

Classroom Management Strategies to “Live By”

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Effective classroom management is often the yardstick by which teachers are measured, leading many to become disheartened if their daily teaching strategies and their own personal authority appear to fail them in the classroom. Traditional teacher-training courses do not usually provide much training on classroom management, leaving new teachers ill-equipped for the “challenging classroom”. This workshop aims to provide information that could help take the stress out of teaching, and to provide reliable positive classroom management strategies as well as some related classroom management theory. The workshop also aims to explain the characteristics of a “good” school behavior system and its connection to classroom management. This connection will demonstrate how a teacher with even a low personal authority can effectively manage difficult students. Management strategies may change depending on the age range of students and this topic will also be addressed during the workshop. A wide range of strategies will be provided at the workshop for coping with common classroom management issues. This paper will be of interest to experienced and inexperienced teachers alike. The main area of focus will be “Middle” and “High School” classroom management, although there will also be some references to strategies that can be used in an Elementary School.

Keywords: classroom management, practical tips, strategies, behavior, Elementary School, Middle School

Introduction

The strategies presented in the workshop will help to create a positive work day where teachers feel less tired and worn down by disruptive classroom management events. Also considered will be common classroom management scenarios and best practices for dealing with them. The workshop content has been distilled from the author’s own baptism by fire in the UK school system, where a mixture of in-school training and guidance from other more-experienced teachers helped her to overcome a shaky start and quickly become effective in a large variety of difficult classroom management situations. The author learnt to “live” rather than “die” when faced with the sometimes dauntingly steep rock-face that is teaching.

It is hoped that delegates will benefit from the author’s experience and will leave with a set of “strategies to live by”.

Classroom management is a crucial teaching skill and yet it is often barely visible in teacher-training course curricula. Teacher-training courses have a tendency to focus on the presentation of knowledge in the classroom and on the development of syllabus, curriculum, and related knowledge. Often teacher-training courses hold to the belief that classroom management needs to be learnt through experience. This has meant that traditionally little has been taught in the teacher-training classroom about management strategies and school behavior systems. This attitude is partly due to the fact that each situation in a classroom can be unique,

and that the personalities of teachers and students will differ. In addition to this, teachers have different teaching styles and levels of personal authority. For these reasons, it is not possible to adopt a “one size fits all” approach for every teacher or every school, nor is it possible to prescribe teaching strategies and teaching systems for every classroom setting.

However, it is possible to present a range of possible strategies that teachers can adapt to their own personal teaching styles. It is also possible to identify the core features that should be present within a “positive” school behavior system which supports individual teachers and learners.

The foundation of behavior in any school comes from the “whole school behavior system”. According to Flynn (2008):

The code of behaviour is the set of programmes, practices, and procedures that together form the school’s plan for helping students in the school to behave well and learn well. The code of behaviour helps the school community to promote the school ethos, relationships, policies, procedures, and practices that encourage good behaviour and prevent unacceptable behaviour. The code of behaviour helps teachers, other members of staff, students and parents to work together for a happy, effective, and safe school.

The first question a manager needs to ask is: What management system does my school require?. And the first question a teacher should ask is: What is the behavior management system at my school?. If at an interview for a teaching post the hiring manager is unable to advise the candidate on the school’s behavior system, the author would recommend that the candidate view this as a negative factor in deciding whether or not to work at that particular school.

A behavior management system should consist of a system of rules and conventions for teaching and learning that need to be adhered to by both students and staff. It is also useful to include staff, parents, and students in the actual development of the system, as individuals are more likely to support a system which they have personally helped to construct. The system should itself be supported by a documentation process that will record behavior events within the school. This is important for evidencing patterns of behavior and is thus useful in negotiation with parents and with other groups of professionals, such as counselors and social workers. The system should also contain a set of predefined “rewards” and “consequences”. It is of utmost importance that the management teams support their teaching staff in the consistent application of these rewards and consequences. A system can easily fail if a teacher threatens a consequence which does not materialize, since students soon learn that they are able to behave in a disruptive way with little or no consequence for their actions. Likewise, if promised rewards are not forthcoming then students will lose their motivation to respond positively and will lose faith in the school behavior system. Therefore, overall good behavior standards in a school arise from the existence of a school system, from the competence of management in supporting that system, and from the contribution of individual teachers working within the system.

