

SAMPLE CHAPTER

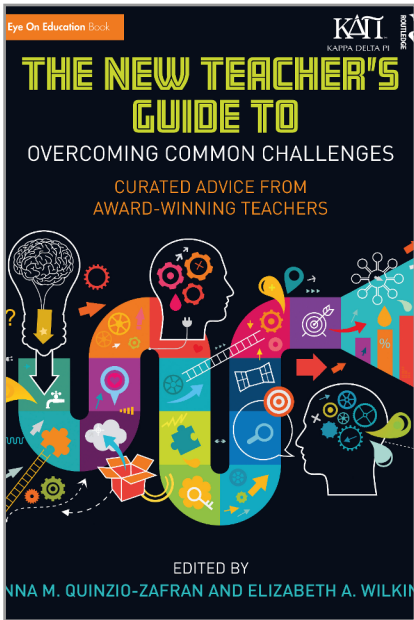
# The New Teacher's Guide to Classroom Setup & Management



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Edited By Anna M. Quinzio-Zafran,  
Elizabeth A. Wilkins

*from The New Teacher's Guide to Overcoming  
Common Challenges: Curated Advice from  
Award-Winning Teachers*

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# Classroom Setup and Management

## A Principal's Advice: Invest in Your Future

Jesse Kraft

*Principal*

*Lutie Lewis Coates Elementary School, Fairfax County Public Schools, VA*

We talk about classroom management like it is a hot topic primarily for new teachers. Not true! In this job, you will encounter veteran teachers who never quite got these management skills down. They can be positive people who are adequate teachers. They may even give you good advice and mentorship. But watch them closely. With loose procedures, weak follow-through, and unclear expectations for student behavior, these teachers are playing a constant game of whack-a-mole in their classrooms. Misbehaviors pop up throughout the day, every day, and they pause their teaching just as often to deal with the ongoing issues. It must be exhausting!

Pushing yourself to become a master at classroom management is not just about creating a positive learning environment for students—it is an investment in yourself. You will teach academics better if behavior problems are minimized. You will feel successful at the end of the day if you are not drained from dealing with misbehaviors. You will have a longer, more fulfilling career if you can be the inspiring teacher you always wanted to be. That IS the goal, right?

Here is my advice for becoming a skilled classroom manager:

- ◆ **Determine your expectations and communicate them so students can understand.** Think through everything. Can students call out answers without raising their hands when you ask questions or is hand-raising necessary? What should transition times look and sound like? It all starts with this: Figuring out exactly what you want and explaining it effectively to your students.
- ◆ **Create your management system and teach it explicitly.** Reteach as needed. Should there be a multistep procedure for what a student does when s/he arrives in the classroom? What should a student do when s/he finishes an assignment early and you are working with a small group? Do you have a warning system for when the class is too loud? You will develop these procedures and more. Your various procedures come together to form a system for how students manage themselves in your classroom. Define it, display it, teach it.
- ◆ **Reinforce the right behaviors.** Use words, body language, and gestures to let your students know they are on the right track. Did they line up quickly and quietly?

Let them know. Did they show improvement today when cleaning up? Notice it, let your students know. Nothing motivates like success.

- ◆ **Be consistent.** This is the most important thing to know. All the aforementioned actions will fail without consistent follow-through. If you declare that certain misbehaviors will be met with consequences, but you relent when it happens, the students will notice. If you are great with reminding the class about their volume in one class but you let it go in a later class, they will conclude (correctly) that your expectations are conditional. Since consistency is so crucial to your success, I recommend that any system you create in your class be as simple as possible. Simple processes are easier for you to manage.
- ◆ **Build personal relationships with each student.** When students feel that you care about them, they listen. You do not have to be a push-over in your efforts to build respectful relationships. Students want the safety of knowing that someone is in charge. When that authority figure shows them love, they conclude (again, correctly) that they are valued. When this happens, they respect and adhere to the system and work to meet the expectations. If they break a rule and experience consequences, they can recover. They realize that you care, your punishment was not personal, and you want them to succeed.

You can use the classroom management plan download to articulate your expectations to plan and self-reflect on your progress.

As you work on your management skills, remember what is at stake. If you can create and manage a positive and productive classroom environment, the stability and safety of the room bring out the best in your students. You also benefit because you spend your day focused on teaching.

Bottom line: Invest the time into developing and honing your classroom management plan. During your first years of teaching, by facilitating a well-managed classroom, you will have more time to unpack your curricula, find your place on your team, survive the evaluation process, establish parent communication, develop grading practices, and hone your instructional delivery. You will go through countless trial-and-error processes in all these areas. It will be easy to divert your focus from reflecting on and constantly refining classroom management practices. Do not let that happen! These skills will make or break you, so invest the time into mastering your management. You have a long career ahead of you—you may as well make it a rewarding one.

