

A high-angle, soft-lit photograph of a white desk. In the foreground, a silver laptop is open on the right. To its left is a black smartphone. Further left is a small, lit candle in a glass jar. In the background, a stack of books is held by a silver metal bookend. To the right of the books is a small white cube table holding a black diffuser with three reed sticks. A large, frosted glass sphere sits on a wooden base to the left of the candle. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

Strategy

**A Practical Skill
Book: Effective
Classroom
Management**

By Mr. Dickens

**STRATEGIES FOR
ENGAGEMENT AND EQUITY**

INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Mr. Dickens.

Classroom management is not about control.
It is about culture, clarity, and consistency.

Without clear routines, expectations, and relationships, even the best lesson plans fail to deliver meaningful learning.

I am a STEM educator with experience teaching diverse learners across challenging classroom environments.

Over the years, I have learned that classroom management is not about control or punishment—it is about creating structure, trust, and consistency so students can focus, engage, and succeed.

This eBook is a practical guide drawn from real classroom experience. It focuses on strategies that work in everyday teaching contexts, not abstract theory.

Whether you are a new teacher or an experienced educator refining your practice, this book will help you build a classroom culture that supports learning, accountability, and growth.

Effective classroom management can be learned—and when it is done well, everything else becomes easier.

Mr. Dickens



***“The influence
of a good teacher
can never be
erased.”***

– Unknown

Understanding the Critical Role of the Classroom Manager

The Teacher's Role:

As the teacher, you are in charge and have the responsibility and privilege of making decisions about what happens in your classroom. You must find your teacher voice, which refers to how you advocate for yourself and your students in efforts to improve the teaching and learning environment. Classroom management is a critical component of effective instruction. It supports the academic and behavioral competence of all students.

Consistency and Predictability:

Creating a well-managed classroom requires a good deal of effort. You must give yourself grace, reflect on what works, and try again. Modeling, practice, consistency, and predictability are critical across all areas of classroom management.

Evidence of Impact:

Successful classroom instruction is contingent upon effective management to maintain appropriate student behavior and engagement. Research shows that high-quality classroom management significantly reduces disruptive and aggressive behavior. Furthermore, research has found a significant and positive effect on academic achievement resulting from effective classroom management. In fact, classroom management was identified as the only significant predictor separating top-quartile and bottom-quartile teachers in one study of elementary teacher effectiveness.



***“A good education
can change anyone.
A good teacher can
change everything!”***

Avoiding Common Management Pitfalls

Mistake #1: Responding to Surface-Level Behavior (and not the underlying reasons):

It is a mistake to think that bad behavior always stems from a desire to break rules, or that punitive measures will effectively address the underlying reasons students act out. If two students are disruptive, they may be acting out for different reasons, meaning a single strategy might help one but worsen the behavior of the other. Misbehavior can be linked to academic struggles (if students do not understand the assignment or find it too difficult, frustration can lead to misbehavior 20% of the time). Misbehavior may also be tied to complex issues like abuse or neglect at home, or restlessness and boredom in class. Teachers should look for the underlying reasons for misbehavior, as defining misbehavior only by how it looks does not tell us why it occurred and often does not help in behavior-change efforts.

Mistake #2: Confronting Every Minor Infraction:

Inexperienced teachers may feel the need to fix all misbehavior, but pointing out negative behavior (like brief talking or not paying attention) can make students feel less connected to the class, leading to more behavioral issues later on. Teachers can unintentionally engage in a "negative reinforcement pattern," a downward spiral that actually amplifies students' inappropriate behavior. Instead of calling students out, teachers should highlight positive conduct or use nonverbal responses, such as "the look" or hand signals, to subtly encourage attention

Mistake #3: Using Time-Out Corners (as punishment):

When used as a form of punishment, sending students to a corner can cause feelings of shame or embarrassment, which undermines the teacher-student relationship and jeopardizes trust. A preferable alternative is a peace corner, which gives students an opportunity to calm down, reflect on their thoughts and feelings, and practice self-regulation skills. Unlike time-out corners, peace corners are not places of stigma and are used by all students, often featuring activities like breathing exercises or reflection charts.



CHAPTER TWO

Mistake #4: Writing Names and Other Public Shaming:

Publicly identifying students who act out or are disruptive—such as writing names on the board, using color-coded sticker systems to track misbehavior, or posting lists of detention recipients—is a destructive strategy. These shaming practices fail to inhibit future wrongdoing and may even make matters worse. Instead of calling students out publicly, teachers should approach them privately and encourage them to reflect on the wrongdoing, think about its source, and take responsibility.



