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Proper Classroom Management is Essential for an Effective Elementary School Classroom

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Kayla Cotter

Honors Senior Thesis

Major: Elementary Education

Topic: Proper Classroom Management is Essential for an Effective
Elementary School Classroom

Classroom management is crucial to any elementary school classroom. A poorly managed classroom cannot run smoothly, which results in an environment that prevents students from having the opportunity to learn to their highest potential. An elementary school classroom should have a positive and enjoyable atmosphere, while also functioning as an active learning environment. The reasons why classroom management is mandatory for any effective elementary school classroom will be demonstrated. Exploration in classroom management philosophies I have developed from my experiences during Practicum and student teaching, in combination with other classroom management theories, will be applied to explain and show how classroom management is evident in any strong elementary school environment.

To begin, during Practicum and student teaching, I spent my time in a fourth grade classroom at the Guiteras Elementary School located in Bristol, Rhode Island. The school is one of many in the BWRSD district, This educational opportunity has allowed me to take over the entire classroom on my own, and in doing so I have discovered that classroom management is the root of everything that happens in a classroom. It is the cement of the classroom, from the quality of learning that takes place to the classroom atmosphere running smoothly, and an overall good experience for both students and teachers.

According to Wong and Wong, “effective teachers manage their classrooms. Ineffective teachers discipline their classrooms....The teacher is responsible for organizing a well-managed classroom where students can learn in a task-oriented environment”. (*The First Days of School*, 85) One of the most crucial components of effective classroom management is being in control of your classroom to avoid disorder. In such an environment, students would not have the

opportunity to learn to their fullest potential. But sometimes, a teacher can become too concerned with being in control. Teachers often turn to a chart or list of rules that must be followed and can result in both positive and negative consequences. This is only showing students that they must follow the rules simply because there is a consequence if they break or follow them, and does not help them grow as individuals. It is necessary to teach children the reasoning behind appropriate behavior. These are life lessons and values. A set of rules simply cannot teach children the deeper meaning behind their actions. It is in the best interest of the students to learn and practice these moral and ethical values.

“Even when children are ‘successfully’ reinforced or conseqenced into compliance, they will likely feel no commitment to what they are doing, no deep understanding of the act and its rationale, no sense of themselves as the kind of people who would want to act this way in the future. They have been led to concentrate on the consequences of their actions to themselves, and someone with this frame of reference bears little resemblance to the kind of person we dream of seeing each of our students become.” (Kohn) Again, if we just discipline our children for doing something wrong they will never develop the sense of understanding they can obtain if exposed to the reasoning behind the expectations they are held to. After observing a multitude of classrooms the educator concluded, “students are far less likely to act aggressively, intrusively, or obnoxiously in places where the teacher is not concerned with being in charge--and, indeed, is not particularly interested in classroom-management techniques.” (Kohn)

In my classroom, there are rules and procedures up on the wall. However, I do not refer to them. If there is an incident of any kind, I discuss the situation with the student, along with how we should handle it and how to move forward. Quite recently in my classroom, a student was

misbehaving and I asked to speak with him during the first five minutes of recess. When I asked this student why it's important to do what a teacher/adult tells you, he responded, "because you'll get in trouble if you don't". Then, I proceeded to ask him what the principle and bigger meaning behind listening to the teacher is. Together we came to the conclusion that I treat him with respect, and he should treat me with respect, along with the fact that if he is being asked to do something, there is an important reason why.

On the other hand, I also do not reward students who do behave the way that they should. For example, I do not want my students to treat each other with respect, or complete their homework, just so that they can receive a prize or piece of candy, or avoid getting a detention. I want them to do these things so they can be the best people they can. In certain classrooms in this school, there is a "traffic light" classroom management tactic. Everyone begins on green, but if you misbehave and land on yellow or red, consequences generate quickly. Additionally, if a student does land on the red light, it does not help their confidence or motivation to be singled out in front of the class on a chart for all to see. Again, there is no meaningful reflection happening with such management systems.

As a result of partaking in classroom management practice that is not determined by a list of rules and consequences, the class actually runs much more smoothly. I feel in control of my class because students know what is expected of them, and why, and act in this manner. This shows that they can handle more hands on learning activities to make lessons more meaningful and engaging. Their ability to handle these activities, then, lets students learn to their full potential, which is why I maintain that teaching the reasoning behind actions is important not just for maximum learning, but also to teach life lessons. I feel that I have been able to receive these

results because of the consistency I press upon the class. My expectations do not change or fluctuate depending on the student. In *The First Days of School*, the authors argue:

