Student-Centered Approach to Classroom Management in English Language Teaching

Nona KERDIKOSHVILI *

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to investigate how classroom management and discipline problems can be dealt with in a student-centered way. The term "classroom management" refers to the procedures, strategies, and instructional techniques teachers use to manage student behavior and learning activities. Effective classroom management creates an environment that is conductive to teaching and learning. It is the most important - and the most difficult-skill a novice teacher has to master. Even experienced teachers often find themselves faced with a student-or an entire class- who challenges their established management skills and forces them to find new ways of dealing with classroom situations. A survey was held. The goal of the survey was to find out how well aware are school teachers in Georgia of issues of effective classroom management. I also intended to find out whether teachers hold teacher-centered or student-centered views on classroom management. Time management was emphasized. The results showed that, although student-centered approach to classroom management in English Language Teaching has already gained popularity among English teachers in Georgia, much still has to be done to be able to say that our classroom are managed in a student-centered way.

Key words: allocated time; engaged time; time on task; participation structures; self-control; procedures; rules; action zone; overlapping; maintaining a group focus; movement management; hostile response style; assertive response.

Introduction

Learning virtually always takes place within particular contexts-social group, culture, and society. Classes are particular kinds of environments. Classrooms are multidimensional. They are crowded with people, tasks, and time pressures. Many individuals, all with different goals, preferences, and abilities must share resources, accomplish various tasks, use and reuse materials without losing them, move in and out of the room, and so on. In addition, actions have multiple effects. Calling on low-ability students may encourage their participation and thinking but may slow the discussion and lead to management problems if the students cannot answer. And events occur simultaneously-everything happens at once and the pace is fast. Teachers have literally hundreds of exchanges with students during a single day.

Gaining student co-operation means much more than just dealing effectively with misbehavior. It means planning activities, having materials ready, making appropriate behavioral and academic demands on students, giving clear signals, accomplishing transitions smoothly, foreseeing problems and stopping them before they start, selecting and sequencing activities so that flow and interest are maintained – and much more.

Time Management

The aim of classroom management is to maintain a posi-

tive, productive learning environment. Dealing with timing is one of its essential aspects. Allocated time is time set aside for learning. This time is important for learning outcomes. The correlations between content studied and student learning are usually larger than the correlations between the specific teacher behaviors and student learning. However, to be valuable, time must be used effectively. Time, spent actively learning, is called engaged time or time on task.

Each classroom activity has its own rules for participation (when to raise hand, when to stand up, etc.). The rules defining who can talk what they can talk about, and when, to whom and how long they can talk are often called participation structures.

Issues of Discipline

One of the goals of any management system is to help students become better able to manage themselves. Students learn self-control by making choices and dealing with the consequences. A student involved in learning is usually not involved in a clash with the teacher or other students.

Procedures describe how activities are accomplished in classrooms, but they are seldom written down; they are simply the ways for getting things done in class. Among procedures we differentiate:

- administrative routines, such as taking attendance
- student movement, such as entering classroom on late arrival or going to the bathroom,

* *A Doctorate Student at International Black Sea University,Tbilisi,Georgia;*
E-mail: nona2008@mail.ru

- housekeeping, such as watering flowers and cleaning the board

- routines for accomplishing lessons, such as collecting assignments

- interactions between teacher and students, such as how to get teacher's attention

- talking among students, such as giving help or socializing

Unlike procedures, rules are often written down and posted. In establishing rules, you should consider what kind of atmosphere you want to create. The rules you set should be consistent with school rules.

As soon as you decide on your rules and procedures, you must consider what you will do when a student breaks a rule or does not follow a procedure. It is too late to make this decision after the rule has been broken. Decisions about penalties and rewards must be made early on, so students know consequences beforehand.

Effective classroom managers spend the first days of class teaching a workable, easily understandable set of rules and procedures by using lots of explanation, examples and practice. As soon as understanding of rules has been achieved, teachers can – if such a necessity arises – use cues (simple signals to indicate that a certain behavior is desired or should be stopped). A teacher's smile or a nod stimulates a student to go on, while a raised finger or a disapproving look has to stop him/her.

