



INNOVATIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT APPROACHES FOR SOCIAL STUDIES: BUILDING A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: This paper explores innovative classroom management strategies in social studies education aimed at fostering a positive learning environment and improving student engagement. Key approaches discussed include collaborative learning, technology-driven tools, culturally responsive teaching, and project-based learning. These strategies not only promote active student participation but also address the challenges of managing diverse classrooms and sensitive social studies topics. By integrating these methods, teachers can enhance student behavior, engagement, and academic achievement, creating a classroom culture that supports critical thinking and respectful dialogue.

Keywords: Classroom management, social studies, collaborative learning, culturally responsive teaching, student engagement

1. Introduction

Classroom management plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of social studies education, as it sets the foundation for a productive and focused learning environment. In social studies, where students engage with complex concepts such as history, politics, and culture, effective classroom management ensures that students can actively participate in discussions, understand the material, and connect it to real-world contexts (Jones, 2016). Social studies also often involves debates on sensitive issues like social justice, human rights, and global conflicts, making it essential for teachers to manage these discussions constructively while maintaining order in the classroom (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

The relationship between classroom management and student engagement is particularly significant in social studies. Research shows that well-managed classrooms foster a sense of safety and respect, which encourages students to express their opinions and engage with the material critically (Wang & Eccles, 2013). On the other hand, poor classroom management can lead to disruptions, student disengagement, and a lack of focus on the subject matter, ultimately affecting



academic performance and the overall learning experience. For social studies, which relies heavily on student participation and collaboration, creating a structured yet flexible classroom environment is essential for fostering active learning and critical thinking (Patrick et al., 2003).

The increasing diversity of learners and the influence of technology in classrooms highlight the need for innovative approaches to foster a positive learning environment in social studies education. Traditional classroom management techniques, such as authoritative discipline, may not be sufficient to engage students in meaningful learning experiences. Instead, modern approaches focus on collaborative learning, culturally responsive teaching, and digital tools to promote engagement, inclusivity, and motivation. These innovations allow students to take a more active role in their education, making social studies more relevant and interactive (Hattie, 2009).

The purpose of this paper is to explore innovative classroom management strategies that are specifically tailored to the unique demands of social studies instruction. By examining these strategies, the paper aims to identify approaches that can improve classroom dynamics, encourage positive student behavior, and increase engagement with the subject matter. The analysis will focus on how these strategies promote collaboration, inclusivity, and active learning in social studies classrooms, while addressing the diverse needs of modern learners.

This paper will also analyze the impact of innovative classroom management techniques on student engagement, behavior, and learning outcomes. With social studies being a subject that often involves discussion-based learning and group projects, effective classroom management is essential for fostering a collaborative and respectful learning environment. This paper will explore how different strategies can help manage classroom discussions, support diverse learners, and enhance academic achievement.

Implementing innovative classroom management approaches in social studies helps create a positive learning environment that fosters student engagement, promotes collaboration, and enhances academic achievement. These strategies not only improve student behavior and participation but also support the development of critical thinking skills, empathy, and social awareness, which are central to social studies education.

2. Challenges in Classroom Management in Social Studies

2.1 Diversity of Learners

One of the key challenges in managing social studies classrooms is the diversity of learners. Classrooms are often composed of students with varied cultural, linguistic, and ability differences, making it difficult to implement a one-size-fits-all



approach to teaching (Gay, 2010). In social studies, where the subject matter often explores historical events and political systems from different cultures, students may have differing perspectives based on their backgrounds. This diversity, while enriching, can also pose challenges for classroom management, as teachers must find ways to adapt the curriculum and teaching methods to meet the needs of all students while maintaining discipline (Banks & Banks, 2004).

For instance, students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) or those with learning disabilities may struggle to keep up with complex texts or historical analysis. Teachers must use differentiated instruction techniques to ensure that these students can engage with the material meaningfully, while also maintaining equitable participation in classroom activities (Tomlinson, 2014). However, managing diverse learning needs can be demanding, especially in large classrooms where individual attention is limited.

