

Classroom Management

*Creating a Positive
Learning Environment*

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Contents

Foreword by Kerry J. Kennedy	vii
Preface	ix
1. Understanding Classroom Behaviour and Situations	1
2. The Influence of Chinese Culture on Hong Kong Classrooms	21
3. Effective Classroom Management	45
4. Managing Misbehaviour	63
5. Approaches to Students' Misbehaviour	85
6. Enhancing Communication and Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships	109
7. Promoting Positive Peer Relationships	129
8. Collaboration with Colleagues to Improve Classroom Behaviour	149
9. Working with Parents to Create a Positive Classroom Environment	165
10. Learning from Classroom Experience: Reflection and Action Research	183
Index	203

1

Understanding Classroom Behaviour and Situations

Hue Ming-tak

A leader is best when people barely know that he exists; not so good when people obey and acclaim him; worst when they despise him. “Fail to honour people, they fail to honour you.” But of a good leader, who talks little, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will all say, “We did this ourselves.”

(Lao Zi, 500 BC)

Synopsis

This chapter encourages teachers to continue to expand their repertoire of classroom management and discipline strategies. It offers a broad view of classroom management and stresses its positive functions in promoting students’ academic, social and emotional growth. An interactionist perspective is adopted and its theoretical framework is explained, with the cycle of interaction being used to highlight the complexity of classroom behaviour. Some types of classroom situations are then described, and their implications for good classroom management strategies are outlined. The discussion then shifts from whole-class to individual behaviour, for explaining which a framework of “ten important questions” is introduced. Finally, the chapter focuses on the importance of identifying patterns of classroom behaviour for effective management.

Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- define the term “classroom management” and identify its purposes;
- take an interactionist perspective in examining classroom behaviour;
- identify features of classroom situations and their implications for behaviour management;

2 *Classroom Management*

- explain classroom behaviour by examining the linkages between the situation, the person and the behaviour;
- use the framework of “ten important questions” for diagnosing classroom behaviour.

Pre-Reading Reflection and Discussion

- What factors contribute to the creation of an effective classroom?
- What do teachers and students do in an effective classroom?
- How can a classroom be managed in an effective manner?
- What kinds of student behaviour should be viewed as misbehaviour?
- What are the common causes of student misbehaviour?
- How may students explain their misbehaviour? How might this differ from teachers’ explanations?
- What can be done to prevent student misbehaviour?
- What are the best ways for students to become disciplined?

Introduction

Teachers clearly wish to teach effectively and make learning meaningful for students. However, they are often frustrated in attaining their goals because of behavioural and academic problems of some students for whom they are responsible. Many teachers ask: “How can a good classroom be created and maintained?” Effective classroom management does not, of course, happen automatically, even with proper teacher and student attitudes and expectations in place. How a teacher manages the classroom will have an important influence on whether most of the time is spent on promoting learning or on confronting management and discipline problems. There is no single best way to manage classrooms; and no one model or theory can address the great variety of circumstances and difficulties teachers encounter.

In the following case, before Miss Yeung entered the classroom, the whole class was in chaos. Why did the students behave in this way? What do you think Miss Yeung could do to restore order and avoid this happening again?

Classroom scenario

After playtime, Miss Yueng was on her way to take class 3B for an English lesson. When she got close to the classroom, she heard a very loud noise, and

she was surprised to find that the door was closed. When she opened it, she saw five students standing in front of the blackboard drawing graffiti, and four others throwing folded paper to each other. At the same time, a group of students was busy decorating the display boards at the back of the class. Also, three students were chasing a classmate and others were chatting and laughing.

Definition of Classroom Management

Different views

Effective management is a key factor contributing to a positive classroom environment. While considerable effort and attention has been directed to the development of teachers' instructional roles, less emphasis has been placed on the knowledge and skills required for management and discipline. This is partly related to teachers' varied conceptions of what "classroom management" means. Their first point of reference in defining the concept is their own experience of schooling and personal growth, and particularly the culture which nurtured them. The culture in which they grew up provides the foundation for their social and moral values which can be shared and communicated, and it contributes to the development of a common language related to management and discipline.

The term "classroom management" has been defined in many different ways, depending on which of its aspects one focuses on, the particular philosophical positions held, and the operational approaches adopted. Some examples of different views on classroom management are summarized below.

- It is a dimension of effective teaching, and a process through which an effective classroom environment is created (Good and Brophy, 1997).
- It focuses on student behaviour, especially discipline problems, and deals with issues of low learning motivation and poor self-esteem (Campbell, 1999).
- It refers broadly to all activities that teachers carry out in the classroom. It aims to promote student involvement and cooperation (Sanford et al., 1983, cited in Jones and Jones, 2001).
- It emphasizes the educational value of promoting the growth of students. Its focus is also on proactive and developmental classroom practices, rather than those with negative features of control and punishment (McCaslin and Good, 1992).

Although teachers make sense of classroom management in different ways, in general they have a common approach to promoting classroom discipline. It includes the following features (Hue, 2005) which are elaborated throughout this book:

4 *Classroom Management*

- adopting effective approaches to teaching and learning;
- having plans for avoiding disruption;
- establishing a positive relationship with students;
- using knowledge of individual students and the class to develop appropriate strategies for discipline; and
- being sensitive to the influence on classroom management of factors such as the student seating plan, the arrangements for floating classes, and the examination schedule.

Definitions

While various views on classroom management are included in this book, in general it refers to teachers' actions which lead to the creation of a learning environment where positive interpersonal interaction is promoted and effective learning is facilitated. It aims to enhance the cognitive, personal and social growth of students, developing in particular their self-motivation, self-understanding, self-control, self-evaluation and self-management. Some other terms related to the concept of classroom management which are also used frequently in this text are defined below:

- **Classroom behaviour:** This refers to the actions or reactions of classroom participants. The behaviour of an individual is complex as it is controlled not just by the nervous system but also by the social context in which she/he participates. The actions of individual teachers and students form particular patterns of classroom behaviour.
- **Discipline:** This is the act of responding to misbehaving students in an effort to restore and maintain order, authority and control. It is also considered to be a form of training, aimed at influencing students' moral and mental development in ways which promote self-control, self-discipline and self-management.
- **Misbehaviour:** This refers to behaviour that interferes with teaching, violating the right of other students to learn, and sometimes makes them feel psychologically uncomfortable and physically unsafe.

Activity 1.1

Your perceptions of classroom management

Answer the following questions which will help you to understand how you perceive the key concepts of classroom management.

- When you enter a classroom, in what ways can you tell if it is managed effectively or ineffectively?

