

Classroom Management: Teachers' Communication Styles

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Classroom management skills are fundamental to any teacher's professional competence in today's diverse classrooms. Lacking a proactive system of management strategies is compromising educators' career productivity. Unfortunately, university preparation has failed to emphasize this requirement, assuming practical experience will compensate for insufficient training (Goodwin, et al, 2014). However, based on personal observations of over eleven - hundred teachers in dozens of communities since 1973, this belief is illogical.

Initially, all classrooms require clarification of instructional expectations and social - behavioral requirements. Establishing predictable schedules and routines must be communicated within the first days of a school year. Academic standards and learning goals are emphasized to promote achievement and accountability. Class rules are identified, rehearsed, and incorporated into daily operations to stress responsibility.

These procedures create a community of learners to accomplish targeted achievement objectives and socialization outcomes.

Mr. Grabowski's 3rd - grade band students are excited about his newly decorated classroom with its colorful posters, organized storage closets, and semi - circle seating. Daily agendas are listed in contrasting colors, a timer is set for practicing scales, and class rules are posted above the Smart Board. Student photos are displayed on the Wall of Fame board for outstanding participation and cooperation. Monthly certificates are sent home to recognize progress. His preparation assures a proactive readiness for any probable behavioral problems.

Popular classroom management programs offer a structure dependent on the power of various strategies to motivate students' compliance with 'rules.' While the central feature of research - based models (Garrett, 2012), another facet of management is typically minimized. In actuality, teacher - student interaction is the *primary* variable in creating effective management strategies. Though the method and tone of communication is imbedded in the application of interventions, it is rarely

understood or analyzed. Since communication style is more predictive of success than techniques are (Brown, 2012), teachers must learn to fully appreciate its relevance to behavioral programming.

Awareness of one's personal history of communication is essential to assess the interface of language, nonverbal expression, and behavior management. It is imperative to identify the complex interaction of voice tone, emotionality, and reactions during engagement with students. As students quickly learn to manipulate teachers' speech tendencies, in particular, knowing one's verbal expression pattern is paramount to more productive communication. Reflecting on the clarity and fluency of statements, opinions, and directives, by example, will ultimately shape the application of management practices. This task is crucial to beginning teachers (Kizlik, 2014), as they examine their communication of academic information, behavioral mandates, and general discourse. Learning the subtle nature of dialogue consumes considerable focus and psychological energy that is easily neglected by other priorities, especially instructional practices. Awareness of this dynamic is a major predictor of first - year obligations.

Ms. Simpson, a beginning 7th - grade social studies teacher in an impoverished rural community, was perplexed by students' excessive talking during group activities. She frequently asked students to "please quiet down," displaying contorted facial expressions and an agitated physical response. Her voice was elevated with repeated commands, which was followed by pleading, "Could you stop talking so I can continue our project?" Student misbehavior will continue to sustain this reactive cycle until Ms. Simpson speaks assertively ("Points will be rewarded to cooperating classmates.") in a calm manner.

Veteran teachers should accept that traditional communication habits are less effective with their increasing population of entitled, prematurely independent, and emotionally needy students. Repeating directives ("How many times can I ask you to come prepared to class?"), using a confrontational voice, and expressing disappointment ("I've never taught a 5th grade like this before!") are doomed to fail with at - risk learners. Especially during adolescence, where students naturally resist authority, simply stating a directive ("stay on task") or requesting cooperation ("I appreciate if everyone finishes the assignment") is frequently challenged. This negates the advantages of age,

maturity, and experience that veterans historically received in prior decades. Motivation to employ proactive communication techniques is required to sustain career longevity.

Mr. Rodriguez has enjoyed exceptional success during his 24 - year career teaching math in a progressive high school. However, one class of 11th - grade remedial students was confrontational toward his communication on a daily basis. This relatively new problem was depleting his enthusiasm for teaching. Defensively, Mr. Rodriguez relied on asking approval, "Excuse me, I need your attention to teach this lesson." Continuous resistance and prolonged off - task behavior resulted in a reduction in lesson completion. Adopting a style of direct statements, "These five problems must be finished in 10'," will empower Mr. Rodriguez's effectiveness.