Developing rights and responsibilities rather than rules makes a very important point to the students. Students should understand that the rules are developed so that everyone can work and learn together.

Planning spaces for learning involve desk arrangement, student and teacher movement in the class. Front-seat location does seem to increase participation for students who are predisposed to speak in class, whereas a seat in the back will make it more difficult to participate and easier to sit back and daydream. But the action zone where participation is greatest may be not only in front of the board. "To spread the action around" teachers move around the classroom when possible, establish eye-contact, address questions to students sitting in the back of the class.

The traditional sitting arrangement in rows and columns is useful during tests or presentation of new materials, circles and semi-circles are good for whole-class discussions, clusters of 3-5 chairs are good for small-group work. A good start is much, but not the end. Effective teachers build on this beginning. They maintain their management system by preventing problems and keeping students engaged in a productive learning environment.

The format of a lesson affects student involvement. In general, as teacher supervision increases, students' engaged time also increases. Activities with clear steps are likely to be more absorbing, because one step leads more naturally to the next.

Effective Classroom Managers Should Be Especially Skilled in Four Areas

The ideal way to manage problems is to prevent them. Kounin (1970) concluded that effective classroom managers were especially skilled in four areas: "withitness", overlapping activities, group focusing, and movement management. "Withitness" means awareness of everything in a classroom. For instance, the teacher may not stop explaining, but just show with a gesture that s/he is aware that a student is not attending. "Overlapping" means supervising several activities at the same time. The teacher may be helping one group while giving a task and promising to come up later to another. Maintaining a group focus means keeping as many students as possible involved in appropriate class activities. One student produces ideas, one writes them down, another comments critically on them, etc.). The effective teacher avoids abrupt transitions, such as announcing a new activity before gaining students' attention or starting a new activity in the middle of something else (this is called movement management – keeping the lesson and the group moving at an appropriate and flexible pace, with smooth transitions and variety).

Being an effective manager does not mean publicly correcting every minor infraction of the rules. This kind of public attention may actually reinforce the misbehavior. The key is to know what is happening and what is important so you can prevent problems. Here are some ways to stop misbehavior:

- make an eye-contact with, or move closer to the offender

- try verbal hints such as "name-dropping" (simply insert the student's name into the lecture), asking student a question

- in a calm, unhostile way ask the student to state the rule or procedure and then to follow it

- tell the student in a clear, assertive, and unhostile way to stop the misbehavior

- offer a choice (do you prefer to follow the rules or to leave the classroom so that I can have a private discussion with you later?)

- sit the students continually breaking the same rules away from others influenced by them

- be consistent in applying established consequences, do not accept promises to do better next time

A defiant, hostile student can pose serious problems. One possibility is to give the student a chance to save face and cool down by saying "It's your choice to co-operate or not. You can take a minute to think about it."

Violence or destruction of property is a difficult and potentially dangerous problem. The first step is to send for help and get the names of participants and witnesses. Then get rid of any crowd that may have gathered; an audience will only make things worse. Do not try to break up a fight

without help. Make sure the school office is aware of the incident; usually the school has a policy for dealing with these situations (disciplinary boards, etc.).

A very important aspect of classroom management is the ability of the teacher to communicate with students. Communication between teacher and students is essential when problems arise. Communication is more than "teacher talks – student listens". It is more than the words exchanged between individuals. We communicate in many ways. Our actions, movements, voice tone, facial expressions, and many other non-verbal behaviors send messages to our students. Many times the messages we intend to send are not the messages our students receive.

Principle of Communication

The first principle of communication is that people respond to what they think was said or meant, not necessarily to the speaker's intended message or actual words. A student may be insulted by the teacher's tone of voice, not the words actually spoken. If it seems to a teacher that a student inadequately reacted to communication, s/he should use paraphrase rule. If the speaker was misunderstood, s/he must explain what s/he meant.

In communication, when a problem arises, it is essential to diagnose who owns it. A technique of emphatic listening is helpful here. It means hearing the intent and emotions behind what another person says and reflecting them back by paraphrasing. It is essential to differentiate between the intellectual and the emotional content of the message. Teachers need to make inferences by students' feelings.

