

Improving Classroom Management

Research suggests ways administrators and staff developers can help teachers with the important task of organizing and managing classrooms.

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The concept of classroom management is broader than the notion of student discipline. It includes all the things teachers must do to foster student involvement and cooperation in classroom activities and to establish a productive working environment. Characteristics of a well-managed class that are supported by research include the following:

1. There are high levels of student involvement with work, especially with academic, teacher-led instruction.
2. Students know what is expected of them and are generally pretty successful.
3. There is relatively little wasted time, confusion, and disruption.
4. The climate of the room is work-oriented but relaxed and pleasant.

In brief, a well-managed classroom is a task-oriented, predictable environment where children know what is expected of them and how to succeed. Research has shown that in a class such as this, most of the students will make good achievement gains (Good, 1982; Brophy, 1979; Medley, 1979).

Classroom Management Studies

Although studies of teaching have contributed to knowledge of effective classroom management, few research programs have focused specifically on management and organization of classrooms. Kounin's research (1970) laid the groundwork for research in this area by identifying several general characteristics of classroom management that were consistently related to good student behavior. More recently, at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas at Austin, a series of studies has been conducted to find out how teachers

establish and maintain classroom management.¹ During the past five years, researchers at the Center have observed the classrooms of over 200 teachers, from the first week of school to the middle or end of the year. The studies focused on the beginning of the school year to find out how effective teachers establish and maintain their management systems and to identify sources of management problems in the classes of less effective teachers. Very little information was previously available about this crucial time of the school year.

The first descriptive study, conducted in eight elementary schools, included 28 teachers with different levels of experience. The following year, 51 junior high school mathematics and English teachers participated in the study, with two of their class sections visited frequently by an observer. Data collected in about 25 hours of observation for every teacher in both studies included detailed descriptive narratives of classroom events and activities, measures of student engagement, ratings of specific teacher behaviors and strategies, ratings of disruptive and inappropriate student behavior, and logs of the use of class time.

At the end of each study, measures of student achievement and behavior were used to identify groups of very effective and less effective classroom managers. Although both the effective and the less effective groups included teachers with varied teaching styles, personalities, and experience, the two groups differed in the classroom management strategies they used. Moreover, the roots of a teacher's success or problems in managing a class could often be seen in the first weeks of school.

Keys to Management Success

Although some aspects of classroom management varied with students of different ages, similar principles of effective management appeared to operate in both elementary and junior high school classes. At the beginning of the school year, effective teachers showed evidence of careful planning and detailed thinking about procedures and student behavior in their classrooms. They planned routines that would help their classes function with a minimum of

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effort, and they had clear expectations for student behaviors in a wide array of classroom activities.

For example, when instructing small reading groups, effective elementary teachers anticipated:

—Movement of students into and out of groups

—Cues teachers would use to signal movement

—Means of informing students what materials to bring to groups

—Behavior expected of students in the group and those not in the group (expectations for talk among students, what students should do when they need help, what students should do when they finish their assignment, where students would get supplies)

—Communication of different seatwork assignments for different reading groups.

For more general aspects of student behavior, the effective managers had chosen a few appropriate rules to govern student behavior in the class and school building and had posted them in the classroom. They also planned a workable system of consequences—both rewards and penalties—for student misbehavior.

In the first days of school, effective classroom managers carefully taught students how to follow classroom procedures and rules. They explained, discussed rationales, demonstrated, had students rehearse or practice, gave accurate feedback, and reviewed or retaught as needed. Until procedures and rules were well established, teachers relied on whole-group activities that allowed them to stay in charge of all of the students continuously. They selected activities that would involve the students, allow them to be successful, and make them feel comfortable with their new class.

Once school was under way, effective teachers maintained their management system by actively monitoring student behavior and work, by stopping inappropriate behavior quickly, and by using appropriate consequences in a consistent manner. They maintained a flow of activities by using clear directions and instruction and by avoiding the slowdowns caused when many students fail.

They kept students accountable for completing assignments and gave them frequent feedback about their work. These strategies helped teachers maintain task-oriented classes that functioned smoothly throughout the year.

