

**PROACTIVE VERSUS REACTIVE DISCIPLINE  
IN EARLY ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS**

**A Research Proposal Submitted  
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## **Abstract**

### **Proactive Versus Reactive Discipline in Early Elementary Classrooms**

Is classroom management the most important factor in establishing an effective learning environment? Many educators would argue that learning can only take place once a successful classroom management plan is in place. Classroom management is a widely studied topic among educational researchers. Specifically researchers have studied the difference between proactive and reactive methods. Historically, research has taken a reactive approach in addressing the issue of classroom management. Current trends are leaning towards a proactive approach, many researchers are finding that students respond positively when a teacher is able to effectively implement a Positive Behavior Support Model.

The data I collected consisted of semi-structured interviews with three second grade teachers and observation logs collected from the three second grade classes. In examining the data I was able to identify the current methods these teachers use. Furthermore, I looked at how the method used affects classroom morale and prevents potential misbehavior. I found that a proactive approach allows teachers to spend more time teaching valuable material and less time reprimanding negative behavior. Teachers should only use reactive discipline as a secondary approach to classroom management. If a problem persists with individual students a specific behavior plan should be established. With a well implemented classroom management plan students are set up for academic success and teachers are able to spend less time and energy addressing misbehavior.

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## **Introduction**

In Ms. Smith's second grade classroom the teacher has focused on a method of classroom management commonly known as reactive discipline. This form of discipline provides consequences to students after the inappropriate behavior has occurred. With this method Ms. Smith has chosen to use a technique where a child pulls a card after he or she has engaged in a negative behavior. However, Ms. Smith has found that she is spending more time reprimanding negative behavior rather than teaching valuable material. Across the hall from Ms. Smith is another second grade classroom taught by Ms. Anderson. In Ms. Anderson's class the students seem to always be on task and attentively listening. On average Ms. Anderson sends fewer students to the principal's office, and her classroom provides a productive teaching environment where students are actively learning. Ms. Anderson has chosen to focus on positive discipline in an effort to establish a learning environment where students are encouraged to actively learn and appropriate behavior is reinforced. This allows Ms. Anderson to spend less time focusing on discipline and more time applauding positive behavior.

What are the differences between the ways in which classroom management is applied that either positively or negatively affects the classroom's learning environment? Does Ms. Anderson simply have a well behaved class, or is her method of discipline reinforcing positive behavior among the students? These questions lead me to the issue of classroom management. Many educators believe classroom management is vital to maintaining a positive learning environment that fosters active learning among all students. When a classroom is disruptive not only are students robbed of their ability to learn, educators are unable to effectively teach students valuable material.

In this study I am interested in researching the different forms of discipline and their effects on classroom behavior. I want to specifically look at the differences between proactive and reactive discipline to determine how they either improve or worsen behavior. I am also interested in discovering an appropriate balance between the two forms of discipline that will be most effective in the classroom setting. Researching classroom management will help me as a future educator to implement an effective means of discipline that will allow me to provide my students with a positive learning environment, giving them the opportunity to excel in academics.

In researching classroom management I hypothesize that students will be more receptive to positive discipline within the classroom. I would argue that if students and teachers collaborate together to create classroom rules and an effective method of discipline, students will be more likely to take responsibility for their actions. Positive discipline will also give students the motivation to behave appropriately leading to a decrease in the need for reactive discipline. Before beginning the research process on the topic of classroom management it is important that I take a look at past research to establish a foundation for further study.

## **Literature Review**

### *Introduction*

Classroom management is a widely studied topic among educational researchers. How to maintain classroom order has been studied throughout the decades, and is seen as being vital in establishing an effective learning environment where students can excel in academics. Among the research that is out there on the topic of classroom management, the issue can be looked at through five different themes: public concern, reactive

approach, discipline strategies, proactive discipline, positive behavior support model and school reform.

*Public Concern*

School discipline has been pushed to the forefront of the concerns of the American public.

The management of problem behaviors or the 'lack of discipline' has been identified by the public as the most persistent and possibly the most troublesome issue facing schools...Public schools are far from being a safe environment where teachers and students can focus their attention solely on the learning process.

(Colvin & Kameenui, 1993, sect.2)

Findings from 1998 show that most American's believe students should be taught self-discipline in school (Bear, 1998). In today's society schools are not always looked at as a safe haven for students, "many students attending public schools exhibit discipline problems such as disruptive classroom behavior, vandalism, bullying, and violence. Establishing effective discipline practices is critical to ensure academic success and to provide a safe learning environment" (Luisellie et al., 2005, p.1). Teachers today are faced with a difficult task of teaching to a wide diversity of students. Not only are they teaching students from different ethnicities, but they are teaching students of varying socioeconomic status. Several of these students are found to be below the poverty line.

Classroom management has clearly become a concern for many parents as well as school personnel. Every parent worries about their child when it pertains to school policy and safety issues. Parents with a bullied child worry that the school may be too relaxed on discipline, and they fret the vulnerability of their child. While on the other hand,

parents of a student with behavioral problems worries their child will be consistently disciplined, robbing them of the opportunity to succeed academically. Finding a way to cope with this balance has become a struggle for many schools, making classroom management a prevalent issue in today's educational research.

