

Classroom Management for Urban Teachers
Lessons from Films and Real-Life Experiences

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Abstract

Identifying effective classroom management techniques and working discipline methods is a challenge within the education arena, particularly for new teachers. An educator reading this thesis will be able to identify leading problems in managing student behaviors, especially within the inner-city classroom. This thesis highlights a number of prevention strategies and addresses how to avoid ineffective techniques. By acquiring a better understanding of the hidden rules of poverty, the reader will learn how to adapt classroom management strategies to meet students' needs within the inner-city classroom. Various movies have been made concerning effective inner-city teachers. These films are based on real teachers, students, and educational conditions. They stand out as beacons of their time because of their realistic portrayal of urban school conditions and effective strategies modeled through each teacher's experience. By examining these films, teachers can identify the four types of challenging behaviors in their proper contexts and analyze how teachers adequately responded to each situation. This research will benefit the Education Community by reducing behavioral incidents due to poor classroom management and ensuring that disciplinary methods develop responsible students.

Classroom Management Strategies for Inner-city School Teachers

The goal of a teacher is to ensure that students are learning, comprehending, and applying knowledge so that they can develop into moral citizens who effectively function in society. Poor behavior in the classroom hinders these goals. If students are disruptive or inattentive, they cannot learn; as a result, they cannot develop the skills needed to be successful in the world. Management of difficult behavior is one of the greatest common concerns among urban teachers (Milner & Tenore, 2010). These teachers “express the view that they are powerless in their own classrooms” (Richmond, 1992, p. x).

Poor behavior can be both prevented and addressed when urban teachers understand the reason for student behavior choices and when they implement effective classroom management strategies. This paper identifies strategies that urban teachers can imply in order to decrease poor behavior and increase learning. Examples from films and real life experiences will be discussed to illustrate the strategies identified. The employment of the reviewed strategies within an urban context will be provided from movies, such as *Freedom Writers*, *Stand and Deliver*, *The Ron Clark Story*, and *Beyond the Blackboard*.

Problems with Poor Classroom Management

Classroom management is a combination of techniques that teachers use apart from explicit instruction to ensure that students are developing personal accountability (Charles, 1983). The absence of simple classroom management measures can transform even the best classrooms into centers of chaos. When the proper classroom management is not implemented, teachers lose valuable

instructional time. They spend their time repeating directions, addressing behavior problems, or carrying out trivial tasks. The mastery of simple classroom management skills “can be the difference between a bright beginning to an exciting career or the reason for an early exit!” (Hovland, 2008, p. 4).

Classroom management is a concern for urban teachers; teachers of urban public schools are “almost twice as likely as rural teachers to report that they spend at least 1 hour per week maintaining order in their classes” (Lippman, 1996, p. 116). The absence of this essential skill has negative consequences for teachers as well as their students. Poor management can contribute to high stress and burnout for urban school teachers and greatly decrease a teacher’s effectiveness in instruction (Anhorn, 2008). Due to this high stress, urban school teachers are also susceptible to high attrition and transfer rates (Chittooran & Chittooran, 2010). Kunjufu (2002) writes in his book *Black Students, Middle-Class Teachers*, “Of inner-city teachers, 40 percent transfer within five years” (2002, p. v). This inconsistency, in turn, hinders students because the teacher has not provided an atmosphere conducive to learning.

Research has consistently shown that poor classroom management in urban school environments negatively impacts students (Van Acker & Talbott, 1999), and good classroom management is critical for students’ learning. Whether it is the direct result of inconsistent teachers or a chaotic environment with teachers who remain, students suffer because poor behavior directly affects their ability to learn (R. Marzano, J. Marzano, Pickering, 2003). Alternatively, teachers who employ good classroom management promote positive student behavior and

high academic achievement while instilling in students both self-control and self-responsibility (Froyen & Iverson, 1999). Contrary to common misinterpretation, classroom management includes, but is not limited to, disciplinary methods practiced in a given moment. Unlike pure discipline or behavior modification, the goal of classroom management is not only to prevent poor behavior, but to also teach character, responsibility, conflict resolution, and listening skills. It entails teacher and student expectations, verbal and nonverbal cues, daily procedures, and classroom jobs utilized throughout the year to keep the classroom flowing smoothly. These techniques progress from being explicit and intentional to habitual and nearly invisible as responsibility shifts from the teacher to the student. This is how both “educators and students become co-participants in the teaching-learning process, striving to make the most of themselves and their collective experience” (Froyen & Iverson, 1999, p. 256) By utilizing strategies for establishing genuine relationships with students and strategies based on understanding, teachers can regain control of the classroom while developing responsible students.

Understanding the Urban Student: Problems Within the Classroom

Prior to implementing classroom management strategies, teachers must understand the makeup of the urban school and its students. By evaluating how students perceive themselves and the world around them, teachers can develop adequate strategies that will encourage positive behavior and help students develop skills to become independent, productive members of society. For example, an urban teacher may write disruptive students’ names on the board.

This action, though intended to prevent negative behavior, does not necessarily discourage the negative behavior or assist the students as some urban students “may be humiliated while others may feed on the negative attention” (Kramer, 2005, p. 38). Within an urban context, “saving face” or maintaining personal dignity is a priority (Curwin & Mendler, 2008, p. 30), so a teacher may write the disruptive student a brief note on a sticky pad rather than drawing attention to the student’s disruptive behavior by writing his or her name on the board. Such responses correlate to the urban context because they are based upon prior knowledge concerning students’ environments. In understanding urban environments, students’ needs, and how students’ perceive behavior of authority figures, teachers can better prevent and respond to negative behavior.

