

What Kind of “Managers” Do Adolescents Really Need? Helping Middle and Secondary Teachers Manage Classrooms Effectively

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It is a well-accepted tenet that effective classroom management is essential for effective student learning and achievement (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). It has been suggested by some researchers that novice teachers must exhibit some minimum level of competency in managing student behavior before they are able to effectively incorporate more complex instructional techniques into their classrooms (Berliner, 1988). Unfortunately, novice teachers report that classroom management is the arena in which they feel the least prepared by their teacher education programs (Davies & Ferguson, 1997). A study of first-year teachers reported that 65% experienced anxiety about their ability to maintain order in their classrooms and wondered if their students viewed them as competent authority figures (Long & Morse, 1996, p. 237). Often, poorly prepared teachers embark on a “trial by fire” experience, reacting to misbehavior out of frustration and barely surviving the first years of teaching. These teachers flounder, and their students are shortchanged in an ineffective learning environment. Even experienced teachers rank managing behavior and maintenance of student discipline as significant challenges. Twenty-two percent of the teachers surveyed in *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* identified “students with discipline problems” as a “big problem” (Harris Interactive, 2001).

Successfully managing student behavior in the classroom, particularly disruptive and aggressive student behaviors, is a significant challenge with the increasing cultural, linguistic, and academic diversity of students

(Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Increasingly, adolescents with disabilities are included in general education classrooms, where instruction must take place on a variety of levels. Research demonstrates that students with disabilities can succeed in rigorous curricula if provided with appropriate instruction in a supportive, well-managed environment that considers students’ individual needs (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Elbaum, 1998). The need for an environment conducive to achievement for diverse learners is especially challenging at the middle and high school levels, where more students with learning challenges are included in the general education program, but teachers tend to be less tolerant of disruptive and distractible behaviors (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Muscott, 1996). Thus, students who do not conform to the behavioral expectations of the general classroom are often removed from the classroom through suspension or expulsion (Skiba, 2002) or are placed in more restrictive school environments for students with emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD), where emphasis is often less on academic learning and more on controlling inappropriate behavior (Johns, 2000; Scott, 2002).

Underlying the challenges of effective classroom management at the middle and secondary levels, especially for novice teachers, is an ethos of punishment. Teachers embrace punishment because it is easy to administer, it works for many students who have occasional minor misbehaviors, and it is highly reinforcing to teachers (Maag, 2001). Unfortunately, punishment often serves as a negative reinforcement to many

students, resulting in what Patterson (1975) calls the “negative reinforcement trap.” A student misbehaves to avoid a difficult or routine academic task, resulting in eventual removal from the classroom, which removes the aversive stimulus. Novice teachers who have received minimal training in effective behavioral management are more likely initially to use removal as a type of punishment because it negatively reinforces them by telling the misbehaving student to “get out!” Both parties are reinforced and academic progress suffers. The punishment may provoke what Coloroso (1994) refers to as the three Fs: fear, fighting back, and fleeing. Even many experienced teachers rely on coercion and punishment as primary methods for gaining compliance to their directives. Forcing students to comply arises from the idea that students have to be harmed or hurt in order to learn (Marshall & Weisner, 2004). Students perform best when they feel good about themselves, what they are learning, and the classroom environment in general. Punishment is counterproductive to teacher-student relationships because it can prompt negative feelings against the teacher (punisher), and it threatens the well-being of the student (Marshall & Weisner). Simply waiting for students to fail and then administering punishment not only is ineffective but also may incite problems that further alienate students from successful school experiences (Hyman & Perone, 1998). The use of punishment as a means of managing behavior is magnified when considering students of color, particularly African Americans, and students with EBD in their significant overrepresentation in suspension and expulsion (Townsend,

2000). By itself, punishment does little to teach students self-control and responsibility, and it often leads to a cycle of misbehavior and reaction, resulting in continual power struggles (Emmer, Evertson, & Worsham, 2003).

How, then, can novice and experienced teachers more effectively manage student behavior using positive techniques that enhance the learning of diverse students in middle and high school? What kind of “managers” do adolescents really need? Fully prepared teachers with background knowledge of pedagogy, including classroom management, and sound knowledge of content are better able to recognize individual student needs, customize instruction to increase overall student achievement, and provide students with increased opportunities to learn (Stronge, 2002). Add to this a thorough knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy (see Irvine & Armento, 2001)—which sensitizes teachers to the needs, interests, learning preferences, and abilities of students—and one should have a formula for instruction that promotes high achievement in all adolescents. High student achievement is dependent on teachers who realize that classroom discipline is a thoughtful and purposeful way of interacting with students on a daily basis. “It is a style and a philosophy of relating to others, and not a switch to be turned off and on in terms of need” (Long & Morse, 1996, p. 243).