Maintaining classroom control is also a major concern for many teachers in today's education system. Classroom misbehavior inhibits the learning environment of the students and increases the stress level among teachers. According to the findings of Hastings and Bham (2003) severe student misbehavior leads to teacher burnout. Misbehavior leads to detrimental effects by negatively impacting student achievement and the well-being of teachers (Little & Hudson, 1998).

### *Reactive Discipline*

Historically, research has taken a reactive approach in addressing the issue of classroom management. "Prior to the late-1960s the emphasis in dealing with student behavior was on discipline. The little training teachers received was focused on what to do after students misbehaved" ("Classroom Management", 1989, p.1). Colvin and Kameenui (1993) argue that traditional methods of discipline suffer from two main problems; one of which is a restrictive and reactive approach to discipline. This form of punishment known as the reactionary approach is a general approach to discipline centered on the idea of punishment. Reactive discipline occurs after the student has misbehaved, generally resulting in the loss of a privilege, detention, and/or suspension.

Research has found that the reactionary approach is unsuccessful in teaching students the correct way to behave. Instead, it has become a quick fix to behavioral problems that is ineffective in the long run. When students are simply reprimanded after

they have engaged in a negative behavior they are stripped of the ability to learn how to behave appropriately. Along with failing to teach students the “right way” of thinking, reactive discipline is ineffective in dealing with students with severe behavioral problems. As a result, many of these students tend to drop out of school. Reactive discipline has been used throughout the years as the primary method of discipline; however recent research has discovered that it fails to establish a positive learning environment that fosters academic success for all students.

### *Discipline Strategies*

In an article entitled, “School discipline in the United States: Prevention, correction, and long-term social development” the author, George Bear (1998) examines the techniques of both effective and ineffective teachers in classroom management. Bear found that immediate compliance was characterized by punitive strategies which include punishing, threatening, and/or yelling. This proved to be an ineffective means to classroom management. The effective teacher used what Bear refers to as an authoritarian approach. This approach allows the teacher to reprimand negative behavior, while also re-socializing the student. This method is characterized by its ability to combine “preventative strategies, short-term operant learning strategies and strategies that fostered children’s social decision-making and problem-solving abilities” (Bear, 1998, sect. 3). This helps to establish a positive environment that teaches students the proper way of behaving both in and out of school.

### *Proactive Discipline*

Much research done on the issue of classroom management has come to find that discipline should be dealt with proactively. Beginning in the 1970s research has shifted



its focus and began examining how teachers can take preventive measures to maintain classroom order. With this change in focus teachers began learning how to prevent negative and disruptive behavior while reinforcing positive behavior.

The author(s) of the article entitled, "Classroom Management" (1989) takes the view that classroom management should take a comprehensive, realistic approach. This approach,

must provide teachers with knowledge and skills for examining the classroom environment and making decisions to adjust classroom factors in order to provide students with a sense of meaningful involvement in the instructional process and through thoughtful and creative examination of issues presented in a meaningful, dynamic curriculum ("Classroom Management", 1989, p. 4).

Proactive discipline requires that classroom management is fully integrated into the curriculum. Within this approach teachers must establish positive teacher-student relationships, as well as peer relationships. Students should have the opportunity to be in an environment meeting both their academic and basic psychological needs. When classroom management is treated as a proactive matter the focus becomes positively engaging the students in the learning process.

A key factor to the success of an effective classroom management program is to ensure that both the teacher and the students are on the same page. Teachers should lay a clear foundation for the classroom management techniques that will be used throughout the year. This provides teacher with a reference to assess their own use of the program and for students to clearly understand the consequences that will be consistently employed ("Classroom Management", 1989).

Furthermore, a study on the effects of proactive discipline by Colvin and Kameenui (1993) found that a proactive model allows students to learn the “right way” of thinking. This model has the ability to,

- (a) utilize instructional procedures to teach and manage problem social behaviors,
  - (b) treat problem behaviors as skill deficits and teach appropriate skills, (c)
  - consider and respond to incidental or less frequent problem behaviors in the same way as academic errors, and (d) re-direct students toward appropriate behavior.
- (sect. 10)

The authors also discovered that the use of this model was effective in decreasing office deferrals as well as increasing the control within the schools.

A study conducted in 2008 compared the use of proactive and reactive discipline with teacher stress levels and student misbehavior. The authors concluded “preventative measures will assist in reducing teacher stress and increasing student learning opportunities” (Clunies-Ross, 2008, p. 693).

#### *Positive Behavior Support Model*

Within the context of proactive discipline many schools have found success in implementing a program which is based on a Positive Behavior Support Model, also known as a PBS model. Recent research has proposed that the PBS model is effective in reducing disciplinary problems and aiding in the adjustment of student’s behavior to meet social standards. This approach is believed to, “benefit the individual who exhibits inappropriate behaviors by evaluating and adjusting the setting so that the problem behavior will decrease” (Sherrod et al., 2009, para. 5).

