1

Introduction to Transformative Classroom Management

In This Chapter

- Introduction
- Transformative classroom management
- Developing a guiding personal vision
- The progression of the book

This book offers strategies to make your classroom a place that changes lives for the better: *a transformative classroom*. It will demystify the process of creating a high-functioning classroom and will be your guide to creating the kind of class environment that you desire.

CASE**STUDY**

1.1

Ms. L's Transformative Elementary Class

What first strikes a visitor to Ms. L's urban public school third-grade class is the low level of anxiety and high level of confidence among the students, which allows them to take risks and express themselves. Today the students return to the classroom after recess and take their seats without any need for direction. After a smooth transition, the class is directed into a math lesson.

In contrast, the third-grade class next door comes back from recess somewhat rowdy and unfocused, and the teacher immediately begins to call out students who are misbehaving. The students finally open their math books after an extended transition.

(*Continued*)

During the lesson, only a few students volunteer to share their ideas because they worry that they will look incompetent, and the teacher interrupts the lesson many times to deal with misbehaving students.

Back in Ms. L's class, every student appears engaged and eager to share answers and ask questions when they are not clear about the material. The energy in the room is almost entirely focused on the activity, and no students feel the need to entertain themselves or their friends by misbehaving. Ms. L is calm and soft-spoken and refrains from any hint of negativity. She leads the lesson with questions that keep the students engaged and thinking critically, and there is a distinct flow to the activity. Throughout the lesson, the students look forward to being intellectually challenged.

If we had the ability to examine every classroom in every school, we would find that they vary dramatically from one another. We would find classrooms in urban, suburban, rural, public, and private schools, from every grade level and subject area, kindergarten through twelfth grade, that were functional and productive places. In the same sorts of schools, we would also see dysfunctional and unproductive classrooms. If we were to identify the variable in each class that was most responsible for the quality of the learning environment, we would find that it is we ourselves: the teachers. Our thoughts, values, and actions all have the effect of defining the climate and experience in our classes. Too few of us truly appreciate the ultimately powerful influence that we have, and we too often neglect to recognize that our classroom management choices can have a number of important effects:

- Promote community or fragmentation
- Lead to clarity or confusion
- Create a psychology of success or one of failure
- Be a liberating influence or perpetuate an unjust social class structure
- Foster a climate of motivation and joy or one of disinterest and drudgery

Researchers have found that classroom management actions and attitudes can be the difference between teachers having either a sense of job satisfaction and a feeling that their gifts are being successfully used or a feeling of burnout and unhappiness (Friedman & Farber, 1992). Moreover, how teachers approach classroom management will significantly determine the degree to which they feel successful and satisfied with their teaching (Fallona & Richardson, 2006).

READER NOTE

The reflections throughout each chapter offer you opportunities to reflect on the ideas presented in the text in relation to your own experience. They are a means by which you can process the content in the chapter in a practical and personal manner. Some of you may want to skip over the reflections on the first reading, especially if you are attempting to progress through the chapter at a quick pace.

REFLECTION

Survey a sampling of teachers to determine their levels of job satisfaction and levels of stress each day, and include a question about how successful they feel in the area of classroom management. Do you find a relationship between the two?

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT?

To understand what makes a classroom a transformative place, we might begin by examining the four case studies in this chapter. All four teachers have created what could be characterized as transformative classrooms. As you read about each classroom, notice their common attributes: clarity of purpose, self-responsibility, bonds among students, and an increasing level of function over time. In other words, they promote skills that are critical for success both in and outside the classroom.

CASE**STUDY**

Ms. R's Transformative High School Social Studies Class

Ms. R teaches social studies in an urban public high school that is considered low performing by most measures: its dropout rate is above 50 percent. But in Ms. R's class, students are working collaboratively. The students are from different cultures, neighborhoods, and cliques within the school, but in Ms. R's class, they function as a unified team. When this same group of students was observed the period before, they seemed to be mentally checked out and unruly. In that class, the teacher appeared to struggle with control, spending a lot of time raising his voice and threatening the students about what would happen if they didn't get to work. In Ms. R's class, in contrast, the students were entirely invested in the task and prepared when it was time to report their group's findings. Maybe the best words to describe the class are *trusting* and *respectful.* The students respect each other, their teacher, and their learning, and they know that their teacher trusts and respects them.

