

## A Discussion of a Positive Learning Environment and Classroom Management

A question I once asked of a Student Teacher whom I had nominated for Clarion University's "Outstanding Student Teacher-of-the Year Award" was, "How do you create a positive learning environment for all students?"

The response I received was, "Learn not to take yourself so seriously. Take the experience seriously, but learn to laugh at yourself and your mistakes. Enter the classroom with a sense of humor and humility. If it weren't for mistakes, we wouldn't learn. There are lots of ups and downs in the student teaching experience. This is your opportunity to make risk-free mistakes. So, take risks!"

A teacher is only as good as the learning environment he can create. How many times have you been part of a classroom where you knew the instructor was brilliant, but he just couldn't engage the learners or create an interesting lesson? We have all been in that situation. Creating a positive learning environment and being able to design effective lesson plans is the foundation for student learning.

Setting up a classroom and establishing procedures and routines are **key** components of classroom management. Your Cooperating Teacher has already made decisions about how her classroom will be organized, she has established procedures and routines, and she maintains a behavior management system that works for her. Remember that you are a guest in your Cooperating Teacher's classroom and you will be following the procedures and routines that she has already established. However, after discussing classroom management with your Cooperating Teacher, you will find out if she wants you to strictly follow her management system or if you are afforded the opportunity to create and incorporate your own management plan. You may observe some things that you do not agree with or that you would do differently in your own classroom. Try to learn to understand why the teacher would do it this way. Use these differences of perspective as opportunities for processing your own reflection about classroom management.

Classroom management is often associated with classroom discipline or class control. Gaining and maintaining student attention throughout a lesson or creating a respectful environment would be a more appropriate way to think about your classroom setting. Years ago, an effective teacher may have been one that kept her class orderly and had complete classroom control. Today, you of course still want a sense of order and routine, but I believe that the goal for a student teacher should be to actively motivate and engage the learners, and to have them understand the material, concept, or idea being presented in positive and supportive learning environment.

Your disposition and attitude as a pre-service teacher are critical factors in designing a well-organized, positive, supportive, and well-managed classroom conducive to learning. If you do not have the respect of the students and if you cannot gain and maintain their attention, you will not be able to teach your lessons effectively. Respect comes from giving respect and providing an atmosphere of respect for others. Do you smile? Do you greet students pleasantly at the door? Are you prepared and organized? (Students can easily tell if you're not, and you are sending a message that you do not have respect for them if you are unprepared and not organized.) Do you like to talk with students one on one? Do you move around the room in an effort to make all students feel your presence by physical proximity? Do you consider yourself a positive force in the classroom? Do you respect differences and promote fairness for all?

The design of effective classroom management strategies and incorporation of them in daily planning are the best techniques for preventing disruption and management problems. However, an effective teacher does recognize the fact that sometimes no matter what you do, there will be a difficult student or situation that needs to be addressed.

Classroom management is typically the most challenging aspect of student teaching. Now is the time for you to create and test management strategies. Hopefully you will develop successful management strategies that minimize discipline problems and lead to more effective teaching and learning. Take the advice [above] of a previous Student Teacher and be willing to take **risks** and accept any mistakes as a part of your on-the-job training learning experience.

Remember that I am here to support you in any way I can!