Within schools today, teachers and staff are expected to raise the academic achievement of students who are showing an increase in behavioral problems. They are expected to do this in a setting where teachers spend more time and effort reprimanding negative behavior than teaching valuable material. The PBS model addresses this issue by, “acknowledging expected behaviors while applying clear consequences to inappropriate behaviors” (Sherrod et al., 2009, para. 7). Positive Behavior Support is “characterized by its focus on defining and teaching behavioral expectations, rewarding appropriate behaviors, continual evaluation of its effectiveness, and the integration of supports for individuals, groups, the school as a whole, and school/family/community partnerships” (Warren et al., 2006, p. 2). This ultimately allows the teacher to spend less time focusing on negative behavior and more time applauding and rewarding positive behavior. Immediate reinforcement is proven to have the ability to decrease disruptive behavior among all students (Alexander & Apfel, 1976). Not only does this help to decrease discipline, but it also increases the morale of the students and the teacher. This shows that Positive Behavior Support “can help create a productive environment for learning in the school setting by using prevention and intervention methods to decrease discipline referrals, which is likely to result in a safer learning environment and increased academic support” (Sherrod et al., 2009, para. 31).

The foundation for an effective method of classroom management varies among researchers. However, the basic principles of positive discipline remain the same. According to Luiselli et al. (2005) there are six critical components to the PBS model which include,

(1) setting consensus-driven behaviour expectations; (2) teaching critical interpersonal skills; (3) providing systematic positive reinforcement for meeting and exceeding performance criteria; (4) monitoring intervention efficacy continuously through data collection and analysis; (5) involving all stakeholders in the formulation of discipline practices (students, teachers, administrators, and parents); and (6) reducing and eliminating reactive, punitive, and exclusionary strategies in favour of a proactive, preventive, and skillbuilding orientation (2005, p.2).

The authors found these to be critical components necessary to improving classroom management techniques.

Another study completed by Warren et al. (2006) looked at the effects of the implementation of a school wide positive behavioral model in a struggling school. They found that targeted classrooms showed a significant decrease in off-task behaviors as opposed to non targeted classrooms. With their findings they concluded that, “a well-functioning school-wide program improves the efficiency and effectiveness with which teachers teach and students learn” (Warren et al. 2006, p.13). This study shows how elementary schools containing students with severe behavioral and academic problems can be successful with a properly implemented PBS model.

Researchers have also found that students can be taught behavior in the same way as academics. The basic steps of teaching appropriate behavior include, “1) teaching expected behaviors 2) reinforcing expected behaviors and 3) enforcing consequences when violations of expected behavior occurs” (Stransberry & Neilson, 2009, p. 1). With this approach teachers are expected to lay a clear foundation of the rules in the beginning

of the school year. Students must fully understand the consequences for negative behavior and the procedures that will take place. Classroom rules are also changed from what not to do to what to do (Stransberry & Neilson, 2009). Teaching students the correct way to behave has proven to be an effective means of behavioral management over an extended period of time.

With a Positive Behavior Support program Stransberry and Neilson (2009) argue that there must be a differentiation in the level of support that is included. This allows students who are struggling more with behavioral management than the average student to receive further assistance. At the base of the support system is the category of Universal Support. Eighty percent of students fall into this category. Here the belief is that teaching appropriate behavior will reduce the discipline problems of these students. The second category is characterized as small group/classroom support; fifteen percent of students fall into this category. These interventions are more intensive and may take the form of a social skills group. The final level provides individual support to the 5% of students with challenging behaviors. At this level the students, staff and parents will develop an IEP plan for the individual which will meet that particular student's needs. In this approach to discipline management it is important to have family support. "Teaching expected behaviors requires consistent efforts across school and home settings" (Stransberry & Neilson, 2009, p. 3). When everything is in place students have the ability to reach their full academic potential in an environment that promotes positive learning.

### *School Reform*

Many researchers have found the importance of a school-wide approach to positive discipline. They argue that all teachers need to be on the same page in developing a plan that is consistently used throughout the school. Colvin and Kameenui (1993) believe that traditional behavior management models fail to consider staff development issues. They find that staff development plays a key role in student behavior, therefore when implementing a form of classroom management a school should provide interventions and training to all staff. Netzel and Eber (2003) found that establishing an effective PBIS program requires that there is a shared philosophy among all staff members and school personnel. This will reduce inconsistencies among students, and teachers can work together as a team to control student behavior.

Luiselli et al. (2005) also stresses the importance of team building in the implementation of the PBS model. They believe that this is an important first step to maintaining an environment that fosters a positive behavioral learning environment. There must be a group understanding of the behavioral management plan in order to have a positive effect on student behavior (Luisellie et al., 2005). Fenning et al. (2004) argues that, “traditional reactionary practices in discipline codes, while the most widely used are not effective in addressing the complex behavioral and emotional issues that students present to us” (2004, p. 12). They found that integrating proactive discipline methods into the school’s code of conduct was effective in addressing the complex behavioral problems of today’s student.

## *Summary*

Positive Behavior Support is a consistent theme when looking at current research on the topic of classroom management. Schools across the United States have found this model to be an effective way to decrease behavioral problems, while at the same time increasing academic achievement. When teachers can effectively manage a classroom they are able to ensure that students are receiving the education that they need.

Majority of the literature out there focuses on a school wide approach to discipline management. In my research I would like to examine the effects of Positive Behavior Support at the classroom level. I am seeking to research whether or not a teacher can effectively implement this behavioral management model without the support of the entire school. Furthermore, I am interested in determining whether or not there is an appropriate balance between positive and reactive discipline that will provide students with an effective learning environment.

