

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND ACTION RESEARCH:

ACTIVITY 1:

Classroom Organization

As a teacher, the way you organize your classroom is extremely important. Whenever you decorate or organize your classroom, keep in mind how you can develop your classroom environment to provide quality learning.

Student Benefits

The prime benefits of a well-organized classroom will accrue to your students. Your organization and procedures (or lack thereof) are, after all, ever-present reminders to the children of how to behave, how to conduct their business, and how best to be effective without discord in a group. Respect for others, consideration, efficiency, pride of accomplishment, security in knowing what, how, when, and where to do something—all these positive elements are the hallmarks and characteristics of students who learn in well-organized classrooms. Children like a predictable, safe, and orderly environment—and they like going to a school that provides that environment. For these reasons alone, it behooves any teacher to pay close attention to good organization.

Teacher Benefits

Aside from the benefits to students, good organization brings powerful help to the teacher. In fact, it can be truthfully said that the first “aide” any teacher has is his or her ability to organize the classroom well.

The immediate benefits of a well-organized classroom to the teacher are clear—less wasted time and therefore more efficiency. Not so immediately apparent, perhaps, are the following very significant elements:

- reduced teacher fatigue
- improved student-teacher relations
- improved parent-teacher relations
- increased job satisfaction
- increased enthusiasm for professional growth
- increased student academic progress

Here are three important points to remember when organizing your classroom:

1. Create a positive and safe environment for your students.
2. Create an environment that will maximize learning.
3. Create an environment that will minimize the frequency of behavior problems.

Desk Arrangement

- Check these suggestions to include in your decision-making when arranging the desks in your classroom. Remember that the classroom is there for your teaching and the students' learning.
- Observe how other teachers have arranged their classrooms and choose the arrangement that best suits your needs and goals.
- Desks or tables might be arranged in one of the following ways: (1) half-circles with a front row and a back row (2) in groups of four or five (3) the traditional way, with chairs lined up, one behind the other.
- Arrange your room so you can have eye contact with all your students.
- Arrange your desks so that the students' attention is on the teacher.
- Make sure that each student is able to see chalkboards, whiteboards, and other modes of visuals.
- Desks should not be placed in front of windows. The glare can be distracting and difficult on the eyes.
- Note where the "high traffic" areas will be. Try to keep this area free of congestion.
- Students need to have easy access to those materials that will be used frequently.
- Students should be able to find their work easily and quickly to promote learning.

ACTIVITY2:

What Is Action Research?

There are many ways to conduct research. Each of these ways is used in various professional fields, including psychology, sociology, social work, medicine, nursing, education and so on. However, the field of education often uses **action research**, an interactive method of collecting information that's used to explore topics of teaching, curriculum development and student behavior in the classroom.

Action research is very popular in the field of education because there is always room for improvement when it comes to teaching and educating others. Sure, there are all types of methods of teaching in the classroom, but action research works very well because the cycle offers opportunity for continued reflection. In all professional fields, the goal of action research is to improve processes. Action research is also beneficial in areas of teaching practice that need to be explored or settings in which continued improvement is the focus.

Let's take a closer look at the cycle of action research. As you can see, the process first starts with identifying a problem. Then, you must devise a plan and implement the plan. This is the part of the process where the action is taking place. After you implement the plan, you will observe how the process is working or not working. After you've had time to observe the situation, the entire process of action research is reflected upon. Perhaps the whole process will start over again! This is action research!



Methods of Action Research

There are many methods to conducting action research. Some of the methods include:

- Observing individuals or groups
- Using audio and video tape recording
- Using structured or semi-structured interviews
- Taking field notes
- Using analytic memoing
- Using or taking photography
- Distributing surveys or questionnaires

Researchers can also use more than one of the methods above to assist them in collecting rich and meaningful data.

While there are various methods to conducting action research, there are also various types of action research in the fields of education, including individual action research, collaborative action research and school-wide action research. For example:

- **Individual action research** involves working independently on a project, such as an elementary school teacher conducting her own, in-class research project with her students.
- **Collaborative action research** involves a group of teachers or researchers working together to explore a problem that might be present beyond a single classroom, perhaps at the departmental level or an entire grade level.
- **School-wide action research** generally focuses on issues present throughout an entire school or across the district. Teams of staff members would work together using school-wide action research. As you can see, action research can be used in many educational settings.

We'll explore two examples of action research being used in the field of education. The first example discusses observation as the method of choice for collecting data in the classroom. The second example discusses using surveys as the method of choice for collecting data. The cycle of action research is emphasized in each of the examples.

Observation Example (Individual Action Research)

Step 1: Identify the Problem

You are a fifth grade teacher and have identified a problem in your classroom. The problem is that your students do not have much experience working in task groups, and you believe that they need to have more opportunities to do so. You want to assess the skill set of your students and observe their overall approach to group work. By doing this, you feel that next time you offer group work, you will have some new insight into what works well and what needs improvement regarding conducting group work in your class.

