CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT: A CHALLENGING TASK FOR THE TEACHERS

By

S. THANGARAJATHI * T. ENOK JOEL **

* Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Technology, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.
** Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Technology, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.

ABSTRACT

Teaching can be a daunting endeavor for both experts and novice teachers. It is a profession that requires the ability to be responsive to new demands and changing needs. In recent years, school reform promoting high-stakes testing in the name of improving academic achievement has dominated the list of problems demanding consideration. The ability of teachers to organize classrooms and manage the behavior of their students is critical to achieve positive educational outcomes. This paper begins with a discussion of research related to the importance of effective classroom management. Next, it provides a conceptual framework of Classroom Management, the categories of troublesome behaviors, preventive measures and some practical advice for dealing with the kinds of troublesome situations that commonly arise. Finally, it outlines the recommendations for improving professional development efforts.

Keywords: Classroom Management, Troublesome Behavior, Professional Development.

INTRODUCTION

More than three decades ago, teachers had a strong power to control their students. Parents allowed teachers to give strong punishment to their children because they believed that teachers can make students learn when they are afraid. Teachers in the past had strong direct authority over their students so they can get great respect from them. But society changed it. Particularly students who are in middle school and high school. They don't know how to recognize and to be grateful for the effort of their teachers. Most of them don't know that teachers are those who are molding and motivating their skills to be successful in the near future.

As what other people say, teaching as a profession is a very stressful job. All kinds of job can give stress but teaching is more stressful. In this case they are not dealing with computers, business matters or so on. Instead they're dealing with people or kids who have the power to change our world into a better place to live.

Everyone who works in or around schools knows that it is a dramatically different classroom today. The problems are different. What teachers can do and can't do are different. What works and doesn't work are different. Classroom management is a tougher job than it used to be.

Once teachers understand the new nature of the classroom, they can adjust their professional strategies accordingly. Obviously, some of the old techniques, such as writing "I wont" 100 times, standing in the hall, corporal punishment, don't usually work very well today. Even out of school suspension is now suspect because many students enjoy the time off too much. Classroom control can't be established solely through punishment anymore – if it ever could be. Today's teachers have to adopt some fresh approaches to classroom management.

The Importance of Effective Classroom Management

The ability of teachers to organize classrooms and manage the behavior of their students is critical to achieving positive educational outcomes. Although sound behavior management does not guarantee effective instruction, it establishes the environmental context that makes good instruction possible. Reciprocally, highly effective instruction reduces, but does not eliminate, classroom behavior problems (Emmer & Stough, 2001).

A significant body of research also attests to the fact that classroom organization and behavior management competencies significantly influence the persistence of new teachers in teaching careers (Ingersoll &Smith, 2003). New teachers typically express concerns about lacking

effective means to handle the significant disruptive behavior of students (Browers & Tomic, 2000). Teachers who have problems with behavior management and classroom discipline are frequently ineffective in the classroom, and they often report high levels of stress and symptoms of burnout (Berliner, 1986: Browers & Tomic, 2000; Espin &Yell, 1994). Disruptive classroom behavior is a significant reason why teachers leave the profession (Ingersoll &Smith, 2003).

Disruptive behavior is a particular problem in classrooms of economically disadvantaged students (Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998). Thus, the ability of teachers to prevent or address disruptive behavior becomes especially important in the context of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004. These federal laws place a high priority on improving results for students with historically low achievement (eg. economically disadvantaged students) and students with disabilities. In addition, these laws embrace the following: teacher quality as a critical factor affecting student achievement; the amelioration of learning and behavioral disorders; and broad educational outcomes for students, such as high school completion and participation in post secondary education and careers.