2.2 Engagement and Motivation

Another significant challenge is keeping students engaged and motivated in social studies, a subject that can sometimes be perceived as less engaging than others like science or physical education. Social studies often requires students to read complex texts, understand historical narratives, and analyze political and social systems, which may not immediately capture their interest (VanSledright, 2013). Teachers frequently face student disengagement, which can lead to disruptive behaviors such as talking out of turn, lack of participation, or inattentiveness (Patrick et al., 2003).

Motivating students to see the relevance of social studies in their lives is a challenge that requires teachers to implement innovative strategies. In traditional classroom settings, social studies can feel disconnected from students' lived experiences. Therefore, finding ways to connect historical content to modern-day issues and using interactive teaching methods, such as debates or simulations, is crucial for maintaining motivation and ensuring that students remain focused on the subject matter (Levstik & Barton, 2015). However, balancing engaging activities with the need to maintain discipline and prevent disruption can be difficult in practice.

2.3 Complexity of Social Studies Topics

Social studies covers a wide range of sensitive and controversial topics, such as politics, history, human rights, and social justice. Addressing these topics in a classroom setting requires careful management to ensure that discussions remain respectful and productive. For example, discussions on political systems, historical injustices, or current events can evoke strong emotional responses from students, leading to conflicts or disagreements (Evans & Saxe, 1996).



Managing classroom discussions on these sensitive issues involves teaching students to express their opinions constructively and listen to differing viewpoints respectfully. However, this is not always easy, as students may come into the classroom with preconceived notions or biases, making it difficult to foster a neutral and inclusive environment (Parker, 2003). Teachers must be skilled in guiding these discussions without imposing their own views, while also maintaining order and preventing debates from becoming disruptive. This balancing act requires both emotional intelligence and effective classroom management techniques.

3. Innovative Classroom Management Strategies for Social Studies

3.1 Collaborative Learning and Group Activities

One of the most effective classroom management strategies for social studies is promoting collaborative learning through group projects, discussions, and debates. These activities encourage cooperative learning by requiring students to work together, share ideas, and engage in critical thinking. When students are given opportunities to participate in group work, they often take more ownership of their learning, which can reduce behavioral issues and increase engagement (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Moreover, peer-to-peer learning can be an essential tool for managing classroom dynamics. When students collaborate, they can help each other understand complex concepts and foster a sense of community within the classroom. By organizing structured debates or group discussions on historical or political topics, teachers can ensure that students remain focused and engaged while maintaining classroom order (Slavin, 2011). This approach also helps develop communication skills, empathy, and respect for differing opinions, all of which contribute to a more positive classroom environment.

3.2 Interactive Technologies and Digital Tools

Incorporating interactive technologies and digital tools into social studies instruction can significantly enhance classroom management by increasing student engagement and participation. Tools such as online forums, educational apps, and interactive maps allow students to explore social studies topics in a more dynamic way, making the subject matter more relatable and engaging (Heafner & Friedman, 2008). For example, using digital simulations of historical events or interactive mapping tools can immerse students in the learning process, reducing distractions and off-task behaviors.

Technology can also help teachers manage classroom behavior through interactive lessons and assessments. Educational apps can provide instant feedback,

gamify learning, and track student progress, enabling teachers to monitor participation and ensure that students stay on task (Bebell & O'Dwyer, 2010). Digital tools also allow for differentiated instruction, enabling teachers to provide more personalized learning experiences for students with different learning needs, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and well-managed classroom.

3.3 Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Implementing culturally responsive teaching in social studies classrooms is another innovative approach to classroom management. Culturally relevant teaching practices acknowledge and celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, making them feel more included and respected in the learning environment (Gay, 2010). For instance, incorporating lessons that reflect the histories, cultures, and contributions of various groups can enhance student engagement and reduce behavioral issues by validating students' experiences and identities.

