Key Elements of Classroom Management

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Chapter 10: Whole-Class Strategies

> Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active, reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn.
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> —Loris Malaguzzi (Edwards, 1993, p. 56)

The advantages of presenting instruction to the whole class are attractive to many teachers. Whole-class strategies generally require less preparation time and instruction time. Typical whole-class strategies include lecture, discussion, debate, teacher demonstrations, and giving directions.

Lecture

Lecture is generally defined as the verbal imparting of knowledge. Combining lectures with other strategies may enhance them. They are teacher-centered and, therefore, allow for greater teacher control. Lecturing places the teacher in the role of an "expert" sharing knowledge with students. It is often used to

- Provide basic knowledge needed for future activities.

- Present an overview of knowledge important for students to learn.

- Function as a catalyst for the students' learning endeavors.

Lectures allow the teacher to present a large amount of information efficiently. Figure 10.1 is a guide to help you make preparations for a lecture and consider some of the problems and disadvantages of the lecture strategy.

Figure 10.1. Lecture Planning at a Glance

Making Preparations	Problems and Disadvantages
- Make or collect visuals (transparencies, posters, computer presentations) to support main points. - Develop supports for note taking (incomplete outlines, fill in the blanks, audiotapes). - Plan stops and starts (activities with interaction). - Write questions to guide high-level thinking. - Develop a plan to assess level of student understanding.	- Possible listening-skills deficiencies or short attention spans - Teacher's lecture skills - Level of student preparedness—student involvement and prior knowledge - Limited student interaction with the content - Presentation of limited point of view

Making Preparations

Planning is the key to delivering a successful lecture. Lecturers need at least a brief outline. It is important to keep in mind that successful lectures are built around a few main points. The outline should include the following:

- Purpose and objectives for learning outcomes

- Important details or points

- Examples and illustrations to support each main point

- Summary

- Assessment plan

A well-planned framework is particularly helpful to teachers who must present the same lecture multiple times. The outline serves as a checklist to ensure completeness each time the lecture is given.

Appropriate Topics

Figure 10.2 gives examples of topics that are appropriate for the lecture strategy and those that are not.

Figure 10.2. Lecture Application Examples	
Appropriate Application of Lecture	**Less-Effective Application of Lecture**
Mathematics: Present the problem-solving method and show examples of successful use.	**Mathematics:** Application of the problem-solving method (more effective in a student-centered strategy)
Communications: Introduce a piece of literature, such as a novel.	**Communications:** Teaching the parts of speech (requires a high level of student participation and interaction with teacher)
Science: Present an overview of a science unit, including main topics, expected learning, and a challenge to explore.	**Science:** Topics requiring detailed information (best in written form, such as learning the symbols for the elements)

Visuals

Although lecture is primarily verbal, combining it with other strategies enhances its value. Visuals such as transparencies, posters, and computer presentations increase students' levels of comprehension of material presented in a lecture.

Supports for Note-Taking

Another useful strategy is providing handouts. These might take the form of incomplete outlines or fill-in-the-blank statements completed with information presented in the lecture. Either type of handout can easily be made from the teacher's lecture outline. These tools require students to listen carefully for key information and fill in the missing parts. They also serve to accommodate students needing additional assistance (e.g., special education and at-risk students). Consider making audiotapes of your lecture for students who have even greater difficulties learning by listening so that the students have multiple opportunities to listen.

Stop and Start Times and Questioning

Stop and start times are the points of greatest learning. Therefore, to increase the value of a lecture, plan quick activities for a break from the lecture. During this time students can complete a short activity, such as discussing a teacher-provided question, sharing the most important facts or information presented, or using information provided to solve a problem. The teacher then brings the group back together, at which time students might share the results of the quick activity before the lecture is resumed.

Assessment

It is important to determine the effectiveness of your lecture. Some instructors use a quick quiz. Although this provides some feedback, a quiz does not measure the value of the students' lecture notes. Having students use their notes as a basis for additional activities provides an opportunity for application of the new knowledge.

