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## Managing your classroom for success: organization in the first week is the foundation for a successful school year

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One of the most commonly misunderstood terms in education is classroom management, which is often seen as a synonym for discipline. Unfortunately, with this interpretation in mind, discipline then becomes the focus, instead of learning. Discipline is behavior management. Retail executives manage a store; they don't discipline a store. Coaches manage a team; they don't discipline a team. Likewise, effective teachers manage a classroom; they don't discipline a classroom.

Effective teachers view classroom management as a process of organizing and structuring classroom events for student learning. Creating a well-managed classroom with established procedures is the priority of a teacher the first two weeks of school. In an elementary classroom where each day may have a different array of subjects and at different times during the week, an organized classroom management plan is a teacher's most influential and effective tool and is the primary determinant of how well the students will learn. This includes science lessons that may have the same procedures used in other subjects, such as getting into groups, respecting each other's turn to speak, collecting and returning materials, and starting and remaining engaged in the lesson's task.

Perhaps you've heard the old sayings: "start off on the right foot," or "get all your ducks in a row." That applies to having procedures to organize the first week of school because it is the foundation for how successful the school year will be for everyone involved.

What Is Classroom Management?

Classroom management refers to all the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time, and materials so that student learning can take place. It comprises a plan--a set of procedures that structure the classroom so the students know what to do, how to do it, and when to do it in a classroom.

Effective teachers have a classroom that is organized, structured, and consistent with procedures--steps that guide students in how to get things done in a classroom. Procedures are used to manage a classroom so that instruction and learning can take place. One of the most important gifts we can give our students is to be consistent and predictable. This is because many of our students come from homes where chaos and unpredictability are the norm. Research shows that when we provide a place for our students that is safe, predictable, consistent, and nurturing, we will see increased student achievement.

A well-managed classroom is safe, predictable, nourishing, and focused on learning. Watch the students in a well-managed classroom:

- \* They are responsible for their time.
- \* They know and follow the procedures that structure the organization of the class.
- \* They are engaged and working.
- \* They are learning, achieving, and producing visible results.

To execute these four characteristics requires a review of the historical background and research on classroom management.

Jacob Kounin's Research

The seminal research on classroom management can be traced to the work of Jacob Kounin when he observed 49 first-and second-

grade classrooms (Kounin 1970). From his research, Kounin summarized that good classroom management is based on the behavior of teachers, not the behavior of students.

Kounin observed that two of the behaviors effective teachers exhibit are "with-it-ness" and "momentum." With-it-ness is seen in those classrooms that are so well organized that the teacher always knows what is going on, even if the teacher's back is to the class. With procedures, the teacher--and more so the students--know what is going on. Both the teacher and the students are with-it and, as a result, the lessons flow smoothly and a learning momentum is maintained.

Kounin states it is what the teacher does that produces high student engagement, reduces student misbehavior, and maximizes instructional time; two science teacher examples will be shown.

#### Julie Sanford's Research

Julie P. Sanford (1984) observed and noted the difference between effective managers and ineffective managers. Effective managers had classroom procedures. The students took their seats immediately on entering the room and began by copying the objectives and assignments for the day from the chalkboard. While students completed these routine tasks, the teachers quietly handled administrative chores.

Effective teachers had procedures that governed students with regard to talking, participation in oral lessons and discussion, getting out of their seats, checking or turning in work, what to do when work was finished early, and ending the class.

At the beginning of the school year, the teachers clearly explained their classroom organizational procedures and expectations and then followed their presentations with review and reminders of procedures and expectations in subsequent weeks.

In all classes, the teachers gave clear, simple directions and were noted as excellent in structuring transitions. They kept students apprised of time left for an activity; they forewarned the class of upcoming transitions; they brought one activity to an end before beginning another. They also told students what materials would be needed for an activity and had students get materials ready before beginning the lesson. During lab assignments and when students were assigned to work in pairs or groups, procedures governed how students were to work with each other. These teachers' manner in conducting class was task oriented, businesslike, and congenial.

In contrast, Sanford described the classrooms of the ineffective managers as having no procedures. There were no procedures established for beginning and ending the period, student talk during group work, getting help from the teacher, or what to do when work was finished.

These teachers had difficulty conducting transitions from one activity to another, such as from reading to science or science to physical education. They often did not bring one activity to an end before giving directions for another. They gave directions without getting students' attention, and they seldom forewarned the class or helped students structure their time. In essence, Sanford described these teachers as having no evidence of management with procedures.

#### Start With a Plan

To illustrate the efficacy of Sanford's research, let's look at Amanda Brooks, a fifth-grade teacher at Finley Elementary School, a Title 1 school in Dyersburg, Tennessee. Amanda and a colleague, Anna Hatch, teach fifth grade and, between the two of them, teach several different subjects, including science. Amanda begins her first day of school with a PowerPoint presentation of her classroom management plan (see NSTA Connection to view the entire presentation). See the first slide in Figure 1. B.E.L.L. stands for "Brooks Expects Learners Listening."

Amanda and Anna organize students into groups in the corners of the room. On the students' desks, they will have a sticky note saying what group they are in (for example, omnivores, herbivores, carnivores, decomposers). When they ring a bell, the students move to a corner where there is a task card or activity for them. On the first day of school, they use this as a get-to-know-one-another activity based on scientific categories (e.g., ecosystems, continents).