A transformative classroom functions to change for the better those who are within it—as individuals and as a collective. Transformative classroom management (TCM) is an approach that assumes that classroom management practices have a powerful long-term effect on student development and teachers' ability to be successful. It presumes that over time, high function is possible in any classroom; that some pedagogical and management practices lead to greater function, while others lead to greater dysfunction; and that if designed successfully, *any* classroom can be a transformative place.

TCM, unlike many other models, assumes that problems do not require reaction; rather, the sources of those problems need to be identified and altered. Problems within any class should not be viewed, as some would suggest, as a finite quantity of misbehaviors that need to be "dealt with" or "handled." Both functional and problematic or dysfunctional behaviors have

explicable causes and in most cases are related directly or indirectly to teaching practices. Most problems are manifestations of predictable factors, including the interaction between teacher or school and the student, the systems in place, congruence between the expectations of the students and teachers, and the degree to which the class meets the students' basic needs. TCM places a special emphasis on perpetually working toward a better tomorrow.

1.2 | **REFLECTION**

Have you seen classrooms that you would characterize as transformative? Reflect on the kinds of classroom management practices that occurred in them.

Figure 1.1 depicts the three domains of change within the TCM classroom. First, the transformative classroom supports each student's individual progression from irresponsibility and a "failure psychology" orientation to self-responsibility and a "success psychology" orientation: an internal locus of control, sense of acceptance and belonging, and growth orientation (Ayling, 2009). Second, the transformative classroom promotes the growth of the collective from its current state of function to one of greater function and ultimately into greater levels of community. Third, TCM endeavors to assist teachers in their own growth toward greater levels of self-awareness and a more effective and intentional set of practices, and it provides them the tools to become visionary leaders in the classroom.

DEVELOPING A GUIDING PERSONAL VISION

The process of creating a high-functioning transformative classroom begins by developing a vision of what you want to accomplish. To do so, it will be beneficial to take a few preliminary steps:

1. *Clarify your intention.* What do you specifically want? When you reflect on this question, it is useful not to let your thinking be overly restricted by what others tell you is possible,

	Movement and Growth From _____ → to → _____
Student	Failure psychology → Success psychology
	Irresponsible → Self-responsible
	Dysfunctional behavioral patterns → Functional behavioral patterns
Class or other collective	Dysfunction → Function
	Independent survival → A connected community
	Egocentric → Contributors
Teacher	Reactive or accidental → Intentional and aware
	Short-term survival → Long-term vision
	Manager → Leader

FIGURE 1.1.   *The Domains of Transformative Classroom Management*

or not possible, or what you have become accustomed to through practice or observation. Allow yourself to conceive a vision that is guided as little as possible by fear and resignation and as much as possible by what you think is right. What kind of classroom would make you proud and would give you a sense of being true to your core values?

2. *Be purposeful about raising your level of awareness.* If you have not yet started teaching, you might want to observe a broad range of classes in a variety of schools. It is common for teachers to default to practices to which they were exposed themselves, so recognize that what you have seen to this point may have been a limited sample of what is possible. See what is out there. And if you do not see your vision operationalized within the classrooms that you observe, it may mean that you are in the position of making a significant contribution as a trailblazer. If you are currently teaching, this book will offer many opportunities to reflect on what you are doing and why. Exploring both your internal processing as well as your external situation will be useful. More effective practice begins with an examination of who we are and what we value, followed by taking stock of what we are doing and asking ourselves if it is getting us closer to our vision.

3. *Recognize that every practice has an effect.* Every choice you make shapes the overall classroom climate. Even the smallest action can have a profound impact on the behavior, motivation, and achievement of students.

Stick to Your Vision

Each of us possesses our personal vision of the ideal classroom. For most of us, that vision is rather ambitious and was part of what inspired us to work with young people as teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators, support staff, and paraprofessionals. Yet as we confront the realities of schools over time—the lack of motivation of many students, the discouraging attitudes of some of our peers, the difficulty of the job—many of us increasingly become resigned to relinquishing that ideal vision and make compromises that we never wanted to make out of a perceived need for survival or what seems to be practical necessity. However, what you want to accomplish is possible. You *can* get there. There are answers and pathways to making your vision a reality.

REFLECTION

1.3

Take a moment now or after reading this chapter to envision your ideal classroom. What does it look like? What is going on in it? How do you feel as the teacher?

