



SESSION III: Managing the Learning Environment

OBJECTIVES:

Staff will be able to effectively manage the learning environment by managing the physical environment, by establishing classroom guidelines, by maintaining discipline and by establishing a positive climate for learning.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are several different ways to set up the classroom? How do different room setups accomplish different learning objectives?
- What is the importance of establishing guidelines and routines for your classroom?
- Is it necessary to have a discipline plan?
- What can you do to establish a positive classroom environment?

OVERVIEW

The details of managing the physical environment may seem small, but thinking through and communicating your classroom management approach can make a difference in how effective you are as a teacher. How you arrange your classroom, how you set up routines, your approach to discipline and how you foster a positive learning environment are all important parts of classroom management.

MANAGING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

How you arrange your classroom physically depends on your instructional goals, on the age of your students, and the resources the school allots to you.

Setting up the Room

Ideally, the **elementary classroom** will have an area for whole group instruction, where you can introduce and conclude a lesson, or share information. The elementary classroom may include small group areas, which can be used for cooperative learning, problem-based learning, guided reading or other small group activities. There is also usually a reading area, or other small group work areas

In **middle school**, certain subjects don't require small group work, so rows may be a workable option. Some teachers also use a U-shaped format, so they can see the students. This formation is useful for whole group presentations, but lacks the flexibility for when you want to work in small groups.

Many teachers **assign seats** from the first day of school so they can get to know the students' names quickly. They often reassign seats when they know their students better. Assigned seating gives you the option of mixing students with different abilities together, as well as separating stu-

dents who may have behavioral problems, or who simply talk too much. You may also need to put students with special needs closer to you so you can supervise them better or so they can see the board better.

Safety issues

Evaluate your traffic flow from time to time, and make sure students have enough room to move about without bumping into each other or knocking over objects. For safety purposes, make sure computers and other hardware are kept against a wall, so students don't trip over wires and cords. In the primary grades, cover all outlets.

Thinking through your lesson in advance

It is often the small details which disrupt a classroom. To keep your classroom running smoothly, try to visualize your lessons from beginning to end. Organize your supplies, so that students have access to them when they are needed. Students can help distribute papers and other supplies. For special projects, prepare your supplies beforehand. Plan in advance how you want your students to transition from group to group, or from activity to activity. Make sure your seating reflects your instructional goals. Try to figure out how long an activity will take—although this type of estimation takes a lot of experience! A smoothly run classroom doesn't waste your time, or the students'.

ESTABLISHING CLASSROOM GUIDELINES AND ROUTINES

When you establish classroom guidelines and routines, you create a sense of security for your students, so they are freer to learn. Your routines will vary depending on your students' age and your instructional goals. You will have less discipline problems if you set up consistent guidelines and routines and if students clearly understand these.

Routines

Take the time in the morning to greet your students—this signals to them that you care about them. Many teachers like their students to come in and go directly to an assignment. This is an opportunity to review and reinforce concepts from a previous lesson, or to introduce concepts you will be teaching that day. It is useful in terms of management because the students are not idle while you are taking care of administrative chores, such as attendance. Let your children know what the daily schedule is, and inform them of any changes. The beginning of class is also an ideal time to assign students their daily or weekly chores. Some chores students can do include taking attendance, lunch count, delivering materials to the office, passing out papers, cleaning up, wiping the boards, etc. When students help out in the classroom, they feel more ownership. After the initial daily routine, many teachers move to whole group instruction, followed by small group instruction.

Establishing guidelines

Make sure you establish clearly your rules for transitioning. If students are working in small groups, make sure students know where they should be sitting, their individual roles in the group, how they report the group's activities and the group's accountability for completing the task. Establish your expectations for how you want students to behave in different settings, such as the lunchroom, the library, the bathroom, hallways, etc. Work out the procedures for going to the bathroom or for leaving the room for special instruction or other purposes. What about pencil sharpening and getting drinks of water? All these details are best worked out in advance to keep your classroom

running smoothly. The students can help make these guidelines with you; when students participate in establishing classroom guidelines, they are more likely to be accountable for their behavior.

MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE

All teachers have their own special way of maintaining discipline. It is useful for a beginning teacher to ask veteran teachers what has worked, or to observe other teachers in their classrooms. Good classroom management helps maintain discipline. If your instructional plans meet the needs of the students, if you make classroom expectations clear, and if you take a proactive stance towards student behavior, you will have fewer discipline problems.

Try to keep your **students engaged**. Make sure they understand what the assignment is, and direct them to ask other students for help. Keep down time to a minimal. For the younger grades especially, vary your method of instruction, and change the pace of your lessons frequently. Younger students may need to get up and stretch. Centers or small-group work are effective for this age group because students can move around and change the pace of their learning. When students are engaged and learning, there are fewer discipline problems.

In the beginning of the year, set up with the students a few **rules** to keep your classroom running smoothly. Try to keep the rules broad and make sure students understand the rationale behind the rules. Post your rules so everybody can refer to them. Enforce the rules consistently and fairly. In the lower grades, behavior may need to be practiced and can take some time to be mastered.

Take a **proactive stance** towards discipline by circulating in the classroom so you can be sure all your students are on task. Make eye contact with students who are off-task, and redirect them to what they should be doing. Rarely turn your back to students. Encourage your students to monitor themselves. Praise good behavior.

Your classroom will be filled with many different students with varied needs. If a student misbehaves, try to figure out why. Does the student understand the task? Are there difficulties at home? Do you need to change the child's seat? Does the student need extra help? Use your school's resources, such as the social worker, veteran teachers or administrators to help you with discipline problems, or to help you make a plan for students with behavioral problems. Make sure to include parents when you make a plan for an individual student.

CREATING A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

It is up to you to set the climate for learning in the classroom. You are the leader in a community of learners. Create a positive classroom climate by cultivating respect in your classroom, by demonstrating leadership, by valuing diversity and by motivating students to learn.

Emphasize to students that respecting each other is an important value in your classroom. Discuss what that entails, such as valuing everyone's differences. Have students come up with a few guidelines on how they should treat each other and you. How do you expect them to speak to each other and to you? Encourage your students to help each other out. If you have a newcomer to the school or class, or a student who doesn't speak English, assign him or her to a buddy to help this child through the initial transition and to explain classroom routines and the vocabulary of school.

Show an interest in your students, as this communicates to them that you care about them. Smile as often as possible, and use your students' names frequently. Find out what you can about your students' families, their interests, their hobbies. Set high expectations for your students. Research shows that there is a correlation between high expectations and performance. Provide help when students need it, but encourage them to be independent and to look for answers themselves. It is your responsibility to create a community of learners, where students respect each other and work collaboratively, where diversity is valued, and where students feel motivated to learn.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you manage your classroom:

- Does my room setup reflect my instructional goals?
- Do I have an assignment ready for students when they first come in?
- Are the students aware of their daily schedule, and their chores and responsibilities?
- Are there established procedures for transitioning from group to group?
- Am I prepared for each lesson? Have I thought out the instructional goals, seating arrangements, and supplies necessary?
- Do students know what I expect from them in different settings? Do they understand their assignment?
- What rules have been established in terms of going to the bathroom, leaving the class, raising hands, sharpening pencils, etc.?
- Have we created behavioral expectations as a class and are they posted?
- Am I willing to ask for help from other teachers?
- Do I have a plan for students with behavioral problems?
- Have I established a climate where students respect each other, and diversity is valued?



SESSION III: **Managing the Learning Environment** **Discussion/Activity**

Divide into small groups, either by grade level or by subject matter. After your discussion, share your conclusions with the whole group.

I. Room Setup

Explain why and how you have chosen or will choose to set up your room. How does the room setup reflect your learning objectives? How does it reflect your philosophy?

II. Classroom Guidelines and Routines

Brainstorm with your group some guidelines for routines in your classroom. You may want to discuss some of the following:

- What will students do when they first come into the class?
- How will you create and communicate guidelines for transitioning to different groups?
- How do expect students to behave in different settings (small groups or in areas outside of the classroom)?

