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Managing Classroom Behavior and Discipline

Jim Walters and Shelly Frei



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Editor

Maria Elvira Kessler, M.A.

Project Manager

Maria Elvira Kessler, M.A.

Editor-in-Chief

Sharon Coan, M.S.Ed.

Creative Director

Lee Aucoin

Cover Design

Lesley Palmer

Imaging

Phil Garcia

Don Tran

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Corinne Burton, M.A.Ed.

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Examine Your Classroom Management Practices

The greatest fear of new teachers across the nation is losing control of a classroom of students. Before starting a new school year, even returning teachers have nightmares about the principal walking into the classroom with the students running around everywhere. These fears are well-founded, because for the majority of educators this is the most difficult aspect of their job. Researchers Dollase (1992) and Gordon (1991) reached this conclusion when they reported that the biggest challenge that teachers face is maintaining discipline and order in their classrooms. When teachers have trouble establishing management and order, their morale takes a beating and they feel that they are not up to the task, resulting in stress and burnout. Teachers who burn out often end up changing their profession. Research in the 1990s showed that over 40 percent of new teachers do not teach longer than four years, and that half of those are actually gone before teaching a full three years (Bernshausen & Cunningham, 2001). More current research from the National Education Association (NEA) shows that this is still true today; they report that 20 percent of all new hires leave within three years. Close to 50 percent of new hires that are placed in urban districts leave the profession before teaching five years (NEA, 2006). Teacher stress commonly affects a teacher's general health and emotional state, as well as the other teachers and the students around them (Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

If this describes you, then take comfort in knowing that you are not alone in respect to your own frustration with class control. One of the primary preventions of teacher burnout is to consult with other educators on issues that directly impact their classrooms (Wood & McCarthy, 2002). This book will explore the vital concerns surrounding classroom discipline and management. Harry and Rosemary Wong, whose book *The First Days of School* (1998) is often given to new teachers, write, "Student achievement at the end of the year is directly related to the degree to which the teacher establishes good control of the classroom procedures in the very first week of the school year" (p. 4).

The correlation between management and student success should provide teachers with the motivation to examine their practices from the beginning of the school year. This book contains multiple levels of application and reflection. The goal for this reflection is to identify the need for the most effective strategies that will result in reaching high student achievement. The end of each chapter, as well as application activities throughout the chapters, will allow you to reflect on your current practices in the specific topical areas. The final chapter will offer the opportunity to plan for a successful future involving classroom discipline.

Classroom Management vs. Classroom Discipline

Before continuing, it is important to draw attention to the difference between the terms *classroom management* and *classroom discipline*. Although they are often used interchangeably, they are actually two different topics. Classroom management refers to how things are generally carried out in the classroom, whereas classroom discipline is the specific management of student behavior. Dr. Marvin Marshall explains, “Classroom management deals with how things are done; discipline deals with how people behave. Classroom management has to do with procedures, routines, and structure; discipline is about impulse management and self-control. Classroom management is the teacher’s responsibility; discipline is the student’s responsibility” (Marshall, 2003, para. 7).

The reason these terms are often used synonymously is that the teacher first has to set up how the classroom functions in order to expect the students to behave. Simply put, effective teachers *manage* their classrooms with procedures and routines. This process often takes care of many of the concerns surrounding classroom discipline. In contrast, ineffective teachers only attempt to *discipline* their students with threats and punishments rather than laying a foundation with effective procedures for the learning environment (Wong & Wong, 1998). It is no wonder that the most significant issue on the minds of most new teachers is that of controlling their students. Inexperienced teachers often do not have the time to develop successful strategies and thus burn out early in their careers (Bernshausen & Cunningham, 2001). Classroom management includes the organization of students, space, time, and materials so that the teacher can then allow the students to learn the intended content (Wong & Wong, 1998). It remains a challenge for veteran teachers as well, as each year brings a fresh group of students for whom to establish management practices.

Of all the things teachers are expected to do during their professional days, classroom discipline is perhaps the most significant and is clearly of concern

to many parents and teachers alike (Langdon, 1996). When considering classroom discipline, it is first important to consider that without order provided by effective classroom management, there is little hope for teachers to instruct in any consistent and effective manner. When teachers feel that they need to discipline students, it is often because there was a lack of procedures and routine in place (Wong & Wong, 1998). Classroom learning requires classroom order and, while it may be very difficult, it is central to what educators need to do.