Mistake #5: Expecting Compliance (Without Relationship Work):

Effective classroom management is not about controlling students or demanding perfect behavior. Demanding compliance without emotional work often leads to power struggles, testing boundaries, or rebellion. Good management is achieved by building a solid relationship based on trust and empathy, which supports students in managing their own behavior throughout daily activities.

Mistake #6: Not Checking Your Biases:

It is essential to be cognizant of implicit biases, as studies show that teachers may inadvertently perceive students of color as being less capable and more aggressive than White students. This may lead to applying rules inconsistently. For example, studies found that Black students often receive fewer warnings before being sent to the office compared to their White peers. This perceived unfairness can contribute to a "trust gap" and lead to more discipline problems and decreased interest in applying to college. Teachers must review all disciplinary measures they enact to identify and address potential biases



Setting up the Physical Learning Environment

Your classroom arrangement forms the physical foundation for student learning. Every square foot needs to be used for activities that support learning.

Maximizing Structure: A well-designed classroom arrangement supports predictability, which is essential because students thrive in a comfortable learning environment. The spatial structure must consider how students will move and must be consistent with the needs of all learners. Maximizing structure includes having predictable routines and procedures for staff and students, and minimizing crowding and distractions.

Designated Areas and Flow: The physical layout should include a small group area, independent work areas, and a whole class area. Teachers must ensure there is easy traffic flow and adequate supervision. Proper organization of materials helps students retrieve them quickly, which helps to decrease unwanted behavior. You should consider what materials students can access versus those the teacher must access. It is important to ensure there are no blind spots or dead spaces in your classroom.

CONSISTENCY
CREATES A
STRONG
LEARNING
FOUNDATION.



INCONSISTENCY CREATES CHAOS



Developing Clear Expectations and Routines

Routines are the "backbone of daily classroom life" and facilitate teaching and learning. Predictable and consistent routines help children feel secure and comfortable, reduce the frequency of behavior problems (such as aggression), and allow teachers to spend more time on meaningful instruction.

Taking the time to explicitly teach classroom systems and routines may take a lot of time, but it will ensure that your classroom is a well-oiled machine for the rest of the school year!



Developing Clear Expectations/Rules:

Research supports designing and implementing rules, but indicates that they should not simply be imposed on students; they should be created with students. When students are involved, they are more likely to make the rules their own.

1. Positive Language: Rules should be written in positive language, telling students what TO DO to be successful, instead of what not to do.

2. Teaching and Modeling: Teachers must model procedures and provide time for students to talk or write about why rules are important.

3. Posting and Consistency: Rules/expectations should be centrally and visibly posted. It is critical to follow through consistently and reinforce these norms all year long.

Establishing Routines and Procedures:

Routines refer to the activities students do daily (like turning in homework), while procedures refer to how students complete those routines (how it will look or sound). Routines help to simplify a complex environment, inform students what is expected, and create smoother transitions between activities, allowing fewer opportunities for disruptions.

1. Explicit Instruction: Routines and procedures must be explicitly taught, modeled, and reinforced. They should be reviewed frequently, especially right before the activity.

2. Language and Visuals: They should be written and explained in developmentally appropriate language and include visuals if necessary.

3. Self-Management: Routines provide students the opportunity to learn greater responsibility and self-management skills.

The Importance of Building Positive Relationships

“Positive student-teacher relationships are fundamental to success. When students feel supported, they are more likely to engage in learning, have better academic outcomes, and have fewer behavioral problems. A positive, respectful relationship helps create an environment where students feel connected to the school.”



Strategies for Connection:

1. Greet Students at the

Door: Setting a welcoming tone and establishing early connection is vital. Your smile can set the tone, but a neutral expression followed by a firm, kind redirect is necessary if students veer off track.

2. Build Psychological

Safety: Positive interactions, like authentic praise, release dopamine and create a cycle of motivation. Social activities like talking and laughing release oxytocin, which helps us bond and creates “psychological safety,” making students more likely to participate and ask questions.

3. Get to Know Them

Individually: You must observe, slow down, understand students, and meet them where they are, as authentic connection is defined by what the child perceives, not by your intent.

- Use the **2x10 strategy** (talk with students for two minutes a day for ten days about anything) to learn about their interests, strengths, and struggles.

- Craft open-ended **student surveys** to elicit meaningful answers about their interests, struggles (e.g., “It takes me an hour and a half to get to school each day”), and learning process.