Step 2: Devise a Plan

Your plan includes having your students work together in groups for their upcoming science project. By doing this, you hope to explore a variety of information, such as how the students brainstorm together, how they interact with each other and how they distribute work among the task groups. You provide them an instruction sheet and a time frame to work from.

Step 3: Act to Implement a Plan

You act by assigning your students into groups and having them work through their science projects. This step can also be thought of as initiating and carrying out the plan.

Step 4: Observe

During this step of the action research process, you observe the groups of students working together. You take note on how they are progressing and what types of issues they are having, watch them brainstorm and form interesting ideas and even observe some students not getting along, arguing and not participating altogether. This is the observation and data collection phase.

Step 5: Reflect and Share

This final step is the end point of action research... however, it also might be the beginning! You have noticed that throughout the whole week of observing and watching your students work together, there were some things that just weren't working. You have also noticed some things that were working really well! Either way, this is the step where you determine if the plan needs to be observed again with some modifications or if the plan worked perfectly.

ACTIVITY3:

Dealing with Classroom Management Problems

Saul Axelrod explains how Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and positive reinforcement can help teachers successfully manage their classrooms

THERE IS PROBABLY NO ISSUE MORE pressing for teachers than dealing with classroom management problems. Teachers wake up obsessing over a student's behavior or even leave education. Here is what is so sad about this. It is unnecessary. For approximately 50 years, there have been available to teachers Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) interventions that can solve most classroom management problems in a quick and humane manner.

ABA is derived from the basic principles of behavior outlined by famed psychologist B.F. Skinner about three quarters of a century ago. Thousands of journal articles and books have demonstrated that ABA can be used to solve some of the most difficult behavioral problems. Yet, for reasons I have discussed in other articles, ABA is regularly used in special education, but seldom used in regular education. This is unfortunate. If ABA procedures were used more often in regular education, inclusion of children with disabilities would be more of a reality in regular education, and teachers' lives would be much happier.

Positive reinforcement procedures

There are many complex principles in ABA. Yet, by knowing how to apply a relatively simple principle – positive reinforcement – teachers are able to produce large and desirable changes in the behaviors of their students.

The principle of positive reinforcement indicates that when a pleasant event follows a behavior, the behavior is more likely to occur in the future. For example, when teachers compliment students for behaving properly, it is likely that they will behave more appropriately in the future. If the teacher awards extra marks to students for handing homework in on time, the chances are that students will be more diligent in handing in their homework next time.

What we know

- There is a lot of evidence that ABA can be used to solve some of the most difficult behavioral problems.
- ABA interventions, like positive reinforcement, work well and are easy to implement.
- Students enjoy being in a classroom where positive reinforcement procedures are being used, and teachers enjoy teaching with positive reinforcement procedures because the results are so gratifying.

It is surprising to me that people have so many reservations and concerns about positive reinforcement procedures. The principle of positive reinforcement is a natural, not a contrived, process. People say: "Hello" to people who smile back at them. Salespeople make efforts to sell more products, because such activities increase their commissions. Athletes try hard to meet the incentive clauses of their contracts.

What is so wonderful about positive reinforcement procedures?

There are few things in life that produce only pleasant outcomes. Positive reinforcement comes as close to this ideal as any other process does. Positive reinforcement works and is humane. Children love being in a classroom where positive reinforcement procedures are being used. Teachers enjoy teaching with positive reinforcement procedures because the results are so gratifying. Positive reinforcement procedures create a loving bond between students and teachers.

How do I find out what children's positive reinforcers are?

This is not hard to do. There are a number of things you can do to find out what a student's possible positive reinforcers are. I italicized possible because you cannot be sure if an item or activity is a positive reinforcer until you try it out. Here are some things you can do. First, you can ask the child what they would like to work for. You can ask the same question to their parents. You can also ask them to pick from a list of possible reinforcers. Another way of identifying possible positive reinforcers is to note what a child spends a lot of time doing. If a student frequently runs to the computer, computer time is likely to be a positive reinforcer. Finally, you can observe what follows an inappropriate behavior. This may be a positive reinforcer. For example, if you notice that often when a student storms out of the classroom, he or she gets to spend time with a favorite principal, visiting the principal may be a positive reinforcer. You may then have the child earn time with the principal for behaving appropriately.

What are some positive reinforcers I can use?

This is easy. The first one falls under the category of social reinforcement and consists of smiles, compliments, or a call home to a parent reporting how well their child behaved that day. It is helpful to compliment children when they walk into class each day. This prompts appropriate student behavior, which should also be praised. The best predictor I know of for successful classroom management is the number of compliments a teacher gives. The more, the better. Think of how you feel when someone gives you a sincere compliment. Some teachers are admonished not to smile until Christmas. I say, start smiling on Labor Day and keep smiling until Flag Day.

There are also a number of activity and tangible reinforcers for students of all ages. These include having extra free time, collecting student papers, having lunch with the teacher, earning extra points toward a grade, and reading favored materials.

What are a few examples of successful ABA programs?

Here are a few examples. One first-grade teacher I know had a student who made animal sounds 45 times per day. The teacher divided the day into 15-minute blocks. For every 15-minute block without an animal sound, the girl earned a minute on the computer to be enjoyed at the end of the day. The girl then made animal sounds only four times a day.