Additionally, classroom discipline is absolutely necessary for instilling a sense of responsibility and maturity in the students. Each time a teacher works with children in an effort to modify their behavior, both parties should be able to observe and better understand what is being expected of them.

Examine Your Current Practices

With that in mind, the self-assessments on pages 16 and 17 will allow you to scrutinize your own practices in your classroom. In order to obtain an accurate view of your own current teaching practices, you shouldn't try to second guess your initial response. An accurate score will come from what you think actually describes your teaching practice and not what you wish your teacher practices would be on a day-to-day basis. Only by honestly reflecting on existing practices and challenges can you begin to see what needs to change and how you can embark on making valuable modifications. These reflection tools are not meant to be used in an administrative evaluation context for any teacher. They are simply provided for teachers to honestly reveal to themselves where they are weakest so that they will know where to focus their energy on strengthening their classroom management practices. The first assessment, "Rate Your Role in the Classroom Environment," will allow you to rate your overall role in facilitating a well-managed classroom. The second assessment, "Rate Your Teaching Responses," will allow you to examine your general response to students and situations.

Rate Your Role in the Classroom Environment

Rate yourself within your current classroom by reading the statements below and labeling them with a Y (Yes) or an N (No).

_____ I understand the different types of students I have and I take this into consideration when planning a lesson, an activity, or a field trip.

_____ I clearly communicate my classroom management expectations to my students.

_____ I follow through with consequences when classroom rules are broken.

_____ My students know what to do when they finish an assignment.

_____ My discipline is somewhat flexible according to the student.

_____ I don't typically lose instructional time due to discipline problems.

_____ I usually understand why a child is acting out or not doing his/her best.

_____ I always address student problems in an appropriate and timely manner.

_____ I use a variety of intervention methods.

_____ I teach my students how to solve their problems independently.

_____ My students are encouraged to work out their interpersonal problems without teacher help.

_____ My students help other students deal with problems.

_____ My students want to be in my class.

_____ My students feel safe in my class.

_____ I follow a systematic approach to classroom management.

_____ I have a signal to get my students' immediate attention.

How many **Yes** answers do you have in the survey above? _____

Out of the total 16 responses, what is your percentage of maintaining a successful classroom environment? _____

$$\frac{\# \text{ of Yes answers}}{16} = \frac{\text{Your percentage (\%)}}{100\%}$$

49–55: You have shown a *fair ability* to calmly address classroom issues.

42–48: Your score highlights the areas in which you might *need improvement*.

1–41: Your total shows that there are various areas in which you might *need guidance and coaching* in order to establish a positive environment of classroom management.

Taking the Time to Reflect

The next step to classroom management is to examine the information you have just gathered when rating your management practices. Attention will be given throughout this book to the importance of teacher reflection toward continuous improvement. In order to become successful, teachers need time to think about practices and then share concerns and questions frequently with teachers they deem successful and credible in order to gain new insight and ideas (Bernshausen & Cunningham, 2001). Certainly, there is a significant amount of thinking about what occurs in the classroom, but most of it falls very short of effective reflection that leads to authentic positive transformation. If a teacher never questions the goals and the values that guide his/her work, the context in which he/she teaches, or his/her assumptions, then this type of “reflection” will be shallow and fruitless.

This process, painful as it may be, is pivotal and beneficial for teachers in training, as well as for new and veteran teachers (Ferraro, 2000). Critical reflection is an important aspect of both teaching and learning. Teachers learn from those experiences that they contemplate, explore, review, and question. Teachers don’t learn from experience alone; it takes reflection. From this critical process, teachers can begin to recognize differences from their own practices and those of successful practitioners; this is commonly viewed as an efficient technique for professional development and an effective way to more efficiently influence student academic success (Ferraro, 2000). Each teacher needs to decide what is reasonable and helpful while planning future experiences. It’s only through reflection that one can gauge actions in order to further the goal of being a more professional educator. Teachers need to develop a thoughtful problem-solving disposition toward teaching.

After you have taken the self-assessments on pages 16 and 17, you may be doubting your choice of vocation. Perhaps now you are even thinking that you do not have the right personality for teaching. This is natural and can actually be quite healthy, if appropriate actions are then taken. Low assessment scores do not mean that you are not fit for the profession; it simply means you are probably working twice as hard but only getting half the results.