- What can a teacher do to manage a classroom in an effective manner?
- To what extent do you think your understanding of “misbehaviour” and “discipline” differs from students’ understandings?
- What kinds of off-task behaviour do students perform? Why do they do this?

General purposes

Classroom management is concerned not just with discipline and student behaviour but, in a wider sense, can be considered a means by which the broader purposes of classroom life can be achieved. Just as a manager in a company does not aim simply to manage, but to achieve pre-set targets, discipline is not an end in itself: rather, it is a means through which the wider aims of schooling can be fulfilled and students are socialized into moral, ethical and social values.

Two specific purposes of classroom management are highlighted below.

- First, it is a necessary condition for the creation of a supportive, respectful learning environment. Effective teaching and learning can take place only if there is good order and a positive learning climate in the classroom. The view that discipline is a crucial dimension of classroom management and is essentially a means to create the necessary conditions for learning has been endorsed by various educationalists (e.g. Ames, 1992; Corrie, 1997).
- Second, it is a proactive and developmental way to promote the growth of students, in terms of their personal, social and emotional selves. There is a commonly held perception that classroom management, particularly when it refers to discipline and punishment, is related to reactive control and sterile practices. However, classroom discipline should never be considered in isolation from the students’ academic, personal and social growth. This is because positive classroom management has enormous potential for increasing students’ motivation, learning and self-esteem and, more specifically, positive disciplinary practices can give students a sense of achievement and of control over their classroom behaviour (Gillborn et al., 1993).

□ Activity 1.2

Your reflection on positive classroom management

As indicated above, classroom management has two basic purposes: creating and maintaining a positive learning environment, and promoting students’ whole-person growth. Can you think of other purposes? What difficulties can you foresee when putting such purposes into practice? Would you expect to receive any support from the school to overcome these difficulties?

Making Sense of Classroom Behaviour

The classroom is a social setting where participants interact with each other in “classroom behaviour”. As such behaviour takes many different forms, it is necessary to develop a theoretical framework to explain it and so gain a deeper understanding of those involved.

An interactionist perspective is taken here for understanding how classroom participants interact with each other as individuals and groups, as well as the relationships between individual and group behaviours. In the course of interpersonal interaction in the classroom — a context in which teachers and students spend much of the school day — meanings are constructed and shared with others. To clarify how interactionists view the classroom, the basic principles of interactionism (Ritzer, 1992: 348) and its implications for classroom management are summarized in the Table 1.1 below. Also highlighted is the ways in which G. H. Mead’s ideas, which laid the foundation for symbolic interactionism, can enhance our understanding of classroom behaviour.

From the seven basic principles proposed by Mead, two points in particular need to be highlighted. First, to understand the social experience of teachers and students, priority has to be given to examining the social world of the classroom, rather than by looking first at the behaviour of individuals as separate participants.

The second important aspect is the dialectical feature of the interaction. As Mead explained, when individuals think about how to react to a stimulus, they not only consider the situation in which they are participating but also review their past experience and anticipate the results of their reactions. They do not simply respond immediately to external stimuli but rather think about and assess them through mental imagery.

In the following scenario in a Chinese language lesson, a student, Ah Wing, misbehaves by refusing to obey the teacher, Mr. Lee. The case is then analysed from an interactionist perspective.

Classroom scenario

In a Chinese lesson, a teacher, Mr. Lee, asked the class to copy answers for a test which he wrote on the blackboard. Occasionally, he asked some questions from the test paper. In response to a question, a boy, Ah Wing, called out without standing up as he was supposed to and gave a totally irrelevant and ridiculous answer. The class laughed. The teacher looked stern but simply told him that his answer was wrong. Ah Wing then turned his back and started chatting to the three students behind him. Mr. Lee said, “Shh! Ah Wing, stop chatting and

making a noise!” He stopped for a while, but then chatted again. “Ah Wing, did you hear what I said — how many times do I have to tell you? You are meant to be copying the answer, but you just keep talking and talking. I won’t give you another warning, You know very well how you were punished last week,” Mr. Lee said, beginning to lose his temper and staring at Ah Wing with a severe look. Ah Wing made a face and responded in a rude manner, “You see. I have copied the answer. I haven’t made any noise. I talked because I asked them (his classmates) about the answers you wrote on the blackboard!” Mr. Lee got very annoyed and ordered Ah Wing to see him after the class.

Table 1.1 The basic principles of interactionism and its implications for classroom management

Basic principles	Implications for classroom management
1. Human beings have the capacity for thought.	1. Teachers and students have their own thoughts and motives when participating in the classroom.
2. The capacity for thought is shaped by social interaction.	2. Teachers’ and students’ understanding of the classroom keeps changing in the course of interaction. They act and react in relation to the actions of other participants.
3. In social interaction, people learn the meanings and symbols that allow them to exercise this capacity.	3. Teachers and students have been socialized into the cultures of the classroom, the school and the society so that they can make sense of symbols which they use in the course of interaction.
4. Meaning and symbols allow people to carry out human actions and interactions.	4. In the classroom, the participants have a set of commonly shared symbols, such as verbal and non-verbal signs, which allow them to interpret the meaning of others’ behaviour.
5. People are able to modify or change the meaning and symbols that they use in action and interaction on the basis of their interpretation of the situation.	5. New meaning and symbols may arise in a particular class which can only be interpreted by the participants in this class.
6. When interacting with others, people are able to examine possible courses of action, assess their relative advantages and disadvantages, and then choose one.	6. All behaviours are purposeful. There is always a reason for the occurrence of any classroom event.
7. The intertwined patterns of action and interaction make up groups and societies.	7. The patterns of interaction among classroom participants make up the classroom reality.

From an interactionist perspective, three points stand out in the behaviour of Mr. Lee and Ah Wing. First, the whole incident is composed of a cycle of interaction between them, as illustrated in Figure 1.1. Also, the class inevitably played a role in influencing how Mr. Lee reacted to Ah Wing: the fact that they laughed carried a symbolic meaning that Ah Wing was successfully taking over the classroom and getting the attention of the class and the teacher. This might be one of the reasons why Mr. Lee gave Ah Wing a stern look — if the class had not reacted in this way, Mr. Lee would probably not have become so angry and the outcome might have been different. Only by examining the series of actions and reactions by the two participants can one see the complexity of the incident: to view the situation simply as a case of a boy making a noise oversimplifies it.