Creating a culturally responsive classroom also involves fostering an inclusive environment where students from diverse backgrounds feel valued. Teachers can achieve this by using culturally relevant examples in their lessons, incorporating multicultural perspectives in discussions, and encouraging students to share their experiences. When students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, they are more likely to engage with the material, reducing the need for strict discipline measures and creating a more harmonious classroom dynamic (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

3.4 Project-Based Learning and Hands-On Activities

Project-based learning (PBL) is an innovative classroom management strategy that allows students to take responsibility for their own learning while working on meaningful projects. In social studies, PBL can involve activities like researching historical events, creating multimedia presentations, or developing community-based projects related to social issues (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). These hands-on activities not only engage students but also promote positive classroom behavior by giving them a sense of purpose and ownership in their learning process.

In PBL, students work on long-term projects that require collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving, which helps develop their self-regulation skills. By providing students with clear expectations and structured timelines, teachers can reduce off-task behaviors and encourage a self-directed learning environment (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). Moreover, the hands-on nature of these projects helps students connect the abstract concepts of social studies to real-world issues, making the subject matter more relevant and interesting, which in turn fosters better classroom management.

4. Promoting a Positive Classroom Culture in Social Studies

4.1 Building Respectful Relationships

A key aspect of effective classroom management is building respectful relationships between students and teachers. In social studies, where students are often encouraged to share personal perspectives on complex issues, mutual respect is essential for fostering open dialogue and creating a safe learning environment. Teachers can foster this respect by modeling empathy and actively listening to students' thoughts and concerns (Pianta, 2014). By showing genuine interest in students' experiences and ideas, teachers create a classroom culture that promotes trust and encourages participation.

Moreover, teachers can use strategies such as restorative practices to resolve conflicts and reinforce respect between students. These practices help students take responsibility for their actions, repair harm, and build stronger relationships with peers (Gregory et al., 2014). Empathy plays a crucial role in this process, as it encourages students to understand the feelings of others and contributes to a more supportive and positive learning environment.

4.2 Encouraging Student Voice and Choice

One of the most effective ways to engage students in social studies is by encouraging student voice and choice in the learning process. Providing students with opportunities to select topics for assignments, participate in decision-making, and engage in discussions that reflect their interests fosters ownership of learning and increases motivation (Cook-Sather, 2006). For instance, offering a range of topics for research projects allows students to pursue areas of personal significance while still meeting curriculum objectives.

Managing a classroom where student input is actively integrated can pose challenges, particularly in balancing structure with flexibility. Teachers need to establish clear guidelines while also providing students with autonomy in their learning (Pattall et al., 2010). When students feel that their voices are heard and respected, they are more likely to engage positively with the content and contribute to a harmonious classroom dynamic.

4.3 Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation

Teaching students conflict resolution skills is particularly important in social studies, where debates and discussions often revolve around sensitive or controversial topics. By equipping students with the tools to manage disagreements constructively, teachers help maintain a peaceful and productive learning environment (Deutsch & Coleman, 2014). Techniques such as active listening, perspective-taking, and negotiation can be taught to encourage students to resolve conflicts respectfully.

Additionally, peer mediation can be an effective tool for managing conflicts in the classroom. In peer mediation programs, trained students help their classmates

resolve disputes, which not only reduces teacher involvement in minor conflicts but also empowers students to take an active role in creating a positive classroom culture (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). Peer mediation fosters a sense of community and responsibility among students, which can contribute to a more peaceful and respectful classroom environment.

4.4 Using Positive Reinforcement

Implementing positive reinforcement is a powerful strategy for managing classroom behavior and promoting academic growth. By recognizing and rewarding positive behaviors, teachers can encourage students to stay engaged and contribute constructively to the classroom (Skinner, 1953). In social studies, where discussions and debates often require students to think critically and engage with one another, using praise and rewards for participation, respect, and collaboration can help maintain a positive learning environment.

Positive reinforcement can take many forms, from verbal praise and recognition to tangible rewards like certificates or additional privileges. The key is to ensure that the reinforcement is consistent and meaningful, motivating students to continue exhibiting positive behaviors (Willingham, 2009). Over time, positive reinforcement can contribute to a classroom culture where good behavior is the norm and students feel motivated to succeed both academically and socially.

