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A classroom management technique: Preparing the classroom as an effective learning environment – one means of preventive disciplines

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A classroom management technique: Preparing the classroom as an effective learning environment – one means of preventive disciplines

Abstract

A smooth-running classroom, free from disruption and chronic misbehavior but full of students involved in learning activities, does not just happen. Such classrooms exist because the teachers work at making it happen. These teachers give careful consideration to preparation of the classroom before the first day of the school year. Classroom management is one area the Educational Testing Service is working on to place in the teacher competency examinations they are preparing (Weber, et al., 1983). Because of this emphasis, classroom management may soon be a required class for graduation in the field of education.

A CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE: PREPARING THE CLASSROOM
AS AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT--ONE MEANS OF
PREVENTIVE DISCIPLINE

A Research Paper

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Master of Arts in Education

by

Kay Lents

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Entitled: A CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE: PREPARING THE
CLASSROOM AS AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT--ONE MEANS
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has been approved as meeting the research paper
requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Norman McCumsey

4/7/87
Date Approved

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Date Received

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A smooth-running classroom, free from disruption and chronic misbehavior but full of students involved in learning activities, does not just happen. Such classrooms exist because the teachers work at making it happen. These teachers give careful consideration to preparation of the classroom before the first day of the school year.

Classroom management is one area the Educational Testing Service is working on to place in the teacher competency examinations they are preparing (Weber, et al., 1983). Because of this emphasis, classroom management may soon be a required class for graduation in the field of education.

Present literature available on classroom management discusses strategies which involved establishing, maintaining, or restoring classroom conditions to promote appropriate student behavior so that effective and efficient instruction and learning would take place. Different authors expressed varying views on the effectiveness of certain managerial strategies, even when their basic premise was the same, so a consensus did not appear (Brophy & Putnam, 1978; Charles, 1981; Emmer et al., 1979; Howell, 1979; Paine, 1983). Authorities agree, however, on the importance of a positive and preventive approach. In a review of the literature by Weber and Roff of the University of Houston nearly 300 managerial strategies emerged (Weber, et al., 1983). Although

much has been written about many of the strategies, little empirical research exists to prove the effectiveness of those ideas.

Brophy and Putnam (1978) indicate that several polls show that teachers list classroom management as the first or second problem of concern. The best cure lies in avoiding the development of behavior problems by practicing preventive discipline (Peckenpaugh, N.E.A., 1974).

This paper treats classroom management as a means of prevention rather than remediation. While acknowledging that knowing how to deal with student behavior problems is important, this paper maintains that the most crucial skills necessary for successful managing of a classroom are those involving planning, organizing, and maintaining a learning environment where a maximum of learning takes place. These strategies minimize the need for dealing with problems (Brophy & Putnam, 1978). Creating and maintaining a classroom atmosphere which is conducive to learning is the main theme.

Any comprehensive treatment of classroom management must include many areas. Due to allowable space this paper will deal only with preparation of the classroom as an effective learning environment. There are, of course, many other elements of classroom management which must all be combined into an internally consistent and effective system

(Brophy & Putnam, 1978). While preparation of the classroom as an effective learning environment will be the major emphasis, pure isolation of an area becomes difficult, so some other phases will be mentioned.

Using a preventive approach assumes that children react to the circumstances existing in the classroom at any given time. The teacher prevents behavior problems by providing circumstances that motivate students to behave appropriately, rather than waiting for the problems to occur (Brophy & Putnam, 1978). The first step in combating misbehavior is the teacher's ability to analyze all aspects of the setting, knowing which elements of the classroom environment are assets or deficits. Time spent considering even the smallest detail of classroom size, shape, and composition before any students enter the classroom will be well rewarded (Howell & Howell, 1979).

In a study of effective teachers, a characteristic of operative planning emerged (Emmer & Evertson, 1979). Those teachers thought about the potential problems before the year began and made some preparations. They anticipated a too-small room, foresaw a shortage of materials, moved furniture out, and arranged the room for better movement. Included in the area of preparing the classroom are preparations of instructional procedures and rules (which

will not be covered in this paper), space, equipment, and materials.