## **Research Question**

The primary research question I will be focusing on throughout the study is: What method of classroom management does the second grade teachers at X Elementary School view as most effective? Furthermore, I would like to examine a couple of secondary questions: How can a proactive approach to classroom management be successfully implemented in the classroom? Is there an effective balance between proactive and reactive discipline that will establish a positive learning environment?

## **Methodology**

### *Method and Rationale*

For this research project I have used a qualitative approach, with this approach I have specifically chosen to perform a case study. This form of research methodology seeks to understand the “real world” in its natural setting. Generally, in a case study a specific person or group of people is researched over a period of time. This form of study is all encompassing, meaning it allows the researcher to use methods such as observation, interviews, and questionnaires.

Using a case study was a helpful way to answer my primary and secondary research questions because I was able to include a variety of research tools to help explain my questions. This method allowed me to observe classrooms in their natural setting while I was student teaching. Through observation I was able to see the forms of discipline that different teachers use and observe its effectiveness in the classroom. A case study has also given me the opportunity to interview different teachers about their perspectives on discipline. This has allowed me to ask questions about the differences between proactive and reactive discipline, and how this affects the morale of the classroom. Finally, this method has helped me to answer the question, is there an appropriate balance between proactive and reactive discipline that will create a positive learning environment in the classroom? With the insight I have received from the teacher interviews and through observing the classrooms I was able to identify an appropriate balance between both types of discipline.



### *Sample*

The sample I used to conduct my research consisted of three second grade teachers at X Elementary School. I collected both observational data and interviews from these teachers. The interviews provided information about their past experiences, feelings, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions towards classroom management. These teachers are representative of a good sample, because of their differing experiences in the profession of teaching. Among the three teachers teacher A is approaching her 10<sup>th</sup> year of teaching early elementary, teacher B has taught in a variety of school districts and grades for 24 years, as well as spent a few years as principal, and teacher C has spent nearly 24 years teaching early elementary. These teachers have helped me to understand the methods that are currently used for classroom management, as well as methods used in the past. They are also representative of three different teaching styles, which have provided a diversity of opinions to my research.

Along with the sample of teachers, I have incorporated the three second grade classrooms into my sample. Observing the three classrooms has allowed me to examine how classroom management is implemented on a daily basis. I have been able to study how a wide range of students react either positively or negatively to the current methods of classroom management. Incorporating three different classrooms into my research has helped to ensure that I am collecting data from a wide range of students. Students react differently to methods of discipline therefore, increasing the student population has provided validity to my research.

### *Instrumentation*

I have collected my data using two different methods: observations and interviews. The observational data I have collected has been very useful to my study, it has helped me to identify classroom management practices in the natural setting of the classroom. I have used photographs of classroom management posters displayed throughout the classroom to examine the use of proactive versus reactive discipline. I have also studied student behavior in the class through the use of a behavioral log. Within this log I have tracked moments when students have become disruptive and I have recorded the teacher's response. I also recorded whether or not the teacher's response was interruptive or non-interruptive (NI) to the learning environment of the students. I have also tracked the use of proactive versus reactive discipline in the classroom, and how it affects student behavior either positively or negatively.

The interview data I have gathered is vital to understanding my research question. I interviewed the three second grade teachers at X Elementary School. By interviewing each of these teachers I was able to get an understanding of their views on classroom management. Interviewing three different teachers has allowed me to get a variety of opinions and backgrounds about discipline. I have used a semi-structured interview which has provided me the opportunity to ask planned questions, while also allowing the participants to add useful information that comes to their mind. The purpose of this interview was to discover current methods of classroom management. I was also interested in seeing if these teachers have tried methods in the past that have failed to work, and if so why. Interviewing these teachers has also provided me with feedback on their views of both proactive and reactive discipline as well as its effectiveness in the

classroom and at the whole school level. Below is an example of an interview I conducted with the teachers:

1. What grade do you currently teach?
2. How long have you been an educator?
3. Have you taught any other grades besides what you are currently teaching?
4. What method of classroom management do you currently use in your classroom?
  - a. Does this method take a more proactive or reactive approach to discipline?
  - b. Do you find it effective in maintaining control while decreasing disruptive behavior? Why or why not?
  - c. Have you always used this particular method? If not, what other methods have you used?
5. Is there a school wide approach to discipline? If so, what is it?
  - a. How do you incorporate this approach into your own classroom?
6. What are your views on proactive versus reactive discipline?
7. Do you find one approach more effective than the other in maintaining classroom behavior?

As a researcher I began the process of collecting data during my student teaching experience. At this time I began the observational phase as well as took some time to interview my subjects. I started the research process by interviewing the teachers to get an understanding of their current practices. At this time I collected any artifacts that may further help the research. I then followed up the interviews through observation, in which I connected what the teachers have said to their everyday practices in the classroom setting.

Throughout the research process I have specifically been looking to see what current types of classroom management techniques are used in the second grade classrooms at X Elementary. I have also examined whether or not these teachers use proactive versus reactive methods of discipline, or a collection of both. With this I have categorized how each type of classroom management technique is played out in the natural setting of the classroom. I have also examined the similarities and differences among teachers, and how the different classes and students respond to these differences. Throughout the research I have observed the behavior of the classroom and how the teachers either effectively or ineffectively control the classroom.