The most important thing a teacher can provide in the classroom during the first week of school is consistency. Students want a well-managed classroom more than the teachers do because there is security in a classroom that is consistent. There are no surprises and no yelling in a classroom where everyone, teacher and students, know what is happening. Consistency comes from installing procedures and routines. Nothing will send kids into orbit faster than letting them suspect that their teacher is disorganized. Disorganized teachers think only about presenting lessons-lectures, worksheets, videos, activities-never management. And when classrooms aren't managed, they become chaotic. Therefore, the most important thing a teacher can provide in the classroom...is consistency. Classroom practices and procedures must be predictable and consistent. The students must know from day to day how the classroom is structured and organized. If they break a pencil point, they know what to do. If they are tardy, need help from the teacher, walk down the hall, or move from one activity to another, they already know what to do. There is no yelling of instructions. (Wong, Wong, 84)

A teacher who has a classroom community with meaningful and in depth learning occurring must also see that engaging their students is an important tactic. If a teacher comes in and portrays that a certain subject area is uninteresting, students will quickly follow suit. If you expect your students to be enticed and engaged by your lessons, you must also be engaged and enticed about the content you are teaching. A teacher must also be able to motivate their students and really get them interested and upbeat about what they are about to learn. It does not matter how a teacher is feeling emotionally-as soon as you walk into the classroom you must be excited and ready to teach so that your students are ready to learn. Children are very impressionable and a teacher's attitude toward a lesson does indeed carry over to them. But it doesn't end here. If you expect your students to come into school and learn, they are expecting you to be able to teach them. If you are unprepared or do not fully understand the content you are teaching yourself, you cannot possibly expect your students to understand this.

"Teacher efficacy is strongly conveyed through a teacher's enthusiasm. When a teacher's enthusiasm is obvious to students, it helps build the students' own sense of efficacy. In fact, teacher enthusiasm is a positive factor from any theoretical perspective: Behaviorism says that a teacher's enthusiasm is received as a positive reinforcement by the learner. Social

learning theory holds that student's will imitate what the teacher models-if the teacher is enthusiastic, so too will the student be enthusiastic. Cognitive learning theory says that emotions are important to the creation of new mental schemes; thus, sharing enthusiasm can be exciting and can set the stage for learning. Information processing theory says that new information can find a place in the student's long-term memory when learned with pleasure at the hands of an enthusiastic teacher. Finally, humanistic learning theory teaches that a teacher's enthusiasm can help meet students' needs for safety, belonging, and self-esteem. Indeed, teacher enthusiasm occupies an exalted throne in learning theory and in the practice of teaching". (DiGuilio, 54)

In my classroom, students must work on their Math Boxes everyday in their math journals. These are six different boxes with an array of math problems and students know what to expect of them. This task can become quite competitive. So when going over the math problems, I try to pick up the spirit a little bit by using examples. I have used examples of students in the class going out to lunch at *Pizza Wave*, a popular local restaurant, to explain fraction problems. We used an example of hiring buses for a class fieldtrip that is coming up to go over a math box problem that caused confusion. I write in different color markers on the overhead when going over them as well to keep students attention. They are more likely to catch their attention as opposed to an entire page written in green. Small things such as these make a huge impact on students learning and are crucial to managing a classroom. Again, the whole purpose of having a well-managed classroom is so students can learn to their fullest potential. Management is not just about behavior-it is also about reinforcing the emphasis on the joy of learning.

Communication is also vital to a well-managed elementary school classroom. This means communication between the teacher, student, and parents. Every classroom is unique because every learner in that space is unique. A teacher may teach in the same room for 20 years, but each of those years will be a completely different experience. Each class has a character of its own. Part of this open communication is understanding that as a class, we work

together. In regards to relationships with parents, regular communication can be established via telephone, e-mail, notes sent home, or even a “communication journal” where parents and teachers can leave each other messages in a notebook. Both tuning parents into student behavior and even “establishing a system of consequences to be administered at home” (Marzano, Gaddy, Foseid, Foseid, Marzano, 50) are signs of effective communication with parents and therefore good classroom management.

I also feel that in order to have a strong relationship with a parent, one should be sure to not just call home when a student has done something wrong. Positive conversations about a student's strengths and academic success is just as important as discussing improvements or other issues. Relationships with parents must not be overlooked, just as relationships with students also cannot be forgotten and are absolutely vital. In my classroom, parents can send in notes on paper or can communicate with the teacher through the student's agendas. My cooperating teacher also contacts many parents through e-mail, and makes it a point to let them know if a child's behavior or academics are getting better or worse.

Another reason why classroom management is absolutely mandatory for an elementary school classroom is an issue of safety. If you have complete chaos in your class, the safety of your students could be in jeopardy.