A teaching system should be supportive of all teachers, no matter what level of personal authority they may have. The system should not require raised voices, physical punishment, or strictness. It requires consistency in application, in other words, all teachers should apply the same system of rewards and consequences. It also requires a strict application of the behavior documentation process and the use of “positive” behavior system and classroom management strategies. Most of all, it requires cooperative and supportive team work from all the system’s stakeholders.

Routines and Organization

Littleton, Wood, and Kleine Staarman (2010) have stressed the value of “daily” routines to behavior management in the classroom. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the repetitive use of “routines” and good organization can decrease the amount of behavior management necessary in a classroom situation. For example, students should always know the general format that their lessons will take. The system should also include routines for lesson-commencement, entrance, and exit. In addition to this, it should include: registration routines, break time routines, reward-giving routines, and formalization of the roles and responsibilities of the students within the lessons. It may also include routines for homework, book-giving, and for the handing out of equipment such as pens, erasers, etc.. Classroom routines and “good” organization provide natural boundaries which make students feel secure; they are less likely to be disruptive when they know what to expect and what is expected of them. Therefore, it is important to establish routines and to be consistent in their execution. In addition, if a class has effective organization and routines then there will be less “dead” classroom time, in turn leading to less disruptive behavior.

How to use the Black or White Board to support classroom management? (see Figure 1).

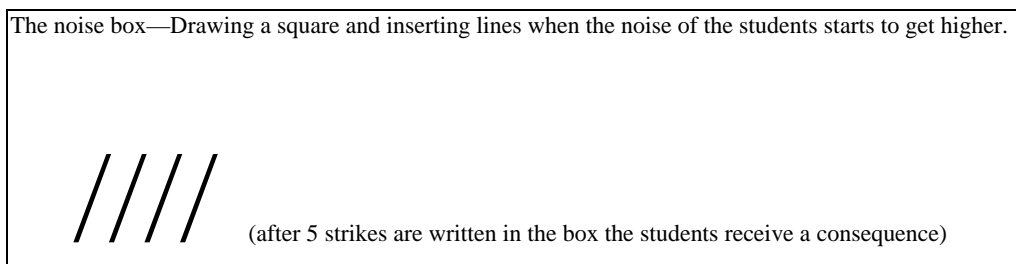


Figure 1. The noise box (Good for age 8-15).

There will often be a need for students to make productive noise in the classroom. A teacher must be able to distinguish noise which is productive from that which is disruptive, and must also find a positive mechanism for controlling noise levels; the “noise box” is one such effective tool. The teacher should draw the box on the board at the start of the lesson. If noise levels rise, the teacher should place a strike in the box and explain that if five strikes are put in the box due to continued excess noise, then the students will receive a sanction (such as staying in at break time, extra homework, staying after school, or tidying the classroom).

As with all behavior management methods, students must be allowed the chance to redeem themselves by improving their behavior. According to Hunt, Touzel, and Timothy (2009), “Punishment must be administered in such a way that allows the student to redeem themselves with the teacher”. In the author’s experience, it is more useful to all the chance for redemption to occur before the punishment has taken place. This redemption scheme will allow the teacher to gradually remove the strikes, and will promote a “feel-good” atmosphere in the classroom as students come to realize that improvements in their behavior will be rewarded. If punishments are fixed in stone early in a lesson with no opportunity for redemption, then there is no incentive for students to improve their behavior; and if a child feels that there is no chance to redeem the situation, then he/she may continue behave in an inappropriate way, knowing that the punishment will occur regardless of their behavior for the remainder of the lesson. A teacher who perceives that the class noise becomes more productive and/or lower in volume should gradually remove strikes to reward and acknowledge the improvement in behavior. The value of the noise box is that it is very visible and flexible.

If one or two students continue to make noise in an inappropriate way, these students may be given their own noise box and personal sanctions (see Table 1).

Table 1


Personal Noise Box

| | |
|-------|-----|
| John | /// |
| Gemma | / |

Using a chart on the classroom board can be a positive way to record and highlight both good and inappropriate behavior. Adding smiley faces or funny faces can add fun and humour to the situation. Younger students can get great joy from seeing their names in the happy face column. Students will also be mortified to find their name in the sad face column which is indicating that they have behaved in an inappropriate way. The chart will usually encourage children to seek rewards for positive behavior and to avoid using inappropriate behavior (see Table 2).