GAINING PERSPECTIVE

Common sense and teaching experience are valuable, but in most cases, they alone are not sufficient in helping us succeed at translating our classroom management vision into a reality. Good intentions and common sense do not necessarily lead to good practice. If they did, we would see mostly excellent teaching and classrooms free of conflict and full of motivated students. And experience does not necessarily lead to improved practice over time either. If this were the case, we would observe that the most experienced teachers would be the most effective classroom managers. In some cases this is true, and the value of experience cannot be underestimated; however, in many cases, more experience simply leads to repeatedly applying the same flawed principles and practices day after day.

Moreover, adding isolated management strategies here and there may or may not result in improvements. We need to ask ourselves, "To what are we adding them?" Without a foundation that supports a positive strategy, the strategy itself may not bring about the positive effect that we desire, or even have a desirable effect at all. Having in place a sound set of guiding principles for action and thinking is necessary for independent practices to be effective and to function as part of an integrated whole. Furthermore, in most cases, our classroom management will be more positively affected by what we cease doing rather than something we add to our repertoire.

The Natural Condition of Classrooms

The natural condition of any classroom is functional, harmonious, satisfying, and productive. It exists beneath the various sources of dysfunction, stress, and strain in each classroom and is most often masked by the effects of ineffective management practices and the negative student reactions that result from them. Apathy, struggle, hostility, anxiety, inefficiency, and resistance, while common, are essentially unnatural conditions that are brought about by one or more dysfunctional ingredients present in the class. In other words, they are normal but not natural. The positive feelings that exist in any class—the love of learning, a desire to collaborate, the experience of achievement, inspiration, the joy of contributing, and growth—are all natural states. This is not to suggest that teaching is naturally easy or that an effort to promote a classroom that characterizes more of this natural condition will cause problems to disappear overnight. In most cases, the process of creating a high-functioning class is challenging and entails a great deal of commitment and effort. But the closer we get to it, the more normal that natural state becomes.

In addition, we need to be wary of advice that includes the phrase, "Well, it works." The fact is that anything can be said to "work." Every sound and unsound practice that is being used by teachers today is defended with, "It works." But the question should not be whether a particular practice works; the question to ask is, "Is this practice getting me closer to my long-term management goals and vision?" In many cases, justifying a classroom management practice based on the rationale that it works is often a smokescreen for using an ultimately dysfunctional practice only because it is familiar or convenient. Many popular strategies have genial-sounding names, such as *token economy, praise, behavioral charts,* and *reward systems.* However, as you will see throughout the course of this book, a close examination of these practices reveals them as having detrimental long-term effects. We might ask ourselves whether we are looking for practices that will sweep problems under the rug, lead to domestication rather than growth, deceive students temporarily, or make us feel better or justified. Or do we want our management practices to have long-lasting effects that change the lives of our students for the better? Isolated quick-fix strategies can be helpful for ameliorating problems, but in some cases, they can disguise the true source of a problem or, worse yet, limit the growth of the students toward more evolved behavior.

1.4 **REFLECTION**

How would you answer the question, "What does it mean when a classroom management practice 'works'"? Was it more difficult to answer this question than you first thought? Why?

Results from a study of twenty-one urban schools comparing the effects of different forms of classroom management practices found that transformative classroom management practices produced both a higher-quality school climate as well as greater student achievement when compared to other types of practice (Shindler, Jones, Williams, Taylor, & Cadenas, 2009). Appendix G outlines the results. Regardless of the grade or the neighborhood from which the students attend, the use of practices classified as transformative encouraged a wide range of desired outcomes including better student-teacher relations, better student-student relations, higher-quality instructional practices, and a more positive attitude and culture at the school. These effects were absent or demonstrated to a much lesser extent by the use of other more "traditional" methods.

THE PROGRESSION OF THE BOOK

The progression of this book is designed to be developmental, and all of the chapters are inter-related. The sequence of content is intended to support new teachers in the development of a personal classroom management plan and experienced teachers in the process of reforming and improving their classroom management practice. It begins with chapters intended to promote self-assessment and the development of a personal vision and set of intentions. It then offers a series of chapters that address essential elements of successful management, including the practical steps in creating a democratic classroom. This is followed by chapters that address specifically what it takes to achieve the qualities of a transformative class.

