

# Introduction

## ■ What is classroom management?

Your classroom management is the way that you manage students' learning by organising and controlling what happens in your classroom ...

- Or the way that you consciously decide *not* to organise and control.
- Or the way that you delegate or relinquish such control to the learners.

It is also what happens (or doesn't happen) when you avoid or remain ignorant about these choices.

The classroom management choices you make play a large part in creating the individual working atmosphere of your class – how it feels to be in a room with you as a teacher. Whether it is an enjoyable, engaging place to be learning or whether it is dull, uninvolved and uninspiring. They reflect what you believe about teaching and learning, about learners and their potential and about the relationship of teacher to learner. They reveal how everyone relates to the class as a whole and to the hierarchy of the learning institution you are a part of.

Behind each selection of a technique is an intention – the thing that you want to happen.

A teacher who always keeps the students in whole-class mode and never makes use of pair work or group work of any kind may be a teacher who believes in such 'traditional' educational approaches, or one that has never thought about or questioned them very much. Or perhaps this sort of teacher is afraid of losing control over things or thinks that whole-class teaching is what the school or students expect and demand.

Similarly, at another extreme, a teacher who runs lessons in which the students always take the lead and decide what they want to do and how they want to do it may be working in such a way based on definite beliefs. Or perhaps that is simply what they have always done – and they will continue to do so – in the absence of clear ideas about how things might be done differently.

## ■ Classroom management is independent of methodology

This book is not about one method of teaching. The techniques in this book underlie all methods. You may be following a task-based approach, the grammar-translation method, a communicative approach, a coursebook-driven course, or any way of teaching. The techniques discussed here should be usable and effective, whichever method you use.

Having said that, there is a definite set of beliefs and values informing the ideas proposed: an assumption that the most effective teaching and learning is going to happen when learners are actively involved, interested and engaged in their work. This is more likely to come about in situations where the learners are asked about, and have at least some direct influence or say in, what they study and how they do it. This presupposes a classroom

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where teacher and learners can work together and talk or listen to each other in a respectful and supportive manner – and much of good classroom management is to do with creating the conditions where such an atmosphere is likely to exist.

## ■ A wide definition

You may have noticed that the definition I am giving to classroom management is considerably wider than the way this term is often used in secondary education, where it typically refers to ways of keeping order in class and specifically to discipline-related problems. Discipline is certainly one area of classroom management, but it is only one, and, interestingly, many of the biggest problems associated with keeping order are often best answered by dealing with other, seemingly separate, issues of classroom management. For example, in many contexts, if you make significant improvements in how well you encourage all students (rather than just the fastest two or three) to participate in classroom interaction, then this is very likely to have significant knock-on effects to how engaged students are in your lessons – which then affects how well they behave.

## ■ Classroom management is complex

There is no way that a book such as this can solve the organisational problems of specific classes in all the different contexts of the world. Within any individual problem, there are many distinct characteristics that will make each situation unique (to do with location, cultural norms, people involved, time available, preceding events, relationships, moods and many other factors).

This means that I can't ever tell you what to do. There is no fixed book of guidelines that can ever tell you how to respond in a particular situation. All effective teaching requires an active moment-by-moment processing of the current situation and a flexible ever-changing reflection as to what might be the best thing to do next.

Some of the decisions we make will be just right and useful; others will be ineffective or even disastrous. That's normal for any teacher taking risks in the process of learning how to be a better teacher. We have to learn, slowly over time, which sort of responses seem to be suitable for certain types of situations. We also have to ensure that we don't let any of those responses set in concrete – for the answer that works one week may fall completely flat next week. Good classroom management involves learning from experience, but never allowing that experience to put you into automatic pilot.

## ■ Classroom management is simple

Having said that classroom management is complex, I also want to emphasise that, in lots of ways, it is also deliciously simple.

There are many small, easy-to-learn, concrete, practical techniques that can be read about, tried out, practised, improved and then used as part of any teacher's repertoire of

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classroom skills – and in most cases, having more of these at your fingertips will make you a better teacher. It's as clear-cut as that.

I would go so far as to assert that if most teachers in the world could get really good at just five or six of the key techniques, then the quality of education worldwide would hugely improve. Experienced teachers often take higher and higher qualifications, involving more and more in-depth study of aspects of education and become very knowledgeable classroom practitioners. Yet many remain ignorant of, or poor at, some absolutely foundation-level practical techniques that could and would, in a matter of minutes, completely transform their teaching. In such cases, one supportive 45-minute lesson observation of them at work in class, followed by insightful feedback and suggestions, might have a very profound and immediate effect on their classroom practice.

