

## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

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### Abstract

*This paper is a theoretical overview on four theories of classroom management. The paper explains in detail the meaning of classroom management by studying the theories propounded by B.F. Skinner (Operant Conditioning), William Glasser (Choice Theory), Froyen and Iverson (Schoolwide and Classroom Management) and L. Canter and M. Canter (Assertive Discipline). All these theories give distinct thoughts on the concept classroom management. After going through several studies and theories, it is distinct that components or dimensions of classroom management cannot be restricted to certain behaviour reinforcements, strategies, rules and consequences, management skills, etc. These theories will help a teacher identify various classroom management styles and adapt their principles into an eclectic theory and then implement in the classroom. Thus, giving teacher an opportunity to work efficiently to create a positive learning environment in the classroom.*

**Keywords:** Classroom Management



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### Introduction

Prior to 1960s the approach to classroom management was teacher centered and highly interventionist. Classroom management theories were on the basis of certain proverbs such as “spare the rod spoil the child” and so on. Interventionists, as explained by Wolfgang (1995) believe that rewards and punishments of a teacher form appropriate behaviour in students. Further, the interventionist philosophy advocates high degree of control by teacher in the classroom (Badiei, 2008).

Throughout the 1960s and later non-interventionist approach to classroom management gained prominence. It was also understood as the egalitarian (Porter, 2007) approach. Neill (1960) led the non-interventionist school of thought which believed that there was no need for teacher’s intervention to modify the behaviour of the children into a desirable one as they were innately good and should be allowed time and space to grow. There were also other proponents of the non-interventionist approach.

Harris (1967) a proponent, promoted transactional analysis to solve problems. Ginott (1972) elaborated his theory on congruent communication, that is, teachers should avoid confronting students and understand their feelings so as to promote positive behaviour among

students. Teacher Effectiveness Training by Gordon (1974) elucidated the way teachers should actively listen to the issues of the students and communicate to students. Kohn (1996) explained the concepts of discipline and student directed learning. These were some of the major non-interventionist approaches to classroom management.

. Interactionalists stress that students learn necessary behaviour as a result of encountering the outside world of people and objects (Badiei, 2008). Thus, the interactionalists believe that the students and teachers share the responsibility of classroom management. Approaches to responding to misbehavior (Wachtel, 1999), Albert (as cited in Griffith, Cooper & Ringlaben, 2002) on Cooperative Discipline, Judicious Discipline (Gathercoal, 1990) and Discipline with Dignity (Curwin & Mendler, 1988) are some of the major studies based on the interactionalist ideology and approach to classroom management. Dreikurs, Gruwald & Pepper (1982), Kounin (1970) and Glasser (1992) provided the framework for interactionalist approach to classroom management (Wolfgang, 1995).

The earliest known systematic empirical study on classroom management was conducted by Jacob Kounin (1970). Kounin (1970) focused on classroom management as mastery of techniques that enables teachers to programme for individual differences and individual students. Baumrind (1970) explained the concepts of socializing a child which offered different styles of parenting namely authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. This approach was used in the classroom back then.

After 1970 many studies emerged worldwide on the classroom management. Canter & Canter (as cited in Charles and Senter, 2005) advocated Assertive Discipline which established teachers to help form a structure in the classroom without hindering into the student rights. This Assertive Discipline training programme has since been given to teachers worldwide. According to Egeberg, McConney and Price (2016) in 1960s and 70s the theoretical foundation for teachers on classroom management was applied behaviour analysis.

Glickman and Tamashiro (1980) introduced an instrument called Beliefs on Disciplinary Inventory which is used in clarifying teachers' beliefs on discipline so they can select strategies with which they are comfortable. In 1980s studies on classroom management pointed out that instruction and management are layered upon each other (Doyle, 1986). Classroom management is inclusive of both behavioural and instructional management (Glickman & Tamashiro, 1980; Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986).

The Theory of Reinforcement (Skinner, 1953) gained prominence as an approach to classroom management in the later 1980s and the 1990s. In the Skinner model the teachers direct student behaviour to get desired outcomes and effective management (Omomia & Omomia, 2014). Brophy (1996) stated the importance of teachers as effective classroom managers who should focus on creating positive learning environments by preparing and teaching interesting lessons and supervise students.