CASE STUDY   1.3

Mr. T's Transformative Elementary Class

Mr. T teaches fifth grade in a suburban public school. What an observer first notices is that he has given control of the class almost entirely to the students when it comes to making decisions and solving problems. He calls his class "Mr. T's Tribe." He commonly gives his class collaborative problem-solving exercises and simply watches from the sidelines. The self-directive skills that the students demonstrate are evidence of a great deal of training, practice, and reflection, but by this point in the year, Mr. T finds himself needing to intervene very little. One of his tools is a participation assessment system that incorporates a clearly defined rubric for high-quality behavior. After a couple of months, almost all of his students have developed the habit of working at the highest level defined in the system, which is characterized by a student finding ways to help others succeed. As a result, most of the students in the class have internalized the notion that their success is contingent on their ability to contribute to the group and support others.

Part One provides you an opportunity to assess your current beliefs and practices, form a vivid guiding vision, and set a path for improved practice. Chapter Two addresses how to move from less effective to more effective classroom practices. This chapter examines the nature of the effective classroom and what types of practices lead to function or dysfunction. Throughout the book, you will be encouraged to recognize the advantages of those practices that lead to increased levels of effectiveness and function, as well as the problems that are generated by the use of dysfunctional practices characterized by either teacher passivity or teacher domination.

Part Two begins in Chapter Three with an examination of the fundamental dynamics of the classroom environment, including the idea that "we teach who we are." This chapter looks at the nature of social and indirect learning dynamics and how to harness its power. Chapter Four compares common strategies for developing clear and shared classroom expectations, examines which strategies will be more effective in this process, and considers why shared expectations are the cornerstone to successful classroom management. Chapter Five addresses technical management: the strategies that promote a culture of listening and respect and ensure that every student is attentive, on task, and responsible and the entire class functions efficiently on a practical level. Chapter Six explores motivational strategies, and Chapter Seven looks at how to create a psychology of success in students. We will explore how each teaching act promotes or undermines students' psychological orientation to learning and achievement and the practices that are likely to produce each result.

Part Three begins in Chapter Eight with examining how to create a functioning democratic classroom. At the heart of any functional class is a set of common understandings and a sense on the part of students that they are responsible for being accountable and contributing to the collective. Through the development of a shared social contract, clear expectations, a sense of purpose, and a set of logical consequences, any class can achieve the qualities of a high-functioning democracy. In Chapter Nine, a distinction is made between punishments and logical consequences, and a process is outlined for developing logical and related consequences that will lead to more responsible student behavior and a stronger social contract. Chapter Ten outlines a system for implementing the social contract and promoting student responsibility, the key to a functioning democracy.

We begin Part Four by examining in Chapter Eleven the connection of instruction, assessment, and classroom management. The starting point for this discussion is the idea that teachers who are more effective pedagogically have fewer problems. In this part, we examine the relationship between how we teach and how it affects our management. Also, we explore how instructional and managerial choices work to either reinforce or liberate the social class structure and the students within that structure. Chapter Twelve presents practical ideas for leading and managing cooperative learning.

1.4

CASESTUDY

Mr. S's Transformative Middle School Math Class

In this urban public middle school, most students fear and dislike math. But Mr. S's math students bound into the classroom with a sense of positive energy. What a visitor notices first about the way that Mr. S teaches is that he uses questions many times more than statements. The students are responsible for doing the thinking and problem solving. The guided-practice activity today is hands-on and active: students use algebra tiles to work out solutions to problems. When Mr. S asks students to report their findings, all students eagerly volunteer—in contrast to many other classes where weaker students avoid involvement. It is clear that the expectations in this class are well established for those occasions when the student who is responding struggles. Students are entirely supportive of those responding, and Mr. S stays with the responder and helps the student work through his or her thinking. The result is a group of students who feel empowered and safe to take risks.

Chapter Thirteen, the first chapter in Part Five, addresses how to work with conflict and students who are considered difficult by some teachers. Conflict is a natural part of life in and out of the classroom and can be a source of growth or result in suffering. Some students come to us with habits that require a greater degree of intentional effort on our part than others. In Chapter Fourteen, we examine how to bridge the gap with students who appear disconnected and help students who have developed a pattern of negative identity learn to re-form the processes they have used to reach their goals and encourage them toward healthier, more functional behavior patterns.

