Authoritarian or Laissez-Faire?: Making a Case for Effective Classroom Management

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**Introduction**

Debate over the optimal style of classroom management has raged for decades; the dichotomy between East and West is particularly pronounced in this regard. While laissez-faire classroom policies are seen to cultivate creative genius in American classrooms, the authoritarian efficiency in Asia continues to churn out the highest-scoring automatons. As teachers, classroom management remains a dilemma of foremost concern because we not only care about academic achievement, the happiness of the child is also paramount. Balancing performance against student welfare is a juggling act which few have seemed to master. This study seeks to uncover the relationship between classroom management style and academic learning: Does an authoritarian or laissez-faire environment produce better academic learning?

Authenticity holds the key to unlocking the inner persona – “the human heart that is the source of good teaching” (Palmer, 2007, p. 4). It is why we do action research – to provide insight into our teaching practices even as we do it. The more we understand ourselves, the better we can improve our teaching environment for the sake of our students. It is a circular process that constantly feeds itself with newly gleaned information in an attempt to better refine the process itself. As teachers combine real-world observations with systematic data collection and testing, they are able to shed *a priori* assumptions for conclusions grounded in scientific praxis.

Action research is relevant because teachers have privileged access to the inner workings of the classroom. Being on the ground, they are best able to identify ongoing problems and implement possible solutions. Their unique status as both participants and researchers provides insider information that can be used to generate practical changes – lending weight to the term ‘*reflective* practitioner.’ This practitioner seeks out improvement not because he *ought* to but because he *wants* to. When “deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Palmer, 2007, p. 31), there you find true vocation.

While classroom management is preeminent amongst factors influencing academic learning (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003; Norris, 2003; Wang, Haertel, and Walberg, 1993), the exact nature of the relationship remains elusive. Most classroom management programs, in fact, show little direct evidence of their overall effectiveness in improving student performance.

Research literature contains mixed reviews of classroom management: Freiberg, Huzinec, and Templeton (2009), McGarity, Jr. and Butts (1984), and Logie (1991) find a positive correlation between classroom management and academic achievement while Greenwood, Hops, Walker, Guild, Stokes, Young, Keleman, and Willardson (1979) and Burke, Oats, Ringle, Fichtner, and DelGaudio (2011) find little relationship. These studies fail to provide a consistent basis for comparison because of their wide range of durations and choice of variables. For example, McGarity, Jr, and Butts (1984) took 10 days to compile their data compared to two years for Freiberg et al. (2009). Similarly, vastly different measures were used to evaluate classroom management behavior: 12 selected management indicators from the Georgia Teachers Performance Assessment Indicators (TPAI) were used by McGarity, Jr. and Butts (1984) to measure teacher behavior while Burke et al.’s (2011) study utilized a collective group approach (teachers who attended WMC – a classroom management program).

Perhaps the glaring weakness in the extant literature is the minuscule windows of observation used to generate data. From 16 minutes in the case of Burke et al. (2011) to one class period for McGarity, Jr. and Butts (1984), these ‘snapshots’ of classroom management are hardly conclusive representations of the whole teacher – “all of the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time, and materials so that instruction in content and student learning can take place” (Wong & Wong, 1998, p. 84). On the other hand, Freiberg et al. (2009) and Greenwood et al.’s (1979) collective group approach has no way of determining individual teacher effectiveness.

Rather than inducing the relationship between classroom management and academic achievement as these studies have done, Logie (1991) conducts an *a posteriori* investigation into what produces high-performing schools. The results were: classroom management, teaching practices, teacher attitudes and classroom environment. She successfully proved that high-performing schools *necessarily* had effective classroom management; however, as demonstrated by the other studies, the reverse was not necessarily true.

Given the findings that effective classroom management did not necessarily produce better academic achievement, this study aims to discover what *style* of classroom management is associated with better learning. The binary nature of the comparison between authoritarian and laissez-faire environments is designed to facilitate more vivid contrasts in experimental results. Most importantly, instead of measuring classroom management on a continuum of individual behaviors or training program efficacy, this study focuses on a crucial gap in the extant literature: teacher characteristics.

