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Chapter 1

Classroom Management

First-year teacher Kathryn Flaherty was ecstatic when she was offered the position teaching grade three at Meadowlark Primary School. She spent the weeks before school started decorating her classroom with colorful posters and artwork, rearranging the desks into perfect rows, making sure she had plenty of supplies from whiteboard markers to blank transparencies for the overhead. A stickler for details, she had the first three weeks of lessons worked out and written neatly in her lesson planner. She knew the subjects she would cover forward and backward and felt she was prepared for any questions the students might have.

On the first day of class, she greeted her students enthusiastically and started right in on her first lesson. But her carefully made lesson plans did not tell her what to do when the students didn't pay attention day after day. They didn't help her cope with one particularly ill-behaved student whose antics, while not destructive or harmful, were a constant distraction to the other students. They didn't tell her how to get students to respond to her excellent open-ended questions. When she placed the students in pairs or groups of three to work, they, and

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she, accomplished even less. When a friend phoned her to inquire about her first weeks on the job, Kathryn said simply, "I was doing just fine until the kids showed up."

Clearly Kathryn didn't have a Classroom Management Plan (CMP). A teacher with a CMP will not look or feel like a beginner. With the support of the CMP, a teacher sends a message not only to students but to administrators that she knows what she is doing.

What is Classroom Management?

Les Fortune, a Virginia Beach, Virginia, Teacher of the Year, writes: "Classroom management is the most misunderstood term in the educator's vocabulary. All teachers seek it, parents expect it, and administrators demand it. Should an administrator enter the classroom for an observation, the teacher is most cognisant that his or her performance will be judged primarily on the merits of viewed classroom management—not learning, a far more difficult accomplishment to measure."

The quote above underscores the conundrum that is classroom management—it's tough to define but everyone knows when it's not there. This teacher effectively characterises both the significant and the intangible nature of classroom management. But classroom management need not be so elusive. The purpose of the classroom management plan (CMP) is to put, literally and figuratively, the tools for classroom management in teachers' hands.

In a nutshell, a CMP structures teaching and student learning and autonomy and provides a sense of community in a classroom. But the best way to describe and define a CMP is to discuss each of its components and their effect on classroom management. The four primary components of the CMP are classroom organisation, instruction, student assessment, and teacher reflection.

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The Components of a Classroom Management Plan

Classroom Organisation

Classroom organisation supports teacher instruction and student learning. It encompasses the classroom environment—the physical aspects such as lighting, temperature, decorations, and the set-up, comfort, and proximity of furniture—and the classroom operation—aspects the teacher imposes such as rules, routines, consequences, and incentives.

Classroom environment

The physical environment should make students enjoy coming to class. The room should be bright and welcoming, with student work displayed on the walls and bulletin boards. Most important, students should feel safe there.

The placement of desks must allow students to view the blackboard and the screen used with the overhead projector and allow the teacher to access the desks easily. The classroom should have traffic patterns carefully established for frequent activities such as to reach the pencil sharpener, go to the board, and exit the room.

The environment makes it easier or more difficult to implement classroom management. For example, the seating arrangement can support or discourage the aim of a lesson. Straight rows with the teacher's desk in front may be neat and orderly, but this arrangement contributes little to a sense of classroom community. Desks arranged in a semi-circle or groups of four promote discussion and working and learning together. The teacher's desk at the back of the room instead of the front signals that the students are the most important part of the class. Students' work displayed on the bulletin boards, interactive bulletin boards for instruction and improved learning, and student-designed bulletin boards not only enhance the environment but give students a role in planning that environment.

Classroom operation

The other aspect of classroom organisation is the formulated policies, rules, incentives, consequences, established routines, and procedures that fall under the heading of classroom operation. Perhaps the most important item under classroom operation is rules.

Whether the teacher refers to them as rules, rights, expectations, or responsibilities, these principles govern classroom operation and

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