this kind of approachability is in teacher-centered classrooms.

I am not advocating that all professional barriers between teachers and students be removed such that teachers and students function as close friends. The goal of the teacher is to facilitate a good *professional* working relationship that is conducive to teaching/learning. So to this end, the teacher should be friendly with the students, but at no time during the teacher-student relationship should she/he actually become friends with the students. This is a very important point and as such, I think the teacher should be explicit with the students from the beginning. Many students have difficulty in adjusting to a teacher-student relationship where the role of teacher and students are not defined clearly and openly. Even though the teacher's role should be that of facilitator, the teacher should clearly state from the beginning that he/she is there to help the students learn, and the students are there to learn. The teacher can also explain that almost always, both teacher and student are engaged in both teaching and learning simultaneously, but this is dependent upon the teaching style of the teacher. The teacher should explain to students that even though she is a friendly teacher, she can never be their friend. She must explain that there is line that exists between teacher and students, and that line must not be crossed by either student or teacher. Thereafter, the teacher and students must mutually decide where to draw the line. Actually, this is usually not a big deal and for the most part should be dealt with individually with students as I find that saying this is enough for most of the students to get the message and act accordingly. But there are some students who find it difficult to make the distinction and others who have difficulty maintaining the distinction. As a further precaution and to minimize these relational issues, the teacher can establish a routine in the class whereby either the teacher or the student can simply remind that, "You just crossed the line." This will be sufficient to guard against relationships crossing the bounds of a professional working relationship and it

empowers the students to establish their own personal boundaries which by mutual agreement will be respected by the teacher.

### **Facilitation**

Once the professional working relationships are established, the teacher can begin the process of facilitation. Clear open working relationships between the teacher and students remove much of the tension and stress building factors in the classroom preparing the stage for a tremendous amount of teaching/learning to take place. This is so because effective professional working relationships between teacher and students, when coupled with other classroom management components, eliminates or otherwise marginalizes almost all potentially disruptive influences in the classroom. At the same time, the teacher encourages students to inquire and the atmosphere supports this spirit of inquiry. Indeed, the teacher should structure lessons that foster and support this atmosphere of inquiry. Also, as much as possible, lessons should be structured so that they are both experiential and communicative in nature. By experiential, I mean that lessons should be connected to some experience which is meaningful to the student. By communicative I mean that as much as possible, the lesson should connect to a genuine need that the students have to communicate in real life. Such structuring of lessons should necessarily include an abundance of group and pair work among the students. This is important to allow students to combine their zeal to learn with other students' to create powerful teaching/learning opportunities. An environment is created whereby students are constantly teaching and learning simultaneously. Thus, when the teacher functions as a facilitator in the class, she/he creates conditions in which actual learning takes place. Or, as mentioned earlier, students develop the following skills: a deeper understanding of the lessons taught, the ability to recall information when needed, and the ability to integrate learning in novel and practical situations.



## **Classroom Environment**

### ***Think About It!***

*What kind of learning environment prevails in your classroom? What do you do to promote an ideal learning environment? Are students constantly learning in your class even when there is no conventional lesson taking place?*

The final component of classroom management we will explore is the classroom environment. Simply stated, the classroom environment is the culmination of all other classroom management efforts. The focus of a teacher's classroom management and their practices are readily apparent in the environment present in the classroom. In fact, an astute classroom observer may focus on the environment as a way to see beyond the specific lesson to the practice of teaching. The overall purpose of this paper has been to help educators consciously think about their classroom management practices and how to manage classrooms so that the maximum time in a classroom is spent on teaching/learning. I find that when I am able to put into practice most of what I present here, the environment in my classroom is charged with teaching/learning and almost all the time in the classroom is used for teaching/learning in one form or another.

Safe Space provides for a safe environment in which students can feel secure, accepted, valued and acknowledged. This safety greatly reduces the affective filter of students (Krashen, 1987). According to Krashen, if students feel anxiety, it interferes with the acceptance and understanding of language input, thus impeding learning. Structuring the teaching/learning environment to be a Safe Space reduces and all but eliminates anxiety which greatly enhances teaching/learning. Safe Space also creates an atmosphere in which learning is encouraged.

### **Making Mistakes**

Another aspect of a Safe Space class is that it helps create an ideal teaching/learning environment in which students are not afraid to make mistakes. In my classes, after

establishing the class as a Safe Space, I train the students immediately that it is not only acceptable to make a mistake, but we can often learn more from the mistakes than we can from correct answers. As a class we can explore why the student made the mistake and correct mistakes at a deeper level. I will ask the student why they made the mistake. I will ask what they were thinking when they arrived at the answer. The student will share what they were thinking, then we will work from the student's perspective until we can arrive at the correct answer. This way, the entire class will be free of the mistake in the future. To establish this process, I say early on when a student makes a mistake, "That was a wrong answer, but that was a very good wrong answer." The students are immediately intrigued and curious to know why I would make such an unusual statement. We discuss the mistake as a class and try to get at the root of the mistake. After some time, students will begin to look at mistakes in the same way and on their own, initiate discussion with minimal prompting from me. Thus, an environment is created in which students are not afraid to make mistakes as they learn.

