Creating Productive Learning Environments

Chapter Outline

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Creating Productive Learning Environments: Involving Parents
- Benefits of Parental Involvement • Strategies for Involving Parents

Learning Objectives

After you have completed your study of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the essential characteristics of a productive learning environment.
2. Explain how teachers’ personal characteristics contribute to a productive learning environment.
3. Describe how classroom management contributes to a productive learning environment.
4. Explain how involving parents contributes to a productive learning environment.

Case Studies

Elementary
Middle
Secondary
Creating productive learning environments is one of teachers’ most important roles. As you read the following case study, ask yourself what a productive learning environment looks like and how Shannon Brinkman, the teacher, helps create one in her classroom.

Shannon, a fifth-grade teacher, is in her third year of teaching in an urban elementary school in the Southwest. As she anticipates the new year, she spends several days preparing her room. She tapes posters and pictures on the walls and labels the clock, windows, door, and other common objects with signs in both Spanish and English.

As her students enter her classroom on the first day, she greets them at the door and tells them to find the desk with their name on it. As soon as the students are settled, she asks them to introduce themselves and say a few words about themselves, their favorite activities, and anything else they think might be interesting.

After students have introduced themselves, Shannon comments, “We are going to have a great year this year. I asked you to introduce yourselves, because we all want to get to know each other and work together to help each other learn and grow as much as possible. This classroom is like a family, and in families people help each other. So, that’s what we will do throughout this year.

“So, to be sure we all can help each other and learn as much as possible, we need some guidelines that will help our classroom run as smoothly as possible,” she continues and then asks the students to make suggestions that will help them all be comfortable and keep the classroom safe and orderly. They discuss the suggestions, and Shannon makes notes about rules and procedures, which she plans to post the next morning.
After the discussion, she then takes a picture of each student with her digital camera and then turns to her planned math topic. She prints the pictures that evening and has them displayed on the bulletin board under a large sign saying, “Our Class,” when the students come in the next day.

During language arts that day, she divides students into pairs and has them interview each other about things like family, hobbies, and favorite foods. The next day she teaches them a standard format and has each write a paragraph about the other student that they would put on the bulletin board next to the pictures. Students take turns using the two computers in the back of the room to enter their paragraphs into the computer. When students encounter difficulties, she has several students who are more familiar with computers help out.

Think about some of your past experiences in classrooms. Why were some comfortable and inviting, whereas others seemed cold and impersonal? This question is important, because the classroom environment you create will significantly influence the amount your students learn and how much they enjoy school. In this chapter, we examine the characteristics of productive learning environments and how teachers can create them.

Before proceeding on with this chapter, take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire on page 453. We address each of the items in the chapter.

**Characteristics of Productive Learning Environments**

As you saw in Chapter 1, classrooms are complex places where teachers make an enormous number of decisions. One of the first, and most important, is deciding how to create a productive learning environment, a classroom that is orderly and focuses on learning. Orderly doesn’t mean rigid or punitive; rather, it means safe, relaxed, and inviting. In an orderly environment, students are respectful and accept responsibility for their actions, teachers rarely raise their voices, and the focus is on helping everyone learn. How can teachers create this type of environment in their classroom? Research provides some answers.

**A Focus on Learning**

Learning is the central purpose of schooling. While this simple statement may seem self-evident, keeping it in mind is important because it helps simplify our decision making. For example, we try to create an environment that is comfortable and inviting because it contributes to student learning. We emphasize respect and personal responsibility because this emphasis helps students develop personally, socially, and morally. We avoid criticizing students because criticism decreases learning. We create systems of procedures and rules because students learn more in environments that are safe and predictable.

This focus on learning guides our actions as teachers and helps answer the question, Why are productive learning environments so important? They are important because they promote learning for all students.

**A Focus on Learners**

Productive environments are also learner centered. What does this mean? Learner-centered classrooms have three characteristics. They emphasize

- Classrooms as learning communities
- Personal and social development
- A positive classroom climate

Let’s look at each of these.
Classrooms as Learning Communities

Learner-centered classrooms create learning communities, classrooms in which the teacher and all the students work together to help everyone learn (Haberman, 2004; LePage et al., 2005).

A learning community is characterized by the following:

- **Inclusiveness.** All students—high and low achievers, members of cultural minorities, students with and without exceptionalities, boys and girls—participate in learning activities and believe they can succeed. Each feels that they belong in the classroom. Shannon began this process by having her students interview each other so that they could get to know each other and feel part of the classroom. Teachers also make it a point to involve all students in learning activities, such as calling on them as equally as possible.
Personal development. The growth of enduring personality traits that influence the way individuals interact with their physical and social environments.

- **Respect for others.** We said earlier that teachers avoid criticizing students because criticism decreases learning. Avoiding criticism doesn’t mean that students are allowed to do as they please, nor does it mean that teachers lower expectations for their students. Rather, it means that teachers respond to students with courtesy and respect, and expect the same courtesy and respect in return. For example, when the teacher speaks, students show respect by listening. When a student has the floor, he or she deserves the same respect from others. When students learn to be respectful, they grow as human beings, and this growth is part of the total learning process.

- **Safety and security.** In a learning community, students must be safe, not only from physical harm but also from name-calling, bullying, and other forms of hurtful interactions. The teacher again sets the tone with the classroom rules and procedures that he or she introduces the first day of school and reinforces throughout the year. One middle school teacher has her cardinal rule, “No Put-Downs,” realizing that middle schoolers sometimes forget about the feelings of others and that sarcasm and biting humor can get laughs. When this happens, students become reluctant to share ideas, and they learn less. (We examine rules and procedures in detail later in the chapter.)

- **Trust and connectedness.** In learning communities, students learn to trust and depend on each other for assistance. Shannon promoted this support when she had students who knew more about word processing help others. When students know they can depend on each other, connectedness and trust develop.

Classrooms that share these characteristics increase student learning, and they are also pleasant environments in which to teach and learn (LePage et al., 2005; Zins et al., 2004).

**Personal and Social Development**

A second important dimension of learner-centered classrooms is that they provide opportunities for students to learn about themselves and others. Learning involves more than understanding how to add fractions, explain the causes of the Revolutionary War, or write an effective essay. In addition to developing cognitive abilities, it also includes developing students’ personal and social development. Increasing awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, and learning to get along with others are important dimensions of learning that will influence students’ happiness and success later in life (Berk, 2005, 2007; Zins et al., 2004). Educators understand the importance of this development, as evidenced by statements such as “Works and plays well with others,” “Accepts responsibility,” and “Is courteous and considerate,” on elementary and middle school report cards.

**Personal development** refers to the growth of enduring personality traits that influence the way individuals interact with their physical and social environments. Students’ personalities are determined in part by genetics, but peers, parents, and other adults, especially teachers, are also influential (Berk, 2005, 2007). Some important aspects of personal development include (Zins et al., 2004):

- Self-discipline and motivation to learn
- Organizational skills and goal setting
- Personal and moral responsibility
- Control of personal impulses
- Self-awareness in terms of personal strengths, needs, and values

Teachers promote personal development by discussing these traits, explaining why they’re important, modeling them in their teaching, and providing opportunities for students to practice them. For example, when Shannon gave her biography writing assignment, she explained its purpose, gave students a due date, and emphasized that each student was responsible for producing a usable product for the bulletin board. When students met this goal, they not only increased their writing skills but also developed personally.
Social development refers to the advances students make in their ability to interact with and get along with others. Healthy social development affects both learning and students’ satisfaction with school. In a review of research in this area, experts concluded, “there is a growing body of scientifically based research supporting the strong impact that enhanced social and emotional behaviors can have on success in school and ultimately in life” (Zins et al., 2004, p. 19). Researchers have linked healthy social development to a number of important outcomes including increased academic achievement and motivation to learn, greater satisfaction with school, and reduced dropout and substance abuse rates (LePage et al., 2005; Zins et al., 2004).

To illustrate how teachers and classrooms influence social development, let’s return to Shannon’s classroom, where her students are working in small groups on social studies projects.

Rolando, Katrina, Meagan, and Bill are involved in a social studies project on the American West. They’ve been working as a group for 3 days and are preparing a report to be delivered to the class. There is some disagreement about who gets to research which topics and present them to the class.

“So what should we do?” Katrina asks, looking at the others. “Rolando, Meagan, and Bill all want to report on the Pony Express.”

“I thought of it first,” Rolando argues.


“Why don’t we compromise?” Katrina asks, “Rolando, didn’t you say that you were kind of interested in railroads because your grandfather worked on them? Couldn’t you talk to him and get some information for the report? And Meagan, I know you like horses. Couldn’t you report on horses and the Plains Indians? . . . And Bill, what about you?”