Jones (1996) describes the complex nature of classroom management by identifying five main features: (1) an understanding of current research in classroom management and students’ psychological and learning needs; (2) the creation of positive teacher-student and peer relationships; (3) the use of instructional methods that facilitate optimal learning by responding to the academic needs of individual students; (4) the use of organizational and group management methods that maximize on-task behavior; and (5) the ability to use a range of counseling and behavioral methods to assist students who demonstrate

serious behavioral problems (p. 507). With these five features as an overall framework, four manager qualities or dispositions of teachers that the authors believe are essential to successful student achievement in middle and high schools have been identified:

1. Teachers who make a regular and focused effort to know their students as individuals and who care about their well-being;
2. Teachers who understand how to communicate with adolescents and who are appropriately assertive;
3. Teachers who understand that different strategies must be used with different students depending on individual needs; and
4. Teachers who are committed to culturally responsive classroom management.

When novice and experienced teachers enter classrooms with a solid background in management techniques and the dispositional qualities that enhance their ability to successfully manage classroom environments, they will be far more effective in creating a learning climate that maximizes student achievement.

Quality Relationships

Wolk (2003) states that “[f]or most teachers, their relationships are their teaching” (p. 14). In a meta-analysis of more than 100 studies, R. J. Marzano, J. S. Marzano, and Pickering (2003) found that the quality of teacher-student relationships is the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management and that teachers who had high-quality relationships with their students had 31% fewer discipline problems and rule violations. When teachers make concerted efforts to know their students as individuals, they are communicating to their students that they value their interests, cultures, and life experiences. This expression of caring is especially critical for students who may lack appropriate social skills to be fully accepted by

a peer group. The teacher’s interest in a student “on the fringe” may be the only positive interaction that the student has and a beginning point for inclusion in the classroom community.

Brown (2002) maintains that one has to make a social and emotional connection with students to “get inside their heads” (p. 67). How one teaches and what one teaches play integral roles in teacher-student relationships. When students are given choices within the curriculum, when the curriculum is connected to students’ lives and interests, and when the curriculum is situated within students’ cultures and backgrounds, then good classroom relationships ensue (Wolk, 2003). *Table 1* suggests a number of ways for teachers to foster positive interaction.

A key component in building successful relationships with students is the teacher’s self-awareness. Teachers need to be aware of the “emotional triggers” that provoke undesirable responses in them, as well as the emotional triggers of their students (Richardson & Shupe, 2003). Such self-awareness is particularly important in successfully dealing with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. “No teacher enters the classroom with a symptom-free history or has a perfect psychological fit to work successfully with all students” (Long & Morse, 1996, p. 241). Teachers are encouraged to become more aware of the difference between having feelings and being had by their feelings (Richardson & Shupe). Colleagues and supervisors can help teachers decipher whether behaviors, attitudes, or both are helping or hurting their effectiveness in the classroom. Videotaping classroom sessions can provide feedback on handling conflict, frequency of positive interactions, and overall classroom climate. Teachers must evaluate their own perceptions, biases, and stereotypes, which can dramatically affect their relationships with students, particularly students with significant behavioral challenges.

When novice and experienced teachers enter the classroom, they should know that effective classroom

Table 1 WAYS TO FOSTER POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

- Use a questionnaire format to find out about students' interests, preferred learning styles, and demands on their time.
- Get to know students' neighborhoods and cultures, and share your own background.
- Make it a point to talk with students before and after class about their interests in and out of school.
- Allow time during class for students to showcase their interests and talents.
- Support students with your attendance at plays, athletic events, science fairs, debates, and community activities.
- Choose three to five different students per class each day to talk with informally.
- Allow students input into class rules and procedures, as well as choices in projects and curricula.
- Bring students' interests and backgrounds into lessons and activities.
- Eat lunch with students at least once a week.
- Advocate for students, but avoid taking on a parental role.

Note. From R. J. Marzano, J. S. Marzano, and Pickering (2003) and Wolk (2003).

management is more than just a well-designed, engaging lesson. They should realize the importance of entering into meaningful, caring relationships with their students. Yet meaningful relationships are not dependent upon popularity or the necessity of being liked by students. Cushman (2003), in giving advice to teachers from interviews with high school students, comments, "Students say that if a teacher sets a steady example of fairness and respect, they respond positively whether or not they like a teacher personally" (p. 17). Setting this example of fairness and respect requires teachers "to act like adults, confident and authoritative" (p. 23). These dispositional qualities hinge on good communication skills, particularly appropriate assertiveness.

