

# Preface

*F*rom *Lesson Plans to Power Struggles, Grades 6–12* is a book for novice secondary school teachers and those who foster their development. Its purpose is to help **novice teachers** improve their **classroom management** ability, that is, their ability to establish and maintain social order so that instruction and learning can occur. The term “novice teacher” refers here to a teacher with fewer than 3 years of teaching experience. Why a book for novice teachers? Because the novice years are crucial in establishing the pattern for a teacher’s future professional development. Yet novice teachers all too often are left to sink or swim. Hard-pressed to survive, they fall back on the few strategies they know. This book provides an opportunity for novice teachers to learn the classroom management strategies that other novice teachers have used, ones that could also be useful for them.

Why a book about classroom management? Because 50% of novice teachers leave the profession, many citing classroom management problems as the major source of their dissatisfaction. Moreover, principals, instructional supervisors, and the public focus on classroom management when assessing the efficacy of a teacher. Thus classroom management is a pressing concern for novice teachers. This book is an account of the strategies that more than 100 student teachers used to solve their ordinary classroom management problems.

Each chapter is about a particular kind of classroom management problem and consists of one to several novice teachers’ stories about managing that problem along with an analysis of the details, strategies, and practical principles that contributed to each teacher’s success. Why stories? A **story** is a narrative that imbues a set of events with meaning. Accordingly, a story is

both more appealing and more memorable than a list of strategies or principles for informing the immediate decisions in managing a classroom.

Second, whereas a list embodies **theoretical knowledge**, a story embodies **practical knowledge**. Novice teachers already have the theoretical knowledge to teach. That's the knowledge they constructed during their teacher preparation coursework, the knowledge expressed in generalizations. What they need is practical knowledge, that is, experiential knowledge, the knowledge that is bound up in the perception of details, the knowledge that is concrete and directly applicable to practice. By attending to others' stories about teaching, novice teachers transform their theoretical knowledge into practical knowledge. That's why stories are the next best thing to experience.

Why stories about novice teachers? Because the knowledge base of a novice is different from that of an expert. Not only do their respective repertoires of strategic knowledge differ, but the way they each perceive and define a problem differs as well. Accordingly, the strategies that a seasoned teacher would use and recommend are not necessarily helpful to a novice teacher, who cannot yet identify the dynamics within a classroom as the seasoned teacher does. In short, novice teachers need their own strategies to solve their own problems.

Second, novice teachers' stories help other novice teachers construct more realistic expectations about managing a classroom. Novice teachers enter the classroom with unrealistic optimism, believing their own personal attributes will shield them from the management problems that vex their peers. The harsh reality of the classroom, however, soon transforms their self-assurance into self-doubt, even shame. Consequently, rather than share their experiences, they retreat into professional isolation. Other novice teachers' stories confirm their experiences, restore their confidence, perhaps even their sense of humor, and help them to construct, along with practical knowledge, realistic expectations for managing their own classroom.

And why stories about student teachers? Because they are the rank novices. If a student teacher can identify a problem, formulate a strategy, and execute that strategy effectively enough at least to alleviate the problem even temporarily, then presumably

another novice teacher with the same problem could recognize the correspondence and execute that same strategy. Thus the stories of other novice teachers, in particular those student teachers who solved a classroom management problem, are the best source of management strategies for another novice teacher.

The student teachers who contributed the stories for this book were preparing to teach in a New York State secondary school. They wrote their stories during their fifth week of teaching in either a rural, suburban, or urban public middle, junior high, or senior high school. Their stories are arranged in chapters according to the kind of problem they each addressed so readers can scan the Table of Contents for a chapter about their own problem.

The chapters are grouped according to whether the problem is a **lesson execution problem** or a **discipline problem**. Teachers' errors cause lesson execution problems. For example, an error in planning, preparing, or executing a lesson can cause directions to be confusing, activities to run short of the allotted time, or lessons to be boring. Each kind of lesson execution problem is assigned to one of the 13 chapters in Part I.

On the other hand, **misbehavior**, behavior the teacher regards as competing with, disrupting, or threatening to disrupt the lesson, can cause a discipline problem. Misbehaviors typically involve one or a few students rather than the entire class. Examples in this book include one or a few students violating a rule, talking a lot, or even cheating, fighting, having a tantrum, or **bullying** another student. Each kind of discipline problem is assigned to one of the 16 chapters in Part II.

Although no clear line divides a lesson execution problem from a discipline problem, and certainly one can exacerbate if not provoke the other, solving a lesson execution problem is simpler than solving a discipline problem. To solve a lesson execution problem, a teacher needs to change only his or her own behavior. On the other hand, treating misbehavior requires effecting a change in at least one student's behavior and often the teacher's as well. The purpose of this book is to help novice teachers effect such changes by providing them, through the stories of other novice teachers, an opportunity to reflect on and expand their own repertoire of classroom management strategies.

## PERSPECTIVES ON NOVICE TEACHERS

Aside from my own perspective on novice teachers, I have relied on the work of Robert V. Bullough, Jr., author of *First-Year Teacher: A Case Study*. Through his compassionate portrayal of Kerrie, a promising first-year middle school teacher, the reader shares in the struggles, quandaries, misconceptions, fears, frustrations, disappointments, and failures as well as the insights, victories, satisfactions, and growth of a novice teacher. Examples of the practical principles I advance that derive from his work include the following:

- *Preparation and organization are crucial to the execution of an activity-based lesson.*
- *Novice teachers have difficulty claiming their power as the authority.*
- *If used consistently, a **routine** minimizes the time and energy needed to direct a regular classroom event.*

## ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Teaching is a moral craft. A classroom management strategy must therefore not only promote social order, but the principles that justify its use must exemplify an ethical perspective. The ethical perspectives of the following teacher educators have contributed to my own perspective and guided the formulation of many of the practical principles in this book.

