How To

Manage Your Classroom Effectively

Want to create a positive, engaging, and orderly learning environment? Sharpen your classroom management skills with these tips from the experts.

Classroom management includes everything from seating to transitions to engagement to discipline. What classroom management should not include is a command-and-control approach, says Carol Ann Tomlinson, a professor in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia and coauthor of ASCD's Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom. "If a teacher's notion is to manage, [his] style becomes domineering," says Tomlinson. "This results in resistance from students and an adversarial relationship."

Some teachers, especially new ones, confuse classroom management with discipline, says Tomlinson's coauthor, Marcia Imbeau, who is a professor of curriculum and instruction in the College of Education at the University of Arkansas. Although discipline is an element of classroom management, other elements, such as established routines and mutually designed guidelines for good behavior, can foster a manageable environment while greatly reducing the number of disciplinary incidents.

The goal, says Tomlinson, is to create the kind of environment that studies have shown to be most conducive to learning: one that is orderly but enabling. "An orderly/enabling environment facilitates high-quality learning."

Tomlinson says. There should be a defined structure with clear processes and expectations, but the structure should include enough flexibility to accommodate students' needs.

A solid set of classroom management strategies can combine with a defined structure to help create an environment that is orderly, but the enabling part is up to the teacher. Here are a few favored strategies from experienced classroom teachers at all levels:

* Take the time to get to know your students and enlist them in their own success. Elona Hartjes, a special education and math

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Manage Your Classroom Effectively

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teacher at Woodland Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario, has been teaching for 29 years. She has been writing her blog, Teachers at Risk (www.teachersatrisk.com), for five years. One of her most popular posts is titled, “Nine Questions I Ask My Students on the First Day of School,” in which she describes how she asks students about their learning successes and difficulties.

“I want the students to know that we are a team, and that we each play a part in the learning,” Hartjes says.

• **Collaborate with your class to create guidelines for appropriate classroom behavior.** It’s important to enlist kids in the creation of these guidelines, especially at the high school level, says Hartjes. “I emphasize to them that they’re in grade 9; they’re experts at school by now. We work together to create four basic behavioral guidelines for the year and to describe what each behavior, such as attentive listening, looks like. Kids won’t buy in otherwise.”

• **Establish a routine for starting class.** Post a problem or a writing exercise on the board that students will begin as soon as they stow their gear in their desks. Also, create a seating chart so you can take attendance without calling roll, suggests Tomlinson.

• **Establish a signal that indicates when students should stop talking** and give you their full attention. Never talk when students are talking; doing so diminishes your leadership role and doesn’t motivate them to stop talking, says Tomlinson. The signal could be a bell, a hand clap, or dimming the overhead lights—whatever works for you. Susan Alexander, a middle school English teacher at Berkeley Preparatory School in Tampa, Fla., uses a vibraphone (a vibrating percussive instrument) for this purpose. The vibraphone’s tone can take several minutes to dissipate, says Alexander, who notes that students naturally become quiet as they strain to hear when the tone will stop completely.

• **Give clear directions.** “Consider what good quality will look like,” Tomlinson. You can also make “task cards” and place them in the center of tables or on the board so kids can remind themselves of the steps they need to take to finish a project.

• **Create a strategy for kids to request help.** When you’re working with students one-on-one or in small groups, you want the others to have a way to get help without interrupting you. Formulate a strategy for this and ensure students understand it, says Imbeau. Some teachers use “check with three before me”—meaning that students should ask three classmates before going to the teacher for help. Other teachers place “hint cards” in a central location that students can check when they get stuck.
At the elementary level, students can place "stoplight cups"—green, yellow, and red—on their desks as nonverbal signals of understanding.

• **Find creative ways to set the mood.** Alexander, a former professional actor, director, and writer, borrows from her theater background to harness kids' energy and set the mood in the classroom. "You can create an environment with lighting and sound that is appropriate to your underlying message," she says. "After all, a play begins before the actors take the stage." Alexander might put colored gels on the overhead lights, project an image onto the wall, and play music as students enter the room.

• **Use technology strategically (or, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em").** Many students have cell phones or smartphones, so figure out how you can leverage those devices to aid in classroom management, suggests Lori Gracey, executive director of the Texas Computer Education Association. For example, at www.todaysmeet.com, teachers can create private forums where they can post questions for students to answer, tweet-style. "Students are writing rather than talking," Gracey notes. "Students using technology are paying attention, responding to their teacher and to each other."

• **Practice flexible grouping.** Imbeau emphasizes that it's important for kids to be exposed to diverse personalities, interests, and ability levels as you work together to build a community of learners. "Flexible grouping supports the idea that students can learn from each other," she says. She works hard to mix up groups throughout the week, charting them out and keeping notes on her rationale for her student pairings.