“I don’t care . . . whatever,” Bill replies, folding his arms and peering belligerently at the group. At just that moment, Shannon approaches the group.

“How are we doing?” she asks. Seeing that they appear uneasy, she continues, “Does everyone want to report on the same topic?” At once she hears these comments,

“Nobody listens to me.”

“She’s always so bossy.”

“Who cares?”

“Hmm,” Shannon replies. “You know other groups are having similar problems. Maybe we ought to talk about this as a class.”

Shannon’s students were at different points in their social development. Katrina, for example, demonstrated perspective taking, the ability to understand the thoughts and feelings of others, when she suggested that Rolando and Meagan switch assignments because of their interest in different topics. She understood that the reason they were balking was because each was interested in the Pony Express.

Perspective taking develops slowly and with practice (Berk, 2005, 2007). Children up to about age 8 typically don’t understand responses such as Bill’s angry reaction or why Rolando might be happy reporting on railroads. As they develop, their ability to see the world from others’ perspectives grows. Perspective taking is important because it helps people handle difficult social situations and feel empathy and compassion for others.

Students skilled in perspective taking are better liked and respected by their peers (Berk, 2005; Schult, 2002). Students who haven’t developed this ability tend to be mistrusting and
often interpret the intentions of others as hostile, which can lead to arguing, fighting, and other antisocial acts. They also tend to feel less guilt or remorse when they make mistakes and hurt other people’s feelings (Crick et al., 2002; Dodge et al., 2003).

Teachers can promote perspective taking by making students aware of others’ feelings, providing opportunities to interact with one another as Shannon did with her group project, and intervening when problems arise (Berk, 2007).

Productive learning environments also help students develop social problem-solving skills, the ability to resolve conflicts in ways that are beneficial to all involved. Katrina demonstrated social problem-solving skills when she suggested a compromise that would satisfy everyone.

Social problem solving occurs in four sequential steps (Berk, 2005, 2007):

1. Observe and interpret social cues. (“Bill seems upset, probably because he isn’t getting his first choice.”)
2. Identify social goals. (“If we are going to finish this project, everyone must contribute.”)
3. Generate strategies. (“Can we find different topics that will satisfy everyone?”)
4. Implement and evaluate the strategies. (“This will work if everyone agrees to shift their topic slightly.”)

Social problem solving is a powerful tool. Students who are good at it have more friends, fight less, and work more effectively in groups (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Patrick et al., 2002).

Like perspective taking, social problem-solving skills develop gradually (Berk, 2007). Young children, for example, are not adept at reading social cues, and they tend to create simplistic solutions that satisfy themselves but not others. Older children realize that persuasion and compromise can benefit everyone, and they’re better at adapting when initial efforts aren’t successful.

As with perspective taking, teachers can promote social problem-solving skills by making students aware of their importance, modeling the skills, and giving students opportunities to practice, as Shannon did by guiding her groups.

In addition to perspective taking and social problem solving, productive learning environments also develop other social skills such as:

- Respect for others
- Working cooperatively with classmates
- Empathy and compassion
- Appreciation of diversity (Zins et al., 2004)

Personal and social development also grow in classrooms where the classroom climate is positive and supportive. Let’s see what this means and how it might be achieved.

Positive Classroom Climate

Classroom climate refers to the emotional and psychological environment of a classroom, and a positive classroom climate is essential to a productive learning environment (D. Brown, 2004). When classroom climate is positive, the teacher and students demonstrate mutual respect and courtesy, and everyone feels safe to express thoughts and opinions and ask questions without fear of embarrassment or ridicule. It is virtually impossible for students to develop personal traits, such as self-awareness and motivation to learn, or social skills, such as respect for others and empathy and compassion, if the classroom climate is negative or threatening.

Shannon attempted to promote a positive classroom climate in several ways. Before the school year began, she created displays and placed pictures on her classroom walls in an attempt to make her room physically attractive. Then, because she knew that a number of native Spanish-speaking students were in her class, she labeled objects around the room in both English and Spanish. As the students entered the first day, she greeted them at the door, had them introduce themselves, and displayed their pictures on the bulletin board. She immedi-
ateley initiated a discussion of the procedures that they would follow to keep their classroom safe and orderly. Each of these moves was an attempt to make her classroom inviting.

What else can teachers do to promote a positive classroom climate? Let’s see what Mr. Appleby, an English teacher in a rural high school in the South, says about making his classroom a place where students want to be.

If you pay attention to these kids and do some things for them they appreciate it [Mr. Appleby explained,] . . . I think it’s more important for a kid to feel he’s got somebody at school—an adult—somebody he can trust or can talk to or who can cheer him up when he’s feeling raunchy . . . . they need to know that when they walk into your classroom that you’ll say something nice to them or that they can talk to you if things are bad ‘cause there’s nobody else they can go to . . . . kids need to feel they can open up and share some of their feelings which they may not ever do because they may be in a family situation where they get slapped for it or put down for it . . . as they frequently are, you know . . . . (Dillon, 1989, p. 238)

How do students react to teachers’ attempts to create this type of climate? Let’s see what two of Mr. Appleby’s students have to say.

Melinda: I act differently in his class—I guess because of the type of teacher he is . . . . He is hisself—he acts natural—not tryin’ to be what somebody wants him to be . . . . he makes sure that nobody makes fun of anybody if they mess up when they read out loud.

Bernard: I like him just by the way he’d talk, he were good to you . . . . he don’t be afraid to tell you how he feels—he don’t talk mean to you, he just speak right to you . . . . some teachers only likes the smart people—and Coach Appleby don’t do that. (Dillon, 1989, pp. 241–242).

Shannon and Mr. Appleby both recognized that their professional commitment is first to their students and not to the content they’re teaching. This doesn’t imply that content isn’t important or that teachers should lower their academic expectations but, rather, that students learn more when they feel cared about and the classroom climate is positive (Raiderr-Roth, 2005).

Check Your Understanding

1.1 Describe the essential characteristics of a productive learning environment.

1.2 How do productive learning environments help promote personal and social development?

1.3 In this section, we said that learning is the primary purpose of schooling, but we also emphasized a positive classroom climate. How are the two related?

For feedback, see Appendix A, Check Your Understanding, located in the back of this text.

The Human Dimension of Productive Learning Environments

Teachers are essential to creating productive learning environments; they set the emotional tone for the classroom, creating either an inviting or a threatening environment. (As a student, one of your authors entered his high school biology class and was greeted with, “My name is Isabel Wilharm, and the name means exactly what it says. Step out of line and I will harm.”) Then,
they design learning experiences that can engage, ignore, or even distance students. They interact with students during instruction in ways that motivate, interest, or possibly bore them.

Think about some of the best teachers you’ve had. What comes to mind? If you’re typical, the first thing you remember is that you believed that they cared about you as a person, were committed to your learning, and were enthusiastic about the topics they taught. We examine the human dimension of creating productive learning environments as we discuss the following teacher characteristics:

- Caring
- Personal teaching efficacy
- Positive expectations
- Modeling and enthusiasm

**Caring: An Essential Element in Teaching**

Caring refers to a teacher’s investment in the protection and development of the young people in his or her classes (Noddings, 2001), and a caring teacher is at the heart of a productive learning environment. The importance of caring is captured by one fourth grader’s comment: “If a teacher doesn’t care about you, it affects your mind. You feel like you’re a nobody, and it makes you want to drop out of school” (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995, p. 683).

Students are more motivated to learn and achieve higher in classrooms where they believe their teachers like, understand, and empathize with them (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Students who feel they are welcome and who receive personal support from their teachers also demonstrate more interest in their class work and describe it as more important than students whose teachers are distant. A supportive classroom environment, where each student is valued regardless of academic ability or performance, is essential for both learning and motivation for all students (Stipek, 2002).

This section answers the first “Professional Knowledge: Test Yourself!” item, “Teacher caring is most important in the lower elementary grades, and its importance diminishes as students grow older.” Teacher caring is, in fact, essential at all levels, and its importance does not diminish as students grow older.

**Communicating Caring**

How do teachers communicate that they care about their students? Some ways include

- Learning students’ names quickly and calling on students by their first name
- Greeting them daily and getting to know them as individuals
- Using effective nonverbal communication such as making eye contact and smiling
- Using “we” and “our” in reference to class activities and assignments
- Spending time with students
- Demonstrating respect for students as individuals

The last two items on the list deserve special emphasis. We all have 24 hours in our days—no more, no less—and the way we choose to allocate our time is the truest measure of our priorities. Choosing to allocate time to an individual student communicates caring better than any other single factor. Helping students who have problems with an assignment or calling a parent after school hours communicates that teachers care about students and
whether or not they are learning. Spending a moment to ask a question about a baby brother or compliment a new hairstyle communicates caring about a student as a human being.