From the late 1990s to the present focus of research on classroom management is more on the area of creating positive environment through teacher-student collaboration in the classroom in solving the problems. Oliver & Reschly (2010) supported the positive learning environment methods which produce and increase constructive interactions resulting in successful classroom environment. Martin, Yin, and Baldwin (1998) developed the Classroom management Style Inventory which measured teachers' styles to the classroom management in three broad dimensions such as instructional management, people management, and behavior management. The Choice Theory (Glasser, 1998) has influenced classroom management by teachers creating environments and curricula that cultivate appropriate behavior through meeting learners' needs for belonging and the feeling of empowerment.

Froyen and Iverson (1999) found that classroom management focuses on three major components such as Content Management, Conduct Management and Covenant Management. Hardman & Smith (1999) argued that teachers should create by working towards positive learning environments by identifying conditions in the classroom and implement activities that promote desirable behaviour in the classroom. The actions taken by teachers to create a supportive and positive learning environment will facilitate the academic learning of the students and also, they may adhere to the rules prevalent leading to social-emotional learning (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). McDonald (2010) worked on the Positive Learning Framework and explained that a teacher by developing a systematic learning environment, students can engage in meaningful activities that support their learning in an orderly manner. Banks (2014) found that teachers who create positive classrooms pay close attention to even little details in the environment which stimulate the behaviour of students in the classroom. Egeberg, Mc Conney and Price (2016) appropriately found that teachers' approach towards students vary according to their theoretical orientation. Therefore,

classroom management includes actions by teacher to create, implement and maintain a positive learning environment.

### **What is Classroom Management?**

Effective classroom management is the process of organizing and conducting a classroom so that it maximizes student learning (Kellough & Kellough, 2011). Henley (2010) identifies classroom management as the essential teaching skill and suggests effective teachers minimize misbehaviours to reduce interruptions and create learning environments that allow for students' intellectual and emotional growth. Wong & Wong (2014) believed that classroom management is all of the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time and materials so that student learning can take place. Effective teaching and learning cannot take place in a poorly managed classroom. McDonald (2010) suggests classroom management involves teacher actions and instructional techniques to create a learning environment that facilitates and supports active engagement in both academic and social and emotional learning.

Gay (2006) argues that classroom management is more comprehensive than controlling student misbehaviour and administrating discipline. It involves planning, facilitating, and monitoring experiences that are conducive to high levels of learning for a wide variety of students. It also involves creating and sustaining classroom environments that are personally comfortable and intellectually stimulating. Kunter, Baumert and Köller (2007) assert that classroom management generally is conceived to include all actions taken by the teacher to ensure order and effective time use during lessons. Wubbles (2011) identifies that classroom management has two distinct purposes: it seeks to establish an orderly environment so students can engage in meaningful academic learning and it aims to enhance student social and moral growth. Brophy (1988) explained that classroom management refers to creating a learning environment which support successful instruction that is "arranging the physical environment, establishing rules and procedure, maintaining students' attention to lessons and engagement in activities" (p.9).

### **What s Classroom Management Problem?**

After extensive reading on classroom management one can come to the conclusion that classroom management problem is whatever that hinders or obstructs the academic learning of the students in the classroom, such as student misbehaviour leading to low student learning; ineffective teaching methods employed by teacher; lack of infrastructure leading to

low student learning; lack of learning aids leading to low student learning; lack of previous knowledge of students leading to low student learning; cultural differences among students leading to low student learning, etc.

### **Theories of Classroom Management**

It is important how teachers manage their classrooms to make it into an effective learning environment. In a classroom all students learn differently (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer & Bjork, 2009) and choosing an effective instructional method could alleviate behavioural problems of the students. A teacher's orientation towards classroom management is significant as it forms the classroom management theory of the educator (Egeberg, McConney and Price, 2016). Classroom management theories are constantly evolving according to the day and age. However, there are major theories which will always help the educators to acquire necessary knowledge on how to solve a classroom management problem.

