The New Teacher's (mini) Handbook on Classroom Management

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Assignment: Create a classroom management handbook for beginning teachers. In it, provide clear guidance on developing a proactive approach to classroom management and suggestions for appropriate reactive management. Include brief explanations of why the suggested approaches are of value. Illustrate the concepts with visuals such as photographs, drawings, or cartoons.
Proactive Management

Proactive classroom management allows teachers to put structures into place that prevent issues, troubles, and other more negative happenings from occurring. In no small sense, it “stops things before they start.” Proactive classroom management lays the groundwork for students to feel comfortable in their learning environment, feel as though they are valued, and gives the teacher the opportunity to give the students what they need to learn, and the students therein the opportunity to get what they need.

Building Classroom Community

It is no surprise that students appreciate when their teachers make an effort to get to know them. When a teacher actively shows interest in a student and in the student’s life, it helps to “shed the anonymity and alienation” that is sometimes felt in the classroom (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010, p.78). When a student feels that a teacher cares about them, and about their growth as an individual, it supports a student’s enthusiasm for learning and being challenged. Tomlinson and Imbeau break this notion down very simply: “students work for the people they value”, who are usually the people who value them (p. 79). Once teachers begin to establish a connection and put forth the effort to get to know their students, they begin to take greater responsibility in the students’ success. Getting to know a child’s strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, and culture also gives the teacher insight into the student’s world, and therefore a better sense of their needs and ways to facilitate learning and success (pp.78-79).

As a teacher, establishing a connection with students is vital. It may take a good bit of effort, and may be a challenging task when working with difficult or reluctant students, but the
end result can help set a positive groundwork for good classroom management. Students feel supported, valued, and validated when their teacher reaches out to show they care about those in their class. When a connection is in place, students feel less vulnerable and use their feelings of support to achieve their goals and engage in learning. The connection cannot be feigned or superficial: it must be genuine and the information collected can be used to put into place methods of teaching that will fit each student’s needs.

*Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom* (2010) suggests a few strategies to get to know students and use that information to create learning strategies for both them and yourself:

- **Greeting at the Door:** Talking to students before or after a class helps improve communication and gives the teacher a sense of what a student is proficient, developing, or struggling with. Simply asking “How was the homework?” and interpreting the feedback creates a bank of information that is invaluable. The teacher can use this information to plan future lessons or accommodate for or support a particular student’s learning needs. The ease of this strategy combined with the connection it promotes results in a huge payoff for all parties.

- **Take Note:** Taking notes, even simple ones, about what you have learned about students is an important tool. When used as a boost to formative assessment, notes become extremely helpful; notes on student struggles and strengths can make differentiation and accommodation for learning much easier. Jotting down a student’s interests, struggles, and strengths make it easier to find what will work for the student and to catch problems before they start. This strategy helps to get students where they need to be without the need to fail first; a problem or weakness can be addressed and differentiated for before feelings of helplessness, isolation, and discouragement get the chance to creep in and hinder a student’s learning. This is an organized, proactive way to get to know students.

Connections and a sense of support should not stop with just the teacher and student. The classroom should be molded into a space and group of people who work together to support and
encourage each other to better the learning of everyone. Students, especially middle and high school students, are especially in need of a community that fosters the love of learning and a feeling of worth. Mendler (2009) has noted that students have basic needs like the needs to fit in, feel competent, and to have some autonomy in their lives in order to have the motivation needed for learning. A strong, caring, and connected classroom community can help meet these needs and further positive feelings towards education (Mendler, 2009, p.7).

- Start building classroom community by first establishing a policy of caring and respect from your own positive interactions with students by getting to know them. By modeling your positive behaviors, students will take notice and replicate respect and values (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010, p.87). Warm students up to the idea that the classroom is a place that demands equity and respect for all, an idea very similar to a democracy.

- Discourage use of unkind language, put-downs to other students, and put-downs to oneself. Students will feel more comfortable in being open with their peers if they do not feel judged, which will begin to foster a community love of learning and openness.