Let us assume a student is doing something that actively interferes with the educational process. Gordon (1981) recommends sending an "I" message in order to intervene and change the student's behavior. Basically this means telling the student in a straightforward, assertive, and nonjudgmental way what s/he is doing, how it affects you as a teacher, and how you feel about it (e.g., "When you call out, I can't concentrate on each answer, and I'm frustrated").

Instead of telling the student directly what to do, passive teachers tell or often ask the student to try to think about the appropriate action (e.g., "Why are you disturbing the class? Don't you know the rules!"). A hostile response style involves condemning the student without claiming what the student should be doing (e.g., "You should be ashamed of such behaviour!)". An assertive response communicates to the students that you care too much about them and the process of learning to allow inappropriate behaviour to persist (the teacher in a calm and firm voice demands from the student to stop). Teachers who believe in assertive discipline (clear, firm, unhostile response style) never get into a debate about the fairness of rules. Not all

educators (especially educators who are thinking in the student-centered way) support this sort of discipline, as some of them doubt its upbringing value (it undermines student self-management).

If the above ways do not work, and the student persists in misbehaving, it means the teacher and the student are in conflict. People in conflict usually cannot perceive each other's behaviour accurately. Research has shown that the angrier you get with another person, the more you see the other as the villain and yourself as an innocent victim. This makes compromise and, correspondingly, co-operation impossible. By the way, showing your anger to a student, you show your weakness. Even if you send such a student out of class, it is him/her who has won the battle, not you. Such a student is a hero in the eyes of his/her peers.

There are three methods of resolving a conflict between teacher and student. One is for the teacher to impose a solution. This may be necessary during an emergency, but it does not finally solve the conflict. The second method is for the teacher to give in to the student's demands. This is neither a good solution.

Gordon (1981) recommends a third approach which he calls a no-lose method. In this solution the needs of both the teacher and the student are taken into account. They discuss many possible solutions, evaluate each, make the most painless solution and determine how to implement it. Later they assess the success.

Student conflicts and confrontations are sometimes very serious. One common form of conflict in schools involves teasing and harassment. The line between good-natured exchanges (just joking at each other) and hostile teasing may seem thin, but a rule of thumb is that teasing someone who is less powerful or less popular or using any racial, ethnic, or religious slur should not be tolerated. When teachers are silent, students may hear approval. Teachers, who seem to be most effective in dealing with cultural conflicts, practice culturally responsive management and have been called "warm demanders".

When parents and teachers share the same expectations and support each other, they can create a more positive classroom environment and dedicate more time to learning.

Classroom management systems that emphasize reinforcement are preferable to those that use punishment. If, however, a teacher chooses to use punishment,

- it should be done immediately and directly to the behavior,

- teachers should avoid seat work as a punisher,

- they need to apply punishers logically, systematically, and dispassionately – never angrily or in a humiliating way.

Assertive discipline is a classroom management system that emphasizes carefully stated rules and specifically described reinforcers and punishers (Kauchak&Eggen,

2005). The rules must be clear and specific and must clearly outline standards for behavior. The teacher then describes reinforcers that are given for following the rules and punishers that are administered for breaking them.

Assertive discipline is controversial. Critics charge that it is punitive, pits teachers against students, and stresses obedience and conformity at the expense of learning and self-control. They further argue that research suggests teachers who use assertive discipline are perceived as less supportive and less caring by students. Supporters disagree, contending that its emphasis on stated rules and positive reinforcement is proactive, provides a structured environment for both teachers and students, and is thus effective.

In helping students manage their learning the difference between obedience orientation and a responsibility orientation is essential. An obedience model of management (typical for teacher-centered educators) is an approach to classroom management in which teachers demand from students to follow rules and obey authority through the use of reward and punishment. A responsibility model of management (typical for student-centered educators) is an approach in which teachers let students make responsible choices by explaining reasons for rules and applying logical consequences for misbehavior (Kauchak&Eggen, 2005).

