

SOME EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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It is a matter of common knowledge that one essential area for teachers is classroom management. If there is a failure in this aspect, it leads to classroom interaction breaking down and this in turn affects learning. Effective classroom management is much more than just administering corrective measures when a student misbehaves; it is about developing proactive ways to prevent problems from occurring in the first place while creating a positive learning environment. Establishing that climate for learning is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching, and one of the most difficult skills to master. For those new to the profession, failure to set the right tone will greatly hinder your effectiveness as a teacher. Indeed, even experienced teachers may sometimes feel frustrated by classroom management issues. Strategies that worked for years suddenly become ineffective in the face of some of the challenges today's students bring with them to the classroom [1, 2].

Classroom management is about dealing with problems, managing activities, and managing classroom language. In this article we will focus on dealing with classroom problems.

To begin with, it is necessary to point out that classrooms are social in nature and just as in society there is potential for conflicts or problems to arise. Here are some of the common problems which teachers have to deal with in the English language classroom: discipline, motivation, range of levels, covering materials, and organizing activities [2].

The first thing to say is that the way in which teachers view these problems usually influences the way they deal with them and the decisions they make. Looking at things as problems is negative and this can trigger the wrong kind of response. As soon as we think of something as being a problem we feel that it will

be difficult to solve, we feel negative about it and we often make excuses as to why we cannot do anything about it. Problems are also seen as weaknesses and nobody likes to admit to having weaknesses especially if the reaction they get from other people is that these problems really should not occur. People then start to wonder if they are the only person who faces these problems and they start to become insecure. We need to realize that most of us face very similar problems when it comes to teaching English in the classroom. It is very unlikely that we are the only people in the world to face such a problem. In fact, the chances are that our colleagues face similar problems, but are also too scared to admit it. So, rather than keeping problems to ourselves we should take time to share and discuss them. It may well be that our colleagues have suggestions and ideas as to how we might solve the problem.

The second thing we need to do is to change the vocabulary we use. Rather than using the word “problem” with its negative connotations we should use the word “challenges”. By doing this we change the mindset and start to see things in a positive light – we start to see things as having solutions.

The next thing to look at is how we talk about these challenges. In many cases we use quite general terms such as discipline or motivation. However, categorizing problems in such general terms really does not help us solve them. We need to look deeper – explore why the problems are happening.

Here are a few possible reasons: the lesson is too easy and they are bored; they do not understand what they are supposed to do; the lesson is too difficult and they need help.

It is when we understand these underlying causes that we can make changes that will actually solve the problem.

The following questions can guide you in investigating and understanding the root of problems that arise in the classroom.

- What is the problem?
- How does it affect the class?
- What are the underlying reasons for the problem?

- What do I do about these at the moment?
- Are any of the things I do effective?
- Why (not)?

Thus, it is obvious that effective classroom management is necessary for all teachers and facilitators. Classroom management involves all aspects of what is going on in the classroom while a lesson is being taught. Not only does classroom management include how the teacher or facilitator delivers the curriculum, but also how the students interact with the teacher and with others in the classroom, and extends into the classroom environment in which students learn as well.

Students cannot learn in chaos. Classroom management includes elements of classroom discipline, but focuses more on creating a peaceful learning environment that is comfortable, organized, engaging, and respectful for both the teacher and the students.

Classroom management strategies need to be planned, be thoughtful, and in line with curriculum fidelity. It is important to prioritize curriculum fidelity when selecting classroom management strategies. While some classroom management strategies focus more on setting clear rules and some focus more on transitions, the strategies should not change how the lesson is taught. Classroom management strategies should add organization for the students and classroom, but not change the content of the lessons or the fidelity of the curriculum. It is important for all providers to deliver the curriculum with the highest degree of fidelity as possible.

Proactive classroom management strategies focus on implementing strategies emphasizing how students should behave in the classroom, the expectations in the classroom, and how to make the classroom as structured and predictable as possible to avoid disruptive behaviors. Class-wide strategies are implemented with all students within the class and address the needs of most students in terms of behavior, while individualized strategies might be needed for a small number of students who will not respond appropriately to class-wide strategies [3].

