Be Proactive, Not Reactive

WHAT: PLANNING IS THE KEY

Ineffective classroom managers wait until problems occur and then decide how they will deal with each situation. They are not consistent, and they dole out disciplinary consequences depending on their mood or their feeling for a particular student, usually with a great deal of screaming, shouting, or other negative emotions. They appear annoyed, frustrated, and often engage students in power struggles, which teachers are always destined to lose.

For example, several years ago I was observing in the classroom of a teacher who consistently experienced a large number of disciplinary offenses. Her students did not like her and the feeling seemed to be mutual. The teacher was walking up and down the aisles of the classroom and noticed the book bag of one of the students she liked lying in the aisle near the student’s desk. She politely asked the student to pick up the book bag and place it in the appropriate location so that she would not trip over it. The student complied. Several weeks later, I was once again observing the same teacher when a similar incident occurred. However, this particular book bag belonged to a student who was one of her pet peeves. The reaction this time was totally different. She kicked the book bag while screaming at the student to get it out of her way. She then accused him of purposely trying to trip her. The student shrugged his shoulders but reluctantly moved the book bag while mumbling some indiscernible words under his breath.

The research that follows summarizes some of the key concepts of proactive management. Teachers who manage well are able to separate the behavior from the student. They are capable of putting proactive plans in place so that the majority of potential behavior problems never actually occur. They also use brain-compatible strategies that actively engage all students in the learning. Since the average attention span in minutes is approximately equivalent to the age of the student, proactive teachers divide the content into meaningful chunks or segments and then teach each chunk by allowing students to practice what they are learning through active engagement strategies. It is the purpose of this book in this and subsequent chapters to show the reader specifically how to be a more proactive and less reactive classroom manager.
WHY: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Learning as much as you can about your diverse learners enables you to bridge the cultural gaps between you and them (Davis, 2006).

Because teachers will always have someone who may become a behavior problem, they must be both mentally and physically prepared for whatever happens (Crawford, 2004).

Taking advantage of students’ strengths is a major way to decrease behavior problems and increase achievement (Davis, 2006).

Effective classroom managers will exhibit the following proactive characteristics:

- They lead the class by modeling the expected behaviors, such as how to control impulsivity and how to use positive self-talk.
- They build resiliency in students by gathering and interpreting student data, developing a positive relationship with each student, providing feedback to each student, understanding students’ unique differences, and understanding that content should be taught from a variety of linguistic and nonlinguistic organizers.
- They take care of behavior problems quietly and quickly.
- They move from low-profile interventions to more elevated measures while remaining calm.
- They realize that student behavior can be affected by a positive physical and emotional environment.
- They provide routines that are followed consistently daily.
- They assist students in perceiving the value or importance of the task.
- They directly teach students how to reach personal goals and provide feedback on their progress toward those goals.
- They reduce stress by making sure that students know what to do and how to do it (Tileston, 2004).

Teachers should have very clear expectations of what will be acceptable as appropriate behavior and what will not be accepted (Crawford, 2004).

A smart teacher who is in tune with students will make changes before boredom or disinterest sets in (Tileston, 2004).

Because classroom management is tightly tied to how we deliver instruction, lessons that engage and motivate students minimize management concerns (Smith, 2004).

Because each student has a preferred modality, if a student does not understand a concept after the first presentation, the teacher should change to another modality when re-teaching that concept (Tileston, 2004).

Learning strategies with high degrees of inherent positive and negative feedback facilitate the learning process better than a sit and get lecture (Jensen, 2003, p. 28).

Brain-compatible strategies are research-based, are just plain common sense, and take advantage of the way students learn—which is why they work (Erlauer, 2003).
Change the state (feeling moments) of a student’s brain and you will change his or her behavior. Social interaction, movement, music, and lighting variations all change the state of the brain (Jensen, 2003).

Students who are provided with enough time to process what they are learning not only retain their focus for a longer period of time but retain more of what is taught (DiGiulio, 2000).

