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Designing
Effective
Classroom
Management



THE CLASSROOM STRATEGIES SERIES

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Reproducibles are in italics.

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Chapter 1

RESEARCH AND THEORY

Classroom management is arguably one of the most challenging areas teachers must address. A teacher's level of skill with classroom management is critical to his or her effectiveness in the classroom. This makes intuitive sense—in order for students to learn, the classroom must run smoothly—and research has identified a number of specific benefits associated with effective classroom management. Research has suggested that effective classroom management can help teachers foster a safe and orderly environment in their schools and can reduce rates of misbehavior, bullying, and unsafe behavior (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Horner et al., 2009; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997). These findings are particularly salient given the prevalence of school violence in the United States. In 2011, 12 percent of high school students reported being involved in a physical fight at school (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2012). On average, bullying involves one-third of students (Otieno & Choongo, 2008), with 10 percent of victims reporting weekly assaults (Nansel et al., 2001). Moreover, school violence is not limited to students: 7 percent of teachers reported being threatened or physically attacked by a student (CDC, 2012), and almost 10 percent of teachers reported acts of student disrespect beyond verbal abuse (Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2013).

Research has also suggested that effective classroom management lays a foundation for students' academic success (Anhalt, McNeil, & Bahl, 1998; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2009; Musti-Rao & Haydon, 2011). Indeed, one of the strongest rationales for improving one's classroom management ability is that it influences student achievement. Researcher John Hattie (2009) synthesized results from over 800 meta-analyses and identified a number of factors related to classroom management that impact student achievement. Table 1.1 (page 4) displays the factors and their corresponding effect sizes.

As shown in table 1.1, Hattie (2009) calculated effect sizes for several classroom management-related factors. An *effect size* is a statistical measure describing the expected effect of a practice or intervention on students. An effect size of 0.20—considered small (Cohen, 1988)—is equivalent to a percentile gain of eight points. In other words, a student at the 50th percentile who received an intervention with an effect size of 0.20 would be expected to move to the 58th percentile. An effect size of 0.50, considered moderate, is associated with a 19-percentile-point gain, and an effect size of 0.80, considered large, is associated with a percentile-point gain of 29.

Table 1.1: Effect of Selected Classroom Management–Related Factors on Academic Achievement

Classroom Management–Related Factor	Effect Size	Percentile Gain
Tangible recognition	0.82	29
Feedback about appropriateness of behavior	1.00	34
Group contingencies	0.98	34
Rules and procedures	0.76	28
Disciplinary interventions	0.91	32
Direct, concrete consequences	0.57	22

Source: Data from Marzano, 2000, as cited in Hattie, 2009.

In addition to Hattie’s findings on student achievement, there is evidence that effective classroom management can improve teachers’ work environments. Catherine P. Bradshaw, Christine W. Koth, Katherine B. Bevans, Nicholas Jalongo, and Phillip J. Leaf (2008) reported that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)—a schoolwide behavior management and discipline framework that includes teaching and reinforcing behavioral expectations—was associated with better organizational health of a school, as well as with the staff’s perceived influence on students’ academic scores. The authors hypothesized that the enhanced behavior management led teachers to feel more effective and capable of altering students’ scores. Bradshaw and her colleagues (2008, 2010) also noted that the use of PBIS can lead to an environment in which teachers feel more inclined to collaborate.

Finally, teachers without the necessary skills and tools to implement effective classroom management may be less likely to remain in the profession. Richard Ingersoll (2002) estimated that nearly one-third of new teachers quit teaching within their first three years of employment, and almost 40 percent leave the profession within five years. As Lisa Gonzalez, Michelle Stallone Brown, and John R. Slate (2008) pointed out, student behavior is one of the top three reasons that new teachers leave the profession (the other two being administrative issues and salary concerns).

Clearly, effective classroom management skills are pivotal to fostering a safe and orderly school environment, academic success for students, positive working conditions for teachers, and high teacher-retention rates. In attempts to cultivate effective classroom management, teachers, schools, and districts have utilized a number of practices and policies over the years. Here, we review several examples of practices and policies that have been found to be ineffective, such as zero-tolerance policies and the use of suspensions and expulsions, or difficult to implement with fidelity, such as individualized behavior plans. We then present a number of practices and policies that have been found to support effective, proactive classroom management.

