

Preface

Classroom learning environments are constantly changing—with each new group of students, with the addition of one or two new students, with the rhythm of the school year, and with changes in curriculum. Often, our goal is to anticipate these changes by trying to organize our classrooms to avoid disruption, establishing rules and procedures, and consistently following through. As teachers, we often think that if we are in control, then we will maximize student on-task behavior and their learning, right?

But what if our primary focus was on managing *relationships* rather than on managing individual students? What does it mean to manage classroom relationships for learning? For us, the answer is complex. It involves not only recognizing the variety of needs and goals each student brings to our classroom, but also developing authentic relationships with our students that are built around the desire to learn and grow together.

With so many individual differences and so much content to cover, it may feel like an impossible task to create a classroom culture where everyone has “bought in” to the learning objectives and each member shares in the responsibility to meet those objectives. However, many teachers achieve this culture in some of the most difficult teaching situations. It requires a willingness to reconsider why our current approaches to classroom management may not bring about the outcomes we want or are not working well for students. And it requires a willingness to consider what we might be missing or misunderstanding when we attempt to manage students without first understanding and managing relationships.

Managing relationships to enhance student learning requires us to adopt a developmental perspective on children and adolescents' interactions and behaviors, to consider not only the kinds of behaviors we'd like to see them exhibit *now* but also in the future. And managing relationships can require us to move out of our cultural comfort zones and recognize that other families, classrooms, and communities interact in ways that feel foreign to us.

Our purpose in writing this book is to share with teachers what it means to manage classroom relationships for learning and how to think about each dimension of our instruction in a way that optimizes three interconnected types of student engagement: relational, cognitive, and behavioral. In this book, we describe an integrative, relational approach to understanding *classroom management*. We draw from the work of educational psychologists who largely argue that disruptive student behavior, inattention, and lower performance occur when students are not actively engaged by the curriculum. We draw from the work of social developmental psychologists to examine how children think about their relationships in qualitatively different ways and how relational conflict (among students and with teachers) occurs as children learn to navigate increasingly multifaceted and complex relationships. And we draw from the work of sociocultural researchers who remind us that our identity as part of a "clan" affects the way we interact with each other and the curriculum, providing us frames of reference for interpreting events and skillsets for interacting with each other.

Heather

My interest in this book project grew out of my research in studying students' and teachers' understandings of their relationships with each other, and, in particular, a three-year collaboration with a district that was so committed to developing optimal relationships for all of the students in their district that they embarked on a wide-scale reform of their high schools. In interviews with teachers, I listened as teachers described with joy the successes they perceived in their abilities to connect with students, and then, with sorrow, the children they felt

remained estranged despite their best efforts. I listened as students described teachers who were “really nice but I didn’t learn much from them,” classrooms where the culture prohibited being them from being “real,” and schools where they knew every teacher cared about them. I learned that most teachers developed their relationship and management skills on the job and that those who were successful at connecting with kids credited it to their mentors: their own exemplary teachers, administrators, and colleagues. I learned that this makes for patchy knowledge—with only some teachers lucky enough to experience this kind of support. Today, as a teacher educator, I try to integrate knowledge and skills about relationships and management into my own courses in learning theory and child development. But I have also learned over the past 10 years that as we pack our teacher education curriculums with courses in academic content, courses in classroom management become optional. I wanted us to create a book that would bridge theory on teacher and peer relationships with actual tools that could be used to improve classroom climate and relationship quality.

Jessica

My interest in this book was inspired by Heather’s strong commitment to the development of teacher-student relationships and my own interest in students’ motivation and social interactions in the classroom. Specifically, most of my research has focused on students’ motivation in collaborative/cooperative learning groups, asking such questions as, “Do students in groups influence each other’s motivation for learning?”, “Do feelings of classroom community affect their motivation to learn?”, and “Do different types of group learning reduce student incivility in the classroom?” Although most of my findings are mixed, one consistency has been that teachers need to use interactive learning in very strategic ways if they are going to motivate their students to listen and learn, particularly as they try to build positive relationships in their classrooms.