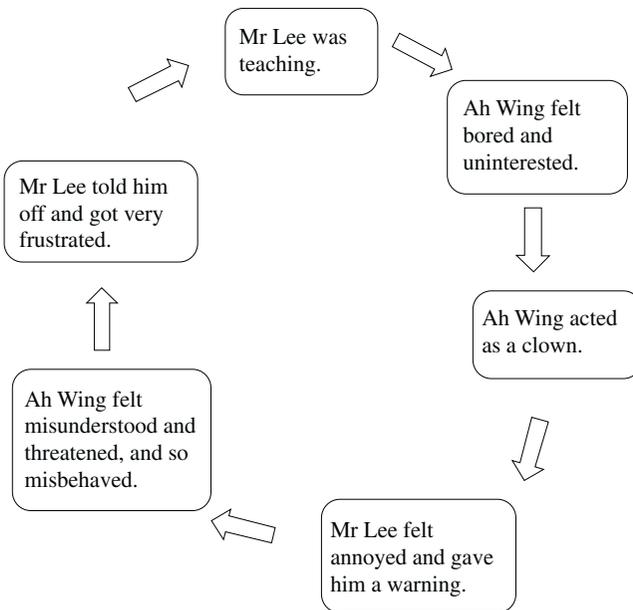


Figure 1.1 A cycle of interaction between the teacher, Mr. Lee, and the student Ah Wing

Second, many verbs carry various symbolic meanings which can be interpreted, shared and understood by the classroom participants. For example, the verb and gesture of “Shh” meant something more than just “keep quiet”. It can be interpreted as a warning to those students who were engaged in chatting, which told them that the teacher was alert and was to be in control of the classroom.

Third, the interactions among the participants are determined by their previous classroom experience. In a sense, what is going on at present has a connection with “the past”, which shapes the classroom reality and has an impact on how students

make sense of everything happening there. For example, Mr. Lee threatened Ah Wing by referring to the punishment he had given him the week before. However, Ah Wing did not feel threatened as the teacher expected and continued to misbehave. Maybe he took this as an opportunity to get his revenge by fighting with the teacher for power.

□ Activity 1.3

Using an interactionist perspective to explain classroom behaviour

Study the scenario below, and then try to: (1) draw a cycle of interaction to show the interpersonal relations between the teacher Miss Hung and the student Kwok King; and (2) explain the motives for their behaviour from an interactionist perspective.

When Miss Hung copied the answers to a listening exercise on Chinese language on the blackboard, she noticed that Kwok King did not write down anything for a long time. She urged him several times to do what he had been told. Kwok King gradually got annoyed, and then listlessly picked up a worksheet and attempted to show it to Miss Hung. The gesture was intended to pass the message to Miss Hung that he had already done it. Miss Hung then got close to him and, unsurprisingly, found that it was not his work. In fact, he had just taken it from Hui Ting, the student who sat next to him, and shown it to her. Miss Hung, who felt this showed lack of respect for her, was very irritated and scolded Kwok King severely. Without pausing for a second, Kwok King said loudly to her: “You need not be so harsh. You want to put me into ‘a dead corner’, don’t you?”

Characteristics of Classroom Situations

Each classroom is unique in terms of the patterns of interpersonal interaction and the types of behaviour. One of the ways to identify the features of a classroom is to ask teachers what metaphors they use to describe it. The answers they give can be fascinating and diverse. Each metaphor tells a story and captures a particular type of classroom experience. For example, some say the classroom is like “a market”, in which people are busy with their own business and talk loudly; others describe it as being “like Nathan Road”, the most crowded and busy street in Hong Kong; and yet others compare it to “a prison”, to capture the sense of boredom which prevails.

The characteristics of the classroom can be identified by summarizing all these metaphors. For example, Watkins and Wagner (2000: 54–58) list five common features of school classrooms, the key points of which are presented and elaborated in Table 1.2 on pp. 10–11. This analysis draws attention to the complexity of the classroom, which cannot be romanticized as simply a place of teaching and learning. In relation to each of the characteristics, particular forms of interaction, interpersonal relationships and classroom dynamics are indicated and some related managerial skills are also suggested.

Table 1.2 The characteristics of classroom situations and various related classroom management skills

Characteristics of the classroom	Description of the classroom	Required managerial skills
1. Classrooms are busy places.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers and students engage in a large number of interactions every day. • Events happen fast. • As they are very “busy” places, aspects of classroom life need to be made routine. • Little attention is given to individual students. • Students have got used to being one of many. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage through the timing and pacing of activities. • Learn to react quickly. • Make decisions rapidly. • Build up classroom rules and routines. • Care for the needs of individual students.
2. Classrooms are public places.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The behaviour of each classroom participant is highly visible to others. • The teacher is expected by all school members to be the centre of the classroom. • A teacher’s reaction to one student’s behaviour affects others. • Students have learned to cope with the public evaluation of their work and behaviour. • Students have learned to be treated as members of a group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play the role of a leader. • Blend public and personal interests. • Take care of the issue of “face”, especially when managing students’ behaviour in front of the whole class. • Help students to play their roles as members of a group.
3. Classroom events are multi-dimensional.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide variety of purposes, interests and goals are represented by different participants. • Classroom life is affected by personal and social aspects of participants’ lives. • There is a multiplicity of information sources, such as participants’ verbal and non-verbal behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage instruction and students’ behaviour on a multiplicity of dimensions, such as knowing your subject and encouraging thinking. • Interpret classroom behaviour using various types of information from, for example, students’ body language and social networks.
4. Classrooms events are simultaneous.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom events do not happen in a step-by-step fashion. • Many events happen at the same time. • Students have skills for avoiding teachers’ monitoring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage numerous aspects of classroom life at the same time. • Monitor more than one aspect of classroom life at a time. • Choose which aspects to respond to and which to ignore. • Exercise the skill of selective ignoring.

(continued on p. 11)

(Table 1.2 continued)

<p>5. Classrooms events are unpredictable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are always internal and external interruptions in the course of teaching and learning. • Students develop strategies for dealing with unpredictability, such as searching for answers the teacher expects and requesting predictable and familiar tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become skilled in recognizing and tolerating unpredictability. • Develop various plans for dealing with unpredictability. • Make classroom life routine and reduce its ambiguity. • Constantly review and re-establish classroom rules and routines. • Constantly examine classroom situations where difficult behaviour is exhibited.
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□ Activity 1.4

Identifying classroom situations and developing strategies for improvement

Study the following three classroom scenarios (you will recall reading the third scenario in an earlier section.) Identify the characteristics of the classroom, and then suggest strategies for managing students’ behaviour.

