

# Classroom Management, Scheduling, and Community Involvement

## Overview, Chapters 1–4

1. **Elizabeth Grelle Kruse**, a kindergarten teacher in Chicago, shows us how she builds a productive learning environment in her kindergarten classroom. Elizabeth's invaluable tips explain how to set rules, form bonds with the students, and create an equitable classroom atmosphere.

2. **Tony Nichols**, a kindergarten teacher in Richwood, West Virginia, explains how a circus-themed classroom can be the solution to classroom management woes. Easily adaptable to any theme, Tony's ideas can be used to guide students through daily routines, enhance their academic skills, and encourage good behavior.

3. **Ginger Mendenhall**, an elementary school instructor in Oklahoma, suggests a cheap and effective way to transition between activities in classrooms where transition times can take over instruction time. Use a dancing bear or a singing bunny to get students focused, on task, and ready to learn.

4. **KJ Bailey**, a second-grade teacher from Punta Gorda, Florida, involves students with their communities by asking them what they want to be when they grow up. Based on student answers, KJ invites community and family members into the classroom to share fun facts about their profession.

## 1. Building the Atmosphere

*Elizabeth Grelle Kruse*  
Chicago, Illinois

**Recommended Level:** Grades K–3

**Overall Objective:** Start the school year right in your classroom. Through forming personal connections, observing students closely, and setting rules and enforcing them consistently, you can build an atmosphere conducive to learning.

The question of how an early-childhood or elementary teacher begins to manage a classroom can often go way beyond textbooks and college classes. Courses are often designed to teach the fundamentals and the educational backgrounds in order to prepare future teachers for teaching. Teachers are prepared with all the latest reading, writing, math, or science curriculum, but they are given little preparation for building the atmosphere for an effective learning environment. Teachers must be able to create a classroom community built out of respect, where students are safe both physically and emotionally. When it comes to learning how to manage different behaviors inside the classroom, you can't easily find the answers in your college child-development book. This is unfortunate because teachers need to learn how to make the classroom a community before actual teaching can begin. I will discuss what I believe to be the major factors in creating a well-managed classroom community in the early childhood years. I will address these factors separately, but they all complement each other. These factors include forming bonds, making observations, setting up guidelines, and being consistent.

## Form Bonds

I believe there must be a bond created between the teacher and each of his or her students before “real” teaching can occur. I learned this early on as I observed my mother, a teacher, when she interacted with children, as well as my fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. All of these teachers created a nurturing learning environment.

In college, I was fortunate to student teach with another great teacher who practiced the belief I hold to be true: You must establish a personal connection with your students. Each day, she would talk to her students about her dog. She told them his name, Bobo, and started each day with personal stories about her dog mostly, but also about her husband or her own children. I watched as her students became more and more fascinated with the stories their teacher told. Even more important than the stories was the transformation of the children. They were spellbound by their teacher and gave her their complete attention. In return, the children wanted to be there, wanted to learn, and their behavior displayed that.

I begin each year by giving a part of myself to my students. I form connections with them by sharing simple events from my own life. I might talk to them about what I made for dinner last night before we begin our morning meeting. I might bring up something from the morning news or how my cat, Toonsie, woke me up by licking my nose. While I am sharing my stories, I am also watching to see who is smiling, who shakes his head, and what topics are of interest to whom. I then collect these observations, so I can learn more about each of my students.

The idea of sharing yourself with your students is simple, but I have found it to be very important. Often, children entering kindergarten are a little scared and not sure what their role is in the classroom. I can see my students opening up and becoming more comfortable with me and with our class from day one. My students then share their stories with me, form common interests with other children, and quickly begin making friendships. As a result, a sense of belonging and trust has been built on all levels in our classroom.

## Observe

Children genuinely want to learn, they want to be in a safe place, and they tend to want to be where the other children are. In the early

childhood years, before you begin teaching any subject, it is imperative to build the foundation of your classroom. So how do you do that? You must first start each year by doing a lot of observing. Don't be so quick to jump right into assessing students' prereading, writing, and math skills. Don't rush into teaching this semester's goals or worry about how the children need to recite the Pledge of Allegiance by next week. Wait about two weeks before you start teaching the first theme of the year. This is the time, the crucial time, for you to set the foundation of your classroom. It must be a priority! If you don't establish good classroom management early on, you are less likely to establish a classroom of well-behaved and engaged learners as the year continues.