Most classrooms have materials and equipment that require special or careful handling. For example, many classrooms have one or more computers, software, and perhaps a printer; others have maps, globes, scales, and other specialty equipment; and art and science classes are filled with special supplies and tools. Given the diverse array of the classroom resources and equipment, this section does not include detailed suggestions for rules and procedures regarding the handling and storage of specific items. You yourself must identify the item that needs specific handling, set appropriate rules, and ensure that students understand them...Regardless of students' age, however, every teacher must stress 'safety first'. In fact, ensuring that students understand the safety procedures should be the first order of business at the beginning of the school year. This can be as straightforward as establishing a rule for young students that they may use scissors only while seated and then being vigilant about enforcing this rule. For other materials and equipment,

such as chemicals or specialized art equipment, more detailed rules and procedures may be in order. (Marzano, Gaddy, Foseid, Foseid, Marzano, 20-21)

Recently in my student teaching experience, our school had Reading Week. As part of our Reading Week, students got to go on a trip to the local public library. Although it was a fun trip, the library is so close to our school that we walk. It was a beautiful day, and students wanted to run around. But I made sure I strongly enforced the safety rules, and that when students walk they stay with their “buddy” who is pre-assigned. Prior to going on our walk, I asked students why it was important to stay with their buddy, listen to teachers while walking and stay with the class. The children understood it was a matter of safety. Again, students understood the reasoning behind the walking procedure and because of that we had no issues. This was much more effective than yelling at children to stay on the sidewalk, and led to an enjoyable trip where students were safe and got to have fun.

Another area in my classroom in particular where safety is emphasized to students is during science class. In science, students take part in quality hands-on learning, applying prior knowledge and obtaining new knowledge in various experiments. These experiments, however, often require students to use tools that cannot be mistreated for safety reasons. So as part of my modeling, I always take time to point out appropriate safety measures. During one of my first co-taught lessons during Practicum, I was conducting a science lesson which was part of a rocks and minerals unit. Students would be acting as geologists and taking a nail (which was to represent a tool called a geologist pick), and chisel away at their mock rock. At the end of the lesson, they would learn that minerals make up rocks. However, knowing they would be using nails, when I did my modeling, I was sure to make very clear how I was using the tool and also what I was not

doing with the tool. Not only was I keeping the safety of my students in mind in the modeling, but by displaying these safety tactics it led to a smoother lesson with students on task. One of the first priorities of any good elementary school teacher is including student's safety in their classroom management.

Teachers constantly reflect on their tactics when administering knowledge to their students, and they must also be sure to reflect on their management practices. "You can learn from your mistakes. You can get better. In the process, you might even stumble upon precious moments that can allow your students to soar higher than they ever thought possible". (Esquith, 10) Something I have spent a good majority of my time during Student Teaching and Practicum doing is reflecting on my teaching, and even more on my classroom management. In fact, classroom management was my biggest goal for student teaching. I am always asking my cooperating teacher what I could do differently, and she also will interject during the day and tell me what is working and what is not. From addressing the class as a whole, to angling myself at the white board so I can watch students while I write, to dealing with a behavioral issue with a particular student, I have learned how to manage a classroom not only by my opportunity to student teach but by the time I take each day to reflect on what I have done in my management, whether the impact was negative or positive.

Esquith, the author just referenced above, is one of my biggest idols in the education world. He is a classroom teacher who is famous for teaching in an urban area with a lot of poverty and students with low motivation. His classroom has turned these children around, to the point that they come into school early and leave late and soar to levels most fifth graders never do. A large reason Esquith is able to move his students to such great heights is because of his

ability to acknowledge each student uniquely—"our goal is to help each student become as special as she can be as an individual-not to be more special than the kid sitting next to her. As a teacher and parent, I always try to learn and improve, but I measure my success or failure against my own past actions, and never to those of the teacher down the hall or the parent down the block". (Esquith, 80). Although a teacher is running an entire class of approximately 15-25 children, one must step back and note each child individually. Just as a salad is made up of individual components to come together as a whole, each student is one special aspect of the class you are teaching. Students should not be compared to one another, but rather noted for their own challenges and achievements. If a teacher does not take this into consideration when teaching and building relationships with his/her pupils, students will not all feel recognized and many will become discouraged and left behind. I believe taking the time to familiarize yourself with each child is crucial to classroom management, as you cannot relate and get through to your students if you do not take the time to do this. When you do, an elementary class will be a much more open place and will run more effectively.

To conclude, classroom management is essential to any Elementary School classroom. The students need an orderly and comfortable place in order to learn and perform at their best. Classroom management also is crucial to necessary happenings in the school day such as safety and communication. In order for the teacher to create this climate, he/she must have the respect and cooperation of their students, and recognize them all uniquely. Using the above tactics discussed, a teacher can obtain this respect along with creating a classroom environment where students feel welcome and comfortable and this allows them to learn to their highest potential.

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