During the research I have ensured that both the school and the teachers have remained anonymous. I have done this by referring to the school as X elementary, as well as assigning a random name to each teacher. As I reference each classroom throughout the research project I will refer to them as class A, B and C. Keeping both the school and the teachers anonymous has allowed me to protect the privacy of each.

#### *Analysis/Validity*

Throughout the research I have used multiple forms of data, which has helped to increase credibility. The use of teacher interviews and classroom observations has helped to produce triangulation. The interviews have allowed me to get an understanding of the methods of discipline these teachers use and why. Furthermore, the classroom observations have helped me to observe whether or not the teachers actually use the classroom management techniques that they claim to in their interviews. Examining inconsistencies between the data from the interviews and the observations has helped me to identify the reliability of the interviews. Using different methods of data collection has

helped me to understand the issue of classroom management from all angles, which has increased both the validity and reliability of the research.

This study is focused on early elementary grades, which may make it difficult and/or ineffective in generalizing to secondary classrooms. The data may also only be generalizable to classrooms that are representative of similar demographics as X Elementary. Classroom management techniques have been proven to have different effects dependent on the student's ethnicity and SES. As a result, the experiment may only be repeatable in similar settings as X Elementary.

As a researcher I will also be a student teacher, therefore I am an active participant in the research data that I will be collecting. I will need to take into account my biases pertaining to proactive discipline and make a conscious effort throughout the interviews to eliminate my own opinion from the data. I will also need to spend some time as an observer of the class, as opposed to an active participant in an effort to take reliable notes and to reduce my influence in the classroom setting.

## **Data**

The data from the research can be divided into two categories consisting of observation and interviews. The first phase of research consists of observation. The study took place over the course of two weeks and totaled up to 15 hours of in class observation. During this time three different second grade classes at X Elementary were observed. Throughout the study the teachers will be referred to as teacher A, teacher B, and teacher C. During the observation phase I tracked student misbehavior and the teacher's response. I then categorized the different responses into three categories: proactive, reactive, and reactive with loss of privilege. Below is a table of the findings.

<p>Proactive</p> <p>Total: 48</p> <p>Teacher A: 11</p> <p>Teacher B: 9</p> <p>Teacher C: 28</p>	<p>Teacher A</p> <p>I – Recognizes GB</p> <p>I – Points out a student’s good behavior strategy.</p> <p>I – Preps students for what’s ahead. “We have a lot to get done over the next few weeks. In order to get everything done I need the cooperation of every student”.</p> <p>I – Demonstrates appropriate behavior.</p> <p>I – Writes the routine on the board.</p> <p>I – Provides clear directions, restates them.</p> <p>I – Divides boys and girls up to cut out pictures for a report.</p> <p>Works with each group individually.</p> <p>I – While girls are working on the cutting, teacher gives boys a task to do. Provides several options so they are always working.</p> <p>I – Questions student who is leaving during instruction. Reviews why you should not leave during instruction.</p> <p>I – After a student got up during instruction teacher reviews with students why it is not ok to leave when the teacher is giving instruction.</p> <p>I – Redirects students who are talking</p> <p>Teacher B</p> <p>I – Reviews expectations.</p> <p>I – Recognizes GB</p> <p>I – Preps students for transition: tells expected behavior.</p>
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I – Reviews with student computer lab expectations.

I – Reviews expected hallway behavior.

I – Recognizes GB

I – Pays first team ready \$5.

I – Discusses appropriate behavior for the end of the year.

I – Redirects student who is talking.

Teacher C

I – “We are going to do a high five freeze, let’s see how quickly we can do it”

I – “I’m looking around to see who is following directions”

I – “We need to be better about this tomorrow”. Referring to High Five Freeze.

I – “If you are following directions you should be .....” States expectations.

I – Check off of what should be done.

I – Gives \$5 to students who are being good followers.

I – Pulls aside a student who has gotten several warnings. Shows the student the behavior chart. Together the teacher and student brainstorm what a third grader should look like.

I – Redirects a student who is wandering.

I – Transition: gives students \$5 who quickly transition.

I – Preps students for what a good audience is during

presentations.

I – Student goofing off: “Your face doesn’t show me that you’re going to be a good student. Show me the face of a student”.

I – Recognizes students who are following directions by saying their names.

I – Transition: “I am looking for kids in their seats such as \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_”.

I – States the expectations of students during a transition.

I – Pays students who are on task.

I – Role play how to say excuse me when someone is in the way.

I – Prolongs wait time until everyone is paying attention.

I – Preps students for the lesson, “anyone who makes a bad choice will loose recess”.

I – Demonstrates what good measuring looks like.

I – Uses proximity with students who are showing signs of being off task.

I – Pays on task students \$5.

I – Transition: tells students exactly what they need to do.

I – “\_\_\_\_, show me you won’t be the last one this time”.

I – Recognizes appropriate behavior. “I like the way \_\_\_\_ is sitting nicely”.

I - Recognizes appropriate behavior. “Good job \_\_\_\_”.

I – “\_\_\_\_, what needs to be out? Don’t lose money”.