The inability of teachers to effectively manage classroom behavior often contributes to the low achievement of at-risk students and to their excessive referrals for special education (Donovan &Cross, 2002; Harrell, Leavell, Van Tassel, & McKee, 2004). These effects are exacerbated by the current pattern of teacher distribution, which reveals a disproportionate assignment of less qualified and less experienced teachers to classrooms with economically disadvantaged children (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2005; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler,2007;Peske & Haycock,2006). Thus, many of the least capable teachers begin their careers teaching the most challenging students-with the predictable result being low student achievement.

In addition to inappropriate assignment, inadequate preparation and inadequate professional development are other major contributing factors to the classroom management problems faced by the new teachers. Although the importance of effective classroom organization and behavior management is widely acknowledged by educators, many new teachers report inadequate training and little assistance from colleagues and supervisors in establishing positive and productive classroom environments(Baker,2005;Siebert,2005). Teacher educators insist that their preparation programs teach classroom organization and behavior management skills, but the indication is that such skills are not taught thoroughly or with adequate supervision in a real classroom context (Siebert, 2005). The absence of supervised experience and professional development in the critical competencies of classroom organization and behavior management significantly reduces the effectiveness of many teachers, especially new teachers (Berliner, 1986; Espin&Yell, 1994).

What Is Classroom Management?

A narrow view of classroom management sees it primarily as discipline and management of student misbehavior. However, successful teaching requires more than controlling student behavior. According to Evertson and Harris (1999), "the meaning of the term classroom management has changed from describing discipline practices and behavioral interventions to serving as a more holistic descriptor of teachers' actions in orchestrating supportive learning environments and building community" (p. 60). Brophy (1999) echoed those sentiments when he stated that "the most successful teachers approach management as a process of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments" (p. 44). Finally, Larrivee (2005) noted that "classroom management is a critical ingredient in the three-way mix of effective teaching strategies, which includes meaningful content, powerful teaching strategies, and an organizational structure to support productive learning" (p. vi). Successful teachers employ strategies "for establishing rules and procedures, organizing groups, monitoring and pacing classroom events, and reacting to misbehavior" (Borko & Putnam, 1995, p. 41), and, when done well, it "looks seamless,

even invisible" (Randolph & Evertson, 1995, p. 17). Despite an understanding that classroom management is a complex set of skills that includes much more than being able to influence and control student behavior, there remains an overall impression that classroom management is primarily about 'discipline.'

Discipline and Classroom Management

Discipline's "most typical current meaning seems to be most associated with the notion of bringing children into line" (Skiba & Peterson, 2003, p. 66); how teachers accomplish that is often determined by their assumptions about how children learn, grow, and develop. Texts on classroom management and discipline often suggest strategies that are organized into models that reflect philosophical approaches that are commensurate with these assumptions. On the behavioristic end of the continuum is the position that humans are by nature bad and greatly in need of control, and on the humanistic end of the continuum is the position that humans are basically good and need to be guided. Teacher beliefs and assumptions about children fall somewhere along this continuum, and ultimately these philosophical assumptions are likely to influence the discipline model or management practices that a teacher chooses to employ. On the humanistic end of the continuum are democratic models that see misbehavior as an opportunity to learn. On the behavioristic end of the continuum are strategies that make use of punishment, coercion, and rewards. Thus, how a teacher manages student behavior is impacted by his or her assumptions about children, the models he or she adopts, and the strategies that are commensurate with these models.

How Do Teachers Learn Classroom Management Practices?

The first place teachers learn classroom management practices is in the very classrooms that they inhabited for thirteen or more years as students. Research indicates (Fajet, Bello, Leftwich, Mesler, & Shaver, 2005) that pre-service teachers develop perceptions about classroom management from their own experiences as students, and that they bring these perceptions with them when they enroll in teacher preparation courses. Research also indicates that these perceptions persist well into teachers early years of teaching.

A second place that teachers learn classroom management practices is in the schools where they do field observations and student teaching. It can be assumed that the impact of this learning is determined by the variety and quality of what students observe in actual classrooms. If the modeling of veteran teachers is all of one sort, or if it is of poor quality, pre service teachers may have a limited set of skills to emulate, some of which may be of uncertain value.