### **B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning**

B.F. Skinner involved the principles and ideas of behaviourism in his work and contributed immensely towards understanding human behaviour. Through his research with animals he found out that it is possible to produce desirable behaviour outcomes through rewards and undesirable behaviour through punishment so as to modify the behaviour into a favourable one (Skinner, 1953). Originally, Skinner's work on operant conditioning was not designed to address classroom management, however, the ideas that he developed could be used successfully to solve classroom management problems.

Omomia & Omomia (2014) view that Skinner's operant conditioning principles have influenced education and the greater influence is on classroom management. The instructional objectives, programmed instruction, mastery learning and behaviour analysis are some of the areas which it has influenced. Skinner's operant conditioning is based on the concepts of reinforcement and punishment. Skinner (1986) aptly believed that an individual cannot learn by doing something alone but learns on the basis of the consequences that follow after the performance. That's why he used the term reinforcement.

If a student adheres to the rules of the classroom that means the child is producing a favourable behaviour which should be reinforced with a reward. On the other hand, if that child disobeys the rule, that means the behaviour is unfavourable which should be reinforced with a punishment. Therefore, reinforcement could be positive or negative. Reinforcement is

meant for behaviour to be increased and one should keep in mind that rewards and punishment should follow right guidelines (Tauber, 2007).

Positive reinforcement is given when a desirable behaviour occurs and is rewarded so that it continues to occur. For example, congratulating students on the completion of their tasks, rewarding the students with extra marks, rewarding those who scored well in the tests, etc. this proper use of reward could solve certain problems lingering in the classroom. Negative reinforcement is applied when an undesirable behaviour is projected by the students and are punished to induce desirable behaviour which may continue to occur. Using the concepts of punishment should be carefully thought out as the objective is to correct the behaviour of the student, not create a mental trauma. Skinner also believed ignoring the misbehaviour is an alternative to punishment. Teachers should carefully use reinforcers to make sure that students continue to produce desired behaviours and not retract back to undesired behaviour (Standridge, 2002).

In order to modify the behaviour of the students, constant reinforcement is necessary. Desirable behaviour must be rewarded whereas undesirable behaviour must be ignored or be punished. In a classroom where teachers make students to follow rules of the classroom, negative reinforcement is applied. Thus, the Theory of Reinforcement provides theoretical support to teachers and helps them to follow and set procedures to get desirable behaviour outcomes.

### **William Glasser's Choice Theory**

Glasser developed a theory known as the Choice Theory also known as the Control Theory which is beneficial to solve classroom management problems. The theory is based on the five basic principles of human needs. Glasser (1998) identified survival, belonging, freedom, power and fun as the driving force behind displaying desirable or undesirable behaviour in the classroom. The basic idea of this theory is that teachers cannot control the behaviour of their students just by telling them what to do but can play a critical role in helping students to make a choice, therefore leading to positive behavioural changes (Glasser, 2001).

The need for survival includes food, shelter, physical comfort, etc. are basis for human functioning. If the survival need is unsatisfactory then the students in the classroom may not feel safe and secured. Gabriel & Matthews (2011) point out that teachers must make sure that students eat well, are healthy, get adequate sleep, etc. Teachers should understand

that all students do not come from a safe and sound environment. Glasser (2001) believes that for managing the class better, a teacher must arrange lighting, seats, air circulation, etc. which in turn will be conducive to classroom learning.

The need for love and belonging is an important need to be satisfied in a student. This is perhaps one of the most important needs in the Choice Theory. Glasser (1998) argues that it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure that students are loved and cared for. The way to fulfill these needs is to by allowing students to share their knowledge among their friends and. The students must feel that they are accepted and respected by classmates and adults (Frey & Wilhite, 2005).

Need for freedom further helps in making choices. Here making choices by the students is vital. This gives a feel of independence and autonomy. To achieve this, students must be given to create, think, have sufficient space and independence, thus giving a sense that the students have made a choice (Frey & Wilhite, 2005). This will further enhance their confidence in participating in the classroom activities.

