Classroom Management: Whose Job Is It?

Classroom management is frequently at the top of the list of factors that contribute to student achievement (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). But administrators and teachers often see this issue differently.

For example, in a study that involved more than 1,000 schools, teachers consistently identified lack of administrator support for management issues as among the most pressing problems in their schools (Marzano, 2006). For the most part, teachers believed that their administrators didn’t live up to their responsibilities. Interestingly, the administrators in these same buildings believed that the teachers who held this perspective were abdicating their responsibility for management and blaming the school for their own shortcomings in the classroom.

Research and common sense clearly demonstrate the importance of shared responsibility. That is, teachers, administrators, and students all have a role to play in effectively managing behavior in school.

**Teacher Responsibilities**

The teacher must provide clear direction to students and generate an atmosphere in which all students feel valued and intellectually challenged. To provide academic direction, a teacher must have clear learning goals coupled with instruction and assessment that help students achieve those goals. To provide behavioral direction, the teacher must have well-designed rules and procedures (usually established at the beginning of the school year) that he or she continually updates and reinforces throughout the year. In addition, these rules and procedures need to be the basis for interacting with students regarding behavior: When students follow the rules and procedure, the teacher thanks them; when they don’t, the teacher reminds them of behavioral expectations.

To provide an atmosphere that’s accepting of all students, the teacher must engage in daily activities that communicate to students that the teacher likes them and is there to help them learn. Such behaviors include both verbal and nonverbal messages to students, such as a pat on the back, a nod, and comments like “Nice job!” and “Thank you for doing that.”

To provide an atmosphere that challenges students, the teacher must behave in a way that indicates that he or she expects all students to accomplish great things intellectually. Teachers can do this by asking all students challenging questions and using student answers as fodder for delving into and honoring each student’s thinking.

**Administrator Responsibilities**

Although it’s true that teachers have the lion’s share of the responsibility for classroom management, administrators must establish the proper schoolwide foundation. In fact, one of the main complaints I hear from teachers in schools that have problems with classroom management is that administrators have either not articulated a schoolwide approach or not implemented their approach with fidelity. It’s the job of administrators to not only clarify rules and procedures for student behavior in hallways, in parking lots, and at extracurricular activities, but also monitor adherence to these rules.

Perhaps their greatest responsibility is to ensure that guidelines exist for safe and
respectful behavior toward teachers and other students. Some teachers have reported that their schools don’t enforce policies pertaining to aggressive behaviors. For example, a teacher recently e-mailed me, asking for suggestions about how to stop students from cursing in his classroom and throwing things at him when his back was turned. I responded that these behaviors shouldn’t be tolerated in any classroom and that students should know that the administration would immediately intervene if they did occur. The teacher responded that although his school had a written policy about such behaviors, teachers were expected to handle these issues on their own.

This goes well beyond what schools should expect of teachers. Indeed, it’s the teacher’s job to be on the lookout for potentially volatile situations and deescalate them as quickly as possible. In the example just cited, the teacher might have confronted the offending student in a calm and respectful but assertive manner, indicating that such behavior is not tolerated in the school, and provided the student with an opportunity to apologize. If the teacher was unable to identify the offending student, he might have addressed the entire class, explaining that the school policy would be strictly enforced. If the incident reoccurred, however, it would be the administration’s job to quickly and automatically address such aggressive and potentially dangerous behavior.

**Student Responsibilities**

Students must be willing to engage in designing rules and procedures within their school and classrooms as well as to support enforcement of those rules. Of course, to act on these responsibilities, students need to be invited, and all too frequently, no such invitation is offered.

At the school level, student involvement in such issues typically entails student councils and student representatives participating in decisions about running the school. At the classroom level, one powerful strategy I’ve seen is designing a class list of individual rights and responsibilities along with the behaviors that support these responsibilities. After developing the list, the students and teacher sign it as a symbol of their agreement. The process can also be employed at the school level.

**Take Action!**

Classroom management is still a major weakness in some schools. Those schools should take immediate action because effective management is the foundation on which effective teaching and learning thrive. The first step is to engage administrators, teachers, and students in a concerted effort to define what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior and then work together as a team to establish and implement fair and equitable policies that facilitate the desired behavior.

**References**


Author’s note: To contact Marzano or participate in a study regarding a specific instructional strategy, visit www.marzano research.com.