The Urban School Environment and Its Influence on Students

Poverty is a major problem within the urban community. Inner-city schools usually receive the least funding, supplies, and community support. This affects students by communicating that they are not worthy of a good education. Because of poverty, many children are more concerned about basic survival than about learning. Students see the inconsistencies of the school system and the ineffectiveness of programs and distrust all of those involved. Although parents are asked for support, many work multiple jobs and have difficulties getting seriously involved in their children’s education. Steinberg (2007) asked thirty individual educators from the Brooklyn, New York area what it meant to be an urban student. After observing the student conditions, these teachers answered:

Being an urban student means that transportation is difficult... you have reduced lunches... parents have long days at work... classrooms are overcrowded and schools are rundown.... [There is] less individualized attention given... school supplies are minimal if they exist at all.... [You are] a guinea pig for every new school initiative and pilot program, and those programs don't work.... [You are] told that you are bad because you are from the inner city... [and you are] aware of corruption in every part of the education system. Being an urban student means that the odds are stacked against you. (p. 282-3)

Educators entering the urban classroom must be aware of these student perceptions and implement strategies that will directly address them. For example, if teachers realize that their students live in poverty or have difficulties purchasing lunch, they may provide small snacks for students who are hungry. Likewise, teachers must demonstrate that they care by being prepared, identifying students' needs, and reaching out to them where they are.

In *Beyond the Blackboard* (Bleckner, 2011) Mrs. Stacey Bess was a first year teacher assigned to instruct homeless students in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She had no books, resources, or curriculum. Mrs. Bess was the only teacher at that shelter, so her students ranged in age and academic ability. Like many urban students, these children were accustomed to inconsistency and expected Ms. Bess to leave without warning. However, Mrs. Bess came to each class prepared and excited. She addressed students' needs by providing small juice boxes and fruit cups for students, so that they would not be distracted by hunger. She also

solicited help from parents in the shelter to help paint the classroom. Mrs. Bess directly confronted negative assumptions by showing her students that she cared. This effort set a foundation of trust, and student behavior improved as a result of her strategies based on understanding (Bleckner, 2011). Likewise, urban educators must lay a foundation of trust by understanding their students.

The Influence of Poverty on the Urban School Environment and the Urban Student

Urban teachers must develop an understanding of the hidden rules of poverty in order to reach their students. Poverty impacts the lives and cultural values of many students in urban schools. Examples of the hidden rules in poverty include a high noise level, the extreme importance on entertainment (primarily mainstream), and emphasis on physicality (Payne, 1996). These same children living under this poverty framework are expected to adjust to a completely different set of values when entering the classroom environment.

Dr. Ruby Payne (1996) explains in her book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* many “schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules [or values] of middle class,” which are often different from students’ values (p. 3). A third grade teacher described a particular student encounter within an inner city school: “It’s the walking by someone and just shoving them for no reason... [T]heir way of being with each other and socializing with each other is very physical and I find in a negative way” (McCready & Soloway, 2010, p. 117). Developing an understanding can better prepare teachers to manage negative behaviors related to these hidden rules.

The hidden rules of poverty are related to the four types of challenging behaviors that teachers in urban schools find most challenging. McCready and Soloway (2010) conducted a study on four model inner-city schools in Toronto, Canada and found that teachers these challenging behaviors include: 1) Physicality with peers, 2) Verbal behaviors, 3) Miscellaneous non-compliance, and 4) Academic disengagement. Examples of physical misbehaviors include kicking peers or fleeing the classroom. Likewise, students may yell or swear during verbal defiance. Non-compliance can be identified by stubbornness or even testing boundaries. Academic challenges may involve cheating on tests, inability to complete a task, or disinterest.

The Role of Power and It Influences Effective Classroom Management

Classroom management appropriate in the urban school setting is not only contingent upon teachers understanding their students, but it is also contingent upon the power teachers have and implement in the urban classroom. It is important for urban teachers to understand the different types of power, their benefits and challenges, and how some types of power may not be appropriate due to hidden rules of the students' culture.

Social power is "the potential influence of one person over another" (Cartwright & Zander, 1968, p. 316). A commonly cited definition is that of French and Raven (1959) who describe the five social bases of power a teacher can use to promote change in students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. In its proper context, each social base of power can be effective. For example, prizes, grade, privileges, and praise are all example of rewards. When rewards are used to

influence behavior, the teacher is employing reward power. Rewards can be powerful motivators to encourage students to choose the correct behavior. Token economy systems have been shown to be effective in urban schools (Boneicki & Moore, 2003). The problem is that the teacher relying solely on reward power only has as much influence as the reward. So, if students do not perceive that the reward is worth the effort, the teachers' influence is weakened or even diminished.

The underlying basis of Coercive Power is the belief that non-compliance can be punished and punishment controls behavior. In school, denial of privileges, removal from the class, suspension, and expulsion are degrees of coercive power. These measures can stop negative behavior and help clearly establish boundaries, which can help provide urban students with a sense of safety needed to learn (Tauber, 1999). However, overdependence upon them can lead to urban students' development of attitude (Tauber, 1999).

Coercive and reward power both align with the Skinnerian system of rewards and punishment. As described above, these solutions only pacify poor behavior. Their benefits are often short lived. Eventually, students lose interest in rewards (stickers, candy, pizza parties, etc.) or challenge the "punisher" (Tauber, 1999, p. 23). At their best, coercive and reward power merely influence wanted behavior for a period of time; they do not develop character or conflict resolution skills. At their worst, coercive or reward power leave teachers stressed and discouraged, completely losing control of the classroom (Tauber, 1999).

Other teachers may rely upon legitimate power in which students recognize the teacher as an authority figure, possessing the “right to prescribe behavior” (Tauber, 1999, p. 23). This method is ineffective because it requires that students operate from a middle-class framework. A hidden rule of poverty is that authority figures are generally mistrusted (Payne, 1996). As a result, the student may not automatically assume that teachers are qualified to dictate behaviors. On the other hand, students who do accept this assumption may become heavily dependent on the teacher to distinguish positive from negative behavior (Schopler & Bateson, 1965). This is equally detrimental because students are not becoming reflective in their actions. They are merely relying on the teacher for instructions. For example, a student may not be physically abusive in the classroom, but he may initiate fights after school. This student has no authority figure. If teachers are to develop moral citizens, they must teach students to be independent, fully understanding the basis of their actions without needing to be prompted by the presence of an authority figure.