Power need must be fulfilled through personal development. If the power need is not met, then the students may portray undesirable behaviour. Students must feel that they are worth. Frey & Wilhite (2005) believe that power is not about dominance over the other instead it is defined as the capability of the child. The students must be given the power to choose what they want to study and make a choice to actively participate and have a say in the learning activities. This need if fulfilled, the misconduct of the students in the classroom will reduce.

Fun need includes joy, pleasure, doing the activities one enjoys, etc. (Glasser, 2001). It is important that learning be made fun. If a teacher incorporates fun need while teaching, then the students will cooperate and learn more effectively. When students experience that they have successfully learned and are competent, then they will feel confident. This will in turn help the students to bond with the teacher. The choice made should be real and not illusionary, therefore must not be forced or restricted by the teacher, although giving a number of options to choose from is important (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008; Brooks & Young, 2011). Choice theory explains that the brain gives everyone the self-directing capability to fulfill life needs (Quality Educational Programs, 2009).

Glasser (2001) believed that problems or misbehavior in the classroom occurs because the needs of the students are not met. In a classroom it is very important that a

teacher identifies which needs are not being met. Behaviour is a matter of personal choice because a learner's behaviour based on their choices (Glasser, 1998). Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to guide the learner to make a choice so that the learner produces a favourable behaviour.

### **Froyen and Iverson's Schoolwide and Classroom Management**

Froyen and Iverson (1999) identified that robust, management and organizational skills have led to lesser classroom management problems. Froyen and Iverson (1999) found out that disciplinary issues in a classroom has a significant impact on teaching and learning. Later they identified that teachers facing these problems often failed to implement their lesson plan. This theory focuses on the three major concepts of Content Management, Conduct Management and Covenant Management.

According to Froyen and Iverson (1999) Content Management occurs when teachers manage space, materials, equipment, the movement of people and lessons that are part of a curriculum or program of studies. Here the emphasis is given on instructional management skills, sequencing and integrating additional instructional activities and dealing with instruction-related discipline problems. An example is when students are working in partners on an assignment and the teacher monitors the group by circulating around the room (Taylor, 2009). It is necessary for the teacher to give feedback and assist them.

Froyen and Iverson (1999) identifies conduct management as a set of procedural skills that teachers employ in their attempt to address and resolve discipline problems in the classroom. Conduct management is centered on one's beliefs about the nature of people (Shamina & Mumthas, 2018, p.2). It is essential to create an orderly and task-oriented approach to teaching and learning. Froyen and Iverson (1999) have found that best teaching practices are "acknowledging responsible behavior, correcting irresponsible and inappropriate behavior, ignoring, proximity control, gentle verbal reprimands, delaying, preferential seating, time-owed, time-out, notification of parents/guardians, written behavioral contracts, setting limits outside the classroom, and reinforcement systems". Teachers can manage their classrooms in a better manner if they can assimilate knowledge about diversity and individuality. Teachers must take disciplinary actions if the learners fail to adhere to the expectations. This intervention compels a change in behaviour of the students.



Froyen and Iverson (1999) believe that covenant management focuses on the classroom as a social system that has its own features that teachers have to take into account when managing interpersonal relationships in the classroom. Wubbels, Brekelmans, den Brok & Van Tartwijk (2006) concur that the role of inter-personal relationship in classroom management is a crucial component. The teacher-student relationship is an important factor to maintain a conducive learning environment.

Taylor (2009) believes that covenant management is for example, when students work in a group, problems may occur. The role of the teacher is to encourage the group to work together to find a solution. Thus, improving the relationship amongst the students. Froyen and Iverson (1999) point out that effective classroom management should be the primary responsibility of the classroom teacher with the students accepting the responsibility of their inappropriate behaviour.

### **Canter and Canter's Assertive Discipline**

Canter and Canter (1976) developed Assertive Discipline model which is competency-based program where it focuses on the need for teacher to exhibit assertive behaviour. Assertive Discipline is not entirely a behavioural theory, but, has some elements of a behaviourist approach (Mohapi, 2007). This approach enables the teachers to clearly communicate what they want and how they feel and at same time not abusing the rights of the students. Canter and Canter (as cited in Charles and Senter, 2005) pointed out that assertion training skills could assist businessmen, students, teachers and a wide spectrum of individuals.

