

EDUCATION WEEK

SPOTLIGHT

On Classroom Management



EMILE WAMSTEKER FOR EDUCATION WEEK

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Social-Emotional Programs Target Students' Long-Term Behavior

By Liana Heitin

One morning early this fall, 1st graders in Nydia Mendez's class at Public School 24 in Brooklyn, N.Y., were working on identifying feelings. "It's your birthday, make a face and show me how you feel," Mendez said to students, who instantly became all smiles and flapping arms. "You lost your favorite pencil." Their puppy-dog eyes hit the ground. "Your body's

Public School 24 in Brooklyn, N.Y. is one of a growing number using socialemotional learning curricula to help students recognize and regulate their emotions, understand others' perspectives, and resolve conflicts.

Editor's Note: In this Spotlight see how educators use social-emotional learning to manage student behavior, hear from leading experts on classroom management strategies, and learn how planning, procedure, and personal solutions can boost instructional practice. These articles come from the Education Week Teacher story package "Inside Classroom Management: Ideas and Solutions," designed to provide teachers with ideas that spur discussion and self-reflection.

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showing me that you're disappointed," she said to the boy next to her.

A few halls away, Maria Diaz's 5th graders were revisiting an SEL lesson they'd done recently in which they drew a picture of themselves and then listened to a story. Each time students heard a "put-down," or a hurtful statement about someone in the story, Diaz had them tear off a piece of their self-portrait.

"[When] we ripped them into pieces—how did we feel about that?" Diaz asked the class. "I was sad," a student responded. Diaz jerked her head toward a word chain hanging from the ceiling with synonyms for sad. "I was depressed," he indicated more precisely. Afterward, Diaz asked students to turn to their partners and give them three "put-ups."

Both Mendez and Diaz were teaching components of a social-emotional learning curriculum called the 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution) that is used schoolwide by PS 24. By building students' self-awareness and emotional vocabulary, the teachers say they are working toward helping students to resolve conflicts and monitor their own actions. "I don't want to be the police person in the classroom," said Mendez. "I really want them to solve their own problems and become independent with that."

Diaz said she emphasizes to students that "this is a place where they are safe and could discuss what they feel and find positive solutions." Knowing they're in a safe environment, she noted, makes it easier for students to concentrate on their work.

A Focus on Causes

Mendez and Diaz were voicing a premise that the many schools now prioritizing social-emotional learning are working under: Teachers should manage student behavior with more than just immediate compliance in mind. They should be working to shape more responsible and empathetic people.

It's a lofty goal, no doubt, but one that is gaining plenty of traction. Schools around the country are using programs like Responsive Classroom, Second Step, and the 4R's to teach young students to recognize and regulate their emotions, understand others' perspectives, resolve conflicts, and build relationships.

And there is some evidence that such programs are having positive results. In a meta-analysis of 213 research-based social-emotional-learning programs, the Chicago-based Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning found that such programs boost student achievement, as measured by standardized tests and



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NYDIA MENDEZ

1st Grade Teacher, Public School 24, Brooklyn, N.Y.

school grades, by an average of 11-percentile-points. According to that study, SEL programs also reduced conduct problems and emotional distress, and improved students' attitudes "about themselves, others, and school."

Traditional behavior-management systems tend to focus on compliance, or getting students to abide by rules and consequences. SEL-based systems, on the other hand, are more concerned with the emotional causes and ramifications of student behavior.

"The most critical thing to think about in classroom management is, 'what is the ultimate aim?'" said George Bear, an education professor at the University of Delaware and former school psychologist, "What is the long-term aim? The short-term aim might be compliance—and I have no problem with that—but is that the only thing you want to develop in a kid?" More than just meeting behavioral expectations, he said, children need to learn "empathy, perspective taking, social problem-solving skills, anger control, self-regulation, and, to be honest, shame and guilt."

Compliance may only work in a single classroom, under certain circumstances, while SEL takes the long view, said Maurice Elias, a psychologist and professor at Rutgers University in Livingston, N.J., and co-founder of the Social Decision Making/Problem Solving Program. "In the mental health field, what people do when they're institutionalized doesn't necessarily generalize when they get out," he said. "You can have people who are very compliant and obedient in that setting, and when they get out bad things happen. It's not coincidental there are high rates of recidivism in prison populations. It's the same thing here. Compliance is not the goal. We want kids to learn key skills they need to be successful and responsible and good people in life."

Having the basic tools in place for compliance "is important," said Bear, who has conducted comparative research suggesting that American students may be overly reliant on punishment as the basis for moral reasoning. "But then you build upon

that and don't stop there. I get frustrated when teachers have an orderly class and that's their only goal."

'A Messy Process'

There are certain elements common to many SEL programs: Students learn vocabulary words related to feelings and practice identifying their emotions. Classroom rules, or community standards, are created with student input. Students often convene for class meetings, during which they express their feelings and solve problems together.

Rebecca Schmidt, who teaches 4th and 5th grade at The Inspired Teaching School, a charter school in the District of Columbia, uses a variety of social-emotional-focused methods to manage her students. "It's tough, and a messy process, and takes a lot longer than a typical external-incentive/rewards classroom management," she wrote in an email. "But I honestly think it creates a more healthy and safe environment for learning. And it sets kids up for life success—not just following arbitrary rules for points, etc."

SEL programs also tend to focus on having students repair the damage when they misbehave rather than simply receive a punishment. For instance, said Schmidt, if one child in her classroom does not let another play at recess, instead of just having to sit out, the offender will have to find a way to "fix" the problem. "He could make a card or write a note to the kid," she explained. "He could apologize and invite the kid to sit with him at lunch. Often this 'apology of action' or 'fixing' is a lot harder than just losing recess."

According to Tom Roderick, executive director of the Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility in New York City and creator of the 4R's SEL program, "the misbehavior then becomes an opportunity for learning."

Not a Therapy Session

Teaching social-emotional lessons also comes with some inherent risks. For instance, the "put-downs" activity in Maria Diaz's 5th grade class in Brooklyn, in which students tore

up their self-portraits, brought much of the class to tears. (Emma Gonzalez, a trainer at the Morningside Center who works with PS 24 teachers, emphasized that Diaz is a “master teacher” and that most teachers do the activity with paper hearts.) At times, classroom meetings and other discussions can churn up feelings students are having about serious problems at home, which can be difficult for a teacher to navigate.

Diaz noted that she has conversations with the class about not repeating what they hear from members of their “class family.” She also explains that as a mandated reporter of child abuse and neglect there are certain things she’ll have to pass on to counselors and administrators. In addition, she said, she warns parents at the beginning of the year that their children may open up to her about what’s going on at home. As it turns out, the parents also “share insights into situations they are going through in their own lives,” she said.

This kind of emotionally fraught work “does take a toll on me,” Diaz admitted. “I become so engulfed in [the students] lives that I sometimes forget to take care of me. It is a balancing act that I have not mastered.”