Table 2

Behavior Chart

| | |
|---|---|
|  |  |
| John Gemma Oh | Jin Joy |

Round Robin Lines

Giving lines to students is an old-fashioned method of punishing students. Traditionally, if a student is “given lines”, he/she must write out a prescribed phrase many times, for example “I must not interrupt my teacher when she is talking”. If we change the manner in which we give out lines we can add humor and ease classroom tension, thus creating a more positive relationship with the students. Humor is a very important part of good classroom management. “Round Robin Lines” is a way of introducing humor, fun, and variety into this traditional classroom management technique. If a student talks, the teacher will give him/her a blank piece of paper to be used for writing down the lines. Then if another student speaks inappropriately, the paper will be passed to him/her. The student who eventually gets to write down the lines will be the student who is left holding the paper at the end of the lesson. This method of giving lines encourages students not to talk inappropriately. It also allows a student the chance to improve their behavior in the hope that another student will receive the lines for talking.

The method also creates a fun atmosphere as there is an element of chance in the technique which makes it almost like a game. The students often receive their punishment with a smile and at the same time learn a valuable lesson about not talking when the teacher is talking.

Managing Teenagers—and Turning a Blind Eye

Younger children accept the natural authority of an adult more readily than older children and readily imitate in a bid to seek the approval of the teacher according to Steiner (1996). Therefore, it is easier for teachers in a Kindergarten or Elementary School to give orders to children but better for them to lead by action

and behaviour (Steiner, 1996). As children get older, however, they need to develop a sense of conscience about their own actions. Older children and teenagers need to be encouraged to think about and discuss the consequences of their actions. This is an important part of the process that allows a child to develop into a mature adult. Generally speaking, the older the children, the slower they will be at reacting to requests and orders. Pushing a teenager to respond before he/she is ready will often lead to unproductive conflict, creating negative feelings, and disrupting your lesson. Teenagers need to be given sufficient time to respond, and usually if they are prompted with gentle reminders of the school behavior system and are given some time to think about your request, then they will react positively and will complete the action that you require of them. It is sometimes best for teachers to walk away from the teenager. Intervention central suggest 20 seconds between teacher responses, however, the author has found in practice that it can take from a few minutes to up to 10 minutes to see a student comply with the request, thus, it is important to allow them this time to avoid a possible confrontation that might destroy a lesson (Retrieved from <http://www.interventioncentral.org/behavioral-interventions/challenging-students/working-defiant-kids-communication-tools-teachers-retrieved>).

According to Mandel (2009), it is important to learn to ignore some behavior issues. Therefore, it may also be desirable to deal with minor rule infringements at a time of your own choosing, rather than at the time that the offence occurs. For instance, a teacher's responses to “gum chewing” could be left until a natural break in the lesson; prior to that a teacher can pretend not to notice. In this way, the teacher retains control of the lesson and avoids unnecessary disruptions.

A Consistent Application Required for Success

According to Swanson (1978), classroom management strategies can take a significant amount of time to become obviously effective and require monitoring as they often start to lose effect or have less effect on some students. A common teacher error is to give up too early or to apply the management strategy inconsistently without any monitoring of student's behaviour. In a UK school where we employed a new set of management strategies and “code of conduct”, it took six weeks of consistent teamwork to see definite and consistent changes in the student's behavior. The author recommends that adequate time is allowed for the establishment of a new management and behavioral system, and that a system is properly trialed for a significant period before any changes are considered. Constantly, “tinkering with” a behavior system is likely to confuse students, and at worst, may cause conflict with them (Swanson, 1978).

Addressing Behaviour in Class

Many teachers make the error of trying to respond to individuals who are not conforming to the behaviour expected in the school. For example, a teacher enters the classroom and finds students wearing a coat which is against this particular school's rules. If a teacher says, “Gemma, take off your coat”, “John, take off your coat”, and “Sharon, take off your coat”, it is not a successful strategy. This turns into a situation not unlike the fair ground game where you have to use a hammer to hit the ducks as they jump up at you. As soon as you manage to hit one duck another pops up. This practice can be exhausting and unfruitful as the teacher is constantly engaged in managing behaviour and is unable to start teaching. While the teacher is distracted, the other students start to misbehave during this negative strategy.

A much better way to approach the situation is to make a general request to the whole class: for example, “Could everyone still be wearing an outdoor coat please remove it”. Then it is possible to remind the whole class.