Developing and Testing Inservice Education Materials

Center researchers used the management principles that resulted from these studies to develop teachers' manuals to be used in experimental studies. The two manuals—"Organizing and Managing the Elementary School Classroom" and "Organizing and Managing the Junior High Classroom"²—used descriptive observation records from classes taught by effective managers as sources of case studies, illustrations, and management suggestions. Guidelines and checklists were provided to help teachers organize and plan for the beginning of the school year. To assess how well the manuals could help teachers establish and maintain well-managed classes, two field tests were conducted, one in elementary grades and another in middle and junior high grades. Both studies focused on relatively inexperienced teachers but included some who were more experienced.

In each study, two teacher groups, balanced for years of experience and grade or subject area, were formed before the year began. One group received a classroom management manual and attended two workshops at the beginning of the school year. The first workshop was designed to introduce teachers to the contents of the manual and to motivate them to use it in planning for the beginning of school. A second workshop, held several weeks later, focused teachers' attention on the manual's suggestions and guidelines for maintaining the management system. Teachers in the comparison group in each study received the management materials later in the school year. All classes were observed frequently from the first day of school to monitor the extent to which teachers used the strategies recommended in the manual and to assess their success in classroom management.

In both studies, results of group comparisons after the first eight weeks of school indicated that teachers who re-



ceived the materials and attended the workshops at the beginning of the school year used the recommended management strategies and behaviors significantly more than did teachers who did not receive the materials at first. In addition, use of the recommended strategies helped teachers establish higher levels of student task engagement and cooperation.

Brief outlines of these studies have been presented here; more details are available in published reports (Emmer, Sanford, Evertson, Clements, and Martin, 1981; Emmer, Sanford, Clements, and Martin, 1982). The purpose of this overview has been to suggest several key points:

1. Observation of many classrooms has resulted in the identification of principles and strategies that contribute to effective classroom management.
2. Information about effective management techniques can help teachers establish better learning environments in their classes at the beginning of the school year.
3. Staff development in classroom management need not be limited to elaborate, long-term training programs. Research suggests that many teachers,

particularly the inexperienced, can benefit from research-based information and one or two half-day workshops, particularly if training is provided at the beginning of a school year.

Staff Development Strategies

This research has a number of potential applications for staff development in school settings. One is classroom management training in district or school-wide orientation and support programs for new or relatively inexperienced teachers. Not only are such teachers often unaware of the amount of detailed planning necessary to begin the year, but they don't necessarily know what to plan for. First-year teachers often overlook the need to decide on and consistently implement a system of consequences to go with their classroom rules and procedures. Second-year teachers often realize the importance of classroom organization and management at the beginning of the school year, and are eager (sometimes desperate) to get information, guidelines, and ideas that will help them. Many preservice teacher education programs give students no exposure at all to the first week of school or limit their experience to a single teacher or grade level.

For an inexperienced teacher, guidelines about how to plan, what things to consider, what kinds of class structure and climate to strive for, and what kinds of activities to include in the first week may make the difference between a confused, anxious beginning and one that will contribute to a good learning environment for the entire school year. Providing inexperienced teachers with management guidelines at the beginning of the school year can help reduce the trials and errors that both teachers and students have to endure. Many experienced teachers will also appreciate and make use of organization aids and management suggestions, particularly if they are provided when the teachers are thinking about and planning for a new school year.

A staff development workshop focusing on the beginning of the school year might include the following kinds of activities:

1. A brief description of the classroom research on which the workshop activities are based
2. Presentation and discussion of guidelines for identifying an effective system of procedures, rules, and consequences; arranging classroom space and

equipment; planning activities for the first week of school; teaching students classroom procedures and rules; and monitoring the class and handling inappropriate behavior

3. Small-group discussions in which teachers share ideas for classroom procedures, consequences, and problem solving

4. Opportunities for teachers to consider, discuss, and critique models or case studies of conducting the first day of school, teaching rules and procedures, or different aspects of classroom management.

Such a workshop should last at least three or four hours. A whole day or two half-days would be better, particularly for new teachers. A staff development session after school is under way can also help focus attention on teaching behaviors necessary for *maintaining* good management throughout the year. This workshop could include discussion of guidelines and ideas for improving teachers' success at monitoring student behavior, handling inappropriate behavior, knowing when to ignore inappropriate behavior, keeping students accountable for work, pacing instruction to maintain the flow of activities, and promoting student success and involvement. A good activity is the small-group discussion in which teachers brainstorm solutions for common classroom problems, such as managing grouped instruction, adjusting instruction in heterogeneous classes, or dealing with particular kinds of student behavior problems.