SEL-based classrooms also do not work for every child. Students with behavioral issues may require an extrinsic-rewards system or a more structured approach. For that reason, Elias said, teachers “need to feel comfortable turning to the school psychologist, or a behavior specialist, or the school counselor.”

Roderick said it’s important to emphasize to teachers that “this is not about therapy. It’s about teaching kids skills and giving opportunities to practice and apply them to real life situations. A class meeting is not therapy—it’s problem-solving.”

For Diaz, despite the exhaustion and other potential difficulties, implementing SEL has been worth the effort. In addition to seeing academic benefits, she said, “I do take pride in saying that I have formed decade-long friendships with parents and students alike and I attribute a lot of this to the SEL work. ... Knowing that my children are OK and that they’ve acquired the necessary skills to live in a peaceful environment is what matters most. The challenges become secondhand.”

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INTERVIEW:

Harry and Rosemary Wong: Following Up on *First Days*

By Anthony Rebola

*Nearly 25 years ago, Harry and Rosemary Wong, both former teachers, decided to write a how-to book on teaching based on the well-received presentations that Harry was then giving on the school professional-development circuit. The book, titled *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher*, was self-published and designed to look “like an automobile’s manual.” The Wongs didn’t expect it to make much of an impact. “We just thought we’d write a book to help teachers,” Rosemary Wong says.*

*What they didn’t account for was how many teachers would need the help they were offering. Since its publication in 1991, *The First Days of School* has sold some 3.8 million copies and has been printed in six languages. According to the Wongs, it is used as a classroom text in more than 2,000 colleges. In all likelihood, it is the most popular book on K-12 teaching in the United States—a text that every teacher seems to know. At one point early on, Harry Wong recalls, they had to start publishing it with a specialty binding because they were getting complaints from teachers who said the pages were falling out from overuse. The Wongs, who are based in Mountain View, Calif., followed up on *The First Days of School* with a series of DVDs about instructional issues and have become highly sought-after speakers on teaching. For the past 10 years, they’ve also written a monthly column for *Teachers.net*.*

*The *First Days of School*, still their signature work, is oriented around three characteristics of effective teaching—classroom management, positive expectations, and lesson mastery. But the Wongs have become especially well known for their advice on classroom management, an area where many teachers struggle. Emphasizing teacher preparedness and the use of well-defined procedures, the Wongs’ approach to management promises educators highly concrete practices they can use to create greater order in their classrooms. But the approach has also faced criticism over the years, with*

some educators saying it can stifle spontaneity in classrooms and lead teachers to become overly controlling.

*The Wongs have a new book on classroom management scheduled to come out later this year—titled, somewhat plainly, *The Classroom Management Book*. We recently talked to the couple about their advice on leading a classroom and how it applies to a new generation of teachers.*

Q *The *First Days of Schools* is one of the most well-known and frequently referred to books on teaching. Why do you think it has resonated so strongly with teachers and teacher-educators?*

HARRY WONG: I think the reason is really in the subtitle of the book, which is “How to Be an Effective Teacher.” We tried to give teachers very practical advice on being effective in the classroom, and a teacher’s effectiveness has been shown time and time again to have a greater impact on student achievement than any other factor. Educators get that. So we zeroed in on the three characteristics of effective teachers—classroom management, lesson mastery, and positive expectations. And what we talk about is based on the research. Years ago, I was at a conference and an education scholar named Thomas Good gave me a copy of a book he had co-written called *Looking in Classrooms*. It was a groundbreaking study on what makes good teachers good, and it had a major influence on how we described effective teaching. The characteristics we outlined have also been highlighted by later teaching experts like Robert Pianta of the University of Virginia and Charlotte Danielson, who’s very popular now. So you could say that the advice we give teachers, in a very easy-to-use format, has stood the test of time.

ROSEMARY WONG: Yes, the heart and soul of the book was distilling the research on how to be an effective teacher. We think that the strength of the book is that it shows teachers

not just what to do—there are lots of books that do that—but also why you’re doing it. It combines the how and the why so that you can put these characteristics in place in your classroom in a coherent and seamless way.

Q Your forthcoming book, *The Classroom Management Book*, is billed as a companion volume to *The First Days of School*. What made you decide to write it and publish it now?

HARRY WONG: Well, we’ve been planning to publish it for about 10 years! We just kept getting so much great material—you know, we have drawers full of examples that teachers send us of the excellent work they’re doing—that we put off finishing it. But finally we just said, “OK, let’s just put a stop to this whole charade and write the book.”

But I’ll tell you about the origins of the book. About 12 years ago, we heard about this new teacher right here in Silicon Valley named Sarah Jondahl who was apparently doing outstanding work. So we went to visit her classroom. Sure enough, we watched her teach and our jaws just dropped. She had a command of the classroom like we’ve seldom seen, and she was a brand new teacher! So we asked her how she learned to teach like this. She said that, in education school, she had taken a class on classroom management. *The First Days of School* was the textbook for the class and the final project was to develop a full-blown classroom-management plan, to be kept in a binder for your first teaching job. We asked her to see the binder, and she had this beautifully developed action plan full of procedures and examples. I looked at Rosemary and I said, “Oh, my goodness, here’s our next book.” That is, we want to teach people how to take that part of *The First Days of School*—the classroom-management part—and really come up with a detailed plan for when they walk in the classroom every day. Because classroom management isn’t something you can just do on the fly. You don’t want to go in there just hoping for the best.

ROSEMARY WONG: Yes, of the three characteristics of effective teaching we outline in *The First Days of School*, we feel the classroom-management part is primary. Unless you have your classroom organized for success, nothing you do is going to make any difference. You have to be organized and ready.

Q Why do you think so many teachers struggle with classroom management?

HARRY WONG: I think the major reason is that they think it has to do with discipline. Many teachers think classroom manage-

ment means discipline. So what they do is they go into the classroom and put all their emphasis on discipline. They think classroom management is about crowd control or teaching kids to be quiet. But classroom management and discipline are two different things. The key word for classroom management is “do”—it’s about how you get kids to do things in the classroom. By contrast, the key word for discipline is “behave.” So with that, what you end up with is a reactive process, where the teacher teaches and then there’s some misbehavior and the teacher stops and reacts to the problem. By contrast, what we teach is how to be proactive, how to come up with a plan to prevent most of the problems from occurring.

ROSEMARY WONG: Another reason many teachers struggle with classroom management is that they just tell students what to do rather than teaching them what to do. You need to teach the procedures you want to follow and explain why, not just expect them to do whatever you say.

Q Right, your approach to classroom management has an emphasis on procedures and routines. Is that grounded in research?

HARRY WONG: You bet. These aren’t just our ideas. We have been very much influenced by the research done on classroom management by Carolyn Evertson, who’s now at Vanderbilt University, and the late Jacob Kounin. I call Kounin the father of classroom management. In the 1970s, he noted that, in determining whether a classroom runs smoothly, it’s the teacher’s behavior, not the students’, that really counts. It’s all about what the teachers do. That was big. The most important factor he talked about was momentum—when you have a classroom that has procedures and is flowing smoothly and the kids are learning.