- Plan brief **one-on-one check-ins** with disruptive students to learn about potential reasons for problematic behavior.

4. Maintain a Positive Ratio:

Interact positively with each student every day. Maintain a high ratio of positive to negative interactions.

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM)

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM) is a pedagogical approach applied to all children, not just racial/ethnic minority children. CRCM recognizes that definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts are likely when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds.

The Goal of CRCM:

The goal of CRCM is not to achieve compliance or control, but to provide all students with equitable opportunities for learning. It is "classroom management in the service of social justice". This framework helps reduce the risk of disproportionality in discipline and special education referrals, which can result from teachers misreading the behaviors or communication patterns of culturally diverse students.

Essential Elements of CRCM:

- 1. Recognition of One's Own Cultural Lens and Biases:** Teachers must explore where their assumptions, attitudes, and biases originate and reflect on how these influence behavioral expectations, recognizing that their worldview can lead to misinterpretation of behaviors and inequitable treatment of culturally different students.
- 2. Knowledge of Students' Cultural Backgrounds:** Teachers need to gain knowledge about students' cultural backgrounds (including views on behavior, rules of decorum, and communication styles) to avoid misinterpreting actions and forming stereotypes. Teachers can seek this knowledge by conducting home visits, consulting with parents, or engaging students in family history projects.
- 3. Awareness of the Broader Context:** Teachers must examine how current discipline policies and practices might perpetuate discriminatory practices. For example, children of color are sometimes judged as "disrespectful" when they are not being disrespectful in their culture.
- 4. Using Culturally Appropriate Strategies:** Culturally responsive managers ensure that the physical setting supports academic and social goals and communicates respect for diversity. Examples include posting signs in different languages, displaying world maps highlighting students' countries of origin, and arranging desks in clusters for cooperative work.
- 5. Commitment to Building Caring Communities:** Students make decisions about their behavior based on their perception of whether the teacher cares about them. Respecting student perspectives, initiating out-of-class conversations to get to know students personally, and beginning each day with a morning meeting are ways to build a caring community.

Partnering with Families

Good two-way communication between families and schools is necessary for student success. When parents and teachers share relevant information about a student, both are better equipped to help that student achieve academically, socially, and behaviorally.

Components of Effective Communication:

1. Initiation: Teachers should initiate contact as soon as they know their class list, perhaps with an introductory phone call or letter to establish expectations.

2. Timeliness: Contact should occur soon after a problem has been identified so a timely solution can be found.

3. Consistency and Frequency: Parents desire frequent, ongoing feedback about their children's performance.

4. Clarity and Usefulness:

Communication should provide the necessary information to help students in a form and language that makes sense to parents, perhaps including a "handle with care" phrase for families to communicate difficulties at home without giving details.

5. Diverse Methods:

Teachers cannot rely on a single method due to the great diversity among families. Strategies should be adapted to the needs and schedules of particular families, utilizing phone calls, newsletters, emails, and technology platforms like Seesaw or Remind. Brag tags, Tootles, and shout outs are effective ways to communicate positive behavior to parents.



Implementing Reinforcement Systems

Positive reinforcement is focused on acknowledging and promoting specific behavior through positive responses. Studies have found that students are more likely to repeat a rewarded behavior than they are to stop a punished behavior.

Behavior-Specific Praise (BSP): BSP is one of the three most consistently noted evidence-based classroom management skills. Studies suggest that BSP is the most effective (salient) single skill for increasing student engagement and decreasing disruptive behavior.

- **Definition:** BSP is a contingent verbal statement that explicitly tells the student what they did right (e.g., "Good job, I like that you raised your hand").
- **Specificity and Intentionality:** General praise like "Good job!" is less effective than being specific and intentional about what is pleasing to avoid students becoming desensitized.
- **Timeliness:** Waiting to comment on good behavior is less effective because the association becomes diminished over time; reinforcement should be given in a timely manner.

- **Continuum and Reward Systems:** Teachers should use a variety of reinforcement methods to keep students engaged:
 - a. **Nonverbal Cues:** Such as jazz hands or clapping.
 - b. **Verbal Praise:** Including behavior-specific praise.
 - c. **Tangible Rewards:** Such as Tootles sent home or brag tags.
 - d. **Activity Rewards:** Such as two minutes of free time for those who stay on task.
 - e. **Group Rewards:** Such as extra recess or a classroom game.

Reward systems should focus on effort, not accomplishment. For example, everyone who remained on task for thirty minutes gets five minutes of free time. Furthermore, reinforcement should never be taken away once earned.