5. Case Studies

5.1 Case Study 1: Collaborative Learning in a Social Studies Classroom

In a rural middle school in Thailand, a social studies teacher implemented collaborative group projects as a classroom management strategy to engage students in learning about local history and geography. Students were divided into small groups and assigned research topics related to the cultural heritage of their local communities. The groups were tasked with presenting their findings through creative projects, such as maps, presentations, and reenactments.

This approach not only improved student engagement but also helped manage classroom behavior. The cooperative learning environment encouraged students to take ownership of their tasks and reduced disruptive behaviors, as they became more invested in their group's success (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The teacher observed that students who had previously been disengaged or disruptive became more involved when working in teams. Additionally, group work fostered a sense of accountability, as students relied on each other to complete their projects. The collaborative nature of the projects enhanced classroom dynamics and created a more supportive learning environment, where students could learn from one another.



5.2 Case Study 2: Technology-Driven Classroom Management

At a high school in Bangkok, a social studies teacher faced challenges with maintaining student participation during lectures on complex topics like international relations and political systems. To address this, the teacher integrated technology-driven tools such as interactive maps, online quizzes, and educational apps into the classroom.

Using an educational app that allowed students to respond in real-time to quiz questions during lessons, the teacher noticed a significant improvement in student participation and focus. The app also provided instant feedback to students, which helped them correct misconceptions and stay engaged with the lesson material (Heafner & Friedman, 2008).

Furthermore, the use of digital tools helped the teacher monitor classroom behavior more effectively. Students became less distracted by unrelated activities, as they were actively engaging with the material on their devices. By transforming traditional lectures into interactive learning experiences, the teacher was able to manage classroom behavior and improve both academic outcomes and student engagement.

5.3 Case Study 3: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Classroom Management

In a diverse urban school, a social studies teacher struggled with managing classroom discussions on sensitive topics such as race, immigration, and national identity. The teacher decided to incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices to create a more inclusive and well-managed classroom. Lessons were designed to reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students, with activities that allowed them to share their own experiences and perspectives (Gay, 2010).

For example, during a unit on immigration, students were encouraged to research their own family histories and present their findings to the class. This approach not only made the content more relevant to the students' lives but also fostered respectful classroom discussions. As students recognized the value of their diverse experiences, they were more inclined to participate in discussions thoughtfully and listen to their peers (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The incorporation of culturally relevant content also helped reduce behavioral issues, as students felt more connected to the material and more valued in the classroom environment. The teacher observed a decrease in classroom conflicts and an increase in student engagement and cooperation. This case illustrates how culturally responsive teaching can lead to a more inclusive and well-managed classroom, where students feel respected and supported.

6. Recommendations for Implementing Innovative Classroom Management Approaches

6.1 Teacher Training and Professional Development

To effectively implement innovative classroom management strategies in social studies, it is essential to provide comprehensive teacher training and ongoing professional development. Teachers must be trained in classroom management techniques that promote collaboration, engagement, and inclusivity, with a focus on social studies-specific challenges such as facilitating discussions on sensitive topics (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Professional development should also emphasize the use of technology in the classroom, equipping teachers with the skills to integrate interactive tools and digital platforms to enhance student engagement (Bebell & O'Dwyer, 2010).

Additionally, teachers should receive training in culturally responsive teaching, which is crucial for managing diverse classrooms effectively (Gay, 2010). By helping teachers understand and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students, professional development can foster more inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued. Ongoing professional development ensures that teachers stay updated on the latest teaching techniques and classroom management strategies, improving overall classroom dynamics.

6.2 Flexibility in Curriculum Design

Providing teachers with flexibility in curriculum design is another important recommendation for implementing innovative classroom management approaches. Teachers should have the freedom to design lessons that incorporate diverse learning methods, such as collaborative projects, technology-based lessons, and hands-on activities. This flexibility allows teachers to adapt their classroom management strategies to the needs of their students and to experiment with different approaches that promote engagement and positive behavior (Tomlinson, 2014).