First, according to the late Haim G. Ginott (1972) in *Teacher and Child: A Book for Parents and Teachers*, the teacher is responsible for creating a positive emotional climate for learning and can create such a climate through authentic, solution-oriented (rather than blame-oriented) communication. Some of the practical principles that derive from his work include the following:

- *A teacher should be strict about students' behavior but permissive about their feelings.*
- *Instead of criticizing the actions of their students, teachers can safely express their anger by referring to their own feelings.*

Second, Alfie Kohn (2006a), in *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*, argues that it is better to foster a student's maturity (e.g., moral development, interest in learning, willingness to cooperate, or self-control) than force his or her compliance. Some of the practical principles that derive from his work are as follows:

- *A “working with” rather than a “doing to” approach promotes student maturity.*
- *Using threats (or bribes) to control student behavior undermines any potential for a mutually respectful relationship.*

And third, James Levin and James F. Nolan (2007), in *Principles of Classroom Management: A Professional Decision-Making Model*, advocate using the least intrusive management strategy so students can learn to control their own behavior. Some of the practical principles that derive from their work include these listed below:

- *Teachers need a systematic management plan ranging from subtle to progressively more direct and intrusive interventions.*
- *Rather than impose control, it is better to foster students' self-control.*
- *A private conversation preserves the student's or students' dignity, thereby forestalling a defensive or hostile response.*

Thus the strategies and practical principles in this book are grounded in the experiences, research, and perspectives of notable scholars in teacher education.

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

You can read this book in one of two ways: by either selecting a chapter for a particular problem or reading the book sequentially. Every chapter can stand alone. Each technical term (or grammatical variant of that term) is printed in a bold font the first time it is used in each chapter and then defined in the glossary. Moreover, the glossary includes an index so readers can locate that term in other chapters (see Glossary and Index of Technical Terms).

Likewise, every practical principle is italicized in each chapter and listed in both the Alphabetical Index of Practical Principles and the Topical Index of Practical Principles. Thus, by selecting a particular chapter, readers can get immediate help for a classroom management problem and, with a little more exploration, elaborate their understanding of a technical term or practical principle.

Each chapter also includes at least one supplementary note about and set of references for a concept related to one or more of the stories. Some references cite the literature in which the concept was first formulated. Others cite contemporary applications of the concept. Thus each chapter also has pointers for further study (see Index of Supplementary Concepts).

Alternatively, reading the book sequentially provides an opportunity to appreciate the range of novice teachers' ordinary problems and strategic options. First, readers can proactively formulate their own management plan, something novice teachers desperately need but, given their unrealistic optimism, neglect to do. Such a management plan would enable them to respond temperately and consistently whenever a rule or routine is challenged.

Second, readers can see how lesson execution problems or strategies interact with discipline problems or strategies. For example, Charlotte's inability to give clear directions (see Charlotte's Story, Chapter 4) prompted some of her students to cheat. Likewise, a teacher can obviate some of a **class clown's** disruptions (see Chapter 15) by replacing whole-class with small-group learning activities.

Third, readers can recognize the roots common to various problems and accordingly manage them with a common set of strategies. For example, reading about how to manage a class clown (see Chapter 15) can help a novice teacher like Abby (see Abby's Story, Chapter 27) manage a student who persistently seeks her attention.

Whether selecting particular chapters or reading the book sequentially, for each story readers should ask themselves the following questions: How would I respond to this situation? Given the details of the situation, how would I justify my response?

How could I use this strategy in other situations? When would the strategy be inappropriate? How do my values and beliefs compare with those implicit in the use of the strategy?

So let's begin with a story about a student teacher who was anxious about managing her classes:

### **Cora's Story**

I just started student teaching in a large urban district with a reputation for tough, hard-to-control kids. My friends and colleagues warned me that this would not be the district I'd want to stay in. All their comments made me anxious about managing the large classes of mostly minority students.

During these first few weeks, however, I have been teaching lessons with hands-on activities that have involved almost all the students. The head of the department recently observed me teaching a lesson on the color wheel, which I thought went well. All the students participated in the activities and seemed to understand the main points of the lesson.

When I met with the head of the department after the class, he said, "You seem to have the class under control, and I like the fact that you've created your own way to teach this concept." I was overjoyed because I felt he was endorsing the approach I believe in.

I am fortunate to be in a school where the head of the department has confidence in me and encourages me to teach in a way that makes sense to me. Because of the school's reputation, I was needlessly afraid of the classroom management challenges, but my lessons keep the kids engaged and reward them for their engagement.

Cora found that both the head of the department and her students were receptive to lessons with active learning opportunities. *An appealing lesson is necessary but not sufficient to preclude most discipline problems.* Because novice teachers have a limited repertoire of appealing lessons and little experience executing such lessons, classroom management is a pressing concern. The advantage of a well-planned lesson and the frustration that can come from an oversight in its execution are, accordingly, the subjects of Chapter 1.