1. When Miss Lee was writing some notes on the blackboard, she found two students involved in a game of throwing pieces of chalk to each other. She gave a serious warning to those involved. Less than a minute later, two other students joined in the game. Miss Lee asked the four students to stand up. They refused to do so and said to her disrespectfully: “Go back to your teaching. No one cares for what you teach.”
2. In the course of teaching, Mr. Wong heard the beep-beep sound of an alarm clock. He asked the class who owned it, but nobody responded. With the beep-beep sound going round the classroom, he raised his voice and gave another warning in a very serious tone: “You all must know who brought in the alarm and where it is. Tell me, or the whole class will be punished.” All the students sat still and the classroom was silent.
3. After playtime, Miss Yeung was on her way to take class 3B for an English lesson. When she got close to the classroom, she heard a very loud noise, and she was surprised to find that the door was closed. When she opened it, she saw five students standing in front of the blackboard drawing graffiti, and four others throwing folded paper to each other. At the same time, a group of students was busy decorating the display boards at the back of the class. Also, three students were chasing a classmate and others were chatting and laughing.

Explaining Classroom Behaviour

As each classroom is unique, the same behaviour performed in different situations can carry different meanings; and even if the situation is the same, the participants may react differently. Watkins and Wagner (2000) attempted to illustrate the complexity of classroom behaviour by using the formula, $B=f(P.S)$, which was suggested by Lewin (1946), a social psychologist. This formula indicates that behaviour varies in relation to the two variables of person and situation. For instance, a student who misbehaves in a lesson on a particular subject may not do so in another. Similarly, a teacher who reacts to a particular kind of student behaviour in class X may not do so in class Y.

You can probably think of many examples of the operation of this principle. In most cases, teachers tend to react in relation to not only students' behaviour but also the context in which they are participating. For example, when a student breaks a rule in the last few minutes of a lesson, most teachers tend to tolerate this as the lesson is coming to an end, whereas they would probably have taken action had it occurred earlier.

In the light of this, for a better understanding of students' behaviour, it is useful to examine the context in which it occurs (Dolye, 1986; Geiger and Turiel, 1983; Hargreaves, 1980; Watkins and Wagner, 2000). This involves teachers in analysing teacher-student interactions and the circumstances at particular moments, to help them see the uniqueness of each classroom incident. More important, such an analysis gives them a more comprehensive picture of the behaviour and eventually leads to the development of a more reflective explanation and a wider range of possibilities for action.

To achieve this, Watkins (1999) and Watkins and Wagner (2000) have suggested a set of ten questions which were selected from the work of Hamblin (1984) (see Table 1.3). By asking these questions when managing students' behaviour, a teacher will have a better understanding of classroom behaviour in terms of the context, the interactions between the participants involved, and the situation in which the behaviour problems arise. According to research carried out on teachers who used this approach when managing students' behaviour (Watkins and Wagner, 2000: 100), it is effective in:

- broadening their thinking;
- facilitating discussion with other school members involved;
- enhancing exploration with students;
- improving the system for collecting information on misbehaving students.

Table 1.3 Ten important questions

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the cause for concern? 2. In what situation does the concern arise? 3. In what situations does the concern not occur? 4. What happens before the events of concern? 5. What follows the events of concern? 6. What skills does the person apparently not demonstrate? 7. What view does the person have of the events of concern? 8. What view does the person have of him/herself? 9. What view do others have of the person? 10. Who is most concerned by this behaviour? (Watkins, 1999: 17) |
|---|

Using the ten important questions to explain student behaviour

For a better understanding of how teachers can use the framework of “ten important questions” to explain student behaviour, two cases of classroom incidents are reported below — one from a secondary school and the other from a primary school — and the interaction between the participants is explained by using this framework.

Classroom scenario from a secondary school

This scenario is about a boy named Siu Keung who is in his second year in a secondary school. In the course of a Chinese lesson, the teacher, Mr. Tse, wrote the answers for a test on the blackboard, and everyone copied them as instructed except Siu Keung, who just sat without attempting to copy a single word. Mr. Tse urged him to do as he had been told and Siu Keung immediately showed him a piece of written work and said he had completed it already. However, from the handwriting, Mr. Tse could tell immediately that this was the work of another student, Fei Yin. Mr. Tse got very angry and scolded both of them. Siu Keung then said very impolitely, “Don’t be so harsh!” and Mr. Tse asked him what he meant. At this point, another student, Ah Ping — who had already been punished for being late for class — interrupted and said loudly: “Siu Keung doesn’t intend to make you feel threatened, but just wants to teach you something.” Mr. Tse scolded him as well and sent the three students to the team of discipline teachers.

In this scenario, it can be seen that what made the teacher most concerned kept shifting away from teaching and learning to the management of students’ social behaviour. This can be shown clearly when the case is examined by asking the four participants the ten important questions listed earlier, as shown in Table 1.4 on pp. 14–15.

Table 1.4 The interactions between the teacher and the three students

Diagnosis of the case	The teacher	Siu Keung	Fei Yin	Ah Ping
1. What is the cause for concern?	Feels disrespected and cheated	Refuses to copy answers; takes another student's work and claims it is his own	Works well and shares her work with Siu Keung	Interrupts when the teacher talks to Siu Keung, and makes a loud comment
2. In what situation does the concern arise?	Copying the test answers on the blackboard	Feels bored with copying	Gets involved when her neighbour Siu Keung refuses to work	Intends to support Siu Keung, and uses this occasion to express his discontent with the teacher's actions
3. In what situations does the concern not occur?	When students behave as instructed	When he finds the class interesting	When she is not disturbed by the classmates near her	When the teacher shows him some respect
4. What happens before the events of concern?	Asks students to copy answers	Feels bored with the class and realizes that he is labelled as a difficult student	Completes the copying as instructed	Punished by having to stand for being late for class
5. What follows the events of concern?	Feels angry, and stops teaching	Talked to and scolded directly by the teacher	Scolded by the teacher	Scolded by the teacher
6. What skills does the person apparently not demonstrate?	Keeps her emotion in calamity when managing students' misbehaviour	Deals with authority; gets attention from proper ways	Refuses Siu Keung's in-appropriate request	Supports Siu Keung in positive ways
7. What view does the person have of the events of concern?	Students have failed to behave as instructed	Behaved as other classmates expected, as they expect him to respond to the teacher in a hostile way occasionally.	Did a favour for another classmate in need	Used this as an occasion for expressing his anger
8. What view does the person have of him/herself?	Feels cheated, disrespected, and losing face as the the students are hostile	Feels that he was being picked on, labelled and loses face	Feels strongly that she is innocent	Feels very angry

(continued on p. 15)

(Table 1.4 continued)

9. What view do others have of the person?	Much time was spent on managing the students' behaviour	Admired by certain members of the class and gains a reputation for being tough	Viewed as innocent	Viewed as an opportunist
10. Who is most concerned by this behaviour?	Acts to defend her teaching and leading roles and protect her authority from being undermined			

Classroom scenario from a primary school

Mei Lai is a 10-year-old girl who refuses to engage in learning tasks and is unable to get on well with other students. On many occasions, she has attacked other students verbally in the classroom. Her teacher, Miss Fung, has tried various strategies to change Mei Lai's behaviour, such as putting her in a remedial group, using different assessment tools and involving her mother. However there has been little change in the way Mei Lai behaves.