Q Can you give an example of what you mean by procedures?

HARRY WONG: Sure. One of the procedures we recommend is greeting students as they enter the classroom. That immediately sets up a relationship. It shows kids that you recognize them, that you care for them. Then when the student goes into the classroom, there’s a procedure for bell work—on the east coast you call it a “do now.” The students open an assignment and get to work. So there’s no time wasted with the students waiting for the teacher to start the task. Those are just examples. You also may need procedures for how to quiet a classroom, how to have kids ask for help,

how to collect and return papers, and how to manage transitions—all sorts of things that go on in the classroom. There are academic procedures as well—people never talk about them because, again, they think procedures only have to do with discipline. But you can have procedures for note-taking and how to do homework. I was big on those when I was a teacher.

ROSEMARY WONG: I like to say that if you could close your eyes and say to yourself, “This is something I’d like to have happen in my classroom,” then you need to come up with a procedure for it. The beauty of a procedure is that it saves time in the classroom, and that gives you more time to teach. But again, you can’t just tell students what the procedure is. You need to teach the procedure, and there are three basic steps to doing that. The first is to explain it. The second step is rehearsing it, physically going through the procedure and making corrections as needed. And the third is reinforcing it, which you can do by acknowledging that the procedure is being carried out correctly. Many teachers don’t do these steps or they stop after the first one, and they wonder, “How come [the students] aren’t doing it?” So it takes time and diligence. But when there are procedures in place, it’s amazing what a different atmosphere it can create in the classroom. We receive letters from teachers about this all the time. They see a new sense of orderliness and responsibility on the part of the students.

Q There’s been some pushback on your approach. For example, some educators say that a heavy focus on procedures can make classrooms dull and leave little space for teachers to get to know students’ individual needs and interests. How do you respond to that kind of criticism?

ROSEMARY WONG: Yes, I think that kind of criticism is mistaken. If you take the time to set procedures and routines in the classroom, you actually have more time to teach and get to know students. Students automatically know what to do, so the teacher isn’t stopping all the time to scold kids or put out brush fires. When you see this working in a classroom, it’s the furthest thing from heavy-handed. Instead, there’s a sense of calm.

HARRY WONG: If it seems heavy-handed, we think we know why that happens. Again, it’s because the teacher thinks this is all about discipline, so they don’t establish the procedures properly. Instead they set up consequences. We get questions on

this all the time: “Dr. Wong, if the students don’t do what I’m asking, what are the consequences?” But we don’t advocate consequences or penalties, except in very limited cases. We are about establishing procedures and routines. By having a plan and setting the procedures, teachers are able to teach and enjoy their students. You don’t have to pester them or come up with rules and threats at every instance.

Q So do you think your work is sometimes misinterpreted?

HARRY WONG: The fact that you’re asking these questions points to that! (Laughs.) But it’s the same as I said before: People misinterpret our work because they think classroom management is the same thing as discipline, and they think that’s what we’re talking about. We get questions like this from teachers all the time, essentially asking us how to crack down on kids, or looking for one-shot solutions. But that’s not what we’re talking about. We’re talking about having a plan in place with procedures that spell out what it is that you want your students to do. It’s interesting: In most areas of life, the word management is very positive—you manage a business, you manage your finances, you manage your schedule. But in education, you say classroom management, and to some people it’s a negative term—they think you’re trying to stifle kids’ growth and punish them. That’s not what we teach. We want teachers to be able create an atmosphere of consistency and mutual understanding where kids can thrive.

Q What should a teacher do if he or she has a student who really is disruptive and not following the procedures? That does happen?

HARRY WONG: Yes, it does happen: You’re not going to succeed with every kid. But you don’t penalize them, you don’t try to coerce them. You simply teach the procedure again—as an athletic coach or music teacher might teach a particular technique. I tell teachers, “Don’t lose your cool.” You don’t want to get in a situation where you’re implementing rules and penalties all the time. Yes, there will be discipline problems in a classroom, but you won’t really reduce those problems unless you teach the students what to do. The effective teacher reteaches a procedure until it becomes a routine.

Q What’s your view of classroom-management systems that place a greater emphasis on social-emotional learning, with the goals, for example, of

developing students’ sense of empathy and self-control?

HARRY WONG: In principle, classroom management and social-emotional learning are two different things. Classroom management is meant to help you facilitate whatever approach you as a teacher choose to use. It’s not a curriculum. So if you want to use a social-emotional instructional approach, that’s great, but you still need some way to manage that approach.

ROSEMARY WONG: A number of schools that use our recommendations on effective classroom management also use Responsive Classroom, which is probably the best-known social-emotional program. So, as Harry is saying, the two can go hand in hand. But I’d like to add that we do address social-emotional factors, though we don’t always use that term. We think that an important part of social-emotional learning is giving students a sense of consistency and predictability and reliability. When you set up that consistency, it becomes a form of trust—and students appreciate that and learn best when they experience it. And they do internalize what’s expected of them, what they need to do to keep the classroom running smoothly. In this way, they become more responsible and self-directed.

Q Is the practice you recommend predicated on using direct instruction?

HARRY WONG: No, what we’re providing is the foundation for what you want to do in the classroom. You have to have procedures. We’re all in favor of teaching whatever you want to teach—whether you want to do project-based learning or flipped classroom or technology-based instruction. But you have to have some organization to help you do what you want to do. As we say, having that structure in place can facilitate student autonomy and increase learning time.

Q If you were writing *The First Days of School* today, is there anything you would change?

ROSEMARY WONG: Well, the book is in its 4th edition, and each time there’s a revision we go back and look at the research to date to make sure that it supports the things we’re talking about. And through the years, we’ve not needed to change anything in terms of the three characteristics of effective teachers.

HARRY WONG: Teaching teachers how to be effective—that’s our passion. And it’s what

we’ve done for 30 years, and we haven’t changed because the research on that hasn’t changed. In this way, we are somewhat unusual. What they do in education is jump from one program to another—one fad, one philosophy, then a different one. We’re always looking for some magic bullet that will save schools. Schools are drowning in what [education-reform scholar] Michael Fullan calls all these “ad hoc programs.” They jump from one to the next, and that’s not good for teachers or students. So we don’t intend to add to that trend—we know what works, we’ve seen it, and we stick to it.

Q OK, say I’m a teacher and I’m having a difficult time managing my class. What’s the one thing you would want me to remember?

ROSEMARY WONG: That every day is a new day in the classroom. You can always start anew, as if it’s the first day no matter how late in the year. Every single morning is a new morning in the classroom.

HARRY WONG: There are three characteristics to effective teaching that we talk about in *The First Days of School*, and we haven’t talked about the last one, which is having positive expectations. So in that situation, I’d want you to remember that. We firmly believe that teaching is the noblest of all professions—you have the power to change your students’ lives. But you have to convince your students that they can achieve. That’s half the battle. The other half is to convince yourself that you can make a difference. We truly believe that every single teacher has the potential to run and manage a classroom and effectively deliver instruction. But you have to back up and have a plan.