With each procedure shown, Amanda teaches the procedure and has the class practice the procedures that will be used to manage the classroom for learning. At the end of her first day as a brand-new teacher, Amanda shares, "My class went like clockwork. The day was absolutely flawless, and I had an awesome day."

At the end of her first year of teaching, she says, "Because of our procedures, I never had to waste time repeating what they should be doing or reprimanding them for bad behavior. It allowed me to be everything I wanted to be as a teacher and create an environment where students could just learn. I simply taught and enjoyed my students."

An error many science teachers make is thinking that if they have a continuum of activities that this will keep the students engaged and well-behaved; they do not see how classroom management applies to them. Activities are fine, but they are of no value in a classroom that is in disorganized chaos. Amanda knows that to teach any subject, there must be consistency in how the classroom is organized so the students know what to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

During her second year of teaching, she reported, "My state test scores came back and my class had the highest test scores in my school. I am only saying this to encourage new teachers to get it right the first day and then enjoy the rest of their year."

## A Well-Managed Classroom

Just as a pilot has a flight plan, a coach has a game plan, and a wedding coordinator has a wedding plan, effective teachers have a classroom management plan. The plan consists of procedures that create a classroom environment that is safe, trusting, caring, and benefits the students. An atmosphere is produced that is less confusing and geared towards maximizing learning opportunities.

Karen Rogers is a science teacher at Olathe North High School in Olathe, Kansas. She loves to tell everyone that her classroom has to be well-managed or "I will be chasing after the kids all year long." She teaches in a small, packed room with a large number of English Language Learners (ELL), Special Education (SPED) students, and students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Karen says, "I love the first few days and weeks of school. When adults walk into my classroom, they are amazed that my students all know what to do, when to do it, and how to do it."

Karen plans everything for her very first day of school and the first two weeks of school. The plan for each of the first 10 days of school is meticulously crafted. Just as a football coach scripts the first 10 to 20 plays, Karen has her first-day plan on a clipboard. As each item is shared with the class, she checks it off. For her first day of school, she writes out where she is going to stand to welcome her students. She has her seating chart done. She has an opening bell work assignment posted. She has all the classroom procedures written out to present to the class with a worksheet for student response (Figure 2 includes the answer key). She even has her welcome speech written out to explain her plan. With a plan, she takes away all the anxieties that would prevent her from focusing on her students. She doesn't have to worry about anything else. She knows what is going to happen in her classroom.

When the students first enter the classroom, there is always an agenda with the bellwork and the lesson objective posted. Once the bellwork time is complete, Karen tells them the "game plan" for the day even though it is clearly posted on the board. They tease her about it. "So what's the game plan, Ms. Rogers?" even though they know what to expect and the class gets to work.

Karen's classroom is organized and managed with procedures. The procedures provide the framework for the consistency that exists for her students. Many of her students come from home environments that are chaotic and the consistency that Karen creates promotes a classroom of stability and confidence in the teacher.

The students are secure in knowing what is going to happen every day. Karen does not take or alarm her students with surprises in how their classroom is organized.

There is a consistent agenda with a schedule so the students can get right to work. There are procedures that help students organize their day. There are lesson objectives and rubrics to guide students in their learning.

Her students thrive with the structure and routine. They feel comfortable and safe in the reliability of their classroom routines. Her ELL, SPED, and ADHD students function well in the predictability of a classroom when there are no surprises or sudden changes.

## The Foundation for a Successful School Year

When a classroom is well-managed with procedures, there is little downtime and learning is productive. The students are motivated and on task, and the climate of the classroom is work-oriented but relaxed and pleasant. The school year flows smoothly with the teacher and the students experiencing success. As Amanda Brooks said, "Because of our procedures, I simply taught and enjoyed my students."

## References

Kounin, J.S. 1970. Discipline and group management in classrooms. New York: Holt, Reinhardt, and Winston.

Sanford, J.P., 1984. Management and Organization in Science Classrooms. Journal of Research in Science Teaching 21 (6): 575-587.

## NSTA Connection

Visit [www.nsta.org/SC1207](http://www.nsta.org/SC1207) for Amanda Brooks's PowerPoint presentation and Karen Rogers's classroom procedures worksheet.

## RELATED ARTICLE: Connecting to the Standards

This article relates to the following National Science Education Standards (NRC 1996):

## Teaching Standards

Standard C: Teachers of science engage in ongoing assessment of their teaching and of student learning.

National Research Council (NRC). 1996. National science education standards. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Figure 2. Classroom Procedures Name Answer Key 1. Entering the classroom handouts, seated, bellwork 2. Bellwork objective in planner, posted on board 3. Attendance teacher will take attendance quietly 4. Tardy must have pass, go to tardy table 5. Dismissal clean up, seated, teacher 6. Quiet work time What should it look like? 7. Attention getting signal "listen up, let's get started" or "the hand" 8. Calling on students raise hand or random calling 9. Asking for help raise hand, ask teacher 10. Make up work teacher will tell you 11. Turning in papers across rows or table under the clock 12.

Returning papers usually during bellwork 13. Leaving your seat only when needed (no wandering) 14. Leaving the room must have planner--don't abuse 15. Time when work is complete What will you do? 16. Red alert drill teacher locks doors, move toward corner of room 17. Fire drill south commons doors, across street, stay together 18. Tornado drill stay in room, prepare to take cover 19. School announcements listen 20. Visitors in the classroom look good, keep working 21. Watching videos no talking, texting, or sleeping 22. Lunch (if applicable) First lunch 23. Grading, tests, extra teacher will help as needed credit

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