Problems and Disadvantages

Listening Skills

The listening skills and attention spans of students for lecture purposes cannot be ignored. Johnstone and Percival (1976) found that an adult's attention span is between 15 and 20 minutes. In addition, they note that the first instance of "downtime" occurs 3 to 5 minutes into the lecture, followed by another at the 10- to 18-minute mark. The length of quality attention time becomes shorter as lectures progress. (Please note that these findings refer strictly to lectures without visuals or stop/start times, and that the attention spans of elementary and middle-school students are even shorter than those of adults.)

Problem: Students are yawning, and their eyes have that glossed-over appearance. Don't you recall lectures that put you to sleep?

Solution: Middle school students don't even try to disguise their boredom; their body language is the easiest to read. Don't wait for a planned break. Stop. Initiate a quick activity and then resume your lecture.

Use the following questions to help you decide whether to choose the lecture strategy and, if so, how to prepare students for learning via a lecture:

- Do your students have good listening skills?
- How long can your students listen effectively?
- Do your students have acceptable note-taking skills?
- Are your students comfortable asking questions in front of their peers?

Based on the assessment of your students' skills, you may decide to provide some tutoring before you use lecture as an effective strategy.

Lecture Skills

Another important factor is the speaking skill of the teacher. Analyze your ability to lecture by considering these questions:

- Do you speak clearly with expression and enthusiasm?
- Do you use gestures to emphasize important points?
- Do you make eye contact?

Your body language and the volume and pitch of your speech help students identify important points. If lecturing is difficult for you, practice delivering your lecture in front of a mirror or recording it on a tape recorder. Listen to the audiotapes and use them to identify ways to improve your lecture skills.

Student Preparedness

The following questions and answers help you identify other problems that can impact the effectiveness of a lecture and provide hints on how to address these problems.

What is the students' prior knowledge about this topic? It is imperative that teachers understand students' prior knowledge about the topic of the lecture. A lecture should begin on a firm foundation of prior knowledge and expand from there. One effective way to build a foundation for the topic is to ask students either to write or discuss what they already know about the topic and what they would like to learn about it.

What can be done to minimize passive learning? The stop and start activities designed for interaction and application support active learning. Lecturers need to make maximum use of these interaction opportunities by carefully planning quick activities and timing them to match students' attention spans. Student involvement increases each student's level of concern, resulting in greater efforts at listening and providing opportunity for interaction with the content of the lecture.

Point of View

When appropriate, various points of view should be included in the lecture. An effective way to do this is to present one point of view in the lecture and then ask students to generate other possible points of view.

Conclusion

Lecturing is a skill. It can be refined to an art. I had a college professor whose lectures were like soliloquies—performances that made time pass so quickly that we were amazed when the bell rang to signal the end of class. On the other hand, I had another college professor who spoke in monotones. He droned on for the full period with no chance for discussion or student interaction. The most exciting part of the class was watching his annoying habit of walking his fingers up the back of his head and then scratching his bald head multiple times during a lecture. Time crawled. What a waste!

It is important to be a well-prepared lecturer. To do less is a misuse of time on task. However, what if, in spite of your planning and preparations, your lecture is not working? That spaced-out look on the faces of students makes it obvious that their attention has wandered. It is time to insert a stop and start time requiring student input and activity. Ask questions such as, "What don't you understand?" and, "Is this something you already know?" to determine whether to continue the lecture or shift to another strategy. Don't continue with a strategy that is failing. Identify the problem, solve it, and move forward either to continue the lecture or switch to another strategy. Lecturing is a valuable strategy only if it helps students accomplish the objectives of the lesson!

Discussion

Discussion focuses on interactions. Participants are allowed to express their knowledge, understandings, and opinions on a topic. It is a student-centered strategy in which teachers assume the role of facilitator, and students become interactive participants. Student participation promotes active learning and greater student accountability because students must share their knowledge.

Figure 10.3 is a guide to help you make preparations for a discussion and consider some of the problems and disadvantages of the discussion strategy.