### **Continuous Learning**

Another important environmental benefit of a Safe Space class is that since the atmosphere becomes so safe and stress free there is always teaching/learning going on. This teaching/learning is not restricted simply to the teacher providing official lessons and students learning those lessons. Students are also continually engaged in teaching and learning from each other. This is especially true since the students are always in pairs or groups. Also, students keep this commitment to teaching/learning as they engage in other activities or in other academic settings such as the playground. In fact, in my classes, students usually become so addicted to teaching/learning that they prefer to stay in the class for recess and continue teaching and/or learning. They continue this process even if I am not in the classroom.

In looking at the classroom environment, I have focused on the Safe Space class. The chapters on Teacher as Facilitator and Behavior Management also contribute significantly to a classroom environment in which the maximum amount of time is spent on teaching/learning. In Chapter 2, I mention how the system of behavior management reduces or eliminates disruptive behavior in the classroom. In the absence of disruptive behavior, students and teacher consistently gain momentum in spending more time teaching/learning. This is true because such behavior actually disrupts teaching/learning in the classroom. With minimal or no disruptions, not only is more time spent on teaching/learning, there is a momentum of teaching/learning. Teaching/learning is consistently increased until almost all time in the classroom is spent on it. Likewise, when the teacher functions as a facilitator in the class, students are left to engage with the material and discover the lessons on their own. The teacher does not tell the students what to think. This spirit of discovery brings lessons alive and greatly increases the engagement of the lessons by students. This creates an environment charged with discovery. Using the system of classroom management I propose, the resultant environment will be charged with the spirit of inquiry and discovery. There will be minimal disruptions and almost constant teaching/learning. Students will take responsibility for some of their own teaching/learning.

## **Conclusion**

### ***Think About It!***

*How do you assess your classroom management practices? What questions can you ask to be able to assess your current classroom management practices? How can you improve on your classroom management in the future?*

In this paper, I have presented the most important components of a classroom management system that has been very effective for me. Though I have had much success with this system, I reiterate that it has not been my goal in writing this paper that the reader accept and practice exactly what I present here. The goal of this paper is to get educators to consciously think about and reflect upon their own classroom management practices and the core beliefs which guide their practice. I present components of my system to facilitate the process of reflection by educators, especially those who teach younger learners. This paper has been written with a focus on young learners because that has been the crux of my experience. Readers should question everything presented here and determine where what I present fits into their own system based on their core beliefs about teaching. The bottom line is that classroom management practices must be consciously decided just as lessons are consciously planned. Observe your classroom and identify what your current classroom practices are. Thereafter, question and reflect. Are they effective in maximizing time spent on teaching/learning? Do your classroom management practices include all of your students in a positive and meaningful way? What is the nature of your relationship with each of your students and the class as a whole? What are your core beliefs behind all these practices? After asking yourself these and other reflective questions, you can then begin to make better classroom management decisions for the future.

### **Ways to assess**

Let's explore different areas you can look at as you explore your classroom management practices. Firstly, you can look at the overall environment present in your

classroom. How much do you as teacher lecture in your class? Are students having a chance to engage with the content of lessons? Are students having ample time to interact with each other as they learn? If your students routinely look bored and listless, it may be a sign that you are talking too much, and/or they are not having enough opportunities to actively engage with the content of lessons. If there is an average of one behavioral disruption per lesson, you might want to look closer at your behavior management practices. If students routinely argue and/or fight in your class, you might need to look closer at how relationships are structured in your class.

### **Resources**

I would like to share some resources that may prove helpful in exploring classroom management. Froyen and Iverson's *Schoolwide and classroom management: The reflective educator-leader* (1998) is a good resource for exploring classroom management especially in a reflective manner. John Schindler, Ph.D. has a brand new book titled, *Transformative classroom management: Creating a climate of responsibility, community and success*. (2009) It is a good source of well-rounded classroom management practices and community building within the classroom. Also, I offer two books for facilitating group work. First, *Designing groupwork* by Elizabeth Cohen (1986) Ms. Cohen offers a step by step guide to facilitating group work in the classroom including the resultant benefits. *Group dynamics in the language classroom* by Dornyei and Murphey (2003) also give details on how to facilitate group work, but the focus is on a language classroom specifically. Wong's *The first days of school: How to be an effective teacher* (2004) focuses on classroom management from the perspective of establishing routines in the classroom. Finally, I offer two books that focus on discipline in the classroom. *One minute discipline* by Arnie Bianco (2002) is an excellent book on behavior management. It has a tremendous amount of ideas and strategies for developing and maintaining positive, productive behaviors in both students and teacher. It

also has strategies for motivating and encouraging students and actively engaging them in lessons. It even has strategies for effective communication with parents. The final book, *What to do with the kid who...* by Kay Burke (2008) is another excellent book on behavior management. It focuses on building effective cooperation as well as self-discipline. There is also a focus on strategies for dealing with the non-compliant student and inducing compliance.

### **Conclusion**

Thus we come to the end of our exploration of classroom management. It is my sincere hope that this paper has been inspirational in helping educator's bring classroom management to the forefront of their consciousness. I readily agree that classroom management is something that in effect, has to become second nature to us as educators. We cannot plan classroom management on a per lesson basis as we do lesson plans. This is because classroom management spans far more than one specific lesson. It involves as demonstrated in the paper, the general environment, teacher-student relations as well behavior management. These issues span entire courses and need to be both established and stable. Therefore, it is important to think about them preferably when planning a course, or at least when we first begin teaching a course. Also, it is important to include students in the planning and maintaining of classroom management as much as possible. Also, don't be afraid to simply look at what you already do and reflect on how to make your classroom management better. There is always room for improvement.

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