Part Seven looks at how to synthesize the strategies outlined in the previous fourteen chapters into an approach for achieving a transformative classroom. Chapter Fifteen explores how to successfully implement a student-centered management approach and promote classroom community. Chapter Sixteen offers an in-depth exploration of the relationship between our thinking patterns and our effectiveness and job satisfaction. In many respects, the level of function or dysfunction in our classrooms will be a reflection of our own thoughts, attitudes, patterns, and beliefs. Here we discuss how to make our thinking an ally in the process of reaching our goals rather than a self-limiting hurdle.

A series of online resource articles related to specific issues in transformative classroom management is available at no cost to readers at trasformativeclassroom.com.

- "Developing and Implementing an Effective System for Assessing the Quality of Student Process, Participation and Behavior" provides an extensive step-by-step system for assessing investment, effort, and the process aspects of tasks. It explains why attempts to assess these kinds of outcomes must be sound and intentional or should not be attempted at all.

- "Why to Stop Using Colored Cards and Names on the Board Systems, and What to Do Instead" explains the many fundamental and practical problems related to the use of these popular behavior assessment systems. A sounder and more effective alternative is offered.

- "Competition in the Transformative Classroom" offers an in-depth analysis of competition in the classroom and provides an explanation of the difference between the healthy and unhealthy use of competition.

- "Moving Up the Continuum from a 4-Style Approach" will be helpful to those who find themselves relying on a dominating and teacher-centered approach. The 4-Style approach is characterized by a "boss" personality and relies to a great extent on personal confrontation with students. This style is explained in more detail in the next chapter.

The book finishes with a series of appendixes that include a question-and-answer session (Appendix A), a comparison of sound versus faulty management assumptions (Appendix B), an analysis of the use of the phrase "it works" (Appendix C), and analysis of the use of the term "the real world" (Appendix D), a catalogue of sources of classroom drama (Appendix E), an introduction to the Transform Your School schoolwide behavioral system (Appendix F), and results of a study demonstrating the effects of TCM on school climate and student achievement (Appendix G). Transformative classrooms can exist in isolation and can still be powerful as independent entities, but when an entire school adopts a transformative mind-set and set of practices, the burden for each teacher becomes lighter and the results become more profound.

In the next chapter we will examine the Teaching Style Matrix, and the four possible teaching styles, and classify classroom management strategies by their tendency to create more or less function and effectiveness.

READER NOTE

Each chapter in this book ends with Journal Reflections and Activities. These sections are intended to help you engage with key ideas in the chapter. A journal can be a valuable asset in processing your thinking more deeply. The activities may be helpful as you develop your own personal classroom management plan or teaching improvement plan.

Journal Reflections

- In what ways has school had a transformational effect on your life? What events were responsible for that effect? Why?
- What do you want to accomplish through reading this book?
- Have you ever been part of a transformative context—for example, in a classroom, team, group, project, or committee?
  - If you have not, the notion of creating one in your classroom may seem somewhat abstract. But as you apply the principles and practices from the book, you will begin to better recognize what it is.
  - If you have had this experience, what was it like? Many of those who have will tend to judge each successive context by that standard. This is very often true for students. Those who have been part of a transformative classroom are changed permanently. Reflect on why this is the case.

Activities

1. Develop a personal vision for your ideal classroom. Do not be too concerned for now about limitations that you feel are present in your school or the kinds of schools in which you see yourself working. Paint a detailed picture of how it looks and feels. What kind of work is going on? How does it feel in the class? What do teacher-student interactions look like? What is the climate in the room?

2. In a small group, discuss the following question: Do you see evidence of a transformational mind-set in schools in general? How do you explain your findings? What is either encouraging or discouraging this mind-set?

REFERENCES

Anyon, J. (1981). Social class and school knowledge. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *11*, 3–42.

Ayling, G. (2009). *Report of an adolescent transition, a possible intervention for the stress response and diseases in adult life*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Fallona, C., & Richardson, V. (2006). Classroom management as a moral activity. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management* (pp. 1041–1062). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Friedman, I. A., & Farber, B. A. (1992). Professional self-concept as a predictor of burn out. *Journal of Educational Research*, *86*(1), 28–35.

Shindler, J., Jones, A., Williams, A., Taylor, C., & Cadenas, H. (2009, January). *Exploring below the surface: School climate assessment and improvement as the key to bridging the achievement gap*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Seattle.