

Classroom Management: The Proactive Approach

A 5-Part Classroom Management Mini-Course

By Adam Waxler

www.TeachingTipsMachine.com

“The best classroom management plan is a strong instructional plan”

“Assume nothing...anticipate everything”

“If you want it...Teach It!”

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Adam Waxler

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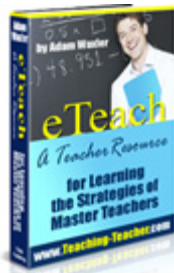
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About the Author

Adam Waxler is currently a middle school social studies teacher at Haile Middle School in Bradenton, Florida and also works as an adjunct professor at Manatee Community College.

Adam has also played a big role in teacher recruitment as well as new teacher training. He currently owns and operates several web sites that provide resources to help teachers become better teachers.

For information on some of his other work make sure to visit these web sites:



[*eTeach: A Teacher Resource for Learning the Strategies of Master Teachers*](#)



[*52 Teaching Tips*](#)



[*Your Basic Guide to Acing ANY Teacher Interview*](#)

Part I: Increase Student Motivation

Let's start with what classroom management is *not*.

Classroom management is not about creating elaborate systems of rewards and punishments. Instead, *effective* classroom management is about keeping *all* of your students actively involved in *all* of your lessons. In this manner the teacher is addressing classroom management issues *before* they arise...the teacher is being pro-active rather than re-active.

However, it is difficult to keep students actively involved if they are bored or uninterested.

That's why student boredom is one of the two major factors contributing to classroom management issues.

Therefore, it is the teacher's job to spark student interest and increase student motivation to learn.

How?

The best way to do this is by making connections between what the students are learning and what is going on in their own lives...in other words, find out what is important to them.

With social studies this is fairly easy. For example, in our unit on the "Roaring Twenties" students read an expert about "flappers" from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, but before they read I have all the students make a list of things that today's youth does that may be considered rebellious. After the students have generated their lists we then discuss the connections between today's youth and the flappers of the 1920s.

The bottom line is...if you can get the students to "want" to learn then everything else becomes much easier.

Another way teachers can go about increasing motivation to learn is with simple critical thinking questions. For example, in a lesson Japanese-Internment during World War II (when the U.S. placed Japanese-Americans in "relocation" camps), I start the lesson with the following critical thinking

question:

Do you think the President has the right, during times of war, to violate individual's rights in order to protect national security?

This critical thinking question usually turns into a heated discussion and it is at this point that I introduce the topic of Japanese-Internment. The students are then eager to learn what President Roosevelt did and whether or not it was the right thing to do.

A third way to increase motivation to learn is with video. Of course, this seems obvious, but many teachers show video at the *wrong* point in the lesson...they save it for the end.

Video should not be shown at the end of the lesson in an “if you’re good we’ll get to it” sort of way.

Instead, short video clips should be used at the beginning of lessons to spark student interest and pique curiosity.

Ok, so let’s recap. Classroom management issues are directly related to student boredom. Therefore, the teacher needs to increase student motivation to learn. Three ways teachers can accomplish this are:

1. Make connections between content and the student’s own interests.
2. Use critical thinking questions to spark heated discussions.
3. Use of video at the beginning of the lesson to pique interest and curiosity.

Part II: Limit Student Confusion

Let's face it...students (and adults for that matter) get frustrated when they do not understand what to do next. Often times for students (and adults for that matter) this frustration leads to discipline problems.

Therefore, it is important for teachers to *anticipate* and clear up any possible confusion *before* problems arise. Remember, the effective classroom management teacher is pro-active.

One way to limit student confusion is to be consistent. Your class should *never* be a surprise to your students. For example, I always have my day's agenda and, most importantly, the lesson's objective, clearly posted. And, I make absolutely certain to go through both at the beginning of *every* class. Again, I do not think these things should be a surprise to your students. Your lesson's objective is what you want your students to learn from the lesson...don't you think it would be a good idea to let your students know what it is. ☺

Another simple teaching strategy that will greatly reduce student confusion is to always *check-for-understanding*. Simply ask one or two students (at random) to repeat the directions back to you. You can do this whether you are giving directions for a worksheet or directions on how to quietly walk down the hall. If you *check-for-understanding* often throughout the lesson you will see less and less student confusion, and therefore, less classroom management problems.

Part III: Increase Class Participation

As part of any strong instructional plan you must know effective ways to increase class participation. You see, class participation and classroom management are directly connected. The more you have students actively and constructively participating in your class the less discipline problems you are going to have.

In fact, your ultimate goal should be to get 100% class participation.

Think it's impossible? It's not.

There are many simple strategies that you can use to drastically increase the percentage of students who participate in your class.