Showing respect is also essential. Teachers show respect in subtle ways, such as the way they look at students and how long they wait for students to answer questions. Interestingly, maintaining high standards is one of the most powerful ways to show respect. One school motivation expert observed,

One of the best ways to show respect for students is to hold them to high standards—by not accepting sloppy, thoughtless, or incomplete work, by pressing them to clarify vague comments, by encouraging them not to give up, and by not praising work that does not reflect genuine effort. Ironically, reactions that are often intended to protect students’ self-esteem—such as accepting low quality work—convey a lack of interest, patience, or caring. (Stipek, 2002, p. 157)

This view is corroborated by research. When junior high students were asked, “How do you know when a teacher cares about you?” they responded that paying attention to them as human beings was important, but more striking was their belief that teachers who care are committed to their learning and hold them to high standards (Wilson & Corbett, 2001).

Respect, of course, is a two-way street. Teachers should model respect for students, and in turn they have the right to expect students to respect them and one another. “Treat everyone with respect” is a rule that should be universally posted and enforced. An occasional minor incident of rudeness can be overlooked, but teachers should clearly communicate that chronic disrespect for themselves or the students in their classes will not be tolerated.

**Personal Teaching Efficacy**

In addition to caring, teachers who create productive learning environments believe in their ability to help students learn and grow. To illustrate this important idea, let’s look at a brief conversation between Shannon and Jim Fantini, one of her colleagues.

“*My students didn’t score as well as I would have liked on the math part of the Stanford Achievement Test last year, and I promised myself they were going to do better this year*,” Shannon comments as she glances through a set of math quizzes.

“But you said your students aren’t as sharp this year,” Jim responds.

“That doesn’t matter. I need to push them harder. I think I can do a better job than I did last year. They’re going to be so good at doing decimals and percentages that they’ll be able to do the problems in their sleep.”

“You never give up, do you?” Jim smiles, shaking his head.

Shannon’s comments illustrate **personal teaching efficacy**, a teacher’s belief in his or her ability to promote learning in all students regardless of their prior knowledge or experiences (Bruning et al., 2004). Shannon’s comments “I think I can do a better job than I did last year” and “They’re going to be so good at doing decimals and percentages . . .” reflect her belief in her ability to help all her students learn and her decision to take responsibility for the success or failure of her own instruction. This characterizes teachers with high personal teaching efficacy.

When students aren’t learning, high-efficacy teachers don’t blame it on lack of intelligence, poor home environments, uncooperative administrators, or some other external cause. Instead, they redouble their efforts. They emphasize praise rather than criticism, persevere with low achievers, and maximize the time available for instruction. Low-efficacy teachers, in contrast, are less student centered, spend less time on learning activities, “give up” on low achievers, and are more critical when students fail. Not surprisingly, students taught by high-efficacy teachers learn more than those taught by low-efficacy teachers (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).
Positive Teacher Expectations

Teachers who create productive learning environments have faith not only in their own capabilities but also in the capabilities of their students. Positive teacher expectations are teachers’ beliefs in students’ capabilities to learn.

To illustrate the importance of teacher expectations, let’s analyze two short interactions between a teacher and her students.

Mrs. Davis: What kind of triangle is this? . . . Lisa?
Lisa: I . . . don’t know.
Mrs. Davis: What do you notice about the lengths of these three sides?
Lisa: They’re . . . equal. It’s an equilateral triangle.

Now compare what you’ve just read with the following:

Mrs. Davis: What kind of triangle is this? . . . Jessica?
Jessica: I . . . I don’t know.
Mrs. Davis: Can you help her out, Gena?

The difference in the way Mrs. Davis communicated with the two students is subtle but important. By prompting Lisa, she demonstrated that she expected Lisa to be able to answer, but turning the question to another student suggested that she didn’t have the same expectations for Jessica. A single incident isn’t significant, but if Mrs. Davis’s interactions with the two girls represent a pattern, long-term and substantial differences in achievement can result (Good & Brophy, 2003; R. Weinstein, 2002).

Teacher expectations about students’ learning can have profound implications for what students actually learn. Expectations affect the content and pace of the curriculum, the organization of instruction, evaluation, instructional interactions with individual students, and many subtle and not-so-subtle behaviors that affect students’ own expectations for learning and their behavior. (Stipek, 2002, p. 210).

Research indicates that teachers treat students for whom they have high expectations differently than those for whom they have low expectations. High-expectation students receive differential treatment in the following areas (Good & Brophy, 2003):

- **Emotional support:** Teachers interact more with perceived high achievers; their interactions are more positive; they make more eye contact, stand closer, and orient their bodies more directly toward the students; and they seat these students closer to the front of the class.

- **Teacher effort and demands:** Teachers give perceived high achievers more thorough explanations, their instruction is more enthusiastic, they ask more follow-up questions, and they require more complete and accurate student answers.

- **Questioning:** Teachers call on perceived high achievers more often, they allow the students more time to answer, and they provide more encouragement and prompt perceived high achievers more often.

- **Feedback and evaluation:** Teachers praise perceived high achievers more and criticize them less. They offer perceived high achievers more complete and lengthier feedback and more conceptual evaluations.

Students are sensitive to these differences, and even early elementary children are aware of differential treatment (Stipek, 2002). In one study, researchers concluded, “After ten seconds of seeing and/or hearing a teacher, even very young students (third grade) could detect whether the teacher talked about, or to, an excellent or a weak student and could determine the extent to which that student was loved by the teacher” (Babad, Bernieri, & Rosenthal, 1991, p. 230). This
is both amazing and disquieting; it challenges teachers to communicate caring and high expectations to all students.

Expectations can be self-fulfilling; when we treat students as if they are low achievers, they don’t try as hard. Reduced effort results in less learning, and a downward spiral begins (R. Weinstein, 2002). Unfortunately, teachers often aren’t aware of their lowered expectations. When introduced to this research and encouraged to analyze their own classrooms with this framework, teachers can learn to treat all students as potential learners, and as a result, the learning environment becomes more productive.

Modeling and Enthusiasm

“Actions speak louder than words” is a cliché, but it is often true, and it is particularly important in productive learning environments.

Think about times that you have become excited about a class or topic you were studying. Often, your excitement was the result of teacher modeling, the tendency of people to observe and imitate others’ behaviors and attitudes (Bandura, 2001, 2004). Your teacher demonstrated his or her own genuine interest in the topic, and as a result your interest also increased. Like all people, students tend to imitate behaviors and attitudes, and teachers who are enthusiastic about the topics they teach increase the likelihood that students will feel the same way.

The impact of modeling has important implications for teachers because students constantly observe their actions. For example, imagine how you would feel if one of your instructors said, “I know this stuff is boring, but we have to learn it” compared to, “Now this topic is exciting; it will help us understand how our students think.” Obviously, you’re more likely to be interested in the second topic.

The impact of modeling goes farther. If you want your students to be courteous and respectful to you and each other, for instance, you must treat them with courtesy and respect. If you want them to be responsible and conscientious, you must model these same characteristics in ways such as returning their papers promptly, having your instructional materials organized and ready to use, and using your instructional time effectively.

As we said at the beginning of this section, creating productive learning environments begins with the teacher, and caring, high personal teaching efficacy, positive expectations, and teacher modeling are essential elements of effective classrooms.

Check Your Understanding

2.1 Why is caring important for a productive learning environment? What can teachers do to show they care?

2.2 What are personal teacher efficacy and positive teacher expectations? How are they related?

2.3 What is teacher modeling? How is it related to teacher enthusiasm?

For feedback, see Appendix A, Check Your Understanding, located in the back of this text.
To begin this section, let’s revisit Shannon’s classroom, where she is involved in a math lesson reviewing decimals and percentages during the second marking period of the school year.

“What kind of problem is this, . . . Gabriel?” she asks as she walks down the aisle and points to a problem on the overhead.

“. . . It’s . . . a percentage problem,” Gabriel responds after thinking for a few seconds.

As soon as Shannon walks past him, Kevin sticks his foot across the aisle, tapping Alison on the leg with his shoe while he watches Shannon’s back. “Stop it, Kevin,” Alison mutters, swiping at him with her hand.

Shannon turns, comes back up the aisle, and continues, “Good, Gabriel,” and standing next to Kevin, asks, “And how do we know it’s a percentage problem, . . . Kevin?” looking directly at him.

“Uhhh . . .”

“What words in the problem give us a clue that it’s a percentage problem, Kevin?”

“. . . Which is the better buy?” Kevin answers, pointing at the sales numbers from the two different stores. “We have to figure out which store sale saved us more. That’s a percentage problem.”

“Good,” Shannon replies, and she then moves over to the overhead and displays additional word problems involving percentages.