By allowing teachers to tailor their lessons to the specific interests and abilities of their students, schools can foster a more personalized learning environment that reduces behavioral issues and enhances academic outcomes. Flexibility also encourages teachers to introduce relevant, real-world topics in their social studies curriculum, making the subject matter more engaging for students.

6.3 Fostering School-Wide Support

School-wide support is crucial for ensuring consistency in classroom management across all subject areas, including social studies. Teachers, administrators, and support staff should work together to create a collaborative approach to classroom management, where clear expectations for behavior and



learning are established school-wide (Gregory et al., 2014). This can be achieved through regular meetings, professional learning communities, and peer observations, where teachers can share best practices and support each other in implementing innovative management techniques.

Additionally, school leadership should actively encourage a culture of collaboration by providing resources and opportunities for teachers to work together. Creating a consistent approach to classroom management across the school not only reduces behavioral issues but also ensures that students receive a cohesive and supportive learning experience.

6.4 Engaging Parents and the Community

Finally, engaging parents and the community is a critical component of effective classroom management. Parents can play an essential role in reinforcing positive behavior at home and supporting their children's academic engagement in the classroom. Schools should involve parents through regular communication, parent-teacher conferences, and workshops that provide insights into the classroom management strategies used by teachers (Epstein, 2001).

Moreover, schools can involve the wider community by collaborating with local organizations, cultural institutions, and experts to enhance the social studies curriculum. Bringing in community members as guest speakers or organizing field trips can make social studies more engaging and relevant for students, while also promoting positive behavior by connecting the classroom to the world outside (Epstein, 2001). Engaging the community not only supports learning but also strengthens the relationship between the school and the families it serves.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Key Points

This paper has explored several innovative classroom management strategies designed to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes in social studies education. Key strategies discussed include collaborative learning, which promotes teamwork and peer engagement, technology-driven classroom management, which leverages digital tools to improve participation and behavior, and culturally responsive teaching, which ensures that all students feel valued and included in the classroom. Additionally, project-based learning was highlighted as an effective approach for fostering active learning and positive classroom behavior. These strategies collectively contribute to a more engaging, inclusive, and well-managed learning environment, ultimately promoting both academic achievement and personal growth for students in social studies.

7.2 Final Thoughts

Integrating innovative approaches to classroom management is essential for improving student engagement, especially in a subject like social studies, which often deals with complex and sensitive topics. By adopting flexible, inclusive, and technologically enhanced strategies, educators can create a more supportive and dynamic learning environment that fosters critical thinking and collaboration. As classrooms continue to evolve with advances in technology and increasing diversity, it is crucial for teachers to continuously adapt their management techniques to meet the changing needs of their students. Encouraging ongoing professional development, curriculum flexibility, and strong school-community partnerships will ensure that social studies educators can effectively manage their classrooms and inspire a new generation of engaged, thoughtful learners.

7.3 Body of Knowledge

The body of knowledge surrounding classroom management in social studies education emphasizes the critical role of innovative strategies in promoting student engagement and maintaining a positive learning environment. Research indicates that collaborative learning techniques, such as group projects and peer discussions, not only enhance academic performance but also foster critical thinking and cooperation among students (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Additionally, the integration of technology-driven tools—like interactive maps, educational apps, and real-time assessments—has been shown to improve participation and classroom behavior, offering teachers effective methods for monitoring student progress and reducing distractions (Heafner & Friedman, 2008). Meanwhile, culturally responsive teaching has emerged as an essential component in managing diverse classrooms, ensuring that students from various backgrounds feel valued and respected, which, in turn, enhances engagement and reduces conflicts (Gay, 2010). The use of positive reinforcement and project-based learning further supports this approach, helping to create a classroom culture where students are motivated to participate and learn actively. Collectively, these strategies form the foundation for modern classroom management, particularly in subjects like social studies, where discussions of complex, sensitive topics require careful navigation and a respectful learning atmosphere.

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