Lastly, pre service educators may have opportunities to learn about classroom management in their college classes. In-service teachers continue to learn about classroom management, but usually in far less formal ways. Teachers may attend professional development workshops that deal with management and behavior issues, or they may initiate learning on their own, seeking out books and materials that offer insight and support for dealing with behavior and management problems in the classroom. Teachers, however, are part of communities of practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) where they often share knowledge with one another. Learning is situated in contexts, and school is a context where adults as well as students learn from one another. "Learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally constructed world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 51). Thus, teachers' beliefs, knowledge, ideas, and practices with regard to classroom management are affected by the social context of the school and by teachers' contact with one another.

Categories of Troublesome Behaviours

What kind of student behaviors do instructors perceive as most negatively affecting the teaching and learning process? In an interview study of professors at a liberal-arts college, Appleby (1990) found considerable consensus among faculty members about student behaviors that they regarded as most irritating. Behaviors were sorted into three categories: (i) immature behaviors such as talking

during lectures, chewing gum, eating or drinking noisily, being late, and creating disturbances; (ii) inattentive behaviors such as sleeping during class, cutting class, acting bored or apathetic, not paying attention, being unprepared, packing books and materials before class is over; and (iii) miscellaneous behaviors such as cheating, asking "Will it be on the test?" and expressing more interest in grades than in learning. Despite the fact that students do not always behave in class as instructors would want them to, instructors are reluctant to confront them. Weimer (1988) and Rutherford (1991) have suggested several reasons. First, because student offenses in the classroom tend not to be egregious, instructors are hesitant to challenge them. They ask themselves whether it might be better to ignore the behavior rather than to make a scene. Also, instructors hesitate to deal with misbehaviors because they somehow feel they are in blame, that the behavior points to some deficiency in their teaching. Finally, instructors hesitate to deal with disruptions because they are truly unsure of what they do. Instructors can be sure of two things. First, they need to do something. The longer inappropriate behavior continues, the more acceptable it becomes and the more difficult it is to stop it. Second, it is easier to prevent disruptive behaviors than it is to deal with them after the fact. Establishing a positive climate in the classroom, for example, can avert many problems.

Dealing With Troublesome Behaviours In The Classroom

Clearly, prevention is to be preferred to confrontation. Defining a class at the outset, decreasing student anonymity, seeking feedback from students, and encouraging active learning are preventive measures that allow instructors to work smoothly with students and to create an atmosphere that is conducive to positive, respectful attitudes. However, instructors may still run into some students or classes that present problems. All of the suggestions given here address the immature and inattentive behaviors that faculty members report as most troublesome (Appleby, 1990). Some of the recommendations are adapted from Weimer (1988) and Sorcinelli (1990a). They include strategies for handling (i) talking and inattention,(ii) unpreparedness and missed deadlines, (iii) lateness and in attendance, and (iv) direct challenges to authority.

Talking and Inattention

Usually the best time to handle a problem is when it occurs.

- If students are chatting, make direct eye contact with them so that they know you see them. Sometimes stopping the lecture, looking directly at the students, and resuming the lecture when talking stops is enough to resolve the problem.
- Direct a question to someone right next to the students. That focuses attention to that area of the class but avoids confrontations or putting anybody on the spot.
- Physically move toward that part of the room, again making eye contact with the students.
- Break the class into mini discussion groups or in some other way vary the method of presenting or processing the material.
- Speak to the student or students privately after class or before the next session. Tell students who talk in class that their behavior distracts you and the other students, and ask them please to refrain. With chronically inattentive students, try to ascertain the cause.

Unpreparedness and Missed Deadlines

Make it clear to students that there are logical consequences if they don't do their homework or if they turn in assignments late.