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## When It Comes to Classroom Management, Less Is More

Jana Hunzicker, Associate Professor  
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When I was in second grade, our classroom was home to an elf. Yes, an elf. Mr. Quiet was only eight inches tall, but he exerted a great deal of influence. On the first day of school, we found him perched on the chalkboard ledge, and each day he relocated to a new position.

Our teacher explained that Mr. Quiet liked students who talked with quiet voices. She told us that when he sat close to us, he was pleased with our behavior. A week later, with Mr. Quiet reclined on a bookshelf near my desk, I did not make a peep all day.

Of course, Mr. Quiet was just an inexpensive Christmas decoration. Even a bunch of seven-year-olds could see that he was just a toy, yet much like with Santa Claus, we hoped that maybe he was real. Through Mr. Quiet, our teacher found a way to encourage good behavior so that fewer consequences for misbehavior were needed. She understood that when it comes to classroom management, less is more.

To effectively manage a classroom, you do not need an eight-inch elf, but you do need three to five classroom rules, a list of progressive consequences, and examples of rewards for good behavior. You must also see yourself as an authority figure. But a well-managed classroom does not end there. Just as my teacher used Mr. Quiet, you will need a variety of strategies to motivate and coach students toward good behavior so that you can give fewer consequences.

The behavior management cycle (Canter, 2010) is one effective strategy for coaching students toward appropriate classroom behavior. First, give clear directions describing exactly what you want students to do. Then, have them practice. As soon as students begin, use behavioral narration to describe students who are doing exactly what you asked. For example, "Jamal is getting supplies for his group without talking; Group 3 is getting out their notebooks. Nice!" Such comments provide positive reinforcement for the students who are following your directions and prompt those who are not with an indirect reminder.

Behavioral narration will work for all but the most challenging students. These students will need individualized, more subtle cues. For example, if Hamed is telling a joke and misses your attempt at behavioral narration, try proximity. Don't say a word. Just walk over and stand nearby as you continue to supervise the rest of the class. Chances are Hamed will take the hint and save his joke for later. Another subtle-but-effective cue is "the look." Try this one from across the room. Just lower your chin, catch the offending student's eye, and hold her gaze. Her misbehavior is likely to stop without a word. For added emphasis, you can use "the voice." For example, when a student in Group 3 raises his arm to throw a paper wad across the room, simply say his first name using a firm voice. When he lowers his arm and gives you a sheepish grin, you can direct him to the recycling bin.

Only after using behavioral narration and subtle cues should you consider giving consequences. When you do, remember that less is more. Unless a student does something so dangerous or disrespectful that it warrants an immediate call to the office, begin with the lightest consequence on your list, like a warning or one minute after class. Progress to more serious consequences only if the misbehavior continues.

Although giving consequences is necessary for maintaining a well-managed classroom, it can temporarily make matters worse. Some students may talk back or escalate the misbehavior to impress their peers or to see what you will do. When you are tempted to give another consequence, don't forget that less is more. Try the broken record technique instead. When a student demands to know why she has been given a consequence, don't take the bait. Instead, simply keep repeating your direction—like a broken record: "Shelly, I expect to see you after class today." Once the student realizes that you will not be drawn into an argument, she is likely to relent.

Effective teachers find ways to encourage appropriate classroom behavior so that fewer consequences are needed. Even without an eight-inch elf like Mr. Quiet, behavioral narration

and subtle cues are classroom management strategies you can use immediately. (You can download Mr. Quiet’s Management Tips.) Classroom interactions are more enjoyable for everyone when you emphasize coaching over consequences. Because when it comes to classroom management, less is more.

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# Creating an Effective Plan for Positive Behavior Management

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Part of designing the learning experience is planning for effective classroom management. The teacher’s plan sets the tone for the rest of the school year. Management is often thought of as a list of rules and consequences. This format is reactive and often ineffective. Instead, consider teaching behavioral expectations proactively as a set of skills that students need to learn. Teachers don’t punish students for not having a set of academic skills. Instead, we assess, teach, practice, assess, and reteach as needed to help a student progress. The skills of positive behavior should be approached in the same manner. A basic set of steps that are easily adaptable can set you on the path to creating a positive behavior management system.