Let the children explore the classroom. Your job now is to watch to see how developed your students are socially. Watch, with minimal interaction, to see how they respond to other children, how they share their toys, how they clean up, and so on. Take note of which children need help solving minor peer conflicts and which children seem to show an interest in playing with dolls. Spend a little time talking with each child individually to learn about him or her first as a unique child. This will enable you to be more effective when the time comes for instruction.

### Set Rules

After you have observed for a while, it is time to use your observations to set the rules and expectations in your classroom. Get your students involved in the process of creating what can and cannot happen in your classroom. Give them the responsibility for what happens in the classroom, and involve them in the understanding of why rules are important. For example, if you observe students arguing over the blocks, use it as a problem-solving opportunity. "I noticed some children were taking blocks from other children's towers to use them for their own. What do you think we should do about that?" In my class, we made several rules from this one example. These included (1) only four children can be in the block area at a time, so there will be enough space and blocks for the children to build; (2) the children agreed that you cannot take blocks off other towers; and (3) if more blocks are needed, they have to talk to each other to work out a solution.

Making rules together gives my students power and ownership in the classroom. I could have put a sign in the block area with a number 4 on it and told the kids that only four children are allowed in there at a time. Instead, the children took ownership for the rule. As a result, a minicommunity was created.

### Enforce Rules Consistently

Once your class has established classroom rules, they must be consistently enforced. If you decide that the children need to raise their hand to share comments and answers, you have to avoid responding to the child that yells out—the first time and the fiftieth time. If you call on students with their hands up mostly but still acknowledge the ones who don't, the rule is not going to work because you are not consistent. It will be challenging not to respond to the child that calls out. Ignore that child, and respond to those who are raising their hand by saying something like, "Oh, Jessica, I'm going to call on you because you are raising your hand." This will take time, but eventually, the children will understand what is expected of them and feel comfortable knowing this will always be the rule.

### Communicate in Multiple Ways

I have found that my students don't want to listen to my voice every time I want to tell them something. Because of this, I teach my students what to do by using different techniques. For example, if I want to talk to my group in the middle of a center time and everyone is busy working, I simply turn off the lights. The children know to freeze when that happens. I could also clap my hands in a pattern. The children know to stop what they are doing and repeat my pattern. Try whispering to your students during group time when the children are getting a little noisy. You'll be surprised how quickly they will stop to hear what you are saying. Walk down the hallway with the kids blowing up their cheeks. They love it, but it also reminds them to quiet their voices when they are in the hall.

Each year, I incorporate sign language into my classroom. My students love to use it, and it provides me with a tool to communicate without distracting the children's learning while managing the class. For example, when I am teaching a lesson or reading a story to my class, a student needing to use the restroom does not need to interrupt

to ask for permission. The student makes the “restroom” sign; I nod my head; the student leaves; and class continues without disruption. My students use sign language in other situations as well. A child might remind another child to sit down during a story by making the “sit” sign. Students often congratulate each other with a sign (good work, perfect, wow, etc.). I have found sign to be a wonderful instructional and innovative teaching tool while also providing the children with the foundation of a new language.

### **Helpful Tips**

Just as each child has his or her own personality, each group of children will also have a unique personality. From class to class, the blending of personalities will make for a distinctive community of learners. If you take the time to form bonds with students, observe the chemistry and interactions within your classroom, set classroom guidelines accordingly as you confer with your students, and maintain consistency, you will be well on the road to a productive and enjoyable school year.

## 2. Creating a Thematic Classroom Environment

*Tony Nichols*  
Richwood, West Virginia

**Recommended Level:** Grades K–3+

**Overall Objective:** Create a unique learning community for students, structured around a theme, and use the theme to establish classroom routines, opportunities for skill practice, and guidelines for behavior management.

### **Materials Needed:**

- Large circus pictures or paper cutouts of ringmaster, lion tamer, elephants, lions, dancing bears, clown faces, popcorn kernels, admission tickets, stars

- Construction paper circles
- Bungee cord
- cut with an Ellison cutter
- Circus cloth material
- Popcorn containers
- Clothespins
- Graphing ring
- Circus animal foams
- Pocket chart

Each year, I create a unique classroom environment integrating a yearly theme to assist students with learning classroom routines, academic skills, and appropriate behavior. Even after they have graduated from my class, students will remember the things they did and the organization of the classroom. Recently, a student who is now a parent reminded me of the “Wheel of Fortune” spinner I used for behavior management in a third-grade classroom over 15 years ago. That spinner is still stored in my garage. Maybe it is time to pull it out again.