Just keep in mind, good class participation does not only consist of students raising their hands and volunteering information.

A great way to increase class participation is by combining two simple teaching strategies known as the “all-write” and the “pair & share”.

For example, instead of asking a question and having the same handful of students respond by raising their hands, I'll ask a question and tell all my students, “You have 3 minutes to write down an answer...” After their three-minute time limit is up, I will then tell all students to take 2 more minutes to discuss their answer with their partner or group.

In this way I have taken what would have been less than 10% class participation and turned it into 100% class participation. And, those students who would have raised their hands anyway have now had a chance to develop stronger answers.

By keeping students actively involved the teacher is being proactive. The teacher is limiting the opportunity for classroom management issues to arise in the first place by simply keeping the students involved in the lesson.

Part IV: Be Specific

In the last part of this course I discussed the connection between student confusion and classroom management. Another way teachers can reduce student confusion is by being *specific* with their directions.

For example, there is a big difference between these two statements:

“Take a few minutes to answer the questions.”

And ...

“Take 3 minutes to write down answers to questions 1 through 5 on your own.”

See the difference. Now, of course, the next step would be to check-for-understanding by simply having a student repeat back the directions. Actually, I would have one student repeat back how much time the students have to complete the task, another student to repeat which questions they are going to answer, and I would ask a third student who they were allowed to work with on the assignment.

Speaking of being specific, did you notice that I attached a very specific time limit to the task? This is important. Whenever you put students on a particular task make sure to attach a specific time limit. In other words, you are putting your students “on-the-clock”.

Part V: End Procrastination

By now you have received a number of tips to help you become an effective classroom management teacher. The whole basis of these tips, and this report, is to teach you how to take a proactive approach to classroom management.

However, even if you are using all these tips, even if you are using the “all-write” strategy and the “pair-share” strategy, even if you are using video, critical thinking questions, and making connections to student’s interests, even if you are making your objectives clear, and checking for understanding, and even if you are giving very specific directions...you still have problems.

The problem is it doesn’t matter how proactive you are or how many tricks you use to try to get students involved, some students still just don’t do anything, they simply procrastinate as long as they can.

Don’t get me wrong, these students are more than capable, they just simply procrastinate. They are the ones that say, “I don’t get it” as an excuse for “not doing it”.

The trick to solving this frustrating problem is in how you “monitor” the room after you give a set of directions.

First of all, you need to understand that teaching today does not involve the teacher sitting, or even standing, in one place. An effective classroom management teacher is constantly moving about the room. How else can you truly monitor student work?

Now, there is a tendency for teachers to want to go to their less-abled students first. This is natural, but it is also a mistake. If you go to your less-abled students first, who require more time, you procrastinators will simply procrastinate longer. Instead, you want to go immediately to your procrastinators with a quick “hit and run”.

First, tell procrastinator, “I’ll be back in 30 seconds (or whatever specific time you choose), and I want to see you do this.... (be specific)

Second, make absolutely sure that you return to the procrastinator in the time you specified.

Procrastination is planned or intentional stalling. Getting these students on task doesn't take much, it just takes persistence.

Do this a few times and you will see your procrastinators stop procrastinating.

And, by getting the procrastinators started on the task, you can actually spend more time with you less-abled students.

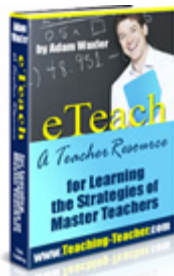
Author's Note

I truly hope you enjoyed the Classroom Management Mini-Course and have put the strategies to good use.

Remember, information is just information unless you do something with it.

Also, an effective teacher is constantly changing, growing, and improving. To continue to be a truly successful teacher requires an arsenal of effective teaching strategies that you will continue to add to your repertoire throughout your career.

If you are looking for just that...*an arsenal of effective teaching strategies*, then make sure to read some of my other works:



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[*52 Teaching Tips*](#)

And, if you're still looking to land that perfect teaching job, then read:



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5-Part Classroom Management Mini-Course Quick Reference Guide

- I. Increase Student Motivation
 - A. Make connections between content and the student's own interests
 - B. Use critical thinking questions to spark heated discussions
 - C. Use of video at the beginning of the lesson to pique interest and curiosity

- II. Limit Student Confusion
 - A. Be consistent
 - B. Check for understanding
 - C. Make daily agenda clear
 - D. Make daily objectives clear

- III. Increase Participation
 - A. Combine strategies: all-write & pair/share
- IV. Be Specific
 - A. Give specific directions
 - B. Give specific time-limits (on-the-clock)

- V. Stop Procrastination
 - A. Monitor Map: go to procrastinators first!