1. Set between three and six clear expectations that will be universal for your class. These will apply no matter the location, the type of learning students are engaged in, or who the adult is. These are general guidelines, such as “Respect,” “Safety,” “Hard Work,” and “Honesty.” This will become the common language used when addressing behavioral expectations with students. Keep these ideas broad and basic.
2. Make a list of the different learning environments or situations that will regularly occur in your classroom. These could include entering the classroom, small group work, independent work, laboratory stations, or whole class activities. Choose situations that happen most frequently (daily or several times weekly). Create a chart listing your expectations down the left side, and your situations across the top. This downloadable chart is called a behavior matrix, and is now the heart of your classroom management plan.

3. For each situation, fill in your matrix with your expectations. For example, what will “Respect” look like during small group time? What about during independent work? Record concrete, observable items for each box. Include ideas such as returning materials to the appropriate location at the end of tasks, language to use when responding to peers in discussion, or how to handle common situations. All language should be positive (no “do not’s”).

Many teachers will choose to create parts of the matrix with their students as a beginning-of-school activity. This is useful for building shared ownership of the learning environment. If you choose to do this, you should still complete a matrix yourself prior to working with your students so that you know what information should be included.

4. Plan to teach your students the desired behaviors. This can be done through brainstorming together, acting out or role-playing situations, or having students make posters depicting positive behaviors. Don’t skip on this part. Too often teachers, particularly as students get older, expect students to “already know” what is expected or assume that they should only need to be told once. Avoid simply providing a handout about behavioral expectations with other beginning-of-course paperwork. Teaching desired behavior is as necessary as teaching any academic skill.
5. Plan for practice and review. It is important for students to practice the behaviors you want to see, especially at the beginning of the year. Just like an academic skill, students need to practice and receive constructive feedback on their performance in order to improve. Ensure the behavior matrix is posted in an accessible location and referenced frequently.
6. Provide ongoing feedback to individual students. Feedback is critical, both for students who are demonstrating desired behaviors, and for those who need correction. Students who are demonstrating positive behaviors need reassurance and encouragement to continue. When providing corrections, do so in a way that is constructive, preserves individual dignity, and maintains a growth mindset. Address students individually, not in front of their peers. Help them understand the long-term benefits of these skills. Set individual goals and differentiate as needed.
7. Assess individual student progress with your behavior matrix and provide continued feedback throughout the year. A return to instruction and practice may be necessary, particularly during times of the year that are stressful, such as the holiday season or after a break. Documentation of assessment can also be helpful when discussing challenges with parents or with colleagues.
8. Have a reward system. Students of all ages should be acknowledged for their positive choices. Rewards do not have to be large or costly, often something as small as a smile, high five, or a sticker is all the acknowledgment a student needs. Give students the opportunity to determine how they would like to earn rewards based on your matrix. Providing ownership can motivate students to set high standards for themselves.

Classroom management of student behavior requires thoughtful planning and instruction but is well worth the investment. When students understand what is expected of them and receive regular feedback, they have a stake in the process. The result is a classroom that can focus on the importance of continued learning without distraction from widespread problem behaviors.

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## Make It Safe and Positive

Sarah Brown

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I never thought I could teach first grade. I was so scared of managing 20 primary students who are very different from the third graders that I was used to in student teaching. When I started out, I stuck to one thing that a previous teacher taught me: Build a relationship with each of your students. I learned that year how important it was to get to know my students beyond their test scores. Without a caring relationship between the teacher and student, I've found it is extremely difficult to develop any level of trust. Although I have adjusted my classroom management every year I have taught, I always keep our class community strong. During my third year of teaching, I had a student who was very challenging. I felt like a first-year teacher all over again, just trying my best to manage his behavior. I knew that what I was doing in class wasn't working like the years before. I had to stop myself and think about how I could maintain a positive learning space for this specific student. It was obvious that he didn't feel safe or comfortable, and I had to take the time to fix this. Every day was a new adventure with him, but before he left for summer that year, he looked up at me and said, "Miss Brown, I'm really going to miss you." He showed me again how a relationship with students can make all the difference.

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## Making Relationships Stick

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Building positive relationships with all students is one of the most powerful things you can do as an educator. When students feel seen, listened to, and have a trusting relationship with you, classroom management gets easier while students' motivation and engagement

increase. In my eighth grade classroom, I use customized stickers as one of my classroom management strategies. While I have multiple ways of praising students who are doing well and redirecting those who aren't, I find that my stickers are a powerful way to silently communicate with my students.

Why use stickers for silent communication with students? It's a way of giving feedback and encouragement without interrupting the flow of your lesson. Finding ways to allow all 30 of my students to feel seen and heard daily is a time management challenge. While students are working in groups, or independently, I can come over, stick a sticker on someone's hand, and walk away. While the student reads the message, I am already able to check in with another student.