The decisions a teacher makes before the year begins will have important consequences for the success of a proper learning environment (Eberle, 1984). This paper will deal with decisions which need to be made about walls and ceiling space, floor space, material and supply placement, student comfort, desk arrangement, room arrangement for traffic flow, arrangement for teacher monitoring, and group management.

The physical arrangement of a classroom includes walls and ceiling space, floor space, storage space and supplies, proper conditions for student comfort, and desk arrangement. For as much as seven hours a day, the rather small area for up to thirty persons must be a workspace for the students and the teacher. Furthermore, the activities will be varied and different areas of the room will be used (Paine, 1983). Arranging the classroom means considering desks, bookcases, filing cabinets, chairs, tables, audiovisual equipment, bulletin boards, maps, material storage, plants, and other miscellaneous items. All of these items involve decisions a teacher must make. Constraints must be considered (Charles, 1981). Is it really necessary to spend a lot of time figuring out the best physical arrangement of the classroom? Proper classroom arrangement affects student behavior in four areas:

student noise and disruptions can be decreased, the level and quality of student interactions can be improved, desirable student interaction can be increased, the percentage of time that students spend on academic tasks can be increased, and efficient use of space can be achieved (Paine, 1983).

Wall and ceiling space may be one place to begin in looking at room arrangements. Wall space and bulletin boards can be used to display student work, instructionally relevant material, decorative items, assignments, rules, schedules, a clock, and other items of interest. Ceiling space can be used to hang mobiles, decorations, and student work. There may be times when attractive objects seem to overpower self-control. At this point the teacher should remove the seductive object, with an explanation to the student that the removal is only temporary (Charles, 1981). Class rules, a place for listing daily assignments, and a decorative display should be up at the start of school. Other useful items might include an example of the correct paper heading and a content-relevant display.

Floor space comes into play because of the need for teacher monitoring and student movement within the classroom (Emmer, 1979). All furniture and equipment should be arranged so the teacher can easily observe students from any area where work will be done. Students should be able to see the

teacher, as well as the overhead/film screen and chalkboard. If chalkboards or electrical outlets are poorly spaced, the teacher may have to figure out how to work around those constraints (Charles, 1981). For a classroom that is too small all unnecessary furniture or equipment must be removed. If there is inadequate storage, perhaps an extra file or supply cabinet could be located.

When looking at a floor plan, the area of whole-class instruction must be considered. The teacher must determine where instruction will be given, perhaps considering the location of the chalkboard or the overhead projector screen. See Appendix A for examples of good room arrangements. Specific items to look at include the arrangement of student desks, classroom partitions, small-group areas, the teacher's desk, filing cabinets, overhead projector, bookcases, centers, plants, aquariums, and other special items (Paine, 1983).

Since many different arrangements of student desks are possible, the underlying consideration has to be that all students can see the whole-group teaching area without getting out of their seats, or sitting with their backs to that area (Brophy & Putnam, 1978). Another consideration is that the teacher must have an unobstructed view of all students. Only in this way can discipline problems be stopped before they start. Many researchers and theorists feel that the

more effective teacher monitors students well (Vasa, 1984). Unless a teacher knows the students well, placing desks in rows facing the chalkboard and separated from each other is probably the best plan. This can be changed later in the year. Several room arrangements in Appendix A show children's desks in clusters rather than rows; however, no child is seated with his/her back to the large-group instructional area. Desks which are separated and in rows will help minimize disruptions and unwanted interactions at times the students should be working independently. This arrangement also enables the teacher to move around the room with ease to praise students, help them if necessary, and correct work being done (Eberle, 1984). Ease of monitoring and the ability to draw students into learning activities is enhanced if the low performing students and students with behavior problems are in the front of the room (Paine, 1983). Disruptive students should not be seated next to each other for obvious reasons.

A tour of any school will find varied student seating arrangements. This is especially true in special subject classrooms, such as art or music. Students in these rooms are usually allowed some freedom of movement from seat to seat unless disruptive activities begin. At that point the offender is often given a designated seat (Eisenhart, 1977).