“Go ahead and do the first problem,” Shannon directs. Be sure you’re able to explain your answers.”

She watches as the students work on the problem and then moves over to Sondra, who has been whispering and passing notes to Nicole across the aisle. “Move up here,” she says quietly, nodding to a desk at the front of the room.

“What did I do?” Sondra protests.

“When we talked about our rules at the beginning of the year, we agreed that it was important to listen when other people are talking and to be quiet when others are working,” Shannon whispers.

She watches as Sondra changes seats. Then, tapping her knuckle on the overhead, Shannon says, “Okay, let’s see how we did on the problem. Explain what you did first, . . . Juanita.”

Shannon’s experience illustrates why classroom management can be a vexing problem for teachers. She had carefully planned her lesson and was conducting it effectively, but she still had to respond to Kevin’s and Sondra’s disruptions. Incidents like these are common in many classrooms, and, if left unattended, they can seriously disrupt learning.

Classroom Management: A National Concern

From the 1960s until the present, national polls have identified classroom management as one of the most challenging problems teachers face. In 2003 and 2004, the public viewed it as the second greatest problem facing schools, and in 2005 it ranked third after lack of financial support and overcrowded schools (Rose & Gallup, 2005). It has historically been the primary concern of beginning teachers, and disruptive students are an important source of stress for beginners and veterans alike (Bohn, Roehrig, & Pressley, 2004; Public Agenda, 2004). It is a major reason that teachers leave the profession during their first 3 years; it’s also a primary cause of teachers leaving urban classrooms (L. Weiner, 2002); and colleges of education are being asked to address the issue more carefully (J. Johnson, 2005).

Classroom management has become a major concern of policy makers, parents, and the public at large, particularly in the wake of highly publicized incidents of school violence such as the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 that left 14 students and a teacher dead, and Red Lake, Minnesota, in 2005 resulting in the deaths of 7 people including a teacher and security guard. Although incidents of school violence cause fear and concern in both parents and students, they are extremely rare (National Center for Education
Classroom management. Teachers’ strategies that create and maintain an orderly learning environment.

Discipline. Teachers’ responses to student misbehavior.

Chapter 11 Creating Productive Learning Environments

Statistics, 2005): establishing and maintaining orderly, learning-focused classrooms is the major challenge teachers face.

The importance of classroom management in creating productive learning environments is well documented. One group of researchers concluded, “Effective classroom management has been shown to increase student engagement, decrease disruptive behaviors, and enhance use of instructional time, all of which result in improved student achievement” (Wang et al., 1993, p. 262).

Classroom Management Goals

Some of the earliest research on classroom management was done by a researcher named Jacob Kounin (1970), who found that the key to orderly classrooms is the teacher’s ability to prevent problems from occurring in the first place, rather than handling misbehavior once it occurs. This research has been consistently corroborated over the years (Emmer, Evertson, & Worsham, 2006; Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2006; Good & Brophy, 2003). Experts estimate that anticipation and prevention make up 80 percent of an effective management system (Freiberg, 1999b).

This research was important because it helped teachers understand the difference between classroom management, teachers’ strategies that create and maintain an orderly learning environment, and discipline, teachers’ responses to student misbehavior. Expert teachers place primary emphasis on management, which reduces their need for discipline.

We now have an answer to the second item on our introductory “Professional Knowledge” survey, “Teachers who have the most orderly classrooms are those who can quickly and effectively respond to student misbehavior.” Though it is important to respond to management problems quickly, the most important aspect of effective classroom managers is that they are proactive and prevent problems before they occur through careful planning.

Effective classroom managers have three primary goals:

- Develop learner responsibility.
- Create a positive classroom climate.
- Maximize time and opportunities for learning.

Let’s look at them.

Developing Learner Responsibility

Earlier in the chapter, we said that productive learning environments are learner centered, where teachers emphasize personal and social development. As conceptions of classroom management move away from discipline and toward prevention, educators place increased emphasis on helping students take responsibility for their own behaviors and their own roles in creating productive learning environments. Both contribute to personal and social development.

Student understanding is essential for developing responsibility (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Jones, 2005). Students need to understand why an orderly environment is necessary and their role in creating one. Students obey rules because the rules make sense, instead of obeying rules simply because they exist or because they will be punished for breaking one. Teachers promote this orientation by emphasizing the reasons for rules and procedures and explicitly teaching responsibility.

Let’s see how one middle school teacher, Doug Ramsey, does this.

Allen, a rambunctious seventh grader, runs down the hall toward the lunchroom. As he rounds the corner, he bumps into Alyssia, causing her to drop her books.

“Oops,” he replies, continuing his race to the lunchroom.

“Hold it, Allen,” Doug, who is monitoring the hall, commands. “Go back and help her pick up her books and apologize.”

“Aww.”

“Go on,” Doug says firmly.
Allen walks back to Alyssia, helps her pick up her books, mumbles an apology, and then returns. As he approaches, Doug again stops him.

“Now, why did I make you do that?” Doug asks.

“Cuz we’re not supposed to run.”

“Sure,” Doug says evenly, “but more important, if people are running in the halls, what might happen?”

“Somebody might get hurt,” Allen responds sheepishly.

“Exactly, and we don’t want that to happen. . . . That’s why we have a rule saying, don’t run in the hallways. Remember that you’re responsible for your actions. Think about not wanting to hurt yourself or anybody else, and the next time you’ll walk whether a teacher is here or not. . . . Now, go on to lunch.”

By emphasizing the reason for the rule prohibiting running in the hallways, Doug helped Allen understand his behavior and its effect on other people. Research indicates that children who understand the effects of their actions on others become more altruistic and are more likely to take actions to make up for their misbehavior (Berk, 2007).

Developing student responsibility is both sensible and practical. Learners are more likely to obey rules when they understand the reasons for them, one of which is to protect their rights and the rights of others (Good & Brophy, 2003). This responsibility orientation can also contribute to ethical thinking and character development (Berk, 2007). For instance, in time, students may learn not to call each other insulting names, because name calling not only is unacceptable but it also hurts other people’s feelings. By promoting student understanding and responsibility, teachers find that classroom management becomes easier and students develop personally. Such development takes time, but with effort it can be accomplished.

Creating a Positive Classroom Climate

We emphasized the importance of positive classroom climate earlier in the chapter, and an effective classroom management system contributes to this climate (D. Brown, 2004). Students are more likely to feel safe, secure, and welcome when their classroom environment is orderly and predictable. And students are more likely to be courteous and respectful in an orderly classroom. It is virtually impossible to create a positive classroom climate if students are disruptive or disrespectful (Certo, Cauley, & Chafen, 2002; Davis, 2003).

Maximizing Time and Opportunities for Learning

Throughout the chapter we have emphasized that learning is the central purpose of schooling. To optimize learning, teachers must use their available time efficiently. Maximizing the amount of time available for learning is the third goal of classroom management. To meet this goal, some reformers have suggested lengthening the school year, school day, and even the amount of time devoted to certain subjects. Improving learning by increasing study time isn’t as simple as it appears on the surface, however, because just allocating more time to a topic may not result in significant increases in learning (C. Weinstein & Mignano, 2003).

Classroom time exists at four different levels:

• Allocated time
• Instructional time
• Engaged time
• Academic learning time

The levels can be viewed as the area of a series of concentric circles, and the correlation with learning becomes stronger as the areas of the circles get smaller. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 11.1 and discussed in the following paragraphs.
Allocated time is the amount of time a teacher designates for a particular content area or topic. For example, teachers in elementary schools typically allocate much of their time to reading, language arts, and math, with much less allocated to science, social studies, and other subjects. Although middle, junior high, and high school teachers appear to have less control over time allocations because of their fixed schedules and bells signaling the beginning and end of class periods, all teachers have considerable flexibility. A 10th-grade English teacher, for example, could choose to emphasize writing rather than grammar or literature by simply spending more time on it.

Instructional time is the amount left for teaching after teachers have completed routine management and administrative tasks, such as taking roll, returning papers, and making announcements. Teachers also lose instructional time when they respond to student disruptions and make transitions from one activity to another. Some lost time is out of a teachers’ control, but they are often unaware of time as a valuable resource, thinking of it instead as something to be filled, used up, or even “killed.” For example, compare two teachers. One has a warm-up exercise on the board when students enter the classroom, and takes roll and completes routine tasks while they finish it. She then moves immediately to her lesson, and when finished, gives an assignment, and monitors the class while they work on it. A second teacher takes roll and completes routine tasks while her students sit talking. After a few minutes, she begins her lesson and finishes it with 10 minutes left in the period, during which she lets students talk quietly. If these differences represent patterns, the second teacher loses nearly 40 hours of instructional time over the course of a school year! The obvious result is less student learning.