When a student is off task, it's common to call out the student's name, asking him or her to stop doing something. Too often, these same students hear their names called out over and over, for things they are doing wrong. I work very hard to never say aloud, in front of the whole class, the name of a student who is off task. I believe that as much as possible, we should say students' names in front of the class for positive things. All students want attention. However, some only know how to get it through negative behaviors. By redirecting some negative behaviors silently, students often stop these behaviors because they aren't getting any public attention for them. I do a lot to support those students to reengage and am quite strict with my expectations and consequences. The following are the key components for how I use customized stickers as part of my classroom management strategy:

- ◆ I know that students need space when they are upset about grades or not doing well on an assignment from class. I am always there to support and help them, yet I recognize that teens are often not ready for assistance in that moment.
- ◆ I try to stay very aware of status issues in my classroom. I especially like to use the positive stickers for students who need positive recognition and who may not be getting it publicly or from their peers. More often, I use positive stickers for students who have struggled and persevered or for those who started class irritated at something and turned things around.
- ◆ I always hand out stickers by silently walking over to a student (or a group of students), sticking one on the outside of their hand and walking away. It may be followed by a squeeze of the shoulder or making eye contact as I walk away. Later, I may pull the student aside for a private conversation. However, in the moment, whether I am beaming with pride or really frustrated with off-task behavior, my demeanor is the same and I simply place the sticker on their hand.
- ◆ Students love them! THEY COME AFTER CLASS AND BEG FOR MORE, even seniors in high school! I try to keep them on their toes, never knowing what other phrases I have stashed away in my sticker drawer. I use them sparingly, and NEVER give them when someone asks for one. Receiving a sticker is always a surprise.

I created my stickers on the website VistaPrint. You can easily find coupons online. Download the directions.

## Flexible Design for Optimal Learning

Cynthia Dawn Martelli, EdD, Associate Professor  
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One cannot have a community of learners without having a positive instructional climate. Instructors help to create this climate by everything that they do, from the way they respond to student questions to the arrangement of the classroom chairs.

—Alexa Darby, n.d.

A learning space is an essential aspect of a student's education experience. Flexible design takes a classroom from the traditional setting with individual desks and chairs to a less conventional design arrangement. Kayla Delzer (2015) describes this trend as a "Starbucks" environment. Once, while visiting her local Starbucks, she noticed people chose different seating options. Delzer herself always gravitated to the more comfortable seating, as others selected traditional tables and chairs. She liked having a choice in her seating and decided to bring this variety to her classroom. This more flexible arrangement gives students the freedom to choose the environment where they learn best. For example, if students work best sitting on a rug with a clipboard, then they would choose that option over another provided in the classroom. This would be very similar to the atmosphere in a Starbucks. Not all students learn in the same way. Having a choice where to sit and in what type of chair can make a difference (Grubbs, 2019).

### Benefits of Flexible Design: The Five Cs

Your students will require environments that encourage discovery and deeper learning. Flexible design is fundamental to creating an environment of optimal learning for your students and consists of several benefits:

- ◆ **Choice:** Choosing where to work and with whom enables your students to have some control over their learning environment. By offering choice, you encourage them to consider their learning needs and preferences.
- ◆ **Collaboration:** When students change seats to work with a new group, you create conditions that encourage collaboration with peers. This classroom design offers the opportunity for students to pair up, work in small groups, or discuss as a whole class. By creating these various classroom environments, you then facilitate more collaboration and communication, which can enhance creativity and critical thinking.
- ◆ **Community:** Getting to know each other is key during flexible design. Your students are encouraged to share space, supplies, and perspectives when working with each other in different locations within the classroom and with a variety of design elements. Your students' learning environments should reflect those of the real world.

- ◆ **Commitment to Learning:** Learning environments can have a direct impact on your students' achievement. They can take an active role in their educational journey when provided with a choice as small as where they prefer to complete an assignment. You give them a sense of ownership that encourages them to be more invested in their own education.
- ◆ **Classroom Management:** A hidden benefit of flexible design can be stronger classroom management. You will need to develop clear rules and expectations with students as well as be consistent in their practice. Students who understand the daily routine will be empowered by the opportunity to have choices and are more likely to take responsibility for their learning.

Flexible design is more than simply having a variety of different, fun (e.g., beanbags, swivel, furry, and saucer) seats and spaces to meet in the classroom. It is about utilizing student voice, creating buy-in, heightening collaborative learning, and prioritizing students' needs concerning the environment in which they work. "Students know how they learn best. Give them credit for the knowledge they bring to the classroom and make them partners in the creation of a positive instructional climate" (Darby, n.d.). Flexible design can result in a more active, engaging, enthusiastic room of students learning. Download the steps to creating a flexible design in your classroom that will support your students' needs and interests.