Thanks to medical advances and amazing discoveries about how the brain learns, teachers now know why some methods work better than others (Erlauer, 2003).

Anticipate and prevent misbehavior before it occurs by thoroughly examining a specific situation and asking questions, such as What are the circumstances that could lead to an outburst or explosion? (Kottler, 2002).

Effective teachers plan backward by starting where they expect to end up (Guskey, 2001).

Once students’ attention is captured, their interest can be maintained by using a variety of instructional approaches such as demonstrations, reviews, group projects, problem solving, role-playing, gaming, and computer-assisted instruction (Burden, 2000).

When students’ brains are experiencing downtime, hands-on lessons will keep their brains alert and actively engaged (Erlauer, 2003).

When teachers instruct students in remembering information with words and images, they are using mnemonics (Carney & Levin, 2000).

Students who experience success seldom misbehave. To experience success a student must do something of value (DiGiulio, 2000).

Brain-compatible strategies can address the downtime within a lesson that occurs after approximately the first 20 minutes (Sousa, 2001).

A teacher’s effectiveness for the remainder of the school year will be determined by what that teacher does during the first few days of school (Wong & Wong, 1998).

What a student does—participates, performs, creates, designs, produces—has a greater impact on a student’s feeling of success than what the teacher believes, knows, or says (DiGiulio, 2000).

Ineffective teachers discipline their classrooms; effective teachers manage their classrooms (Wong & Wong, 1998, p. 83).

The most effective way to deal with misbehavior is to prevent the misbehavior in the first place (Burke, 1992).

HOW: CLASSROOM APPLICATION

- Many of your classroom management concerns can be alleviated by the way you set up the physical space around you. By arranging your classroom to facilitate the physical movement of students and to expedite their
conversation about class content, a great deal of management concerns can be avoided. Turn the artificial environment of school into a homelike atmosphere by adding plants, alternative seating, and natural or low lighting. Consult Chapters 4 through 8 for specific suggestions that will enable you to create a brain-compatible, proactive classroom environment.

- Prior to the beginning of the school year, determine those rituals (expectations and procedures) that will be required of students to maintain appropriate discipline in your classroom. For example, since students need to talk, how will you get students’ attention when you need it? Since students need to move, how will you get them in and out of their seats? (See Chapter 12 for ways to determine and teach your rituals.)

- When students’ brains and bodies are actively engaged in learning, behavior problems are diminished. Those students who were bored become actively engaged. Students with feelings of inadequacy gain confidence. Plan to use the 20 strategies outlined in the book *Worksheets Don’t Grow Dendrites: 20 Instructional Strategies That Engage the Brain*, which take advantage of the way brains learn best. When planning a lesson, determine the purpose of the lesson (objective, standard) and the knowledge and skill students should know and be able to perform. Examine the list of strategies to ascertain which one(s) would be most appropriate for delivering the instruction in a brain-compatible way. These strategies are outlined in the Introduction of this book.

- Prior to the beginning of the school year, make plans for ways to celebrate the successes of those students who are complying with classroom expectations and procedures. (See Chapter 16 for sample celebration activities.)

- Prior to the beginning of the school year, make plans for the negative consequences that students will encounter if they choose not to follow the established expectations and procedures. (See Chapter 18 for sample consequences for misbehavior.)

- Involve students in determining the classroom’s rituals, celebrations, and consequences. When students have input into the development of a classroom management plan, they are more likely to take ownership of the plan and its implementation. In fact, students will often formulate plans that are stricter than the teacher’s original ideas.

- Determine ways to remain calm when students disrupt or refuse to comply with designated expectations and procedures. These ways may include counting to ten, pausing, taking deep breaths, regarding the incident as humorous, or feeling confident that you can deal with the challenge at hand.

- Learn to separate the disciplinary infraction from the student. Maintain the utmost respect while informing the student that you will not tolerate this type of behavior in your classroom.
REFLECTION

What is my plan for becoming a proactive, not reactive, classroom manager?

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