Figure 10.3. Discussion Planning at a Glance	
Making Preparations	**Problems and Disadvantages**
- Assure that students have sufficient prior knowledge of the topic. - Select a topic appropriate for discussion. - Create, teach, and enforce guidelines for quality discussions. - Ensure that each student has an equal opportunity to be involved in the discussion. - Develop questions to prompt and guide discussions. - Plan a culminating or summarizing activity.	- Difficult to guarantee full student participation - Difficult to keep students focused on topic - Difficult for teacher to know whether to intervene - Students' lack of prior knowledge or depth of understanding of topic

Making Preparations

Sufficient Prior Knowledge

Using discussion as a strategy involves knowing the abilities of each student. Because discussion is a student-centered strategy, success depends on the readiness of the students. The students' depth of knowledge of the topic is a critical variable in determining whether the discussion strategy will be effective. For example, a discussion is effective following a period of study on the topic. This preparation makes it more likely that students can discuss the topic intelligently.

Appropriate Topics

When choosing a topic for discussion, consider its grade and age appropriateness as well as the students' abilities to understand the topic and participate in a discussion. Curriculum guides are valuable resources for discussion topic options.

Figure 10.4 gives examples of topics that are appropriate for the discussion strategy and those that are not.

Figure 10.4. Discussion Application Examples	
Appropriate Application of Discussion	**Less-Effective Application of Discussion**
Mathematics: Find solutions to open-ended problems.	**Mathematics:** Learn how to do a mathematical procedure (requires a more linear approach).
Communications: Share personal reflections about a piece of literature.	**Communications:** Answer questions on a literature piece that require specific answers (no point to discuss as answers are clear cut).
Science: Share experiment results and their ramifications; consequences of choices.	**Science:** Learn the parts of a plant (text is a better source and working within a small group or partnership).

Discussion Guidelines

Preparing students to participate in discussions is essential. Decide if you want open discussions or restricted ones that require the raising of hands. Model and practice the rules for classroom discussions. Role-play different situations and identify appropriate and inappropriate responses to help students understand and respect the principles of quality discussions. As you begin to implement discussions in your classroom, stop the discussion if students ignore the rules. Ask students to modify their behavior to meet the predefined rules and then return to the discussion. When rules are disregarded, discussions may turn into aimless, chaotic conversations without educational benefit.

Problem: The discussion is out of control. It is no longer meeting the needs of the curriculum. **Solution:** Monitor and adjust. Don't be hesitant about changing what is not working. Out-of-control discussions yield little in the way of quality results. Primary students easily jump to unrelated topics, but the positive side is that with a few teacher comments they can be easily guided back to the topic!

Guiding Discussions with Questioning

One major issue in implementing classroom discussions is assuring that all students participate and that a few students do not dominate the discussion. Addressing teacher-directed questions or comments to inactive discussion participants may solve part of the problem, but it may also be necessary to set rules that limit the number of times a student can speak or to simply ask the student dominating the discussion to become a listener for a period of the time. Good preparation should include development of critical thinking questions to help guide the discussion through rough times.

Culminating or Summarizing

Summarizing activities enhance the value of a discussion. One possible activity involves having students summarize the content with teacher guidance. Another option is to have each student quickly share one idea from the discussion. The teacher then guides students in prioritizing the list. Plan for a culminating or summarizing activity to assess the quality of understanding developed by the discussion. If this assessment reveals a weakness in the students' overall level of knowledge, you may need to present this same lesson using another strategy.

Problems and Disadvantages

Level of Participation

Quality discussions depend on knowledgeable student interaction. It is easy to overlook uninvolved students. Tally sheets are one way to monitor student participation; use a class roster to help with these. When it becomes apparent that some students aren't involved, the teacher needs to decide on a course of action. Some students are naturally quieter than others and prefer not to talk in front of class. Are there times when lack of active participation should be allowed? Teachers know their students best, and lack of participation is an option for some students. Having those inactive students jot down what they learned can support passive participation. If that option is allowed, it should be given as a choice at the beginning of the discussion. However, nonparticipation because of student inattention should not be tolerated.

Staying on Topic

How does a teacher monitor a discussion so that students don't wander to tangential topics that arise in the discussion? Teaching students to self-monitor is a choice. Again, role-playing is helpful for training. When students understand the concept, they can help monitor the discussion.

Teacher Interventions

When discussions run off topic, teachers may also choose to interject a phrase as simple as "off topic" to guide older students. Subtle teacher interventions in the lower grades are less disruptive to the flow of discussion. How often a teacher has to intervene may be directly related to the amount of training done before the discussion strategy is used.