- Give students power through discussion that is meaningful. Allow the class structure to be one that facilitates discussion and the sharing of ideas in order for students to learn to respect others’ thoughts and challenge their own (p.86). Doing this puts meaning back behind learning, instead of simply teaching it and essentially saying to do it because “it needs to be done.” This can be done by leaving class time to discuss the content or perhaps concerns and possible strategies to help each other. In the beginning of the semester, spark conversation and discussion with prompts, and later teach the students how to begin and uphold discussion themselves.
Grouping

Group work is often a woe of many students due to anxieties about working with others, feelings of a lack of competence with their work, and about being judged by their peers. However, with a good classroom community in place where students are familiar with each other, respectful, and comfortable, group work will seem like less of a negative and more of a chance to work with others, develop social bonds, and above all learn to operate in a collective to get a task finished.

- Consider what type of group is needed for what your students must accomplish, and how groups should be made. What is the requirement of the work being done? Is it reading, writing, or something else? Should students be assigned groups, and if so, by what criteria? Perhaps students can choose who they work with?

- Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010) suggest when appropriate using groups called “standing groups” in the classroom: standing groups are repeating groups that become familiar to the students within them and can vary based on the demands of the work or task (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010, pp. 107-109). For example, a standing group can be implemented for a unit that is reading-heavy. Students in each standing group should be informed of who is in their group and learn to get into their group when directed. These groups can be arranged in “Text Teams,” or students with similar reading levels; “Synthesis Squads,” where students are grouped with others of various learning strengths; or “Teacher Talkers,” which are a group of students with similar learning needs that will have extended meetings and support with the teacher (p. 109). These groups will remain fluid and not permanent or semi-permanent, but instead remain a supplement to readiness-based groups. Using standing groups allows students to have groups they know to meet with at a certain time or in a particular circumstance, thus reducing the need to constantly create new groups and focus more on the learning taking place within them.

- Differentiation in Groups: Grouping and group work can be a form of differentiation, but sometimes more differentiation is necessary to give students the help that they need. Students should be given clear directions for getting into their groups and what to do
them. Some may require more supplementation to this initial direction, which can be managed by putting directions into multiple formats such as a recording, in writing, or by telling students to check back with the teacher to check for the next step. If a student has difficulty understanding the directions, meet with them directly and explain in a way that works for them; clarified directions will help students become more successful in their groups and work (p. 113).

**Learner Motivation**

Motivation is a hot topic in education, and is something very much needed in classrooms today. Motivation should not simply be thought of as a tangible reward used to motivate students, as this type of motivation creates a mindset where once the student has worked towards the goal, learning is no longer necessary and the reward was the only motivation to get there. Through a number of different methods and strategies, students can and should be motivated intrinsically and be motivated and rewarded by their own success and learning.

- **Effort:** It is important to recognize that there are different degrees of success for different students. What may seem like “nothing” could really mean a lot to a student, such as getting a 65 (passing) on a test when previously, they were unable to pass. This is why emphasizing effort is important; learners are boosted and motivated to keep trying and working towards their goal of mastery. A teacher can implement the motivation to learn through emphasizing effort by doing what Mendler (2009) called “building on mistakes and partially correct answers” (p. 10). This method of motivation boosts students’ confidence and keeps them working towards their learning goals with the motivation that while some things may not be completely right, others are; for some learners, this sort of motivation is hugely appreciated and treasured. Effort can also be used as motivation with the three Rs; that is, Redo, Retake, and Revise. Allowing students to use genuine effort to assist their learning makes effort more meaningful and can be viewed as a positive tool to
get learners where they need to be in terms of mastery development.

- **Creating Hope:** Emphasis on effort can help create hope in struggling students and students who lack motivation. Showing students that their learning and effort relates to their lives may get otherwise unmotivated learners into a position where they are more comfortable and passionate about learning. Hope can be instilled, too, when the basic most skills a student will need to thrive are addressed and supplemented in the classroom, such as reading, writing, and listening (Mendler, 2009, p. 23). This need can be met with extra instruction, more time to work, and new opportunities to practice the skills a student has trouble with. With competency comes hope, and with hope comes motivation.