Recommendations for Teachers

Below find some recommendations how to make the learning environments more supportive for students:

- Make sure that productive behaviors are reinforced and that unproductive behaviors are not reinforced. The pleasure one gets from reading, the pride one feels after accomplishing a challenging task, the internal satisfaction one feels about helping others should be supported. Some form of reinforcement should be used, otherwise these behaviors may decrease or totally disappear – a phenomenon called extinction. On the first stage, reinforcement is needed frequently, later, when the learner gains self-confidence, it is necessary only in case of challenging tasks.

- To shape the desirable behavior the teacher begins with reinforcing behavior that is more or less close to the desirable one, then, step by step, teacher reinforces behavior that is closer and closer to the desirable one, finally reinforcing only the desirable behavior. Thus, gradually, desirable behaviour is achieved.

- Model desirable behavours. Learners should pay attention to the model, remember what the model does, reproduce the model's behavior, and finally become motivated to become a model him/herself.

- Provide physical (e.g., paper, pencils) and cognitive (learning strategies) tools that help students work effectively.

- Encourage student dialogue and collaboration. Create a community of learners – a classroom in which teachers and students consistently work to help one another learn. All students are active participators in classroom activities; everyone is a potential resource for each other, etc. The teacher provides some guidance, but students also contribute to it.

Classroom Management Strategies

Effective classroom management - creating and maintaining a classroom environment conducive to learning and achievement - has little to do with noise or activity level. A well-managed classroom is one in which students are consistently engaged in productive learning activities and in which students' behaviors rarely interfere with their own or others' achievement of instructional goals.

When we talk about the classroom environment, we are to some extent talking about the actual physical setup - the arrangements of tables and chairs, the availability of tools and resources (painting supplies, dictionaries, computer-based encyclopedias, etc.), the use of bulletin boards and other displays to present information and engage students' interest, and so on. But even more important is the psychological environment, or classroom climate. The ideal classroom is one in which students feel safe and secure, make learning a high priority, and are willing to take the risks and make the mistakes so critical for long-term academic success.

Good management begins well before the first day of class. Proactive, preventive strategies are those designed to establish a productive learning environment right from the start. As teachers arrange classroom furniture, decide where to put instructional materials and equipment, and think about where each student might sit, they should consider the effects that various arrangements are likely to have on students' behavior. Here are several widely recommended strategies:

• Be well prepared for class and in other ways demonstrate that they enjoy teaching and take their teaching responsibilities seriously

• Convey high (yet realistic) expectations for student performance and provide the support students need to meet those expectations

• Include students in decision making and in evaluations of their schoolwork

• Acknowledge that students can occasionally have an "off" day and not hold it against them

The quality of teacher-student relationships is one of the most influential factors affecting students' emotional well-being, motivation, and achievement. When students have positive, supportive relationships with teachers, they have higher self-efficacy and more intrinsic motivation to learn, engage in more self-regulated learning, are more

likely to ask for help when they need it, are less apt to cheat on classroom assignments, and achieve at higher levels. Teacher affection, respect, and support are especially important for students who face exceptional hardships (poverty, uninvolved or abusive parents, violent neighborhoods, etc.) at home.

We have already considered the concept of a community of learners, a classroom in which teacher and students consistently work together to help one another learn. Ultimately, teachers should also create a sense of community in the classroom - a sense that they and their students have shared goals, are mutually respectful and supportive of one another's efforts, and believe that everyone makes an important contribution to classroom learning. Creating a sense of community engenders feelings of belongingness: students see themselves as important and valued members of the classroom.

Although positive relationships with students are essential, teachers and students alike must recognize that they are at school to get certain things accomplished. Accordingly, a relatively businesslike atmosphere should prevail in the classroom most of the time. This is not to say that classroom activities must be boring and tedious. On the contrary, they should be interesting and engaging, and they can sometimes even be exciting. Entertainment and excitement should not be thought of as goals in and of themselves, however. Rather, they are means to a more important goal: mastering academic subject matter.

Classroom rules are apt to be effective only when they're consistently followed. Imposing no negative consequence for inappropriate behavior, especially when that consequence has been spelled out in advance, can actually be a form of reinforcement.

As effective teachers plan their lessons and classroom activities, they also plan specific ways of keeping students on task. One strategy, of course, is to make the subject matter interesting and relevant to students' values and goals. Another is to incorporate variety into lessons, perhaps by using colorful audiovisual aids.