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## Building an Atmosphere for Trust: Doing Science

George Dewey, NBCT

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If I have learned anything from my students after several decades in the classroom, creating an ambience of trust is essential to our mission as teachers. Most recently, I have been teaching 10–12th grade students in a physics program that includes a class of ESOL (English for

Speakers of Other Languages) students—ten different countries, seven different languages—in a large northern Virginia public high school. Building an atmosphere of trust in the classroom is imperative for student success.

For starters, the **room arrangement** places students facing each other in assigned seats at long laboratory tables in eight teams of four. This conveys two important messages: (1) the expectation for purposeful communication and dialogue between students and (2) the course begins and ends in the laboratory. As Michael Shermer infers, science is a verb not a noun.

For me, and I suspect for most teachers, the “Happy New Year” greeting comes in September (August), rather than in January. Consequently, the most important day of the year is the **first day** of school because it sets the tone for the entire year. Therefore, since I want my students to know they will be performing the role of a scientist all year, we begin with a discovery activity on the very first day.

Establishment of trusting relationships must come first, though. Our school is scheduled around 90-minute blocks, so the initial 35–40 minutes of the first class are spent **visiting each** of my 28–32 students. I ask them to help me pronounce their names correctly, followed by a couple of short questions about their current math level and what they found easiest and hardest in their previous science courses. This helps me to better understand how to differentiate for these students. As I do these mini-interviews, the rest of the students are busy filling out a two-sided page with their course schedule and answers to questions like, “What do you enjoy doing when you have free time?” Or, “Describe the person who has meant the most to you in your life.” I use this information to get to know the outside interests of my students.

The **science activity** that follows can be either a black box or mystery tube where students predict the arrangement of objects inside (Miller, 2014). Recently, investigating the physics of toys has been fun as well as challenging for the students. Students are asked to describe the physics principles that they think make the toy do what it does based on their observations. In all cases, students work in pairs with their elbow partner, diagramming their predictions on 24×30-inch whiteboards. Once all boards are displayed around the room, then the partners describe and share those predictions with the class. In this way, scientific ideas are explored, insights shared, and a respectful and trusting atmosphere is established between listeners and teams of presenters. This introduces the students to how they will, in teams of 2–4, similarly present lab data or problem solutions throughout the course.

Day two begins with **class rules**. Given a scenario like, “You are directing an important meeting with 25 of your friends. In a short time, your boss expects you to come to agreement on an issue of choice and report your committee’s conclusion.” With no discussion, each individual student is to write on a sticky note the most important rule she or he would tell the committee to follow to accomplish their goal as expeditiously as possible. The sticky notes are then posted anonymously on a sideboard in the room.

Only after they post do I explain why I asked them to do this. I then copy each comment on a page (see download), under what seems logical headings, for us to project and discuss the next day. When consensus is reached on major rules, I lead a discussion to come up with no more than three class rules, which become our rules for the year (see download). Each quarter we review their rules, though all I need to do when adolescent energy becomes too extreme, is remind them that these are their class rules, not mine. While each class has its own personality, when emotions or learning struggles overwhelm the best intentions of

students, this sense of student agency has worked to help them compensate for their conflicted feelings or academic roadblocks.

Another benefit occurs in **testing situations**. Although some teachers unwisely choose testing time to grade papers/homework or use elaborate physical barriers to discourage cheating, I have found two simple steps work best: (1) all phones are stored in backpacks for the testing period and (2) I circulate continually during the test period, keeping vigil on each student at all times, plus giving personal assistance answering questions or giving hints, if needed.

These are a few of the effective ways I have used to build an atmosphere for trust in which each student can feel cared about and cared for. Students more easily accept the challenges involved when performing an experiment as a scientist does, exploring and predicting without knowing the answer in advance. Most labs are discovery rather than confirmatory in nature. This can become a powerful life lesson as well.

## Reference

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# Building a Strong Classroom Community

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Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of being a new teacher is knowing how to build a strong classroom community. Taking the time to build positive relationships with and among students mitigates many of the classroom management issues that teachers often face. Here are some ways to build a strong classroom community:

- ◆ Start the year by telling students how excited you are to be working with them because you believe they will be the kind of students who will aspire to your classroom mission of leadership, kindness, and respect. Remind your students of this often throughout the year.
- ◆ Begin every day with a Morning Meeting (Kriete & Davis, 2014). It is a way for students to start their day on a positive note and practice crucial social–emotional skills they need for an engaging classroom culture.
- ◆ Play team-building games and emphasize kindness and positive support. For example, when playing a group juggle game, discuss what you expect out of students if someone drops a ball. You could encourage them to clap, then say, “It’s okay, you’ll get it next time,” or pat the person on the back.