Maximizing Active Engagement

Active engagement is a core domain of evidence-based classroom management. Actively engaging students, often through high rates of opportunities to respond, increases their attention and improves learning outcomes.

Opportunities to Respond (OTR): An OTR is any time you ask students an academic question (e.g., “What is 4+4?”). Providing OTRs at a brisk pace is essential for increasing student attention and engagement.

- **Variety:** Incorporate variety and unpredictability into question asking by utilizing PAX Stix, so students learn they can be called on at any time.
- **Methods:** Students can use small whiteboards or response cards (yes/no, true/false, agree/disagree) to show their answers.
- **Pace and Scope:** OTRs should be provided to both group and individual students at a brisk pace.
- **Formative Data:** The level of student accuracy to OTRs serves as formative data to inform instruction. If student responses fall below 80% accuracy for new material or 90% for review material, additional instruction and practice may be needed.

Movement and Learning: Incorporating movement into the classroom is a powerful tool for enhancing learning, improving focus, and reducing classroom management issues. Movement strategies can include gallery walks, having students act out concepts (like solids, liquids, or gases), or using brain breaks.

Active Supervision and Precorrection

Active supervision is an effective strategy for creating a safe environment and preventing misbehavior by transforming supervision from a passive approach to an active skill.



Components of Active Supervision:

1. Circulation and Scanning:

Staff must circulate around the classroom or playground to provide proximity and assess performance or monitor interactions. Continuous scanning of the entire environment is required to know where everyone is and what they are doing.

2. Interaction: Staff should interact with students by greeting them, engaging them in conversations, and providing precorrections.

3. Anticipation: Teachers should use their knowledge of each child's development and abilities to anticipate what they will do (e.g., when they might wander or get upset) to prevent misbehavior or accidents.

Prompting for Expectations/Pre-corrections:

Prompting for expectations (pre-corrections) is one of the consistently noted evidence-based classroom management skills.

• **Definition:** Pre-corrections are antecedent instructional events designed to prevent predictable problem behavior and facilitate appropriate replacement behavior. They provide students with specific cues about the desired behavior before it is expected.

• **Examples:** A pre-correction might involve a verbal reminder, a behavioral rehearsal, or a role play of walking quietly into class before students enter from recess. Nonverbal cues, such as teacher gestures or the "teacher look," can also prompt a desired behavior.

Despite proactive efforts, students will engage in unexpected behavior. It is important to have a continuum of consequences—a menu of strategies to manage classroom behavior—and a consequence system to ensure responses are applied consistently and fairly.

The Continuum of Consequences

Consequences vs. Punishment:

- Logical Consequences are defined as being related to the behavior, respectful of the student, reasonable for the student to carry out, and (whenever possible) revealed in advance. Logical consequences are powerful in maintaining calm, safe, and respectful learning environments.
- Punishments are the opposite of logical consequences; they are often harsh and involve shaming students (e.g., writing names on the board). Punishments breed resentment and diminish self-esteem, potentially leading to even more disruptive behavior.

Goals of Consequences: Consequences should stop misbehavior in the moment, get students back on track (e.g., putting a phone away), and help students learn from their mistakes (e.g., cleaning up a mess). Consequences cannot, however, teach missing skills that students do not already possess.

The Continuum Framework: The continuum should range from the least intrusive responses to the most intrusive.

- Least Intrusive: Planned ignoring (if the behavior is motivated by attention), physical proximity, direct eye contact (the "teacher look"), non-verbal cues, and praising the appropriate behavior in others (BSP).
- Mid-Range: Redirecting (restating the desired behavior), re-teaching, and differential reinforcement (reinforcing positive behavior while ignoring inappropriate behavior).
- Most Intrusive: Conference with student, time-out/take a break, or logical consequences.

Categories of Logical Consequences:

1. You Break It—You Fix It: The child takes responsibility for fixing the problem or mess they created, such as apologizing for hurting feelings or cleaning up a spill. A student who wastes class time must make up the time later.
2. Loss of Privilege: The student loses a privilege related to the rule they failed to uphold. Examples include losing the use of scissors for misuse or losing computer time for visiting unacceptable websites.
3. Time-Out or Take a Break: Used when a student is on the verge of losing control, they are asked to leave the scene to regain control and self-regulate. The student may return when they are ready to participate positively.

Consequences must be administered calmly with consistency, applied immediately, and be considerate of a student's culture, background, and dignity. Consequences must focus on behavior, not character, such as stating: "I like you; I don't like it when you push others".