Miss Fung tried to diagnose Mei Lai's case, and listed the features shown in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5 A diagnosis of the behaviour of Mei Lai

What is the current concern?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mei Lai has difficulty in concentrating on her work. • She likes to attack others verbally and snatch implements from them. • Many classmates are upset when trying to relate to her. • She is a loner. • Teaching is sometimes interrupted by Mei Lai.
Expectation of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many girls feel they suffer from Mei Lai's behaviour, but apparently the boys do not share this view. • Many girls tolerate her, but some have started to complain. • The boys have started to ignore her. • Most members of the class expect her to act in this way.
When does she behave in this way?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When engaged in learning tasks, she takes much more time to complete them as she cannot concentrate on them. • When others are getting on with a task she has difficulty in doing, she snatches things from them. • When she is frustrated by, for example, getting a poor result in a test, she verbally abuses others.

(continued on p. 16)

(Table 1.5 continued)

When does she not behave in this way?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When she finds a learning activity interesting. • When she knows what she is doing. • When her best friend Mui Kuen works with her. • When a teacher works with her, prompting her through the task.
What does she seem to gain?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She seems to gain nothing. Although she grabs things from other she just keeps them for a short time and returns them to the owners when asked. • She wants to be the one in control by verbally attacking others, but all this does is to upset them.
What strategies do you find are helpful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The behaviour of Mei Lai is getting worse. Some teachers have found that she works well in small groups, particularly when a teaching assistant, as her personal tutor, helps her to go through tasks by frequently asking her brainstorming questions. • She concentrates better when she is encouraged frequently by the teacher. • Time out does not help; it just makes her more and more upset. • Things got worse when her mother was informed about what she had done in the classroom.
Is there any other relevant information?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her father works in mainland China. When he arrives home two or three times a week, Mei Lai is already in bed. • Mei Lai does not have any brothers and sisters, and gets excessive affection from her parents. • Her mother seemed hesitant when contacted by the school and may not want to bear the responsibility for Mei Lai's behaviour.

Activity 1.5

Study the above information, and try to think about what could be done in the classroom context to improve Mei Lai's behaviour. Use the ten questions to help you in this task.

Summary

This chapter introduces commonly used terms such as “classroom management”, “classroom behaviour”, “discipline” and “misbehaviour”. It aims to help teachers take a broad view of classroom management, focusing not merely on preventing and eliminating student misbehaviour, but also on its proactive and positive functions in promoting student growth academically, socially and emotionally. The chapter stresses that effective classroom management is an inseparable part of the process of teaching and learning which helps students to develop self-control in a way that allows both teachers and students to feel good about themselves.

Two intellectual frameworks are provided as a theoretical basis for understanding classroom behaviour. First, an interactionist perspective is adopted for explaining the interaction among classroom participants and illustrating the complexity of classroom behaviour — with the idea of a cycle of interaction being introduced as a practical way for behaviour analysis. The second perspective involves looking closely at the classroom situation in which the misbehaviour takes place, and taking situational factors into account when explaining student behaviour. For this purpose, “ten important questions” are introduced to collect more relevant information about the events and broaden views on the participants’ behaviour.

Also, five characteristics of classroom situations are summarized, and the events which take place there are described as being “busy”, public, multidimensional, simultaneous and unpredictable. Finally, teachers are encouraged to manage classroom situations with appropriate managerial strategies for improving whole-class behaviour.

Questions for Discussion

1. State your goal for classroom management and then compare your view with those of others to see to what extent they differ.
2. How could this goal be put into practice? What difficulties do you think you are likely to encounter?
3. Are there any differences in managing higher-form and lower-form classrooms?
4. What differences are there between the causes of classroom misbehaviour in lower and higher forms?
5. Can you think of any student behaviours which would be considered “misbehaviours” in one classroom but not in another? If so, why is this the case?
6. To what extent is students’ classroom behaviour related to their academic ability and achievement? Do you agree that disruptive students tend to be of lower academic ability, and that those of higher ability do not exhibit such problems?

Useful Resources

Websites

1. Classroom Management Site:
http://www.ez2bsaved.com/class_manage.htm
2. Education World:
http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/archives/classmanagement.shtml
3. Kimskorner for Teacher Talk:
<http://www.kimskorner4teachertalk.com/classmanagement/menu.html>

4. Teachnet.com: <http://www.teachnet.com/how-to/manage/>
5. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD): <http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.8835d3e3fbb1b0cdddeb3ffdb62108a0c/>

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Index

Authors

- Albert, L., 106, 194–195
Alley, R. D., 117, 120
American Federation of Teacher, 45, 56
Ames, C., 5
Anderson-Levine, K. M., 106
Arends, R., 187
Argyris, C., 189
Asher, S. R., 131, 134
Ashton, P., 199
Axworthy, D., 149, 153
- Bainer, D., 199
Baker, K., 60
Baloche, L. A., 131, 142–143
Bandura, A., 72, 123
Bennett, B. J., 86
Boesser, C., 121–122
Bond, M. H., 31–35
Bonds, M., 134
Borko, H., 187
Bredenkamp, S., 49
Brookfield, S. D., 190
Brooks, D., 127
Brophy, J., 3, 51, 53–55, 60, 65, 70, 106
Brophy, J. E., 137
Brown, S., 149
Bullough, R. V. Jr., 187
Burman, E., 99
Butler, L., 135
- Campbell, J., 3
Canter, L., 76, 85–86, 88, 97, 105
Canter, M., 76, 85–86, 88, 97, 105
Carkhuff, R. R., 127
Carr, W., 188
Cassel, P., 87, 195
Charles, C. M., 48–50, 66, 98, 111, 116, 170, 196–197
Charles, M. G., 170
Chu, R. L., 35
Clarizio, H. F., 57
Clarke, D., 152
Colton, A., 188
Conger, J. J., 132, 135
Connolly, T., 123–124
Cooper, P., 127, 184
Corrie, L., 5
Cowie, H., 142, 146
Criste, A., 123–124
Cruikshank, D. R., 187, 199
Curwin, R. L., 57
- Docking, J., 57–58, 63
Dolye, W., 12, 65, 106
Dowd, T., 123–124
Dreikurs, R., 78, 85, 87, 100–101, 105, 119, 195
- Education Convergence, 86
Edwards, C. H., 124
Eggen, P., 52