Imagine going into a classroom to observe a teacher. Intuitively, one of the first things you would look for is whether students are paying attention and thinking about the current topic. This describes engaged time or time-on-task, which is the time students actually spend actively involved in learning activities. The correlation between engaged time and learning is much higher than the correlation between learning and either allocated or instructional time.

Teachers influence the engagement rates of their students with the instructional strategies they use. Interactive strategies, such as questioning and group work, which place students in active roles, result in more engaged time than strategies such as lecture, which places students in passive roles (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007).
Academic learning time combines student engagement with success to produce learning. (Michael Newman/PhotoEdit Inc.)

Student frustration also influences engaged time. If work is beyond students’ capabilities, they become frustrated, give up, and go off task. Success is a key variable in these cases, which leads to the concept of **academic learning time**: the amount of time students are both engaged and successful. When academic learning time is high, both learning and student motivation increase (Brophy, 2004; Stipek, 2002).

So, now we know the answer to the third item on our introductory survey, “The most effective way to increase the amount students learn about a content area, such as math, is to allocate more time to the study of the content area.” Though allocating more time to a topic can have a weak positive effect on learning, the most effective way to increase learning is by increasing academic learning time. Students who are successfully engaged in a topic learn significantly more than those who aren’t.

**Preventing Problems Through Planning**

In productive classroom environments, management is nearly invisible. The atmosphere is calm but not rigid, movement around the classroom and interaction in lessons are comfortable, and students work quietly. Learning is taking place. Teachers give few directions that focus on behavior, they reprimand students infrequently, and reprimands rarely intrude on learning. This was the case in Shannon’s lesson; she stopped Kevin’s and Sondra’s disruptions without interrupting the flow of the lesson.

The cornerstone of an effective management system is a clearly understood and consistently monitored set of rules and procedures that prevents management problems before they occur (Emmer et al., 2006; Evertson et al., 2006). Obviously, some classes are tougher to manage than others, but an orderly classroom is possible in most instances. It doesn’t happen by accident, however. It requires careful planning, and beginning teachers often underestimate the amount of time and energy it takes.

In planning rules and procedures, effective teachers consider the developmental levels of their students. For example, first graders are usually compliant and eager to please their teachers, but they also have short attention spans and tire easily (Evertson et al., 2006). In comparison, middle schoolers often attempt to test their developing independence, and they’re sometimes rebellious and capricious. They need rules that are clearly stated and administered (Emmer et al., 2006). If you’re a first-grade teacher, you will make different planning decisions than if you’re a middle school teacher. For first-grade students, you’ll need to carefully teach rules and procedures through modeling and examples and systematically reinforce them over time. Middle schoolers understand rules and procedures but need firm and consistent application of them combined with caring and positive expectations for good behavior (C. Weinstein, 2007).

**Preparing Procedures and Rules**

Having considered your students’ developmental characteristics, you also need to make decisions about procedures and rules you will implement in your classroom. **Procedures** are the routines students follow in their daily learning activities, such as how they turn in papers, sharpen pencils, and make transitions from one activity to another. For instance, Shannon’s students turn in their papers from the ends of the rows, with each student putting his or her paper on the top of the stack as it moves forward. This allows Shannon to collect the stacks from the students in the front, and when she returns the papers, she simply gives the stacks to the first students in each row, they take their papers and pass the stacks back to the students behind them. Simple procedures such as these both create a sense of order for students and save teachers time and energy.
Effective teachers create procedures for activities such as

- Entering and leaving the classroom
- Handing in and returning papers
- Accessing materials such as scissors and paper
- Sharpening pencils
- Making trips to the bathroom
- Making up work after an absence

After planning and teaching students about procedures, expert teachers have students practice until the procedures become routines that students follow virtually without thinking about them.

Rules (e.g., “Listen when someone else is talking”) are guidelines that provide standards for acceptable classroom behavior, and research confirms their value in creating productive learning environments (Emmer et al., 2006; Evertson et al., 2006). When consistently enforced, clear, reasonable rules not only reduce behavior problems that interfere with learning but also promote a feeling of pride and responsibility in the classroom community. Perhaps surprisingly, students also see the enforcement of rules as evidence of caring: “Students also say that they want teachers to articulate and enforce clear standards of behavior. They view this not just as part of the teacher’s job but as evidence that the teacher cares about them” (Brophy, 1998, p. 23).

Some examples of rules at different grade levels are found in Table 11.1. Note that some rules occur at all levels, such as students staying in their seats and waiting for permission to speak. Other rules are specific to a grade level and reflect the developmental characteristics of students at that level.

Deciding on rules for your classroom is the first step; actually implementing and making them work is the next. Guidelines for implementing rules include:

- State rules positively.
- Emphasize rationales for rules.
- Minimize the number of rules.
- Monitor rules throughout the school year.

Each of these guidelines is intended to help students understand rules and the reasons for them, and this understanding helps students begin to accept responsibility for their
own behavior. Stating rules positively communicates desirable expectations for students. Providing rationales for rules is perhaps the most essential guideline. Students are much more likely to accept responsibility for their own behavior and obey rules when they understand the reasons for them. Keeping the number small helps prevent students from breaking rules simply because they forget. Finally, in spite of teachers’ best efforts during planning and the initial teaching of rules, students will need periodic reminders throughout the year.

Intervening Effectively

Even when teachers have planned carefully, disruptions inevitably occur, as we saw in Shannon’s lesson. Dealing with off-task or potentially disruptive behavior requires immediate and

### TABLE 11.1 Examples of Classroom Rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Grade Teacher</th>
<th>Seventh-Grade Teacher</th>
<th>Tenth-Grade Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• We raise our hands before speaking.</td>
<td>• Be in your seat and quiet when the bell rings.</td>
<td>• Do all grooming outside class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We leave our seats only when given permission by the teacher.</td>
<td>• Follow directions the first time they’re given.</td>
<td>• Be in your seat before the bell rings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We stand politely in line at all times.</td>
<td>• Bring covered textbooks, notebook, pen, pencils, and planner to class every day.</td>
<td>• Stay in your seat at all times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We keep our hands to ourselves.</td>
<td>• Raise your hand for permission to speak or to leave your seat.</td>
<td>• Bring all materials daily. This includes your book, notebook, pen/pencil, and paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We listen when someone else is talking.</td>
<td>• Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself.</td>
<td>• Give your full attention to others in discussions, and wait your turn to speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leave class only when dismissed by the teacher.</td>
<td>• Leave when I dismiss you, not when the bell rings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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**IN TODAY’S CLASSROOMS: VIDEO**

Establishing Rules and Procedures at the Beginning of the School Year

Having seen how important rules and procedures are for an effective classroom management system, you now can see how one teacher implements these in her classroom.

The episode focuses on a middle school teacher who takes the time at the beginning of the school year to describe and explain the rules and procedures for the school year. As she describes each rule, she helps students understand how it contributes to a productive learning environment. In addition, she also includes a community-building exercise in which students in the class get to know each other better.

To complete this activity, go to the Becoming a Professional DVD, and view the video episode “Establishing Rules and Procedures at the Beginning of the School Year.”

To answer questions about the video online and receive immediate feedback, go to the Companion Website at [www.prenhall.com/kauchak](http://www.prenhall.com/kauchak), then to the In Today’s Classroom module for Chapter 11.
judicious decision making. If a misbehavior is brief and minor, such as a student asking another student a quick question, it often can be ignored. However, if the behavior has the potential to disrupt the learning activity, you must intervene. Some guidelines to help you intervene effectively include the following:

- Intervene immediately.
- Direct the intervention at the correct student(s).
- Use the least intrusive intervention.

Let’s see how Shannon implemented these guidelines. First, after concluding that Kevin’s and Sondra’s behaviors could distract others and detract from learning, she intervened immediately. Second, she identified the correct students. She recognized that Alison’s muttering was a response to Kevin tapping her, so she said nothing to Alison; instead, she quickly moved to where Kevin was seated to address his behavior. Third, she used the least intrusive intervention possible. She stopped Kevin’s misbehavior by looking him in the eye and calling on him, and she briefly whispered her direction to Sondra and reminded her of an agreed-upon classroom rule. Her actions simultaneously stopped the misbehaviors without disrupting the flow of her lesson.

During the episode, Shannon demonstrated a concept called withitness, a teacher’s awareness of what is going on in all parts of the classroom at all times and the communication of this awareness to students both verbally and nonverbally (Kounin, 1970). Withit teachers seem to have eyes in the backs of their heads, and they use this awareness to monitor and direct student behavior. For instance, had Shannon admonished Alison for her muttering instead of Kevin, she would have “caught the wrong one,” and in doing so, communicate that she didn’t know what was going on in her classroom.

