

Contradiction, Paradox, and Irony: The World of Classroom Management

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I live in a curious professional world. I teach Classroom Management and often find that, like Alice in Wonderland, I am wandering through a paradoxical landscape. Over the past decade I have spent a considerable amount of time exploring the many paradoxes of my field of study as I listen to the fears and joys, despair and elation of in-service and preservice teachers. Classroom management is a topic I find to be fraught with more curious contradictions in the form of moral dilemmas and a desire to make right decisions all the time.

There are paradoxes and contradictions embedded in the topic itself. Some people call what I teach "classroom discipline," a title that makes the subject seem deceptively simple. After all, most of us are enculturated with notions that the term discipline has to do with such phrases as "Spare the rod and spoil the child," or "Children should be seen and not heard." There are, of course, alternative perspectives on the subject, and I spend most of my working hours teaching about and researching these alternatives. I examine a variety of tools for building classroom climates, particularly those tools that mutually encourage all members and rely on self-management as opposed to authoritarian controls dependent on threats, coercion, and punishment.

I find Classroom Management to be the most fascinating topic to teach and to research in large part because it is so loaded with personal memories, values, ego, fear and, at times, panic. The students in every class I teach spend a good deal of their time trying to resolve internal conflicts between their enculturated concepts of what is meant by discipline, on the one hand, and incorporating into that framework new strategies designed, on the other, to preserve dignity and inspire a sense of safety in the classroom.

Every teacher, new or experienced, enters my class with the preconceived notion, or perhaps a fervent wish, that management will be little more than a series of tricks or a simple formula that, when deliberately applied, consistently lead to classrooms filled with beaming, quiet, perpetually on-task children. They are engaged in a quest

for pixie dust. One "Poof!" and all the problems students would ever present are fixed forever. I have come to believe that as implausible as the pixie dust theory is, it nevertheless lingers because classroom management has no equivalent concept in society. We all are cognizant of the reality that interpersonal relationships take time to build and nurture. But relationships with students are somehow not viewed through that same lens. Nothing else we do in life prepares us to guide a roomful of students on a learning adventure for five days of the week, nine months of the year. There are no transferable paradigms and thus there is a persistent attempt to apply old adages in an attempt to ensure survival.

That is only the first of many paradoxes in this curious world. Here is another: every teacher I speak with tells me that successful classroom management is the key to all learning; teachers who lack a developed set of skills in this area will experience classrooms that fall apart. Yet, despite its evident importance, classroom management is the topic least attended to professionally. Many teacher education programs do not include the study of management in their programs. Courses on educational law are even more rare. Researchers largely ignore it as a field of study. Many textbooks on the topic are little more than sales pitches in thin disguise.

Two tendencies dominate. Teacher education programs tend either to ignore classroom management entirely in their official curriculum, or they offer a discrete course in management or discipline. Both approaches are paradoxical to the nature of the subject matter. Classroom management is not something that "just happens," as is believed by many who place their faith in the magic of subject matter competency and imagine that management will occur because every student is enthralled by the teacher's wealth of knowledge. Conversely, teaching management as a separate topic sends the erroneous message that it exists apart from curriculum, rather like oil and water. There is the hope that if the mix is right and appropriate blending occurs, somehow curriculum and management will work together. But separating curriculum from management, I believe, sends teachers the false message that the two are something other than interwoven threads of the same cloth.

So, at this point on our journey we have explored two basic paradoxes that color our perspective of what classroom management is or is not or what it should or should not be. The inability to even clearly define what the topic is or its need to be included in teacher education protocol creates a muddle not only for preservice teachers but those who have been teaching for a long time.

In the classes I teach and the workshops I present, I encounter teachers who have been professionally engaged for years. For many of them management has become

a source of constant struggle and anxiety. For some, it has become the monster who resides in their classrooms, threatening eventually to drive them into careers of selling aluminum siding. Their concern can be boiled down to one constant theme that runs through the comments they make: their fear of losing control.