	<p>I – During lesson teacher calls on students who are not paying attention.</p> <p>I – “I am going to call on good listeners”.</p>
<p>Reactive</p> <p>Total: 26</p> <p>Teacher A:10</p> <p>Teacher B: 5</p> <p>Teacher C: 11</p>	<p>Teacher A:</p> <p>I – Student messing around - “Honey, don’t do that” NI</p> <p>I – Student talking - Gives a quick disapproving look NI</p> <p>I – Questions student off task: “Hey _____, can you stay with us”?</p> <p>I – Student talking – says name and makes a clicking noise. NI</p> <p>I – Student not on task, “_____, I am waiting on you”.</p> <p>I – Student off task – “Uh-oh _____, come on”.</p> <p>I – Students begin to talk, “Keep working kiddos”.</p> <p>I – Student getting up during instruction. “No uh-uh not a good time”.</p> <p>I – Notices boys talking. “No uh-uh, what are you doing”?</p> <p>I – Student talking – “Oh, sh sh sh, _____ do you need help”?</p> <p>Teacher B:</p> <p>I: Student talking – “You have one reminder”. NI</p> <p>I: Student talking – “You have one reminde”. NI</p> <p>I: Students talking – “_____, what are you working on?”</p> <p>I: Student playing with slinky, gives the student a choice. “Do you want me to have it or your back pack?”</p>

	<p>I: Student blurts out – “Oh, it’s not time to talk”.</p> <p>Teacher C</p> <p>I – Say name: student talking NI</p> <p>I – Say name: student talking NI</p> <p>I – Say name: student talking NI</p> <p>I – Look at me please: students talking NI</p> <p>I – Reprimand – Don’t be silly NI</p> <p>I – “Still waiting on _____”. NI</p> <p>I – Say name: student off task NI</p> <p>I – Questions a student who is off task. Redirects the student.</p> <p>I – Student off task. “I am goint to wait until ____ is ready”.</p> <p>I – Students up at drinking fountain. “Kiddos go back to your seats, I can’t hear _____”.</p> <p>I – Student talking. “Are you with me _____?”</p>
<p>Reactive with loss of privilege</p> <p>Total: 4</p> <p>Teacher A: 0</p> <p>Teacher B: 0</p> <p>Teacher C: 4</p>	<p>Teacher C</p> <p>I – After transitions, student still moving. \$5 fine</p> <p>I – After transitions, student still moving. \$5 fine</p> <p>I – Charges student who is not on task \$5.</p> <p>I – Student messing around: \$5 fine</p>

The second phase of the research consisted of teacher interviews. I interviewed the same three teachers I previously observed in phase one. Below is a transcription of their responses. In transcribing the answers minor errors may have occurred, but the main idea is consistent with the interviewer's response.

*Question 1: What grade do you currently teach?*

**Answers:**

**Teacher A:** 2<sup>nd</sup> grade

**Teacher B:** 2<sup>nd</sup> grade

**Teacher C:** 2<sup>nd</sup> grade

*Question 2: How long have you been an educator?*

**Answers:**

**Teacher A:** 24 years

**Teacher B:** 9 years

**Teacher C:** 24 years

*Question 3: Have you taught any other grades besides what you are currently teaching?*

**Teacher A:** Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and principal

**Teacher B:** 1<sup>st</sup> grade

**Teacher C:** Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>

*Question 4: What method of classroom management do you currently use in your classroom?*

**Teacher A:** A lot of what I use is rapport based. I actually do not use a specific behavior plan, I have chosen to cater the way I react to student misbehavior based on each student's needs. It is pretty casual for the most part.

**Teacher B:** I have based my method of classroom management on the love and logic approach. In the beginning of the year I give the students one rule, you can do anything you want as long as it does not make a problem for you or someone else. When student misbehavior does become an issue I use a green, yellow, and red system. If a student receives a red he or she will be asked to complete a refocusing slip. If misbehavior continues a communication slip will be given to the student.

**Teacher C:** Classroom management is the most important part of teaching. If you do not have a firm and consistent classroom management plan you are allowing for chaos to consume the class. Students need to respect the teacher, themselves, and their peers. I currently use a system that is based on rewards and consequences.

*Question 4a: Does this method take a more proactive or reactive approach to discipline?*

**Teacher A:** I take more of a proactive approach to discipline. I think it is important to front load everything. During the first few days/few weeks I establish with the students clear routines and procedures that will be used throughout the year. As a class we continue to practice them until they are perfected.

**Teacher B:** I always begin by being proactive. The proactive approach is established during the first weeks of school. When students come into the classroom we practice the routines and procedures over and over again. Students need to know exactly what is expected of them. Once all proactive methods have been exhausted and a student is still in need of discipline I may choose to use a reactive approach taking away privileges. I do

however work with the student to establish a way to replace the negative behavior with positive behavior. This is also done through the use of the reflection sheet.

**Teacher C:** The method that I use definitely takes more of a proactive approach to discipline. During the first few weeks of school I really focus on establishing clear routines with the students, what things should and will look like in the classroom. We also discuss the consequences for misbehavior. I also let the students help make up rules for the class, I want them to feel like they have input towards how the class will be managed. If a problem occurs I work to remove it as quickly as possible and refocus with the student. At this time I work with the student to process what the child has done wrong. I always try to end the discussion on a positive note, describing how to behave appropriately in the future.