Lauren

My interest in this project stemmed directly from my experiences as an elementary school teacher. While the importance of classroom management was emphasized throughout my traditional teacher preparation program, deliberate instruction in management theory and methodology was absent from my training until I began my student teaching program. And even then, most of my peers and I learned management

techniques from our mentor teachers, which meant we were exposed to only *one* approach by *one* individual. In my own experience, the first few years of my teaching career started when I developed a management style, and even then it was mostly through a system of trial and error. It was my hope that we could create a text that could be used by teachers at all experience levels, from teacher education students in their earliest field experiences to seasoned educators searching for an alternative approach to management. I hope that this text prompts educators to reflect on the relationships they cultivate in their classrooms and to think in new ways about management.

This book was written in order to share our ideas about what it means to take a *relational* perspective on classroom management. It presents our unique perspectives and approaches to designing classrooms that consider, holistically, the social-developmental needs of children and adolescents, and creating teacher and peer relationships that provide optimal environments for motivation and learning. Although we recognize that creating optimal classrooms for learning is far easier when teachers have the support of their colleagues and administrators, we focus on identifying strategies that can empower teachers to transform their classrooms even without this support.

This work stands on the shoulders of many other researchers across the fields of classroom management, motivation theory, social and emotional development, culturally relevant pedagogy, and teachers and mentors we have worked with throughout our careers. At the end of each chapter, we highlight accessible readings, websites, and reviews of literature that can support future inquiry. Scholar James Wertsch (1991) described how the people we interact with can become the “voices in our mind,” guiding individual thoughts and behaviors. In this way, our thinking was shaped by assumptions or prominent voices cited at the end of this text:

1. Children and adolescents will *thrive* academically in classrooms where they feel connected to their teacher

and their peers (Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985; Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

2. All classroom relationships are reciprocal, but teachers are leaders in their classrooms and possess the authority and power to shape the climate and quality of their relationships *with* and *among* their students (Hartup, 1989).
3. Opportunities for learning and development occur when teachers and students reflect openly on the quality of their relationships as well as on the culture and climate of the classroom. We invite you to adapt and photocopy any of the exercises in this text to use with your students.

This book also was designed to provide a gap in texts and professional development materials in teacher education in several ways:

1. By making explicit theoretical connections between the research and practice. We explicitly connect research on teachers' beliefs, student motivation, and the psychology of emotions and relationships with findings about the teachers' decision making on managing students' academic behavior and interacting in their classrooms.
2. By examining these theory-research-practice connections from our perspectives as classroom teachers, as researchers who listen to children and adolescents talk about their relationships and who study relationship dynamics, and as university-based teacher educators who empathize with the dearth of coursework and support available in many teacher preparation curriculums.
3. By offering tools for reflection, observation, and data collection (from students), we provide pathways for teachers to translate the ideas in this book into realities in their classrooms. We believe these activities can be

revisited each summer as you plan to greet a new class and also throughout the year as you identify dimensions of the climate or specific relationships that you desire to improve. We designed this book to be more than simply a discussion of how to improve classroom relationships. Instead, we view this text as an interactive workbook, designed to help you think through (sometimes inconspicuous) elements of instructional design.

We have structured the book in three parts. In Part I, *Management as a Function of Student Engagement*, we offer the perspective of educational psychologists on classroom management. Specifically, we define what it means for students to be engaged in the learning process, we offer an overview of basic tenets of motivation theory, and we outline the ways in which classroom structures contribute to student engagement. From an educational psychologist's perspective, classroom disruptions and relational conflict can be largely viewed as a function of poor student engagement. We offer tools and strategies for teachers to use in reflecting on their current beliefs and pedagogy and assessing how their students' view their classroom and school.

In Part II, *Management as a Function of Classroom Relationships*, we draw from the social-developmental literature on teacher-student and peer relationships to understand the nature of relational engagement. From this perspective, classroom disruptions and relational conflicts may be a function of problems with teacher or peer relationships. We devote much of this section to helping teachers reflect on their beliefs about teacher and peer relationships, their role in helping students develop into autonomous learners, and their ability to be in sync with diverse learners. We offer tools and strategies for modeling and caring about each other, learning in our relationships with students, and helping students learn to connect in meaningful ways with each other.

In Part III, *Management as a Function of Teacher Self-Regulation*, we attempt to empower teachers in their capacity to anticipate issues with student engagement. We review the tenets of self-regulation theory and apply these tenets—planning, instruction, interaction, assessment, and documentation—to teachers’ classroom practices. From this perspective, classroom disruptions and relational conflict may be viewed as a function of breakdowns in the self-regulatory cycle. We offer strategies for systematically reflecting on dimensions of the classroom, our interactions with students, and for caring for ourselves so that we may sustain relationships with our students.