• **Provide opportunities for collaboration.** "Kids are dying to collaborate," Alexander notes. Set aside time for students to work together to solve problems, conduct research, and play games that build teamwork.

• **Allow kids to use their own words.** In her "Fishbowl" exercise, Alexander places three chairs in the middle of a large circle of students seated on the floor. She asks a provocative question—one designed to foster conversation, with many possible valid answers—but only students seated in the chairs may respond. Once students in the center have spoken, they must relinquish the chairs and return to the larger circle. The exercise gives each student the opportunity to be heard.

• **Plan a high-quality curriculum.** This is the Holy Grail—the strategy that will render all your other classroom management strategies unnecessary. "A high-quality curriculum is an effective method of discipline," says Tomlinson. "Students who feel that they belong, that they have a voice, and that they understand classroom routines are more engaged. Engagement gives them less of a reason to rebel."  

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**Video:** Want to see examples of effective classroom management in action? Use your smartphone to scan the QR code and watch a clip from the ASCD video Classroom Management that Works.  
**Don't have a smartphone?** Watch the video at www.ascd.org/eu-nov11-qr-video.  
**What's a QR code?** Go to www.ascd.org/qrcodes to learn more.

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In the Classroom with

Brad Kuntz

Engage Students in the School Community

Education Update is pleased to introduce Brad Kuntz, another award-winning teacher who will offer practical advice about how to increase student achievement and educate the whole child. Kuntz will share his insight on a range of topics, including engaging students in school culture; improving students' reading, writing, and thinking skills; and using project-based instruction.

Please share the column with your colleagues, and join the “In the Classroom” discussion on ASCD’s blog, Inservice, at http://ascd.typepad.com/blog/in-the-classroom-with, where you can also read advice from past “In the Classroom” columnists Bijal Damani and Deirdra Grode, who are also former Outstanding Young Educator Award (OYEA) winners. To learn more about the OYEA program, go to www.ascd.org/oyea.

Today, we see more and more students floating through school without engaging with the world around them. Some are disinterested in classes. Many lack self-esteem. Perhaps they are just bored. Often, these students just get by in their

ASCD Needs You! Call for ASCD Candidates

ASCD’s Nominations Committee is seeking candidates for governance positions in 2012. Elected leaders are responsible for ensuring that programs, products, and services focus on the success of learners and that ASCD resources are used wisely to promote ASCD values and guide the future direction of the association.

Please consider nominating yourself or encourage potential candidates to apply. Go to www.ascd.org/nominations for more information on the open positions, including the time commitment and qualifications, and to access the nominations form. The deadline to submit the completed form is January 31, 2012. Please contact Governance Director Becky DeRigge at bderigge@ascd.org with any questions.

Make Your Next Move with ASCD Job Ramp™

Looking for some career assistance? Join thousands of other educators who search and post listings on the ASCD Job Ramp, a customized education jobs site that uses the technology that made CareerBuilder the number one jobs site in the United States. ASCD Job Ramp combines CareerBuilder’s job-posting engine and résumé and job search services with all of the jobs listed in the CareerBuilder education category to create a valuable and unique job search experience for our educator audience.

The ASCD Job Ramp listings integrate into the main ASCD website and our ASCD EDge® social networking community, personalizing education-related listings to a user’s geographic location in either the United States or Canada. The site is open to anyone, and job seekers can use the service for free. Job posters pay for the service, but ASCD members receive a 10 percent discount off any jobs they post on the site. To learn how to post résumés, view current job listings, or review the fees for job posting, visit www.jobramp.org.
classes. I believe encouraging and inviting students to get involved with organizations that match their interests can go a long way toward setting them up for success and giving them a place to belong in the school community.

A student involved in some sort of club, group, or team stands a better chance of becoming an engaged citizen, gaining self-confidence, and feeling more accepted. In addition, he is more likely to improve qualities that are directly linked to success both inside and outside of the classroom, such as an increased sense of duty, responsibility, and commitment to self and the school community. He may also improve his teamwork skills, work ethic, communication abilities, and more. Plus, connecting with an adult may be just what he needs in his life at this point.

Often, an otherwise apathetic student might be more motivated in class if academic eligibility is a factor in continuing a certain activity. Receiving encouragement to succeed academically from a coach or advisor can have a positive influence on the child. Clubs also benefit students by teaching them to more actively manage their after-school time. Because there is less time to waste in a busy schedule, this kind of commitment can lead to improved homework completion and test preparation.

Joining a club could be equally useful for the student who does average classwork and feels uninspired. An extracurricular activity might offer this student a reason to feel excited about going to school, and that enthusiasm could take the student from ordinary to extraordinary.