It is important to first prompt rather than demand responses from students, according to McGinnis and Goldstein (2003). Therefore, should anyone still be wearing a coat after the teacher's requests: The teacher should still commence the class and then once the students are engaged in their work, the teacher should give each student a gentle reminder to take off their coat and a reminder of the consequences for not listening to the teacher?

“I can see you are still wearing your coat, what is the school rule for wearing outdoor coats in the classroom”. Once, the students state that they know the rule. The teacher can give the student five minutes to conform to the rule, and if the student still refuses to conform the teacher must then use the school system. In many systems, at this point, a referral slip or a card will be given to the student. The teacher provides options to the student. The student is given the choice of having the slip torn up if they conformed to the rule about outdoor clothing or to receive the consequence connected to receiving the card and triggering the school behavioural system. Most students when given the choice will respond after a few minutes and be happy to see the visual tearing up of the card or referral slip. The positive behaviour has led to the teacher rewarding them with the removal of the card or slip. It is clear to the student that his/her “good” response to the request has been seen and responded to. This will encourage the student to act positively in the future.

Dealing with the issue quietly when the other students are working means that the student can gain less “negative” attention and will reduce the temptation for the student to “act out” using disruptive behaviour in front of the whole group audience. The student will also feel less threatened. A threat or warning issued in front of the whole class may trigger a conflict situation some students who have authority issues or behavioural issues. Keeping the situation calm but firmly sticking to the school system helps keep the behavioural event in perspective. Wearing a coat in the classroom may be against the school rules but it is not on the same level as acting out violence or being rude to the teacher. The teachers’ firm but fair response, and using the system helps the students see that you are reasonable and that it is not a personal attack.

Mandel (2009) has stated that teachers should not display negative emotions and should avoid “having their buttons pushed” by students. It could be argued therefore that Discipline in schools should never be emotional or personal. Emphasis must always be placed on the school system and not on the individual teacher's personal opinions and feelings (Mandel, 2009). One of the worst examples the author has seen of this was in an English class. The author heard some loud shouting and she found a student who was about to start an English test in an inconsolable state. The author asked the class teacher what the student had done to deserve such a serious telling off. The teacher responded by telling the author that the student had forgotten her pen. The author asked the teacher why she was so angry and she told the author that it was because the student had “hurt her feelings”, because she had forgotten her pen for a second time. This teacher had let her own feelings dominate and had created a very negative situation and was not in control of the situation. The student was unable to write her test due to being so tearful, which was no use to the student or even the teacher as her score would be low.

A teacher should remain in control at all times and respond, according to Mandel (2009), without any outward appearance of negative emotion. It would therefore have been better if the teacher had spoken to the student after the test about her concerns. It would have been useful to enquire why the student was forgetting her pen. Did she in fact have a pen to bring? Were her parents buying her pens? Did she have other events on before the class that led to a situation that made it hard for her to remember? Did she need to leave her pen at school with the teacher or to devise a system that would help her to remember her school supplies? Perhaps the teacher could also have encouraged the student to bring her pen by rewarding her with a sticker or praise when

she did bring it to class. A teacher can control when he/she deals with the situation. It was not necessary to scream at the student before the test. The conflict in the class can disturb the student and all the other students, which might possibly affect the scores of all of the students in a negative way. Not to mention the fact that they could hear the sniffing of the crying student all the way through the test.

Prompt Arrival to the Classroom and Adequate of Students

The first 15 minutes of any class are the most important. This is the period of time that the teacher bonds with the students, establishes boundaries, and provides the key information and instructions for the activities that take place in the lesson. The two times that the author was unable to reach a classroom before the lesson both ended up with the students being out of control. In one classroom, the author could hear the noise of the students from the school entrance hall when she arrived as a school substitute teacher in a rough area of London. When the author finally made it to the classroom, the students were jumping on top of the tables shouting “Saiyd’s dead”. The author asked where Saiyd was, and a student told the author that he was in the rest room. When the author found him he was not dead, but he was lying on the floor after having an epileptic fit in a semi comatose state. The author was able to send another student to get help and she managed after 10 minutes to calm the class down. Saiyd was a special needs student who the class resented, because he often disrupted the lesson when his helper was not present. As the teacher was off sick the behaviour in the class had rapidly disintegrated. The class was not only in chaos; it was a potentially very dangerous situation. It is important that students are supervised at all times. Most bullying and accidents take place in the lesson transitions and times that a class is left unattended. If a teacher cannot supervise a class, it is important that a classroom assistant can.

