

TED 406 Anchor Assignment: Classroom Management Reflective Paper

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Part A: Philosophy

a) The targeted grade-level for this paper is high school. The reason I chose this grade-level was because I want to pursue high school music education. I also currently work with students in this grade-level in my private music teaching and when volunteering for band programs. My classroom management reflection will mainly be focused toward a music class.

b) Classroom management is an important factor when creating an “effective organization and administration of any school music program.” (Walker 36) Every classroom has classroom management—whether detailed in a set of rules or implied through the teaching environment. The goals of classroom management are to maintain decorum in a classroom while developing progress in students learning. This can be achieved through many techniques based on several theories. According to Martin and Sugarman, classroom management “refers to those *activities* of classroom teachers that create positive classroom climate within which effective teaching and learning can occur”. (Martin & Sugarman 9) As teachers—as well as aspiring teachers and future educators—it is important for us to understand classroom management and develop our own system to creating the optimal learning environment.

The topic of classroom management is interchangeably used with other topics and can lead to confusion about what classroom management really is. “Whether it is called *classroom management*, *classroom control*, or *behavior management*, the subject remains the same.” (Walker 36) Classroom management focuses on productive learning, teaching students to be self-directing and responsible, and promoting all of our students to be strong citizens in our classrooms. (Charles 1) Specifically, classroom management is to

control behavior, discipline, and motivation in a classroom setting to aid in learning.

With proper classroom management and discipline students are likely to take care of school equipment, tools, and textbooks. Classroom discipline is the “Teacher’s efforts to maintain classroom decorum and secure students’ cooperation in learning and exercising self-control.” (Charles 12)

There are many theories of what necessary components make an effective system of discipline. One suggestion is that effective discipline depends on the teacher’s ability to identify misbehavior, be technically proficient in intervention tactics, be positive in the procedures they choose to use, analyze misbehaviors in hindsight and foresee problems, and be able to communicate effectively and clearly. (Charles 5) When it comes to maintaining a disciplined classroom it is difficult to do so when the students are unmotivated. It is also “equally difficult to motivate students toward a specific goal if they are not in a disciplined environment.” (Walker 37)

I believe classroom management is important in music education—and education in general—because it provides both the teacher and the students an optimal learning environment. With good classroom management “Students will find school satisfying or even fun, teachers will feel rewarded and fulfilled, and parents will have positive feelings toward teachers and the school.” (Charles 1) Classroom management is not only important for the learning environment in the classroom setting but also good for the school’s community.

Classroom management should have constant assessment and reinforcement to create motivation. The works of B. F. Skinner and Jacob Kounin integrate well with each

other in music education. By utilizing their theories, teachers in music education can create an optimal learning environment.

However, it is generally agreed that there is no definite approach to classroom management or discipline. According to Darwin E. Walker, “Too many variables are involved in all cases of misbehavior to enable a single mandate to be offered as the best solution.” (35) Every classroom is different. It is important for our teachers to be flexible, great improvisers who are always prepared for the most extreme situations. Every teacher needs to develop their own classroom management system that works best in their situation.

- c) The classroom management philosophies that are the closest match to my personal teaching style are B.F. Skinner’s *Discipline Through Shaping Desired Behavior* and Jacob Kounin’s *Improving Discipline Through Lesson Management*. In a music classroom setting routines are important. “Well-constructed lessons with explicit instructions, systematic integration of rules and procedures, and the well-known teaching sequence of demonstration-wait time-guided practice-assessment are all ways in which attention and focus can be maximized in the classroom.” (*Prelude to Music Education* 164) With music classrooms commonly at sixty students per teacher Skinner’s behavior modifications aid in attention and can turn daily routines into habits. After routines are created Kounin’s group alerting and lesson management can be used to keep students engaged at all times. In music class students typically perform in small groups or together as a class. Once students are alert and understand the classroom routine more time can be used for lessons and learning.

Strengths of these philosophies are they allow for quick pacing and on-task students in a music class. Classroom sizes for music classes are large and can reach past sixty students when working with ensembles and up to three hundred students or more when working with marching bands and auxiliary. It is important to be able to develop a steady routine in music classes to control such a large group.

