Bill Kirkwood
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Philosophy of Classroom Management

Simply put the term Classroom Management, left unexamined, is a meaningless expression. Taken at face-value, it means the management of a classroom. But rooms themselves do not need managing at all. Therefore a classroom void of persons requires no management. Perhaps a thorough cleaning, but certainly no management. The term Classroom Management then must presuppose students present in the room who require managing. Classroom Management then comes to mean "the management of the people in the classroom". Now we have some work to do. A quick word study on Management produces short phrases such as, "The process of dealing with or controlling things or people." and "The act or manner of managing; handling, direction, or control."[1] There are two important principles of management which arise from these definitions. The first is the matter of control, the second is an implicit lingering question of purpose, and I will address these in turn.

The First Principle. Is there any real expectation of a teacher being able to control or program 40 students in a 90 minute group-encounter repeated a few days a week? Is there any argument a teacher *ought* to control their students? Pianta wrote, "using control-oriented discipline and competitive academic values with early adolescents who value autonomy, exploration, and a sense of identity, tends to produce lower levels of motivation and achievement and higher levels of problem behavior..."[2] Control will need to evolve and be redefined and refined; how about influence or empower? Few would argue teachers do not influence their students. Classroom Management must be intrinsically addressing the influence of a teacher over his/her students. Control has restrictive and possibly negative

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[1] https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#safe=strict&q=management+definition
[2] Jones, Vern; Jones, Louise. *Comprehensive Classroom Management 11th Edition.* 39

connotations. Influence and empowerment are the counterweights. Oxford professor C.S. Lewis once said, "The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts."[3]

Influence can manifest in a number of ways; a person I encounter can influence how I feel, think and act. The question is, which is it? Which are educators focused on? Behavior is the obvious choice. It is blatantly visible from the hallway. To judge a teacher's classroom management, under this model, hardly requires entering the classroom. My supervisor commented on the students' behavior both of the times she has been in my classroom. Therefore from my understanding assessment of a teacher's classroom management skills are majorly, if not entirely, focused on the behavior of the students. I suggest, however, this would be a colossal failure. This is the critical issue I will take a position on; classroom management, if focused on behavior, is at best a surface level exercise in making the teacher feel better about them self, and at worst damaging to the students as learners and humans.

While behavior of the students is an important factor in building the environment of a classroom, they are not the root of any issue. The classroom environment may be improved by addressing behavior only, but to what end? So the teacher may rest well knowing his/her classroom remains under control? Behaviors of an individual are indicative of the beliefs and values of the individual, what kind of day, week or month they are having. What kind of family they come from, what their home life looks like. Behaviors are the above-water, visible portion of a person's iceberg, so to speak. Therefore, in order to address behaviors, it is the sub-surface lives, beliefs and values of students I will focus. The questions then become; how will I elicit students to divulge their stories, and what values will I support and nurture in my classroom? To answer this we need to investigate the second principle derived from our definitions of management.

The Second Principle. Influence and empowerment endeavor toward achieving a goal, or a purpose. No conductor ever directed an orchestra without a specific music piece in mind. Furthermore

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[3] Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man.* 13

success could never be assessed without knowing which piece the orchestra were to play. The Portland Philharmonic might play Mozart beautifully, but the patrons will still want a refund if the orchestra was supposed to perform the Carmina Burana. Jones and Jones reference the goals of teachers as a primary indicator of their classroom management methods, therefore the notion of directing, or influencing a classroom begins its journey toward coherence with a clearly defined goal.[4] One value most people can agree on is the goal of success. Every teacher wants his/her class to be successful. I want my students to be successful students and successful people. Even the late great John Dewey said, "The main purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill, which comprehend the material of instruction."[5] But what does "success in life" mean? What does being a successful student mean? What does a successful classroom look like?

I hear a lot of people proclaim , "She is very successful" or "His business has done well". The tacit undertones of such truth statements presume something; monetary wealth is synonymous with success. Though I hardly reject money and economics as important, I will not operate under the fallacy money equals success. I do not say fallacy lightly. One reason to reject amassing wealth as necessarily successful is, what will a young man or woman think if they do not grow up to obtain the acceptable amount of money? The vast majority of people throughout time, who have ever lived anywhere, did not turn out to be wealthy people; and it would be the most snobbish form of judgementalism to classify all of them as necessarily unsuccessful people. On the contrary, the great people we admire through history are often and usually precisely those who chose to forgo monetary wealth in lieu of something else. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi; all chose a life which would not, could not, lead to wealth. They chose to live for others, and no matter one's philosophy, religion or creed it is nearly impossible to denigrate what they did for humanity. This phenomena is happily not isolated to

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[4] Jones, Vern; Jones, Louise. *Comprehensive Classroom Management 11th Edition.* 23
[5] Dewey. *Experience and Education*

civil rights activists; the great artists van Gogh and Rembrandt; and writers Edgar Allan Poe and Emily

Dickinson; Architects Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Kahn; or athletes like Jackie Robinson or the 1966

Texas Western basketball team, along with countless musicians and nameless figures history has

forgotten lived their lives without recognition but who's influence on the world is still being felt today.