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For Teachers, Wired Classrooms Pose New Management Concerns

By Liana Heitin

In a growing number of K-12 schools, the use of 1-to-1 computing devices—including iPads, laptops, and Chromebooks—is becoming a central part of instruction. For teachers making the digital leap, one of the greatest hurdles can be figuring out how to manage the tech-infused classroom. How do you keep kids, who suddenly have the Internet at their fingertips, on task? How do you ensure the devices are safe and well-maintained? And how do you compete with your most tech-savvy students?

“I think this is the new frontier frankly with classroom management. We’ve never confronted this,” said Kyle Redford, a 5th grade teacher at Marin Country Day School in Corte Madera, Calif.

Redford’s school introduced iPads in the middle grades three years ago. “I think we were a little wide-eyed and naïve initially. We were letting students guide the exploration into technology,” she said.

Since then, she and her colleagues have had detailed discussions about expectations and appropriate use. “Everyone really does need to have these conversations because these tensions are real,” she said.

For many teachers, decisions about how to manage the 1-to-1 classroom stem from conversations they have with more experienced peers and, of course, from trial and error. And as more schools introduce personal devices into the classroom, some common solutions to the attendant management problems are emerging.

Wander the Room

While district firewalls and pre-loaded applications are certainly helpful in keeping kids on task, they are far from foolproof. Educators generally need to take additional measures to prevent students from straying.

Perhaps the most stringent guidance Redford’s school has come up with, for example, is that when students are on digital devices, teachers must walk around the classroom. “The siren call of technology and its bells

and whistles is just too powerful for kids,” said Redford. “If they know we’re moving around the room they’re much less likely to wander down the path of distraction. We are literally doing laps around the room.”

Sherly Chavarria, a 5th grade teacher at National Teachers Academy, a public school in Chicago, noted that iPads can be a bit easier to monitor than laptops because they lay flat on the desk. When her school began using Chromebook laptops last year, “I had to keep walking back and forth to make sure they weren’t clicking tabs,” she said. “At moments too many students were off task in too short a time, so I took the Chromebooks away for a week. We had conversations about how tools are there to support our learning, not distract our learning.”

This year, she’s piloting Hapara for her school, a computer dashboard that, among other things, allows her to see all of her students’ desktops at once and open and close tabs on their computers from afar.

At Howard University Middle School of Mathematics and Science, or MS2, a charter school in the District of Columbia, this kind of remote desktop software is a critical component of instruction. The 300 students at the school, which receives financial support from nearby Howard University, all have laptops both at home and in each of their classrooms. During a recent class, Wesley Ellis, an 8th grade social studies teacher, used the desktop program to keep an eye on students’ work as they annotated a National Geographic video at their own pace. “After the first month or two, it’s so easy” to have kids working independently on the laptops, he said. “They know the expectations.”

Create a Sense of Value

One of the best ways to keep devices in good condition, teachers seem to agree, is by creating a sense of value around them. Christine Taylor, MS2’s instructional technology liaison and Spanish teacher, said she began the school year by making sure



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KYLE REDFORD

5th Grade Teacher, Marin Country Day School, Corte Madera, Calif.

“the students understood what a privilege it was to have a classroom laptop and that not all schools had that.” She added, “This goes for anything—if the teacher makes it important then it becomes important to the students.”

In rolling out the Chromebooks, Chavarria talked to her classes about “what it means to be early adopters and tech pioneers. It creates a sense of pride in students.” She also developed specific lesson plans around maintenance and care since Chromebooks are “easily damaged,” she said. “I did a whole lesson on how to carry them, open them, how to turn them to show a partner. I can hold students accountable if I taught them how to do it.”

In her first year of using Chromebooks, Chavarria said, two screens broke. Now, she keeps a broken device to show to her classes. “We role-play the scenario exactly as it happened—a student was excited to show another student and grabbed it by the screen and turned it,” she said. “We talk about how to show it to another student.”

Another management practice common to many tech-infused classrooms is ensuring that students receive the same device every day. Chavarria said that each Chromebook and each desk in her classroom have a number, and students’ assigned computers do not change.

Rebecca Christian, a 6th grade teacher at MS², numbers her computers as well and holds her students accountable for their particular laptop’s upkeep. “They know, as soon as you turn it on, if you’ve got a problem, you’ve got to let a teacher know. Otherwise, you’re assumed responsible,” she said.

Taylor encourages teachers to keep track of which computers are out for repairs as well, and who has what computer in the meantime. For her, this system “increased the level of student responsibility. I knew that if a key was flicked off the computer, I could easily trace it back to who had been on that computer that day.”

MS² also keeps its devices—and middle schoolers—safe by forbidding students from transporting laptops. Students keep the personal Macbooks they’re issued at home for homework and use the classroom laptops while at school. If a home laptop “needs to be serviced, a parent must bring that laptop in,” said Taylor. “In D.C., most students take public transportation, so in order to maintain safety for them, we don’t want them to carry it for service.” This also prevents mishaps in which the laptops are dropped or damaged en route.

At Redford’s school, students receive personal iPads in 5th grade but cannot begin taking them home until 6th grade. The graduated responsibility allows students to “get

good at taking care of their iPads,” she said.

Officials in the Los Angeles school district, which conducted a mass iPad rollout this year, discovered the risks of allowing students to take devices off campus the hard way, when 71 iPads went missing and 300 students hacked through security filters once outside the district firewall. Superintendent John Deasy has since put a moratorium on letting students transport the devices.

Putting Students in Charge

Appointing a student technology monitor can also ease logistical issues. In Chavarria’s classroom, she said, “There are two students who pass [the Chromebooks] out in the morning. There’s no conversation about it. It’s the same with pickup.”

Robert Pronovost, the STEM coordinator for the Ravenswood City school district, said that putting maintenance tasks in the hands of students was one of the biggest changes “from the beginning to where I felt successful” implementing 1-to-1 devices. “Going from me being responsible for getting everything charged every night to having the tech monitor going back and checking to make sure everything is plugged in and in the right place” made an enormous difference, he said. “It’s the small things the tech monitor does, like jiggling plugs that hadn’t gotten plugged in all the way.”

Most teachers have a cart or cabinet that can charge a classfull of laptops or iPads overnight, often a key resource because classrooms tend to lack outlets. Even with the carts, however, teachers will inevitably be faced with devices running out of battery power during a lesson at some point, so having set procedures for such situations is important. At MS², Christian’s 6th graders know to head toward a charging station at the back of the room if their laptop dies.

According to Krista Moroder, the K-12 technology integrator for the 4,300-student Kettle Moraine school district in Wales, Wis., it’s important to have charging stations and a “classroom design where cords aren’t being tripped over.” Flexible seating, in which students are allowed to move with their devices as needed, can be helpful in solving this problem, she explained.