Teachers may also use expert power within to manage their classrooms. Here, students may perceive the instructor as extremely knowledgeable. Teachers may strike student interest with new knowledge, trivia-like facts, or inspirational stories. Children adhere to given requests because they perceive that the teacher knows something that the student wants to know. This method is a great motivator for learning; however, it must not be the sole source for classroom management. Expert power can diminish with the difficulty of the task. If students perceive the knowledge as too lofty, they may become discouraged. Concerning the hidden rules

of poverty, education is “valued and revered as abstract but not as reality” (Payne, 1996, p. 42). Although expert power may earn a degree of respect from the student, it is not enough to evoke action because the teacher’s advanced knowledge is perceived as unattainable, if not intimidating, to the inner-city student.

Major problems that occur with the first three social bases of power are they do not build character, impose middle-class values, or are irrelevant to students’ personalities and cultures. Sadly, many teachers “have bought into deficit mentalities about students in urban schools... [and] treat them as needing to be contained, subordinated and to some degree, broken” (Ullucci, 2009, p. 13). These teachers have mistakenly relied too heavily upon one of the four powers mentioned and neglected that “Warm, positive, community based approaches to management can be just as effective in urban schools. This is what all children deserve” (Ullucci, 2009, p. 13).

In order to provide that positive environment, teachers must establish strong relationships with their students. Referent power is derived from respect and strong identification with a teacher. Examples of using referent power may include incorporating story time during instruction, so that the teacher can know the students as individuals. Teachers may simply “be human” by sharing information about themselves, such as their “family, hobbies, and interests to let students know that [they] have a life outside of the classroom” (Kramer, 2005, p. 2). Hanging up family photos, reading a favorite book, or introducing a lesson with a story from the teacher’s life experience, will help students connect with that adult. Teachers may also exhibit referent power by explaining the purpose of various classroom rules.

For example, teachers may state that talking while others are talking shows disregard for the speaker and also prevents the reception of information, or they may ask students to deduce the purpose of the “one mic” rule where only one person is allowed to speak at a time. This simple gesture may help students perceive that the teacher is not simply imposing their values or pushing their authority. These acts develop a sense of respect for that teacher that will last longer than any threats or incentives a teacher can give. Also, training students to reason through procedures prepares them for life without a chaperone. Although each social base of power is effective within its respective purpose, referent power promotes long-term cooperation and ensures the maturity of students.

Film Example of Application of Power

Film provides teachers with an example of how the different types of power can be effectively used in the urban classroom. In the film *Freedom Writers* (DeVito, 2006), Mrs. Gruwell’s classroom experience demonstrates how an educator may use the different social powers effectively and ineffectively within an urban classroom. Erin Gruwell entered Wilson High School in Long Beach, California teaching Freshman English. Many of her students were affiliated with gangs and had a strong contempt for Mrs. Gruwell due to her race (Caucasian) and socioeconomic status (middle class). As a recent college graduate, Mrs. Gruwell had little experience working with inner-city students. Throughout the beginning of the film Mrs. Gruwell struggles to connect with her students.

In the film, Mrs. Gruwell begins the school year by using legitimate power. She directly confronts noncompliance by explaining to her students that a person must give respect to receive it. Her students respond poorly because legitimate power is based on middle-class values concerning authority figures and is highly irrelevant to inner-city culture. Consequently, they continue to engage in profanity, passing notes, reading magazines, and talking during instruction. One student, Andre, disputes the middle class perspective about respect by saying that Mrs. Gruwell “could be a bad person standing up there” (DeVito, 2006). In *Freedom Writers* (DeVito), students’ affiliation with gang-related violence had taught them that to survive they had to think of everyone as an enemy until those people had proven themselves to be friends. Thus, the use of legitimate power was not effective in the urban school setting as it conflicted with the cultural view about authority.

Expert power, however, hinges upon students’ interests and perceptions of the teacher’s abilities. For example, a teacher may try to manage her classroom by getting students excited about learning something new. One scene in *Freedom Writers* (DeVito, 2006) clearly demonstrates how expert power needs to be used in a culturally sensitive manner; otherwise, it is ineffective. Mrs. Gruwell’s students were passing around a note. Tito, a Latino student, drew a caricature of Jamal, a Black student. The picture was intended to be offensive because in it Tito grotesquely exaggerated the size of Jamal’s lips and nose, distinctly African-American features. Mrs. Gruwell used that incident as an opportunity to educate her students (the majority of whom were affiliated with some sort of gang) that Nazis

used similar drawings to incite hatred toward Jews and to eventually begin World War II. Although this subject sparked interest, many of the students felt intimidated and reacted accordingly. They argued that Mrs. Gruwell had no right to compare them to hateful Nazis. Students stated that Mrs. Gruwell had no idea how they “have to struggle each day for what [they] have” (DeVito). These students presented a good point; Mrs. Gruwell lived in a safe neighborhood, working in a safe classroom teaching grammar, but that it did nothing for the “world out there” (DeVito). These students respected the knowledge, but found it unattainable and irrelevant for their situations.

The most effective behavior model is referent power. One of the hidden rules of poverty indicates that relationships are the most valued resource, even more important than money and financial support (Payne, 1996). Thus, inner-city teachers can prove effective in managing their classrooms by developing a solid relationship with their students and understanding the importance of respect. Mrs. Gruwell demonstrates this later in the film. During a class period, she challenged her students’ worldview: “You think that when you’ll get respect when you’re dead? No! You will rot, and people will go on living and forget you” (DeVito, 2006). She explained that no one would remember them for their caricatures, murders, or negativity. They would be remembered for how they made a positive difference in their communities. Through this simple gesture, Mrs. Gruwell reached where her students were. These students wanted respect, security, and social change. Mrs. Gruwell clearly communicated that negativity would not provide them with either of these desires. Only positivity would give them the power to change

their circumstances and impact the status quo. Mrs. Gruwell gained control of her classroom because she helped her students to see that they could stop that cycle with knowledge.