Left unchallenged, feelings of self-doubt or excuses can prevent you from

acting on your most creative ideas. After looking at your scores on the self-assessments, you may feel disappointed. Again, this is normal. Keep in mind that the process of reflection will become easier and more meaningful the more it is practiced. Start by reading through the chapters in this book and reflecting on each aspect of classroom management that is discussed. Take the time to fill in the idea boxes provided throughout the chapters and then complete the reflection questions at the end of each chapter.

Reflection helps you to learn who you are as a teacher and to be aware of how you teach. Your work is complex and requires constant and deep reflection, so do not try to hurry through the process. Over time, this can significantly affect and direct your professional choices and decisions. Getting that great blend of classroom management with a positive atmosphere should not be a mystery.

Establishing Strategies That Inspire Student Academic Success

All teachers, of course, have different personalities, but they also have a lot in common, including the fact that many of them entered the profession in order to help students learn. They are often included in the professional category with others in serving industries, such as those who become nurses, counselors, ministers, and social workers. Writers Harry and Rosemary Wong go further, saying “Teachers are in the helping and caring profession, a service profession to help people enhance the quality of their lives” (1998, p. 21). With a responsibility as great as this, teachers often feel an insatiable need to help others and finish the day with positive expectations for student behavior and achievement. Optimistic teachers believe that they can influence student learning and positively affect their lives. It is vital that teachers demonstrate positive expectations toward all students, because research shows that whatever the teacher expects is generally what the learner tends to produce (Wong & Wong, 1998). Teachers go into the teaching profession with the best of intentions but will still be ineffective without productive classroom management strategies.

In order to establish dynamic strategies in the area of classroom management, you have to be in charge of your students, the space around them, the time allotted for your content area or areas and how you use it, and the materials needed so that everyone in your class is effectively learning. There definitely is a link between how well-managed your classroom is and how much your students achieve (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). Through all your efforts, you are essentially trying to do two things: enhance student involvement and cooperation and establish a positive working environment.

Every educator has a different idea of what makes a good teacher. In all areas, including discipline, teachers glean ideas from their own personal experiences while growing up, past teaching experiences, and the advice and ideas from other educators. Sometimes it is difficult to go off of personal memory or even the advice of another teacher because it is difficult to second-guess what some other person might do in a given situation. You might think that a particular method, style, or point of view is the best way to do something and then end up frustrated when it doesn't fit your teaching style or work for a particularly challenging group of students. Try to be someone else and you will almost always get poor results. There is definitely room for individualism and flexibility in the profession of teaching. Teachers need to reflect and then act upon strategies that will work with their personal styles and the needs of their particular students. It is a continuous, changing process as new students come into your classroom and your teaching approaches evolve.

Teacher Conduct

Before we examine the behavior of the students, it is very important to examine the general conduct of the teacher. The teacher's attitude, educational pedagogy, planning, preparation, and conduct are going to affect how students respond in the classroom. It is essential that students perceive teachers as confident, in charge, and fair. For this to happen, the teacher must establish himself/herself as an appropriate authority figure and role model. Often when students are challenging a teacher's authority, the teacher may unwittingly follow with a counterproductive negative emotional response. However, there are several key components that need to be in place in order to avoid any such situation. By carefully planning lessons, knowing the students, having a discipline action plan, and learning from past mistakes, teachers can avoid their own exaggerated emotional responses to disrespectful students, as well as avoiding subsequent defiant outbursts from the students (Fischer, 2004). While teachers are expected to be caring, dedicated, skillful, sensitive, flexible, and responsive, most of all they must be the authority figure in the classroom.

One of the top mistakes of new teachers is to try to be too friendly with students. While a friendly rapport with students is certainly desired and might come later in the year, the beginning of the year is the time to establish rules, expectations, and order. The teacher can still develop a friendly rapport by personally greeting each student upon entering the classroom and then starting the day officially with the expectation of correct behavior and high standards for learning. Some teachers will have their students show signals as they enter the room to show how they are feeling. For example, a student who shows the number one is having a bad morning and the student showing a five

feels great. As you go through your own learning process about which strategies work best for you, be patient with your own learning curve and with your students (Starr, 2005).