If teachers have not been given information about planning classroom procedures and management systems before the school year begins, a workshop later in the year should include this information. A checklist can be used by teachers in assessing their own classroom management and planning changes. A school holiday such as the winter break can give teachers an opportunity to implement new classroom management approaches. It should be noted, however, that the Center's studies suggest that management workshops are probably more beneficial at the beginning of the school year than later; it is difficult for many teachers to change

in ways that affect levels of student engagement and cooperation once classroom behavior norms have been established.

Successful Example

A staff development program conducted in 1981-1982 by the Currituck County Schools, a rural district in North Carolina, provides a good illustration of how a school district can help teachers with classroom management.

Before school started, two full-day workshops, based on the Texas R&D Center's program, were held for teachers and principals of the district's five schools. Discussion centered on guidelines for readying the classroom, teaching rules and procedures, applying consequences, stopping inappropriate behavior; planning strategies for potential problems, holding students accountable for their work, and monitoring student behavior. A number of related activities were conducted. District personnel from various grade levels who had previously been trained with the management workshop materials served as facilitators for small-group discussions in which were grouped according to the grade level they taught.

Following these workshops, half-day sessions were conducted by the principal in each school. All members of the school staff—including teachers, aides, custodians, cafeteria personnel, and bus drivers—met together to choose a set of rules for the school, the buses, and the cafeteria.

After the school year began, a two-hour workshop was conducted for the various grade level groups to discuss instructional organization, pacing, and clarity in presenting instruction.

The results of this program were felt almost immediately. Teachers were pleased with how well their classes were going and with the additional time they had for instruction. The benefits of the program were particularly pronounced in the junior high school. One example of the impact on student behavior can be seen in a comparison of student referrals to the junior high principal before and after the classroom management program. In October 1980, there were 129 referrals, but in October 1981, there were only 28.

The management field studies conducted by the Texas Research and Development Center for Teacher Education were designed to test staff development strategies that required minimal commitments of time and money and that could be easily replicated in a variety of school settings. Such a staff development strategy cannot be expected to meet the needs of all teachers, of course. For some, especially experienced teachers with a history of classroom management difficulties, more intensive, long-term interactive strategies are called for. These teachers probably need classroom observation, feedback, and counseling over a period of time, as well as information about effective management practices. For working with a small number of teachers in this way, the staff development model developed by Stallings (1979) may provide the answer. In this model, a trained classroom observer collects data about teacher and student behaviors, which is analyzed to produce a teacher behavior profile used in giving feedback to the teacher. Cohort support groups provide counseling and suggestions for remediation. Cycles of observation, data analysis, feedback, and problem solving are repeated.

The Administrator's Role

In addition to staff development workshops on classroom management, school administrators and supervisors can do much to help teachers establish and maintain good learning environments in their classes. One positive step is for principals to lead their faculties in developing a set of schoolwide rules and procedures. While it does not take the place of a more detailed system of procedures for individual classrooms, this schoolwide consensus provides a good framework for teachers as they formulate and teach expectations for student behavior in their classes. Wide involvement of school faculty and staff in choosing school rules and procedures is advisable; in fact, it was one of the keys to the success of the Currituck County staff development program.

A second step suggested by research is to encourage teachers to share solutions to problems. Holding staff development workshops featuring small-group discus-

sion is one way to do this. Two other good strategies are establishing cohort support groups and using aides or administrative staff as substitutes to free teachers to observe each other's classes.

Finally, school administrators can contribute to good classroom management by being aware of the ways school policies and practices can make teachers' management tasks either easier or more difficult. Minimizing classroom interruptions by office staff, public address announcements, phone calls, visitors, and late-arriving students can make a difference. Allowing teachers to take charge of students all at once as a class at the beginning of the day, rather than having students straggle into the room over an extended period of time, facilitates a smooth class beginning, especially during the first week of school.

In summary, research on classroom management suggests a number of ways administrators and staff developers can help teachers with the important task of organizing and managing classrooms. A staff development program built around information and materials based on classroom research can have a decided impact on management success, partic-

ularly when such a program begins before school starts and is part of an ongoing, cooperative school effort. □

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²Both manuals are available from Communication Services, Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, University of Texas at Austin, EDA 3.203, Austin, TX 78712-1288.

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