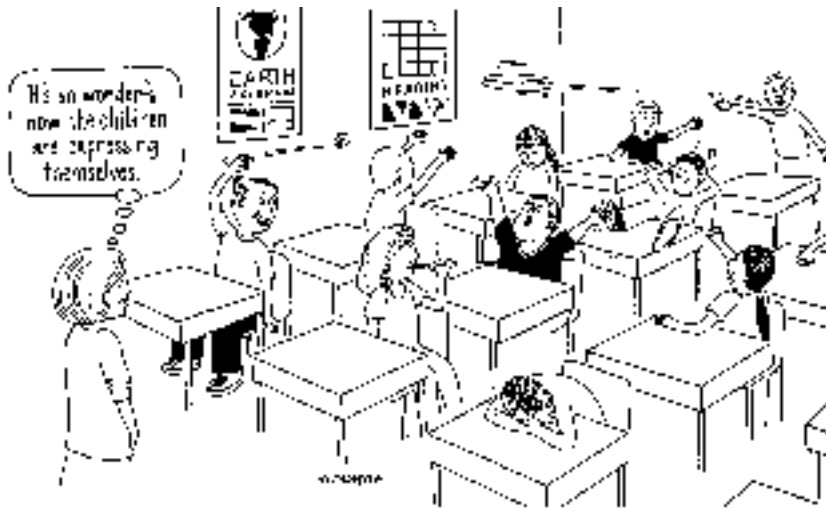


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INTRODUCTION

*“I’m a teacher. A teacher is someone
who leads. There is no magic here.
I do not walk on water. I do not part
the sea. I just love children.”*

— MARVA COLLINS



ON MY FIRST DAY as a student teacher, I was sent to observe how an effective teacher set up his classroom management system. The theory: I would reproduce the successful system six months later when I took over my first classes for student teaching. It was a great idea.

It failed miserably.

Enthusiastic in my ignorance, I entered the classroom of a veteran tenth-grade English teacher, my eyes open for every detail, my pen in hand. I was ready to learn. Throughout the course of the first week, I noticed that Mr. Miller's classes ran incredibly smoothly. When he said to his students, "Open your books to page 27," every book opened to page 27. The students were silent, leaning forward, attentive. I saw no evidence of hard-hitting management strategies or overbearing lists of rules. I saw *nothing*. My notebook was empty. I thought to myself, "This is easy. I just say it, and they do it..."

Visions of students lining up behind me, the model teacher, appeared in my mind's eye. I could just see it; these kids would happily follow my lead as I journeyed into the wonders of learn-

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ing. My classes would be even better than Mr. Miller’s; they would break the mold. I would have no need for discipline because my students would tap into their natural hunger to learn. I would be their relaxed, loving, and skillful guide, seamlessly employing invisible management strategies.

I came to earth later that same first week while observing another tenth-grade English teacher attempting the same lesson Mr. Miller had taught. When this ineffective teacher asked the students to open their books to page 27, several students did indeed open their books. Some were on the right page. Some even had the correct book. But this simple task was torturous. Amid an outpouring of chatter, complaints, confusion, and paper airplanes, any sense of order within the room simply disappeared.

At first glance, I couldn’t figure out why Mr. Miller had been so much more effective. Since I definitely didn’t want a career in dodging paper airplanes, I made it my mission to break the code. I began with a basic question, “Why can the same request asked of two groups of students result in opposite behaviors?”

The answer to this — and a million questions like it — is the motivation behind my writing this book.

Effective classroom management is essentially invisible.

It is so seamless that unless we know what to look for, we won’t be able to see it. Hundreds of thousands of student teachers, new teachers, and even veteran teachers each year have this same experience: they look for effective classroom management strategies in their classroom observations, but:

- ▲ They don’t know what to look for
- ▲ They don’t see anything
- ▲ If they do see something, they don’t know how to translate it into their own classroom teaching

As a new teacher, I became obsessed with understanding invisible management. I was desperate to survive in my classes, and asked, begged, pleaded with, interrogated anyone I knew who might be able to help me. Still, my first years were a struggle. Later, as a mentor teacher working closely with new teachers, my obsession remained — but in a slightly different form. Simply growing into a more effective teacher was not enough; I also wanted to find a way to make the invisible visible to others. I wanted to communicate to other teachers how to “see” classroom management and how to translate it into their teaching. To do this, I sought to make effective classroom management tangible by moving it out of the realm of “instinct.”



A Closer Look

By slowing down the camera — by looking more closely at what is happening both in the classroom and behind the scenes — we can increase our awareness of what works and why, thus providing a road map for improving our classroom experience.

This book describes the key elements I have discovered along the way that help create classroom management conscious. By slowing down the camera — by looking more closely at what is happening both in the classroom and behind the scenes — we can increase our awareness of what works and why, thus providing a road map for improving our classroom experience.

Throughout the book, I refer to a fictional teacher named Mrs. Allgood. Like the effective tenth-grade English teacher I observed my first week in the profession, she has fabulous classroom management skills. Looking closely at both what she does and the thinking behind what she does can shed light on essential skills for managing the classroom. Imagine that she teaches your grade and subject area(s), and is just down the hall.

I also refer to a not-so-effective teacher named Mrs. Meanswell. She tries hard but is struggling. So far, Mrs. Meanswell cannot consistently make cause-and-effect connections between her management choices and her classes’ behavior patterns.