For the purposes of this paper, the following terms are defined:-

**Classroom management:** The steps that a teacher takes to create the best possible learning environment

**Academic learning:** Learning achieved in the classroom

**Authoritarian:** Form of classroom management where the teacher retains heavy control over his students and where rules and discipline are tightly enforced

**Laissez-faire:** Form of classroom management where the teacher allows his students vast latitude in behavior and where the students are mostly responsible for self-discipline and management

**Classroom engagement:** Students are actively listening to the teacher and engaged in classroom activities

**Behavior:** Actions in the classroom that determine disciplinary measures

**Teacher characteristics:** The classroom management style of the teacher in terms of control over students and enforcement of rules and discipline

**Classroom management training programs:** Instructional programs conducted by professional agencies that instruct teachers in classroom management techniques

Naturalistic inquiry was the model used in this case study of two teachers with vastly different classroom management styles. Given the “natural setting” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39) of the school, this methodology was most suited to generating a holistic picture of the overall classroom environment. Data was collected in three ways: classroom observations, interviews, and primary documents. Each classroom management style could then be assessed against the other to determine learning effectiveness.

A more detailed look into the research literature follows in the next section. The majority of the studies investigate the relationship between classroom management and academic achievement through the eyes of external observers. Their objective is to determine whether classroom management or other factors play a significant role in student performance, and what teachers can do to create the best possible learning environment.

**Literature Review**

Classroom management has long been identified as an integral factor in student academic learning. “The classroom climate they [teachers] establish for themselves and their students greatly affects the learning process” (Norris, 2003, p. 315). But the exact relationship between classroom management and academic learning is still a tenuous one. Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) ranked classroom management as number one in a list of the five most important factors that influence school learning. Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering (2003) reached a similar outcome in their seminal review. However, most classroom management programs provide scant evidence of their efficacy in improving student academic performance.

Research literature has been likewise inconclusive in its findings. Freiberg, Huzinec, and Templeton (2009), McGarity, Jr. and Butts (1984), and Logie (1991) found that effective implementation of classroom management had a positive impact on student achievement as measured by tests. Greenwood, Hops, Walker, Guild, Stokes, Young, Keleman, and Willardson (1979) and Burke, Oats, Ringle, Fichtner, and DelGaudio (2011) on the other hand found little correlation between classroom management and grades. Part of this discrepancy might be explained by the different measures used to assess student performance. While Freiberg et al. (2009), Logie (1991), and Greenwood et al. (1979) utilized standardized tests as their measure of academic achievement, McGarity, Jr. and Butts (1984) and Burke et al. (2011) relied on teacher-constructed tests as their means of evaluation.

Moreover, these studies span a vast spectrum of durations and settings, each dictated by the choice of locale and target populations. While Freiberg et al. (2009), Logie (1991), Greenwood et al. (1979), and Burke et al. (2011) chose to focus on elementary students, McGarity, Jr. and Butts (1984) studied middle and high school students of varying aptitude. Student backgrounds were also different in that some were inner-city urban (Freiberg et al., 2009; Burke et al., 2011) while others were rural/suburban (Greenwood et al., 1979) or mixed urban/rural (McGarity, Jr. and Butts, 1984). Logie’s (1991) study on the other hand was located in Trinidad and Tobago. The eminent effects these variables play on the outcome of the experiments cannot be overstated as different populations respond very differently to attempts at classroom management.

Even more significant is the overall length of the study and the measures used to observe and record teacher classroom management behavior. One of the biggest weaknesses in the extant literature is the wildly varying experiment durations and the ‘snap-shot’ impressions taken of classroom management. Ranging from 10 days in McGarity, Jr. and Butts’ (1984) research to two years for Freiberg et al. (2009), these highly disparate lengths of study fail to provide a consistent basis to draw reasonable conclusions. Very short studies may only reflect short-term intervention effectiveness while longer studies might introduce factors which dilute the purity of the findings.

For example, McGarity, Jr. and Butts (1984) demonstrate that teachers exhibiting high levels of the 12 selected management indicators from the Georgia Teachers Performance Assessment Indicators (TPAI) had significantly better-achieving students. But this positive correlation was drawn from tests administered 10 days apart, hardly proof that the gains were the direct result of better classroom management. Conversely, Burke et al.’s (2011) one-year study showed little or no correlation between implementation of WMC – a classroom management program – and student achievement despite accompanying gains in student engagement and reduction in out-of-school suspensions. This enigma might be explained by the fact that the longer period of time might have allowed other contingent factors like social and home environments to play a part in the overall report card grade.