I have never worked with any educators who desire to become "mean" teachers. Yet the fear of losing control while experimenting with management practices new to them causes educators to believe that in a crunch they will revert to behavioral measures that, in their words, "work" to end inappropriate conduct. And this leads to yet another paradox, even more curious. Namely, many of the adults with whom I work were far from model students when they went to school. In fact, they were often quite the opposite. And whatever the particulars of their school careers, they all have stories they relate to me of the misbehaviors in which they engaged as students and the treatments they received as a result.

I begin the course I teach on classroom management with story telling. I do not ask my students to think of the most dramatic examples of authoritarian discipline they experienced, but, in fact, that is usually what first comes to their thoughts. For some, the events occurred twenty or thirty years ago, but the fears and humiliation they experienced as students are as keenly painful to remember as they were when they first occurred.

The memories are vivid and acute. I hear stories of how they were locked in dark closets, tied into chairs, or made to sit under desks. In one instance, a teacher recalled being forced as a child to sit under the teacher's desk and smell the teacher's feet. Another student recently related the story of her third grade teacher who, on the first day of class, told the students she was a witch who would "get them" if they were not good. Then, if a child was talking out of turn or exhibiting some other behavior deemed to be inappropriate, the teacher would walk over and pluck a hair from the student's head. The hair would be stored in a jar in the teacher's cupboard.

Many of the discipline stories I hear reflect treatment that was very different between the genders. One woman recalled how being locked in a closet became the "place to be" in her fourth grade classroom. The teacher would send female students there if they were caught talking. As soon as more than one was in the dark closet they could continue their conversation unabated. Although this might seem like fun, there was the ever-present fear of being punished by being locked away in a spooky place. It was considered a more desirable place to be, though, because the students were more fearful of the teacher than of the dark closet. One of my male students recounted how a music teacher he had in the seventh grade began each class by putting on very

dark, red lipstick. If a female student was caught talking, nothing happened. If a male student was caught talking, he was called to the front of the room and kissed by the teacher so that the lipstick left an imprint on his cheek.

The educators with whom I work also will tell tales, equally troubling to them, of times when their names were written on the blackboard, of being forced to wear gum on their noses and, most common, having to stand outside their classrooms and become highly visible in the hallways of their schools. As adults, they now believe the common factor in all these strategies was the desire of their teachers to control them through fear and humiliation.

And here is the paradox, the contradiction, if you will: As dramatic as such examples of intimidation are, I have yet to hear from a single adult who will testify that she or he learned to behave in appropriate and responsible ways from these experiences or are better people because of them. Further, these same teachers go to their own classrooms and seek to gain control through the model most imprinted on them. Sadly, the deepest impressions are left by the traumatic residue of fear and humiliation. When these same people feel the desperate need to enforce control over their own students, they revert to the very strategies that most controlled them.

I once witnessed a former student of mine who, after nearly a full year of discussing and reflecting on issues of fair and equitable management practices, dismissed her students for the day by reading their names aloud in the order of their spelling scores. Those with the highest scores were dismissed first, those with the lowest were forced to sit until everyone else had gone. When asked about it later, she said she believed that the tactic would motivate students to do better and that she had seen similar practices used when she went to school. Would she enjoy an equally public display of her good and bad days during her first year of teaching, I asked? She laughed, as if it were an absurd idea and said, "No."

The point is that there is not a teacher or administrator who would welcome such treatment as an adult. So the paradox of doing to students what teachers hated having done to themselves, suddenly has a second and equally devilish paradox attached. That is, the message we are sending children is that while teachers may, students may not. Children are not allowed to yell, hit, or treat others with disrespect. Teachers are allowed to do all those things, by virtue of being older and bigger, for purpose of being in charge. So the message to students becomes, "When you are big, this is how you get to act." It is a dangerous message to send our young people. While such techniques are being applied as immediate solutions to behavioral problems, none of them employ any educational process that would help students

manage their behaviors into adulthood. However, those techniques ironically enculturate them quite well to reproduce humiliation and disrespect in their own efforts to gain some shred of control.

But we are only getting started. Let us move onto yet another paradox. In the current educational scene, a number of democratic curricular and pedagogical practices are finding wide acceptance in K-12 classrooms. Cooperative learning, authentic assessment, math as problem solving, and critical thinking strategies, among others, are gaining adherents and achieving good academic results. My students often express a desire to incorporate these democratic practices in their classrooms.