The room arrangement must accommodate traffic patterns, lines, and the separation of quiet and noise areas (Paine, 1983). High traffic areas should be free of students' desks as well as other furniture. These areas might include those in front of doors, water fountains, sinks, the pencil sharpener, or other traffic centers. Small animal areas, eye-catching displays, and windows are often distractors so desks should not be too close to such areas. Students may need to face away from windows to avoid the glare of the sun.

Teachers must consider many things to keep traffic flowing freely. They should plan everyday traffic patterns so that students do not bump into furnishings or each other. When students stand in lines, bottlenecks may occur; and the teacher will need to minimize the time students spend standing and waiting. Pupils engaged in an activity will have fewer discipline problems than those waiting in a line (Eberle, 1984). Often monitors can be appointed to help with time-consuming tasks such as passing out books or papers, checking out supplies, and making collections, to relieve the traffic congestion. Perhaps simply dispensing scissors, calculators, or paper from several places in the room might solve the problem (Brophy & Putnam, 1978). Worksheets could be checked as a group activity to avoid students going to a central location to hand in papers.

If a classroom has tables and chairs instead of desks, students should sit on only three sides of the tables if at all possible. Storage of student supplies can also be a problem in this situation, if space is not provided under the tables (Evertson, 1984). If shelves or carts are used to store totes with individual student supplies, they should be easily accessible. Their location must be carefully considered as students will probably visit the area frequently, with several students there at the same time.

After determining the arrangement of student desks, the teacher must select the space for his/her desk. While it is necessary for the teacher to see all students at all times, it is not necessary that all pupils be able to see the teacher if whole-group instruction is not taking place. Some teachers prefer to place their desks at the back of the classroom. If the desk is going to be used for the storage of instructional materials, however, it must be located near the large and small group areas (Charles, 1981). Teachers who work with individual students at the teachers' desks must look closely at the traffic patterns near the desks. One good rule to help keep the teacher's vision of the class open is to have no more than three pupils at the teacher's desk at a time (Eberle, 1984).

Filing cabinets, overhead projectors, teaching areas, centers, and other equipment must be placed appropriately where they are to be used and where traffic flow problems will not occur. Student chairs at centers should face the wall to prevent distractions (Emmer, 1979). These centers need to be in areas not frequently traveled; however, they must be in view of the teacher. Special equipment needed at a center might dictate location. One center might need a tape recorder with headphones or access to water. The teacher must make sure the instructions for equipment use are posted, or students at the center may distract others while seeking help (Paine, 1983).

Many classrooms look like disaster areas, not because the teacher is unorganized, but because planning for the storage of materials and supplies was not done (Brophy & Putnam, 1978). Pens, pencils, lesson plans, attendance records, and the like can easily be stored in the teacher's desk. Kleenex, rags, soap, extra lunch money for emergencies, a hammer, pliers, a screwdriver, and bandages are items many teachers will want. Storage of these items should be accessible to the teacher but not to the students (Charles, 1981). Seasonal and infrequently used items become quite numerous after only a few years of teaching. Piling such items around the room will create visual barriers and provide

distractions. Because ready access to these materials is not necessary, they may be stored at the back of a closet, on top of cabinets in boxes (perhaps covered with contact paper for attractiveness), or stored elsewhere in the building.

Teachers also need to consider the physical comfort of students. A comfortable child finds it easier to be well-behaved (Holliday, N.E.A., 1974). Every teacher must remember that classrooms without air conditioning in climates with afternoon temperatures of 95 degrees will necessitate some changes if discipline problems are to be avoided.