As portrayed in film, Mrs. Gruwell is effective because she encourages students to think of themselves differently. She did not stereotype them nor did she allow them to use their environments as an excuse. This is referent power at its best. When children see that their teachers care, a level of trust is developed that will serve as the foundation of all classroom management activities. Other social bases of power are useful once referent power has been established. Understanding both the unique cultural aspects of the urban community and the five social powers and their effectiveness in the urban school setting are necessary measures for developing reflective students and an environment built on trust.

Classroom Management: Preventions and Interventions

Once urban teachers have laid a foundation of trust and respect, they can execute classroom management procedures. The actions a teacher may take, either through preparation or explicit instruction, to ensure students remain on task is called prevention (Curwin & Mendler, 1999). Anticipation, or prevention, is one of the greatest classroom management techniques that a teacher within urban classroom can implement because it eliminates negative behaviors before they begin. Although prevention is one of the greatest tools a teacher can use, things do happen. Effective teachers also prepare an intervention, which is a plan to respond to various behaviors and situations that occur within the urban classroom. Responses to behavior must be based on understanding and aimed at developing

responsible students. Classroom management is easy to execute whenever a goal is developed. Each rule, procedure, classroom theme, or consequence is influenced by the underlying purpose of the educator. The underlying goal of every strategy must not only be to stop the immediate behavior, but also to guide the student towards better choices in the future. Urban teachers must keep the most challenging behaviors in mind when developing classroom management strategies.

Academic Disengagement: Prevention

Introduction. Teachers in an urban setting need to identify ways to prevent and respond to disinterest, cheating on tests, and other academic challenging behaviors. Establishing community, getting parents involved, and using the available resources are way that teachers can help students feel engaged in the classroom. Urban teachers can employ the following strategies to address behaviors related to academic disengagement.

Establishing a community. When implementing any strategy, teachers must recognize that Classroom Management “is not about obedience; it is about teaching children how to thrive with others, to be productive, to be a good neighbor” (Ullucci, 2009, p. 26). When students perceive a sense of belonging and community within the classroom, they are more likely to engage in classroom activities. To build a sense of community, an urban teacher must take interest in the students and get to know them personally. This may involve attending their extra-curricular activities like sporting events or musical performances. Teachers

can also learn more about their students' experiences by providing story time for students to share.

Teachers may also allow specific time for students to interact with one another. For example, the teacher can develop a class Discussion Board in which students may give a written response to a given topic and discuss their viewpoints or life experiences. In this way, students are learning to use critical thinking skills as they share about themselves while becoming familiar with their classmates. They can make personal connections and learn from one another's experiences. Teachers may also allow students to engage in group projects or team-related games to develop a rapport among students. In essence, this will help prevent disengagement because students will feel like a part of the discussion. Establishing a community keeps students engaged because they are the focus. They will participate because they feel needed and valued.

Parental Contact. To combat academic disengagement, teachers can also reach out to parents. This may include calling each home before the school year begins and periodically throughout the term. Although this proves challenging for larger classrooms, teachers can "divide the total number of students ... by the number of weeks in a grading period" (Kelly, 2008, p. 38). Likewise, at the beginning of the year, teachers could schedule positive parent teacher meetings meet a neutral location (a coffee shop or inexpensive restaurant) to make a goal-oriented achievement plan for students. It is a good idea for teachers to make an effort to have a positive contact with the parent toward the beginning of the year to ensure the first teacher-parent contact is positive. It is important for them to

meet in a neutral location, so that parents do not feel threatened by the school environment and also so the teacher will not be placed in a potentially harmful situation.

Sending a weekly newsletter home will also allow parents to be involved in their children's education (Kremer & Reifman, 1996). Teachers within an urban community can also reach out to parents by "[a]ssembl[ing] a list of community organizations whose addresses and phone numbers parents may need" (Kremer and Reifman, 1996, p. 5). This may include the phone numbers to the police and fire departments, Medicaid program, adult education classes, summer camps, programs like Red Cross, and even legal services. Because of this collaborative effort, parents would not feel overwhelmed by or excluded from their children's academic lives.

Considering behavior, one of the most powerful tools is positive reinforcement. When teachers "catch the students being good" and provide adequate praise, this behavior is reinforced (Kremer & Reifman, 1996, p. 38). When teachers inform parents of the positive things students are doing, this also reinforces that behavior. Parents become more willing to contribute their services when they realize that the teacher truly cares for the child and is not trying to stereotype him or her.

Overall, when teachers understand that "parents are their children's first and most important teachers" (Kremer & Reifman, 1996, p. 5), they can use those resources to strengthen student relations. As a result, teaching will become more manageable and students will no longer feel isolated or disengaged from the

classroom. Instead, they will have a support system—a community of adults who will help them stay accountable.

Academic Disengagement: Intervention

Use community resources. Despite efforts to prevent academic disengagement, it may still occur in the classroom. Teachers may respond to academic disengagement by drawing from student interests and requesting help from the community of parents, colleagues, and other professionals that they have established throughout the school year.

Beyond the Blackboard (Bleckner, 2011) is an excellent example of utilizing community resources. The shelter had limited resources. There were no textbooks, desks, or supplies. Mrs. Bess' students were accustomed to inconsistency. As a result, they were distracted, disrespectful, and disengaged the first few weeks of school (Bleckner). In response, Mrs. Bess drew from the community resources—the parents. They assisted her by ensuring that their children did their homework. This simple act showed the students that people cared. Likewise, Mrs. Bess solicited help from local residents in the shelter. One elderly man was an artist; he painted pictures to decorate the classroom while parents helped Mrs. Bess clean and paint the class (Bleckner). Through these examples, teachers must recognize that classroom management is a collaborative effort. Once they recognize the need, teachers gain control by sharing the power.

Use humor. Urban teachers can also respond to academic disengagement by using humor in the classroom. In the film *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988), Señor Escalante combated academic disengagement by using humor to get

students' attention. In the film, many of his students were affiliated with gangs and found school to be a waste of time. In one scene, Escalante exclaimed, "Tough guys fry chicken for a living!" (Musca) to emphasize the importance of thinking beyond the classroom. His students wanted to do better than their parents (frying chicken) and chose to listen so that they could take charge of their futures. The strategy Escalante used included relevance and insight. He recognized that if the ultimate goal of education was for his students to become successful in society, higher education would be the avenue to reach that goal.