Implementing Restorative Practices

Restorative discipline is a proactive approach that shifts focus away from traditional punitive methods. It helps identify the harm behaviors cause and then moves through a repair process.

Key Principles of Restorative Discipline:

- **Focus on Analysis and Repair:** It is no longer just about the consequence, but exploring what happened, why it happened, the impact of the action, and what was learned to effect behavior change.
- **Accountability through Reflection:** Restorative discipline brings students together through closure, enabling the student who caused harm to hear the impact of their actions. This process compels accountability, requiring students to reflect on why the act was wrong and what they must do next time.
- **Equity and Cultural Responsiveness:** Implementation requires adults to explore, through an equity lens, how current disciplinary practices affect students, recognize how systemic racism is perpetuated through harmful policies, and become culturally responsive.



Relationship



Respect



Responsibility



Repair

Practical Applications (Alternatives to Punishment):

- **Peace Corners:** Unlike punitive time-out corners, peace corners (or "take a break" areas) are used by all students to calm down, reflect on feelings, and practice self-regulation skills.
- **The Push-In Model:** Instead of sending disruptive students to the principal's office, support staff come to the classroom and observe the behavior's antecedent. The staff member observes what happened and works with the student afterward to unpack the situation, often resulting in a reduction of exclusionary discipline.
- **Building Trust:** Every student should have one adult in the school they trust. These relationships lay the foundation for restorative practice, creating a trusting community where students feel safe taking risks and making mistakes, which ultimately reduces misbehavior.

Virtual Classroom Management



Teaching virtually presents new challenges, but the same best practices regarding norms, routines, and differentiated instruction still apply. Technology can even help moderate discussions and potentially allow all students to have a voice.

Strategies for the Virtual Environment:

- 1. Put Distractions Away:** Ask students to put away phones, toys, siblings, and pets to make the virtual classroom feel as much like an in-person classroom as possible. However, teachers must show grace when dogs, cats, or children make webcam cameos, as students cannot always control access to technology or physical space.
- 2. Treat the Webcam Like a Person:** Remind students that everyone is sitting in front of a computer trying to be part of the class. Encourage proper eye contact, polite talk, and smiling through the webcam, teaching a lesson in digital citizenship.
- 3. Have a Dress Code:** Having a simple dress code (like "always wear a shirt and pants, and no pajamas") encourages students to get dressed for school, which helps the virtual classroom feel more like an in-person environment.
- 4. Address Discipline Issues Fast:** Discipline issues take on new urgency when remote because physical cues are limited. Deal with disruptions as soon as they arise, but remember that "extra urgent does not mean extra harsh"; always model respect and a positive attitude.
- 5. Teach Lessons that Emphasize Writing:** Since verbal communication challenges (like limited internet access or lack of body language cues) are common, incorporating written discussions can provide accountability and sharpen writing skills.

Virtual Classroom Management

An illustration of a virtual classroom. A teacher, represented by a blue silhouette, stands on the right side, gesturing towards several computer monitors. Each monitor displays a different student's avatar. The monitors are arranged in a grid-like pattern, suggesting a multi-screen virtual environment. The background is a light blue gradient.

6. Add Visual Cues: Leverage control over the students' screen view by using visual cues on shared screens or slides to indicate actions (e.g., a notebook icon meaning "it's time to write," or a playground slide meaning "you can get up and move around").

7. Flip the Classroom: Use synchronous time for practice problems, questions, and debate to increase engagement. Save dry lectures and rote instruction for recorded, off-camera work that students can watch on their own time.

8. Decide on Signals: Since physical routines (like clapping) are harder, agree on signals that work even when students are muted, such as a thumbs up for "I have a question" or touching the nose for "I need to leave".

9. Hold Class However You Can Hold Attention: A virtual classroom can be anywhere—outer space, inside an atom, or even in video games connected to subjects like coding or geography. Teachers can use creative settings, avatars, and interactive apps to increase engagement.

10. Create a Question Parking Lot: Because only one person can effectively speak at a time in a whole-class online setting, interruptions that are normal in person can be disruptive online. Create a shared digital document (a "parking lot") where students can add questions or thoughts until there is a break to go through the list.

CONCLUSION

Embrace Your Journey

Every effective classroom you have ever seen—calm, focused, productive—did not happen by accident. It was built deliberately through relationships, routines, expectations, and leadership. Yet many teachers are sent into classrooms armed with content knowledge but little practical guidance on how to manage the learning space where that content must live.



- MR. DICKENS