All were living for more than fame and fortune could ever offer; one blatantly common characteristic

between them is their choice to live for people other than just themselves. These were flawed people

just like the rest of us, but nevertheless they in many ways, I argue, are what success looks like.

All persons in a classroom are already students; therefore success cannot mean "turning people

into students". Success must then contain elements of empowering those who are already students, to

grow and develop their desires and abilities as students. A successful group of students then also care

for and work with one another, and a successful classroom is a room where the essence of the class

itself empowers people to edify one another and grow as individual students.

I understand each class and teacher has placed upon them curriculum standards and

expectations outside their own control, and I mean to fulfill these requirements completely. I also

believe the best way to work in a group is to acknowledge the group. I worked as an architect for several

years and had the fortune of working with a brilliant designer from Seattle for some time. He had talents

few others in the business possess, and perhaps counter-intuitively he was nevertheless obsessed with

hearing and seeing the ideas and perspectives of everyone on the team. He called it the "collective

genius" of the group. Rather than working on a design problem linearly, top-down, he would bring the

whole team, even the intern, into the room and spend time brainstorming. He wanted everyone to be

heard. Yes the byproduct of his process was a benefit to the individuals, but he was not a man

motivated by kindness. He believed the collective genius produced a better design. Ilana Horn in her

book, *Strength in Numbers* states, "To encompass all that children learn in school, we need to move

away from a notion of teaching as effective presentation of ideas toward a view of teaching as designing effective learning environments."[6]

Group worthy tasks are difficult to design but can have profound benefits. However if students are feeling manipulated or forced group work can make them feel uncomfortable or worse; attacked. Meeting students where they are is a foundational value of mine as an educator, and a fellow human. Jones and Jones' book *Comprehensive classroom management* reference the work of many but compile a useful table of students' needs (see Appendix A).[7] A need to be controlled is somehow absent from the table; however it is clear students do need, desire and will respond when given they feel they belong, are significant and have some choices.

I believe David Gruenewald's concept of Critical place-based pedagogy is certainly on the right heading; acknowledging the specific context a student comes from, as well as the relationships each person has with the historical and cultural reality we live in.[8] Nurturing relationships happens to be a value of mine regardless the realm I am operating in, Jones and Jones claim these relationships are essential for building a collaborative environment regardless.[9] Relationships are built and formed organically over time. I will take advantage of the in-between class time (before/after class, being available at lunch, etc) and include non-academic stories and jokes into my lessons; treating the students like humans, rather than autonomic computing beings. Jones and Jones warn against failing to address these needs of students saying in schools which, "lacked warmth and joy...often a significant minority of students in these schools felt alienated, found their academic work to be tedious and unrelated to their lives and interests, and did not believe teachers, cared about them."[10]

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[6] Horn, Ilana Seidel. *Strength in Numbers*. 35
[7] Jones, Vern; Jones, Louise. *Comprehensive Classroom Management 11th Edition.* 35
[8] Gruenewald, David A. The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place. (2003)
[9] Jones, Vern; Jones, Louise. *Comprehensive Classroom Management 11th Edition.* 9
[10] Jones, Vern; Jones, Louise. *Comprehensive Classroom Management 11th Edition.* 19

Students will need to undergo the same process with one another as well; Christine E. Sleeter makes the case, "Students need to learn about experiences and points of view of people from racial groups different from their own."[11] I will have to design into the rhythm of the class, opportunities for the students to hear from one another and gain understanding into each other's worlds.

Built into my pedagogy I envisage a room where students see me model selflessness and honesty, where I ask sincere questions rather than come to conclusions about people without their input. I will build and earn positive personal relationships with my students, offer opportunities for students to respond to me, and to listen and respond to one another. These goals will be accomplished with patience, and by means of planned techniques and impromptu encounters as each of us interacts with the world outside and the people inside our classroom.

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[11] Sleeter, Christine E.; Pollock, Mica. Involving Students in Selecting Reading Material. *Everyday Anti-Racism: Getting real about race in school.* (The New Press 2008): (p. 150)

Appendix A

Figure 2.1 Students' basic needs[12]

Brendtro et al. (1990)	Coopersmith (1967)	Kohn (1999)	Glasser (1990)
Belonging	Significance	Collaboration	Love
Mastery	Competence	Content	Fun
Independence	Power	Choice	Power/Freedom
Generosity		Virtue	Survival

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[12] Jones, Vern; Jones, Louise. *Comprehensive Classroom Management 11th Edition.* 35

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