At the same time, though, they cling to their perceived need to manage those democratic curricular practices through authoritarian management measures, despite the contradiction between the two. Authoritarian discipline, by its very nature, works in direct opposition to the curriculum strategies intended to encourage independent learners. The paradox lies in intent. Authoritarian discipline intends that students will exhibit, on command, teacher-approved behaviors to gain promised rewards or to avoid threatened punishments. It yields dependence. In contrast, innovative curriculum intends to foster self-directed learning. It yields independence. While the teacher may want students to be in charge of their own learning, there is little belief that they can make wise choices over their own behaviors. It is an uncomfortable fit indeed between curriculum that advocates self-efficacy and management strategies that establish the teacher as sole determiner of what is and is not appropriate.

Even more ironic, most teachers will respond to questions aimed at uncovering the source of such contradictions with statements that reveal a deeply held distrust for the educational process itself. Educators often argue that teaching students appropriate behaviors is a pointless waste of time. They assume, in effect, that if students are not controlled through basic behavioral strategies, they will lie, cheat, steal, not work, and turn into thugs who cannot be managed at all. Such teachers betray a lack of faith in the efficacy of information, rationality, or inquiry to nurture responsible social behavior. Teachers and administrators mired in this assumption tell me they feel anger toward the existing educational structure and a deep despair that times have changed and classrooms are no longer filled with the apple-checked innocent beings who hang on the teacher's every word—assuming they ever were.

Even those who would reject such despair end up in contradiction, however. They adopt new teaching strategies designed to address various learning styles and multiple intelligences in order to provide better learning opportunities for a broad spectrum of educational needs. Yet, when putting together discipline plans, they

often resort to using a "one-size-fits-all" approach, never considering that just as they design lessons which address various learning styles to make a math concept accessible, so an individualized approach to management will make the concepts of social responsibility equally understandable. Ultimately, the same mistrust of education is at work.

It is curious that teachers will adopt curricular innovations that indicate a level of trust in their students, but manage the process with strategies that indicate a high level of distrust. And the inevitable disequilibrium resulting from the mismatch of curriculum and management point the way to yet another paradox, the increased focus on action research in education. Many teachers and administrators are eager to engage in a critical examination of their own curricular and pedagogical practices. Yet I find these same educators will justify their use of behavioral management practices with statements such as, "If it works, what's wrong with it?" In other words, if a teacher is employing management practices in the classroom designed to result in obedient, on-task behaviors, those discipline strategies appear to be acceptable. It is a rare experience when I meet a teacher who wants to critically examine her own management practices.

One teacher I work with and with whom I usually find myself philosophically compatible shocked me by dismissing her students one day in the order of their scores on that day's timed math test. While the students were gathering their coats and books, she laughingly said to me, "They're so competitive." She never considered the role her dismissal practices played in the competitive spirit within that classroom. Classroom management practices are potentially rich sources for action research, yet I seldom meet educators who are willing to hold that particular "mirror up to nature."

Every discipline decision teaches lessons to students, but too often what is learned is not the lesson teachers had in mind. In fact, the phrase "I'm going to teach you a lesson," when used in conjunction with classroom management, usually means that there is a punitive response in store for the student, as opposed to any sort of worthy educational experience. I see few attempts to critically examine management practices. In fact, teachers often become angry, defensive, or distant if I suggest a joint action research project to examine management styles. Their reasons for avoiding an examination of this most important aspect of education are legion.

When educators place the focus of their decision making on controlling the overt behaviors of students while ignoring all the possible causes of the behaviors, the emotional and educational needs of young people go unattended. Educators too often

choose to mire themselves in discipline responses designed to control symptoms rather than to treat the causes of the problems and effect any meaningful change in how a student might respond to difficult situations.