III. Maintaining Discipline

Discuss with your group what type of discipline plan you will use. Will you establish rules with students? What behaviors are important to you and what will be the consequences if students misbehave? What positive discipline techniques can you use? One of the principals in the videotape said that new teachers establish too many rules. Can you think of one or two rules that would have broad application in many different situations?

IV. Creating a Positive Learning Environment

Describe what you can do as a teacher to create a positive learning environment.

TEST FOR SESSION III: MANAGING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. Which learning situations work best with the classroom setups listed below?
What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
 - Students' desks grouped together:

 - Students grouped in rows:

2. List some routines and guidelines that will make your classroom management easier.

3. Describe a few aspects of a preventative discipline plan.

4. Explain what you can do to create a positive learning environment.

STANDARDS CORRELATIONS

Objectives for Session III: Managing the Learning Environment	INTASC STANDARDS	ACEI/NCATE STANDARDS	NBPTS STANDARDS
Manage the Physical Environment	Principle 5-Motivation and behavior -The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation	Standard 3.4-Active engagement in learning -Candidates use their knowledge and understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior among students to foster active engagement in learning, self-motivation, and positive social interaction and to create supportive learning environments	Standard 3-Learning environment -Establish a caring, inclusive, stimulating, and safe school community where students can take intellectual risks, practice democracy and work collaboratively and independently
Establish classroom guidelines and routines			
Maintain discipline			
Create a Positive Climate for Learning			

ANSWER KEY FOR TEST FOR SESSION III: MANAGING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

(Answers will vary)

1. Which learning situations work best with the classroom setups listed below? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

- **Students' desks grouped together:** This setup is ideal for small-group work, such as cooperative learning, problem-based learning, guided reading or other small group activities. The advantage of having the desks set up this way is that students can work together without having to move desks around, and you promote collaboration among students. One disadvantage of this type of grouping is that students may tend to talk.
- **Students grouped in rows:** This setup works for large-group presentations. The advantage of this setup is that as a teacher you can see all of your students and you may prevent talking or misbehavior. The disadvantage of this setup is that it is not conducive to small-group work.

2. List some routines and guidelines that will make your classroom management easier.

Early morning routines, student chores, transitioning routines, behavior in a group, guidelines for how to behave outside of the classroom, guidelines for leaving the room alone.

3. Describe a few aspects of a preventative discipline plan.

- Be clear about your behavioral expectations with students. Work with students to come up with a few simple rules and establish consequences for misbehavior. Post your rules and be consistent in how you deal with infractions.
- Keep students engaged at all times to prevent boredom and discipline problems. Establish a classroom schedule so that students know what they should be doing at all times.
- Take a proactive stance towards discipline by circulating in the classroom, making eye contact and encouraging students to monitor themselves.
- Praise good behavior.

4. Explain what you can do to create a positive learning environment.

Create a positive climate by setting expectations of how students should treat you and each other. Demand respect and tolerance in your classroom to avoid conflicts. Show an interest in your students so they know you care about them. Set high academic and behavioral expectations for your students. Provide help when students need it, while encouraging students to be independent.

RESOURCES

American Federation of Teachers
<http://aft.org/>

Association for Childhood Education International
<http://www.acei.org/>

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
<http://www.ascd.org/>

ERIC (Education Resource Information Center)
<http://www.eric.ed.gov/>

International Reading Association
<http://www.reading.org/>

Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium
<http://www.ccsso.org/>

National Association for the Education of Young Children
<http://www.naeyc.org>

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
<http://www.nbpts.org/>

National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing
<http://www.cresst.org/>

National Central Regional Educational Laboratory
<http://ncrel.org/>

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
<http://www.ncpie.org/>

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
<http://www.ncate.org/>

National Education Association
<http://www.nea.org/>

National Parent Teacher Organization
<http://www.pta.org/>

Teachers.Net
<http://www.teachers.net/>

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