Respecting Students

Fundamental to any workable program is respect for your students. It is important to accept the students you have, not the students you wish you had. To elevate yourself to this level, you will first have to think of each individual student as a person who deserves to be treated with dignity, regardless of his/her intellectual abilities, primary language, social training, cultural background, or personal circumstance. Those who have been treated unfairly may become scapegoats or targets of violence by their peers. If teachers treat students fairly, they are more likely to respect one another. In some cases, students may react in aggressive ways. Some children have been constantly disrespected even by their own family members for years. Here, it is vital that the teacher persevere in showing them that they not only deserve respect but can live up to that respect.

Effective schools communicate with a deliberate and systematic effort to students and the greater community that all children are valued and respected; for example, displaying children's artwork, posting academic work prominently throughout the classroom, respecting students' diversity (Dwyer, Osther, & Warger, 1999). Students respond to adults who respect them and hold them to high expectations of successful learning. At the start of each school day, teacher Jennifer Moorhouse, who has taught in Illinois, Texas, and California, writes the day's objectives on the board along with the question "What do we need to do today to be successful in today's lessons?" The class makes a plan and she moves into the day's lessons. She reinforces the plan with a message such as "You are accountable for your learning by accomplishing these tasks." Tell students again and again that they are important and that you require them to live up to that standard. This produces a more confident student and proportionally reduces your discipline problems.

Dignifying Students

At first glance, dignifying students seems to be the same thing as respecting them, but it actually takes it one step further. You dignify others when you demonstrate interest in their lives, ideas, and activities. On the schoolwide level, schools that accomplish this are the ones where parents feel invited to participate and to be present on campus. These schools celebrate and validate the various cultures and languages represented in a school. By dignifying students' efforts, teachers in the classroom create an atmosphere where students feel welcomed, valued, and respected. Glasser (2000) even went so

far as to suggest that teachers adopt seven connecting habits—caring, listening, supporting, contributing, encouraging, trusting, and befriending.

The teacher's goal should be to interface with students as an extension of his/her own authority rather than simply attempting to control. Students will normally accept fair and reasonable rules and consequences when they know that you are genuinely concerned about their well-being. This means that they should not be singled out or used as negative examples. When you have had to repeatedly or strongly correct a student, it is important that before the student leaves for the day you reconnect and show that you care about, believe in, and sincerely want what is best for him/her. Perhaps you will want to take this child aside and explain that he/she is a role model for some of the others. With this kind of positive responsibility, they will generally live up to your expectations. The key is to continually validate the student. "You are important." "I know you can be one of the best" "Others are depending on you to" "I'm on your side." These types of statements not only redirect the students from counterproductive behavior, but they also provide them with hope.

Keeping Control of Your Emotions

It is extremely important for you to control your emotions and not lose your temper. This sort of immediate reaction usually reflects a teacher's own lack of confidence in dealing with a given situation (Fischer, 2004). As the adult, you should model appropriate behavior even under highly stressful situations. If you lose self-control, it becomes more difficult for you to make the proper decisions under the circumstances and also to retain the respect of your students (Fischer, 2004). When you lose your cool, behavior becomes the focus of attention rather than the students and their learning. If you feel yourself getting too agitated, take a deep breath and examine what is going on for five seconds. If necessary, assign a few minutes of individual work and take some time to sift through papers at your desk. Then, move in to control the situation, and as you walk, place your hands behind your back. This is less threatening to the students and may possibly save you from inappropriately using your hands.

Maintaining a Calm Voice

Using different vocal inflections in the classroom is appropriate only if it has a legitimate educational purpose, does not demean students, and does not result in yelling, which is ineffective and abusive. Some teachers use loud projecting voices and find that they have to keep getting louder in order to compete with the 30 other voices in their rooms. These teachers might find themselves without a voice at all, or a very hoarse one. Other teachers resort

to fear tactics, such as yelling at students. Authors Nelson, Lott, and Glenn's case study (2000) showed an example of a teacher who was openly hostile with her students. Whenever students misbehaved, she yelled at them, criticized them, and humiliated them in front of their classmates. Using fear tactics to gain control does not prove conducive to learning. Students generally shut down completely or amp up and yell back in these situations. You will generally have much more control, as well as credibility, with your students, their parents, and your superiors if you never raise your voice (Fischer, 2004).