- Elias, M. J., 137, 142
 Elliott, J., 187
 Elton Report, 154
 Epstein, J., 165, 167, 171
 Evans, G., 48
 Evertson, C. M., 65
- Farrington, D. P., 184
 Fields, M. V., 121–122
 Finlay-Jones, R., 149
 Forisha, B. F., 106
 Fullan, M., 154
- Gabrenya, W. K., 32
 Galloway, D., 184
 Gareau, M., 53
 Geiger, K. M., 12
 Gillborn, D., 5
 Ginott, H., 116
 Gitlin, A. D., 187
 Glasser, W., 50, 58, 76, 88
 Glickman, C. D., 86–88, 90, 92, 105
 Goleman, D., 137
 Gonzalo, G., 87
 Good, T., 3, 55
 Good, T. L., 137
 Goodwin, C., 184
 Gordon, T., 48, 60, 74, 87–88, 94–96, 105,
 113–116, 118, 121, 126
 Gower, R., 73, 82
 Graczyk, P. A., 137
 Green, D., 60
 Greenberg, M., 141
 Greenberg, M. T., 137
 Grossman, H., 56
 Grunwald, B., 78, 100–101, 119
 Gunter, P. L., 123
- Hallahan, D.P., 131, 176–177, 179
 Hamblin, D., 12
 Hamilton, P., 149, 153
 Hargreaves, A., 154
 Hargreaves, D. H., 12
 Henson, K. T., 117, 120
- Ho, D. Y. F., 33–34
 Ho, F. C., 194
 Ho, I. T., 31
 Hoffman, N., 73
 Hofstede, G., 31
 Hoover, R. L., 65
 Hopkins, D., 191, 199
 Hsu, F. L. K., 31
 Hu, H. C., 34–35
 Huang, G., 127
 Hue, M. T., 3, 23–24, 28–30, 33, 36–37, 40,
 133, 143
 Hui, L. H., 194, 199
 Huston, A. C., 132, 135
 Hwang, K. K., 31–32, 34–35
 Hymel, S., 134–135
- Ip, K. C., 31–32
 Irvin, J. L., 86
- Jack, S. L., 123
 Jacobson, L., 51
 Jiang, P., 194, 199
 Johns, F. A., 86–88, 100–101, 103, 105
 Johnson, D., 139–140
 Johnson, R., 139–140
 Jones, L.S., 3, 55, 57, 81, 123, 173, 179
 Jones, V., 3
 Jones, V. F., 49, 55, 57, 81, 111, 123, 173, 179
- Kagan, J., 132, 135
 Kauchak, D., 52
 Kauffman, J. M., 131, 176–177, 179
 Kemmis, S., 188, 192
 Kennedy, C., 53
 Kerr, M. M., 72
 Kindsvatter, R., 60, 65
 King, A. Y. C., 31
 Knoff, 138
 Kohn, A., 57, 65, 77, 106
 Kottler, E., 127
 Kottler, J. A., 127
 Kounin, J., 88–89
 Kusche, C., 141

- Larrivee, B., 78, 112, 115, 117, 189
 Lasley, T. J., 66
 LeCompte, M., 81
 Lee, P. W. H., 32
 Leiberman, M., 154
 Lepper, M., 60
 Levin, J., 18, 53–54, 57, 60, 66, 70, 72–74
 Lewin, K., 12, 192
 Lewis, C., 127
 Lewis, R., 85, 91–92, 94, 96, 97–99, 105–106
 Li, W. S., 191
 Liu, S. H., 194, 199
 Lord, E. M., 31
 Lou, W., 194, 199
 Lovegrove, M. N., 99
 Lovell, B., 48

 MacNaughton, R. H., 86–88, 100–101, 103, 105
 Marabinus, N. G., 86–88, 100–101, 103, 105
 Matjasko, J. L., 137
 Maugham, B., 184
 McCaleb, J., 187
 McCaslin, M., 3
 McCord, J., 81
 McEwan, B., 52, 65
 McHale, 163
 McTaggart, R., 192
 Measor, L., 190
 Melloy, K. J., 70
 Mendler, A. N., 57
 Metcalf, K., 199
 Milhollan, F., 106
 Moles, O. C., 82
 Mortimore, P., 184
 Mostert, M. P., 131, 176–177, 179
 Mussen, P. H., 132, 135

 National Tai Dong Normal School, 194
 Nelson, C., 123–124
 Nelson, C. M., 72
 Ng, Y. M., 194, 199
 Nichols, P., 123
 Nixon, J., 5

 Noffke, S., 191
 Nolan, J. F., 18, 53–54, 57, 66, 70, 72, 74

 Olney, H., 149, 153
 Olweus, D., 134
 Ouston, J., 184

 Packard, N., 161
 Parker, J. G., 131
 Peppard, J., 191
 Pepper, F., 78, 100–101, 119
 Pruett, M. K., 137
 Putnam, J. W., 142

 Race, R., 161
 Raffini, J. P., 82
 Redl, F., 70, 82
 Renshaw, P., 134
 Rinne, C., 73, 82
 Ritzer, G., 6
 Rogers, B., 149, 152, 156–157, 163, 199
 Rogers, C., 109, 113, 118–119, 126–127
 Rogers, F. R., 113
 Rohrkemper, M. M., 106
 Rosenholtz, 157
 Rosenshine, B., 50
 Rosenthal, R., 51
 Rudduck, J., 5, 154
 Rutter, M., 184

 Sanders, M., 167
 Saphier, J., 73, 82
 Schaps, E., 127
 Schmuck, P. A., 88
 Schmuck, R. A., 88
 Schon, D. A., 187
 Selman, R. L., 131
 Senter, G. W., 48–49, 111
 Shanken-Kaye, J., 60
 Shores, R. E., 123
 Sikes, P. J., 190
 Simonds, C. J., 127
 Sin, K. F., 194
 Skinner, B. F., 106