Like electrical cords, headphones can also pose problems. In Ellis’ classroom at MS², students return headphones to their original plastic packaging after each use, which both serves as protection and keeps the wires out of the way. Pronovost said he’s tried a variety of systems for keeping headphones safe and untangled, includ-

ing having students wrap them around their iPods and putting them in their desks around a small piece of cardboard. He eventually settled on having kids hang headphones “on the wall with a hook with every student’s name.”

Teach Tech Terms

Many teachers with classroom laptops find it helpful to differentiate between words like “closed” and “signed out,” and to be clear about what state the computer should be in at any given moment. “If I’m going to do brief direct instruction, I tell them to close the Chromebooks,” said Chavarria, meaning they should fold the tops down. “They only have it open if we’re doing a task they need to follow. ... They know the difference between closing and signing out.”

In Ellis’ room recently, one student scolded another for closing the screen rather than signing out during a question-and-answer session after the video. “He said shut it down,” 13-year-old Stephon Greene reminded his classmate.

Teachers seem to agree that another key to managing the digital classroom—akin to having an organized system for passing out papers—is using cloud tools to share documents. Programs like Google Drive, Evernote, and Dropbox allow teachers to put an assignment or instructions in every student’s folder at once. Cloud tools also let teachers “track student work from the time they start to the time finish,” said Wisconsin school technology integrator Moroder. “And having 24/7 access makes it easier because you know whether or not students are focused.”

As in any classroom setting, the thorniest management problems often arise from the cleverest students. Instead of trying to restrain these students’ efforts, many teachers recommend harnessing their know-how and curiosity. “Our biggest tech-savvy kid, he was cracking codes on passwords and getting into all kinds of trouble,” said Redford. So the technology department “hired him for the summer to explore every crack in our system and expose it and they paid him. He was able to identify and come up with solutions.”

Pronovost takes the idea a step further and has students “who really understand how technology is supposed to be used” create videos of themselves demonstrating tech tools. He then puts the instructional video in a shared Dropbox folder so students can return to it at any time. This not only prevents him from having to re-explain the technology but it also empowers students and “adds to the shared ownership,” he said.

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Instructional Coaches Dissect Classroom-Management Challenges

By Anthony Rebora

Probably the biggest issue with which I struggle as a teacher is classroom management,” Ilana Garon, an accomplished high school English teacher in New York City, recently admitted on her blog.

There’s plenty of evidence to suggest that she’s not alone. A 2011 survey of teachers and school administrators by Staff Development for Educators, for example, found that 86 percent of respondents cited classroom management as one of the biggest challenges facing new teachers. Similarly, in a 2006 survey by the American Psychological Association, teachers ranked classroom management, along with instructional skills, as a top area of need for professional development.

Perhaps not surprisingly, instructional experts and teacher-coaches see it as major problem area as well, with some lamenting that schools of education tend to focus far more on curriculum issues and developmental psychology than on the mechanics of running a classroom.

But instructional leaders also say that in most cases teachers can develop their classroom-management capacities—assuming they’re willing to re-examine their practices and attend more closely to the details of their interactions with students.

New teachers in particular have a natural tendency to think they can get by in the classroom on the strength of their personality or academic accomplishments, said Doug Lemov, the co-founder of the nonprofit school-management organization Uncommon Schools, in New York City. “So a little suffering can be good practice” if it leads them to address possible gaps in their approach, he said.

Common Problems

Educators who don’t have a solid foundation (or interest) in classroom management, instructional coaches say, tend to make relatively common and easy-to-detect

“When there isn’t a solid routine established by the teacher, kids will misbehave. [Teachers] see kids being defiant, where I see lack of clarity.”

ELENA AGUILAR

Instructional and Leadership Coach,
Oakland, Calif., School District

errors. Primary among them is the failure to set clear—and developmentally appropriate—expectations for students, typically in the form of carefully laid-out procedures and routines for classroom activities.

“When there isn’t a solid routine established by the teacher, kids will misbehave,” said Elena Aguilar, an instructional and leadership coach in the Oakland, Calif., school district. “[Teachers] see kids being defiant, where I see lack of clarity.”

Teachers often “don’t realize how much they need to break down [their expectations] for students” to give them the “technical skills” they need to follow through on a task, Aguilar added. Procedures may need to be “scaffolded” or incrementally staged for some students. This is particularly true with younger students but can be a factor even in high school classrooms, she said.

Similarly, Lemov, who is also the author of *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College*, stressed that expectations need to be taught and practiced with students. “You can’t just assume that kids know what it means to pay attention, for example,” he said. “You need to give really clear instructions, using an economy of language.”

Randall S. Sprick, a lead consultant for Safe and Civil Schools, a staff-development organization, said that teachers

should teach expectations “like a good basketball coach. You go over [them] regularly, teaching kids how to follow routines and procedures.”

That kind of emphasis on mechanics may sound impersonal or rigid, but teachers “need structure in order to build relationships with students, especially in large classrooms,” Sprick said.

Some teachers, even very passionate ones, “forget they are managers of children and resources, so they aren’t really oriented to think that way,” according David Ginsburg, an independent school-leadership and instructional coach based in Philadelphia. “Love of the content and great lessons aren’t enough. Teachers need [to do] upfront planning around management and organization.”

Steering, Not Controlling

The behavioral issues stemming from a lack clear of expectations in the classroom often lead to a second major error teachers commonly make in managing their classrooms: becoming overly reactive.

“Getting angry at off-task behavior can trigger further problems,” said Lemov. “It gives the power to students by showing them that they can get you off course. It also distracts from the students’ self-reflection about the situation.”

In a similar vein, Ginsburg noted that, in attempting to reassert authority, teachers often err in “going down the path of creating controlling, adversarial relationships with kids.”

“If the teacher’s agenda is about controlling, then it’s a recipe for disaster—for further behavioral problems and withdrawal,” said Ginsburg. “There needs to be structure and procedures, but it shouldn’t feel like prison. If that’s the culture, teachers won’t get the collaboration they need from students.”

Sprick said that in training teachers in classroom-management skills, his organization stresses the importance of interacting positively with students and “correct-

ing calmly, consistently, and respectfully.” Otherwise, he said, problems and resentments can “fester.”

Gaining Awareness

Beyond the general imperatives of setting clear expectations and maintaining composure, instructional leaders and coaches frequently highlight the importance of close observation and finely-tuned awareness to effective classroom management.

“Little things have big muscles” in the classroom, said Lemov, explaining that teachers at Uncommon Schools are trained to exhibit “visible perception” as a way of cultivating student engagement. Teachers need to “notice whether students do what they are asked to do, show that they care, intimate that they are looking, and scan the classroom regularly,” he said.

Close observation and monitoring are likewise central tenets of the Safe and Civil Schools teacher-training program, said Sprick, the author of *Coaching Classroom Management*. By showing students that they are to paying close attention to students’ actions and responses, teachers can foster on-task behavior. “Most of us go the speed limit when a police officer is visible, and houses are always cleanest when company is coming,” Sprick explained by analogy.

