

Book Review: Successful Classroom Management: Real-World, Time-Tested Techniques for the Most Important Skill Set Every Teacher Needs

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While most librarians are required to take classes on reference, collection development, and information organization in library school, courses on pedagogy are usually optional, if offered at all, leading most librarians who end up with instruction duties as part of their position to learn on the job. One method of undertaking this learning is through reading books like *Successful Classroom Management*; although it is written primarily for K-12 teachers, many of the best practices and instructional strategies it discusses are equally relevant for higher education. The premise, upon which veteran teachers Richard H. Eyster and Christine Martin ground all of their suggestions, is that “effective classroom management is based upon an eminently learnable set of skills” (p. 69). A variety of these, such as creating effective lesson plans, are informative and detailed enough that both new and experienced instruction librarians will pick up new tricks.

Many an instructor may pick up *Successful Classroom Management* hoping for a manual detailing how to nip student tardiness, flippancy, and ennui in the bud, but the book is more than a *Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook*. The first part is devoted to developing a positive atmosphere in the classroom, as the authors argue that the maxim an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is especially true in education; “effective discipline is a necessary but insufficient aspect of classroom management” (p. 64). Librarians who think such a section insipid would do well to consider the authors’ argument that “praise is one of the most powerful, and certainly one of the most underutilized, tools in any teacher’s repertoire” (p. 16); it can neutralize negative forces in your class, reinforce excellence, and prevent the hardworking but quiet student from remaining invisible and unacknowledged.

Specific disciplinary techniques makes up a good sixth of the book, so readers looking for this meaty material will not be disappointed. Eyster and Martin argue that “the ability to say—to really say—no” to a student who checks their Facebook page in class or wants to take a discussion wildly off-topic is “perhaps the most telling characteristic of a teacher who’s going to be successful” (p. 87). Also, while instructors may be tempted to ignore the occasional muttered aside because they don’t want to make a big deal of something trivial, the authors advise strongly against this and urge them to take a stand. “Everyone in the class will quickly sense what you will tolerate and what you will not. Turn a blind eye [...] and they will understand that you are giving up part of your rightful authority and that they are the ones who get to set the social guidelines in the room” (p. 60).

Additional topics covered include ensuring prompt attendance to class (especially useful in college, when attendance is usually not mandatory; one method is to have a short quiz as soon as class starts, with no make-ups allowed), ways to guarantee lesson plan variety, the importance of moving around the classroom instead of being tethered to the instruction station, successfully managing small group work, and why a passion for the subject should not be underestimated. Instructors are also reminded to scaffold students from their pre-existing knowledge to the new content being taught (a process which should not be underestimated and is talked about at length in another useful book, Jane Vella’s *Taking Learning to Task*) in order to make learning relevant and memorable.

As a new instructor myself, I have found many of the lessons in the book to be useful reminders and variations of things I learned as an education major. I teach a semester-long 3-credit information literacy class at Bryant & Stratton College, and in the chaos of teaching a new 3.5-hour lesson every week, my primary concern when beginning to teach was figuring out how to fill up all that time. *Successful Classroom Management* reminded me of not just the helpfulness, but the necessity of creating lesson plans, because they ensure that the outcome of the lesson is not a course period completely filled, but content successfully learned and integrated into the students’ pre-existing knowledge. Similarly, time spent at the beginning of the semester discussing expectations and establishing routines is not wasted; indeed, “if you begin by moving directly into your subject[...], you will have squandered the one most valuable opportunity in the entire year, namely to set high expectations, to imprint powerfully memorable daily routines” (p. 148-9).

Much of the book focuses on establishing routines and practices over a long period of time, so it will not be as useful to librarians who only teach one-shots. Other sections (such as “Sending a Student to the Office,” “Enlisting Parent Support,” and “Effectively Managing Parent Conference Day”) are not applicable to higher education at all. For those librarians who do teach for-credit information literacy classes or multiple sessions during a semester for a particular class, however, the vast majority of this book will be extremely useful. Additionally, the book is written in a very engaging style with amusing examples (e.g., regarding assigning students to work in groups—which should be done when “students don’t necessarily make the best choices in learning partners. Denise Distractible almost always has a fascination for the antics of Eddie ADHD, and Eddie is often stimulated

by Denise's mulish hee-haw. Use wisdom in separating them"), so it's an enjoyable read rather than a hard slog (p. 194). I believe *Successful Classroom Management* should be read by every librarian who's just found out instruction is one of his/her duties, and ideally even by those who have been at it for ages. One of the things we learn as librarians and edu-

cators is that the best teachers are themselves constantly learning; this is just as valid for technique as it is for content.

References

Vella, J. (2001). *Taking learning to task: Creative Strategies for Teaching Adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

(Evernote...Continued from page 7)

describing a new learning activity you want to try out in your next class.

In the past, you would have had to remember where and on which devices you stored all of this information. Now, however, you can simply create an ACRL notebook in Evernote, add each document, recording, and photograph as you go, and add tags describing the content. When you return tired and happy from your conference experience you'll have everything you learned organized and searchable right at your fingertips.

Figure 5: Share your notebook with individuals or the world

For Instructors

Evernote can be used to collect interesting teaching ideas and/or relevant articles that you may encounter as you go about your daily work. By adding relevant tags, you can easily locate these items again when you start to develop your lesson plans. For that matter, you might choose to develop those plans right within Evernote. Consider creating a notebook for each of your topic areas and/or class sessions.

Another option is to use Evernote's sharing capabilities to provide your students with information that you create and/or collect for them. For example, you might want to share your lecture notes with the class and could do so by inviting your students to view a shared notebook containing those materials.

For Students

Evernote can serve as a highly effective research management tool for students. For those conducting research projects, they can use Evernote to collect and store the information that they discover throughout the research process. And, for those working in groups, they can share their individual notebooks with one another so that they can more easily track their overall progress. Additionally, if a student group is using a whiteboard to sketch out ideas, a picture can be taken at the end and archived for later viewing.

These are just a few ideas to get you started. Although it may take a false start or two before you get a sense of all the different ways to use this tool, I predict that you may be surprised with how quickly and dramatically it will change your workflow. Give it a try the next time you attend a conference or long meeting and see how well it helps you with organizing, and then later accessing, all your thoughts and the insights you gather from others. With a little exploration and experimentation you can probably think of a multitude of ways to put this versatile research management tool to work for you!

(Mentoring Students...Continued from page 10)

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