This year, I constructed a kindergarten classroom to resemble a circus. Next week, we’ll take our culminating field trip to the city for the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The following is the procedure I used to make the year a memorable one for these five- and six-year-olds.

### Routines

Each morning, students entered the room with several “circus acts” to perform. First, they purchased a circus ticket to enter the classroom. The cost of the entry ticket varied throughout the year so students would quickly learn to identify coins. Students chose or counted the play money needed and placed it in the cash register where they received their entrance ticket. Tickets were then placed in a pocket chart to display morning attendance. Next, students graphed whether they were eating hot or cold lunch by placing paper popcorn kernel cutouts in popcorn containers labeled HOT or COLD. (I bought mine at the dollar bin at Target.) The containers were easy for students to count and tally the lunch count. I displayed the classroom helpers for the day in an area labeled Circus Stars. I used five large florescent paper stars and labeled each with the following jobs: line leader, morning message helper, calendar helper, clean up monitor, and lunch with teacher. Each student made a circus animal from a Foamies kit purchased from Michaels, an arts and crafts

store. I labeled each animal with the students' names. The animals were hung alphabetically by the students' first names and pinned to each of the stars to announce the helpers for the day (I used clothespins to attach them). I rotated them each day. Students quickly learned the system and would not allow me to ever make a mistake or forget to change them.

### Academic Skills

I purchased a bungee cord from a local teacher store and used it as a tightrope across the classroom. Even though it came in handy for hanging student work and wet art projects, I used mine to post letters and sounds. I posted the letter and picture cards from the reading basal to help students learn beginning sounds of words. The pictures were readily available and labeled to help students with sound sorts and writing activities.

Daily, students used an area on the wall where a lion tamer was posted. Students counted the number of animals the trainer had in a ring (I used a graphing ring hooked to the chalkboard with magnets). Students wrote the number on the chalkboard, practicing counting and number writing. After the semester, I used the lion tamer to count a set of ten and ones for teen-number practice. Students learned the months of the year and sets of numbers using an elephant parade set I purchased from a teacher store. Students built a yearly number line using plastic, multicolored, triangular festival flags I purchased from a party store. I hung them from the ceiling, and each day at calendar time, we posted the number of the day on each flag using an index card. Multiples of 5 and 10 were in blue, while the others were on yellow index cards. We practiced counting the flags daily.

I made dancing bears dressed in different costumes and labeled them with all the color words students needed to learn. I made mine from an old coloring book pattern.

I used a balloon poster to post students' birthdays. Children received helium balloons on special days, such as birthdays, and rewards for good work. Some were donated from the local florist.

I used circus material purchased at Wal-Mart for window treatments, calendars, and bulletin boards. I purchased a large clown from a teacher store to greet students outside the classroom door and one to record



students' height and weight throughout the year. I hung a child-sized parachute in the book corner to represent a big top.

### Behavior

We followed the motto, "Have a Circus Day!" I made clown faces for each child in the classroom and then laminated each one. I assigned one to each student by labeling the clowns with students' names. I did not include a mouth on the clowns but used a dry-erase marker to draw them. All students' clowns began the day with a smiling face. If a child misbehaved, their clown face was erased and changed to a straight face, indicating a warning. If the face was changed again to a frown face, students received corrective feedback to improve behavior. Students whose clown was still smiling at the end of the day received a construction paper smile made with an Ellison cutter, and my aide or parent volunteer drew the face on. We labeled the smiles with the following student information throughout the year to help students learn basic information about themselves: students' first, last, and middle names, addresses, phone numbers, birthdays, and lunch numbers.

To teach teamwork, well-behaved students with smiling clowns also received a marble to fill a popcorn container to earn the whole classroom a treat, such as popcorn or ice cream. Students with good behavior also placed their morning circus ticket in a container to be drawn for a door prize each day. Parents provided door prizes such as yo-yos for the letter *Y* or pencils for the letter *P*. I used this for an academic show and tell, as all the door prizes began with the letter sound we were currently studying.