B. F. Skinner's *Discipline Through Shaping Desired Behavior* can be used to create a systematic approach to teaching such a large group and involves "training children [or students] through operant conditioning rather than educating them." (Walker 40) By creating a system, for example a daily routine, we can create what Skinner called *behavior modification*. Systems allow for permanent change over time by breaking down old habits, developing new habits, and reinforcing good habits.

While Skinner's theory can be used to create a system it is important for our teachers to have "*withitness*" based on Jacob Kounin's *Improving Discipline Through Lesson Management*. *Withitness* is a "teacher ability to know what [is] going on in all parts of the classroom at all times and dealing with incipient problems before they turned into misbehavior." (Charles 58) By having a systematic approach based on Skinner's methods and using *withitness* teachers may begin to shape our students habits.

Habits are important in human behavior and in education in that they save us time, effort, and energy with our students. In psychology, habits are considered automatic responses or reactions to specific situations. "Learning in school can be greatly helped by habits, provided they are correct and productive." (Charles 26) Bad habits can be developed in students from society, school, the community, their home, and many other ways. By creating a system, classrooms can create good habits from routines

at the beginning of their students' academics. This would allow students to be able to focus more on learning and the teacher being able to focus more on teaching. (Charles 26)

In a system, habits can be created using Skinner's methods of positive and negative reinforcement in association with certain behaviors students demonstrate. Behavior modification "refers to the overall procedure of shaping behavior intentionally through systematic reinforcement." (Charles 57) For example, a teacher who is counting up from one to three to get their students in their seats by "three" would rarely need to count past "one" or "two" since the students know that there would be consequences—as a group or individually—if the teacher reached "three". (Walker 40) Students also know there may be rewards if the teacher does not reach "three" which gives them motivation as well. The counting method itself can be seen as what Kounin called group alerting, "where teachers gain students' full attention before giving directions or making explanations." (Charles 59) Teachers who use counting methods to get their students attention or to get students to do a specific goal are also using systematic approaches or systematic reinforcement. The response the students make to the teacher is called *operant conditioning*.

Some weaknesses of these philosophies are that some teachers can be seen as too authoritarian. "An authoritarian offers no explanation of the reasons behind the strict restraints." For high school students, this can create problems since students who are ages fifteen to eighteen "Try to find cause, a purpose, and a place for everything." (Charles 24) Also many teachers also feel that "any system based on rewards and punishments is a misguided instrument for controlling students." (Walker 41)

Classroom management should mainly be focused on student progress and achievement through behavioral motivation and discipline. “Motivation and discipline in music education are often ignored areas of study in music education classes.” (Walker 36) It is important for teachers to develop a classroom setting that promotes all forms of motivation. As students learn through systematic approaches developed from Skinner’s philosophies they will begin to exert more of their energy on learning. A teacher is a “good disciplinarian when he or she has learned to use the forces of motivation to keep students moving toward their academic goals.” (Walker 37)

Part B: Application

a) The following section represents some of the strategies and techniques of classroom management identified in the previous section by the various theorists I found that matched my own theoretical orientation with music education. Teachers need to have a plan and approach to teaching their classes. However, before any plan can be implemented it is important for teachers to take into consideration their professionalism.

Teacher professionalism is being “concordant with the standards expected of teachers when carrying out [your] professional duties.” (Charles 6) Teachers should also carry out an appropriate appearance when conducting professionalism. “The visual impression a new teacher makes on students will influence their behavior before a note of music is taught or before those students can become aware of the teacher’s depth of musical knowledge.” (Walker 46) Teachers should not be *the* distraction in the classroom but instead provide a distraction free environment that will let them carry out their teaching plans and strategies.

Some of the major strategies discussed in B. F. Skinner's *Discipline Through Shaping Desired Behavior* that can be applied were using rewards, or reinforcing stimuli, and giving constant reinforcement. The reinforcing stimuli Skinner referred are not to be tangible. In a classroom setting a teacher can apply this by acknowledging results from assignments students complete. Teachers can also have peer approval, give awards and free time, and smile, nod, and praise their students work. After giving rewards constant reinforcement should be "given every time a student behaves as desired" (Charles 57) since it "helps new learning become established." (Charles 57).

