

PART 1

**Classroom
Management**

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Securing Students' Attention

PURPOSE

FACT 1: All effective teachers are effective classroom managers.

FACT 2: Even the most effective teachers work diligently to continually improve their classroom management skills.

FACT 3: Not all teachers are effective classroom managers.

FACT 4: Without effective management skills, effective teaching cannot occur.

FACT 5: *All* teachers possess the ability to become more effective, yet many fail to do so because they lack management skills. This leads us back to FACT 1: **All effective teachers are effective classroom managers.**

Any administrator will admit that if all teachers were effective classroom managers, discipline problems would be dramatically diminished, and learning would improve instantly.

Though we are not downplaying the importance of content knowledge, all the content knowledge in the world will not make someone an effective classroom manager. **You cannot teach any of the content effectively until you can manage the students.** Thus, in the classroom of a teacher who lacks effective management skills, effective teaching simply cannot occur.

Believe it or not, what many administrators and staff developers fear most about conducting an inservice is securing and keeping the attention of their audience. Have you ever attended an inservice and watched the presenter struggle—and fail—to get and keep everyone’s attention? Or an inservice where attendees spoke out of turn? Or an inservice whose presenter, as a last resort, strained her voice to present *over* the talking of attendees? Those are not effective inservices. Likewise, have you ever observed a teacher struggling to get and keep his students’ attention? That’s not an effective lesson.

The good news is that there is a simple, effective solution. And that’s the focus of today’s inservice.

INSERVICE

Begin today’s inservice by asking your teachers, *What is the most important procedure that any teacher must have?* Allow them a couple of minutes to share their answers. When they have finished, tell them that all of their answers are good and valid. However, the single most important procedure any teacher needs is a way of securing the students’ attention.

Having established that fact, ask the next question: *What is your procedure for securing your students’ attention? In other words, what is the one thing you do, consistently, every time you need the attention of your students?* Far too many teachers do not have one procedure solidly established for securing their students’ attention. You know this already, of course, based on your ongoing observations of your teachers. Some say, “I need your attention.” If saying this doesn’t work the first time, they repeat it—often three or four times—until it does. If “I need your attention” still doesn’t work, they try variations: “Excuse me. Stop the talking.” Some resort to threats. And most of these teachers look unhappy while they’re

trying to get their students' attention. The list of methods is long, but the results are the same: chatty, distracted students.

Your best teachers, of course, will be happy to share some effective techniques for securing student attention. Though the sharing of ideas is important, keep in mind that this is a training session and that you are the trainer. You'll want to demonstrate an effective way of securing students' attention.

Here is ours. Feel free to use it:

Tell the students, "There will be times when I will need your undivided attention. When I need your attention, I will do two things. Here's what I will do." At this point, smile and raise your hand. Ask the students, "What two things do you see me doing?" (Note that they will almost always notice the smile first.) Once they have answered, say, "When you see me doing these two things, I need for you to stop talking and raise your hand. That will be your signal to me that I have your attention." Then say, "Now we will practice it. When I say 'Go,' start talking as much as you'd like. When I raise my hand and smile, stop talking and raise your hand. Go!" [Note that you will be demonstrating this for the teachers, so they will be the students for this activity.] Allow the room to get noisy. Then smile and raise your hand, and do not begin speaking until all hands are raised and the room is quiet again. It will take only a few seconds, by the way. [You will also notice that some of the teachers (students) will smile also, though this is not a condition of the procedure.] Smiles are contagious. And smiling teachers experience far fewer power struggles with their students.

Okay, so here you are, smiling and raising your hand. When everyone is quiet, say, "Thanks for following the procedure. But just so you know, students won't follow it that quickly. So you will simply continue to practice the procedure with your students. Remind them when they forget. Continue to implement the procedure consistently, with a smile on your face. The moment you appear upset, they win, you lose, and no procedure will work." [This will be addressed in detail in Inservice 6, "The Biggest Mistake Teachers Make."]

Remind your teachers that procedures apply to all grade levels. There's nothing "elementary" about them. Professional football coaches implement procedures and practice them over and over and over, every day. That's how their teams win.

Finally, remind your teachers that classroom management begins to go awry when teachers stop being consistent. The bottom line is that you have to have a way, one way, of reliably securing your students' attention. You have to use that

procedure consistently. And if you do so with a pleasant look on your face, you remove the allure of a power struggle.

Tell your teachers that you will use this procedure with them for faculty meetings from here on out. It's also a great idea to implement a schoolwide procedure for student assemblies.

IMPLEMENTATION

You have demonstrated for your teachers a procedure for securing students' attention. Now you want them to go to their classrooms and implement this new procedure. If some teachers already have a procedure that works well for them, then tell them to continue it, by all means, and to share it with their colleagues. Your teachers don't have to use the exact procedure that you've shared. You simply want them to implement one consistent procedure for securing the attention of their students. It is important to note, however, that whatever procedure they implement should have two components: (1) it has to be consistently implemented, and (2) they have to look happy while they are implementing it.

Tell the teachers that you will be walking through classrooms this week (and in the future) observing their procedures for securing students' attention. When you meet a teacher in the hallway, especially one who struggles with classroom management, ask how the new procedure is working.

Once you have each teacher implementing a consistent procedure for securing student attention, discipline problems will improve immediately. And now that your teachers have a way of securing attention, they can move forward in establishing better overall classroom management. Stay on top of this one and continue to monitor its implementation. Teachers who are consistent have fewer students who are resistant!