Students may not be involved in clubs at school for any number of reasons. I start by assuming that no one has ever invited them and keep my eye out for students who could benefit from the club experience. When I find a match between a student’s interests and a club in our school, I simply ask if he has considered joining and encourage him to do so. I follow up a few days later. I also speak with the club’s teacher advisor, pass along that student’s name, and request the teacher make an effort to meet the student to discuss the possibility of his joining. I have introduced students to club advisors personally, and I have even walked a student to his first meeting just to help him feel comfortable about taking that first step.

If I have a student who could benefit from club participation but who doesn’t have any particularly well-matched interests, I begin to think of advisors or coaches who may work well with that student and approach the matter from a personality standpoint instead.

Sometimes it doesn’t work. More often, a student feels good about being noticed, honored to be wanted, and better having connected with adults.

Brad Kuntz teaches Spanish and environmental leadership at Gladstone High School in Gladstone, Ore., and is a 2011 winner of ASCD’s Outstanding Young Educator Award, which is sponsored by GlobalScholar.

MINING THE RESEARCH

Stay abreast of the latest education research with the monthly online-only “Mining the Research” column. To read this month’s list of resources, go to www.ascd.org/miningtheresearch.
Teaching and Learning Resources for the Global Classroom

Educators don’t have to break the bank to provide students with access to world-class lessons about global issues, or connect with learners and teachers in other countries. Free software like Skype allows students to participate in face-to-face language lessons; the Smithsonian offers free videos, lectures, and online exhibitions; and National Geographic’s website has a wealth of multimedia resources designed to take students on exciting adventures.

If you want to knock down your classroom’s walls and free yourself of geographical boundaries, check out these teaching and learning resources.

Asia for Educators
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu

The Weatherhead East Asian Institute of Columbia University created this website, which provides extensive resources for teaching Eastern Asian history and culture, including lesson plans, videos, maps, time lines, primary-source documents, and more. The site features several modules on a range of historical topics, including the “China & Europe: What Is ‘Modern?’” module, which looks at the social, cultural, political, and industrial histories of both societies from 1500–2000 and beyond and asks the question, “What do we mean by ‘modern?’”

Teachers can also participate in collaborative, online professional development courses on topics, such as how to teach East Asian history using a multidisciplinary approach, as well as courses in eastern religious practices, geography, arts, and culture.

Asia Society
www.asiasociety.org/education/resources-schools

Find arts, culture, history, math, and other educational resources on this well-designed website. Asia Society offers a plethora of advice and strategies for creating global classrooms and schools.

Choices for 21st Century Education Program
www.choices.edu

Sponsored by Brown University’s Watson Institute for International Studies, this website offers videos from scholars and matching lesson plans on current topics. The curricular lessons are designed to allow students to act as decision makers as they examine crucial points in history. Students can use historical and contemporary primary-source documents, maps, editorial cartoons, and more to develop their critical-thinking, creativity, innovation, and collaboration skills, as well as their media, technology, and civic literacies.

Cleveland Museum of Art
www.clevelandart.org/learn/distance%20learning.aspx

Through the Cleveland Museum of Art’s award-winning, low-cost distance learning program, students can view art and artifacts in the museum’s collection and interact with museum educators. Lessons range from Fauvism to foreign languages, from Mesopotamia to math. Scholarships for the distance learning programs are available for low-wealth school districts.

Global Dimension
www.globaldimension.org.uk

The Global Dimension website is managed by Think Global, an education charity that promotes global learning. This website connects...
current events with curricula, and provides background information, news reports, research, videos, and other resources to help K–12 teachers infuse global issues across content areas.

“Education plays a vital role in helping children and young people recognise their responsibilities as citizens of the global community,” says the website. The lessons are designed to teach students to “critically examine their own values and attitudes” and to learn to “value diversity, understand the global context of their local lives, and develop skills that will enable them to combat injustice, prejudice, and discrimination.”

**iEARN**

www.us.iearn.org

iEARN is a collaborative resource that connects classes around the world. The organization’s mission is to “enable young people worldwide, working in collaboration and dialogue, to make a meaningful contribution to the health and welfare of the planet and its people.” Made up of over 25,000 schools and youth organizations in more than 125 countries, the iEARN network provides extensive opportunities for cross-cultural communication and collaboration.

The website provides a forum for making connections and features news, project updates, videos, and plenty of educational and entertaining resources. iEARN also offers professional development for K–12 educators and hosts local, regional, and international events. iEARN is a partner in Adobe Youth Voices (http://youthvoices.adobe.com), a global philanthropic initiative that trains youth to use digital tools to share their stories and ideas.