For instructional coach Ginsburg, the role of observational skills extends to becoming more aware of students’ particular needs in the classroom. A student may be acting out, for example, because he or she wants to be called on more often or is avoiding a task or assignment in light of past failures. To uncover such issues (as well as positive developments), Ginsburg stressed the “importance of circulating through the whole class” and acknowledging the work each student is doing. “That’s the ultimate reward for a student—acknowledgement from an adult.”

Oakland instructional coach Aguilar, who is also the author of *The Art of Coaching*, said that many teachers need to gain a greater perception of how racial and cultural factors can contribute to classroom problems. Teachers should be conscious of whether they are interacting differently with particular groups, or making assumptions about students’ actions based on unfamiliarity or stereotypes. Just becoming aware of such tendencies can lead to positive changes and fewer power struggles in the classroom, she said.

A Different Lens

Since teachers often personalize and blame students for classroom-manage-

ment problems, instructional coaches say that a key part of helping them resolve such issues is encouraging them to take a different perspective.

“I help them reframe the situation,” said Aguilar. “It’s important to get it out of the personal experience.” For example, she may try to show a teacher that the problem isn’t solely that “students are being obnoxious. [It’s that] they don’t have what they need from you.”

“Anything coaches can do to give kids more of a voice in the way they are experiencing the teacher’s management can help,” she said, adding that conducting a survey of students can be an eye-opening practice for teachers.

Similarly, Ginsburg said that a big part of his work involves “helping teachers see connections between what they’re doing and what kids are doing. It’s easy to see that a child is acting inappropriately, but we need to be open to the idea that it’s something we did or didn’t do that’s contributing.”

Teachers who are struggling with classroom management often “don’t see the forest for the trees,” he said. “They want to address the misbehavior, but that’s addressing the symptom rather than the source.”

Because it’s difficult to self-correct classroom-management problems, instructional coaches often advise teachers to video-tape their lessons or have a peer observe their work and provide feedback. “Look at your strengths and weaknesses,” advised Sprick. “Are you lecturing too much, or paying more attention to negative behavior than to positive behavior?”

Lemov said that teachers, even experienced ones, shouldn’t be ashamed of going back to reconstruct their management plans and practice “the little things” to improve student-teacher interactions.

“People think it’s demeaning to the profession to think about the nuts and bolts,” he said. “But chemical engineers aren’t concerned about that, just to give one example. They aren’t worried about being too micro. In actuality, it shows an anxiety about an endeavor to be apprehensive about going deep into the details, even the most mundane.”

Teaching is “too valuable and powerful” for that kind of thinking, Lemov said.

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Teachers Share Advice on Classroom Management

To improve their classroom-management skills, teachers are often advised to seek help from talented peers. To that end, we recently sent out emails and tweets to teachers asking: “What is the best piece of advice you’ve ever received regarding classroom management?”

Over 40 teachers replied with tips on everything from timed activities to relationship building. Here’s a selection of their responses:



JANE FUNG

1st grade teacher in Los Angeles

“The best piece of advice I have ever received regarding classroom management is that there is not one ‘right’ way to manage a classroom. Just as each child is different, so is each teacher and style. What may work for one teacher in their classroom does not mean it is right for you. Some teachers need quiet, where others, like me, work better in an environment where there is more interaction throughout the day, so my noise level is a little higher than some other teachers. The important thing is that the classroom environment is one that is safe and respectful in which everyone takes responsibility for learning.”



REBECCA SCHMIDT

3rd grade teacher in Washington, D.C.

“Be confident, even if you’re scared. Kids need to trust you, know that you are a leader, feel they are safe, and that you will take care of them.”

“Be kind, even if you’re mad. Kids need empathy and patience, and to know that it’s OK to take risks and mess up in their learning and in their life. “Be consistent in your response to negative (and positive) behavior. “Above all, be honest. Don’t lie to kids. That’s lame.”



NOAH PATEL

6th and 8th grade math teacher in Boston

“The best piece of advice that I ever received was to have a series of timed activities for my middle school students to complete immediately upon entering my classroom each day. They turn in and record their homework. They do a self-assessment of their preparedness for class that day and set up their notebooks for the day’s lesson. They complete a warm-up problem and, if finished with everything, they have extra targeted skills worksheets to work on from their class folders. This all takes place in eight minutes at the start of class. I project

the remaining time on my overhead with a timer. My 6th graders are motivated by the countdown and are so busy completing these tasks that they don’t realize when the clock has finished that they have quietly seated themselves and completely prepared themselves for the day’s work!”



ARIEL SACKS

8th grade English teacher in Brooklyn, N.Y. and blogger of On the Shoulders of Giants

“Madeleine Ray, my mentor at Bank Street College, always encouraged me to build in some time with the whole class to talk about how the class is going—whether things are going well or poorly, little things or big things. We never know what they are thinking until we ask. Just open up the discussion with: What’s working? What’s not?”

“The chance for students to voice their perspectives and concerns goes far with them and provides invaluable information to me. Don’t take the opportunity to lecture students, but also don’t give the impression that your goal is to satisfy all of their “wants.” Listen, ask questions, and look for opportunities to negotiate small changes that might better serve the needs of students and create a more democratic classroom. Whether the conversation lasts three or 30 minutes, it will build your credibility as a group leader and help support everything else you are trying to accomplish with your students.”



LILLIE MARSHALL

7th grade Humanities teacher in Boston and blogger of Teaching Traveling

“The classroom-management system that ends up working for you is likely very different from the management system that works for every other teacher in your building. I made the mistake my first two years of trying to emulate a teacher who screamed all the time. That tactic worked wonders for her, and kids loved her, but what ended up working for me was a more positive, loving tone, and having a concrete system of behavior grades that students could see and check. Experi-

ment and try everything until you hone in on what works for you.

“Aim to make more than half of what you say positive and enjoyable to listen to. If everything you say is consistently harsh, punitive, or nasty, humans of all ages are far less likely to listen when you call for their attention.”



JESSICA SHYU

Vice president of regional affairs and training & support at Teach For China

“The best piece of advice for classroom management is the same I’ve received for adult management: Set clear expectations, give rationale, check for understanding, and give positive or constructive feedback. (Human behavior apparently doesn’t change much between the ages of 5 and 100.) Less intuitive to me was the checking for understanding part—it took me months (and by months I mean my whole first year) to realize that just me saying the instructions or rules wasn’t enough; you need to ask questions or have a student share back what we are going to do. Of course, any behavior management trick or strategy only works if you love your students (and adult staff members)—it doesn’t matter how much you check for understanding if it doesn’t come from a place of love and care. That part doesn’t change, ever.”



NANCY FLANAGAN

Education writer and consultant

“Your success with classroom management is always determined by your investment in good relationships with students. No management ‘tips and tricks’ will work unless students develop trust in the teacher as a straight shooter who cares about them. What this means is that all aspects of your work in the classroom with them—the instructional strategies you choose, your early assessments of their work, the questions you ask, the way you talk to your students—become part of the classroom-management package. Invest, early on, in listening to what the students tell you about who they are.”