My observations of why this might be happening have led me to believe that the answer lies, at least in part, in the painful and personal nature regarding teachers' preferences for some sorts of students over others. Teachers who declare their comfort zone as one defined by quiet require of all students who walk into the classroom that they be quiet. There is no concern whether that paradigm works against students' ability to learn. Too often the methods employed to achieve a quiet, obedient classroom are detrimental to building a climate in which every student can learn successfully. In fact, based on my observations, I am reluctant to equate a silent classroom with a well-managed one. Constantly quiet classrooms look as they do because the students are being controlled through fear, intimidation, frequent appeals to competition, and public embarrassment. While any of the above approaches may be deemed to "work," inasmuch as they are effective tools of control, they most often work against students who already find themselves on the fringe of the school's social environment. While some students may be willing to bend to the control systems practiced by educators, particularly when those practices are consonant with the homes from which the students come, there are others who will view imposed, arbitrary rules as a call to arms.

The compelling need for classroom practices focused on student success becomes self-evident when we look at the statistics of who drops out of our schools to learn the lessons of life on the streets. These appears to be a shared idea among educators that the problems existing in schools are solved through the practices of suspension and expulsion. In fact, these "solutions" only transfer the problems elsewhere. When educators decide to exclude students from educational opportunities, young people are faced with minimum-wage jobs, the street, or prison. The problems do not go away, they only become more dangerous and more costly to a civilized nation.

The high numbers of students with disabilities and students of color who appear in the statistics of school dropouts is, I believe, no coincidence. When our media create a hero out of Joe Clark, whose fame rested on his desire to select the students who would or would not be educated in the high school he administered, the message sent to teachers was that if schools would just expel all the problem students, they would only have to teach those remaining; in other words, only the "good kids" would be left. Equity is not served by such thinking.

The difficulty is that teachers tend to define appropriate behaviors according to their own family backgrounds and values. In a classroom made up of twenty-seven students representing twenty-seven diverse economic, ethnic, family, or religious backgrounds, some deliberate instruction must occur if all its members are to function together as a community of learners. The educators who express the desire to rid their classroom of the undesirables, leaving only those who seem truly deserving of an education, typically hold a preconceived notion of who is worthy of membership in the community. In most cases it is those students who look like, act like, and share the same values as, the teachers.

How we manage students in our classrooms is an issue that reflects many of our struggles in this country to come to terms with demographics that are increasingly multicultural. Given the fact that the vast number of licensed teachers in the United States belong to the majority culture, typically students considered to be potential trouble makers are students of color, students who belong to a minority culture, students who are of a different economic class as the teacher, and students who learn best in ways that are different from the way the teacher acquires knowledge.

If we accept the premise that solving educational problems can be done through mass expulsions, then the students who would be left in the classroom once the "less desirable" ones were gone would typically hold middle-class values, share mainstream religious values, and be native English speakers. Certainly becoming knowledgeable about and sensitive to the needs of many students from a variety of cultures and family structures is challenging. Nevertheless, they are equally deserving of consideration within an educational setting.

When teachers directly address this issue with me, often the question they ask is, "When is it okay for me to just give up on a student?" My answer to that question is the one I believe most teachers least want to hear, and that is "Never." And while that answer might seem impossibly naive, I argue it is not an answer resulting from being ill-informed, but rather the answer of someone who has seen where young people go when society gives up on them. When I offer that response to teachers, they typically counter by telling me that the other students in their classrooms need attention and they cannot spend time with one student at the expense of the rest of the class.

Teachers who express this view seem to believe that their classrooms can only be the way they are now. There are no alternative paradigms that they can imagine, often because they have been presented with no alternatives in their training or subsequent professional development. As a result, they are perpetually seeking quick

solutions to the negative behaviors they see in their students. They lack a framework for understanding the potential impact of deliberately creating expectations that establish and maintain a democratic classroom environment based on mutual respect and equitable decision making, and the effect such strategies can have on mediating the anger and frustration existing in so many classrooms.

I have found, however, that when teachers make the commitment to employ specific ideas that encourage appropriate behavior while not demeaning students, they typically report back to me that their discipline decisions are resulting in more positive outcomes in terms of classroom atmosphere and a higher level of trust established with and among students. I have also found that until most educators have been presented with some level of "cookbook" strategies, they have difficulty imagining alternative approaches.