The research literature’s biggest shortcoming might be the highly circumscribed nature of its observations. Burke et al. (2011) and McGarity, Jr. and Butts (1984) report observation durations of only 16 minutes and one class period respectively; teacher effectiveness was determined solely on these measures. Freiberg et al. (2009) and Greenwood et al. (1979) take a whole-group approach by evaluating the relationship between classroom management training programs and the academic achievement of the corresponding students. Both approaches are limited in the usefulness of their results.

Brief observation windows offer little more than ‘snap-shots’ of classroom management behavior. 15 minutes *eo ipso* cannot give the essential teacher and what he represents. It is “all of the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time, and materials so that instruction in content and student learning can take place” (Norris, 2003, p. 315). The very climate of the classroom cannot be broken down into the minute observable behaviors detailed in Burke et al. (2011) and McGarity, Jr. and Butts’ (1984) data collection. For example, WMC program fidelity was constructed using the Structured Classroom Observation Form V (SCO-V). The SCO-V measures things like frequency with which (a) teachers use verbal prompts or cues for desirable behavior, (b) teachers positively reinforce appropriate behavior, (c) teachers verbally correct student behaviors, and (d) students comply with instruction.

Likewise, classroom management training programs like Freiberg et al.’s (2009) Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline (CMCD) and Greenwood et al.’s (1979) Program for Academic Survival Skills (PASS) train teachers in specific skills to be used in the classroom. But isolated skill-sets only adumbrate what it takes to be an effective classroom manager. There is simply no way of ascertaining in their whole-group research how closely individual teachers came close to emulating program ideals. For instance, CMCD implementation involved the entire teaching staff of 14 inner-city elementary schools in orientation, review of research and philosophy, workshops, and staff support. The schools became known as ‘CMCD schools’ but effectively rendered individual teacher evaluation impossible.

Of the current research, Logie’s (1991) comes closest to an expansive insight into the relationship between classroom management and academic achievement. Instead of inducing the relationship between classroom management and academic achievement, she first identifies high-performing schools and conducts an *a posteriori* investigation into the classroom processes responsible for their performance. In other words, Logie (1991) was looking for “common characteristics of [successful] school systems which transcend the nuances of individual school cultures” (p. 263). Classroom management, teaching practices, teacher attitudes and classroom environment came to the forefront.

The study sample was picked from the group of schools which produced the highest percentage of students in the top 10% on national standardized exams, and contained three public and one private school. Socioeconomic status ranged across the board as did student ethnicity. During the eight-week study, observations, field notes, questionnaires and interviews supplied the information used to triangulate data. The end result of Logie’s (1991) investigation helps explain why some schools consistently meet their academic goals and others seem doomed to repeat their failures: “a significant amount of time was spent on academic tasks,” “over 90% of the students were focused on the class activity,” “tight control through consistent disciplinary rules was observed within the four schools” (p. 263).

Though Logie (1991) successfully proved that high-performing schools necessarily had effective classroom management, the reverse might not necessarily be true. “Within limits as yet undetermined, curriculum, behavior, and achievement may all be independent and each may require separate procedures for inducing change” (Greenwood et al., 1979, p. 250). Burke et al. (2011) demonstrated that their classroom management program successfully increased classroom engagement but produced little report card improvement. Similarly, Greenwood et al. (1979) experienced improved behavior without corresponding improvement in grades.

What is needed is a case study that measures the effect of two opposing classroom management styles on academic learning. Non-participant observation gives an inside look into de facto state of affairs while debunking theoretical mirages. The bilateral comparison helps isolate classroom management as the independent variable in determining classroom learning. Together with teacher interviews and primary artifacts, a composite picture of each teacher is generated in a holistic fashion.

Being administered by a neutral observer, this study opens the way to an unfettered look at the *direct* intervention of classroom management on student academic learning. The extended length of the study (two weeks) obviates duration concerns and fills in a crucial gap in the literature by addressing teacher characteristics as opposed to training measures which may or may not be implemented. Because strong management systems are “based on the development of personal relationships with students” (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2010, p. 4), none of the previous research can successfully measure this intangible.

The ultimate hope of this study is to uncover what constitutes quality relationships between the teacher and his students so that the optimum classroom management style can be adopted everywhere. Though we know that teachers’ actions in their classrooms have a pivotal role on academic learning, the exact nature of this relationship will benefit schools everywhere. Consequently, this study’s deliberate comparison of two opposite classroom management scenarios sheds light on what works best in teaching children the skills to lead useful and productive lives.

