

Classroom Management

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This brief describes classroom management in “learning centered” classrooms, where practices are consistent with recent research knowledge about learning and its contexts. Its purpose is to support fundamental, long-term change by offering a vision of best practices for educators to consider, discuss, and adapt to their circumstances.

In learning-centered classrooms, the emphasis of classroom management shifts from maintaining behavioral control to fostering student engagement and self-regulation as well as community responsibility. Instruction and management blend seamlessly to support challenging academic, moral, and social goals for the learning and achievement of all students.

Reconceptualizing Learning

Expectations for student learning and achievement have changed dramatically in recent years. Much attention has been given to raising academic standards. When academic goals change, goals for moral and social development also must be reconsidered to avoid incongruity. Intended or not, teachers’ classroom management approach inevitably influences all aspects of their students’ development. Thus, every lesson is multifaceted and includes academic, moral, and social aspects.

Academic aspects. In addition to the basic knowledge and skills schools have always

taught, all students today are expected to learn higher-order thinking skills and to master more advanced subject matter. Students are treated as active constructors of knowledge.

Moral aspects. Students have always been expected to “do as they are told” in school and, thus, they learn to comply with external commands. Goals for character development more consistent with a thinking curriculum and the demands of life in a complex world are that students develop autonomy and the capacity for self-regulation. Students are given opportunities, with teacher assistance, to form goals and plans to guide their behavior.

Social aspects. An understanding of citizenship in a community and competence in the social skills needed to participate are important goals for students. If students mostly work alone, they do not develop socially. Classrooms organized as learning communities take advantage of the social context to give students experience in working collaboratively and developing a sense of responsibility.

This brief is based on an NEA Research working paper, “Looking into Learning-Centered Classrooms: Implications for Classroom Management,” by Carolyn M. Evertson and Kristin W. Neal (2006). The paper describes classroom management concepts more fully, includes case studies drawn from the classrooms of two teachers (elementary and middle school), describes the research base, and includes extensive references. The full paper can be ordered by mail or online from the NEA:

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Integrating management and instruction.

Teachers often compartmentalize their instructional and management strategies, but instruction and management interact to affect all aspects of student learning and achievement. In learning-centered classrooms, teachers recognize the importance of explicitly integrating management and instructional strategies to attain broader and more challenging learning goals for all students.

Unless instructional and management strategies are explicitly integrated around a coherent set of learning goals, they can easily work at cross-purposes. How, for example, can teachers ask students to think critically about literature or history but not ask questions about directives related to their own behavior?

Creating Learning-Centered Environments

What does a learning-centered classroom look like? Managing the classroom environment includes not only using its physical arrangement but also organizing and using social, temporal, and information resources.

Flexible room arrangements. Desks are clustered to maximize face-to-face interaction among students. The front of the room is sometimes apparent, but not prominent. Where space permits, extra desks or tables are sometimes arranged around the room's sides so that students can work together or privately.

Varied social forums. Teachers vary their use of whole-class and small-group instruction, as well as the size and structure of student groups, depending on the learning goal. Students have more freedom of movement than they might have in a typical classroom.

- Teachers ensure that transitions are orderly and that parameters for movement are structured.
- Visual aids, such as a highly visible wall chart or pocket charts, may help guide students smoothly through a sequence of movements.

Multiple information resources. In more complex learning environments, students need to use multiple information sources. In addition to textbooks, students use as resources their peers, teachers, outside experts, the Internet, primary source documents, and supplemental resources obtained at the library. Students can move as needed to areas to obtain supplies or resources. Freer access to materials allows students to take better advantage of limited resources by using them at different times.

Fluid and effective use of time. The allocation of time for specific subject matter or skills is more fluid, but teachers show students how to use their time effectively. Students are encouraged to think of time as a valued resource to be used wisely.