Non - verbal communication accounts for 93 % of teacher - student interactions (Linsin, 2009), a reality that surprises a vast majority of professional educators. Voice volume, eye contact, facial expressions, and proximity, for instance, are components of non - verbal communication (Brown, 2010). Unfortunately, non - verbal traits are difficult for teachers to consciously identify or adjust if required. Secondary students, in particular, are extremely savvy at calculating non - verbal tendencies to disrupt management techniques. Any variation in teachers' body language signals an opportunity to prolong their frustration and loss of confidence. Standing with arms folded, or gesturing at an offending student, by example, typically implies a reactive response that inevitably increases misbehavior. Yelling, hovering over non - compliant students, or slouching are cues that energize rejection of authority, especially with beginning teachers. Substitute teachers are incredibly unprepared for this scenario without prior knowledge of students' behavioral patterns (Pressman, 2011).

Dr. Rollins was mystified by his general - level chemistry class's refusal to cooperate during labs. He frequently stared at disruptive students, sat at his desk, and appeared sullen and defeated. This prompted a cycle of manipulation that was sustained by his responses. This sabotage continued until Dr. Rollins suppressed his non - verbal behavior by expressing a composed, positive presence with active engagement and enthusiasm.

Teachers' personality traits also have a profound correlation with communication skills. ---Whether an extrovert or introvert, personality traits are engrained in communication with students, particularly regarding behavior management. Being aware of one's temperament is fundamental to understanding this connection. Students intuitively sense the link between emotionality and communication by assessing teachers' sensitivity, confidence, and assertiveness (Englehart, 2011). By example, timid, permissive teachers often express vulnerability in their comments ("Your tardiness is very upsetting to my starting class") that weakens any behavioral technique. Assertive teachers speak in declarative statements ("Sixth grade is lining up quietly for lunch") which demonstrates a commanding presence (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). They realize the impact of direct statements to minimize student manipulation and resistance. Constructive feedback from colleagues and administrators to target these speech patterns is invaluable to limit long - term complications.

Teachers' stress tolerance also dramatically impacts communication skills. Whether realistic or perceived, stress dominates public school classrooms because of academic standards, social - behavioral expectations, and racial - cultural diversity. Coping with stress is a universal requirement to achieve professional stability, especially related to behavior management (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013). Otherwise, *reactive* habits develop when requests ("Everyone open your books to page 81") or mandates ("Josh, please report to the office to discuss your behavior") fail. Repetitive responses foster a negative cycle of raising voice intensity, emotional tension, facial contortions, and retaliation. Regaining authority to sustain mental health becomes paramount, as disruptive students accelerate the intensity of misbehavior to provoke the same reactions. A self - fulfilling prophecy results that is extremely resistant to modify, especially if evident during the beginning of a school year. Learning to communicate with clarity and purpose will minimize the chronic stress of addressing misbehavior.

Mrs. Tang has struggled with management of her 5th - grade Chinese class since fall. Unable to communicate her intentions ("Class, review your vocabulary for 5' before we begin our lesson") and expectations ("Participation is very important to your progress") has infected her overall competence. Scolding ("Refusing to listen is unacceptable") and emotional sensitivity ("If you cared for me, this disrespect would end") have contaminated her instructional ability and psychological composure.

Accenting compliance with rules (“I appreciate Ming’s contributions today!”), while controlling her emotional outbursts, will eventually neutralize these issues.

In summation, teachers should follow these recommendations to improve their communication ability regarding classroom management:

- * display a positive, assertive presence that commands respect
[“I am impressed that period 6 is prepared to learn this morning!”]
- * communicate in a proactive manner that defines expectations and compliance
[“Our Algebra class is responsible for being respectful with your classmates.”]
- * speak in directive statements (‘alpha commands’) that state specific requests
[“Share the painting supplies to complete our holiday project.”]
- * always speak in an enthusiastic, engaging manner with empathy and composure
[“I’m delighted when table 5 cooperates with your partners on this assignment.”]
- * minimize negotiating, pleading, asking, seeking approval
[“Shh, class, I need the chatting to end, O.K.?”]
- * control emotional reactions to misbehavior
[“Jose, our school rule is to keep hands to self. Sit in the time out chair for 5.’ ”]
- * validate communication skills with a videotape of daily encounters with students
[identify stressors associated with particular groups / students]

Implementing proactive management strategies is a function of teacher - student communication.

Understanding this interaction is mandatory for all teachers’ professional maturation.

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