## ■ Why do we need classroom management?

In our everyday lives – at home, on the phone, on a tram, in a café, on the Internet and in other contexts – we ask questions, talk, explain things, interact, organise, take control, give instructions, listen to each other and so on. When we become teachers, we might suppose that many of these normal natural skills transfer directly from the *world* to the *class*.

The classroom, however, is not the same as the outside world. Our habitual or intuitive responses, formed in the outside world, may let us down and, paradoxically, may lead to outcomes that are actually the opposite of what we had hoped for.

In order to help create the most engaging and useful learning environment, we need to learn new techniques, or perhaps relearn familiar ones, so that they are effective in a classroom environment; for example, how to talk to a group of people, how to give an instruction, how to organise seating, how to hand things out, how to listen to someone who has a problem, how to respond to a person who is talking too quietly and so on. These are all techniques that need to be thought about, tried out, reflected on and refined (maybe quite a number of times) before they become appropriate, effective, normal and instinctive.

## ■ Who is this book for?

This book is intended for you if you are a teacher of English as a foreign, second or other language. The ideas proposed are suitable for a wide range of different face-to-face classrooms and educational contexts. You might:

- Be a native or a non-native speaker.
- Be newly qualified or experienced.
- Teach within the state or private sector.
- Teach children or adults.
- Teach multilingual or monolingual classes.
- Work in a country where English is a first, second or foreign language.

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- Teach students studying general English, CLIL or specialising for example in business English, academic English or any other specific purpose.
- Use any methodology or approach.
- Use any kind of coursebook, resources and materials – or none.

In looking at classroom management, we are looking for the fundamental organisational issues that underlie what you can do successfully in class, wherever and however you do your teaching, whatever your starting point.

This book can't solve your immediate local classroom-management problem for you. But it can show you some techniques that have been effective for a number of different people, in a variety of contexts and situations. You can read these, decide which might be useful for you, try the ideas out and add them to your suitcase of possible classroom actions, for use as, and when, appropriate. They won't all work for you in your classrooms, but many of them will, and the ones that don't work can suggest a starting point for reflection and working out your own solutions.

## ■ What's in this book?

*Classroom Management Techniques* is organised in seven chapters:

- 1 The classroom** This chapter looks at the teaching/learning space and how best to organise it and exploit what it offers.
- 2 The teacher** We look at who the teacher is in the classroom, how he or she can encourage the most learning and what changes the teacher might be able to make to his or her own actions, reactions and behaviour.
- 3 The learners** We ask who the students are and how the teacher can work with both the group and the individuals.
- 4 Key interventions** This chapter provides a detailed look at fourteen different ways that teachers can behave, speak and do things in the classroom.
- 5 Facilitating interaction** Getting students to communicate in English, with the teacher and with each other, forms a significant part of any language teacher's job. This chapter offers lots of practical advice to get more, and better quality, interaction.
- 6 Establishing and maintaining appropriate behaviour** Discipline involves not just applying sanctions after bad behaviour, but a whole way of working that might encourage the desired good behaviour. This chapter looks at the issue from both angles.
- 7 The lesson** The last chapter considers a range of issues directly associated with in-lesson teaching, including ways of running tasks and approaches to materials and resources.

For most people, this is probably not a book to read from cover to cover (though that could be helpful, especially for newer teachers or teachers in training). For this reason, I have included many cross-references so that you can go to parts of the book that you may not have read, but which contain related teaching suggestions. These references are all given in the form 'Chapter x Unit x', where 'chapter' refers to the seven major chapters of the book, and 'unit' refers to the numbered subsections within those chapters.

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I think that there are two main ways that you might approach the material:

- When you face a classroom management problem in your current teaching, you could look in here for possible techniques, strategies and approaches to try out. Even if you don't feel that any of the ideas are directly relevant or suitable for your particular situation, you may still find that reading about similar problems and solutions helps you to clarify your own thoughts and generate your own solutions.
- When you feel that you want to develop professionally and are looking for ways to move your teaching forward, you could research some of the practical ideas and suggestions, select one or two and then try them out in your classes.

At the end of each section I include some 'Questions for reflection' to help you relate the material to your own practice and to think a little more widely about some of the issues.