- Transitions from activity to activity and from place to place are tightly managed by teachers.
- Within an activity, teachers guide students by helping them clarify objectives and work out appropriate allocations of time.
- Teachers ask students focusing questions to help them work efficiently: “When you finish your initial research, what should you do?” or “What can you do if you need more information?”

Redefining Classroom Management

On the surface, effectively managed, learning-centered classrooms may have the look of no management at all, but they are carefully orchestrated at a complex level by the teacher so that learning can occur. The first few weeks are critical and require careful planning and considerable effort because they set the tone for the whole year. Teachers use a variety of classroom management strategies.

Building community. Classroom community arises from the shared ways its members develop for relating to each other. Building community begins on day one and continues throughout the year.

- Teachers explicitly develop students' understanding of what a classroom community is and how it functions.
- Teachers recognize and encourage positive community behaviors, such as helping teammates and volunteering for chores.
- When things go awry, teachers and peers can appeal to students' sense of responsibility as a corrective strategy.

Establishing norms and rules. Negotiating and communicating norms and rules is an essential aspect of community building. Teachers alone do not establish norms and rules; the responsibility is shared, and students play a vital role in both development and enforcement.

- Clear guidelines are jointly negotiated about functional things, such as acceptable classroom noise levels and how to get help on content or procedures.
- Academic standards are negotiated and understood by all. Social standards are equally important.

Practicing procedures. Participating in a learning-centered classroom involves knowing complex procedures, because a variety of activities, involving different resources and movement patterns, occur simultaneously.

- Students need opportunities to practice routines, especially at the beginning of the year.
- Practicing parts of a more complex procedure, and allowing students to have success with each part, may encourage a more thorough understanding.

Handling conflict. However effectively a classroom functions, conflicts will inevitably arise, and students must learn how to handle conflict. Some conflicts may arise as the natural outcome of an environment that fosters the exchange of ideas. Other conflicts arise as students encounter

problems in learning to regulate their behavior and work responsibly with others.

- Depending on the situation, teachers may lead group discussions of problems as they arise.
- Sometimes, it may be better for teachers to engage in private discussions with students about their behavior.
- Peers are encouraged to assist each other in managing conflict.

Sharing authority and responsibility. If students are expected to develop into autonomous human beings, teachers must relinquish some control and share authority and responsibility with students. A dilemma teachers face is finding the right balance of direction and open-endedness.

- Teachers give students more opportunities to develop their capacity for self-regulation and a sense of responsibility toward others.
- Teachers encourage students not only to take responsibility for their own learning but also to support and monitor the learning of their peers.

Understanding and Assessing Outcomes

Teachers cannot reconceptualize learning, instruction, and management along these lines without supportive assessment policies and practices.

Multiple achievement goals and assessments. Students in learning-centered classrooms do not learn the same things that students learn in typical classrooms. Students in learning-centered classrooms are encouraged to go beyond the basics to more advanced levels on multiple dimensions of achievement. These students are expected to demonstrate academic competence in both basic and higher-order skills and in both basic and more advanced subject matter. Students are expected to reach a level of moral development where they become autonomous human beings with the capacity for self-regulation. They



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learn how to participate in a community whose members collaborate and have a sense of responsibility for the common good. Teachers and schools with broad, rigorous achievement goals must have multiple ways of assessing achievement. In today's policy environment, this means supplementing required assessments with locally determined ones.

Valuing both process and product. In learning-centered classrooms, there is an emphasis on both the process and the products of learning. Therefore, teachers use both formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment measures learning as it progresses. It provides teachers with feedback to guide their instruction and students with feedback to guide their ongoing work. Summative assessment measures achievement at the end of a learning sequence.

- Teachers take time at the beginning of a learning sequence to understand students' starting points and build from there.
- As learning progresses, teachers and students track and assess key milestones along the way,

especially when assignments are more complex, include multiple steps, and require a sustained level of involvement.