A middle school teacher found that students were frequently out of theShe set a timer to ring three times a lesson at unpredictable intervals. If all students were seated when the timer went off, the group earned a point. Ten points meant a day without homework. Out-of-seat behavior became a rarity.

A high school mathematics teacher found that students were taking a long time to transition between classes. He solved this by putting bonus problems on the whiteboard at the start of each class. The problems were removed after five minutes. Most students arrived at class punctually, thereafter, in order to receive the bonus points on their grades.

What are some pointers for solving classroom problems constructively?

- *Set reasonable goals.* A small improvement in behavior is appropriate at the start. As student behavior improves, you can increase the requirements for positive reinforcers.
- *Make adjustments in your procedures.* As you use a procedure, you may notice better ways to apply the intervention. Make these changes. A small adjustment in an intervention can produce a major change in the outcome.
- *Talk to other teachers.* You have a lot of smart, skillful colleagues. Talk to them. Ask them what they have found helpful when they have encountered problems similar to yours.
- *Read teacher-oriented ABA textbooks.* They are filled with descriptions of interventions that have been successful with situations like the ones you are encountering.
- *Use interventions that are easy to apply and are inexpensive.* The best procedures are simple and powerful, and they exist. A visit to a dollar store is a good start for inexpensive rewards.
- *Prioritize and work with only one or two behaviors at the start.* There may be several behavior problems in your classroom, but it is too difficult to address all of them at once. Focus on one or two problems. When they come under control, you can add other behaviors to your program. A procedure that is effective with one behavior is likely to be effective with other behaviors.
- *Be an optimist.* The situation may be tough, but it is not impossible. Teachers like you have dealt successfully with more difficult problems. When your intervention does not work, it is not your failure. It is just a prompt to try something else. Giving up is the only failure.

ACTIVITY4:

The eight qualities of successful school leaders

What are the qualities needed to be a successful school leader? This is the question I set out to answer in a new book for which I interviewed some of the UK's best headteachers.

It started with a challenge: imagine you are cast adrift on a desert island with a school full of children in desperate need of a great headteacher. What eight qualities would you take with you to run your desert island school?

The challenge, based on the long-running BBC radio programme Desert Island Discs, produced a treasure trove of contributions from school leaders. Their insights, stories and experiences confirmed my belief that, while there might well be a common set of qualities that are crucial for successful leadership, there is also scope for different leadership styles.

Far from being clones enslaved by government diktat or professional orthodoxy, the best headteachers run their schools through conviction and often sheer personality. Even so, they do share some vital leadership qualities. So here are eight to take with you to your own desert island.

1. Vision

It's easy to dismiss the concept of "vision" as vague and woolly, but the best school leaders are visionaries with a clear sense of moral purpose. Successful leaders have "great vision – the ability to formulate and shape the future, rather than be shaped by events", says Richard Harman, headmaster of [Uppingham School](#), Rutland.

2. Courage

Successful school leaders show great determination, with the willpower and patience to see things through. They are willing to take risks and are steadfast in challenging under-performance or poor behaviour. "There's a mental courage that you don't waver from," says Madeleine Vigar, principal of the [Castle Partnership Academy Trust](#) in Haverhill, Suffolk.

3. Passion

"We are there for the children and we mustn't ever forget that," says Llyn Codling, executive headteacher of Portswood, St Mary's and Weston Park primary schools, Southampton. Like Codling, successful school leaders are passionate about teaching and learning and show great commitment to children. They take an active interest in their pupils' work – and that of their staff.

4. Emotional intelligence

Successful school leaders are team-builders. They understand the importance of relationships, empower their staff and pupils and show great empathy. "Get the relationships right – open, trusting, humorous – and much else follows naturally," says [Kingsbridge Community College](#) principal, Roger Pope. "They feel motivated. They want to follow you."

5. Judgment

The best headteachers show great judgment, make the right calls and are wise leaders. Crucially, however, it isn't simply a matter of acting alone. It's about involving the whole school community and taking people forward together.

6. Resilience

The business of headship is full-on and, at times, gruelling. Successful school leaders are optimistic and resilient, remain calm in a crisis and are energetic and positive at all times. "It's about really knowing yourself and having personal strategies so you are able to steady yourself in stormy waters," says Catherine Paine, primary head and assistant CEO of [REAch2 Academy Trust](#), Waltham Forest.

7. Persuasion

The best school leaders are confident communicators and storytellers. They are great persuaders and listeners, adept at describing 'the story of their school' to any audience. They are also great motivators. "Getting people to do things and go that extra mile lies at the heart of good leadership," says Kenny Frederick, former headteacher at [George Green's School](#), Tower Hamlets.

8. Curiosity

Successful school leaders are outward-looking and curious. As Teresa Tunnadine, headteacher at the Compton School in Barnet, states: "Headship is about having at least one foot outside of the school looking at what's going on elsewhere and picking up good ideas." They are excellent networkers and great opportunists, always in touch with events.

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