When students see that school is relevant, they become motivated to learn. In this way, Escalante empowers his students. They are not helpless because they can decide to make a better future for themselves. In response, they do not feel the need to be distracting. Although this strategy is closely tied with instruction, the educator must recognize that the material itself did not change. It was Escalante's presentation of the subject that deterred disengagement. He made the material relevant and sparked interest within the students.

Miscellaneous Noncompliance: Prevention

Students may demonstrate noncompliance by refusing to participate in a given activity (McCready & Soloway, 2010). The motivation behind resistant behavior is power (French & Raven, 1959). Students may feel threatened and wish to maintain a degree of control in the form of defiance. Urban teachers must use creative strategies to encourage students to comply with classroom rules in such a way that maintains their dignity, teaches them self-reflection, and promotes responsibility.

Rules: realistic, positively stated, and class created. Compliance begins with the rules. Teachers cannot expect students to act according to a certain standard if it is not clearly and consistently expressed in the classroom. Students may not comply with rules because they are not realistic, are worded in a threatening way, or are unclear (Kelly, 2008). Unrealistic rules contradict the very nature of children. For example, it is unrealistic to state, “No talking during class.” Students will talk. To prevent noncompliance, teachers must develop realistic classroom rules. A better rule would be to state, “One mic rule: One person talks at a time.” This addresses all situations because it avoids conversation during instruction because the teacher is talking. Nevertheless, it allows students to contribute while teaching them listening skills.

Students are also less likely to adhere to negatively worded rules (Kelly, 2008). Words like “no,” “don’t,” or “never” can entice a student to rebel. Positively worded, specific rules remind students to focus on the desired behavior and are the easiest to enforce (Kramer, 2005). Effectively stated rules provide students with instruction on what they should be doing. In this way, teachers are not focusing on the negative behavior but are encouraging the positive behavior they desire.

Rules should also be brief, clear, and fair, so that students understand that the rules are designed to protect their rights. This directly combats noncompliance because it removes the perceived threat. The number of rules posted must also be reasonable for that age group. For example, five to ten rules is reasonable for an elementary classroom. Such rules may include: 1) “Be in your seat when the bell

rings,” 2) “Follow directions the first time they are given,” 3) “Raise your hand and wait until ... recognized before speaking,” 4) “Stay in your assigned seat unless otherwise stated,” and 5) “Respect others by not talking while others are speaking” (Kelly, 2008, p. 22).

Ownership and responsibility are important when developing class rules. After basic, non-negotiable rules have been established, students may develop ownership by contributing to the list more specific rules. As students name a rule, the group can discuss it and decide if it needs to go on the list. Once all of the rules have been written on a poster board, each student must sign the list as a formal agreement to abide by them. Teachers should also send a copy of the rules home for parents to sign to prevent misunderstandings and reveal teacher expectations (Kelly, 2008). This helps prevent noncompliance because students help develop and defend the rules. They also commit to adhering to them by signing the document.

Teacher attitudes: Consistent and firm implementation. Even with specific procedures, there will be students who aim to challenge the teacher’s authority. To prevent such behaviors, teachers must be consistent and firm when sharing expectations. In her book, Kelly (2008) emphasizes the need for consistency, fairness, and perseverance in the classroom. Kelly encourages teachers to “be the boss” and “start the year in a stern manner. That way, [teachers] can ease up as the year goes on” (p. 30).

In agreement with this method, Ullucci (2009) in her study of urban teachers noted that effective teachers were firm. She notes: [D]irections were

clear and to the point. Teachers did not ask; they told. They did not often say please. The directive was not up for debate” (Ullucci, 2009, p. 24).

Individual teachers must identify what this balance of firmness and respect in accordance to their personal philosophies and specific student needs. Ullucci describes the urban teachers whom she observed as professionals “who have great commitment and respect for their students while being disciplinarians. This distinction is vital. Teachers in this study were direct and sharp with their discipline. However, this style did not tear at the dignity and self-concept of children” (2009, p. 25). In the same way, today’s inner-city teacher must be firm yet respectful to students. They must aim to establish an environment in which students feel safe, valued, and accountable.

Flexibility through humor. Educators who incorporate humor with minor infractions effectively encourage compliance (Ulluci, 2009). For example, whenever one of her fourth graders left a backpack in the middle of the floor, Jessica, one of the teachers observed in the study, would exclaim, “Backpack for sale!” as a gentle reminder that items should remain in their proper places (Ulluci, 2009, p. 25). Teachers should recognize humor as a powerful classroom management tool because it “can defuse a quickly escalating situation” (Kelly, 2008, p. 34). Humor also provides an avenue of stress relief for the teacher while allowing them to make a personal connection with the students (Kelly). However, teachers must be careful not to use sarcastic humor because it can easily become offensive, and younger students cannot always understand that statements are not to be taken literally.

Classroom jobs. Many students who are openly defiant are holding on to the one thing they can control—their behavior. Because teachers aim to develop responsible and progressively independent students, they can provide students with a sense of ownership by giving them classroom jobs. This simple action creates a sense of trust and respect towards the teacher. Students appreciate that he or she cares enough to plan ahead. Likewise, there is a sense mutual respect.

Students could then understand that if things are not done, they are responsible. Teachers should explicitly teach this shared responsibility before assigning tasks. Each week a different student could be the one who, at a designated time, takes the dull pencils and sharpens them. Other student jobs may include book sorter, coat rack manager, lunch counter, floor/ light monitor. These jobs greatly reduce the stress on teachers from non-instruction tasks to empowering responsibilities for students.