- **Be a Part:** Motivation for some student may manifest in the ability to have an impact on their lives or physical space. Students, especially middle and high school students, are frequently stripped of their autonomy and react well to the chance of being able to control their situations, even if the involvement may seem minor (Mendler, 2009, pp. 34-37). Motivation to learn or be a part of learning may come as easily as allowing students to be a part of decision-making processes like classroom rules and routines, or even helping guide a lesson and directing others. When students are doing something that is good or positive, “catch them” doing so and praise them: students will begin to associate these positive behaviors with good feelings and will continue to work on them (Mendler, 2009, p. 43). A teacher can foster this motivation by “catching” a student following the rules well, and giving them appropriate praise for it.

**The Physical Learning Environment**

Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010) pose the argument that the physical environment “in a differentiated classroom should provide the structure and predictability young people need in order to feel secure” (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010, p. 92). The physical environment of the classroom should be safe, facilitate learning, and allow for flexibility such as group and
independent work. An organized and accommodating classroom setup serves as a basis by which the teacher, and the students, can feel comfortable learning and being challenged.

- Consider the needs of your class and base the physical set up of the classroom around those needs. Move furniture and adjust the classroom’s floor plan to make efficient use of the space while keeping student needs in mind. Opt for tables and a number of individual desks to allow for group work and a sense of community while also giving students who need a more “individualized study [space]” a place to work that meets their needs (p.93). Keep the teacher’s desk out of the way, as it is not a feature of the class: the learners and the learning community are. Your presence will be known not by the placement of “your space,” but by your moving around the classroom while teaching and to give assistance and feedback to students as they work.

- The physical set up of the classroom should allow for student movement as well as teacher movement. Movement around the perimeter of the classroom as well as winding between desks and tables is important in observing, being available, and controlling noise. The materials that students will use should be arranged in an organized way that promotes easy access with few questions or confusion. Cubbies, containers, and similar structures make doing this easy, and when combined with a furniture arrangement that allows for simple, unobtrusive access to needed items, the class can run much more smoothly and students will have better access to the tools they require for learning.

Your physical space can lead to improvements in routines and procedures. This makes sense, of course, when we consider that a good physical set up for the classroom can have a large influence on the comfort of students and their willingness to get involved. It is wise for teachers to set up their classroom in such a way that students can both learn how to use their space and adapt to the class’s procedures and routines.
Procedures and Routines

Procedures and routines help to keep a classroom moving smoothly and allow students to get what they need themselves and feel comfortable doing so. Tomlinson & Imbeau make clear note that procedures and routines are a way for students to build confidence, but are “not mechanisms to control students” (p.100). When teachers are able to organize the physical space within the classroom effectively and convey the need and rationale for their procedures and routines, students will recognize how important it is to be organized, follow procedure, and how much it will lend to their success.

- First, determine what procedures and routines are appropriate for the ages in the class and the demands of the students and the space. Find the “must-haves” for procedures and routines and develop what is necessary from there. These needs include procedures for managing students’ focus and noise levels, replacing and obtaining supplies, and understanding how the class will begin and end. Be careful to not micromanage the classroom, as it will become tedious for everyone in the space, and will become apparent that the students are not trusted or in need of using their minds to work out what they should do outside of a prescribed routine or procedure (p.100).

- Once the class’s procedures and routines have been made, perhaps even with student input for a greater feel of autonomy and community, it is important to develop and teach these elements. Fine-tune procedures and routines based on what is working and what is not; be flexible in order to get where the class needs to be. Then, teach the students why these routines and procedures are important, and explore the rationale behind them (p.100). When students are able to clearly see why the procedures and routines that are in place in the classroom are important, they will be more inclined to follow them and make efficient use of them. Eventually, with application, students will be competent enough to follow the classroom’s procedures and routines. Tomlinson & Imbeau recommend reflecting back on
these ideas so students can refresh the idea’s importance and their benefits (p. 101).

Rules and Consequences

When discussing and reflecting on the procedures and routines in the classroom, another topic that is very important to make clear is the rules of the classroom and consequences. Springer and Persiani (2011) recommend having your class rules and consequences up front and known even in the first days of class to keep students aware of what is expected of them as well as keep control over the class by letting students know the classroom is a place for learning and growing (Springer and Persiani, 2011, p.108). State the rules and consequences of the classroom in a positive way to keep the environment positive as well, and allow the topic to be discussed in a manner that is healthy (pp. 135-136).