“The measurement of how well they have learned these skills, their achievement, is of high interest to parents and educators” (McGarity, Jr. & Butts, 1984, p. 55). Whether it is the traditional discipline-centered approach or the newfangled self-management philosophy currently in vogue, the need for order in the classroom is beyond dispute. Student disruptions eat into valuable teaching time which certainly has direct implications on academic achievement (Freiberg et al., 2009). Disruptive students not only detract from their own learning experience, they interrupt the learning of their fellow students. 56% of students in low-income large-minority schools reported that classroom disruptions get in the way of their learning (Burke et al., 2011).

When teachers spend more time disciplining refractory students than actually teaching, it becomes near impossible to incorporate active learning methods and more student-centered methodologies. The disruptive behaviors can inhibit how and what teachers feel they can teach. More orderly students are able to work in less controlled settings, enabling formats such as cooperative learning, interactive centers, and research projects (Freiberg et al., 2009). These more complex forms of instruction suffer when the teacher is forced to choose between discipline and innovation.

Given the importance of classroom management, this paper asks whether traditional teacher-centered discipline or student-centered self-management produces the most academic learning? The answer to this question will go a long way towards unlocking the door to higher academic achievement.

**Methods**

A case study methodology was used in this study because it allowed me to build composite portraits of each individual teacher. “The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization” (Stake, 1995, p. 8), giving way to comparative interpretations of opposing classroom management approaches. This section describes the selection process of each teacher and how data sources were collected and collated in holistic fashion.

Given the externality of much of the extant literature, action research fills a crucial gap in ‘hot-button’ investigations at the ground level. Many of these problems are best identified by teachers acting as researchers who have direct access to students in the classroom. Consequently, solutions can be tested immediately and problems solved more quickly. The process is an iterative cycle of self-reflection that continues to improve itself to better meet student needs and refine practitioner techniques. Because action research is grounded in *documented* evidence of change, it is very much a best-practices example of teaching in the classroom.

Using naturalistic inquiry, this qualitative study seeks to answer the question: Does an authoritarian or laissez-faire style of classroom management produce better academic learning? Two teachers each embodying one style of classroom management will be observed to determine the better learning environment. Given the subjective nature of this study, its focus on experiences, conceptions and beliefs are the basis for interpreting the data.

*Research Site*

This study took place in Coonwood City High School,[[1]](#footnote--1) a four year high school of approximately 2300 students in Coonwood City Unified School District. Coonwood City is a medium-sized suburb (population: <40000) of a large metropolitan city with a median household income slightly above the state average. There is a fairly large Hispanic population in addition to the majority white residents. Most of the residents work in service industries and have at least a high school diploma or higher.

Coonwood City High School serves the communities of Coonwood City, Iliadtown, and the metropolitan area and has a very diverse student population (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

37% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and there is a significant population of English Learners (16.4%). Class sizes are large (approximately 29 students) while disciplinary issues are slightly above county averages. The school as a whole ranks in the top 30 percent of all schools in the state with an API score of 821

(API = Academic Performance Index, an annual measure of state academic performance and progress of schools in California. The scores range from 200 – 1000, with a statewide target of 800). Overall, Coonwood City High School is a better-than-average high school with dropout rates and graduation rates all significantly better than state numbers.

*Process for Selection of Data Sources*

The two teachers in this study were selected because they closely fit the archetypes of authoritarian and laissez-faire management styles. Both were veteran teachers who firmly believed in the efficacy of their approaches. Mr Ramos taught Spanish I and II to grade 10 students. Born and raised in El Salvador, his approach to teaching mirrors his early schooling experience. The no-nonsense direct instruction in his classroom is a perfect complement to the atmosphere of decorum he expects from his students. Helping them to learn is for him the greatest show of respect for their being. And that is only possible, according to Mr Ramos, with a conducive learning environment supported by rules of conduct. His nine years at Coonwood City High School have taught him that *he* was the decisive element in the climate of his classroom; an exemplary failure rate of less than 2% was the product of his classroom management philosophy. In addition to punitive measures, Mr Ramos incorporates a program of positive reinforcement in the form of point rewards and classroom recognition to encourage appropriate behaviors. “Fresh eyes, open heart, ready to teach” accurately sums up his raison d'être.