- If students are coming to class unprepared, then require evidence of preparation in the form of chapter summaries, homework, writing exercises, but avoid a primitive tone, stance, or attitude.
- Consider requests, short assignments (e.g., a list, an outline, a paragraph, a solution to a problem) to help students keep up with their work and study productivity. To ease the burden of grading, scan the assignments, evaluate them with a check or check plus (or minus for no assignment), and figure them toward the total grade.
- If the policy is not to accept late papers, then don't accept them, except under the most extraordinary circumstances – and then in private. Always document

the rationale for a change in policy should your decision be challenged by a third party.

- Regularly meet deadlines. If you say tests will be graded and returned Friday, then get them back on Friday.

Lateness and Inattendance

Ideally, students should not skip classes or miss half of each one. However, some do. Again, the notion of reducing lateness and in attendance by taking preventive steps makes sense.

- Establish an understanding with students: you expect them to come to class on time; in return you will start and finish as scheduled.
- In large lecture classes in particular, establish a starting ritual: moving to the podium,dimming the lights, reading a notable quotation or passage – whatever suits your teaching style.
- Many instructors leave the question of attendance up the individual students. If you require attendance, be sure to have a system for reliably recording it and a policy to follow up on those who are absent. Some instructors make attendance or participation worth a specific percentage of the final grade.
- If you feel that a student's absences are excessive and are jeopardizing academic performance, call or submit a letter to the student's advisor, dean of the student's college, or the dean of student's office and discuss it with the student.
- If a large percentage of students don't come to class, consider the possibility that they do not finds lessions useful. Make sure not only that the material covered in class is vital on students' mastery of the subject and their performance on tests and papers but also that students understand the connection, too. On the day you give a test (attendance should be high), ask students to write on a piece of paper the reasons why they are not attending classes regularly.

Challenges to Authority

At some point in their career, most teachers will have to face a student who is resentful, hostile, or challenging. The following are a few suggestions for gaining the co operation of an oppositional student.

- Don't become defensive and take a confrontation personally. Respond honestly to challenges, explaining – not defending – your instructional objectives and how assignments and exercises contribute to them. Although the purpose of class activities and lectures may be obvious to you, students often need to have these objectives made explicit.
- As a rule of thumb, avoid arguments with students in class. If a student continues to press, table the discussion until later and then continue it with the student privately. Listen carefully, openly, and calmly to the grievance. Sometimes the opportunity to express a felt grievance may be more important to a student than is a resolution.
- When talking to a disruptive student, tell the student that you value his or her good contributions, but point out how the behavior that he or she is engaging in negatively affects you when you are teaching. Try to enlist the student's cooperation in setting ground rules for acceptable behavior.
- Be honest when something doesn't work as you had planned. Students respond positively when they see that you truly have their best interest in mind and aren't just making things difficult in order to save face.
- On the rare occasion that a student is hostile or threatening, contact the ombudsman's or the dean of student's office. Most campuses have disciplinary procedures that protect faculty as well as students

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Improving the ability of teachers to effectively manage the classroom behavior requires a systematic approach to teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. There is no evidence to support the assumption that new teachers will just "pick up" classroom management skills given the experience and time. Although surveys indicate that experienced teachers have fewer concerns regarding classroom management, such surveys may be less an indication that teachers learn overtime how to mange classrooms effectively and more a result of the fact that many

teachers who did not learn classroom management skills simply have left the profession (Baker,2005). Thus, improved teacher preparation and professional development in classroom management are critical parts of the solution.

Ongoing professional development in classroom management is essential for all teachers but especially important for new teachers. Effectively managing the classroom is much more difficult for new teachers, who may not have received sufficient training and who may be assigned to classes with a large percentage of at-risk students. Overwhelmed by the needs and often unexpectedly disruptive behaviors of their students, these new teachers often are more reactive and more likely to respond to a student's inappropriate behavior by removing the student from instruction. Thus, students who already are at risk for poor academic and behavioural outcomes receive less instruction, and they fall further behind; subsequently, their minor behavior problems escalate and they are more likely to be inappropriately referred for special education services. In addition, students with disabilities are significantly more likely to be suspended than students without disabilities; further, students with emotional and behavioural disorders are suspended at more than four times the rate of students in other disability categories (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). To address these concerns, school leaders need to ensure ongoing professional development in the area of classroom organization and behavior management.