In conjunction with Skinner's philosophies, Jacob Kounin's *Improving Discipline Through Lesson Management* strategies can be applied by integrating student participation with teacher awareness. Kounin's *withitness* can be used with student leadership. Typically in large music classes section leaders and a student electoral group consisting of a President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary are assigned to aid the teacher and take responsibility in managing the classroom—at the discretion of the teacher. These students help monitor other students while the teacher is able to work and interact with other groups or the entire class.

Some of the techniques that I would put into place would include giving awards, compliments, and allowing administration or guest to observe the class. Tangible awards are great motivators for students. For the awards program I would use a point system where students earn and collect points for their achievements. "Awards provide an opportunity to recognize students who achieve some degree of excellence in their work and provide extra incentive for students who can be considered underachievers." (Walker 38)

Compliments are different than Skinner's rewards, or reinforcing stimuli, in that a student does not need to perform a desired behavior. Compliments are given out of praise and "A mark of a good teacher is that he or she knows when to offer a compliment, understanding that compliments motivate only when the person receiving one is aware it is deserved." (Walker 39)

To supplement Kounin's philosophy I would allow administration and approved guest observe the classroom. I have noticed when observing classes that students behave more appropriately when they are seen by observers. With observers or administration more people rather than just the teacher alone monitor students. In large music classes such as marching bands there is usually a large staff that consists of the teacher (band director), parents and volunteers, parent booster club, and instructors hired by the school. I believe the more people that are able to observe or monitor the class the more *withitness* the class will have.

b) In Skinner and Kounin's philosophies there are several unique applications and strategies that can be used based on their suggestions. These strategies can be incorporated into the music classroom. In Sinner's philosophy there is a strategy called intermittent reinforcement which is praising or rewarding a student occasionally "to maintain desired behavior once it has become established" (Charles 57). Skinner then suggest that once the desired behavior begins to finalize that there is less and less rewards given. This works well in music classes because once music a student plays something correct they are always expected to play it the same effort or greater each and every time.

In Kounin's philosophy some unique strategies include "attending to or more classroom events simultaneously" which is called overlapping. (Charles 59) There is also

smoothness or presenting lessons in a steady progression so there is no abrupt changes. (Charles 59) I believe these two specific strategies help music education because they focus on what a rehearsal is like when practicing music. In a rehearsal it is necessary to work with one large group that is organized into smaller ones by instrument. A conductor—also known as a band director or teacher—needs to be able to communicate and monitor the whole group and individual sections within the group. Band directors naturally use overlapping within their rehearsals. When rehearsing music it is important to keep the smoothness. Musicians usually break a piece by chunks. One lesson may be focused on a beginning of the song while another may be focused on the end of a piece. Still it is important to make sure each rehearsal or lesson is congruent and maintains smoothness.

Part C: Conclusion

I believe classroom management is very important to maintaining a classroom discipline and maximizing our students' interest into the subject or motivation. "Music educators can motivate students by developing an association between music and the type of person that students admire." (Walker 37) It is important to develop a discipline that motivates our students to expend their energy into learning rather than misbehavior and misconduct.

After researching and looking through the works of Skinner and Kounin I realize that using rewards (and even awards) can be beneficial to classes. There are many influences that can motivate students. "External and internal factors can influence a music education program." (Walker 38) Although Skinner believes there should not be a negative reinforcement or punishment I feel that acknowledging what *not* to do is

important. There are many who “found that it is simply easier to teach students how to behave desirably and show them how they should *not* behave.” (Charles 58)

I also feel that with a large group it is nearly impossible to have focus and attention to every student and to monitor them. Kounin’s *withitness* is very difficult for a large group of students, especially if they are broken into smaller groups. As a future band teacher, I believe it is important to receive aid from administration, students, parents, and volunteers and to utilize them—properly—when assisting learners and large classes.

Overall I feel that there is no one correct technique for every class or every teacher. Each teacher needs to find his or her methodology approach to handling his or her classroom based on each individual day. I believe it is important for our teachers to be great improvisers yet know how to structure their class so that the lessons can be taught with smoothness and coherence.

Works Cited

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