Miscellaneous Noncompliance: Intervention

When noncompliance does occur, urban teachers must be prepared to respond in a firm, calm, and relevant manner. The film *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988) provides a prime example of miscellaneous non-compliance that interferes with learning. In the film Señor Jaime Escalante began his career teaching in Garfield High School, a school in Los Angeles, California known for its low performance and high gang-related activity. When a student showed Señor Escalante his middle finger, Escalante responded, “Oh! Finger man! I can play games with my fingers too.” He used that threatening opportunity to show a quick hand game involving mental multiplication of 9's. Escalante quickly

communicated that mental toughness, not brutish tactics would help students survive in the real world. Señor Escalante did not deny that situations were difficult, but he encouraged his students to keep trying. He explains, “There will be some who assume you know less than you do because of your name and your complexion, but Math is the great equalizer!” By reaching out to students, Escalante showed that he cared. However, he coupled this affection with high standards, and students rose to the occasion. In this same way, every classroom management strategy that teachers present must show students that they are respected, valued, and capable.

Providing options with the defiant student. Students who are openly defiant do not need flexibility in the rules; they need options (Shore, 2003). Teachers can creatively express rules that give students power through choice. For example, a student who refuses to sit in his or her chair may be asked to sit in his chair or at the quiet study area. Here, the student has power to choose his behavior; nevertheless, the teacher has not compromised on her standards for students to remain seated during instruction. The teacher may also develop a behavior contract with that student to outline teacher and student expectations (Shore, 2003).

Purpose behind defiance. It is also important for teachers to identify the purpose behind the noncompliance. Students act based on the perception of their personal capabilities, significance in relationships, and individual power (Nelson et. al, 1997). These perceptions are adequately modeled in *The Ron Clark Story* (Brockway, 2006). Mr. Clark taught fifth grade for 4 years in North Carolina;

however, he felt called to move to inner-city Harlem, New York because they needed good public school teachers. In the film, Clark constantly wrestles with his student Shameika, who was the most blatantly disrespectful person in his class. Looking at Shameika as an individual, a teacher could observe that she was the leader of the class. However, Shameika did not believe she could score at grade level. She had a low perception of her personal abilities. This is why she compensated in the other areas of perception.

Shameika found significance through her peers. Her classmates respected her and looked to her for direction; she was popular. Many of her female classmates would imitate the way Shameika dressed and talked. As a result, Shameika had a high perception of power and was unwilling to surrender it to any teacher. To retain that power, she would intentionally slam books on the floor, talk while Mr. Clark taught, and skip others in line. Shameika was holding on to the one thing she could control—the classroom atmosphere (Brockway, 2006).

In response, Mr. Clark used the very thing Shameika clung to for significance—the class. Mr. Clark would not allow anyone to leave the room until everyone was lined up. When Shameika skipped the line, the class did not respond with the praises that Shameika was accustomed to, but with negative groans and urgings for her to “straighten up.” Mr. Clark positively reinforced Shameika’s behavior by praising her when she did listen for a set period of time without disruption. Mr. Clark was aware of Shameika’s personal perceptions and used them to build a trusting relationship. Concerning classroom management,

Mr. Clark did not seek to “break” his students, but empower them. In this way, he gained respect (Brockway, 2006).

Effective teachers do not react to the students. Instead, they respond to negative behavior. First, Mr. Clark observed the source of Shameika’s rebellion. She wanted control. Rather than yelling at Shameika or sending her out of the classroom, Mr. Clark addressed the behavior. He clearly communicated his expectations that students were not allowed to exit the class unless everyone was lined up. Mr. Clark even used resources outside of the classroom to confirm his authority. By Mr. Clark’s request, the lunch ladies would not offer students food unless they were lined up. Second, Mr. Clark determined that the focus of his class would be positive, so he used positive peer pressure to encourage Shameika to learn respect. In this way, students began to self-monitor (Brockway, 2006).

Verbal Behaviors: Prevention

Verbal Behaviors may include profanity, offensive language, or using threats. When faced with these situations, teachers should never ignore verbal offenses. Doing so communicates to children that such behavior is “okay” (Shore, 2003, p. 261). The first step a teacher should take when students engage in profanity or any other verbal offense is to clearly state that the behavior is unacceptable through an “I” message. For example, a teacher may state, “I expect that students in this class will talk respectfully to each other,” (Shore, 2003, p. 262). Teachers may also choose a more direct approach. For example, he may state, “Alicia, that doesn’t work here. Let’s choose a different way to deal with the situation.” In neither case did the teacher personally attack the offender;

instead, each response directly addressed the behavior and provided an alternative option. Teaching students an alternative option for expressing themselves helps prevent unwanted behavior.

Teachers must not ignore behavior; however, it is equally important to understand poor habits take time to break. Teachers may develop creative cues to help students who are trying to improve and provide adequate praise when those students do use language responsibly (Shore, 2003). Verbal misbehaviors may also include “back talk” in which students engage in an explicit power struggle with the teacher (Shore, 2003, p. 33). A prime example of this is represented in *The Ron Clark Story* (Brockway 2006) when Shameika would roll her eyes, smack her lips, and be openly defiant towards Mr. Clark. Rather than react in a defensive way, Mr. Clark remained calm and explicitly told Shameika that her behavior was unacceptable. When the behavior continued, the Mr. Clark took action. During these direct attacks on authority, teachers may remove the student from the environment and talk to her privately, take away recreational time to have a private conference or send that student to the office until a private conference can be initiated. In such cases, it is extremely important that the teacher keeps detailed records. He or she should write down the comment in front of the student and inform the parents about it later. Keeping records will communicate to students that they will be held accountable for their behaviors while the private conferences will show students that the teacher cares and wants them to improve. In this way, the teacher can keep that balance of authority and compassion (Shore, 2003).