*Question 4b: Do you find it effective in maintaining control while decreasing disruptive behavior? Why or why not?*

**Teacher A:** Yes, I think it is very important to be proactive when it comes to behavior management. Everything runs more smoothly when you properly prepare your students for how they should behave in the class and during transitions.

**Teacher B:** I think it is very important to begin with a proactive approach especially with students who struggle with disabilities. They need to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Using a proactive approach saves you many hours.

**Teacher C:** Yes, definitely. If you can keep things from happening you allow for more teaching time. It is important to nip the little behaviors while being consistent and fair.

*Question 4c: Have you always used this particular method? If not, what other methods have you used?*

**Teacher A:** I have tried many different tactics, I think it is most important that you figure out how to meet each student's needs. I also think it is important not to publicly shame kids in any way. Throughout the years I have tried to have the students come up with classroom rules. I'll sometimes use a tactile approach. When the students come into the classroom I always greet them at the door with a hug or pat on the back to let them know I care. Some students really need physical touch and proximity. I always make sure to get to know each of my kids. Sometimes I will have them come in and talk at recess if they are having problems. I always let the students know that they will have a fresh start. I tell them that I have a very short memory and I won't even remember their misbehavior the next day or even the next hour. I always want my students to know that they can always turn their misbehavior around, I never want them to think they are a bad kid.

**Teacher B:** For the most part I have always used the same method. I will often times tweak my behavior plan based on specific student's needs. This will be established between the student, his or her parents, and me. It is very important to get to know your students when establishing a management plan. When working with difficult students I have found it crucial to find out what will motivate the student. With \_\_\_\_\_ I have needed to take much more of a proactive approach. \_\_\_\_\_ is not intrinsically motivated so I have had to use extrinsic motivators that will encourage the student to behave appropriately.

**Teacher C:** At one time I was using the green, yellow, and red card system. I didn't like this approach because the student needs to know that the teacher understands things

happen. I don't like that the card system is displayed in the front of the classroom. I began the refocusing sheet in '94 and I have used it ever since.

*Question 5: Is there a school wide approach to discipline? If so, what is it?*

**Teacher A:** Yes, X Elementary is considered a Peacebuilders school, which is based on six principles/behavior guidelines.

**Teacher B:** We use the Peacebuilders program.

**Teacher C:** The school uses the Peacebuilders. We have also recently added a classroom intervention plan this last year. This helps the teacher have a specific plan for when major misbehaviors occur.

*Question 5a: How do you incorporate this approach into your own classroom?*

**Teacher A:** I practice the peacebuilders song with the students. I also have the peacebuilder behavior guidelines posted on my door. When students do something showing they have been a peacebuilder we add a link to a chain in the classroom. The kids love building the chain.

**Teacher B:** I don't really incorporate peacebuilders into my classroom. I do however have the guidelines posted on the door of the classroom.

**Teacher C:** I don't really incorporate this approach into my own plan. I have the peacebuilder guidelines posted in the class but other than that I do not put much stress on reviewing them with students. At X Elementary each teacher kind of develops his or her own management plan. When the behavior is moved beyond the teacher an individual behavior plan is established. The school also uses the classroom intervention plan for major misbehaviors. This is used to track the child's behavior and to keep a record of it.

## **Analysis**

### *Teacher Perspective*

While interviewing the three second grade teachers at X Elementary School it became evident that classroom management is very important. This is consistent to what I have found in previous research. Teacher C states, “Classroom management is the most important part of teaching, if you do not have a firm and consistent classroom management plan you are allowing for chaos to consume the class”. Some may think that a classroom management plan simply refers to how one would respond when negative behavior occurs. While this is true, it does not fully encompass what classroom management entails. Through examining past research and interviewing these teachers I have come to find that classroom management not only covers discipline and consequences, but it also refers to the rules and procedures that are established and teacher-student relationships. These are both ways to ensure classroom management is dealt with proactively.

Through my research I have come to find that the second grade teachers at X Elementary School view proactive discipline as being vital in maintaining classroom control. Each of the teachers expressed the opinion that a proactive approach helps to eliminate misbehavior before it occurs. One teacher states, “If you can keep things from happening you allow for more teaching time” (Teacher C). This allows for the teacher to spend more time teaching valuable material and less time reprimanding negative behavior. Another teacher who views a proactive approach as crucial says “I take more of a proactive approach to discipline. I think it is important to front load everything” (Teacher A).



All three of the teachers addressed the importance of establishing clear routines and procedures during the first few weeks of school. This is another way in which a proactive approach is used within the classroom. Students need to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them, consistency is crucial in working with young children. When referring to rules and procedures Robert Marzano states, “they give students the structure they need and also help them feel that the classroom is a safe and predictable place” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 5). All three teachers’ responses to were consistent with what Marzano has said, students need order and structure. “During the first few days/weeks I establish with the students clear routines and procedures that will be used throughout the year (Teacher A)”. “The proactive approach is established during the first weeks of school. When students come into the classroom we practice the routines and procedures over and over again. Students need to know exactly what is expected of them” (Teacher B). “During the first few weeks of school I really focus on establishing clear routines with the students, what things should and will look like in the classroom” (Teacher C).