ELENA AGUILAR

Transformational leadership coach in Oakland, Calif.

“The best piece of advice I ever got about classroom management was that I should get to know my kids and spend time with them outside of school. I started with my students who appeared to be most challenging. By spending only a few hours outside of school (at a museum, at a park, or having lunch [with them]), I developed a connection with them and affection for them that helped mediate many classroom-management issues. What I learned about them also helped me have deep empathy for them, which helped me manage my emotional responses to their behavior.”

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COMMENTARY

Reducing Student-Behavior Problems: Notes From a High School Teacher

By Paul Barnwell

From many “old-school” teachers and parents who grew up in an age of greater conformity and fear-based authority, the culture of our schools is in dire straits because they believe there is not enough discipline. Not enough respect. Too few consequences for students who don’t toe the line. The kids are out of control.

In reality, we dole out far more punitive disciplinary measures like suspension than we did 30 years ago, and according to research by Villanova University sociology professor Allison Ann Payne, the number of security guards, cameras, controlled grounds, and other police-like measures have been steadily increasing since the mid-1990s.

Yet, as a teacher at various public schools in Kentucky over the past nine years, I’ve rarely seen these types of control measures have the effect of deterring or preventing repeat behavioral problems. At my high school last year, for example, there were 4,996 discipline referrals written on 911 students (over 75 percent of the student body) and 532 suspensions of 284 students. Clearly repeat offenders are not changing their behavior.

I’m certainly not advocating for a “soft” stance on discipline—truly disruptive or violent behavior must be dealt with strongly. But since it seems like punitive discipline isn’t always very effective, shouldn’t we consider other options to change behavior and create improved school climates? Does the “policing” mindset in schools align with our goal—or what should be our goal—of keeping all students safe, in classrooms, and learning?

To me, it’s obvious that there are some serious flaws with the status quo. I also think there are specific actions we can take to cultivate better school climates and behavior. As teachers, I believe we need to set clear boundaries for students in our classrooms and strengthen techniques for engaging them in learning. At the school level, building administrators must introduce policies

and programs that emphasize personal growth and responsibility.

Be Friendly, But Not a Friend

As a young teacher, I was nearly run out of the profession due to a poorly run school, unruly students, and my own massively inadequate classroom-management skills. Looking back, it’s clear I had no idea how to establish authority. I remember wanting to be friends with my students. I remember thinking I already had what it took to maintain classroom order. I remember being conned into favors by 14-year-olds, making bargains with students who wanted to be let off the hook for various disruptions.

So this is my first rule of classroom management: You are not your students’ friend. Friends help each other out with favors and expect give-and-take. This is not the way things work in the classroom. Do not “friend” students on Facebook or other social-media sites, and do not show favoritism to any single student. Because students are perceptive as to how you react to each and every child in the classroom, they are much less likely to talk back or cause other disruptions if it’s clear you are not providing favors or loopholes for any of them. We teachers have all been in situations where some students ask for special treatment, like extra bathroom breaks or letting it slide if they are tardy. You think other students don’t notice this? Not a chance! Contrary to the belief of many teachers, most students want an authoritative, caring adult in the classroom, one who has a consistent approach to dealing with all students.

That said, it’s important to build constructive relationships with students. Show interest in their music, hobbies, and after-school activities. Students will respond. It can be tough to show patience and flash a smile with certain students—a devious fourth-period student of mine comes to mind—but showing you are a friendly, caring adult will go a long way toward preventing behavioral problems. Many students don’t have an

adult in their lives who asks questions and acknowledges likes and dislikes, generally showing interest in their thoughts and feelings. As soon as students realize you care about them as people, many of them will instinctively come to your side and not want to disappoint you behaviorally or academically.

Engagement as Prevention

A classroom-management argument I certainly don’t buy is that it’s the student’s job to sit there, be quiet, and learn. In my view, it’s the teacher’s job to make sure students are engaged. Sure, there is always a student who is going to pop off no matter what I do. I’ve had students who are bipolar, victims of rape, and malnourished when they enter the classroom, among other conditions I can’t control. But I can make the situation better for all of us if I take actions to elicit students’ interest and attention. If I sit back and pass out work packets and expect students to comply, I’m putting myself in a tenuous position. Giving students extended periods of time with no expectation of active involvement or teacher feedback will lead to disruptions, guaranteed.

There are several methods I use to encourage students’ active involvement in lessons. First of all, I have a set of 3-by-5 note cards with each student’s name on a card. I use these for random questioning and classroom-participation prompts. I remember coming to the realization long ago that I had a tendency to call on certain students more frequently than others, or would simply let those whose hands shot up get too much airtime. By choosing a random card, I send a message to the class that everyone’s voice is valued, that everyone is expected to contribute, and that everyone should be ready to pipe up at any time.

Another processing activity that can ensure greater engagement—and fewer disciplinary issues—is the use of simple polls, such as asking students for a thumbs up, down, or sideways in response to instruction. For example, I might ask students

about their understanding of appositives during a writing exercise. “Quick poll,” I’ll say. “How well do y’all understand this concept?” I don’t move on until I see every student’s hand gesture.

Another simple technique I use is to ask a question and have students write their responses on the whiteboard or other assigned places in the room. After everybody has recorded a response, I invite students to come up and examine each other’s answers, analyzing them for similarities and differences. This technique is a structured way for students—especially, in my experience, boys—to release pent-up energy by being allowed to get out of their seats, walk around the perimeter of the room, and then briefly lead the discussion. Creating opportunities for movement and involvement like this is often a good way to curb emerging behavioral problems.

For other ideas on engaging students, I highly recommend the book *Total Participation Techniques: Making Every Student an Active Learner* by Pérsida Himmele and William Himmele. It’s been a valuable resource for me.

Creating the Right Conditions

Educators also need to continually ask themselves whether an infraction warrants losing class time.

Do you want to write up students who come unprepared to class, lacking a pencil or paper, and pass the problem along to the administration? Do you want to remove students from class for dress-code violations? Or, do you want to create conditions where students are in classrooms, potentially learning, for the maximum amount of time?

Over the four years I’ve been at my current high school, I’ve seen the priorities shift. Teachers used to remove students from classes for little things all the time, but now the onus is on us to create more rigorous, engaging instruction, which can prevent the bulk of discipline issues. Our administration has begun shortening faculty meetings in favor of time for professional learning communities and embedded professional development focused on instructional issues, so we’re also not expected to suddenly emerge as more effective teachers without the support of our building leaders and colleagues.

Developing Empathy

Thinking more big-picture, I believe that an emphasis on social-emotional learning, including approaches like restorative justice, has great promise for schools. Some

high schools in Oakland, Calif.; Chicago; Denver; and other cities are shifting away from more punitive disciplinary systems and experimenting with the restorative justice approach in hopes of preventing or reducing student behavioral issues.

At the heart of the restorative justice process, according to a New York Times article, is relationship building and problem solving: “It encourages young people to come up with meaningful reparations for their wrongdoing while challenging them to develop empathy for one another through ‘talking circles’ led by facilitators.”