- ◆ Notice and consistently reinforce positive behavior you see. For instance, “I notice that Lenora is sitting quietly and ready to begin. Way to go, Lenora,” or “Gabrielle and Xu managed their materials carefully during lab.”
- ◆ Stand at the door and greet students as they enter your classroom. If age-appropriate, ask them to choose a high five, fist bump, handshake, or wave to start their day. Tell them how glad you are to see them at school today.
- ◆ Use appropriate humor with your students. Be light-hearted and have fun with them.
- ◆ Share vulnerabilities with your students to build trust. Acknowledge your personal obstacles by sharing stories of how you have had difficult times learning something new or struggled to get along with someone. Take these opportunities to describe how you used social–emotional skills to navigate those situations.
- ◆ Read books that matter. Select and read books about characters with complex lives that students can identify with or feel validated by. Expose them to materials that help them better understand the diverse world around them. Literature is a fantastic way to build empathy for others, discuss difficult topics, and develop social skills. Download the associated teacher resource for book ideas.
- ◆ Teach students kindness. You must teach students to be kind in all things that they do; for example, make eye contact and smile at each other when working in pairs or small groups, acknowledge classroom contributions with peers in age-appropriate ways, invite someone to sit by them at lunch. You must constantly be on the lookout for opportunities to reinforce kindness and redirect unkind behaviors.
- ◆ Contact all families within the first two weeks of school by phone and tell them how glad you are to be working with their child, if you have a self-contained classroom. For those who work with multiple sections of students, devise a plan for family outreach. Share one positive contribution the student made to your classroom. Continue to contact family members throughout the year when their child is successful, and make sure to tell the students when you do so.
- ◆ Connect positively with difficult students every day. Have them assist you in the classroom, find ways to show them that you genuinely care, and affirm them when they do something well. Often the students who have the hardest time at school need the most love and attention. Make your classroom a homeplace for these students (Love, 2019).
- ◆ Hold all students to high expectations. Be firm when you need to be. Be consistent for all students. Be fair in discipline and consequences.
- ◆ Close every class giving students a chance to reflect on the positive moments of the day.
- ◆ Think of ways to get your students’ attention in a positive or neutral way rather than being punitive. Consider using proximity, a look, distraction, or having a student move to a new location instead of yelling at a student to stop a behavior.
- ◆ Clearly express your expectations. Before walking in the hallway, attending an assembly, starting a project, going on a field trip—anything—tell students clearly what you expect of them. When you see students meeting your expectations, offer approval.

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## The Evolution of the Perfect Classroom Setup

Chelsea Marelle

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The start of the school year can be overwhelming for new teachers, and you will probably spend hours after all the professional development meetings perfecting your classroom before the first day of school. I had the same urgency my first year of teaching. I spent hours setting up my classroom only to rearrange everything a million times. I learned quickly that a classroom setup is not meant to be concrete. Instead, it is a work in progress throughout the year that is flexible and always evolving to match the growth of your students. For example, I set up a beautiful reading corner full of books on CD, flexible seating, and pillows to welcome my first class. After school, I was so upset to find the pillows and books thrown around the space. It was in that moment that I realized I had to explicitly teach the expected procedures and expectations for using the different areas of our classroom. I removed the furniture and left only books for the next day. Then I sat my class down to talk about how disappointed I was in the mess left. Together, we came up with appropriate procedures and used role-play and repetition to learn them. When the students could independently perform the procedures, and I felt they were ready, I brought the furniture back as a reinforcer for taking care of our classroom materials.

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## Using SPACE Wisely

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Think back to your favorite classroom from your student days. Envision yourself standing at the door and peering inside. Remember how it felt to get a glimpse of all that space. Now

you are the teacher responsible for creating the learning environment. When setting up learning environments, it is all about use of SPACE:

### **S is for Student Centered**

Teaching is really about the students, not about the teacher. When setting up the space, think through the ways the classroom environment reflects a student-centered philosophy. How much of the space do “teacher things” take up and how much is left for the students? Teachers who minimize their own footprint in the classroom allow more space for students. The décor in the classroom needs to be purposeful for student learning. “Decorations” should be kept to a minimum—there will not be space for them.

### **P is for Perspective**

Perspective pertains to point of view. Try to view the classroom space from your students’ perspective. Sit in the student desks, on the floor at the meeting place, and at the tables. Where are your eyes drawn? What are the distractions? Be sure the things students must be able to see (e.g., boards) are visible from all vantage points in the space. Once students arrive, get down at their eye level and observe the flow in your space. Adjust the environment and/or routines to avoid traffic jams. Ask students for their input and suggestions about changes needed.