Keeping a lesson moving while simultaneously intervening requires sophisticated skills, but expert teachers do it virtually without thinking. In some cases, teachers may need to use a more intrusive intervention, such as reprimanding a student, talking to a student in the hallway, or even removing the student from the classroom if the disruption is severe. However, with effective instruction and careful planning, most disruptions can be handled as Shannon did.

Handling Serious Management Problems: Violence and Aggression

Tyrone, one of your students, has difficulty maintaining his attention and staying on task. He frequently makes loud and inappropriate comments in class and disrupts learning activities. You warn him, reminding him that being disruptive is unacceptable, and blurting out another comment will result in time-out. Within a minute, Tyrone blurts out again. “Please go to the time-out area,” you say evenly. “I’m not going and you can’t make me,” he says defiantly. He remains seated at his desk.

How do you react?

As you work with a small group of your fourth graders, a fight suddenly breaks out between Trey and Neil, who are supposed to be working on a group project together. You look up to the sounds of shouting and see Trey flailing at Neil, who is essentially attempting to fend off Trey’s blows. Trey is often verbally aggressive and sometimes threatens other students.

What do you do?

We have emphasized repeatedly that productive learning environments are safe and inviting; the threat of violence obviously disrupts this feeling. Earlier we said that incidents...
of school violence are rare. As part of school wide safety programs (see Chapter 4), most schools have created prevention programs, taken security measures, and established detailed procedures to protect students and teachers from violent acts such as those that make national headlines (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). When serious problems do arise, teachers are most likely to encounter verbal aggression or student fighting. These incidents are also quite rare, but teachers must be prepared for them. Once you know what options are available, you will feel more confident about your ability to deal with these problems.

When students are verbally aggressive, your goal is to keep the problem from escalating.

Responding to Tyrone in a calm and unemotional tone of voice is a first step. Once the student has calmed down, you can arrange to talk to him after school, send him to a school counselor, or ask for additional support. In the case involving fighting, you should follow
three steps: (1) Stop the incident (if possible), (2) protect the victim, and (3) get help. For instance, a loud noise, such as shouting, clapping, or slamming a chair against the floor will often surprise the students enough so they’ll stop. At that point, you can begin to talk to them, check to see if anyone is hurt, and then take the students to the main office, where help is available. If your interventions don’t stop the scuffle, you should immediately rush an uninvolved student to the office for help. Unless you’re sure that you can separate the students without danger to yourself, or them, attempting to do so is unwise.

You are legally required to intervene in the case of a fight. If you ignore a fight, even on the playground, parents can sue for negligence on the grounds that you failed to protect a student from injury (Fischer et al., 2006). However, the law doesn’t say that you’re required to physically break up the fight; immediately reporting it to administrators is an acceptable form of intervention.

Critics argue that preoccupation with order and control can send the wrong message to students about classrooms and learning.

Critics further contend that assertive discipline treats symptoms, such as talking without permission, as the problem instead of examining possible causes, such as ineffective instruction or not understanding why it is important to give everyone a chance to speak.

Despite the controversy, the program is enormously popular and widespread. It is difficult to find a school district in the country that hasn’t had at least some exposure to assertive discipline, and probably more than a million teachers have been trained in at least some aspects of the program.

You Take a Position

Now it’s your turn to take a position on the issue. State in writing whether you feel that assertive discipline will contribute to a productive learning environment or detract from it, and provide a two-page rationale for your position.

For additional references and resources, go to the Companion Website at www.prenhall.com/kauchak, then to the Teaching in an Era of Reform module for Chapter 11. You can respond online or submit your response to your instructor.
So, now we know the answer to the fourth item on our introductory survey, “Teachers are legally required to intervene if students in their classrooms become involved in a fight or a scuffle.” Teachers are legally required to intervene if a fight or scuffle occurs in their classroom. To ignore would place students’ safety in jeopardy and could result in a liability lawsuit.

Breaking up a scuffle is, of course, only a short-term solution. Whenever students are aggressive or violent, experts recommend involving parents and other school personnel (Burstyn et al., 2001). Parents want to be notified immediately if school problems occur. In addition, school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and principals have all been trained to deal with these problems and can provide advice and assistance. Experienced teachers can also provide a wealth of information about how they’ve handled similar problems. No teacher should face serious problems of violence or aggression alone. Further, excellent programs are available to teach conflict resolution and to help troubled students (D. Johnson & Johnson, 2006). If teachers can get help when they first suspect a problem, many incidents can be prevented.

To conclude this section, we want to put violence and aggression into perspective. Although they are possibilities—and you should understand options for dealing with them—the vast majority of your management problems will involve issues of cooperation and motivation. Many problems can be prevented, others can be dealt with quickly, while some require individual attention. We have all heard about students carrying guns to school and incidents of assault on teachers. Statistically, however, considering the huge numbers of students who pass through schools each day, these incidents remain very infrequent.

Effective Classroom Management in Urban Schools

Urban schools provide unique challenges to teachers attempting to create productive learning environments. Consider the case of Mary Gregg, a first-grade teacher in an urban school in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Mary’s classroom is a small portable room with a low ceiling and very loud air fans. The room has one teacher table and six rectangular student tables with six chairs at each. Mary has 32 first graders (14 girls and 18 boys). Twenty-five of the children are children of color; a majority are recent immigrants from Southeast Asia, with some African Americans and Latinos, and seven European Americans. (LePage et al., 2005)

Research on teaching in urban contexts reveals three themes. First, students in urban environments come from very diverse backgrounds (Noguera, 2003a; Macionis & Parillo, 2007). As a result of this diversity, their prior knowledge and experiences vary, and what they view as acceptable patterns of behavior also varies, sometimes dramatically. Second, urban classes are often large; Mary had 32 first graders in a room built for 25. Third, and perhaps most pernicious, negative stereotypes about urban environments create the perception that creating a productive learning environment through classroom management is difficult if not impossible. Two of the most common stereotypes are, “Students can’t control themselves,” and “Students don’t know how to behave because the parents don’t care” (Goldstein, 2004, p. 43). In response to this stereotype, urban teachers often “teach defensively,” “choosing methods of presentation and evaluation that simplify content and reduce demands on students in return for classroom order...
and minimal student compliance on assignments” (LePage et al., 2005, p. 331). (We discuss effective instruction in urban classrooms in Chapter 12.)

This defensive approach to classroom management and instruction results in lowered expectations and decreased student motivation. Students who are not motivated to learn are more likely to be disruptive because they don’t see the point in what they’re being asked to do, a downward spiral of motivation and learning occurs, and management issues become increasingly troublesome.

However, it doesn’t have to be this way. In spite of diversity and large numbers of students in a small classroom, effective urban teachers can create active and orderly learning environments. Let’s look at Mary Gregg’s classroom management during a lesson on buoyancy.

Once into the science activity, management appears to be invisible. There is, of course, some splashing and throwing things into the water, but as the lesson progresses, the teacher engages in on-the-spot logistical management decisions. For instance, everyone is supposed to get a chance to go to the table to choose objects to be placed in cups. After choosing the first one to go, Mary sets them to the task. Very quickly, it is the second person’s turn and the students do not know how to choose who should get the next turn. At first she says “you choose,” then foresees an “It’s my turn. No it’s my turn” problem and redirects them with a counterclockwise motion to go around the table. (LePage et al., 2005, pp. 328–329)

This example demonstrates that, while challenging, classroom management in an urban environment doesn’t have to be overly restrictive or punitive. How is this accomplished? Research suggests four important factors:

• Caring and supportive teachers
• Clear standards for acceptable behavior
• Structure
• Effective instruction

Caring and Supportive Teachers

We have emphasized the need for caring and supportive teachers throughout this chapter. Teachers who care are important in all schools but are critical in urban environments. When students perceive their teachers as uncaring, disengagement from school life occurs, and students are much more likely to display disruptive behaviors than their more involved peers (Charles, 2005; Jones & Jones, 2004).

Clear Standards for Acceptable Behavior

Because they bring diverse experiences to class, urban students’ views of acceptable behaviors often vary. As a result, being clear about what behaviors are and are not acceptable is essential in urban classrooms (D. Brown, 2004). As we saw earlier in the chapter, students see clear standards of behavior as evidence that the teacher cares about them. One urban student had this to say about clear behavioral expectations:

She’s probably the strictest teacher I’ve ever had because she doesn’t let you slide by if you’ve made a mistake. She going [sic] to let you know. If you’ve made a mistake, she’s going to let you know it. And, if you’re getting bad marks, she’s going to let you know it. She’s one of my strictest teachers, and that’s what makes me think she cares about us the most. (Alder, 2002, pp. 251–252).