Skoyles, P., 200
 Slavin, R. E., 142
 Smith, C., 184
 Solomon, R. H., 32
 Sparke, J., 200
 Sparks-Langer, G., 188
 Stage, S. A., 160
 Steinberg, Z., 123
 Stenhouse, L., 187, 191
 Stevens, R., 50
 Stevenson, C., 183, 186
 Stipek, D. J., 61
 Stoker, S., 134
 Stover, L. E., 34

Tauber, R. T., 85
 Tobias, L., 123–124
 Trent, S. C., 131, 176–177, 179
 Tripp, D., 186, 190
 Tsui, A. B. M., 50
 Turiel, E., 12

Upton, G., 184
 Urquhart, C., 199

Van Manan, J., 188
 Vitto, J. M., 134, 137, 141

Wagner, E., 135
 Wagner, P., 9, 12, 154
 Wallace, P., 142, 146
 Wang, J. J., 194
 Waterhouse, P., 47
 Watkins, C., 9, 12–13, 154
 Watrous, B. G., 31
 Watson, M., 127
 Weber, W. A., 88–90, 105
 Weinstein, C. S., 52
 Weissberg, R. P., 137
 Williams, P. A., 117, 120
 Wilson, R. W., 32–34
 Wineman, D., 70, 82
 Wolfgang, C. H., 86–88, 90, 92, 105
 Woods, P., 190

Woolfolk, A., 127
 Wright, A. F., 31

Yang, K. S., 31, 33
 Yu, A. B., 32
 Yuan, G., 32

Zeichner, K., 187
 Zins, J. E., 137
 Zirpoli, T. J., 70

Subjects

action research, 183–187, 190–192, 194, 196–199
 active listening, 27, 94, 96, 109–110, 113, 121–122, 133, 138, 142, 157, 177–179
 administrator-oriented approach, 87
 advising, 113, 115
 alternatives to punishment, 57
 appropriate responses, 102
 arbitrary consequences, 77–78, 80
 asking questions, 73, 93, 99–101, 103
 assertive teacher, 97–98
 Assertiveness Model, 85, 97, 105
 attention-seeking, 86, 100, 102–105
 authoritarian approach, 58
 authoritarian design, 58, 89–90
 autobiography, 190

barriers to communication, 109–110, 112–113, 126
 behaviour management design, 88
 behaviour modification, 90, 172
 behavioural problems, 63–66, 79–80, 99, 171, 176
 behaviourist theory, 70
 bingo, 144
 body language, 10, 70, 120
 boosting interest, 72
 boss teacher, 58–60
 broken record, 76
 bullying, 56, 101, 131, 134, 179

- calling on students, 72–73
- childhood socialization, 21, 29, 33, 35, 40–41
- classroom atmosphere, 64, 72
- classroom behaviour, 1–2, 4–6, 9–10, 12, 16–17, 21, 28–29, 45, 57, 59, 65, 106, 123, 137, 149–150, 152–155, 157, 161–163, 167, 171–172, 174–176, 180
- classroom environment, 3, 39, 46–47, 52, 58, 97, 165, 186, 189
- classroom experience, 8–9, 150, 155–156, 183
- classroom guidelines, 52
- classroom isolation, 149, 154–156, 162
- classroom management, 1–7, 10, 16–17, 21, 23–24, 28–30, 33, 36, 38, 41, 45–48, 50, 52–53, 58–59, 64–67, 79–80, 85–86, 88–89, 93–94, 105–106, 132, 138, 141, 145, 149, 151–153, 155, 158, 162, 167, 173, 183–188, 191, 194, 196–198
- classroom manager, 21, 45, 58, 185–187
- classroom procedures, 45–47, 52–54, 59
- classroom rules, 10–11, 30, 37, 40, 45–46, 53–56, 58, 75, 100, 152–154, 159, 175
- classroom rules and routines, 45
- classroom scenario, 2, 6, 11, 13, 15, 22, 33, 46, 65, 87, 111, 130, 134, 151, 159, 166, 185, 198
- classroom situations, 1, 9–11, 17, 25, 65, 87, 155, 162, 190
- collectivism, 21, 29, 31–33, 35, 40
- collegial collaboration, 149–150, 153, 155–156, 160, 162
- commonsense models, 85, 87
- communicating classroom rules, 55
- communication, 68, 94–95, 98, 102, 109–116, 118–126, 137–138, 142, 155, 165, 168–170, 173, 176, 178, 180, 192
- complementary roles, 26
- conflict-resolution skills, 129, 137, 139
- conformity, 21, 23, 29, 31–35, 37, 40
- confronting message, 114, 116
- Confucianism, 21–25, 27–30, 35, 37, 40, 41
- congruent communication, 114, 116
- constructing I-messages, 117
- continuum of intervention strategies, 64–65
- continuum of strategies, 64, 67, 80, 90
- cookbook approach, 89–90
- cookbook guide, 68
- corporal punishment, 57, 77, 81
- countertop space, 48–49
- critical incidents, 184–185, 190, 198–199
- criticizing, 112–116
- culture, 3, 7, 21–22, 25, 29, 35, 40, 79, 129–130, 133–134, 142–143, 145, 150–151, 153–156, 162, 167, 169, 177, 180
- Daoism, 23, 25–26, 28, 30, 37–38, 40–41
- direct appeal, 74
- directive statements, 90, 96
- discipline, 1–5, 13, 16, 29, 33–35, 37, 45, 47, 54–57, 59, 65, 67, 71, 73, 85–88, 91–94, 97–101, 105, 110, 138, 145, 149–152, 154, 160–161, 177, 180, 184–186, 188, 192, 194–197
- discipline problem, 2–3, 54–56, 65, 67, 87, 93–94, 154, 161, 185–186, 188, 197
- disrespect, 112
- disruptive behaviour, 49, 54, 69–70, 72–74, 86, 130, 150, 153, 156, 160, 180
- diversity, 28, 51, 167–169, 180
- door-openers, 120
- effective instruction, 50, 52, 58–59, 97
- empathy, 27–28, 30, 37, 39, 109, 112–113, 121, 124, 133–134, 137, 140, 142, 144, 155, 172
- fa*, 24, 25, 30
- face, 10, 14, 21, 29, 34–35, 40, 73, 77, 156
- facets of the physical environment, 48
- floor space, 48
- friendship, 129, 131–132, 137–138, 140, 142–143, 145
- general ambience, 48–49
- good listener, 102, 110, 119–122, 126, 159
- Gordon's principles, 94
- group-oriented approach, 85, 87, 92, 99, 103, 105