Verbal Behaviors: Intervention

An intervention that teaches students how to self-monitor is demonstrated by educator Bobbie Sparks (Personal interview, July 24, 2011). She taught 8th grade at Crockett Junior High in Odessa, Texas. To encourage student responsibility, Ms. Sparks developed a stoplight system. During the first weeks of school, she engaged in the ARR plan (Haviland, 2010). She anticipated (A) that talking during instruction could become a problem. Rather than taking the totalitarian approach, Ms. Sparks based her routine (R) on understanding. In her stoplight system, each color on her construction paper stoplight required a different response. If Ms. Sparks adjusted the stoplight to red, students were expected to be silent. This usually occurred during explicit instruction. When the yellow light was displayed, students were free to speak at low tones, most likely a whisper. An appropriate time for the yellow light symbol would include think-pair-share activities. Finally, the green light would allow students to talk at normal tones during class discussions, centers, or similar activities. Ms. Sparks rehearsed (R) this classroom management strategy repeatedly during the first weeks of school, so that students could learn to monitor themselves. This strategy would greatly benefit teachers because they would not take away from valuable class time to address minor infractions. Instead, teachers could simply point to the stoplight or whatever mutually understood signal so students could correct themselves.

Physical Behaviors: Prevention

Modeling transitions. Unwanted behavior and disruption is most likely to occur during transition times; thus, teachers can prevent this by having a plan for smooth transitions (Hovland, 2008). The Pearson and Gallagher's Gradual Release and Responsibility Model serves as a good basis for planning transitions. It is a scaffolding method where responsibility gradually shifts from the teacher to the student. When planning transitions, a teacher must first demonstrate the expected behavior by modeling the expected behavior and providing detailed explanations. Second, the teacher would invite a few students to role play the correct procedure. Here, the teacher still has most of the control, but she shares responsibility and is available for questions. Guided Practice is the third step in the GRR process. The teacher allows the class to practice the expected behavior. He or she acts as facilitator, ready to provide feedback, affirmation, and correction. Finally, the students will independently practice transitions. During the role play, the teacher pretends to be with a small group and gives the signal. At this step, students assume full responsibility to carry out a quiet transition (Hovland, 2008).

This method would work in an urban classroom because clear expectations are given, students are allowed to move around, and they are comforted by an increased sense of control. The mutual understanding and shift of responsibility will liberate the teacher and motivate the student. During the GRR process, students become more independent of the teacher. As a result, transitions will become automatic. Students will know what is expected of them, and conduct related to confusion or misunderstanding can be avoided.

Physical arrangements. Teachers can also reduce aggression by providing a stress-free environment. Classroom atmosphere directly relates to physical environment. This includes seating arrangements, classroom setup, aroma, and temperature. In a study of six effective inner-city teachers (5 female, 1 male) in Southern California, one of the educators infuses the room with the smell of butterscotch, has mahogany-like furniture in the room, creatively displays students' artwork, and has real flowers dispersed throughout the room (Ullucci, 2009). With such an arrangement, Peter creates an inviting and relaxing atmosphere.

Seating arrangements can also set the tone of the classroom. For example, desks placed in clusters can encourage physical encounters among students and also become an avenue for unwanted conversations. To maintain a sense of consistency and control, teachers may assign seats; this procedure also aids in learning names (Kelly, 2008). Teachers can adjust seating arrangement after every grading period in order to observe student interactions (Kelly). If they notice that certain students are particularly disruptive or destructive when paired, teachers can position students in accordance with that information. To minimize distractions and better control the classroom, Kelly (2008) also suggests that teachers place their desks behind the area students normally face for instruction. This provides teachers with a clear view of the room, and students who wish to be disruptive will be easier to identify because they would be in clear view.

Physical Behaviors: Intervention

The standards for aggressive behaviors are similar to those concerning verbal offenses. Teachers must clearly communicate to students that aggressive behavior will not be tolerated, and provide alternative avenues for students to settle disputes (Shore, 2003). When teachers do not allow threatening opportunities to persist, they create a safe atmosphere. When encountering escalating conflicts, teachers must be assertive in breaking up fights by speaking in a firm voice. If the conflict escalates to a level beyond the teacher's control, he or she must request help to physically break up fight or make a loud noise to distract students involved. After the confrontation has been diffused, the teacher should meet with students to talk over what happened. (Shore, 2003, pp. 5-11)

In *Freedom Writers* (DeVito, 2006). Mrs. Gruwell knew that she was physically disadvantaged when two of her high school students engaged in a fist fight. Loud noises were not diffusing the conflict, so Mrs. Gruwell left the room and got help from a larger male teacher who had a good rapport with the students. He was able to dissuade the students and regain control.

Concerning physicality towards the teacher, professionals must remain calm and cautious in their approach. During her experience teaching in Odessa, Texas, one of Ms. Sparks' students pulled a knife out on her (Personal interview, July 24, 2011). She remained calm because any sudden movements could cause the student to react further. Ms. Sparks spoke slowly to the student, helping him to realize that he did not really want to hurt anyone; he just felt out of control. From there, Ms. Sparks suggested alternative ways to deal with his stress. She took the knife away from the student and escorted him to a private place to talk.

Later, Ms. Sparks referred him to the school counselor. Teachers must take physical offenses seriously and solicit help when necessary. However, every action must be thought through carefully and executed with wisdom in such a way that best benefits and protects all people involved.

Class meetings. When behavior becomes a widespread issue, the teacher can organize a class meeting to address the offense. This collective intervention helps to develop students' listening, communicating, and empathizing abilities (Nelson et. al, 1997). Although teachers are pressed for time, they must address students immediately. The worse thing a teacher can do is to ignore interpersonal issues. Teachers give a nonverbal "okay" whenever they allow behaviors like hitting, bullying, and gossiping to persist. A teacher's immediate response can involve a firm verbal rebuke; however, intervention should not stop there.

Creating a "Bug Jar" to address any offense towards another student can promote accountability and build a stronger community (Blendinger & Wells, 2008, p. 12). In it, students can anonymously place issues that they are having with other students, the general classroom environment, or instructional methods. They can verbally express what "bugs" them without becoming an unwanted distraction. Students will feel respected because their opinions and feelings matter. As Blendinger and Wells (2008) explain: "Getting students to talk about a matter of concern goes a long way in diffusing a troublesome situation" (p. 12).

