

CHAPTER VII: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. WHY CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT MATTERS

Managing the learning environment is both a major responsibility and an on going concern for all teachers, even those with years of experience (Good & Brophy, 2002). There are several reasons:

- 1) At any one moment each student needs something different—different information, different hints, different kinds of encouragement. Such diversity increases even more if the teacher deliberately assigns multiple activities to different groups or individuals (for example, if some students do a reading assignment while others do the math problems).
- 2) Another reason that managing the environment is challenging is because a teacher can not predict everything that will happen in a class. A well-planned lesson may fall flat on its face, or take less time than expected, and you find yourself improvising to fill class time. On the other hand an unplanned moment may become a wonderful, sustained exchange among students, and prompt you to drop previous plans and follow the flow of discussion.
- 3) The variety of perceptions can lead to surprises in students' responses—most often small ones, but occasionally major.

2. PREVENTING MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS BY FOCUSING STUDENTS ON LEARNING

2.1. Arranging classroom space

Viewed broadly, classrooms may seem to be arranged in similar ways, but there are actually important alternative arrangements to consider. Variations exist because of grade level, the subjects taught, the teacher's philosophy of education, and of course the size of the room and the furniture available. Whatever the arrangement that you choose it should help students to focus on learning tasks as much as possible and minimize the chances of distractions.

2.2. Establishing daily procedures and routines

Procedures are more like social conventions than like moral expectations. They are specific ways of doing common, repeated classroom tasks or activities. Examples include checking daily attendance, dealing with students who arrive late.

2.3. Establishing classroom rules

Unlike procedures or routines, rules express standards of behavior for which individual students need to take responsibility. Although they are like procedures in that they sometimes help in insuring the efficiency of classroom tasks, they are really about encouraging students to be responsible for learning and showing respect for each other.

2.4. Pacing and structuring lessons and activities

One of the best ways to prevent management problems is by pacing and structuring lessons or activities as smoothly and continuously as possible. This goal depends on three major strategies:

- selecting tasks or activities at an appropriate level of difficulty for your students
- providing a moderate level of structure or clarity to students about what they are supposed to do, especially during transitions between activities
- Keeping alert to the flow and interplay of behaviors for the class as a whole and for individuals within it.

3. RESPONDING TO STUDENT MISBEHAVIOR

So far we have focused on preventing behaviors that are inappropriate or annoying. The advice has all been proactive or forward-looking: plan classroom space thoughtfully, create reasonable procedures and rules, pace lessons and activities appropriately, and communicate the importance of learning clearly. Although we consider these ideas important, it would be naive to imply they are enough to prevent all behavior problems. For various reasons, students sometimes still do things that disrupt other students or interrupt the flow of activities. At such moments the challenge is not about long-term planning but about making appropriate, but prompt responses. Misbehaviors left alone can be contagious, a process educators sometimes call the **ripple effect**. There are many ways to respond to inappropriate behaviors :

- Ignoring misbehaviors
- Gesturing nonverbally

- Conflict resolution and problem solving:

Conflict resolution strategies that educators and teachers tend to usually have two parts. First, they involve ways of identifying what “the” problem is precisely. Second, they remind the student of classroom expectations and rules with simple clarity and assertiveness. Classroom management is the coordination of lessons and activities to make learning as productive as possible. It is important because classrooms are complex and somewhat unpredictable, because students respond to teachers’ actions in diverse ways, and because society requires that students attend school. There are two major features of management: preventing problems before they occur and responding to them after they occur. Many management problems can be prevented by attending to how classroom space is used, by establishing daily procedures, routines, and rules, by pacing and structuring activities appropriately, and by communicating the importance of learning and of positive behavior to students and parents. There are several ways of dealing with a management problem after it occurs, and the choice depends on the nature of the problem. A teacher can simply ignore a misbehavior, gesture or cue students nonverbally, rely on natural and logical consequences, or engage conflict resolution strategies. Whatever tactics the teacher uses, it is important to keep in mind their ultimate purpose: to make learning possible and effective.