In teacher preparation programmes, greater emphasis needs to be placed on preparing both general and special educators to be competent and efficient at managing today's classrooms with their diverse range of learners. This approach means not only giving preservice teachers the intellectual understanding of the issues involved but also ensuring that they have ample opportunity for guided practice and feedback in implementing both preventive and corrective behavior management strategies.

Conclusion

The ability of teachers to organize classrooms and manage the behavior of their students is critical to positive educational outcomes. Dealing with troublesome behavior in the classroom is one of the most challenging aspects of the teacher. Although instructors have expertise in their content areas, they often have little training in dealing with the interpersonal dynamics involved in working with students. Comprehensive teacher preparation and professional development in effective classroom organization and behavior management is therefore needed to improve outcomes for students in general and special education.

With the combined efforts of all stakeholders, the appropriate policies, incentives and practices can be put into place. This approach will ensure that teachers can acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to mange classrooms effectively, thereby maximizing learning opportunities for all students, preventing disruptive behavior, and responding appropriately to the inappropriate behavior that inevitably will occur. Improving teacher quality through effective classroom organization and behavior management is an important step in improving outcomes in general and special education for all students.

References

[1]. Appleby, D.C. (1990). Faculty and student perceptions of irritating behaviors in the college classroom. *Journal of Staff, Program and Organizational Development*, *8* (2), 41-46

[2]. Baker,P.H (2005). Managing student behavior: How ready are teachers to meet the challenge? *American Secondary Education*, *33* (3), 51-64.

[3]. Berliner,D.C.(1986). In pursuit of the expert pedagogue. *Educational Researcher*, *15* (7),5-13.

[4]. Borko, H., & Putnam, R. T. (1995). Chapter 2: *Expanding a teacher's knowledge base: A cognitive psychological perspective on professional development*. In T. R. Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional development in education: New paradigms & practices* (pp. 35–65). New York: Teachers College Press.

[5]. Brophy, J. (1999). Perspectives of classroom management: Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. In H. J. Freiberg (Ed.), *Beyond behaviorism: Changing the classroom management paradigm* (pp. 43–56). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

[6]. Browers, A.,& Tomic,W.(2000). A longitudinal study of teacher burnout and perceived self-efficacy in classroom management. *Teaching and Teachers Education*, 16(2), 239-253.

[7]. Clotfelter, C.T., Ladd, H.F., & Vigolor,J.L.(2005). Who teaches whom? Race and the distribution of novice teachers. *Economics of Education Review*, 24, 377-392.

[8]. Clotfelter,C.T., Ladd,H.F., Vigdor,J.L., & Sheelar,J.(2007). *High-poverty schools and the distribution of teachers and principles (working paper).* Washington, DC: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Educational Research. Retrieved November 17, 2007, from http://www.caldercenter. org/pdf/1001057-High-poverty-pdf.

[9]. Donovan,M.S., & Cross,C.T.(2002). *Minority students in special and gifted education.* Washington, DC:National Academy Press.

[10]. Emmer,E.T.,& Stough, L.M.(2001). Classroom management: A critical part of educational psychology, with implications for teacher education. *Educational Psychologist,36* (2),103-112.

[11]. Espin,C.A.,& Yell,M.L(1994). Critical indicators of effective teaching for pre-service teachers: Relationships between teaching behaviors and ratings of effectiveness. *Teacher Education and special education*, 17,154-169.