Along with establishing clear routines and procedures it is also important to create positive teacher-student relationships as a way to proactively approach misbehavior. When referring to teacher-student relationships Marzano states “if the teacher has a good relationship with students, all of the other aspects of classroom management will run much more smoothly” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 56). Teacher A specifically addressed the importance of establishing a positive relationship with her students and getting to know their individual needs. “I think it is most important that you figure out how to meet each student’s needs.... I always make sure to get to know each of my kids” (Teacher A).

Teacher B agrees by saying “it is very important to get to know your students when establishing a management plan... I will often times tweak my behavior plan based on specific student’s needs” (Teacher B).

None of the teachers I interviewed expressed any negative feelings towards a proactive approach. They did however, admit that a proactive approach does not always completely eliminate negative behavior. Instead it reduces the likelihood of misbehavior to occur. “When misbehavior becomes an issue a reactive approach is needed. I always begin by being proactive...Once all proactive methods have been exhausted and a student is still in need of discipline I may choose to use a reactive approach taking away privileges. I do however, work with the student to establish a way to replace the negative behavior with positive behavior” (Teacher B). During the interview teacher B explained that there are instances when a reactive approach is needed to address negative behavior. Teacher B did however discuss ways in which the initial consequence can then be turned into addressing future potential issues proactively. This can be done through the use of a reflection sheet. Both Teacher B and Teacher C have chosen to use the reflection sheet as a way to redirect the negative behavior to aid students in developing a plan for the future. The reflection sheet is given to students who have received three warnings throughout the day and requires them to state how they will behave in the future and whether or not they are ready to do that now.

Each of the teachers stressed the importance of redirecting student behavior to prevent future problems. I did however observe that the teachers only used redirection techniques when the misbehavior was reoccurring or significantly disruptive. Minor misbehaviors were addressed by either a call out of a student name or a quick reminder,

there was no follow up with the student. My conclusion is that teachers do not have the time to sit down with each student who minorly misbehaves, therefore a simple reminder is more efficient. Teachers need to weigh the consequences and determine whether or not the behavior is worth discussing further with the student.

### *Classroom Observations*

Consistent with what the three second grade teachers at X Elementary had said in their interview, they are more likely to use a proactive approach to classroom management. The teachers were nearly twice as likely to use a proactive approach as opposed to a reactive approach. Prepping students before a transition seemed to be extremely helpful. For example, when Teacher A transitioned the students from the classroom to the computer lab she reviewed acceptable hallway and lab behavior. There were then no instances in the hall or in the computer lab where a reactive approach was needed. During my observations I found that the teachers were most likely to proactively approach a potential mishap before and during a transition. These seemed to be the times at which students needed a reminder of acceptable behavior.

While interpreting my data I chose to differentiate between reactive and reactive with loss of privilege. In my findings I found that there was a big difference between a simple reminder and a loss of privilege. Generally when the teacher reactively approached a situation he/she would give a reminder and work to redirect the student's attention. This did not seem to have a negative effect on the student in any way. However, during my experience with Teacher C I found that she was quick to charge students \$5 of their funny money. It would be interesting to further study how the students perceive this type of discipline. Through my experience I observed that simply

charging the students money was ineffective. Students need to reflect on their behavior and make a choice to redirect their actions positively. These findings are consistent to what the teachers expressed in the interviews, “if a problem occurs I work to remove it as quickly as possible and refocus with the student. At this time I work with the student to process what the child has done wrong. I always try to end the discussion on a positive note, describing how to behave appropriately in the future” (Teacher C).

### **Implications**

This qualitative study shows the importance of establishing a classroom management plan that proactively approaches misbehavior. When using a proactive approach teachers are able to spend more time teaching students valuable material and less time reprimanding negative behavior. According to my findings teachers should only use reactive discipline as a secondary approach to classroom management. If a problem persists with individual students a specific behavior plan should be established for those individuals.

When using a proactive approach teachers should work to lay a strong foundation for student success before the students enter the classroom. According to my findings this approach should be based on three key ideas: (1) rules and procedures (2) discipline and consequences and (3) positive teacher-student relationships. Rules and procedures provide structure to the classroom which is crucial to student success. They also give guidelines and expectations for specific behaviors such as going to the bathroom and getting students' attention. A consistent use of discipline and consequences is necessary to student success. Applied with positive rewards students have a motivation for behaving appropriately in the classroom. If needed an individual plan can be

implemented for specific students. Finally positive teacher-student relationships allows for all aspects of classroom management to run effectively. When students feel like the teacher has an invested interest in their success they are more likely to put forth the effort needed to succeed.

## **Conclusion**

Classroom management is vital in maintaining a well behaved classroom. Disruptive behavior takes away from the opportunity of students to learn and fails to create a pro-social environment. Therefore, understanding current practices of classroom management is beneficial to teachers in an effort to increase student productivity. This is an issue that affects all teachers and school personnel. Without an effective means of classroom management, teachers spend more time reprimanding negative behavior rather than teaching valuable material. Using a proactive approach will help teachers to eliminate negative behavior before it occurs in the classroom. Teachers will find that this will save them hours of crucial instructional time.

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