Whether implementing class-wide or individualized classroom management strategies the provider sets the stage by being on-time, prepared, organized, and able to move the lesson along at an appropriate pace.

Let us consider class-wide strategies.

- **Create a classroom management plan** – It is important for students to know what is acceptable and unacceptable in the classroom as well as what the expectations are. By allowing students input on developing the classroom management plan, they are invested in following the rules, but should they break a rule, they know what the consequences are.

Some important points to keep in mind when creating a classroom management plan or classroom management contract with students: involve students in all aspects of creating the classroom management plan; create no more than five rules or class norms. Keep things as simple as possible. If you create too many rules, students will feel overwhelmed by the classroom management plan. Look for rules that cover behaviors that could interfere with the learning and engagement of your students. Creating a classroom management plan should be a short, rather quick activity meant to set the tone for the rest of your time together. Always state rules or classroom norms positively and be as brief and to the point as possible. Rules that work well in most situations would be:

1. Respect yourself, your classmates, and your teachers.
2. Raise your hand before speaking or leaving your seat.
3. Keep your hands, feet, and materials to yourself.
4. Listen, follow directions, and ask questions when needed.
5. Be positive.

The classroom management plan should be posted during every lesson, reviewed often, and referred to when challenging behaviors arise.

- **Understand the power of day 1** – Day 1 is the first day you are in the classroom with the students. Day 1 is the most important day you will spend with students because you set the tone for the classroom and the rules and class norms are established. Work to create a classroom that is warm, inviting, and inclusive.

Show enthusiasm for the lessons you are teaching and show students you are excited about being able to spend time with them. We want students to leave the classroom after Day 1 and look forward to the next lesson and the time they will spend in the classroom while you are facilitating.

- **Greet students as they enter the classroom** – Even in the beginning when you are not certain of student’s names, it is important for students to feel a sense of belonging and to know you are excited about being at school and are happy they are a part of the class. Simple phrases like, “I am glad you are here today” or “welcome to class” can help students feel connected and engaged. Also, to show students you enjoyed your time with them and look forward to seeing them again, always say good bye and reference when you will see them again for the next lesson.

- **Create an agenda for each day** – Start each lesson on time and quickly review what is listed on the agenda for the lesson. Check off agenda items as they are completed to build on a sense of accomplishment and to help students know what is coming up next. This helps students understand there is a routine followed during your class time and a predictability of what is coming up next.

- **Be genuine and sincere with praise** – While praise is very important, empty praise or praising for small tasks or less than adequate work can actually cause students to disengage and lose interest in your feedback. Be thoughtful in what you say to students and work to find ways to offer genuine praise and feedback. Always try to focus genuine praise on the work and behavior of a student and not the student themselves.

- **Balance teaching and facilitating** – While maintaining fidelity to the curriculum, look for ways to balance teaching and facilitating. Teaching is typically the class listening to the information being shared by a teacher or facilitator, while facilitating involves sharing knowledge and including the audience in the lesson. Look for opportunities to have students actively respond and participate. Offer opportunities for students to read aloud, write on the board/smart board, answer questions out loud, and assist you during the lesson.

Depending on the student's learning style they may learn best when reading, listening, writing information down, or maybe even moving around the classroom a bit. While we cannot accommodate each student's learning style each time, we can make an effort to allow students opportunities to actively respond.

- **Circulate the room** – Facilitators should circulate the room as a way to keep students engaged and attentive. Not only do students have to pay attention and follow where you are, but it allows you the opportunity to check to make sure students are on-task.

- **Find a seating arrangement conducive to learning** – While during some lesson activities you may have students working in groups with desks connected, typically when student's desks are arranged in rows students tend to stay on-task, focus, listen, and complete more work.

It is best to avoid any seating arrangements which cause your back to be to the class or even part of the classroom for any length of time. If there is the need to write materials on the board, it is a good idea to delegate different students to write on the board for you while you facilitate class instead of turning around and writing on the board.