Survey

The **goal of the survey** was to find out how well aware are school teachers in Georgia of issues of effective classroom management. I also intended to find out whether teachers hold teacher-centered or student-centered views on classroom management. Time management was emphasized. The **method of research** used was quantitative – a survey based on teacher questionnaire results.

Respondents were 42 English teachers from 5 schools in Tbilisi and other towns in Georgia.

Based on the analysis presented above I made up the following questionnaire concerning the student-centered approach to classroom management in English Language

Teaching:

1. What does classroom management mainly concern for you? (Choose one)

    a) lesson planning

    b) classroom organization: arrangement of desks, blackboard, preparation of handouts

    c) time management

    d) communication/rapport with students

    e) selection of the form of activities (individual, pair, small-group, whole-class)

    f) selection of teaching methods (verbal and/or visual, passive or active)

    g) discipline

    h) other (please name)

2. When you plan a lesson, what do you take into consideration? (choose as many as you wish)

    a) students' age

    b) students' language level

    c) students' interests

    d) students' requests

    e) recommendations from teacher's book

    f) your teaching experience

    g) other (please name)

3. If your answer is "c" or "d", how do you find them out?

    a) ask students to participate in planning

    b) give them a questionnaire on their interests in the beginning of the academic year

    c) observe their behavior in class

4. Do you use the same arrangement of desks during all classes? Yes/No

5. If yes, why?

    a) desks are heavy and difficult to move

    b) moving desks disrupts discipline

    c) moving desks wastes time

    d) moving desks doesn't make teaching more efficient

6. If no, why?

    a) it lets students move a little, after it their brains work better

    b) it provides variety and thus motivates students

    c) depending on what we do, different arrangements are more adequate

7. When you write lesson plans, do you do the timing of each activity? Yes/No

8. Does it often happen that either you don't have enough time to do what you planned or time is left? Yes/No

9. If yes, why does it happen?

    a) Something in the class goes differently than I plan and requires plan modification

    b) It is difficult for me to do effective timing

10) If it happens, what do you do?

    a) Fulfill the plan till the point which I can reach (if there is not enough time) or do some revision (if there is time left)

b) I beforehand plan which items may be omitted or added in case my timing is wrong

11) How can one do more efficient timing for planning?

a) Play out the lesson scenario (if I need, say 5 minutes to fulfill the task, I give students 8)

b) Rely on teacher's book

c) Look at the watch during the lesson and add/shorten time for each activity proportionately

50 questionnaires were handed out to teachers during a

teacher conference, 40 of them returned, filled in, which is a high enough rate, demonstrating that the questions were interesting for the respondents.

Results and discussion

Survey results are presented below in Table 1.

Question/answer	a	B	c	d	e	F	g	h
1	75%	0%	0%	0%	5%	10%	10%	0%
2	25%	45%	50%	25%	20%	30%	-	-
3 – out of 30 respondents	20%	34%	46%	-	-	-	-	-
4	yes 20%	no 80%	-	-	-	-	-	-
5 – out of 8 respondents	0%	62%	38%	0%	-	-	-	-
6 – out of 32 respondents	0%	0%	100%	-	-	-	-	-
7	yes 90%	no 10%	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	yes 70%	no 30%	-	-	-	-	-	-
9 – out of 28 respondents	71%	29%	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	30%	70%	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	15%	0%	85%	-	-	-	-	-

Table 1. The results of the survey (percentage of answers)

Discussion

The majority of the respondents answered that classroom management for them is first of all associated with lesson planning, while plan realization items did not receive high scores. Probably it may be explained with great bureaucratization of teacher's work nowadays. Some items (classroom organization, time management, communication/rapport with students) did not get any answers.

In the process of lesson planning its most popular aspects were: students' language level (45%) and students' interest (50%), which is student-centered enough, however, answers "students' age" (25%) and "students' requests"

(25%) are rather underestimated.

To find out students' interests, teachers more often observe their behavior (46%), which is certainly time-saving, but not very efficient.