The other teacher, Ms Gardner, taught 10th grade Earth Sciences and was loved by her students. Growing up in Neptune, New Jersey, she knew from an early age that she wanted to be the kind of teacher that some of her teachers personified – the warm, caring, engaging mentor who worked with her students with love and enthusiasm. This *relationship* with the child is, for Ms Gardner, irreplaceable and central to her teaching philosophy. She is helping them to become human through enculturation, civilization, and socialization. The student-centered constructivism in her classroom allows much latitude in behavioral management and learning responsibility. Many of the students consider Ms Gardner their friend and confidant. All of her seven years as a certified teacher have been at Coonwood City High School where she enjoys a good relationship with students and administration alike.

The opposing nature of Mr Ramos’ and Ms Gardner’s teaching philosophies was ideally suited for comparative analysis. Wholistically speaking, it allowed aggregate measures of authoritarian (Mr Ramos) and laissez-faire (Ms Gardner) effectiveness to be determined by the study. In addition, the amount of academic learning in each environment can be quantified in a very direct way.

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| **Personal** | **Mr Ramos** | **Ms Gardner** |
| **Early schooling** | El Salvador | Neptune, New Jersey |
| **College (major)** | Private university (Science and Management) | Liberal arts college (Anthropology) |
| **Credentialing Institution** | State university | Private university |
| **Advanced degree (if any)** | Master of Arts in Education (Psychology) | Master of Arts in Education with Teaching Credential |
| **Number of years as certified teacher** | 9 | 7 |
| **Number of years at Culver City High School** | 9 | 7 |
| **Teaching methodology** | Direct Instruction + Technology  Checking for understanding through probing questions | Constructivist  (limited by standards-based testing in California) |
| **Teaching philosophy** | Teacher-centered  Structured classroom supported by rules and regulations  Teacher as caring, empathetic, inspiring leader  Reflective practitioner | Student-centered  Humanistic: Helping kids develop into complete human beings  Relationship-based |

*Data Gathering Procedures*

Data was collected in the spring of 2013 and included the following:-

* Nonparticipant observations: I observed both teachers for two weeks making detailed notes about the learning environment including student punctuality, time on task, and percentage of students off-task
* Informal interviews: I spoke to the teachers everyday to understand their classroom management ideologies and practices
* Classroom artifacts: I collected several vouchers from Mr Ramos used for classroom management

In addition, follow-up interviews were conducted two months later as part of my overall reflection process. The information from the interviews was a vital cog in understanding each teacher’s philosophical framework and their associated form of classroom management.

*Description of Data Analysis*

Data analysis was continual throughout the observation period. As observations proceeded, I studied my field notes in parallel with each classroom management style. In addition, for each day of observation the following quantitative measures of classroom management were calculated as follows:-

**Punctuality = Total number of late students / Total number of students in the**

**periods observed**

**Time on Task = Total amount of time on task / Total amount of time in the**

**periods observed**

**Percentage of Students Off-Task = Total number of students off-task / Total**

**number of students in the periods**

**observed**

**(Late is defined as arriving after the bell; time on task is defined as the actual amount of time spent on the lesson; off-task is defined as engaged in something other than the lesson)**

Each measure was plotted on a daily basis to allow comparison between the two teachers. Finally, the initial themes emerging separately from the notes, interviews, and artifacts were triangulated and checked for confirming and disconfirming evidence.

*Summary*

The next section delves into the results from my data collection after two weeks of observation. Much of my method can be described as qualitative content analysis where evaluation of the learning environment is drawn from interpretation. Though the findings are ultimately subjective, the systematic collection and analysis of data makes a comparison of classroom management possible.

**Results**

*Authoritarian Classroom Management (Mr Ramos)*

Mr Ramos runs what is best described as a ‘tight ship.’ From classroom procedure down to rules of etiquette, his classroom is a model of authoritarian discipline. Students abide by pre-established classroom protocol which carry the force of consequences (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

The power of Mr Ramos’ authority comes from the follow-through of his word; no one dares to test his limits. Students have to raise their hands before speaking and getting up is strictly forbidden, resulting in a serene learning environment. Pavlovian in tenor, Mr Ramos’ classroom management operates on behaviorist principles of positive and negative reinforcement. When students behave positively, they are rewarded with *puntos* – point vouchers that add to the final grade. *Puntos* can be awarded for anything from class participation to volunteer activity. Mr Ramos also rewards good students by assigning them responsibilities in the classroom as a means of building self-esteem.