The teacher would periodically check the jar, choosing to immediately address the issue or wait until a scheduled Class Meeting. He or she would act as a facilitator, careful to eliminate names and help students develop ideas to resolve

issues. This process would decrease the need for physical or verbal altercations because students would realize that they have an advocate. They can defend themselves with dignity, and teachers have created yet another teachable moment for open communication and resolving conflict. As issues are presented, students will learn to listen to the problem presented and empathize with their peers.

During class meetings, teachers should allow students to develop solutions on their own (Blendinger & Wells, 2008). Through this monitored independence, students will learn how to reflect on their behavior and compromise. Students will exercise critical thinking as they identify the problem, develop solutions, and evaluate possible results (Blendinger & Wells). During the evaluation process, only the student who presented the problem should decide upon the final solution (Blendinger & Wells). This gives every student a voice and a sense of power while promoting an atmosphere of respect, cooperation, and family. As a result, the teacher will resolve verbal and physical conflict because students will learn to understand and value their fellow classmates.

Things to Avoid when Intervening

Avoid assumptions. When confronting behavior, teachers must be aware of certain barriers to communication if they desire to create an atmosphere of caring. These barriers include assuming, rescuing, or using adultisms. When teachers assume, they do not adequately collect background knowledge about a student. Instead, they deal with the situation based on a particular category they place a student in (Nelson, 1997). This can prove harmful especially if a firm relationship has not been built.

For example, in the film *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988), Senor Escalante was teasing a particularly flirty student who got up without notice to exit the class. He lightly taunted, “Which of your boyfriends are you rushing off to meet?” However, this student responded, “I would appreciate if you would not use my personal life to entertain this class.” Escalante had to quickly follow this student out of the classroom to apologize and adequately inform himself of the problem at hand. In reality, this student was sincerely upset because she was having trouble balancing her home and school life. Escalante’s assumptions, although he intended no harm, almost damaged his relationship with the student. Classroom management also involves managing personalities. If one student stands up in class, it can be for a completely different reason than if another student stands in class. Teachers must be careful to listen to students when conflicts arise, not only to avoid categorizing students, but also to adequately discover the right ways to approach that behavior.

Avoid taking ownership. Likewise, when facing behavior issues, teachers must be careful not to rescue students by giving them the answers. If the goal of discipline is to develop responsible students, children must be able to evaluate their own behavior. For example, during class meetings, teachers must allow students to develop their own solutions to conflict. The teacher may act as facilitator but may not dictate the outcome as long as a compromise has been determined. Nevertheless, students will not know what the teacher expects unless they are told. Teachers must prepare students to develop their own resolutions through clear expectations and direction.

Avoid adultisms. Teachers must remember that they are dealing with children and avoid using adultisms when students make mistakes. These include statements such as, “How could you?” or “How many times do I have to tell you?” (Nelson, 1997, p. 24). Rather than scolding or speaking negatively to children, teachers can use positive reinforcement or even questioning strategies that prompt critical thinking. Again, teachers must think of the goal of their disciplinary methods. Is the result simply bad feelings, or are students truly reflecting on their behavior? For example, a teacher can ask, “What should you be doing right now?”, “Is that the most productive thing?”, or “Would you appreciate being treated the way you treated her?” These questions prompt students to reflect on behavior and think of alternate, positive routes towards expressing themselves.

Consequences

Urban teachers must recognize that each behavior can be addressed with a proper response; these are executed in the form of consequences. When developing consequences, a teacher’s strongest asset is fairness. To communicate this, Curwin and Mendler (1988) suggest that teachers create a hierarchy of consequences in which students know that the offense will be appropriately confronted. In their book, *Discipline with Dignity*, Curwin and Mendler (1988) use the infraction of homework not being turned in to portray the range of consequences. If a student does not turn in an assignment, the teacher will 1) remind the student of the rule or procedure, 2) warn the student that the expectation has not been met, 3) require to hand in the assignment before school ends, 4) require the student to stay after school to complete homework, or 5)

schedule a teacher-parent conference concerning that student's noncompliance (Curwin & Mendler). With this hierarchal system, students who have innocently forgotten their assignment at home will not be penalized while those who are consistently ignoring the assignment are held responsible.

Teachers must be sure to explain to students that treating behavior fairly does not always mean that the teacher will treat each situation equally (Curwin & Mendler, 1988). Depending on the intensity of the situation, a student could receive the highest consequence for the first offense. For example, a student who intentionally strikes another student will not get a reminder or warning. They will be immediately sent to the principal.

Nevertheless, fairness does mean that the teacher's response necessarily delineates from the behavior. In other words, the consequence should not be given to humiliate or harm the student. Good consequences "enable students to respond, are future oriented (like planning), and help the student recognize that he can do things differently" (Curwin & Mendler, 1988, p. 71). For example if the rule is to place all trash in the waste basket, a logical consequence for leaving trash on the floor would be for that student to pick it up and throw it away. An illogical response, or a punishment, would be to make the student apologize to the teacher in front of the whole class. (Curwin & Mendler)

The first response enables the student to identify the offense, correct it, and perhaps plan for a different course of action in the future. The second response, however, does not correct the behavior, and it provides an avenue for embarrassment and resentment. When working with urban students, teachers must

develop a relationship based on trust, understanding, and fairness. This is reflected in the consequences as well as the daily procedures, attitudes, and strategies the teacher implements throughout the year.

Conclusion

Effective classroom management can be maintained within an urban context. By identifying the nature, influential factors, and goals of student behavior, teachers can strategically adapt the classroom environment to prevent disruptive behaviors and intervene when they occur. Rather than imposing middle-class values and creating a hostile environment, teachers can develop solid relationships with students and promote a collaborative effort. Consistency, cultural awareness, and preparation, will prevent the beginning teacher from becoming weighed down in the urban setting. She will understand her students' values, provide create ways for them to succeed, respond to behavior in a way that develops responsible students, and utilize all of the resources available to maintain order in the classroom and ensure that students are learning. The urban teacher will learn to respond to behavior in such a way that develops character while maintaining students' dignity. As a result, urban students will have a learning environment in which they feel a sense of belonging, safety, respect, and personal accountability.

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