One of the most valuable voice techniques teachers can use is a stage whisper, because it is human nature for children to want to know what is being whispered. The teacher should get as close to them as possible and whisper as loudly as possible until they are straining to hear. Since it is impossible for every student to hear you the first time, do not expect them to calm down the moment you start. Give them a few seconds and watch what happens.

Eye Contact

Direct eye contact and nonverbal communication are effective classroom management tools, provided that they don't become inappropriate or intimidating to students. When a student is misbehaving or breaking a class rule, simply pause and look him/her in the eye. This is not to be intended as a threatening gesture, but one of authority. Many times, you won't even need to say a thing—the student will feel the power of your stare. Eye contact is also used as a preventative measure for discipline problems. Your students want some signal from you that validates their presence in the class. Get in the habit of scanning the room once every few minutes to know what is going on and to let the students know you value them being a part of the group. It is also very important to be aware of the cultural norms represented in your classroom. Students in some cultures are trained that eye contact from a student to an authority figure is rude. Thus, do not necessarily demand it of students, "Look at me when I speak to you," because they might be demonstrating respect by looking down.

Praise and Correction

Teachers like to be complimented and validated, and students aren't any different. Students crave attention. Sometimes, a student is so deprived of attention that he/she will invite even negative attention through rude behavior. Therefore, public praise in the classroom can be a very powerful tool. This can be a quick strategy that involves subtly recognizing a student with a positive gesture. When it comes to correction, it is generally more powerful

and appropriate to correct students individually and privately. This applies to students at every grade level. However, it might also be appropriate to direct positive correction in the form of an affirmation, such as “Pay attention, you are very important to us.” Students who are corrected in front of their peers often respond by acting out even more, because they are responding to that unconscious or conscious need for attention. It is ineffective to engage in disciplinary conversation from across the room (Starr, 2005). A general guideline level is to correct privately and to praise publicly.

One way to publicly praise students is to have an impromptu praise time when you go around the room and say one or two sentences about as many children as you can. Many, but not all, students love being singled out if there are others getting the same degree of attention. Compliments should always be genuine, specific, and never contrived. It is up to the teacher to ensure that they are evenly distributing praise, if done publicly. Remember that your students use you as a gauge to see how they are doing. If you like what you see, let them know immediately.

Again, it is very important to be aware of the cultural norms represented in the classroom. There are certain cultural and religious groups in which being in the spotlight is uncomfortable, no matter if the situation is negative or positive. Furthermore, some experts have found praise to be counterproductive in that it can cause students to lose any confidence to give an answer without the teacher’s evaluation immediately expressed. Additionally, not all students seek to please the teacher, especially as they grow older (Hitz & Driscoll, 1989). Teachers can evaluate their use of praise by videotaping a typical lesson and then judging the motivation for praise used and how it seemed to affect the various children in the classroom. Praising should encourage self-confidence and autonomy in the willingness to take risks in learning.

Encouragement

One step further is to give encouragement. With reassurance, you may no longer need to use prizes or rewards. Reassurance shows children unconditional love and acceptance and separates them from their actions. With this support, they see that mistakes can become opportunities for learning. You become inspiring and stimulating without appearing to be judgmental or manipulating. This does not mean you have to “dummy down” your course or give false support, but it does mean you can build scaffolds, academically and emotionally. It also entails providing prompt and detailed qualitative feedback on how well your student is doing. “The students will catch the spirit and will probably come up with other ways to practice encouragement in the classroom” (Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 2000, p. 164). Hitz

and Driscoll (1989) recommend that, rather than using praise, teachers encourage their students. According to them, encouragement differs from praise, as teachers offer specific honest and private feedback on improvement and effort, rather than using evaluative words publicly in order to manage and manipulate the work of all the children in the classroom.

Teacher Jennifer Moorhouse sets up two charts for her middle school seventh-graders at the beginning of the year. On the inside portion of the student chart, she writes a general goal that will be hard for them to attain, such as an “A” grade on the upcoming quarterly math assessments. Then, on the teacher chart, she writes a personal goal of hers that is hard for her to attain, such as running to stay in shape. On the inside of each graphic organizer, she writes down what needs to occur in order for those goals to be reached. On the outside, she writes down what prevents both her and the students from accomplishing the goals. Then, she connects the goals by adding that if the students work toward their hard goals, she will work toward her hard goal; namely, for each “A” on the next quarterly exam, she will run a lap around the track. Now she has students motivated to work hard as they relate attaining their goal to their own teacher’s motivations for working hard in life toward goals as well. This encouraging environment can ultimately simplify the job of teaching as students are motivated to be engaged in their learning processes.