Thoughtful decision making takes time, tricks do not. Adopting management strategies that admittedly take time is the toughest sell in the world of education. However, if educators truly desire to create classroom climates that are supportive of all learners, there must be an investment of time to discuss expectations, set up rights and responsibilities, and follow up on disruptions in ways that will help and not harm students. Building a democratic classroom climate requires an effective integration of pedagogical knowledge, educational psychology, patience, hard work, an unwavering dedication to equal educational opportunity for all students, and a passionate belief that everyone, including the teacher, can learn from mistakes.

The contradiction between this view of management and what is happening in most classrooms is that the statement above indicates the attributes educators are least likely to consider when they are deciding how their schools or classrooms will function. It has been my experience that most educators want quick remedies that will work all the time with every student in all situations, even though logic tells them that the nature of human interactions means no such solutions exist. The payoff for management strategies requiring an investment of time at the beginning of the school year is that classrooms tend to hold together into April and May, thus saving time at the end of the year.

I see in many classrooms a proliferation of teacher-proof approaches to discipline. The subtle but very real message embedded in such management models is that educators cannot be trusted to make their own good decisions, so the model excludes them from the loop. As educators adopt materials that do not require their own creative thinking and professional skill, they are being duped into accepting the

underlying premise that their decisions are not worthy. And, ultimately, if their own decisions cannot be trusted, how can the decisions of young people be?

I find myself walking a tightrope between promoting the use of democratic management with some practical, how-to strategies while trying to avoid the trap of reducing those strategies to step-by-step procedures reminiscent of the very teacher-proof approaches I distrust. Yet, in working with teachers, I have found that there is a greater likelihood of trying democratic management strategies if there is some conversation about what to do in the classroom on Monday morning. As a result, I have come to believe that when assisting educators in the process of abandoning the behavioral discipline practices that rely on extrinsic rewards and punishment, and adopting instead those strategies designed to encourage self-esteem and personal responsibility, it is necessary to present teachers with both the rationale for change as well as some ideas to make it happen.

One compelling rationale for change is the ethical dilemma presented by a reliance on rewards and punishment as a means for establishing discipline. Not only should educators be concerned with the lack of self-efficacy involved in behaving in a proscribed fashion in hope of a reward or out of fear of punishment, but there is also the issue of whether or not the behaviors that are rewarded will in any way serve the needs of democracy when students grow to adulthood. If only the most quiet, docile, dependent behaviors are seen as worthy of reward, what behaviors then can we reasonably expect students to exhibit when they reach the age of majority? Even more alarming is that classrooms that depend on extrinsic methods of behavioral control typically spawn peer rejection and distrust as a natural outcome of some students being punished more often, others being rewarded more often.

Once an educator makes a commitment to employ discipline techniques that will inform rather than punish and are more compatible with democratic curricular models, the next step is to explore what pieces of information are needed for educators and students in order to have everyone modeling and practicing better self-management skills. If educators agree that their teaching practices should be focused on encouraging students to become responsible, independent learners, there are a number of approaches to democratic management upon which they might draw. Although many teachers may long for one prescribed approach to discipline, applicable to every circumstance with no variations, my own experience as a teacher, and the narratives I collect from current classroom teachers, indicates that no one model successfully meets every student's needs in every situation. Rather than depending on one approach to be the answer to all management or curriculum issues,

the most effective teachers I see are those who comfortably synthesize ideas from a number of cognitive models.

There are those who suggest that to use ideas from various discipline models only creates confusion in the minds of students. I argue, though, that the more ideas educators carry with them into the classroom, the more prepared they will be to handle the diverse range of problems encountered on a daily basis. Therefore, if teachers are to master skills that will enable them to create positive and stimulating learning environments, it is most important to assist them in learning about the assortment of discipline techniques aimed at preserving self-esteem and fostering personal responsibility. However, a synthesized approach to management can only have meaning if it arises from a well-grounded philosophical foundation.

