Losing control of the classroom can be one of the most frustrating and intimidating experiences for both new and experienced teachers. Losing control can happen in several different ways. The most common would be where the class is distracted. This could be from a situation outside the classroom such as noisy conversation in the hall, or from an event elsewhere that students find out about,
such as a rumor of the football coach getting fired. Losing control can also happen within the classroom, such as when one student monopolizes the discussion, or where there is a general lack of interest in the lecture, and many students are obviously not paying attention. Here are nine possible ways to regain students’ attention.

1. **Have a distinct sounding object**, such as a bell or cymbal. As long as you don’t use it too often, this can be an effective way to bring student’s attention back to the lecture or class discussion.

2. **Signal nonverbally**, and make eye contact with students when they hold side conversations, start to fall asleep, or show contempt for the lecture material. You can also use hand signals to encourage a wordy student to finish what he or she is saying, or make a time out “T” sign with your fingers to stop unwanted behavior.

3. **Remember what your parents told you** when a sibling was bothering you. Sometimes it is best to ignore mildly negative behaviors. Often the behavior will disappear if you do not pay any attention to it.

4. **Discuss very negative behaviors in private**. During break or after class firmly request a change in behavior of those students who are disruptive. At our university it is very easy for professors to drop disruptive students from class, so one warning is usually enough.

5. **Use humor**. One of my favorite techniques is to stop the lecture, put on a mysterious expression, and look directly at the disruptive student. I announce to the class that I am getting a vision of that student sitting in the same chair next semester repeating the class over again. Usually the whole class laughs, but it gets the message across to everyone that this particular behavior has
consequences.

6. **Rein in overparticipators.** If somebody monopolizes a discussion, I acknowledge the value of their viewpoints and invite them to discuss their views with me during a break. An alternative is to ask for other class members for their perspectives on the topic.

7. **Implement participation rules.** Tell the class that you would like to use rules such as the following: Only students who have not yet spoken can add to the discussion moving forward. Each new comment must build on a previous idea, etc.

8. **Mix it up.** If the last idea does not work very well, change the method of participation. Sometimes, you can experiment with new formats, such as using pairs or small groups rather than whole-class activities.

9. **Don’t take it personally.** Many problem behaviors have nothing to do with you. They often represent the personal frustrations and insecurities of the student. Make a point of getting to know the disruptive student during breaks or after class. It is less likely that students will continue to give you a hard time or remain distant if you have taken an interest in them.

By experimenting with one or more of these classroom management techniques, you will probably find that losing control of a class happens much less frequently and you will feel more confident in your ability to quickly regain students’ attention when it does.

*Dr. Rick Sheridan is an assistant professor of Mass Communications at Wilberforce University.*
Classroom Management Tips for Regaining Control of the Classroom

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[...] I usually skim most of the emails I get, including the one I recently received called “Classroom Management Tips for Regaining Control of the Classroom” [...]

Comments (10)

Excellent ideas--must try them out with my management students. Thank you, Dr. Ramani Nair

A fine post, Dr. Sheridan. Thanks for sharing. One of my colleagues just turned me on to Deborah Schoebel's book, Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness which pairs nicely with some of your ideas.

Not sure if you're familiar with this book, but I just wrote a blog on it. I'd be interested in your thoughts:
http://info.marygrove.edu/MATblog/bid/87811/Zen-T...

Thank you for these ideas. I'm running into that problem a little more than in the past in my current position at a community college. I have often just stopped talking and looked in the direction of the offending student, and that stops it. I never want to resort to dropping a student from a roster, but have had to make that threat before.

Good ideas. Another is to put in the syllabus that the whole class will be given a 3-item pop quiz whenever any student becomes disruptive, uses a cell phone, etc. (spell these out). This is one of the few methods that encourages other students in the class to exert pressure on uncooperative students. Depending on the course, the quiz can be questions specific to the topic or on general topics drawn from, say, Cultural Literacy.
Good ideas. I have been using most of them in my teaching career but the second and eighth point are really important for effective classroom control.

Reply

subramanian  

Great points. I wish to add three points:

BE PASSIONATE. Students often ask me how I can be so enthusiastic teaching the same thing again and again. I tell them I enjoy teaching as much as anyone enjoys eating one’s favorite food item or listening/watching a favorite song/movie repeatedly. Passionate and enthusiastic teaching will easily rivet the students’ attention, at least on the teacher if not on the subject!

BE VERSATILE. By being knowledgeable on various topics pertaining to general life will enhance one’s standing. For some reason, this improves their receptivity to the subject. Probably because, when you regard a person well, you regard the person’s words too.

NEVER GIVE UP. If we could somehow get through the barrier and inhibition of a student & convey that the student is a worthy person regardless of how his/her conduct is in the class, there will definitely come a time when such a student will come seeking the teacher’s help on some matter. The outcome is likely to cement the relationship & help in improving the student’s behavior and performance.

(Kindly bear with this lengthy comment. I seem to have got carried away.)

Reply

Rashmi  

It is true that a student who monopolizes a class discussion, tends to create a lot of negativity in the classroom. He/she then turns the entire class against the teacher. The teacher’s only fault is that he/she is too polite, and unable to control the disruptions. These may in the form of incessant questions; talking without waiting for permission; and interrupting other students.

One good way to deal with this would be the use of ”poker chips”. Each student can be given three chips at the beginning of the class. Every time he/she asks a question, one chip goes back into the box. Once the three chips are utilized, the student cannot ask any more questions. This also levels the playing field.

Reply

Priya Home  

Very informative specially the sixth and the seventh point. Thanks a lot. Rashmi’s ‘poker chips’ is a good idea too.

Reply

Salih  

really amazing!

Reply
I'm a teacher and want to ask about lesson plans for grade 6, 7 (English Grammar).

Reply
Classroom Management Tips for Regaining Control of the Classroom

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