Assertive discipline helps the teacher by providing a system for dealing with the behaviour when it occurs through a plan (Steere, 1988). Canter and Canter (as cited in Charles and Senter, 2005) distinguish three types of teachers: Non-assertive, hostile and assertive teachers. Non-assertive teachers do not have a voice in the classroom and are manipulated by the learners. Hostile teachers dictate and control the students. Whereas, assertive teachers rely on their skills, communicate to the students what they want and foster learning in the classroom (Duke and Meckel, 1980)

Duke and Meckel (1980) brought out the concept of assertive discipline in the following question: "An assertive educator will actively respond to a child's inappropriate behaviour by clearly communicating to the child her disapproval of the behaviour, followed by what she/he wants the child to do" (p13). However, assertive discipline makes it clear that

student's rights must not be abused in any manner. Here, the teacher should be caring and become a guide to correct the behaviour of the students. Canter and Canter (as cited in Charles and Senter, 2005) argue that learners have the right to a teacher who is consistent, positive and encourages and motivates favourable behaviour.

Assertive teacher does not mean aggressive teacher. The aim is to develop in teachers, skills to ensure that they are in control of the classroom. This is a type of teacher who makes his or her presence valuable in the classroom and calmly controls and enforces the previously agreed upon rules. Canter's approach stresses on rules and consequences. A chart listing all the rules must be displayed in charts. Likewise, another chart should list out the consequences for violating the rules must be explained and visible to the students (Steere, 1988). Therefore, the focus in assertive discipline is on classroom control strategy that helps teachers to control the classroom in a democratic and a stable manner. This system enables educators to dispense positive and negative consequences in a calm and fair manner. Thus, assertive discipline assists teachers to deal with misbehaving learners.

### **Conclusion**

After going through several studies and theories, it is distinct that components or dimensions of classroom management cannot be restricted to certain behaviour reinforcements, strategies, rules and consequences, management skills, etc. Skinner's Theory of Reinforcement is widely applied in classrooms all over the world. His theory on operant conditioning is based on the concept that learning is improved through reinforcement of responses (Skinner, 1953). Reinforcement is a process that increases the desirable behaviour or decreases the undesirable behaviour. Chomsky (1959) criticised the theory of reinforcement stating that experiments conducted on animals and generalizing it on human behaviour does not provide fair result.

William Glasser (1998) stated that humans behave through their decisions and are continuously motivated to satisfy their needs – survival, love and belonging, freedom, power and fun. Frey and Wilhite (2005) opine that the five basic needs identified by Glasser can assist teachers to point out the challenging behaviour of the students in the classroom. This allows teachers to identify the unmet needs of the students and devise activities in the classroom to help fulfil the needs as each student's need differ.

Froyen and Iverson (1999) discussed the concepts of management of content, conduct and covenant while explaining classroom management. They found that teachers who face

problems in the classroom fail to plan and design lessons accordingly. In addition, they found that students were not monitored systematically while working in the classroom and they were not motivated to study the teaching-learning materials provided. For these very reasons why Froyen and Iverson (1999) came up with three types of management in the classroom so as to develop the organizational and other necessary skills in the teacher.

Lee and Marlene Canter's views on classroom management is envisaged in their ideas on Assertive Discipline. This theory states that rules of the classroom and behaviour expectations of the students should be distinct and must be enforced by not harming the rights of the students. The principle upon which this theory is based is that teachers have the right to teach without interference and learners have the right to learn without interference (Canter and Canter, 1976). Teacher must take the responsibility of the learner whose behaviour is not in accordance with the rules. Hill (1990) describes that Assertive Discipline model was successful in schools and had its benefits.

The four major theories which have been discussed in this paper gives a sharp explanation on classroom management. These theories will help a teacher identify various classroom management styles and adapt their principles into an eclectic theory and then implement in the classroom. Thus, giving the teacher an opportunity to work efficiently to create a positive learning environment in the classroom.

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