Appropriate Assertiveness

Effectively communicating with adolescents involves good listening skills and clear communication that brings about a change in behavior, thinking, or in the situation that has caused a specific problem (Emmer et al., 2003). An integral part of this communication is referred to as constructive assertiveness (Emmer et al.) or appropriate dominance

(Wubbels, Brekelmans, van Tartwijk, & Admiral, 1999). Both phrases describe the teacher's ability to provide clear purpose and strong guidance for both behavior and academics. Chiu and Tulley (1997) found that surveyed students preferred strong teacher guidance and control rather than more permissive types of teacher behavior. Appropriate dominance is not forceful control over others but is the establishment of clear behavioral expectations and consequences, clear learning goals, and appropriately assertive behavior (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Appropriate dominance or assertiveness preserves the integrity of both the student and the teacher. *Table 2* summarizes each of these elements of assertiveness.

Appropriate assertiveness should not be confused with what Nichols (1996) refers to as a "curriculum of control," in which more emphasis is placed on maintaining silence and obedience in a classroom than truly helping children and adolescents better manage their anger, frustration, or impulses. Appropriate assertiveness is less about positive attempts, negative attempts, or both to control behavior, and more about imparting information and feedback to students about their behavior so that they can learn self-

control. Efforts to control behavior particularly dominate in classrooms serving children and adolescents with EBD, often to the exclusion of an academic curriculum that includes creative approaches to problem-solving that facilitate the development of responsible behavior (Johns, 2000; Nichols). Controls are necessary for an orderly existence, but a constant diet of external control that is coercive in nature, does not guide students through constructive feedback to more responsible behavior, and does not recognize authentic progress with appropriate reinforcement falls short of empowering students to be responsible people who make wise choices.

Use of constructive feedback and positive reinforcement that is specific and informative are effective management strategies that are often underused by teachers of adolescents (Long & Morse, 1996 p. 288; Richardson & Shupe, 2003). Perhaps teachers of middle and secondary school students assume that adolescents no longer need sincere, well-timed, specific, positive feedback to encourage appropriate behavior and continuous progress. Sprick, Garrison, and Howard (1998) recommend that teachers should interact three times more frequently when students are behaving appropriately than when they are behaving inappropriately. Simple procedures for teachers to self-monitor how frequently they engage in positive interactions can be used. For example, teachers can videotape a time period during the day to determine their number of interactions with students. They can then evaluate whether positive interactions outnumber negative interactions, as well as the specificity of the positive interactions. Simply saying, "That was an excellent response, Tony," does not specifically communicate what Tony should continue to do. Rather, "Tony, I like the way you reflected on what the passage meant to you first and then determined that you agreed with the author," gives the student enough information to know what

Table 2 ELEMENTS OF APPROPRIATE ASSERTIVENESS**Establishing Clear Expectations**

- Establish rules and procedures for behavior, group work, transitions, use of materials through discussion, and mutual consent by teacher and students (Glasser, 1990).
- Use prearranged cues to signal expected behaviors.
- Use a variety of verbal and physical cues and behaviors to signal inappropriate student behaviors.
- Provide immediate feedback and recognition of appropriate behavior.

Establishing Clear Learning Goals

- Communicate learning goals at the beginning of instruction, telling students the plan for the day (hour).
- Continually provide feedback on progress toward those goals.
- Revisit the goals and progress made on the basis of the data gathered.
- Provide summative feedback to students on the goals.

Exhibiting Assertive Behavior

- Use body language effectively by making eye contact when addressing a student and by maintaining an erect posture (even when kneeling) while facing the student, not to be intimidating but to communicate your attention to the matter.
- Use a tone of voice that communicates clearly and deliberately without being hostile or sarcastic, using facial expressions that match the tone and content of your statements.
- Clearly state the problem, describing the effects of the behavior and the behavior that is desired.
- Maintain communication with the student, including listening to legitimate explanations, until the behavior is deemed appropriate or consequences are enforced.

Note. From Emmer et al. (2003) and R. J. Marzano, J. S. Marzano, and Pickering (2003).

constitutes a good response, in addition to a feeling of accomplishment. The awareness of the frequency of positive and negative interactions with students can be the first step in making changes necessary to preserve the teacher-student relationship while effecting positive behavioral change. Although it would be nice to think that positive reinforcement could solve all classroom management woes, some students will not respond favorably to this strategy and will require teachers to further intervene and reflect on their interactions with the student. Students' individual needs must be at the core of any plan or approach to address behavior, because no one strategy will meet the needs of all students.