Misjudging Prior Knowledge

It may become apparent that students don't have a sufficient frame of reference to participate in a successful discussion. Bluffing will not make up for lack of knowledge. It is necessary in these cases to step back, build a firm foundation of knowledge, and then try the discussion again. It is possible for a teacher to misjudge the depth of students' prior knowledge. Acknowledge the error, discontinue the discussion, and initiate an alternative activity.

Conclusion

The discussion of the life cycles of skunks and turtles is flowing smoothly. With a look of genuine eagerness, a child offers, "My dog loves to play with turtles." Ignore this comment, and the discussion immediately turns to pets. Staying on the topic is the greatest challenge for students and, therefore, also for teachers.

Some of my middle-schoolers were at times tough to train. With one class I had to stop discussions that were off topic and switch to an alternative activity. After guiding them to realize that the rules are always followed, one student said, "Mrs. Hoover, that was interesting today. Why haven't we done

this before? Could we do this again?" They finally realized that the quality of discussions improved when reasonable guidelines were followed. Even though I had taught the guidelines, I also had to prove I would enforce them.

The quality of discussion is also dependent on classroom management. If the teacher's control is weak, the possibility of a quality discussion is lessened. Good discussions require good classroom management, enforced guidelines, and adequate student preparation for the topic.

Debate

Classroom debates are based on controversial issues—issues that have pros and cons. Debates are student-centered; teachers take on the role of active facilitators. This strategy requires higher-level thinking. Students learn information about an issue or idea, take a position, relate their position to others, and defend it. Students must learn to listen to the opposing side and refute the arguments proposed in a convincing manner. They must learn to manipulate knowledge to appeal to both the factual and emotional needs of their audience.

Figure 10.5 is a guide to help you make preparations for a debate and consider some of the problems and disadvantages of the debate strategy.

Figure 10.5. Debate Planning at a Glance	
Making Preparations	**Problems and Disadvantages**
- Select a quality debatable topic. - Ensure that students have in-depth knowledge of the debate topic. - Provide and enforce guidelines for debates. - Formulate a conclusion.	- Existing pro and con opinions already formed by some students - Inappropriate remarks made by students that lead to out-of-control emotions - Need for teacher to decide when intervention is appropriate - Level of respect for opinions of classmates

Making Preparations

Appropriate Topics

What constitutes a quality debate topic? What topic is appropriate for certain grade levels? Are there topics not appropriate for certain communities? Consider these questions as you select a debate topic. A good source of topics is your grade-level curriculum guide. Successful debates depend on students' abilities to understand the topic and to approach it with an attitude of intellectual curiosity rather than strong emotional reactions.

Figure 10.6 gives examples of topics that are appropriate for the debate strategy and those that are not.

Figure 10.6. Debate Application Examples	
Appropriate Application of Debate	**Less-Effective Application of Debate**
Science: Debate biological advancements in medicine—such as genetic research.	**Science:** Situations that have only one possible solution (no debate issue)
Communications: Debate a controversial issue based on an expository piece.	**Communications:** Application of grammar rules (no debate issue)
Social Studies: Debate any appropriate social problem or issue.	**Social Studies:** Historical event (debate won't change history but if about if the right choice was made—that would be debatable)

In-Depth Knowledge

In order to debate, students must have a command of the knowledge regarding the topic. Before considering the debate strategy, plan to build a foundation of general knowledge. Once that knowledge has been acquired, opinions can be formed. Those opinions must be supported by facts, and the facts must be sorted to support a "for" or "against" position.

What about emotional pleas? How much emotion is acceptable in debates? Think of emotional pleas as a seasoning—a dash is enough. The strongest argument is based on facts and on the ability to manipulate facts to support a position.

Debate in a classroom can take different forms. Once students have a foundation of knowledge, simply opening up a controversial topic for discussion provides an opportunity to debate. Because there are no clear-cut sides in this type of debate, converting others to a position is easier because positions are not yet set.