When deciding what management models would best serve a democratic classroom environment, it is sensible to begin with a foundation that reflects the precepts our society holds as fundamental. It seems logical to me to begin with a consideration of those elements that are common to our democratic system. If this is the point of departure, then the foundation for a democratic classroom begins with the concept that individual rights are sacred yet always balanced against the equally compelling needs of society. There is a dignity that naturally accompanies affording students the recognition of their human rights. There is mutual respect interwoven into an educated perspective of the ways in which our actions have an impact on those around us. Educators who begin with this premise are helping to ensure that all students who enter their classrooms do so on an equal footing.

This leads to a further paradox, one related to the skepticism about educating toward appropriate behaviors rather than relying on unreflective behavioral control. I receive on consistent bit of feedback on the contents of the course I teach, a nearly universal sense of surprise that the concepts which I encourage my students to consider are actually effective. As one intern said to me, "I thought those ideas you were teaching were crap that would never work. But now that I am teaching, I can't believe how well they work." The paradox lies in trying to imagine why I would spend my time teaching ideas that have no practical application. I am dismayed that the significant role democratic decision making plays in the construction of equitable learning opportunities is too often dismissed as being "touchy-feely" and certain to result in chaotic classrooms.

The skepticism with which the ideas presented in my class are viewed and the difficulty my students have in understanding their practical applications rests, in part, with the fact that, however hellion-like they might have been as children, as

adults they are typically highly motivated students. Teaching democratic classroom management to adult learners does not provide many opportunities to model the concepts except during role-playing. The interns and teachers with whom I work are not likely to be discipline problems at this point in their development. Occasionally those enrolled in my class engage in side conversations, but more typically they are on-task individuals not given to seriously disrupting the educational environment. Although we do a good deal of role-playing, the truth is that the course is removed from direct classroom contact and teaching the content equates to teaching a sport without access to a playing field or the appropriate equipment. The students enrolled in my course often learn the material by *imagining* what it would be like to throw, catch, and run, rather than by throwing, catching, and running.

Unfortunately, when the preservice teachers in my class do enter the classrooms to which they have been assigned, they are more likely to see modeled the very strategies that are least likely to promote classroom equity. It is too easy to dismiss the ideas discussed in class once the interns and teachers return to their schools and are told by their colleagues that such strategies just are not effective. I have found that many of the practicing educators who are most quick to disparage the content of the course have not actually tried any of the strategies, or they have tried them as they would have tried some behaviorist "trick"—they applied the strategy in isolation from its philosophical foundation. Educators who fall into either of the above categories express the conviction that democratic management practices are worthless notions presented by a professor who has breathed the air of the ivory tower a little too long.

As I respond to the myriad of issues raised in the course I teach, I consistently try to assist my students in developing responses to behavioral problems that will vary depending on the needs of the individuals as well as the group. I present to them the idea that all human relationships are built with time, patience, and hard work; there is no reason to expect classroom relationships to be any different. There simply is no magic pixie dust that can be sprinkled over our educational environments resolving all problems and curing all ills as it slowly settles on our shoulders.

One of the recurrent issues students bring to me is a suggestion for a way to keep all students on-task with a minimum investment of time. This is an issue that my students as well as workshop participants repeatedly will raise with me. I find it to be reflective of my earlier statement that educators seem to view time limitations universally as their greatest barrier to implementing democratic management practices. It frustrates them to hear that any student-centered management strategy

must be, by its very nature, "time consuming," just as are the interpersonal relations they have outside the classroom.

Time can be viewed as a tyrant that leaves no opportunity to engage in humane interactions or it can be viewed as a commodity that educators can choose to invest in ways that will best serve the needs of all classroom members. Time can be spent working with students to reach a mutually acceptable solution to problems or it can be spent engaged in power struggles with students that lead to stress and result in students who drop out and teachers who burn out. Any problem will take some time to resolve; the issue is how to best spend that time.

Time can either be spent after problems have occurred, trying to come up with perfect punishments in an attempt to ensure it will never happen again, or time can be spent before problems have occurred, at the beginning of the school year, engaging students in discussions concerning behaviors that sustain a safe and encouraging learning environment. And, thereafter, time can be invested in patient communications that reflect the commitment educators must assume to keep students in an educational environment. During our class discussions, I find that my students are consumed with worry about how they will handle the student who is in a state of outright rebellion. What they have trouble imagining is the difference in classroom climate that occurs when every class member understands and has had some voice in the common expectations.