- group-orientedness, 32
group process, 88–89
- harmony, 27, 32
- helplessness/inadequacy, 100–105, 115
- hierarchical relationship, 29, 31
- hostile teacher, 98
- humour, 68, 72–73, 124
- I-message, 74, 94, 96, 105, 109–110, 114, 116–118, 126
- inappropriate responses, 102
- individual differences, 26, 28, 133
- in-group members, 132
- inquiry, 183, 186–187, 191, 197–199
- instructional approach, 89
- interactionism, 6–7
- interactive journal, 190
- interrogating, 109, 114–115
- intervention, 56, 59–60, 63–74, 76–81, 90, 102, 133, 135, 192–195, 197–198
- intervention strategies, 63–68, 79–81, 194–195
- interventionists, 85–86
- intimidation, 58, 89–90, 134
- intimidation approach, 89–90
- inviting communication, 109, 111, 114, 116, 125–126
- labelling, 109
- lead teacher, 58–60
- learning in group, 142
- least disruptive strategies, 63
- legalism, 21–25, 28, 30, 40–41
- lesson planning and design, 45
- Lewis's Framework, 85, 91, 94, 97, 99, 105
- li*, 27–28, 31–32
- logical consequence, 54, 56–57, 63–64, 67–68, 72, 75–81, 104
- mianzi*, 34–35
- misbehaviour, 2, 4–5, 14, 16–17, 31–32, 36, 38, 40, 46, 52, 56–57, 63–69, 75, 77–81, 85–86, 91–92, 95, 98, 100–106, 110, 112–113, 116, 133, 150, 153, 159, 162, 167, 177, 180, 184–187, 192, 194–195, 197
- model of control/teacher-oriented approach, 87, 91, 92, 97, 105
- model of influence/student-oriented approach, 87, 91–92, 94–96, 100, 105
- model of management/group-oriented, 85, 87, 91, 92, 99, 103, 105
- motivation, 3–5, 24, 51, 103, 119, 143
- natural consequences, 78, 104
- needs of students, 50
- non-assertive teacher, 98
- non-directive statements, 90, 96
- non-interference, 63, 68
- non-interventionist, 86, 90, 92, 94
- non-verbal communication, 111
- non-verbal coping skills, 71
- non-verbal intervention, 63, 67–68, 70–71, 77, 79–80
- open and democratic approach, 58
- orders, 24, 47, 74, 98, 110, 112–114
- parent-teacher meetings, 177
- partnership, 165–170, 180
- peer influence, 130, 132
- peer mediation, 140
- peer observation, 190
- peer relationships, 129–134, 137–138, 140–141, 143–145
- perfect gentlemen, 28, 30
- permissive approach, 89–90
- personal action plans, 183
- personal management plans, 183–185, 196–198
- personal plan, 63–67, 79–80
- physical environment, 45, 47–49, 59
- physical intervention and isolation, 90
- planned ignoring, 68, 70, 80
- positive phrasing, 75
- power-seeking, 100–105
- praise, 37, 46, 56–60, 104, 114, 119, 178
- praising peers, 72
- preaching, 109, 113–116
- preventive measures, 65
- proactive measures, 67

- problem-solving skills, 129, 137–138, 140, 144, 158–159
 process of action research, 192–193
 proximity control, 70, 80
 punishment, 3, 5, 9, 24–27, 30, 33, 36–37, 40, 45–46, 56–60, 64, 67, 77–81, 89, 92, 94, 114
 questioning, 73, 113, 184, 186–189, 191
 recognition reflex, 103
 referral, 138, 150, 153, 160–162
 reflection, 2, 5, 22, 46, 49, 64, 69, 86, 91, 110, 119, 122, 130, 135–137, 143, 145, 150, 153, 156, 166, 183–185, 187–193, 197–199
 reflective journal, 189–190
 reflective practitioners, 183–184, 186–187, 197, 198
 reflective teaching, 187, 198
 reflexive loops, 189, 198
 reinforcement, 25, 70, 89–90, 139, 178
 reliable alliances, 156–157
ren, 27–28, 30–32
ren-yi-li systems, 32
 reprimands, 64
 revenge, 9, 100–105
 reward, 24–26, 30, 36–37, 45–46, 49, 57, 89, 92, 94, 99
 roadblocks to communication, 110, 113, 115
 Rogerian theories, 94
 routines, 10–11, 45, 52–54, 56, 59, 69, 75, 185, 189, 196, 198
 school action plans, 183–184, 191, 194–195, 197–198
 seating arrangement, 45, 48–50, 59
 self-awareness, 137, 197–198
 self-discipline, 4, 65, 77, 93, 98, 104, 119
 self-esteem, 3, 5, 39, 57, 114–116, 123, 195
 self-instructional approach, 141
 self-reflection, 187, 189, 197–198
 shelf, 48–49
shi, 24–25, 30
shu, 24–25, 30
 signal interference, 70, 80
 social abilities, 133
 social behaviour, 13, 22, 27–29, 31–32, 34, 40, 160
 Social Discipline Model, 85, 87, 100, 105
 social selves, 32, 141
 social-emotional skills, 129, 135, 137–138, 144–145
 socially isolated, 135, 144
 socio-emotional approach, 88
 stereotyping, 114–115
 student learning journal, 190
 student-centred teaching approach, 58
 student-oriented approach, 85, 87, 91–92, 94–96, 100, 105
 student-owned problems, 95
 Taijitu, 38
 teacher authority, 58, 59
 Teacher Behaviour Continuum, 90, 105
 Teacher Effectiveness Training, 85, 87, 94, 105, 114
 teacher inquiry, 183
 teacher takes charge, 86
 teacher-oriented approach, 85, 87, 91–92, 97, 99, 105
 teacher-owned problems, 96
 teacher-parent collaboration, 165, 167, 170–171, 180
 teacher-pupil relationship, 73, 79, 109–110, 118, 122–127, 198
 teachers' attitudes, 123–124
 teaching log, 190
 technical reflection, 183, 188, 198
 techniques for listening, 120
 ten important questions, 1–2, 13, 17, 135–136
The Stop and Think Social Skills, 138
 theoretically-based models, 85, 87, 88, 105
 tolerating, 11, 56, 67–69
 touch interference, 68, 70–71, 80
 verbal exchange, 111
 verbal interference, 68
 verbal intervention, 63–64, 67–74, 76–77, 80

210 *Index*

wall, 48–49

warning, 7, 8, 11, 110, 113–115

Weber's classification, 88–90, 105

Whole-School Policy, 149, 151–153, 161

wu lun, 31–32

wu wei, 26–27

yang, 21, 24–26, 36–41

yi, 27–28, 31–32

yin, 21, 24–26, 36–41

yin-yang symbol, 38

You-language, 112