In a more formal approach to classroom debate, a teacher might divide the classroom into "for" and "against" groups. Again, it is important to provide a basic foundation of knowledge, or an opportunity to do research to develop the knowledge. Assign students to plan arguments. An argument includes a defined position, facts to support the position, acknowledgment of and plans to refute the opposing position and a plea for support.

In both informal and formal forms of debate, students are exercising higher levels of thinking. There is a higher level of retention using the debate strategy because knowledge is applied, discussed, debated, and reviewed.

Remind students of the key elements of a debate: debatable topic; facts, facts, facts; a little emotional appeal; and a well-stated plea at the end. High school students tend either to distance themselves or become too emotional. They'll need guidance to find middle ground.

Guidelines

Guidelines for debate must be reviewed before a debate, and should include the following:

- How students share—show of hands, presentation of ideas, taking turns, or open debate
- Need to respect everyone's opinion—learning to agree to disagree
- Amount and type of preparation expected
- Monitoring style of teacher—how the teacher responds if the debate gets out of control or off track
- Type of concluding activity—how the students or teacher will summarize to ensure maximum application of knowledge

Concluding Activity

The debate should be stopped before the end of class for a summarizing or concluding activity. This doesn't mean that one side must "win." The concluding activity might be something as simple as a summary from both sides. Some classes might even want to vote on which side presented the best argument. Whatever the final activity used, the end result is that students must review what has been said and decide for themselves how effectively the arguments were presented. This practice further cements the knowledge shared.

Problems and Disadvantages

Preformed Opinions

A teacher carefully plans a debate activity only to learn that no one wants to be on the "for" or "against" team. Instead of a debatable topic, the class holds a unified opinion. This happens. Best alternative? Change your strategy for this topic or find another topic to debate. Most forced sides don't enter the debate with enthusiasm and sincerity. There are exceptions, but why push it? It is easy to move into a discussion strategy and discuss why students have taken a unified position on the issue and explore the opposing position without debate.

Inappropriate Remarks

On the opposite side, some topics are particularly "hot." Opinions may be so drastic that students forget to respect those of others and make entirely inappropriate comments instead.

Teacher intervention. When the debate appears to get out of hand, the teacher should remind students to monitor how they say things before something cruel or inconsiderate is said. This can be done simply with a predetermined warning word said by the teacher, such as "respect," "self-monitor," or "careful." However, once something inappropriate has been said, damage control must be instituted. This is the reason that training in the debate format with less-controversial topics is helpful. Students learn that emotion can only be used with temperance.

Respect for others. Even if emotions are in check, students need to show respect for others. It's easy for students to write off opinions that are in opposition to their own as "dumb," "stupid," or "ridiculous." Learning to agree to disagree respectfully is a skill that many adults haven't mastered, but it is one that should be taught with debate.

Conclusion

"You're crazy," an angry debater responds. Emotions are out of control. Debate is a strategy that requires a high level of thought, but it is effective only when there is quality classroom management in place. Teachers must be active facilitators, monitoring for appropriate conduct until students have learned to function within the guidelines of classroom debate.

If debate seems ineffective, consider taking the following actions:

- Make a controversial statement to get the ball rolling again.

- Check for level of control by asking whether everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinions or whether it feels unsafe to make comments.

- Assess whether students have a sound foundation of knowledge or whether they are trying to bluff their way through the debate.

Teacher Demonstrations

Teacher demonstrations place the teacher in the role of "expert" providing knowledge or skills by demonstrating a step-by-step method. Demonstrations are a form of "show and tell." The following are some possible reasons teachers choose the demonstration strategy:

- There is limited time or a scarcity of necessary materials.

- The goal of the lesson is to give students a pattern or procedure to follow, and a demonstration is an efficient way to do that.

- To limit student contact with dangerous materials by demonstrating proper usage.

Figure 10.7 is a guide to help you make preparations for a teacher demonstration and consider some of the problems and disadvantages of the demonstration strategy.