### **Helpful Tips**

The more commercial materials you can find at a teacher store, the less work you will need to complete yourself. After the year, package all the materials together so you can reuse it for another year. I like to rotate themes about every four to five years. I rarely do the same one year after year, keeping myself motivated and interested year to year. I try to think of themes the students will like and remember and could be adapted to other grades, should I

transfer. Ideas can be used to increase skill level, such as a multiplication tightrope or a lion tamer demonstrating division facts for each day. The behavior management would work for several grade levels before becoming juvenile.

### 3. Transition Time

*Ginger Mendenhall*  
Ponca City, Oklahoma

**Recommended Level:** Grades K–4

**Overall Objective:** Use nonverbal signals to streamline transition time and make it fun for students. This technique will increase classroom time for academic learning.

**Materials Needed:** Singing animal (many varieties are sold online or in stores during holiday seasons)

Turn those stressful transition times in your day into a fun experience for the students. Have you seen those singing hamsters, singing bunnies at Easter, dancing and singing gorillas on Valentine’s Day? Get them! They make the best transition timer you can find. Students love the singing and dancing of the animal or character, and the teacher loves the shortened transition time.

Choose a different singing animal or character for each type of transition. This enables students to recognize the song and know what is expected without you saying a word. Times for use could include lining up, changing to a different subject, getting out supplies, moving to a learning area, and on and on.

Transition time does not have to cause a problem or take up your valuable learning time. Place the singing animal or character where the students can see it and squeeze it, and watch them dance as they follow the prescribed procedure. Reducing the difficulty of transition time will create more instructional time in your day. Students will also enjoy the fun and often dance as they line up or put things away.

### **Helpful Tips**

Because you make several transitions during the day, get a different animal or character to match the designated procedure. An example would be the dog that sings “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” to line up to go home for the day. Another example would be the bunny that sings “Yummy, Yummy, Yummy, I Got Love in My Tummy” to go to lunch. This helps students associate the song with the desired action or behavior.

Have fun! Get creative! The students will love it!

## 4. People at Work

*KJ Bailey*

Punta Gorda, Florida

**Recommended Level:** Grades 1–4

**Overall Objective:** Involve family members and people from the community in your students’ classroom learning, using this unit on different professions.

**Standards Met (Florida):**

English Language Arts: Selects materials to read for pleasure; Reads for information to use in performing a task and learning a new task; Uses simple materials of the reference system to obtain information

**Materials Needed:**

- Paper, pencils, crayons
- Books and encyclopedias
- Parent letter
- Computers
- Parent and community volunteers

In my second-grade class, we begin by discussing the jobs of the world and their duties. As jobs are being named I write them on the board along with two or three of their associated duties. Now that I have their little minds rolling, I ask them about what they want to be when they grow up. Once this is accomplished, we begin a rough draft of a short writing piece on their job of choice. The drafts are collected, checked, and returned within a day. When the students have revised the piece and are ready with a final draft, they receive a small dye-cut of a person. These dye-cut people represent themselves, and they are able to dress their person to match their profession. I have all of my students present their final copies to the class and answer any questions that their classmates might have for them.

Once the papers are turned in, I send a letter home to the families and out to the community for “Community Reader” volunteers. I always try to find people with jobs that my students have chosen to come in for this. All of the readers are asked to either bring in their favorite book or choose one from our classroom library. They are also asked to talk about their particular job, things that they might do on a daily basis, and why it is important to continue reading. I have had many people come to my class to participate in this fun-filled unit. I have had a firefighter who let the students try on his gear, a newscaster with his camera operator who let them do a mock news program, a K9 deputy and his dogs who put on a show, and a scrub tech from a local hospital, to name a few. Once the readers are finished reading and discussing what it is that they do, there are always questions, lots of questions. After all, these students are seven- and eight-year-olds! But I think this unit could be accomplished with first graders and adapted to remain interesting for third and fourth graders.

After the readers have left our room, we begin to make our foldables (the students usually make them big enough to have six to eight readers on each foldable). These foldables consist of the reader’s name, profession, duties they talked about, and two reasons they gave to the class to keep reading. To show our appreciation to each reader for taking the time to come in and share with us, we always make and send thank-you letters.

**Helpful Tips**

- Have a variety of job books for the students to look at and read prior to the unit.
- When introducing this unit, take note of what the students want to be. As much as possible, try to get people with these jobs to be your readers.
- Send parent letters home early, and remind them of this fun unit often.
- Make sure you not only get families involved but the community as well.
- Keep a calendar of all the scheduled readers and their times.
- Always call in advance to confirm your reader is coming.
- Always remember to have fun, and keep reading!