Greetings and Preparation of Classroom Environment

It is therefore essential that the teacher arrives early to the classroom. If possible arriving 10 minutes before a lesson is useful as it gives the teacher to prepare the desks in the most useful order and to hand out textbooks and exercise books or handouts ahead of the lesson. A teacher should greet the students at the door, by name, as they enter. Some teachers find it useful to make the students line up in the corridor outside of the classroom and will only let them enter into the classroom once they are lined up in an orderly fashion and standing quietly.

Classroom Routines for More Challenging Classes

Should a class be exhibiting behavioural issues it can be necessary to include a routine where the students are required to stand behind the chairs and not sit down until the teacher gives the class permission? Students find it tiring to stand still for more than a few minutes and tend to submit to being quiet. The class is then allowed to sit down at their desks by the teacher. This strategy is useful as it ensures that the class starts from a calm and quiet atmosphere and the students, without a voice being raised, are aware of the authority of the teacher and the possibility of consequences. Some teachers of students who are very difficult tend to leave quizzes and word searches on the desks ready for the students. The students tend to immediately engage in the word searches; this means the class starts with the students’ actively learning. The teacher then moves the students to other tasks after the first 10 minutes of the lesson.

Some teachers have used the technique of making students enter and leave the classroom several times till they manage to do it a quiet orderly way. This works on slowly pressing the point that students need to enter in a quiet and orderly way. The students generally give up and after a few exits and entrances they come in the

classroom quietly: This is usually due to a feeling of weariness arising from repeating the routine several times. Super organized teachers request the students to line up in register order and as the students enter they are asked to leave any homework on the desk in this same order. In this way, there is a tight classroom routine where a teacher's authority is induced through a seating plan, and the fact that the students know that their homework is going to be collected immediately on entry to the classroom. The routine puts a spotlight on students that have not done their homework. It is also a useful strategy as the teacher acquires the homework in an easy order for marking and recording the results from the homework. Messages of teacher authority emanate from this strategy without any coercion or force or raised voices. Ridnour (2006) has suggested that when the students know that the teacher cares and has high expectations of behaviour and work standards the behavior of students improves, and these behavioral strategies demonstrate care, concern, and standards with only a little needing to be said by the teacher.

How to Capture the Students' Attention

Freeman and Mathison (2009) have suggested that it is necessary for teachers to include ice-breakers and starters that capture the students' attention even before the lesson begins. Some teachers leave objects of curiosity around the classroom, such as, realia posters or photographs to stimulate interest. The curiosity that arises from the students encountering these objects or pictures will lead them to more readily focus and engage in the class. These routines coupled with an effective warm-up or ice-breaker will stimulate intrinsic motivation and lead to a more focused and engaged class.

Placing Students Outside the Classroom

There may be times that a student ignores warnings or commits a serious offence that requires removing him/her from the classroom. Ideally, a student should be out of the classroom for only a short period of time. At best, this strategy is used as a “cooling off period”. Leaving students in the corridor for long periods can lead them to engage in further acting out. For example, pulling faces at the classroom door or classroom window, disturbing the next door class, or even leaving the school building. It is not always useful unless the school corridors are patrolled by senior members of staff who are ready to tackle the offenders and discuss the offences committed when they are found outside classroom doors. After the child has been outside of the classroom for a short time, the teacher should attempt to discuss the event that took place and ask the student if he/she realizes what they did wrong and if they are ready to go back in the classroom and attempt to work off their “referral slip”. Generally, most students are ready to come back in and decide that it is in their best interests to avoid a punishment that is recorded in the school system. If a student continues to act out, he/she should be removed to the school behaviour unit or other place where he/she is made to work in silence. If students are frequently sent to the behavioural unit or other place to work alone, it is often an effective strategy to make the students do a course in controlling their behaviour or a course that makes them think about their inappropriate behaviour. A successful completion of this course would then allow the student to move back into the classroom with their friends. This strategy works due to the fact that teenagers like to be with their friends and in fact feel seriously inconvenienced when they are removed from their peer group. Experiments have shown that it is better to make students enter school early before their peers come to school and to leave later than their friends. The students should eat their lunch separately from their peers and have no lunchtime or breaktime with their peers. In this way, the students feel the isolation and are motivated to improve their behaviour and classwork in order to rejoin their class.