Imagining restorative justice becoming more widespread in schools can be tough, since many educators may view the approach as “touchy-feely.” Some may say it’s not their job to teach these life skills, but rather to focus on content like geometry or English. But how much can a student learn if he or she is constantly embroiled in tumult? Next to nothing, as I see it.

How often are classrooms, especially those full of students lacking social-emotional skills, disrupted due to students engaged in verbal sparring, which then escalates? Too frequently, at least every couple of years, I’ve had to deal with this type of counterproductive learning environment.

If students improve their social-emotional skills, the small conflicts all kids bring into the classroom can remain just that—small issues, rather than full-blown yelling matches. This is even more important now that spats begun on social-media outlets are streaming into our classrooms. Perhaps these issues could be contained more effectively with a restorative justice-like approach.

We can’t control who comes through our classroom doors or what a student’s home life is like, but we can shift how we deal with—and prevent—transgressions, both on the classroom and school levels. As the year continues, I know I’ll have to deal with student-behavior challenges that I simply can’t prevent. There will be students who stroll into Room 137 angry at the world, their parents, classmates, and what was said on Twitter. But sound classroom and school-wide approaches to behavior can go a long way in shaping environments where students feel safe and are engaged and learning at high levels.

Paul Barnwell teaches English, creative writing, and digital media at Fern Creek Traditional High School in Louisville, Ky. When not experimenting with urban gardening, bow-hunting, writing at his blog (Mindful Stew), or watching football, he’s an active participant in the National Writing Project, and the Center for Teaching Quality’s Collaboratory.

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COMMENTARY

Power Struggles, Paychecks, and Positivity: My Career as a Classroom Manager

By Andrea Palmer

Carter was having a difficult day. He was calling out and disrupting my math lesson. In accordance with our schoolwide discipline plan, I announced in front of the class that he had earned a consequence and later a demerit when he began to argue with me. When his calling out still did not stop, I announced that he had earned a second demerit and that he would be leaving class. Shortly after, an administrator arrived and removed Carter from the room.

The problem? I now realize that by engaging with Carter, I had turned a simple misbehavior into a public power struggle, which I lost. I had also failed to ask or observe the cause of Carter's misbehavior. I found out later that he was frustrated that I had not called on him earlier and had decided to share his ideas another way. I did not give Carter the chance to learn from his mistake and fix it. Rather than addressing the cause of the behavior and having Carter take time to refocus, I sent him out of the room and he missed the rest of the lesson.

In my six years as a teacher, I've seen and tried the spectrum of classroom-management strategies. I started teaching in a school where teachers designed their own classroom-management plans. During my first year, I struggled to establish strong procedures and routines with my students. I was left to manage my classroom with little support. Overwhelmed and inexperienced, I developed a system that was, for the most part, reactive. Rather than anticipating and planning for student behavior, I spent a lot of time responding to what students were doing. I failed to develop the procedures and community that I wanted, so without a clear picture of what I expected, students misbehaved. My reactions to this misbehavior were linked to my mood, which varied greatly from day to day.

Things got better over the next two years as I established stronger procedures and community processes. I also began rely-

ing on an economy system for incentives and consequences. When students followed expectations, they received tickets for the weekly prize raffle. Although my classroom-management skills had improved, the systems I put in place applied only inside the walls of my classroom. Every other teacher in the school had his or her own classroom-management system, which created confusion for students.

A 'One-Size-Fits-All' Plan

The next year I sought a job at a more structured school with a clear, schoolwide approach to discipline. At this school, all teachers followed the same classroom-management plan. Teachers prescribed incentives and consequences consistently, which affected each students' seven dollars per day "paycheck." At the end of each month, students used their money to buy prizes and school supplies. Each time a student broke a rule, he or she lost money. For more serious infractions, students lost recess and served a detention in addition to the financial loss. Conversely, for going above and beyond expectations, students could receive bonus dollars.

Staff members at my school valued learning time above all else. Students were not allowed to disrupt the learning of others. While teaching, I announced misbehavior and consequences publicly, as in the case with Carter. "That is a demerit," I would say. "Stop calling out and raise your hand." I expected students to quickly fix the problem and move on. I administered the same consequence for the same infraction, no matter the student or situation. It was what some might call a "no excuses" approach, but to me it's more aptly called a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

Emotional Rescue?

I've since moved again to a new school that uses Responsive Classroom, a program that prioritizes students' social-emotional learning. Responsive Classroom

encourages teachers to incorporate morning meetings in which students share their feelings, have classes create rules together, impose logical consequences that take into account the exact circumstances of the misbehavior, and use positive language.

With Responsive Classroom, if a student is making fun of a classmate, the teacher first stops the behavior, perhaps by sending the student to a different area to take a break. Later, the teacher speaks with the student about how his or her words affected the other student. To repair the damage, the student may write an apology or meet with the student he or she hurt. This is done privately, so that all students involved feel respected.

While I have yet to take official Responsive Classroom training, I have spent a significant amount of time working with my colleagues to apply this philosophy in our school. Each week, all teachers in the school have an advisory lesson for their homeroom that focuses on character development and community building. All teachers and staff members consistently work together to use the Responsive Classroom approach with students.

The transition from the one-size-fits-all approach to the Responsive Classroom approach has been difficult for me. Rather than apply the same strategy to every student, I've had to develop a broad repertoire of strategies for handling misbehavior. In doing so, I've had to reflect on my role in student misbehavior. How does my planning and instruction affect student behavior? What is the cause behind the student's acting out? How can I deal with the cause?

A Growth Mindset

I have come to realize that it's critical to address the diverse causes of student behavior. With the one-size-fits-all approach, I used consequences to discourage student misconduct without trying to understand why the behavior was happening. Yes, my students spent more time on task. But without a strong focus on character and

community-building, they struggled to learn how to make better choices, especially when adults were not present.

I have also realized that making discipline issues public only invites more misbehavior and diminishes a student's feeling of value. I now stress the importance of having a "growth mindset," or believing that you can improve your skills through hard work and effort, and I encourage students to embrace mistakes as part of the learning process. If I truly believe this, then my classroom-management approach must also acknowledge that mistakes—even ones related to behavior—happen. It is important that students recognize why the mistake happened, why they need to fix it, and what they can do to prevent this behavior in the future. This takes time and looks different for different students, but it's worth the effort.

Perhaps above all, as I've grown as a teacher, I've realized that good classroom management isn't in a program or a paycheck, it's in a lesson. While I develop more relevant, engaging, and challenging lessons, I encounter misbehavior much less frequently. Of course this is easier said than done, but the time I have spent crafting interactive lessons and projects that students feel connected to has paid off.

I still have work to do to successfully use all of these components in my classroom. I know that I will continue to learn from students, staff members, and parents if I take the time to observe and listen. I have to push myself to apply the growth mindset to my own professional learning and recognize that I do make mistakes. The important part is that I regularly reflect on my actions and work to continuously improve.

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