

“I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.”

Haim G. Ginott

Classroom management is a critically important aspect of an efficient classroom and an effective teacher. My classroom management will focus on developing relationships with my students, so that rather than addressing a misbehavior after it has happened, I can focus on promoting a positive classroom environment and fostering respect and responsibility among my students. I want my students to realize that I am in the classroom as their advocate, not their adversary and that while their academic development is critically important, I am also invested in their social and emotional development as well.

My philosophy on classroom management is largely based on *Relationship Driven Classroom Management* by John M. Vitto. The essence of Relationship-Driven Classroom Management is in its name. This system works under the premise that teacher-student relationships are in and of themselves an effective intervention, rather than a prerequisite to intervention. Relationship-Driven Classroom Management “focuses on proactive and behavior management strategies that enhance teacher-student connections, promote social-emotional competency, and protect students from future risk” (Vitto X). To me, having relationship driven management is not just about creating a classroom community, but it is a series of intentionally planned and implemented strategies that foster a relationship between teachers and students which proactively reduce the amount of negative behaviors and encourage positive changes in the way which students think and approach problems.

The goals of Relationship-Driven Classroom Management are simple. This system is intended to create change in the way that students think, foster resilience and a sense of efficacy in students, and enhance students' motivation and responsibility. These are fostered primarily through caring relationships, but also positive and high expectations and opportunities to participate and contribute. As a teacher, I will strive to demonstrate to my students an unwavering commitment and dedication, to model positive behaviors (particularly those related to social-emotional skills), and to have open back-and-forth communication between them and me.

Some strategies to implement in my classroom are emphasizing positive relationships among students and staff, greeting students in the hall and as they enter the classroom, treating all students with equal respect, making sure that opportunities exist for adults to spend quality/personal time with students, helping students to feel safe in expressing feelings, needs, and anxieties, teaching students how to deal with feelings, manage anger, and resolve conflicts, and creating ways for students to share their concerns. I will avoid sarcasm to create a safe space for their students, free of embarrassment. I will build on my students' strengths rather than trying to make up for their deficits. I will reject a zero-tolerance approach to negative behaviors by looking at each situation individually. Above all, I will continuously believe that my most challenging students have something to teach me.

Rather than create huge amounts of very specific rules, my expectations for my students can all be summed up in the word "respect." Students are to demonstrate respect for me as their teacher, their fellow students, and themselves. I will have posters throughout my classroom explaining what each of these types of respect look like. By having an open ended expectation system, I as the teacher will have more freedom to handle situations on a individual and

therefore, more appropriate basis. This approach to rules also fits very well with my relationship-based management style. Respect will not be a monodirectional aspect of the classroom. I will respect each of my students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or orientation and provide each student with opportunities for academic and personal growth.

I also realize that there will be cases where a positive relationship and the notion of respect will not be enough in my classroom. I know that going into a classroom, I will be working with some struggling and broken students. These students who have been hurt or let down by their parents, their peers, maybe even past teachers, are more than likely not going to respond to and behave in my class as I would hope. I recognize that punishing their response to pain is not going to eliminate the behaviors, but could possibly extend them. So, if the hurt is at the root of the problem, then it is going to be healing at the root of the solution. This is why relationships are at the core of my classroom management. Every intervention and disciplinary approach that I use will be intended to strengthen my relationship with the students and increase their chances of success.

One of my major goals when disciplinary intervention is necessary, is to keep all students in the classroom. Since I will only be spending about an hour with any student on a given day, giving up even five minutes, by having a student go the office, is a huge loss. However, should my in-class interventions not work and if the student is limiting other students' ability to learn, I would follow the school's discipline procedure whether it involved sending the student to the office, issuing majors/minors, detention, etc. But still, even in these more drastic responses to misbehaviors, I would strive to promote my relationship with the student and the student's success.