Listen Before You Discipline

It is important to listen carefully to students and to consider their points of view before disciplinary action is taken. Listening to students is particularly important when there is a situation in which you may not have all the pertinent or correct information. When you can take the time to do this, you demonstrate a sincere respect for the child’s sense of self worth. Teacher knowledge of student thinking is critical. Gathercoal (2001) has written that teachers need to listen and hear what students are saying as they conjecture and build arguments. Only then can they judge the quality of students’ justifications and explanations.

The process of listening will not only assist you in making proper decisions, but also will often result in a teachable moment for everyone involved. Sometimes, the greater issue isn’t the problem at hand. Keep an open mind for an underlying situation or frustration that may need to be addressed. If an incident occurs in class and you don’t have time to get into a discussion, you can say something like, “I’d like you to work over there by yourself so that no one bothers you.” This way, you have given the redirection immediately and done it in a positive manner. Some teachers keep a notebook in the back of the classroom in which students are invited to write issues that arise in the

classroom. The teacher reads the notebook at the end of each day and can be aware of ongoing problems between students and address concerns when necessary.

Giving Directions

Even the seemingly simple process of expressing directions can be stated in an affirming way. Examples include, “We need you to pay attention so that you don’t miss vital information,” or “You are important to this discussion.” Other times, you need to give specific expectations in your directions. When you are confronted with a student who needs constant redirection, you might need to take these further steps: look the student in the eye, call him/her by name, use close proximity, and use appropriate verbal and non-verbal cues. The use of a student’s name pronounced correctly automatically conveys to that student that he/she is important to you (Wong & Wong, 1998). Consider specific goal-directed messages such as: “Mary, sit down in your chair now; work quietly, finish these ten problems, and do not get up until the bell rings.” “John, stop hitting Sue now, and do not hit anyone else ever again in this class.” Give the student sufficient time to process the direction, decide to comply, and then actually obey after giving a request. During this waiting interval, do not converse or argue; rather, look the student in the eye, restate the request if required, and wait for compliance. All of this is to be done in a calm and even tone of voice.

Avoiding Confrontations With Students

Arguments are merely power struggles. As the teacher, you already are the authority, so you have no need to argue. Never get into an argument with students regardless of what they may say. These confrontations are pointless, they are futile, and they make you appear unprofessional. Students who disagree with what the teacher requires should be encouraged to discuss those concerns privately. They should not be allowed to argue with the teacher in front of other students or to publicly challenge the teacher’s authority. If a student continues to press the point after you have told him/her what to do, simply say, “Nevertheless” and restate your point.

Eliminate the Use of Threats

One of the reasons that children can behave perfectly without any problems for some teachers, but are uncontrollable with others, is the issue of conducting oneself in a respectful manner. Teachers must use their superior positions and confidence to gain compliance. You should never threaten students. While threatening might cause temporary compliance, the strategy will not help children make ethical, wise decisions about behavior in the

future (Kohn, 1994). Allowing yourself to get carried away with such strong emotional reactions will always be counterproductive, and you will probably regret it later (Fischer, 2004). Rather, be consistent and do not forewarn consequences that you are unable or unwilling to deliver.

Clearly spell out the cost of students' choices and then be prepared to back up your words by consistently enforcing the rules. It is much better to say nothing than risk saying something that cannot be followed through. This is a great example of the necessity of clear expectations from the onset of the school year. If there is a readily seen and accepted list of rules and consequences, then the teacher does not constantly have to come up with consequences to enforce. The students will not be surprised when consequences are enforced. Even if they choose to make the same choice every day with a negative behavior, there will be consistency in the consequence that they are then choosing.

Chapter 1 Reflection

1. What do you consider to be your underlying philosophy or values for creating and maintaining a controlled classroom environment?

2. How does this chapter discussion change your view of your own teaching practices as they pertain to classroom management and discipline?

3. Now that you have explored the difference between classroom management and classroom discipline, write down two strengths and two weaknesses that you have in the area of established classroom management as it pertains to student behavior that is exhibited in your classroom.

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