Zero-Tolerance Policies

Zero-tolerance policies (ZTPs) mandate that specific consequences—typically suspension or expulsion from school—be consistently used to respond to particular student behaviors. ZTPs were originally intended to address severe and unsafe behaviors such as violence, drugs, and weapons in schools. However, schools’ use of ZTPs eventually expanded beyond these behaviors (American Psychological Association

[APA] Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Figure 1.1 presents examples of nonviolent, non-drug-related behaviors that have been addressed using ZTPs. Critics of ZTPs point out that these policies often fail to take into account situational contexts, resulting in a one-size-fits-all approach rather than one that takes school contexts and educator expertise into account (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

The well-intended—yet imperfect—reasoning behind ZTPs is twofold. One assumption is that the use of consequences like suspension and expulsion can deter all students from future acts of violence and misbehavior (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). A second assumption is that removing violent or misbehaving students from schools creates a safer and healthier learning environment. Unfortunately, the data on ZTPs do not support these assumptions. For one, school suspension generally predicts future misbehavior and suspension; that is, students who are suspended from school are more likely to be suspended again (Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Mendez, 2003; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). If ZTPs were an effective means of discouraging misbehavior, there would not be a positive association between a first suspension and future suspensions. Additionally, ZTPs are typically associated with lower school-climate ratings, failure of students to graduate on time, and lower academic achievement in schools (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000). Overall, ZTPs have not been found to be effective behavior management strategies.

- Ten-year-old expelled after turning in a small knife that her mother packed with her lunch to cut an apple (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008)
- Teenager expelled for talking on a cell phone to his mother who was on deployment in Iraq (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008)
- Five black male students arrested for felony assault after throwing peanuts on the school bus and accidentally hitting the driver (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000)
- Six-year-old student suspended for bringing a toenail clipper to school (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000)
- Kindergartener suspended for wearing a Halloween costume that included a toy ax (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000)
- Teenager expelled after it was discovered that he had left a pocketknife in his backpack after a Boy Scouts camping trip (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000)
- Ten-year-old student given numerous multi-day suspensions for violations such as failing to do an assignment, humming while tapping on her desk, and talking back to her teacher (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000)
- Seventh-grade student served a nine-day suspension for drug use after sniffing white-out (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000)
- Fifth-grade student suspended for one year for possession of a weapon when it was discovered that he had taken razor blades away from a classmate who intended to hurt other students (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000)

Figure 1.1: Examples of zero-tolerance policy punishments.

Suspensions and Expulsions

Although suspension and expulsion are related to ZTPs, many schools without ZTPs still rely on suspensions and expulsions as primary forms of behavior management. The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR; 2014) reported that during the 2011–12 school year, almost two million students were suspended and over one hundred thousand were expelled. Research has shown that such an approach can be problematic. John M. Wallace, Sara Goodkind, Cynthia M. Wallace, and Jerald

G. Bachman (2008) found that suspensions and expulsions increase the amount of time students are left unsupervised because they are often at home while parents or guardians are at work. Additionally, neither suspensions nor expulsions typically provide any instructional component to help students learn new behaviors (Mendez, 2003; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Finally, the effects of suspension and expulsion frequently extend beyond students' years in school. Students who are suspended are three times more likely to drop out of school, and students who drop out are three times more likely to be incarcerated later in life (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986).

The correlation between being suspended or expelled and eventually entering the prison system—sometimes referred to as the “the school-to-prison pipeline” (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.; Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000; Lieberman, n.d.)—is especially troubling in light of race, gender, and ability disparities in suspension and expulsion rates. In 2006, Native American, Hispanic, and African American students were respectively 1.52, 1.23, and 2.84 times more likely to be suspended than Caucasian students (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). More recent data indicate this trend has not changed, as African American students are still three times more likely to be suspended or expelled than Caucasian students (OCR, 2014), despite there being no difference in actual rates of problem behavior (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Suspension and expulsion disparities also extend to students with disabilities (who are more than twice as likely to be suspended as students without disabilities) and to boys (who are roughly twice as likely to be suspended as girls; OCR, 2014).

A number of researchers have found that disparate rates of suspension and expulsion are related to facets of classroom management, including the nature of teacher-student interactions, differences in language and culture, and biases toward certain races and ethnic groups (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002; Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). Frances Vavrus and KimMarie Cole (2002) examined interactions between students and teachers in a middle school. They found that suspensions were not always preceded by violent acts or other flagrant violations of school policy. Instead, suspensions sometimes resulted from a series of minor offenses—typically the vaguely defined “disruption”—often by multiple students, in which one student was eventually singled out. That is, researchers observed a number of cases in which, despite “the absence of an obvious breach of disciplinary policy” (Vavrus & Cole, 2002, p. 88), teachers resorted to suspending one student out of a group of generally disruptive students without first attempting to control the situation using less aversive (that is, less severe) strategies. In light of these findings and others, it appears that suspension and expulsion are not optimal approaches to promoting effective classroom management.