Mrs. Meanswell is not necessarily a new teacher, nor is Mrs. Allgood necessarily a veteran. Teachers of all levels of experience have all levels of effectiveness in the classroom. Further, all of us have “Allgood moments” as well as “Meanswell moments.” Even

though Mrs. Allgood represents an ideal to strive for, even she has “Meanswell-like moments.” There is no perfect model teacher; regardless of our levels of skill, we are constantly learning.

Throughout the book I use quotes with various icons to emphasize certain ideas. Though there is some overlap, in general the magnifying glass indicates an idea that is often invisible, the apple icon focuses on global ideas, summaries and advice, and the Mrs. Allgood icon is about teacher-to-teacher insights and practical suggestions.

When referring to a typical student who acts out, I often use the name “Mark.” This is because challenging students inevitably make a “mark” in our awareness. In cases where I refer to teachers or students other than by name, I refer to teachers in the feminine gender and students in the masculine. This is done simply to help with clarity, and is not intended to make any political or pedagogical statements.

How to Use This Book

This book is for any K-12 teacher who would like to improve his or her classroom management skills. There are many references in the book to new teachers, yet this information will work for teachers of all levels of experience. It is also for mentor teachers who are focused on helping other teachers improve.

Although this book is focused on practical strategies, I have included many ideas about teacher attitude and assumptions that at first might seem theoretical. This is because effective classroom management is more than just plugging in a series of consequences to match student misbehavior. It is a complex of approaches that draws on an understanding of three primary areas: the students, the teacher, and the relationship between the two. Success lies in awareness not only of our actions, but also of who we are as people. These two “prongs” form the basis for effective management:

Who We Are ←————→ What We Do

Who we are refers to how we hold ourselves internally, and thus how we come across to our students. Are we rigid and reactive, focusing too much on our own performance to actually communicate with our students? Are we laid back and loose, too focused on being the students' friend to consistently teach behavior? Or are we firm and soft simultaneously, assuming both the best about our students — that they want to learn behavior, and the best about ourselves — that we are human beings who have the students' best interest in mind and heart?

What we do refers to the nuts and bolts of classroom management — specific strategies for designing and maintaining a positive classroom environment, connecting with students, and taking care of business.

The combination of who we are and what we do makes for effective classroom management. It influences the manner in which we communicate with students, parents, and administrators, and it determines our effectiveness in moments of potential conflict. How do we implement consequences? How do we hold our ground with students without being mean, without creating battles down the road?

Taken as a whole, *Conscious Classroom Management* outlines a practical guide to surviving and thriving in the classroom. The “who” of classroom management can be found in the first main section, called Foundation. “What” is divided into Prevention and Intervention. The figure on the next page represents these key elements.

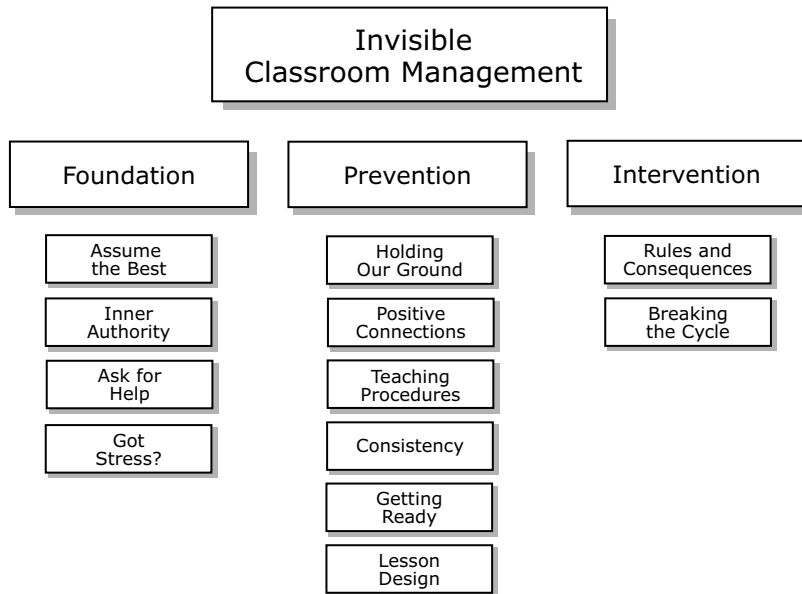
When searching for hints that address one of these issues immediately, feel free to think of the table of contents as a web page: click on the most appropriate chapter, and go there directly. Each chapter is written so that generally it will stand on its own, addressing one of these critical elements of classroom management.

If you are truly pressed for time and are about to start your school year, go straight to the section called “What to do first?” on page 131. It will help guide you through your first days of school.



A Closer Look

The combination of who we are and what we do makes for effective classroom management.



The more I explore classroom management and the more I explore myself, the more connections I make between my growth as a person and my abilities as an educator. I am forty-two years old. This book has taken me forty-two years to write. I've been a new teacher, a veteran teacher, a mentor teacher, and a teacher trainer. I've observed and coached over a hundred beginning and veteran teachers, and I am still constantly learning. I invite you to "get lost" in this book, and discover not only the quick fixes you need for your classes, but also the deeper connection you have to yourself and your students. There is no limit to the wonder to be uncovered in this exploration.

If you are truly pressed for time and are about to start your school year, go straight to the section called "What to do first?" on page 131.