The line between clear standards for behavior and an overemphasis on control is not cut and dried. One major difference is that in productive urban classrooms, order is created through “the ethical use of power” (Alder, 2002, p. 245). Effective teachers are demanding but also helpful; they model and emphasize personal responsibility, respect, and cooperation;
and they are willing to take the time to ensure that students understand the reasons for rules (C. Weinstein & Mignano, 2003). Further, in responding to the inevitable incidents of students failing to bring needed materials to class, talking, or otherwise being disruptive, effective teachers in urban schools enforce rules but provide rationales for them and remind students that completing assigned tasks is essential because it helps develop the skills needed for more advanced work (D. Brown, 2004). In contrast, less-effective teachers tend to focus on negative consequences, such as, “If you don’t finish this work, you won’t pass the class” (Manouchehri, 2004).

Structure

Students in urban schools sometimes come from environments where stability and structure may not be a regular part of everyday life. This makes order, structure, and predictability even more important in urban classrooms. Procedures that lead to well-established routines are important, and predictable consequences for behaviors are essential. A predictable environment leads to an atmosphere of order and safety, which is crucial for developing the sense of attachment to school that is essential for learning and motivation.

Effective Instruction

If students aren’t learning and aren’t actively involved in classroom life, management problems are inevitable. Classroom management and instruction are interdependent, and, unfortunately, students in urban classrooms are often involved in low-level activities such as listening to lectures and doing seat work that isn’t challenging. This type of instruction contributes to low motivation and feelings of disengagement, which further increases the likelihood of management problems. We discuss instructional strategies that challenge and motivate students in Chapter 12.

Check Your Understanding

3.1 Why has classroom management become a national concern?
3.2 What are the major goals of classroom management? How do they contribute to a productive learning environment?
3.3 How are classroom management and discipline different? How can teachers prevent management problems through planning?
3.4 What are the characteristics of effective interventions?
3.5 What actions—both short- and long-term—should teachers take when encountering incidents of violence and aggression?
3.6 What makes urban classrooms unique in terms of classroom management?

For feedback, see Appendix A, Check Your Understanding, located in the back of this text.

Creating Productive Learning Environments: Involving Parents

Learning is a cooperative venture; teachers, students, and parents are in it together. Students must be cooperative and motivated to learn if a learning environment is to be productive, and parental support is essential for promoting this cooperation and motivation.
Benefits of Parental Involvement

Students benefit from parental involvement in several ways:

- Greater willingness to do homework
- Higher long-term achievement
- More positive attitudes and behaviors
- Better attendance and graduation rates
- Greater enrollment in postsecondary education (Garcia, 2004; Hong & Ho, 2005)

These outcomes result from parents’ increased participation in school activities, higher expectations for their children’s achievement, and teachers’ increased understanding of learners’ home environments. Deciding how to respond to a student’s disruptive behavior is easier, for example, when his teacher knows that his mother or father has lost a job, his parents are going through a divorce, or a family member is ill.

Parents can also help reinforce classroom management plans. One teacher reported:

I had this boy in my class who was extremely disruptive. He wouldn’t work, kept “forgetting” his homework, distracted other children, wandered about the room. You name it; he did it. The three of us—the mother, the boy and I—talked about what we could do, and we decided to try a system of home rewards. We agreed that I would send a note home each day, reporting on the boy’s behavior. For every week with at least three good notes, the mother let him rent a video game. In this way, the child’s access to video games was directly dependent on his behavior. This system really made a difference. (C. Weinstein & Mignano, 2003, p. 117)

Parent–teacher collaboration can have long-term benefits for teachers. For example, teachers who encourage parental involvement report more positive feelings about teaching and their school. They also have higher expectations for parents and rate them as being more helpful (Epstein, 2001).

This section answers the fifth question on our “Professional Knowledge: Test Yourself” questionnaire. Involving parents in their children’s education can have a number of beneficial results, including even increased student achievement.

Strategies for Involving Parents

Virtually all schools have formal communication channels, such as open houses (usually occurring within the first 2 weeks of the year, when teachers introduce themselves and describe general guidelines); interim progress reports, which tell parents about their youngsters’ achievements at the midpoint of each grading period; parent–teacher conferences; and, of course, report cards. Although these processes are schoolwide and necessary, you can do more, such as the following:

- Send a letter home to parents within the first week of school that expresses positive expectations for students and solicits parents’ help (see Figure 11.2).
- Maintain communication by sending home packets of student work, descriptions of new units, and other information about academic work.
- Emphasize students’ accomplishments through newsletters, e-mails, or individual notes.

It is important to note that all forms of communication with parents need to be carefully proofread to ensure that they are free of spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors. First impressions are important and lasting. Your communications create perceptions of your competence, and errors detract from your credibility.

One of the most effective ways to involve parents is to call them. Earlier in the chapter, we said that time is the best indicator of caring that exists. When you allocate some of your
August 22, 2007

Dear Parents,

I am looking forward to a productive and exciting year, and I am writing this letter to encourage your involvement and support. You always have been, and still are, the most important people in your child’s education. We cannot do the job without you.

For us to work together most effectively, some guidelines are necessary. With the students’ help, we prepared the ones listed here. Please read this information carefully, and sign where indicated. If you have any questions, please call me at Southside Elementary School (555-5935) or at home (555-8403) in the evenings.

Sincerely,

Shannon Brinkman

AS A PARENT, I WILL TRY MY BEST TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

1. I will ask my child about school every day (evening meal is a good time). I will ask about what he or she is studying and try to learn about it.
2. I will provide a quiet time and place each evening for homework. I will set an example by also working at that time or reading while my child is working.
3. Instead of asking if homework is finished, I will ask to see it. I will ask my child to explain some of the information to me to check for understanding.

Parent’s Signature ____________________________

STUDENT SURVIVAL GUIDELINES

1. I will be in class and seated when the bell rings.
2. I will follow directions the first time they are given.
3. I will bring homework, notebook, paper, and a sharp pencil to class each day.
4. I will raise my hand for permission to speak or leave my seat.
5. I will keep my hands, feet, and objects to myself.

HOMEWORK GUIDELINES

1. Our motto is I WILL ALWAYS TRY. I WILL NEVER GIVE UP.
2. I will complete all assignments. If an assignment is not finished or ready when called for, I understand that I get no credit for it.
3. If I miss work because of an absence, it is my responsibility to come in before school (8:15–8:45) to make it up.
4. I know that I get one day to make up a quiz or test or turn in my work for each day I’m absent.
5. I understand that extra credit work is not given. If I do all the required work, extra credit isn’t necessary.

Student’s Signature _________________________________
personal time to call parents, this communicates your commitment to their child better than any other way. Also, talking to a parent allows you to be specific in describing a student’s needs and gives you a chance to again solicit support. If a student is missing assignments, for example, you can alert the parent, ask for possible causes or explanations, and encourage the parents to more closely monitor their child’s study habits.

When we talk to parents, we need to establish a positive, cooperative tone that lays the foundation for joint efforts. Consider the following:

“Hello, Mrs. Hansen? This is Connie Lichter, Jared’s math teacher.”

“Oh, uh, is something wrong?”

“Not really. I just wanted to call to share with you some information about your son. He’s a bright, energetic boy, and I enjoy seeing him in class every day. But he’s been having some problems handing in his homework assignments in my class.”

“I didn’t know he had math homework. He never brings any home.”

“That might be part of the problem. He just might forget that he has any to do. I have a suggestion. Why don’t we set up a system that will help him remember. I’ll ask the class to write down their math homework in their folders every day. Please ask Jared to share that with you every night, and make sure that it’s done. When it’s done, why don’t you initial it so I know you and he talked? I think that will help a lot. How does that sound?”

“Sure. I’ll try that.”

“Good. We don’t want him to fall behind. If he has problems with the homework, have him come to my room before or after school, and I’ll help him. Is there anything else I can do? . . . If not, I look forward to meeting you soon.”

This phone conversation was positive and created a partnership between home and school. In addition, it created a specific plan of action.

Making Connections:
To deepen your understanding of the topics in this section of the chapter and integrate them with topics you’ve already studied, go to the Making Connections module for Chapter 11 at www.prenhall.com/kauchak. Respond to questions 7 and 8.
Communicating with Parents

Classrooms with large numbers of students from diverse backgrounds present unique communication challenges. Lower parent participation in school activities is often associated with families that are members of cultural minorities, are lower socioeconomic status (SES), and have a child enrolled in either special education or English-as-a-second-language programs (Tiedt & Tiedt, 2005; C. Weinstein & Mignano, 2003). Each factor makes communication between home and school more challenging, both for parents and teachers.