In addition to behavior management, classroom management also involves organization of learning activities. Mr Ramos excels in this regard as his lesson unfolds from one activity to the next, leaving virtually no downtime for the students to wander (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

His awareness of the classroom keeps each student on his toes while keeping track of individual learning (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

Throughout all the elements of classroom management, Mr Ramos was governed by a spirit of mutual respect and never once lost his cool with any of the students. They understood very clearly that he was their teacher, not their friend. The clear boundaries between Mr Ramos and his students created an environment where learning could take place and where students were eager to learn.

*Laissez-faire Classroom Management (Ms Gardner)*

Kind and gentle by nature, Ms Gardner was well-suited to the laissez-faire self-management approach which she firmly believed in. In contrast to the tight controls of Mr Ramos, Ms Gardner’s classroom was more like a free-flowing organic entity (See Figure 2). Student behavior was largely self-managed in line with student-centered constructivist philosophy. Many of them were talking, walking around the classroom, and even doing homework from other classes (See Figure 4). Few paid attention to the lecture and those who wanted to had a hard time concentrating amid the din.

The biggest problem was the students’ habituation to the lack of consequences. Even when Ms Gardner did raise her voice to warn some students, they simply ignored her. Some of them even misbehaved right in front of her as if she was not there. They continually tested her limits knowing there would be no punishment and the misbehavior seemed to be contagious. Several conscientious students looked disillusioned at the chaotic environment and frequently stared into space. Because there was no order in the classroom, learning became so compromised that students lost interest (See Figure 3).

In contrast to Mr Ramos, Ms Gardner wants to be her students’ friend. She genuinely cares for them and wants them to like her in return. Rather than punish them, she praises her students copiously to motivate them to work. The students treat her as a friend and talk to her about anything. Unfortunately, the blurring of the boundaries between teacher and friend tempts the students to test her limits and the result is a chaotic environment of limited learning.

**Conclusion and implications**

Since its inception in the early part of the 20th century, student-centered constructivism began its slow but inexorable march into the classrooms of Western society. The belief in the inviolability of the child essentially overturned the relationship between teacher and student into the ‘cult of the child’ and a new hierarchy of power. Henceforth, the student would occupy the central position in learning with the teacher merely a facilitator of that learning. There is no shortage of literature extolling the virtues of student-centered constructivism (e.g. Dewey, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). But relatively little research has been done on the learning environments spawned by laissez-faire constructivist classroom management versus its traditional authoritarian counterpart. The objective of this study was to fill in this gap in the literature.

Based on my interpretation of the data, the authoritarian style of classroom management clearly produces better academic learning than its laissez-faire counterpart. The serene environment sustained by rules and procedures gives students a chance to learn and allows the teacher to teach effectively. Notwithstanding the dominance of student-centered philosophy in the literature today, researchers have forgotten to ask if children are ready to self-regulate? Are they able to self-motivate? More studies need to be done to determine if children have the cognitive structures to manage so much freedom. The answers to these questions will further refine research into classroom management.

This study has amply demonstrated that the learning environment is the prime factor in the quality of learning in the classroom. On-task time and punctuality are all optimized while minimizing off-task behaviors. While student-centered constructivism poses a challenge to teacher-centered instruction in terms of student potential, *real-world* class sizes of 30 or more severely limit the feasibility of such loose structures.

The traditional role of the teacher in classroom management draws from millennia-old practice and experience. Without pre-established protocol and guidelines governing student behavior, it is unlikely that children will find sufficient motivation in the lesson in and of itself. What Kounin (1970) refers to as “withitness” is the teacher’s awareness of what is happening in the classroom. Without this knowledge, no strategy of classroom management is likely to succeed.

Whether constructivist or teacher-centered, a base level of classroom management is foundational to learning effectiveness. Teachers must retain control of their classrooms (Logie, 1991); once that control is surrendered, the teacher no longer is in charge of the outcome of the lesson plan. Moreover, the tone of classroom management must be established from the outset. Once students become accustomed to a particular mode of classroom management, it becomes near impossible to restrain them from testing familiar tolerance levels in the future.

The battle between laissez-faire and authoritarian styles of classroom management is also a battle between new and old. Many constructivists advocate a complete revolution in our education system because they believe in the systemic replacement of outmoded systems in one fell sweep. On the other hand, traditional systems have been successful for so long for good reason. In balancing the old with the new, homologous elements need to be compared on a case-by-case basis. This paper has attempted to do this for classroom management.

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1. All names are pseudonyms. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)