- **Be effective when giving instructions** – When giving instructions, it is important to provide information in a way that is clear and concise. Once we have gained the student's attention it is important to:

1. Wait until students are seated and not moving around the room.
2. Give one instruction at a time.
3. Use a clear firm voice and repeat each instruction.
4. Wait for student compliance.
5. Provide an opportunity for students to acknowledge understanding of the instruction given.

6. If a class is struggling with following verbal directions you might want to write out ahead of time and post directions for an activity. Having a posted copy of the instructions allows students to refer to this information if they are confused or have questions or concerns.

- **Handle disagreements with respect** – Let students know throughout your lessons information may be presented that a student might disagree with. Create a classroom atmosphere where students know it is ok to disagree, but disagreements are always to be respectful.

- **Integrate students' interests when appropriate** – During activities, such as role plays, try to use language youth can connect with and names they connect with as part of their culture. It is important to remember the goals and messages of the role play must remain unchanged and prioritize curriculum fidelity.

- **Be willing to give a little to get a lot** – Some days students enter the classroom and you can tell the energy level is high and it is going to be an enormous challenge to keep students focused and on-task. Whether it is the weather, a school holiday or break is coming up, or a student has a birthday, offering a small incentive might be just the key to get students to tune in and be alert. Incentives do not have to cost money, but can offer students an opportunity to interact with each other and relax. You can tell students if they work hard, stay focused and on-task for the 45 minute lesson they can have the last 2-3 minutes of class to talk to each other, stand up, and use up some of their energy. While we do not want to give up our facilitation time, many times offering an incentive can help your facilitation time go smoothly and instead of dealing with constant disruptions, you can focus on the lesson and make the most of your time in the classroom.

Along with implementing class-wide strategies, facilitators can implement any of the strategies below to help deal with disruptive students and challenging behaviors.

- **Use proximity to stop disruptive behavior** – Place yourself in close proximity to the student and conduct a few minutes of the lesson standing by them. You do not need to be overly obvious about moving toward the student, but many times having you near will subdue the disruptive behavior.

- **Stop and wait** – On occasion you might need to simply stop the lesson, pause, make eye contact with the student and wait for the student to quiet down

and focus. This can also cue the classroom teacher in on which student is being disruptive or that their assistance may be needed.

- **Location, location, location** – While many teachers have created elaborate seating charts to keep certain students away from each other or in the front of the room, if where the student is seated is causing some of the disruptive behavior, it might be worth having the student moved to another seat. Often behaviors are not as disruptive to you or the class if the student can be seated in the back of the classroom and close to the classroom teacher. If you have an extremely disruptive student you might want to consider putting them in a seat closest to the classroom teacher's desk.

- **Use your voice** – Students often match the volume of the teacher's voice in the classroom. If you want to gain a student's attention or the attention of the class, instead of increasing the volume of your voice try decreasing your volume. It is not productive and effective to try and talk over a student or the side conversations of students. Silence can be very effective and sometimes it is very appropriate so students have to focus and really listen to hear you.

- **Stay cool** – Remember to stay calm and keep your composure when presented with challenging behaviors.

With the exception of encountering a student who is extremely belligerent or disruptive, most disruptions in the classroom will be mild and just disruptive enough to slow the lesson.

Proactive class-wide strategies alone are rarely sufficient in dealing with all classroom behaviors. The classroom teacher will likely handle any major challenging behaviors from students. However, the disruptive behavior can happen while we are facilitating a lesson, so being prepared and having some strategies to deal with challenging behavior can help us more effectively manage the classroom and keep the lesson on-track. Some common challenging behaviors in classrooms range from students wanting to dominate discussions, students who call out answers or do not wait to be called on, to the students who hum, click pens, and cannot sit still. We might also encounter a student who asks too many questions,

wants to know personal information about us, or who wants to debate any information presented. While all of these behaviors would be considered low level distractions or disruptions, we know they can have a high impact on the classroom learning environment. Along with implementing class-wide strategies, facilitators can implement any of the strategies to help deal with disruptive students and challenging behaviors. It is important to stay professional at all times and even when students are disruptive it is important to refrain from sharing frustrations, venting, and complaining.

References:

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