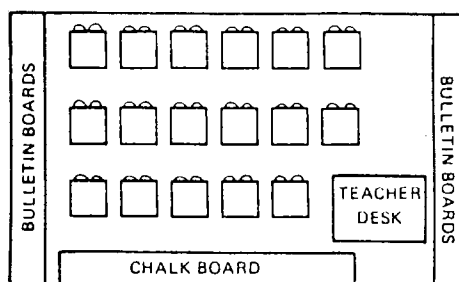
Student behavior and learning do not occur in a vacuum and cannot be isolated from all that exists in and around the classroom. One of the multitude of factors affecting student behavior and misbehavior is the physical environment where learning takes place. The classroom is the part of the physical environment over which the teacher has the most control. Thus, the above considerations in preparing the classroom are necessary for a teacher to be successful and avoid built-in discipline problems. All teachers must keep in mind how aspects of the physical environment may interfere with learning and contribute to disciplinary problems.

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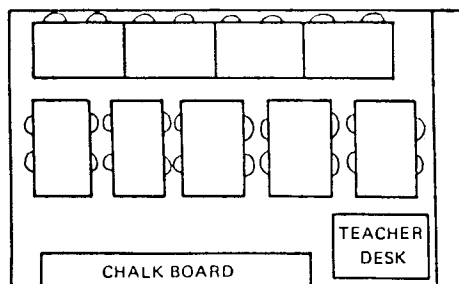
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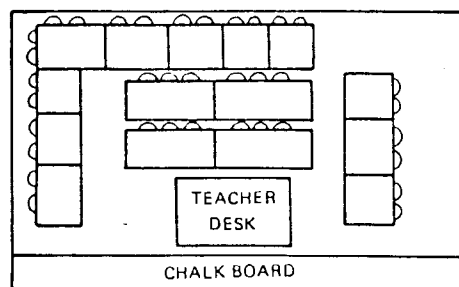
APPENDIX A



(a)

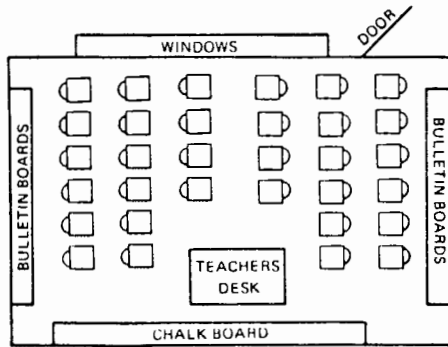
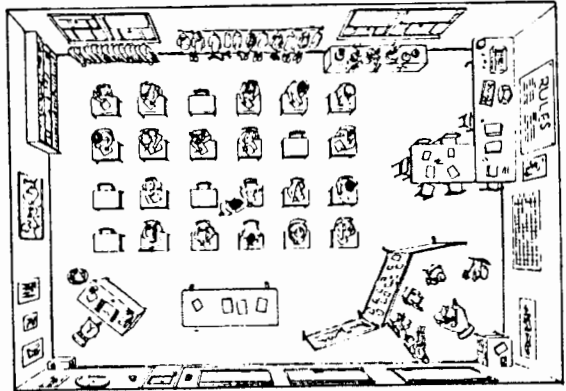


(b)

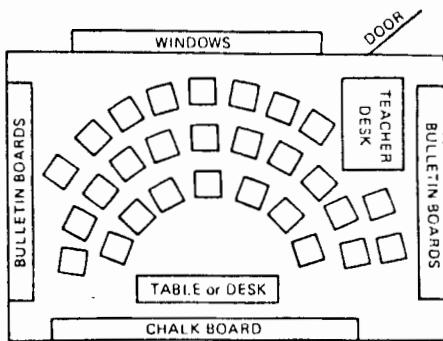


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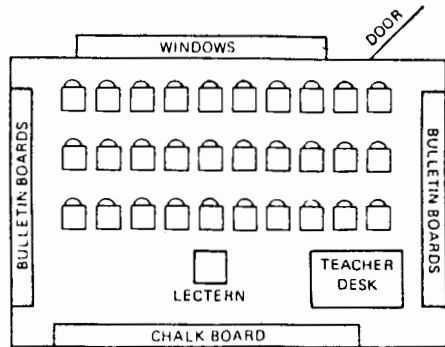
Variations on Seating Students in Groups—Diagrams



Two Halves of the Classroom Face Each Other



Amphitheatre Desk Arrangement



Conventional Rank and File Desk Arrangement