Fairness Without Sameness

Teachers who are effective managers are aware of high-needs students and have a repertoire of specific techniques for meeting many of their needs (Marzano et al., 2003). An individualized approach such as this may mean redefining what is considered "fair" to all students. Lavoie (1989) maintains that fairness is not treating all students the same but is giving each student what he or she needs. This philosophy is reflected in academics as well as behavior, and must be clearly communicated to students and parents from the beginning of the school year, with alignment to overall school and district

policies. Meeting students' individual needs does not mean favoring some students over others or absolving some students of consequences for misbehavior. It does mean that the teacher considers the needs of highly distractible students when arranging or decorating the classroom. It means that some students require cues or prompts to perform a task correctly (Scott, 2002). It means that some students find answering questions in class to be a very aversive experience, requiring the teacher to develop creative ways to engage those students. For example, rather than asking such students a factual question, the teacher may ask for an opinion with no right or wrong answer. Once the student feels more comfortable responding, factual questions can be attempted. William Acree, a middle school teacher of students with learning and behavioral disorders, calls this "coming in the back door to get to the living room" (Acree, 2004). Shy or socially challenged students can be encouraged to write answers to questions rather than be embarrassed by anxiety in oral responding.

Approaches to academics and behavior that consider individual students' needs should be based on data collection and analysis for informed decision making (Sugai & Horner, 1999). Observation, measurement, and assessment make it possible to determine very accurately the effects of a particular instructional strategy or intervention (Alberto & Troutman, 2003). Unfortunately, many teachers, both novice and experienced, use a "one-size-fits-all" approach with both academics and management, only to wonder why all students are not successful academically or behaviorally. Teachers who systemically use data to determine best practices are better able to provide evidence for those practices to parents, administrators, and students as positively affecting student achievement. When teachers create a hospitable environment for students, recognize individual students' needs, and include culturally sensitive and

developmentally appropriate rules and procedures, students will learn and achieve (Schwartz, 2001). To create such an environment, teachers need collegial and administrative support and materials to enhance classroom climate and instruction. *Table 3* provides a list of sample materials that address students' individual needs.

Cultural Sensitivity

In a survey of teachers by Futrell, Gomez, and Bedden (2003), 80% of classroom teachers felt unprepared to teach diverse learners. "Definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts are likely to occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds" (Weinstein et al., 2004, p. 26). In an increasingly diverse student population, particularly culturally, a lack of multicultural competence can exacerbate the difficulties that teachers have with classroom management (Weinstein et al.). Teachers need to understand the relationship between

Table 3 RESOURCES TO ADDRESS STUDENTS' INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

- Algozzine, B., Ysseldyke, J. E., & Elliott, J. (2000). *Strategies and tactics for effective instruction* (2nd ed.). Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
- Beane, A. L. (1999). *The bully free classroom*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Irvine, J. J., & Armento, B. J. (2001). *Culturally responsive teaching: Lesson planning for elementary and middle grades*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Jensen, W. R., Reavis, H. K., Rhode, G., Walker, H. M., Ysseldyke, J. E., Algozzine, B., Archer, A., & Sprick, R. S. (2000). *Tough kid video series*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
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formal and informal cultures, and the implications of this relationship for youths feeling better about themselves, achieving, and belonging to the school community (Holloway, 2003). "Culturally responsive discipline" (Sheets & Gay, 1996) depends on teachers creating caring, nurturing relationships with students that are grounded in cooperation and collaboration rather than solely a compliance-driven model. The need for quality relationships with students is, once again, a critical component. How can teachers be better prepared to implement culturally responsive classroom management? *Table 4* highlights several suggestions.

As schools prepare to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, teachers need to view effective teaching and effective classroom management as inseparable (Holloway, 2003). Teachers should be confident in their abilities to promote the learning of all students by developing positive relationships, understanding differences among cultures, and ensuring fairness and dignity, while recognizing individual needs. Teacher education programs are in the best position to develop the skills and dispositions needed by middle and high school teachers

who want to build successful learning communities for their students. Yet in-service teachers, particularly those who work with students with emotional and behavioral challenges, need to evaluate their role in creating the kind of classroom environment most conducive to student growth and success. Middle and high school students deserve caring, assertive, equitable, and culturally responsive managers, whether they are in general education or special education settings. Adolescents will thrive in schools where teachers who are passionate about what they teach are equally passionate about whom they teach.

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Table 4 DEVELOPING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

- Teachers must examine their own ethnocentrism and biases, reflecting on how they are influenced by them and on ways to keep them in check. For example, do we use dress to form stereotypic judgments of students' academic potential?
- Teachers should survey students' cultural backgrounds by asking questions about families, cultural norms and values, and educational experiences.
- Teachers need to be aware of the ways current practices and policies reinforce institutional discrimination and of remedies to address it. For example, are bused students more likely to be suspended because they cannot stay after school?
- Teachers must reflect on what is equitable in dealing with students, particularly those with backgrounds different from the teacher's, and must develop multiple strategies that match cultural backgrounds with management approaches. For example, do teachers misinterpret males' "verbal sparring" for fighting?
- Teachers need to develop strategies for creating caring communities in classrooms, founded on cooperation and collaboration instead of power and control. Allowing student input with regard to rules, procedures, and consequences sets the stage for increased cooperation.

Note. From Holloway (2003), Irvine and Armento (2001), and Weinstein et al. (2004).

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