Educators can learn to empower themselves to resolve the behavioral issues that occur in schools. They have the training and ability to move beyond prescribed models of discipline and into the realm of decision making based on democratic principles. Time is not the enemy. It can be an ally depending on how it is used. To take advantage of available time, educators might ask themselves some of these suggested questions:

- What expectations have been discussed that will lead to a classroom climate that supports the needs of all its members?
- If I did not hold the discussion at the beginning of the year, what expectations are most important to focus on now?
 - Will all students have some input into how the expectations are established?
 - Will the expectations be presented in ways that are accessible to all learning styles, not just auditory learners?
 - Are the expectations too high for some students?

- Are the expectations too low for some students?
- If so, what adjustments need to be made to be equitable?

Spending time setting mutual expectations is a pro-active approach to building a democratic learning environment that will address the special needs of all students and reduce the sense that problems are so overwhelming there are no solutions. The time spent on establishing a democratic classroom climate will also help educators shift their focus from the subject matter to learners who need to acquire knowledge of the subject matter. The hard work comes with the decisions teachers make from minute to minute and from one day to the next in order to sustain a democratic classroom. The words selected when speaking with students, the phrasing used when developing a syllabus, the amount, color, and type of displays present in any given classroom, even the physical arrangement of the classroom, will all serve to support or destroy the attempts of educators to maintain the democratic climate.

If expectations are stated in the form of rules, the rules should be posted in order to provide students with notice, and posted in the languages the students speak. Cross-cultural communication can be enhanced by having students share expectations in their own native languages. Educators can ask themselves if the expectations are understood and consistent. Did the expectations evolve out of a solid theoretical and philosophical base, or were they made up as time and circumstance seemed to demand? So much to think about, and yet these questions are so crucial to whether or not the playing field students walk on will have any even ground.

Working toward a democratic classroom requires an integration of all decisions, with the definitive goals being the security and self-esteem of every student. While teachers will always be concerned with issues of control, a sense of confidence can evolve from being well prepared with a variety of ideas that assist in responding equitably, appropriately, and professionally to difficult situations in the classroom. The concerns teachers express about democratic management are very real and not to be taken lightly. I have come to believe that preservice and in-service teachers are best served when they are provided with information designed help them incorporate democratic strategies into their teaching as they also learn to confront their anxieties concerning practices which enhance self-esteem and enable their students to feel like valued members of the school community.

And so we look out at this convoluted landscape where little is what it seems to be. Contradictions abound and success is often measured in terms of a day gone well and a year without too much disruption. And what sense can be made of it? Perhaps the answer is that no sense can be made of it because paradox, contradiction, and

irony is the logical outcome when paradigms of linear management strategies are imposed on the natural messiness that results from compelling representatives of all the world to attend public school classroom.

Another way to examine this issue and, perhaps, bring sense to it might be through incorporating Chaos Theory into our understandings of the daily give-and-take in school. One premise of Chaos Theory is the recognition of independently arising patterns as well as the misfit of trying to impose structure on that which cannot be structured. If recurring patterns are evidence of Chaos Theory, then the recurring patterns of student behaviors that arise consistently in direct opposition to authoritarian rules make a great deal of sense. If we can accept this premise, then it would also explain the fact that in the years I have worked in this field, I rarely hear a new question from teachers or administrators. And when I talk to my international colleagues, they tell me they are always faced with responding to the same issues as I am. Time and control consistently are the universal threads found in the concerns about management expressed by teachers everywhere.

Perhaps understanding effective classroom management is the same as accepting paradox as endemic to the topic and the resulting chaos might be the natural outcome of what happens when we work to create climates in which diverse groups of people can come together to seek knowledge. It might be that learning to celebrate the differences and enjoy the nature of all students will bring educators closer to the goal of a calm environment than will than authoritarian constraints that sound so good in theory and so often let down the practitioner.

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