### **A is for Atmosphere**

Just as it did when you were a student, standing at the door of the classroom and peering inside is a useful strategy for getting a sense of the atmosphere of the classroom space. Ideally, the space is inviting, making students want to enter and spend time there. Striking the balance between too much and too little is often a personal preference. Have someone else take a look at your space. Ask them how it makes them feel. It can be challenging to modify the “institutional” look and feel of the space. Fluorescent lighting often feels cold. Consider alternative forms of light such as table lamps, floor lamps, and/or twinkle lights (if permitted) around bulletin boards. You want the classroom space to be welcoming.

### **C is for Community**

Community is developed through relationships. To build connections, we have to be able to meet face-to-face and eye-to-eye. This may be a meeting space where everyone can sit or stand in a circle, or it may mean a desk arrangement that allows everyone to see each other’s faces. Community building is a shared process. Is there a place in the room where the students will be able to put their own stamp on the community? How will visitors to the classroom begin to understand the community just by looking at the space?

### **E is for Easily Organized**

The key to keeping classroom space easily organized is to put the students in charge. This means that everything should have a place. Mark and label where materials go in ways that the students will be able to follow. If they are emerging readers, use pictures/icons. Build time into classroom routines to allow students to put things back where they belong. Keeping the space neat and organized builds community and makes the atmosphere more inviting. Making students responsible for keeping the space organized builds responsibility.

Effective classroom setup and management can be overwhelming. Download the Using SPACE Wisely Classroom Setup Checklist to help you use your SPACE wisely.

## Fostering Classrooms as Safe Spaces

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As I enter my twelfth year as a high school English teacher, I continue to think about what makes me most proud in the work I do with my students. While I look forward to their academic success, what satisfies me most is when students let me know that our classroom is a safe space for them, defined as “a nurturing and emotionally supportive environment” (Vuckovic, Floyd, & Riley, 2019, p. 173).

It is important for students to feel welcome and comfortable being themselves in our classes. Some of my favorite teaching moments are when students let their peers and me see their most vulnerable selves, and often this is just when students are being unapologetically themselves. Their guards come down. They forget that they’re in school, in a room full of people they don’t know that well. So, I thought about what makes students feel comfortable in that way. Here are the principles that ground a safe classroom:

- ◆ **Be yourself.** Let students know what kind of person you are—likes, interests, and even flaws. Students are more comfortable being themselves when you are, too. I find myself answering students’ questions with *I don’t know, but I’ll think about it and get back to you*. I’m not *the* authority on anything. I might be *an* authority, but that’s different. But I’m myself—corny jokes, cat obsessions, and all.
- ◆ **Remind students that the classroom belongs to everyone.** It’s not the teacher’s space. It’s *our* space, and everyone can move about it as necessary (within reason). I encourage students to quietly get up and take the pass if they need to use the restroom or throw their trash out when needed. This demonstrates that students are responsible and trustworthy. There’s something unnatural about a space that’s *too* regulated.
- ◆ **Be curious about your students.** On the second day of school, I have students complete surveys that ask for not only basic information but also fun questions that help me understand who they are. I also use this survey to learn what name or nickname(s) they use, what languages they speak, what pronoun(s) they prefer, and what they hope to get out of the class. Then I try to remember those names and pronouns.
- ◆ **Make your thinking and choices visible.** Students trust their teachers when they understand why they have made specific choices regarding work you are doing. Often, students ask *why are we doing this?* I don’t get offended. I answer that valid question. Students trust teachers who are honest about their intentions/goals and are more likely to get on board with whatever they propose to try in class.
- ◆ **Provide space for student choice.** Sometimes, if a book hasn’t gone over well, or students seem to be struggling with a particular activity, I ask them why and what we could’ve done instead. Or, since I have some freedom in the curriculum, I ask the students, through informal polls or online surveys, what they’d like to read,

either specific titles or genres. Students are more invested in the work and feel more included when their opinion(s) play a role.

- ◆ **Listen to your students' concerns.** Teachers don't always know best. The older I get, the more disconnected I feel from my students' lives or the pop culture they like. So, when something isn't working, or they aren't getting it because it's more removed than you thought, *listen*. Adjust. Don't get offended. Use their suggestions to grow and improve. Let your students know their voices matter.
- ◆ **Allow space for dissent.** Especially in these charged political times, this can feel overwhelming. At the start of a new school year, I make clear to students that this is a space in which we can have discussions and disagree, but disagreement must always be respectful. Not everyone has had the same experiences. I often begin the year watching Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, to set the tone that we should avoid stereotyping and sweeping generalizations when we talk about race, gender, sexuality, religion, or life in general. As teachers, it's our responsibility to address insensitive or misguided comments without shutting students down. This might be the most difficult, but important, thing we do. I try to address problematic comments in the moment, so other students who may feel attacked feel they have an advocate. I find myself saying something like, "I think it's important to be careful that we don't generalize." Or "We should remember that some of the people in this room haven't had the same experience you have."

