

Proceed With Intent

At the heart of a classroom management plan is practice and more practice of key procedures. BY HARRY AND ROSEMARY WONG

The best procedures are the ones we don't necessarily notice. It's like the floor in a room; it's always there, but you only notice it right away if it's in disrepair. Classroom management is like the floor. You don't notice a well-managed classroom because everything flows so smoothly. But if a classroom is not well managed, especially when things are more chaotic during the holidays, you will notice it immediately.

Tammy Meyer, principal at Sisseton Middle School in South Dakota, discovered this when she hosted a preservice teacher in one of her classrooms. "I welcomed him and encouraged him to monitor the students. The following day I asked him, 'So, what do you think of this whole business of becoming a teacher?'" She was not ready for his response.

The teacher told her, "I expected there to be more conflict, argument, and chaos. That is what I experienced when I was in middle school."

Meyer explained that what he experienced at Sisseton was the result of a culture of consistency. All of the teachers teach classroom procedures the first week of the school year.

Nothing is left to chance. There is a plan and procedure for everything that happens in the classroom.

Procedures are the heart of a classroom management plan. They create an atmosphere of purpose, surety, and calm for students. As we prepare for the December break, now is a good time to review your own procedures for the following activities:

- Entering the classroom
- Putting away a backpack
- Designating a lunch preference
- Beginning the opening assignment
- Asking for help
- Replacing a broken pencil
- Coming to attention
- Titling a paper
- Transitioning from task to task
- Working in groups
- Responding to an emergency
- Exiting the classroom upon dismissal

Creating Schools Kids Want to Be In

We had the pleasure of visiting St. Rose Elementary, a Title I school near New Orleans. After an amazing four-hour visit, we did not want to leave—we had

never seen a school run so smoothly and with so much care and love. The students did not want to stay at home the following week for spring break—they wanted to be in school every day because of the calm and consistency that existed in every classroom. The culture of consistency was evident, with signs posted about procedures as reminders for students.

Successful schools have universal procedures that create a safe, organized, and productive environment. Having school-wide procedures doesn't mean every teacher is doing the same thing. It's the concept of a procedure that's universal; the practices are not. For instance, the procedure of an opening assignment is universal, but every teacher has a unique way to accomplish it—whether with bell work, a warm-up exercise, or a daily oral language, do now, or get going activity—when students enter the classroom.

The Three Steps to Teaching a Procedure

Classroom procedures, which cover everything from starting assignments and quieting down a group of students

to distributing supplies and ending the day, foster orderly learning environments. Most teachers who fail at establishing procedures in the classroom do so because they do not teach procedures. There are three essential steps in teaching procedures to students:

1. **State, explain, and demonstrate the procedure.**
2. **Have students rehearse and practice each procedure under your supervision.**
3. **Reteach, rehearse, and reinforce each procedure until it becomes a routine practice for all students.**

A procedure is not a rule. If students do not follow a procedure, there is no punishment, as with a rule. Simply practice the procedure repeatedly until students have learned it—just as athletes warm

up before a game and musicians tune before a performance, students need to practice procedures until they have perfected them. Observe, guide, and prompt students, and encourage them with specific praise to repeat the same process the next time they demonstrate the procedure.

If you do this consistently, students will feel safe and relaxed in your classroom. They will arrive each day eager to learn and ready to achieve success. They will be excited to demonstrate to you that they are responsible students who understand how the classroom is managed—even when you are not there, or in the excitement of the pre-holiday rush.

Effective teachers spend the first weeks of class teaching procedures as part of their curriculum to establish consistency as quickly as possible.

Students thrive in a safe, familiar setting where procedures exist, where consistency is as routine as the bell to signify the start of the school day.

Once students recognize that you are an organized teacher with a classroom management plan for their safety and success, you can get on with what you were hired to do—help children reach their potential personally and academically. □

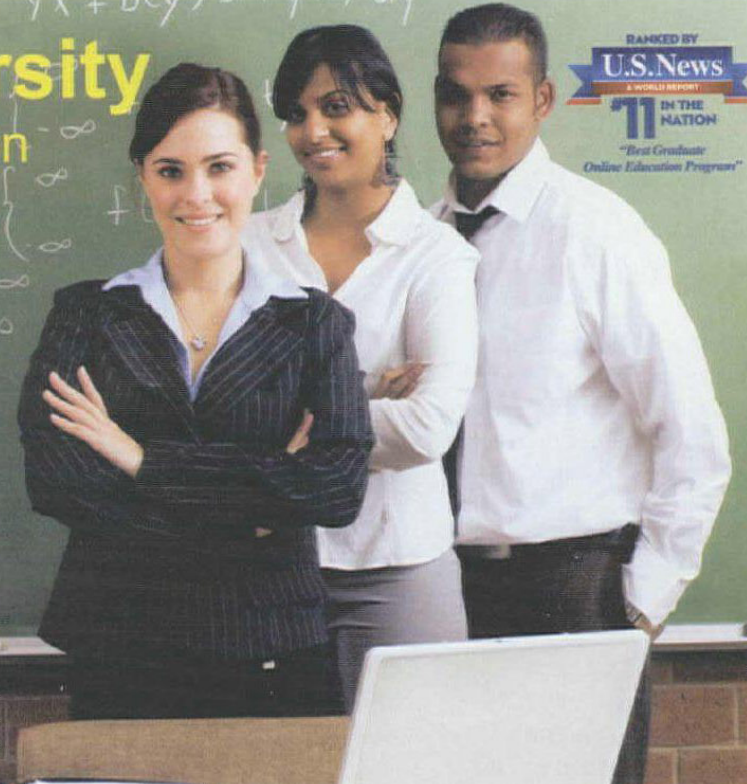


Harry K. Wong and Rosemary T. Wong are coauthors of the best-selling book *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher* and the recently published *THE Classroom Management Book*.

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