Figure 10.7. Teacher Demonstration Planning at a Glance	
Making Preparations	**Problems and Disadvantages**
- Develop a plan for you to follow or establish a pattern for students to follow (consider a handout). - Gather materials or be sure they are easily accessible. - Practice the demonstration if it involves several steps, or if you have not done this demonstration previously.	- Room arrangement or space not adequate to allow all students a direct line of sight to the demonstration - Limited student involvement - Excessive amount of time required for set-up and clean-up

Making Preparations

Making Plans and Establishing a Pattern

The teacher's preparation depends on the purpose of the demonstration. If the purpose is to model good demonstration format, a plan should be developed, demonstrated, and shared with students. This plan should contain the desired actions and the order in which they are to be done, as well as any other requirements, such as visuals. Handouts that explain the demonstration pattern help students follow the process.

Other purposes for teacher demonstrations do not require student understanding of the presentation format. The purpose for these demonstrations is to show how to do something and to provide information to support the demonstration. In these cases, students take notes on what the teacher shares, not how the teacher shares.

Appropriate Topics

Figure 10.8 gives examples of topics that are appropriate for the demonstration strategy and those that are not.

Figure 10.8. Teacher Demonstration Application Examples **Appropriate Application of Demonstration**	**Less-Effective Application of Demonstration**
Mathematics: Solve difficult math problems using manipulatives.	**Mathematics:** Modeling concepts for which students have already demonstrated mastery (not time efficient)
Communications: Make a graphic organizer to show relationships.	**Communications:** As an introductory activity (better comprehension as a culminating activity—for example, provide instruction on graphic organizer and then demonstrate its use)
Science: Model the use of the scientific method to test a hypothesis.	**Science:** Any topic for which students lack sufficient knowledge to understand the principles presented (wonderful demonstration no one can explain)

Gathering Materials

The key to successful demonstrations is advance planning. Demonstration materials need to be easily accessible. Check that all materials are in good working order and that quantities are sufficient. Waiting until the last minute to round up materials is not wise!

Practicing

Practicing a demonstration before presenting it to the class might save embarrassing moments. This is particularly important for science demonstrations. Many times the demonstration might not yield the results you intend because of various factors (e.g., the quality of the materials, the lack of precise measuring devices, or malfunctioning equipment).

Recipe for failure: forget to organize materials, fail to practice the steps, and gamble on results. The eyes of your primary students are glued to your demonstration table, but you seem to have forgotten something. As quickly as you captured their attention, you will surely lose it because you were not prepared!

Problems and Disadvantages

Seeing the Demonstration

Students need a direct line of sight to the demonstration area. Sometimes you can use larger demonstration items (such as a large clock face to demonstrate how to compute elapsed time) so that students can see from a distance. Another solution is to film the demonstration using a video camera connected to a large-screen television. Position the television to provide a close-up view for students seated a distance away from the demonstration site. You can also help students follow the demonstration by using large posters showing illustrations of each step.

Limited Student Involvement

Because students are inactive in the demonstration process, it is vital to increase the level of involvement. Pausing and having a student review what has been done so far can do this. Quick assessments raise the level of concentration and increase student attention.

Preparation Time

One of the disadvantages of demonstration is the time needed to set up and clean up. Organization and preplanning will be helpful in reducing the time needed, as will training your students to assist with these tasks.

Conclusion

Imagine a teacher demonstrating stable air conditions by stacking two jars of water, one cold and one hot, and placing a piece of cardboard in between the stacked jars to separate the two types of water. The teacher plans to remove the cardboard without spilling the water or shaking the jars. As the teacher pulls on the cardboard, the top jar slides. The demonstration failed! Practice might have given the teacher the experience needed to avoid the mess of water spilling out of the jar and ruining the demonstration.

Because teacher demonstrations have few variables to consider, they have a high level of successful completion. The question to consider is, "Do they accomplish the learning goal?" If not, consider increasing the level of student involvement—by asking questions, requiring note taking, or other interactions—or providing equal visual opportunities for all students by meeting the needs of those situated the furthest from the demonstration.

Providing Directions

Providing directions is teacher-centered and is one of the most common whole-group presentations. Giving efficient information on the how, what, where, and when of assignments and class activities makes everyone's lives easier. Providing directions isn't as much a teaching strategy as it is a teacher tool. Used effectively it paints a picture of how the assignment should look—what steps are necessary to complete the work and what the end product is.

