

# Contents

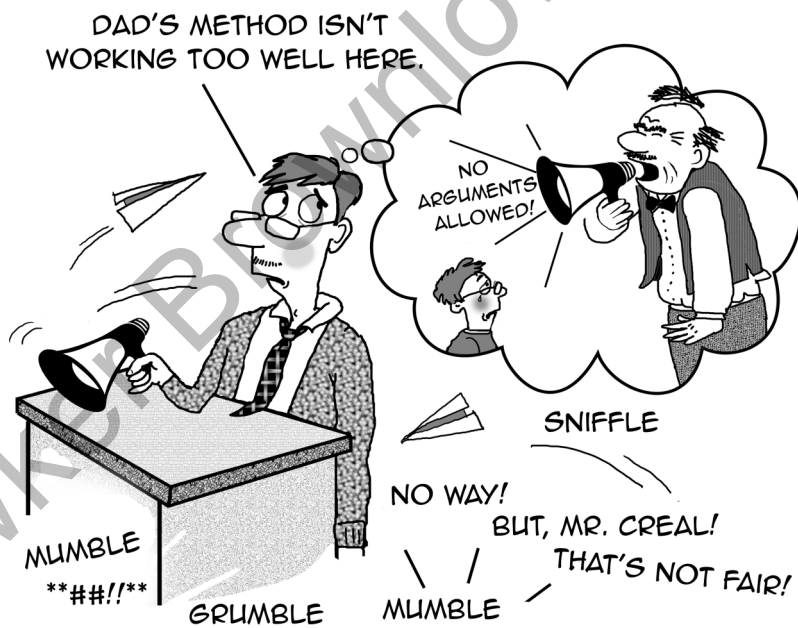


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Chapter 1  
**Attitude & Behavior**  
(The Teacher's!)

# Who's the manager?



Setting the Stage for Chapter 1



## A Personal Reflection on Conflict

In order to better understand yourself as a classroom manager, take some time to explore these questions. Jot some notes in response.

1. How did your parents discipline you? (Were they direct? passive? aggressive? passive-aggressive? Who was the authority figure?)
2. When you manage your own children or students, what techniques do you use that you learned from your parents? Or what do you do differently from your parents?
3. What is your style for handling conflict in your personal life?
  - avoiding (You avoid the situation for several days before addressing the conflict.)
  - assertive (You address the situation soon after the event has happened. You are calm and able to discuss what happened.)
  - Peace-making (You do everything possible to avoid conflict, even if it means you do not address the situation.)
  - aggressive (You confront the situation right as it is happening, if people get angry, that's okay, as long as you have a chance to say your piece.)
  - Passive-aggressive (You do not directly confront the situation but avoid the person, making sarcastic comments, or show subtle signs of hostility or aggression.)
4. Do you handle conflict in the same manner with both males and females? if not, how does your handling of conflict with males and females differ?
5. Do you handle conflict differently with persons of different ethnic backgrounds? if not, how does your handling of conflict differ from person to person?
6. When you are in a conflict, what do you fear most?

*In the beginning, they scared me—these young adolescents I had agreed to teach. They said and did weird things, such as . . .*

- . . . the time Bryan came up to me and asked, “Ms. Campbell, what is your last name?” (I thought to myself, “Is this really happening?” That was just before I thought to myself, “What was I thinking when I decided to be a middle school teacher?”)*
- . . . or the time that Clareese began dancing, alone, in the center of the room—swaying back and forth with not a care in the world. (This was while I was presenting a scintillating geography lesson with great flair.) When I asked, “Clareese, what on earth are you doing?” she answered, “Oh, sorry, Ms. C, I’m just not used to free time, so I thought I would try this.” (Free time?)*
- . . . or the time a student told me to “!\*\$#% off” and threw a chair, right at the high point of my dynamic interactive lecture on colonialism. (How COULD he?) Maybe he had snooped into my lesson plans and noticed that I had labeled my teaching strategy as interactive—and thought cursing and chair-throwing was part of the plan.*
- . . . and the time when a student (I’ll not divulge the name), exiting my 5th-period class, swore that he would come after me when school ended that day.*

I struggled to figure out how to manage these “squirrels on amphetamines” (as they had been described to me). I thought I was the only teacher who was dazed and confused. But I now know that I had company. Most middle level and high school teachers take a college course or two on discipline or classroom management. But for most of us, the realities of handling the students and getting along with them (not to mention helping them get along with each other) while actually trying to teach them something, only sink in when we are actually on the job. By about the fourth day, we discover that 90% of the job is managing kids—finding ways to keep

everyone moving in some sane pattern with little interruption. And when we new teachers figure this out, we spend the next three months wondering why in the world we took this job!