- Interim products and process-related outcomes are important both as evidence of learning and as feedback to guide next steps. Examples of process-related outcomes include multiple drafts of a research paper and increasingly sophisticated discussions.
- As in every classroom, finished products, such as written homework assignments and tests, count as evidence of learning.

Shared responsibility for assessment.

Students in learning-centered classrooms are active participants in their own learning. When it comes to assessment, it follows logically that the teacher cannot be the sole assessor. Teachers and students share this responsibility.

There is greater emphasis on student self-assessment and on peer assessment. Students internalize the criteria for high-quality work and develop metacognitive skills.



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The following summary tables compare typical existing practices with conceptual benchmarks

for best practices that would be consistent with recent research.

Table 1. Benchmarks for Instruction and Management

Benchmarks for...	Moving from...	Moving toward...
Purpose of management	Teachers maintain control as an end in itself.	Teachers actively engage students in learning, encourage self-regulation, and build community.
Academic aspect of lesson	Students learn discrete facts and skills through sequential development of the lesson.	Students learn multiple concepts, facts, and skills, often embedded in larger projects and problems.
Moral aspect of lesson	Students follow directions and learn compliance.	Students develop autonomy, capacity for self-regulation, and sense of responsibility.
Social aspect of lesson	Students work alone, conforming to a fixed set of acceptable behaviors.	Students are interdependent, work collaboratively or alone; teachers allow a wider and more divergent range of acceptable roles and behaviors.
Relationship of management and instruction	Management and instruction are compartmentalized, and approaches may be incongruent.	Management and instructional approaches are explicitly integrated and seamless.

Table 2. Benchmarks for Learning-Centered Classroom Environments

Benchmarks for...	Moving from...	Moving toward...
Physical space/room arrangement	Teacher-determined. Each student has assigned space (single option).	Teacher-determined or jointly determined to facilitate collaboration; changes are based on use (multiple options).
Social forums and groups	Teacher-determined. Students usually work independently. No movement.	Teacher-student determined. Flexible and diverse groupings. The teacher structures student movement.
Information resources	Students have a single text or limited sources.	Students have access to multiple sources including print, electronic, and other people in and outside classroom.
Use of time	Time frame is fixed and defined by subject within specific blocks of time (e.g., 50-minute period for science).	Time frame is fluid, but time management is emphasized. More opportunities are available for longer, complex projects or subject integration.

Table 3. Benchmarks for Classroom Management Strategies

Benchmarks for...	Moving from...	Moving toward...
Building community	Little emphasis; sense of membership is unavailable as a means of social regulation.	Strong emphasis; members share authority, expertise, and responsibility.
Establishing norms and rules	Determined and enforced by teacher.	Constructed by teacher and students together; they share responsibility for enforcement.
Practicing classroom procedures	Simple procedures are explained by teacher.	Procedures are more complex. Students are given opportunities to learn through experience.
Handling conflict	Teacher has responsibility.	Teacher and students share responsibility.
Locating authority and control	Teacher is sole authority.	Authority is distributed; the concern is for student autonomy.

Table 4. Benchmarks for Outcomes and Assessment

Benchmarks for...	Moving from...	Moving toward...
Achievement goals and measures	Overemphasis on standardized tests that do not validly measure multiple dimensions of student achievement.	A coherent set of multiple measures that better matches and more validly measures student achievement goals.
Valuing both process (learning) and product (achievement)	Outcomes of learning are final student products. Summative assessment.	Outcomes include both the process and the final products of learning. Balance of formative and summative assessment.
Responsibility for assessment	Teacher is the sole assessor.	Teacher assessment, student self-assessment, and peer assessment are combined.

Tip for Use

This material is most effectively used to frame group discussion among teachers and teacher-candidates in which the focus is on fundamentally rethinking classroom management. As participants discuss the research concepts, they should be encouraged to contribute practical examples from their classrooms and school. The summary tables in the brief can become overhead transparencies and may be useful as discussion guides. The working paper on which this brief is based supports a more in-depth discussion.