- **Rules:** Rules should be put into place in order to keep the classroom running smoothly and keep learning in focus. Adjust your classroom’s rules to its needs, and remember that not everything needs a specific rule. Consider making some rules more broad and branching and others more specific (pp. 135-136), and “point to an intrinsic and positive [...] way of operating in the classroom” (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010, pp. 102-103). Some more broad, guideline-like rules may include rules such as “Take care of yourself; Take care of each other; Take care of this place,” and more specifically may address a particular issue such as “Students will stay seated until the bell rings” (pp. 102-103).

- **Consequences:** Having clear consequences for when rules are broken allows students to gauge if they would or would not like to push a boundary; as Jones (2007) noted students will push their boundaries but will also actively decide if the pros outweigh the cons in doing so (Jones, 2007, p. 312). Let the consequences be known, and follow through with them when appropriate. The classroom’s consequences should be appropriate to the issue and the student’s age. For example, if the rule of being rude to another student is a meeting with the teacher to discuss further actions to take, it should be followed through
with. Students know when consequences are simply “empty threats,” and will not take them or the rules seriously (p.314).

**Reactive Management**

Reactive management requires teachers to work with students after an issue or problem has already manifested and needs to be dealt with. It is best to act proactively to avoid needing to get to this stage, but sometimes situations are out of our control despite us. Having plans in place to use reactive management will allow the situation to become manageable, under control, and keep the learning environment sound and positive.

**Motivation**

- Students, with proper motivation, will likely avoid causing issues or problems. Motivating students to behave properly for the future after an issue has occurred and warrants reactive management can allow for future learning of how to solve problems. Motivate students after a problem has occurred or a student has stopped caring by using down time such as lunch periods to talk to them about what is going on, and what can be done to fix it (Mendler, 2009, p. 53). Motivation is found in the personal communication with the teacher that is specially-geared to the student’s needs, and becomes a platform and desire for success.

**Off-Task and Inappropriate Behaviors**

- Off-task behaviors, and frequently the noise that comes with it, can be frustrating for teachers and learners alike. During school time, students are itching to interact and be social with their peers, and trying to express themselves and build friendships. A teacher can use this behavior to their advantage and redirect this distraction into something positive once it has started. When the teacher notices off-task behavior, they should discourage it by quietly and subtly telling students to remain focused and get back to their lesson or work. Walking around and having a greater presence in the student-centered
area of the classroom will also help keep students from getting off topic and keep their behavior in line. If needed, stay close to students who are having trouble staying focused and discuss the behavior in private afterwards (Jones, 2007). By being reasonable and not making a scene in front of a student’s peers, there is less resentment and a greater desire to stop the negative behavior and not have to delve into further, perhaps more serious actions and consequences (Jones, 2007). This same idea works for students engaged in inappropriate behavior, depending on the severity of the situation. Students who are engaged in more serious infringements of appropriate behavior should have their behavior stopped accordingly; a student who is merely texting in class would be well-suited to a verbal warning with a clear consequence, but a person engaged in bullying in the class should be removed from the situation promptly. Appropriate reactions are key in reactive management; the punishment should fit the “crime” (Jones, 2007, p. 316).
References:


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There are many types of LEARNERS:

- Some are shut and passive,
- Some are eager and high-strung,
- Some view learning as a chore,
- While others welcome a challenge.

Some are more different than others.

How do we enable each to shine?
To be their best?

...Classroom Management!
Find out what your students are interested in. Let shows you care! You can use these interests to fuel and direct learning. You may be surprised by what you find.

Don't associate student behavior with student ability.

Break the cycle of frustration and acting out by getting to know students and addressing their needs.

Create a supportive classroom community, one where everyone's voice and feelings matter.
Manage the classroom's furniture and floor plan to suit the class' needs. Allow for group and individual seating, and make sure the room is easily maneuvered (especially by you to provide assistance and feedback!)

Establish clear procedures and routines, like raising hands, respecting opinions, and reflecting in a class agenda.

Use procedures and routines to help the class run smoothly and comfortably.