Figure 10.9 is a guide to help you make preparations for giving good directions and consider some of the problems and disadvantages involved when giving directions.

Figure 10.9. Providing Directions Planning at a Glance	
Making Preparations	**Problems and Disadvantages**
- Present a well-defined task with a specified method of assessment. - Provide both written and oral directions. - Engage every student's attention before giving the directions and be prepared to answer specific questions before and during the activity.	- Student confusion about what to do - Missing details in the directions or unclear - Lack of students' attention

Making Preparations

Well-Defined Tasks

An assignment should be a well-defined task! Students should know exactly what is to be done and how to do it. Of course, in assignments such as daily math work, the directions are simple: "Do the even problems on page 232. Show your work. Be prepared for a quiz tomorrow covering these math skills." This type of direction follows classroom instruction. In addition to giving oral directions, jotting the information on the board or on an overhead transparency prevents confusion.

Instructions

If the assignment is a lengthy one, students benefit greatly from both oral directions and a written checklist of required components along with assessment information—including the rubrics or scoring guide if used.

Appropriate Topics

Figure 10.10 gives examples of topics that are appropriate for giving directions and those that are not.

	Less-Effective Application of Providing Directions
Figure 10.10. Providing Directions Application Examples **Appropriate Application of Providing Directions**	
Social Studies/English: Research paper. Oral and written instructions (handouts) for research paper with opportunity for questions. Topics to address: - Acceptable topics - Required points to be covered Format: - Note cards - Works cited - Length of paper - What to be handed in - Thesis statement - Citing within the paper Instructions defining what is required for English *or* what is required for social studies. Include rubrics or scoring guide—English may use rubrics different from the rubrics used in social studies.	**Social Studies/English:** Research paper. "Write a research paper on the social studies topic of your choice."

Engaging Student Attention and Being Prepared for Questions

Before starting to give detailed directions, be sure that you have students' attention. Allow them the opportunity to ask questions to clarify the assignment.

Giving directions for lengthy assignments without preparation directly increases the amount of backtracking a teacher must do to repair the faulty work. Always be prepared to provide quality instructions or to respond to complaints and questions regarding the assignment. This is sound advice for all grades!

Problems and Disadvantages

Student Confusion

Even when teachers believe they have given quality directions, there are usually questions. It is tempting to write off students' concerns, but it is best to address them immediately—to welcome questions and provide answers. When it is evident that very few students have questions, talking individually to the few who do is a viable option.

Missing Details, Lack of Clarity

It is possible that, even with careful preparation in organizing the assignment, some details are missing or unclear. When this happens, write yourself a note to rectify the situation before giving the assignment again.

Lack of Student Attention

No matter how carefully you ask students for their attention as you give directions, some of them may well be off into a dream world of their own or somehow distracted by the actions of others. It happens—be prepared to deal with it.

Conclusion

"I don't understand," claims a student. "How could you not understand? I just spent 15 minutes going over every detail," responds the teacher. Sound familiar? This is why providing a written handout mirroring your oral directions is a helpful time-saver. Students can take notes on the handout and refer to them in the future. It won't stop all questions, but it definitely puts a dent in the number. In addition, a rubric or scoring guide helps students see how their work will be graded, which also helps guide them in completing the assignment. Lengthy assignments need careful planning.

Still having students question about how to do an assignment? Consider

- Organizing what is said and how it is written.

- Engaging the attention of every student before you begin giving directions.

- Updating handouts when flaws are found.

Summary

The strategies discussed in this chapter have common threads. The teacher needs to select the one that fits best, complete preparation for successful implementation, train students in appropriate conduct and response, implement the strategy, monitor for success during implementation, make adjustments as needed, and check student comprehension after completion.

Interestingly enough, the level of classroom management is quite varied. As the level of student involvement increases, so does the need for quality classroom management. Of course, anytime students are working with materials that might be dangerous, the level of management increases as well, and strategies that include "hot topics" require closer monitoring. At all times, students need a safe environment in which to make comments and ask questions.

The willingness to select strategies wisely; monitor, adjust, and change strategies when needed; and consistently check for quality of understanding are all options that enhance the teacher's effectiveness. Being flexible is the name of the game!