The majority of teachers (80%) change the arrangement of desks during all classes, which is contemporary and student-centered, however, 20% of those who don't do it are inflexible and not contemporary. Probably they do not use any pair and small groups work, as this change is necessary for them. They explain is by disruption of dis-

cipline, which means they are certainly not very student centered.

To the question why they change desk arrangement all teachers chose the answer "depending on what we do, different arrangements are more adequate", which is an answer given by a teacher thinking in a contemporary way.

The majority of teachers (90%), while writing lesson plans, do the timing, which means they either (hopefully) realize its importance or just fulfill the requirements posed in front of them by administration. However, those who do not may face serious management problems. Strange enough, but 70% still have timing problems, probably due to lack of timing habits or inefficient and inflexible strategies.

71% of those whose preliminary timing goes wrong answer that something in the class goes differently than they plan and requires plan modification. This is a student-centered view.

70% of teachers answered that they beforehand plan which items may be omitted or added in case my timing is wrong, which is an adequate approach. However, the fact that 30% answered "fulfill the plan till the point which I can reach (if there is not enough time) or do some revision (if there is time left)" means they are not student centered and not contemporary at all.

If something goes wrong with timing, the majority of teachers (85%) look at the watch during the lesson and add/shorten time for each activity proportionately. This is a good way, much better than fulfilling the plan till the point which they reach; however, it is difficult to explain the fact that if 30% of teachers (question 10) do so, how did they choose the answer "look at the watch…"? Does it mean that looking at the watch does not help them modify the plan in the process of teaching?

Limitations

I realize that the survey I held is of a modest scale, so to study the problem deeper a larger-scale research is needed. However, even such a modest survey shows the existing trends. Its results coincide with the experiences I have informally shared with my colleagues at school and teachers' conferences.

Conclusions

The analysis of the literature showed that the teacher's main job concerning classroom management is pre-teaching (lesson planning, preparation of handouts and selection of the form of activities: individual, pair, small-group, whole-class) and while-teaching classroom organization (arrangement of desks, blackboard, organizing the activities, teacher/student and student-student communication, managing the discipline).

The respondent teachers, however, have emphasized pre-teaching classroom management. Probably, this can be explained by great bureaucratization of school teacher's job nowadays. If so, this is a bad tendency, as it leaves no time for teachers to be creative.

The teacher has to analyze the materials s/he will have to teach, to realize their potential (including the potential problem area), to link the previous lessons with the following ones, to do some search to fill the materials in, if necessary, to drop some tasks (if s/he feels they are inadequate), to select the ways of presentation and explanation, training and control, and to decide how much time will be spent on teacher talk and learners' practice.

Effective classroom managers establish and communicate certain rules and procedures right from the start. Ideally, students should understand that rules and procedures are not merely the result of a teacher's personal whims but are designed to help the classroom run smoothly and efficiently. When students have a say in classroom rules, their sense of "ownership" of the rules increases the likelihood that they will abide by them.

Misbehavior is any action that disrupts classroom learning and planned classroom activities, puts one or more students' physical safety or psychological well-being in jeopardy, or violates basic moral and ethical standards. Some classroom misbehaviors are relatively minor ones that have little long-term impact on students' well-being and achievement. Such behaviors as talking out of turn, writing brief notes to classmates during a class generally fall in this category. Other misbehaviors are far more serious, in that they definitely interfere with the learning or well-being of one or more students.

Principles of effective classroom management go hand in hand with principles of learning and motivation.

When students misbehave, beginning teachers often think about what the students are doing wrong. In contrast, experienced, "expert" teachers are more likely to think about what they themselves can do differently to keep students on task and then modify their plans accordingly.

The majority of teachers in the questionnaire expressed student-centered views, however, they are sort of hesitating – answers to some items are typically student-centered, others are not.

Unfortunately, not only timing an efficient lesson is rather often a problem, but also teachers themselves do not spend (and have?) enough time to make teaching more student-centered (e.g., hold a questionnaire on students' interests and needs).

Thus, I came to conclusion that, although student-centered approach to classroom management in English Language Teaching has already gained popularity among English teachers in Georgia, much still has to be done to be able to say that our classroom are managed in a student-centered way.

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