

The importance of comprehensive classroom management

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The teacher is a manager. The organization he or she manages is a group of students from diverse backgrounds and with differing skills and abilities. Some are already eager learners, while others have to be awakened to the joys and satisfactions of learning. Still others have special problems that must be dealt with effectively in order for them to learn and in order to maintain an environment conducive to learning for the whole group. It's important, first, to provide students with opportunities to learn about things that interest them and then, to find ways to introduce the learning that peaks the student's interest.

If the teacher can find ways to relate the topic to the student's present experience, and provide interactive learning activities that the student can actively participate in, then the student will gain motivation. The physical environment plays a role in learning too. Some students learn better in different lighting (softer or brighter), sitting at a desk or lying on the floor, with music on or in perfect silence, in a warmer or cooler place, etc. The teacher can establish areas in the room that meet these different needs and styles of learning.

Students who learn better lying down, for example, could bring mats to school that can be unrolled for study time. A small tent in the corner could provide the dimmer light some students need. A radio or CD player with earphones could be allowed during study time provided it truly helps the student to learn. The importance of reasonable rules that everyone understands can hardly be overestimated. On the first or second day of

school the teacher could initiate an interactive discussion with the students about why rules are needed in the classroom.

Let students share a few experiences that happened when there were no rules. Then, ask them to come up with no more than five rules for classroom behavior. They could each write down a rule or two they think is important on an index card, and the teacher could then let each person read what he/she wrote down. A list could be generated on the board. Or, they could start by brainstorming a list of every rule they can think of, then evaluate, eliminate, combine (just the wordrespect, for example, includes many rules), and whittle them down into three to five good rules.

A student with good handwriting or an artistic bent could be chosen to make a large poster with the rules, or a bulletin board for classroom display where everybody can see it. Once the students have set their classroom rules, they are invested in them. I have tried this with grades 4-7 students, and it worked very well to establish an orderly learning environment. The students took the rules more seriously because they had had a say in setting them. It teaches democracy, too. If the students do not think of something the teacher considers important, the teacher can add it to their list and explain why.

However, this is unlikely. In my experience, the student's rules tend to be very good-actually, the same rules I would have made myself, only they mean more to the students since they have developed them as a group and the rules are in their own words. Lane and Wehby (2005) report that 1% of

school age children have been labeled emotionally disturbed and are receiving specialized education services because of it. They estimate an additional 2% to 16% of U. S. students who demonstrate anti-social behavior patterns such as defiance disorders or conduct disorders.

When a student is oppositional or defiant, the teacher must be careful not to respond angrily and get into a confrontation. Teachers should be aware of their own triggers so that they can control their own behavior. This will help them to avoid a confrontation. It is best to remain calm and to diffuse the student's anger before it escalates into a crisis and/or violence. If a student refuses to do a certain task, offering an alternative choice may help, and it would be a good idea for the teacher always to have alternative tasks ready just in case—alternative activities that are still learning activities.

A sense of humor may be a teacher's best defense when students are uncooperative. It is better to prevent escalation than to deal with a crisis later. One way to do this is to reinforce good behavior with praise, a smile, gesture, touch, "or a pleasant comment when they display unprompted, socially appropriate behavior" (Albin, 2003). Don't wait until students are disruptive to pay attention to them! Teachers should make the effort to notice and praise good behavior and reward it. Punishment is a negative way of dealing with problematic behavior.

It may provide reinforcement for bad behavior if the reason the student is misbehaving is because he/she wants attention. If a student misbehaves because he doesn't want to do his work, and then gets sent out in the hall or

to the office, then he gets what he wanted, and the bad behavior is reinforced. Rewards for positive behavior, such as time to do an activity the students loves, a toy or candy, or one-on-one time with the teacher (just to talk and visit for a few minutes) makes students happy to learn and to be in school. Punishment often produces resentment, and may make the student hate school.

A student who hates school is not an eager learner, so punishment can be anti-productive (Peck & Scarpati (2005). Teachers commonly deal with difficult students by restricting them--the more intense the student's needs are, the more restriction--such as placing a child's desk toward the wall (Duhaney, 2003). However, a needs-based approach is more positive and effective and suggests recourse to greater resources. Perhaps the child needs to learn appropriate ways to handle anger and aggression, more problem-solving skills, or receive feedback for appropriate behaviors.

If the child has trouble with self-control, instructional strategies could include modeling, role-play, and feedback to help him stay out of fights, solve problems, express anger appropriately, and deal with frustration. Without intervention students with or at risk for behavioral disorders are liable to experience many negative outcomes both in school and outside such as impaired social relationships, academic underachievement, and discipline problems (Lane, Wehby, & Barton-Arwood, 2005). Social skills interventions have been used and evaluated for more than 25 years, but their efficacy continues to be questioned.

Researchers suggest that social skills training makes only a modest impact; however, most educators agree that not doing anything is worse. The ability to adapt and modify instruction is crucial to effectively educating these children. Before starting an intervention, it would be wise to gather information about the student, such as why, where and when he uses the particular behavior. Identify what social, affective, cultural, or contextual elements might be at work, and analyze the information. List the specific behaviors and describe where when and with whom the behavior is likely to occur.

What consequences are usually administered? Keep anecdotal records so you can look for patterns and what triggers the behavior. Then figure out what strategies might be effective to avoid the behavior; for example, teach self-talk to students who are impulsive and organize the classroom environment to help hyperactive students. Consider making a contract with the student. Develop personal schedules for students who have difficulty making good use of their time. Consider implementing a token economy in which the teacher systematically awards or withdraws tokens or points for appropriate or inappropriate behavior.

The student can redeem the tokens for something he wants such as privileges, desired activities, or food. Conflict resolution is a way to help students express their feelings and communicate better with others. We tend to see conflict as negative because of the disruption it causes in the classroom; however, conflict is neither good nor bad but simply a fact of life.

According to Vollmer, Drook and Harned (1999) " Learning through social conflict is important to all human development" (p. 122).

As children develop cognitive reasoning skills, they begin to see that others have perspectives, needs, and desires too. Early training with role plays and simulations will help them develop the social skills they need to maintain relationships. Students can be taught a process for resolution of conflict. One way is to use a large visual of a traffic light which shows the steps to conflict resolution and includes the words Cool down and Ground Rules (RED), Tell your side and Listen (YELLOW), and Brainstorm and Ideas (GREEN). A turn arrow at the bottom has the words Choose solution, and do it and Shake hands.

Teachers report that students take more responsibility and often initiate conflict-resolution strategies on their own after learning and practicing this system (Vollmer, Drook & Harned, 1999, p. 124). The teacher should provide a quiet place in the room where students can work things out when they have a conflict. Once they have mastered a structured routine for conflict management, it will be unnecessary for the teacher to get involved.

Classroom management is a challenge that requires the teacher to put his or her heart into it. An ancient Chinese proverb states that a student only learns from a teacher who loves home.

In other words, a child needs to feel accepted and that the teacher cares about him or her. All children have basic needs--physical needs, safety needs, and social needs--that must be met before they can feel free to learn

and develop to their true potential. If their needs are met and a positive learning environment is created, they will learn and be eager to participate. Therefore, the teacher's goal should be, not to fill their heads with specific information, but to make learning possible in a calm, structured, safe, and flexible environment and help them gain the skills to go after knowledge.