**One World Education**

www.oneworldeducation.org

One World Education is a nonprofit program that showcases writing by middle and high school students in an effort to promote youth literacy. In their reflections, students discuss their experiences in another country or with another culture as a starting point for conversation about a timely topic. The One World Curriculum provides teachers with resources to help them infuse lessons about global issues across the content areas. Each month, the website shares new project-based learning activities and materials.

**Peace Corps/Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools**

www.peacecorps.gov/wws

This unique website taps into the experiences, knowledge, and writing of Peace Corps volunteers to create engaging lesson plans, classroom materials, and multimedia resources. The site offers plenty of exciting ways to benefit from the volunteers: students can listen to the Volunteer Voices podcast to hear exciting tales from the field, or correspond with a current volunteer who will send monthly messages. Teachers can also request returned volunteers to come speak in the classroom.

**TeachUNICEF**

www.teachunicef.org

As it states on the TeachUNICEF website, “TeachUNICEF is a portfolio of global education teacher resources designed and collected by the U.S. Fund for UNICEF’s Education Department.” The website features curricular units, lesson plans, videos, and more, focused on the topics of poverty, education, gender equality, water sanitation, and UNICEF’s Millennium Development Goals, to help students better understand the needs of children and families around the world. Students can also watch vodcasts (video podcasts), check out photoessays, and read stories posted by children about their lives.

—WILLONA M. SLOAN

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**MORE ONLINE**

The world is available at our fingertips! Educators who seek to create global classrooms will be inspired by the transcontinental connections forming between Kenyan students and their peers in the United States and Canada. Read the online-only article “Rafiki Link Connects Kenyan and North American Students” to learn how this collaborative learning program encourages young people to “think, link, and act.” To read the article, go to www.ascd.org/eu-nov11-kenya.
Educators Need More Funding Flexibility

States and districts sought flexibility in using federal dollars and in meeting federal education mandates well before No Child Left Behind (NCLB) ushered in a new era of federal control over education, but this call for flexibility has become more urgent during the past several months as almost every state works to implement the new common core state standards and as NCLB’s 2013–14 deadline, by which all students must reach reading and math proficiency, inches closer.

Two recent efforts by federal policymakers to respond to this call for flexibility couldn’t be more different, but unfortunately, both are marked by serious flaws.

The first attempt to provide states and districts with more flexibility comes from House Education Chairman John Kline (R-MN) and his Republican colleagues, who strongly believe in the need to reduce the federal footprint on education and restore local control. They’ve passed a bill that would provide unprecedented flexibility in the use of federal education dollars. States and districts would be able to shift money into and out of a wide range of federal programs—including Title I, Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, and English Language Acquisition State Grants.

But permitting funds to be siphoned from programs that serve high-need students jeopardizes the federal government’s historic role to ensure education equity for each student. The legislation also fails to provide the kind of flexibility requested by educators, such as autonomy in determining how to identify low-performing schools. What’s more, allowing states and districts to use federal education funds for a multitude of purposes makes it difficult for educators to defend spending levels or make the case for necessary increases—an important consideration in this new, contentious fiscal environment.

Flexibility with Strings Attached

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is also sympathetic to states’ calls for flexibility, and he intends to provide them with relief from meeting key NCLB provisions, including the much-maligned 2013–2014 deadline. However, his plan comes with a big catch: to qualify for the NCLB waivers, states must commit to key reforms aligned with the Obama administration’s priorities.

The U.S. Department of Education understandably wants to target its finite resources and balance flexibility against the possibility of watering down accountability; however, offering waivers from one administration’s priorities in exchange for another administration’s priorities isn’t flexibility. It’s simply replacing old mandates with new ones.

Putting Students First

Ultimately, educators need flexibility that is built into federal legislation from the outset rather than added later through incredibly broad allowances or through a patchwork system of waivers. During the legislative process, lawmakers must consider educator input regarding the most effective uses of federal funds and the most appropriate ways to support them in identifying and meeting their students’ needs.

Based on educator feedback to date, it’s clear, for example, that the accountability mandate needs to be transformed from one that is punitive, federally prescriptive, and overly bureaucratic, to a model that rewards growth, is state-driven, and provides research-based supports matched to each district’s achievement challenges.

Finally, any attempt to build flexibility into federal legislation must support the ultimate goal of preparing our nation’s students for lifelong success. Too often the concept of flexibility revolves around the needs and wants of adults. Instead, we must consider how and when students can directly benefit from efforts that empower their local educators to help them reach their fullest potential. In short, federal lawmakers need to hold schools and districts accountable for student learning while providing them with customizable supports grounded in local knowledge of what students need. Only then will the hard work and good intentions of educators at all levels work in concert to help each and every student succeed.