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Classroom Management: Is It Okay to Let It Go?

By [Lily Jones](#) | February 19, 2015 4:00 pm

[New Teacher] Survival Guide

Most new teachers plan to create calm and productive classrooms. But as we all know, things don't always go as planned. When I observe new teachers, I often see them using a great selection of classroom management tools: counting down, waiting for all students' attention, giving consequences, reminding the class of the class agreements... and on and on.

But sometimes when teachers are so focused on classroom management, entire lesson periods are spent trying to get students on task. This is exhausting for both teachers and students — teachers never get a chance to truly teach, and students never get a chance to learn the content.

We talk a lot about making sure 100% of students are engaged before moving through a lesson. But I think it *can* be OK to let go in order to focus on content.

How can you balance managing a crazy class while still getting through the content you've planned to teach? Use these three tips:

Choose a Focus: Academic or Management

Some lessons may be all about classroom management. For example, if you're leading a morning meeting with elementary students, the focus could be on establishing routines and practicing appropriate behavior. If you've decided that this is a period of the day where you'll be practicing classroom management, hold all students accountable for meeting your expectations for the duration of the lesson.

If you're teaching a content-heavy math lesson, perhaps this is a time when you need to put your energy towards content and let classroom management take a back seat. This is not to say that you'll have low expectations during the math period. Instead, prioritize making sure students get to experience the content of your lesson. This is a tricky balance. If the class is so out of control that you can't teach the content, you'll need to go back to classroom management. But if most of the class is ready to learn and there are minimal distractions, give yourself permission to focus on the content.

Use Independent Work Time

Sometimes the key to getting students in front of the content is to maximize independent work time. I see many lessons where new teachers struggle to maintain the attention of the whole class for entire periods. Almost all teachers would struggle with keeping an entire group's attention for an hour! Instead of trying and trying to get the class to focus, move into independent work time as soon as possible.

During independent work time, students who are ready to tackle the content can do so on their own, while you work one-on-one or in small groups to support students

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Lily Jones taught K/1 for seven years in Northern California. She has experience as a curriculum developer, instructional coach, teacher trainer, and is also a contributing writer for Teaching Channel.

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who need extra help. This structure allows you the chance to personalize instruction and feedback, while maximizing the time students spend on academic work.

Pick One Strategy and Stick With It

When a class is hard to get control of, it can be tempting to try as many strategies you can think of to help them get it together. But instead of trying tool after tool, pick one strategy and stick with it. For example, if you really want to work on making sure all students are ready before moving on, focus your lesson on wait time. Throughout the lesson, use wait time to get the class back on track. If they're not responding, keep waiting. If they still aren't responding, use your classroom consequences in conjunction with your chosen classroom management strategies.

If this doesn't feel doable, pick two strategies that you'll use per lesson. But stick to just these two. If you run through strategies quickly, you sometimes miss the opportunity to practice using them in a way that is effective. Mastering classroom management strategies takes time, so allow yourself a chance to focus on strategies in isolation.

After your lessons, reflect on what classroom management strategies worked well and evaluate how much content you were able to teach. Keep track of the balance you feel like you struck between practicing behavior and learning content. As the year goes on, hopefully the scale will tip more and more towards content as your students master expectations and routines.

Lily Jones taught K/1 for seven years in Northern California. She has experience as a curriculum developer, instructional coach, teacher trainer, and is also a contributing writer for Teaching Channel.

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Beth Karr 5:48am

Great blog. Tangible ideas for a new/struggling teacher. All too often feedback is general. This is helpful and specific and something a teacher could put into practice immediately.

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