Individualized Behavior Plans

Individualized behavior plans are interventions designed to manage the behavior of a specific student. Teachers who are struggling with a particular student often request support from experts in the school, such as a psychologist or counselor, or from the student's parents. Sometimes the teacher attends a problem-solving conference or a referral meeting, or a support staff member (for example, a counselor or psychologist) enters the classroom, observes the student, and suggests an individualized solution.

Individualized behavior plans can be powerful, but they can also be cumbersome to implement with fidelity. That is, the amount of time and number of components required often make it difficult for teachers to implement an individualized plan as originally designed or intended (Wolery, 2011). Indeed, Frank M. Gresham (2009) and George H. Noell, Gary J. Duhon, Susan L. Gatti, and James E. Connell (2002) found that behavior plans tend to be implemented with low fidelity, which results in low effectiveness. Additionally, if more than one student in a class needs individualized support, it can be difficult for a single teacher to implement several behavior plans at once. The process of designing and

implementing new plans for each behavior issue can create a fragmented, piecemeal approach to behavior management (Kratochwill, Elliott, & Callan-Stoiber, 2002; Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2004). Overall, many teachers find that juggling several plans at a time with the expectation of doing something slightly different for each student is frustrating, demanding, and fairly ineffective (Dunson, Hughes, & Jackson, 1994; Kratochwill et al., 2002; Slonski-Fowler & Truscott, 2004).

In summary, the three practices reviewed here (zero-tolerance policies, suspensions and expulsions, and individualized behavior plans) have one important feature in common: they are reactive. That is, they are typically used in response to behavior issues that have already arisen. As shown in this section, these reactive practices are not often effective. Consequently, many educators and researchers have called for a more proactive approach to classroom management, one that allows for more flexible use of consequences (such as suspension and expulsion), as well as a range of alternative consequences to logically suit different behaviors (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Evans & Lester, 2012; Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005; Skiba, 2010). As Russell Skiba and Reece Peterson (2000) said, “Educators and policy makers must begin to look beyond stiffer consequences to long-term planning designed to foster nonviolent school communities” (p. 341). In other words, instead of using reactive consequences to address misbehavior, educators can plan ahead to prevent problems by using a proactive approach to classroom management.

A Proactive Approach to Classroom Management

Effective classroom management does not consist of simply punishing students for misbehavior. Instead, we recommend a proactive approach that draws from three theoretical principles: (1) behaviorism and applied behavior analysis, (2) direct instruction of desired behaviors, and (3) predictability and structure. Here, we briefly describe each of these underlying principles.

Behaviorism and Applied Behavior Analysis

A key aspect of the psychological theory of *behaviorism* (Skinner, 1953, 1976) is that all behaviors have a functional purpose, serving either to gain something (such as a reward) or to avoid something (such as an adverse situation or penalty). A *behavior* is any observable and measurable act. Since its conception, behaviorism and its principles have been used in various settings through *applied behavior analysis* (ABA; the methodical use of interventions to improve behavior) in order to promote desired behaviors and discourage undesired ones. This approach has been applied in the classroom and can be extremely effective (for example, see Alberto & Troutman, 2013; Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968; Wolery, Bailey, & Sugai, 1988). One tenet of ABA is that behavior does not occur in a vacuum (Dunlap, Harrower, & Fox, 2005). Instead, it occurs within a chain of events: behaviors are triggered and then maintained by certain stimuli in the environment (Dunlap et al., 2005; Wolery et al., 1988), as shown in figure 1.2. Understanding the context of a certain behavior allows teachers to intervene to increase desired behaviors and decrease others (Carr et al., 2002; Crone & Horner, 2003; Dunlap et al., 2005). This chain of events is referred to as a *behavior sequence* (Wolery et al., 1988).

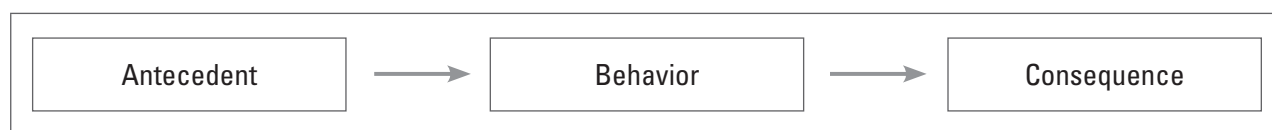


Figure 1.2: Three components of the behavior sequence.

Source: Adapted from Dunlap et al., 2005.