Organization, as well as personal and interpersonal management, is an integral part of societal structure. Guidelines and regulations form the structural supports for effective productivity in the workplace and in the classroom. While good management is largely structural, it also requires careful coordination and planned policies and procedures as well. If any part of the structure, coordination, or procedure fails to be established, chaos and disorder will ensue. A grocery store manager who does not delegate work properly to his employees may not have the shelves stocked for the next day. For a music teacher, classroom management is achieved through establishing policies, a teacher’s attitude, and strategies and methods used by the teacher.

Before a teacher can effectively manage her classroom she must create policies and procedures that outline her expectations. These policies must be established at the beginning of the school year so that the students know what to expect from the teacher and their own behavior. The teacher can put these expectation in the syllabus, on the course website, or on the board for the students to refer to every day. One middle school band director gave a clinic at IMEA 2015 in which he discussed how he and his students came up with their own rules and goals for the year. The benefit of collaborating with your students is that they tend to hold themselves more accountable and have a better idea of how to work in a group and consider the time and efforts of their classmates. If one of the goals is less talking during rehearsals, the teacher can just point at the goal on the board and remind the students that it was their decision.

After the policies have been established, the teacher needs to have a daily routine for the students to get accustomed to. My first placement was with an 8th grade band and a 7th grade brass and percussion ensemble. At the beginning of each rehearsal the students were expected to be in their seats, instruments assembled and functioning, with all of their music, pencils, and materials. The students were allowed to warm-up or practice their music until class started, but as soon as he walked up to the podium, the students knew it was time to begin. My cooperating teacher would begin each rehearsal with a warm-up, an activity that taught a new concept or reinforced a previous one, and then would move on to the concert material or sight-reading. Periodically, my CT would call for a “pencil check” and the students would raise their pencils in the air. If a student did not have his instrument functioning, music on his stand, or pencil in hand the teacher would give them a warning. However, if the student repeatedly forgot their materials or was unprepared, the teacher would ask to talk to them in his office after class. While this routine helped the students know what to expect from the teacher, there are other procedures that are needed to ensure effective classroom management.

An established daily routine and consistency in procedures helps the students know what to expect from the teacher, but if a student breaks one of the guidelines there must be a consequence in place. Rather than thinking of the consequences as punishments, they should serve as reminders of what is to be expected. For example, a strike or check system can be used quickly during class without disrupting rehearsal. For example, if a student is chewing gum during rehearsal, the teacher can give her one check as a warning and ask her to remove the gum. Later in the rehearsal, this student is talking to her neighbor and disrupting rehearsal, so the teacher gives her two checks and asks to talk to her after class. Typically, this would be enough to make a student correct her behavior, but if she were to continue the teacher could give her a third check, resulting in a phone call to her parents and a trip to the administrator’s office.

Although my cooperating teacher did not have a check system in place, he was an excellent example of classroom management through his demeanor and his teaching strategies. During my Task 2 teaching episode, some of the percussionists were being disruptive and were not attentive during an exercise. My CT just stood up, gave them the “teacher stare” – a stern, non-verbal cue – and simply told them to stop in a commanding, but not loud, voice. Given his tall and broad stature, he is a fairly intimidating man to a room full of seventh graders. However, he does not raise his voice very often, and he is typically light-hearted and has a good sense of humor with his students. Because he does not use the look or raise his voice very often, the kids know that there will be consequences if they keep up their behavior. Furthermore, to prevent young adolescents from talking or acting out during class a teacher should build in moments for the students to socialize. If the students are going to take time from the lesson to do it anyway, it is better for the teacher to build in a controlled social environment. This could be done by achieved by allowing five minutes for the students ask their neighbor a question about the music, or for them to teach a new fingering to the person next to them. The teacher should also establish a signal or non-verbal cue beforehand that tells the students that it is time to get back to work.

Flipped classrooms can also be helpful in preventing classroom disruptions. During one of my teachings I handed out worksheets during the lesson. Because it took so long to get the worksheets out to every student and fill them out, the students had lost focus when we tried to put the concepts in the worksheet into practice on our instruments. By recording a video of the lecture beforehand and sending it to the students, or handing out the worksheet the day before the lesson, a teacher can keep his students’ focus during the actual lesson and dive into actual applications of the content. Handing out graded homework after class or posting it on a bulletin board after class can also prevent chaotic shuffling during class time. For my Task 2 teaching I knew to hand out the worksheet before class so that the students already had them, and for any students that arrived late I put extra copies on a stand by the doorway and told them to pick it up. This made our transition into the worksheet activity much smoother and much easier to manage.

Finally, thoughtfully planned teaching strategies can make or break a teacher’s ability to maintain order in the classroom. Two of the most important teaching strategies at an educator’s disposal are proximity and pacing. Many young teachers (like myself) are afraid to move around the classroom for a variety of reasons. For some, they are more comfortable being at the podium with their score and lesson plan as a safety net. For others, they may be afraid to move around the room because they may not be able to see every student as easily. However, I noticed that my cooperating teacher spent almost two thirds of class time moving around the room and only a third at the podium rehearsing music. Simply moving towards a disruptive or unfocused student is enough to correct their behavior. Proximity also helps the teacher assess individual students or sections more accurately than standing at the front of the room. Pacing is equally as important, if not more important, for young adolescents. If the pacing is too fast or there is too much content or connections are not clearly made, the students will easily get lost and give up. On the other hand, if the pacing is too slow the students will get bored and it will be much harder to regain their attention. By building in little successes along the way and scaffolding within the zone of proximal development, a teacher can promote healthier, more enjoyable learning.

I believe classroom management is most related to the new INTASC standard 3, Learning Environments:

The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

Good classroom management embodies this standard because in order to promote a healthy learning environment, a teacher must first be able to establish a foundation of guidelines, goals, and principles for the students to aspire towards. Collaborating with students about what rules they want to set in place and what they want to learn will make the learning experience that much more meaningful for the students, and in turn they will be more respectful towards the teacher and each other. Classroom management also ties in a little with standard 8, Instructional Strategies:

The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.

In order to keep the students attentive and focused, a teacher must have good teaching strategies. Pacing and proximity, consistency in demeanor and consequences, and clarity in instruction all play an integral part in the ability for students to understand and retain knowledge in a meaningful way.

My experiences at Ball State have provided me with numerous opportunities to work hands-on with students and develop my skills in classroom management. I have learned that classroom management is about much more than mere authority; rather, it is about respect between the teacher and his students, consistency and following through with the policies set in place, and thoughtful execution of teaching strategies. In the future, collaborating with my colleagues as well as my students can help me further develop my skills. I believe that classroom management skills will become more natural as I get to know my own students as well as my own tendencies as a teacher.