This is difficult for private institutions or Hogwans, as parents are paying for the teaching. However, it is possible for parents to sign agreements for behaviour on entrance of the academy or Hogwan.

An effective manager will, however, make his/her presence felt in the Hogwan (private/after school) classrooms, calling in to see the students work occasionally or discussing the behaviour of students with students and parents and also providing an area near where they work for the removed students to work in silence. Removing the student will not work if there are no consequences for actions. Morgan (2008) has stated that if consequences: “are too severe, delayed or inconsistent they will probably fail to work” (p. 43). In one Hogwan, an Elementary student whose mother had left was acting out and kicking girls and pulling their hair. He was removed to the office to work alone. When the author went into the office, she found the student eating candy and being indulged by the office staff. As being in the office was a lot of fun, the author imagined that the student might continue his behaviour to go back to the office rather than improve his behaviour to return to his classroom and friends. It is critical that managers enforce consequences. With no consequences, a teacher can feel impotent as warnings and paperwork lead to nothing and the students learn this quickly. The behaviour of the students is unlikely to change positively in this situation. If consequences are enforced, it does not take long for the other students to get the message that if they “act out” then they will face an unpleasant consequence. The other students will soon adjust their behaviour so that it is appropriate.

In situations where students continue to “act out” despite a teacher’s attempts at motivating appropriate behaviour: It is possible to negotiate with parents to provide their child one-to-classes, obviously at the slightly higher cost. It may also be possible to serve notice on the child, telling them that they have for instance a month to show an improvement in behaviour or he/she will be requested to leave the school. It does not help a school to retain students who are exhibiting seriously challenging behaviour. If there are no consequences, the behaviour becomes contagious and the students copy the student who is behaving inappropriately, and soon the school has the problem of gaining a bad reputation and loses many students due to the original student who acted out.

Making an Example and Responding Quickly

Fix (2013) stated that it is useful to act quickly in a lesson, therefore giving a disruptive student many chances and the benefit of the doubt can only serve to encourage the inappropriate behaviour. By responding quickly, the teacher is giving the message that he/she will not tolerate inappropriate behaviour and this will prevent the students from copying and joining in with the negative behaviour. From the author’s personal experience of teaching: It is possible to say that it was always when the author did not react quickly to serious inappropriate behaviour that she had a “rough ride” in a class, and it was often a cause of regret when the author reflected on lessons. Many teachers aim at making an example of a student at the start of a class or the start of the course. This can be a useful tactic: However, it needs to be a fair action. A student, according to Mandel (2009), will accept criticism if he/she perceives it to be a just action and consistent behavior on the part of the teacher. Therefore, the students need to deserve the consequence or the students can perceive you as being unfair or unjust, and this can lead to them resenting the teacher and challenging the teacher further.

Conclusions

It is therefore essential that all educational institutions develop “whole school behavior systems” “codes of conduct” which combined with a “positive” and “supportive” school management team could lead to positive and successful behavior management. Further to this, teachers must attempt to apply the school management system and the code of conduct in a consistent manner. In addition to this, teachers should employ their own

personal management strategies in a consistent manner, employing the schools’ and their own: daily classroom routines, consequences, and rewards in a manner that demonstrates expectations for student’s behavior and facilitates effective teaching and learning.

Teachers should also use visible classroom management teaching techniques: such as, the noise box chart (Upper Elementary and Middle School), “happy” and “sad” face chart, and round robin lines, used to manage noise in the classroom.

It is also necessary to allow older children and teenagers the chance to consider their negative behaviour and possible consequences before acting and enforcing management strategies with sanction slips and consequences, whilst providing viable choices and alternatives so that teenagers can take control of their own behaviour. It is also essential for successful classroom management that all students and pupils are given a chance to improve their behavior and avoid consequences. If consequences are immediately acted on, the students have little motivation to improve their behavior. Finally, classroom management needs to be employed in an age appropriate, “fair”, and “non-personal” manner. The managers and teachers should lead through example, demonstrating respect to each other and the students whilst using positive learning strategies and providing an engaging, and stimulating curriculum that captures the students’ attention. If all these proposed aspects of classroom management are attended to, the teacher and the students will have a positive classroom environment in which to “live” and “learn” and ultimately “thrive”.

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