[12]. Evertson, C. M., & Harris, A.H. (1999). Support for managing learning-centered classrooms: The classroom organization and management program. In H. J. Freiberg (Ed.), Beyond *behaviorism: Changing the classroom management paradigm* (pp. 59–74). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

[13]. Fajet, W., Bello, M., Leftwich, S.A., Mesler, J.L., & Shaver, A. N. (2005). Preservice teachers'perceptions in beginning education classes. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 717–727.

[14]. Harrell,P., Leavell,A., Van Tassell,F., & Mckee,K.(2004). No teacher left behind: Results of a five-year study of teacher attrition. *Action in Teacher Education*, 26, 47-59.

[15]. Ingersoll,R.M., & Smith,T.M (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 30-33.

[16].Kellam,S.,Ling,X.,Merisa,R.,Brown,C.H.,&Ialongo,N(1998). The effect of the level of aggression in the first grade classroom on the course and malleability of aggressive behavior into middle school. *Development and Psychopathology,* 10, 165-185.

[17]. Larrivee, B. (2005). *Authentic classroom management: Creating a learning community and building a reflective practice.* Boston: Pearson.

[18]. Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

[19]. Peske,H.G.,&Haycock,K.(2006). *Teacher inequality: How Poor and minority students are shortchanged on teacher quality.* Washington, DC: The education Trust. Retrieved November 17, 2007, from http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/010DBD9F-CED8-4D2B-9EOD-91B446746ED3/0/TQ Report June 2006.pdf.

[20]. Randolph, C.H., & Evertson, C.M. (1995). Managing for learning: Rules, roles, and meanings in a writing class. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, *30* (2), 17–25.

[21]. Rutherford, L.H. (1991). Trying time: Preventing and handling irksome classroom behavior. *Instructional Development* (University of Minnesota, Duluth Campus). 1-2, 8

[22]. Siebert,C.J.(2005). Promoting pre-service teacher's success in classroom management by leveraging a local union's resources: A professional development school initiative. *Education*, 125,385-392.

[23]. Skiba, R., & Peterson, R. (2003). Teaching the social curriculum: School discipline as instruction. *Preventing School Failure*, *47* (2), 66–73.

[24]. Sorcinelli, M.D. (1990a, April). *Dealing with troublesome behavior in the classroom.* Workshop and unpublished manuscript presented at University of

Massachusetts, Amherst

[25]. Sorcinelli, M.D. (1994). Dealing with troublesome behaviors in the classroom. In K.W. Prichard &R.M. Sawyer (Eds). *Handbook of college teaching: Theory and applications* (pp. 365-373). Westport, CT:Greenwood Press.

26.Wagner,M.,Kutash,K.,Ducknowski,A.J.,Epstein,M.H.,& Sumi,W.C.(2005). The children and youth we serve:A national picture of the charecteristics of students with emotional disturbances receiving special education. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorders*,13(2),79-296.

[27]. Weimer, M.E. (1988). Ideas for managing your classroom better. *The Teaching Professor*, 2(2),3-4

[28]. Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M. (2002). *A guide to managing knowledge: Cultivating communities of practice.* Boston: Harvard Business School.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. S. Thangarajathi M.Sc.M.A. M.Ed.Tech. Ph.D. is working as Assistant Professor in Department of Educational technology, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. Her area of specialization includes Educational Psychology and Educational Technology. She has experience in developing CAI Packages and Instructional Video film. she has published more than fifteen papers in the National and International Journals. At present she is guiding seven Ph.D scholars. She may be reached at thangam_rajathi@yahoo.co.in.

T. Enok Joel, M.Sc.,M.Ed.,M.Phil.,M.Sc(Psy).,PGDHET., is working as Assistant Professor in Department of Educational Technology, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore -641 046. Tamilnadu. His area of specialization includes Educational Technology and Educational Psychology. He is having proficient in the preparation of e-learning packages and Computer Assisted Instruction. He trained the students in the preparation and development of Interactive Multimedia, Video-Based Instruction and e-content development. He developed a multimedia Package in Teaching Network Topology at Higher Secondary Level.