Economic, Cultural, and Language Barriers

Economics, culture, and language can all create barriers that limit the involvement of minority and low-SES parents in school activities (Barton et al., 2004; Gollnick & Chinn, 2006). Low-SES parents frequently lack resources—such as child care, transportation, Internet access, and even telephones—that allow them to engage in school activities. Multiple jobs often prevent parents from helping their children with homework. In addition, high rates of family mobility can create obstacles to effective parent-school communication (Nakagawa et al., 2002).

Cultural differences can sometimes be misinterpreted. Because of their respect for teachers, for example, some Asian and Latino parents hesitate to become involved in matters they believe are best handled by the school, but teachers sometimes misinterpret this deference to authority as apathy (C. Weinstein & Mignano, 2003).

Language can be another barrier. Parents of bilingual students may not speak English, which leaves the child responsible for interpreting communications sent home by teachers. Homework also poses a special problem because parents cannot interpret assignments or provide help, and schools sometimes compound the difficulty by using educational jargon when they send letters home.

Involving Minority Parents

Teachers can narrow the home-school gap by offering parents specific strategies for working with their children (Epstein, 2001). Let’s see how one teacher does this:

Nancy Collins, a middle school English teacher, has students who speak five different native languages in her class. During the first 2 days of school, she prepares a letter to parents, and with the help of her students, translates it into their native languages. The letter begins by describing how pleased she was to
Defining Yourself as a Professional

You’re a first-year, sixth-grade world history teacher in an urban middle school, and you’re having a difficult time maintaining order in your classroom. You’re beginning the study of factors leading up to World War I, and you explain that one of the factors was increased nationalism—loyalty to a country’s language and culture. As you’re explaining, some of the students talk openly to each other, and a few even get out of their seats and sharpen pencils in the middle of your presentation. You point to the rules on the bulletin board, but this only seems to work for a while. You threaten them with referrals and other punishments, which work briefly, but the disruptions soon recur.

Other students seem listless and make no effort to pay attention; several even put their heads down on the desk during the lesson. You try walking around the room as you talk, and you stand near the inattentive students, but neither strategy works well. So you decide to address the issue directly. You walk up to the front of the room and say in a loud voice, “Class, this content is really important. It will help you understand why we continue to have wars in eastern Europe.” As you conclude, you hear a barely audible, “Who cares?” from one of the students.

What would you do in this situation, both long-term and immediately? Why?

To respond to this question online and receive immediate feedback, go to the Decision Making Module for Chapter 11 on the Companion Website at www.prenhall.com/kauchak.
Meeting Your Learning Objectives

1. Describe the essential characteristics of a productive learning environment.
   - A productive learning environment is a place that is learning centered. In learning-centered classrooms, the primary focus is on students acquiring essential knowledge and skills. Teacher decision making is driven by the question, “How will my actions contribute to student learning?”
   - A second characteristic of a productive learning environment is that it is learner centered—a place where students can learn about themselves and others. Productive learning environments provide opportunities for students to develop social skills such as problem solving and perspective taking. They also provide opportunities for students to learn about their own strengths and weaknesses.

2. Explain how teachers’ personal characteristics contribute to a productive learning environment.
   - Teacher caring is a crucial element of any productive classroom learning environment. It creates a foundation of trust for teacher–student relationships.
   - Personal teaching efficacy refers to a teacher’s belief that he or she can affect student learning. It results in better quality instruction and increased student–teacher interactions.
   - Positive teacher expectations refer to teacher beliefs about students’ ability to learn. Like personal teaching efficacy, it results in improved instruction and more effective teacher–student interactions.
   - Teacher modeling is a major way that teachers influence students’ attitudes and beliefs. Teachers also model enthusiasm for the topics they teach, which can influence students’ attitudes toward the subject matter.

3. Describe how classroom management contributes to a productive learning environment.
   - Classroom management is a national concern because of two major factors. First, the public often associates school violence with ineffective classroom management. Second, the public also believes, and rightly so, that there is a link between effective classroom management and increased learning.
   - Classroom management helps develop learner responsibility, it contributes to a positive classroom climate, and it maximizes time and opportunities for learning.
   - Effective classroom management depends upon a system of rules and procedures that provide guidelines for student behavior.
   - Effective interventions are immediate, target the correct student[s], and interfere with instruction and learning as little as possible.
   - Serious management problems, while rare and infrequent, can occur in classrooms. Teachers should understand procedures for dealing with these both immediately and long term.
   - Urban schools present unique management challenges. Effective urban teachers are caring and supportive, have clear standards for behavior, provide structure in their classrooms, and use effective instruction to complement their management.

4. Explain how involving parents contributes to a productive learning environment.
   - Students whose parents are involved in their education have better attitudes toward school, achieve higher, and are more likely to attend postsecondary education.
   - Teachers who encourage parental involvement also feel more positive about teaching and their school, and they have higher expectations for parents.
   - Teachers can involve parents by sending samples of student work home, emphasizing student accomplishments, and calling parents when necessary.
Developing as a Professional

Preparing for Your Licensure Exam

This exercise will provide you with practice answering questions similar to the Praxis II exam as well as your state-specific licensure exam. Read the case study, and answer the questions that follow.

Nick Giardo is excited about the beginning of his first year of teaching at Sandalwood Junior High. Student teaching was a little rocky, but he is sure that most of his problems were due to his taking over another teacher’s class in mid-year. As he sits at his desk planning for the new year, he thinks, “This has got to be better than student teaching”; then with a half smile mumbles audibly, “How could it be any worse?”

As students file into his first-period class, he is in the back of the room putting the final touches on a bulletin board. After the bell rings, he walks to the front of the room and says, “Welcome to U.S. History 101. I’m Mr. Giardo, and I’ll be your teacher for the year. I see you’ve all found seats, so why don’t we begin.”

At this point, two confused students straggle in, looking for their classrooms. One of these students belongs there, the other does not. Mr. Giardo directs the one to sit down while he escorts the other into the hallway to help him find his class. As he returns to the room, there is a general buzz of student talk. Beginning again, he says, “Okay, class. Let’s get started. This is American History, and I’m really excited about the year. I expect all of you to learn a lot about U.S. history and to become as excited about the topic as I am. Since you’ve all been in school before, I’m not going to waste a lot of time with rules. You all know how to play the game. The rules are up on the board, and I expect you to follow them . . . or else,” he concluded with a stern look around the room, attempting to make eye contact with each student.

“Instead, I’d like to jump right into the content. I want this course to be important to you, so I’d like to get some idea of the kinds of things you’d like to learn about in here. I’d like you to break up into groups of four or five, and make a list of the kinds of things you’d like to learn this year. Then we’ll come back together and discuss our lists.”
As the students begin to talk in their groups, one student raises his hand. Nick pulls up a chair and sits down to talk with the student. As he does so, students in back of him start throwing spitballs and erasers. The year is off to a rocky start.

1. Analyze Nick’s classroom based on the characteristics of a productive learning environment.
2. Assess Nick’s actions based on the human dimension of productive learning environments.
3. Assess Nick’s application of research that describes the role of rules and procedures in creating an orderly classroom.

Discussion Questions

1. Almost any teacher would agree that it is important to be a good role model. Given that belief, why do you suppose some teachers don’t model the behaviors they expect their students to imitate?
2. Why is assertive discipline so popular in many schools? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach to management?
3. How can a teacher tell if students have developed responsibility? How might the definition of responsibility change with grade level? What types of instructional and managerial strategies promote responsibility? What types discourage the development of responsibility?
4. How do the following factors influence the optimal number of procedures in a classroom?
   a. Grade level
   b. Subject matter
   c. Type of student [e.g., high versus low achiever]
   d. Type of instruction [e.g., large group versus small group]
5. What advantages are there to seeking student input on rules? Disadvantages? Is this practice more important with younger or older students? Why?
6. If you were a substitute teacher (or a student teacher) and were going to take over a class mid-year, what kinds of things would you need to know and do in terms of classroom management?

Developing as a Professional: Online Activities

Going into Schools

Go to the Companion Website at www.prenhall.com/kauchak, and click on the Going into Schools module for Chapter 11. You will find a number of school-based activities that will help you link chapter content to the schools in which you work.

Virtual Field Experience: Using Teacher Prep to Explore the Profession

If you would like to participate in a Virtual Field Experience, access the Teacher Prep Website at www.prenhall.com/teacherprep. After logging in, complete the following steps:
1. Click on “Video Classroom” on the left panel of the screen.
2. Go to “General Methods.”
3. Finally, select "Module 4: Classroom Management." This video focuses on low-profile management strategies that minimize interruptions to instruction. Answer the questions that follow the video clip.

**Online Portfolio Activities**

To develop your professional portfolio, further apply your understanding of chapter content, and address the INTASC standards, go the Companion Website at [www.prenhall.com/kauchak](http://www.prenhall.com/kauchak), then to the *Online Portfolio Activities* for Chapter 11. Complete the suggested activities.