Teaching is not without its difficulties, and the emotional labor can be taxing. When teachers make efforts to foster safe classrooms, students will be happier and more diligent, and teachers will have opportunities for pedagogical and emotional growth. You can download the accompanying graphic organizer, *Fostering Safe Classrooms*, to plan methods and approaches in creating and cultivating classrooms that are safe for all students.

## Reference

- Vuckovic, M., Floyd, B., & Riley, J. (2019). The first year colloquium: Creating a safe space for students to flourish. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 19(2), 172–186. doi:10.14434/josotl.v19i1.23517.

## Substitute Folder Essentials

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This guide is set up to help you create a quality substitute folder. The following recommendations are tried and true and have assisted many substitutes throughout my 20-year career. Being detail oriented and organized will ensure the safety of your students and that your substitute has the tools needed to have a successful day with your class.

Here is what your folder should include:

- ◆ Class list and seating chart: This should be in the very front of your folder. It is crucial for taking attendance and tracking students during a fire drill or lockdown.
- ◆ Your detailed lesson plan: List your activities for each period or subject area, along with specific directions on the work you are assigning and how it is to be completed.
- ◆ Classroom work and materials: Provide all classroom work and materials labeled with specific directions on how you would like the work completed. Is the work to be completed as a whole group? In pairs? Independently?
- ◆ Homework: Would you like your homework from the previous day collected and corrected? Would you like the substitute to notate who did not return their homework?
- ◆ Teacher schedule: Be sure to include a map of the building and any duties you may have such as bus duty, hall duty, or lunch duty. If your class assembles in a general location such as on the playground or in the cafeteria, be sure to include this information for your substitute.
- ◆ Class schedule: Make sure it is detailed and explains any specific daily routines, especially student dismissal procedures.
- ◆ Specials: If your students have any specials such as Music, Art, Technology, and World Language, this should be in your lesson plan as well as the location of the classroom, so the substitute knows where to drop off and pick up the students.
- ◆ Additional services: If you have any students who are pulled out for additional services such as Speech, Basic Skills/Intervention, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and/or Counseling, notate it in your lesson plan. Include the specialist's name and the time frame the student will be working with him/her.
- ◆ Student allergies/medications: If you have students with specific allergies such as nuts, milk, or gluten, this also needs to be documented. Does the student have an EpiPen or medications in the nurse's office? Should an emergency occur, this information needs to be disclosed. Students may need their medication administered the same time every day, so consistency is key.
- ◆ Your classroom management plan: How do you monitor student behavior? How do you expect the substitute to handle student misbehavior? Is there a seasoned grade-level colleague they can go to for support or send the student to? If the situation is of a serious nature, how should the substitute handle it?
- ◆ Helpers: Provide the names of three helpful students who know your routines and procedures, where to find particular items in your classroom, and how to get around the school building such as the cafeteria, nurse, or main office.
- ◆ Potential student conflicts: You will want to let the substitute know if you have any challenging students who need to be watched intently as well as any students who should not be near each other. Giving the substitute a heads up will help him/her take preventative measures so no problems arise.
- ◆ Contact list: Provide a list of important contacts and their phone extensions in your folder as well as post them near your classroom phone. Your list should include the school's secretary, nurse, guidance counselor, principal, vice principal, and an experienced grade-level colleague.
- ◆ Lockdown/Fire drill procedures: Include your school's detailed plan for fire drills and lockdowns, along with a map, class schedule, and parent contact list, should an evacuation occur.

- ◆ List of student birthdays: If any of your students are celebrating a birthday, be sure to give the substitute a heads up. If you typically give out something to commemorate student birthdays, leave the item for the teacher to distribute so the child does not feel left out.
- ◆ Bathroom policy: How many students do you allow out at a time? Do they sign a ledger? Take a bathroom pass?
- ◆ Feedback form: Leave a spot within your folder to allow your substitute teacher to provide appropriate feedback on how the day went. Have them identify what went well and any problems that occurred during the day.
- ◆ Classroom changes: Be sure your folder is always accurate and up to date should there be changes to your schedule or class roster.

By including all this information in your substitute folder, you are ensuring the safety of your students, making sure your classroom runs as smoothly as possible, and setting students up for a productive day of learning. Download the checklist so you can prepare your substitute folder.