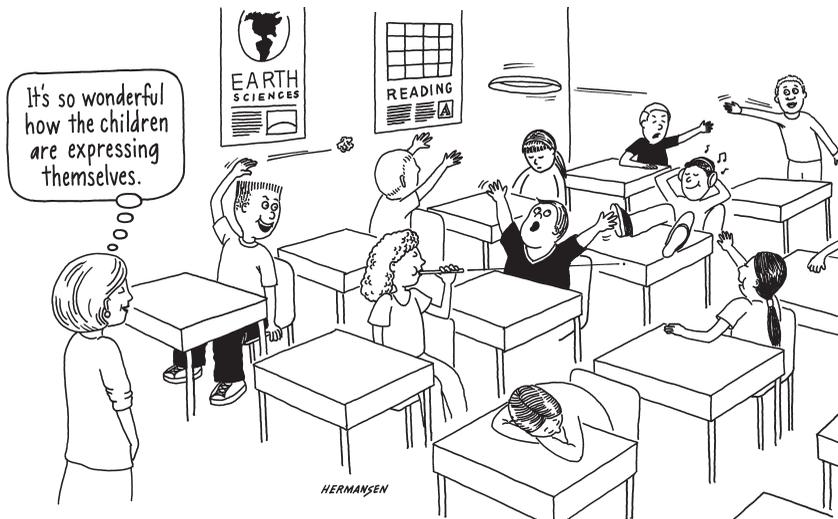


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INTRODUCTION

“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 her 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 Mrs. Miller's classes ran incredibly smoothly. When she said to her students, "Open your books to page twenty-seven," every book opened to page twenty-seven. The students were engaged, 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 my students in a Conga line behind me, their model teacher, appeared in my mind's eye. I could just see it; these kids would happily follow my lead as we journeyed into the wonders of learning. My classes would be even better than Mrs. 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,

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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 Mrs. Miller had taught. When this less effective teacher asked the students to open their books to page twenty-seven, 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 Mrs. 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 — seemingly the exact same request — made to two different groups of students result in opposite behaviors?"

The answer to this — and a million questions like it — is my motivation for 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 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 I asked, begged, pleaded with, and 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 becoming 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 and into the reality of daily practice.

This book describes the key elements I have discovered along the way that help make 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 during my first week in the profession, she has fabulous classroom management skills. Looking closely at what she does and the thinking behind it 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. Additionally, 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 moments.” There is no perfect model teacher. Regardless of our skill levels, we are constantly learning.

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. Further, I use the word “parents” broadly, referring to



A Closer Look

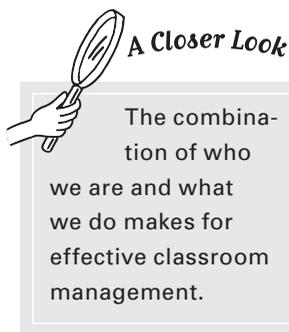
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students' guardians as well as their parents. In addition, even though this book is authored by both Grace Dearborn and me, for reasons of style, it is written in the first person.



How to Use This Book

This book is for any new or veteran pre-K-to-12 teacher who would like to improve his or her classroom management skills. It is also for mentor teachers and administrators who want to help their teachers to excel — for example, Chapter 16 is a new addition called “Strategies for School Administrators and Teacher Leaders.” The practices outlined in this book can be effective for parents or teachers of adults as well.



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 a process of plugging in a series of consequences to match student misbehavior. Teachers often come to our workshops looking for an exotic new consequence — one that will work for all students in all situations. As far as I know, it doesn't exist. Classroom management is a complex of approaches that draws on an understanding of three primary areas: the students, the teacher, and the relationship between the two.¹ 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:

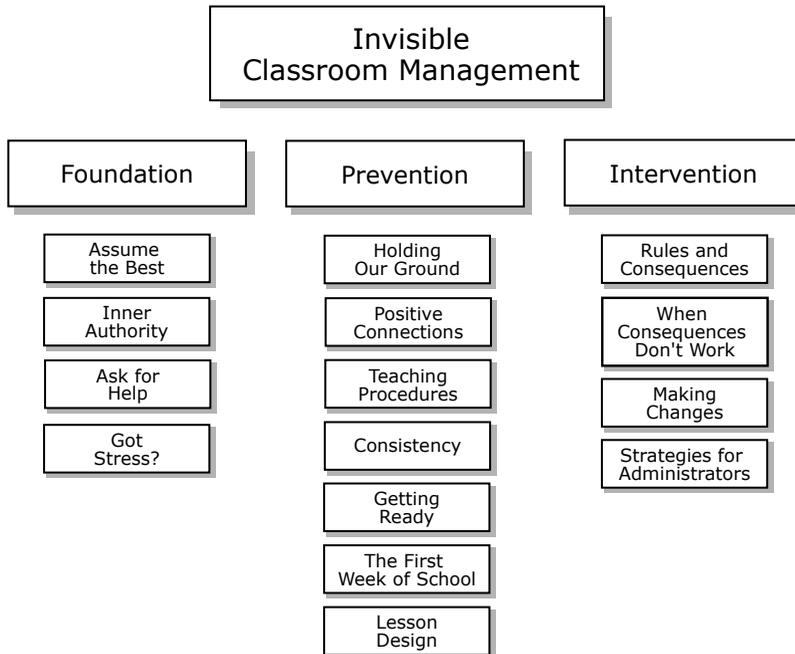
Who We Are ↔ What We Do

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 classroom behavior, and the best about ourselves — that we are human beings who have the students' best interest at 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 address misbehavior? How do we hold our ground with students without appearing mean, while inviting their cooperation and sparking their natural hunger to participate and learn?

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. The “what” is divided into two more sections: Prevention and Intervention. The figure below represents these key elements:



Each chapter is written so that generally it stands on its own, addressing one of these critical elements of classroom management. In addition, on the inside back cover of your copy you will find a unique



The online toolbox has a clickable calendar of each day of the first week, providing lessons for building rapport, teaching procedures, clarifying rules and consequences, and teaching content.

password that allows access to the online component of the content. By signing into the website, you can access a wealth of supporting material, including lesson plans, checklists, and videos, organized by chapter. In chapter 11, “The First Week of School,” the content is formatted as a clickable calendar, in which each day of the week provides a selection of teacher-tested options in the four key areas of building rapport, teaching procedures, clarifying rules and consequences, and teaching content. Anywhere in the book you see the online toolbox icon, you know that additional resources are a click away. In addition, there’s an extensive chapter-by-chapter facilitator guide to help professors and staff developers with book studies for their teachers and student teachers.

If you are truly pressed for time and are about to start your school year, go straight to Chapter 10, “Getting Ready,” and Chapter 11, “The First Week of School.” They will help you land on your feet in the first days of teaching.

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’ve been a new teacher, a veteran teacher, a mentor teacher, and a teacher trainer. I’ve observed and coached hundreds of beginning and veteran teachers, and spoken to over a hundred thousand educators. I am still constantly learning. I invite you to “get lost” in this book, and discover not only some 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.