Whether you have been teaching a few days or several years (and whether you teach elementary, middle school, or high school), you have undoubtedly figured this out: You may be highly intelligent. You may have had a perfect GPA in teacher training or grad school. You may be able to design creative, compelling, well-organized lessons. **But if you can't manage the students, you can't teach them.** There is plenty of research documenting the various connections between classroom climate and student performance. But no middle school teacher or high school teacher that I know needs research to convince her or him of this truth: If you fail to run a classroom that operates fairly smoothly with a minimum of disruptions and bad behavior, there will be little effective learning.

Beyond the drawbacks for students, consistent frustration with student behavior leads to teacher burnout. Student misbehavior is reported as one of the primary reasons teachers leave the profession (Grayson and Alvarez, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001). Improved learning experiences for students, more joy for teachers, and a decrease in discipline problems and classroom interruptions—these are more than ample reasons to work toward satisfying and satisfactory classroom management.

Discipline issues at the middle school and high school levels have increased in recent years. There has been a dramatic rise in rates of misbehavior, suspension, and expulsion at the middle school level (Skiba, 2000). Middle level and secondary teachers are less able to manage difficult student behavior than Elementary school teachers (Baker, 2005). Seventh-grade students with a history of discipline problems are at high likelihood for becoming at-risk or dropping out of school by ninth grade (Murdock, Anderman, and Hodge, 2000).

## The #1 Factor in Classroom Management

**You may think that kids' misbehavior is the major component of classroom management.** This certainly accounts for the most frustration, time, and energy. You may blame the parents who aren't involved in their kids' education enough, aren't setting limits, or aren't helping kids be responsible. You may think it's the current culture with its media messages, attitudes toward learning, lure of getting something without working for it, poverty, hopelessness, apathy, distractions of technology, or any number of other cultural conditions that contribute to misbehavior in the classroom. Many teachers see their schools as having inconsistent (or no) policies regarding student behavior, and blame the system for the increasing struggles with discipline and student attitudes. YES! All this stuff contributes to problems in the classroom. But if you are going to have a safe, comfortable, orderly (mostly) classroom climate in which students can learn well—you will need to come face to face with the key ingredient in effective (or ineffective) classroom management. And that is not the students. It is none of the other things listed. It is YOU, the teacher.

**I believe that YOUR classroom management is rooted in who you are as a person.** YOU bring all these to school with you: your personal out-of-school experiences, your relationships, your history, and your tendencies. This is why I began this chapter with the reflection on page 6. Take a few minutes to go back and review your notes on that page. How you handle conflict in your life plays a **HUGE** role in the classroom manager you become.

*The students move on, but you stay. And the patterns that aren't working? They stay, too.*

**Students come and, as the school year ends, they go.** Your most troublesome students will be in someone else's class. But the management issues you had last year with student X or Y or Z still will be with you when those kids are gone. That's because the students move on, but you stay. And the patterns that aren't working? They stay, too.

**If you work with preadolescents or adolescents, conflict WILL be part of your classroom life!** There will be conflict with them and between them. In order to establish an effective management style, you must examine your relationship to conflict. You will have a tendency to handle conflict and issues in the classroom (and with your colleagues and parents at school) in the same way you manage these in your life outside school. This is particularly true in highly tense or uncomfortable situations. Do you avoid confrontation? Try to get away from conflict—at all costs? Keep your cool? Ignore or downplay anger, aggression, or conflict? Lose your temper? Give up? Give in? Respond immediately and directly, with little emotion? Get away, think about things, and confront later? Feel paralyzed? Feel personally attacked? Do you threaten? Get defensive? Shout? Try to smooth it over? Whatever is your usual