Classroom Management Plan: Creating an Environment for Pre-Adolescent Learners

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The idea of achieving a more cohesive classroom has been around for nearly a century, in 1907 a book called *Classroom Management* writes, “There is no explicit formula that will cover each specific case, but one general suggestion may be given: *get order*. Drop everything else, if necessary, until order is secured” (as cited in Bennet et. al. 1999, pg. 513). This is still a good guideline of how a teacher should pull the classroom together but there are other theories for a classroom management plan. While many education experts claim they have the “correct” classroom management strategies, I will highlight the major theorists: Diane Gossen, Alfie Kohn, and Curwin and Mendler, all of which are based in part from Glasser’s (1998 revised) Choice Theory. The Choice Theory illustrates five basic needs: *survival, love and belonging, power, freedom* and *fun*, to satisfy behavior choices. Each of the above theories satisfy in some part of what is needed to implement a classroom management plan that exhibits the importance of student-centered learning. As Woodrow Wilson once said, “I not only use all the brains that I have but all that I can borrow.”

My first goal in establishing a classroom management plan would be to establish a policy that resounds an overarching need for respect and responsibility, as my classroom is to be a shared territory and not an authoritative organization run by the teacher. Students need to respect themselves, other students, and the teacher; this is very similar to what Curwin and Mendler’s talk about in Dignity and Responsibility in the Classroom. Through my experience with sixth graders if you model respect through actions and language you demonstrate the importance of a positive environment, in turn they will respect you and those around them. When students understand respect they will be able to note the differences in their abilities, identify their strengths and shortcomings, they will be more accepting to other students’ differences. Overall, students will be able to communicate more effectively, which researchers have shown that verbal communication can lead to a decrease in student altercations.

Responsibility not only for one’s actions but also for the actions of the entire class is an integral part of my classroom management plan. I agree with Diane Gossen’s (1992) Restitution Theory when it comes to how I want to handle the corrective strategies in the classroom, this theory
allows me to remain impartial, while letting the student devise what would make the situation better. When I taught at Lake Elmo I would use restitution to handle any infraction on the playground, this worked better than writing them up because they usually did not know what they did wrong. Like a cop, I would blow my whistle and have the student come over to see me. I would then ask what they had done wrong, they would either tell me or would say that they did not know. If they said someone else did it wrong, I would remind them that they had been called over and then remind that I asked, “What did you do wrong?” Once they had accepted responsibility for the problem, I then asked what we should do to remedy the situation. Most students selected something harsh and students who felt that I was infringing on their time usually selected something that was more lenient. Students quickly realized that this method can go fast and they could be back with their friends almost immediately. At the end of the year, some would say exactly what they did wrong and their solution without even having to be prompted. It is important that I also catch my students being good by letting them know that it is appreciated.

Within the first week of school, I want to get to know my students by asking them what their goals are for the classroom. I will not make my classroom management plan public; I believe it should be a private tool, a top-secret document, of how I am going to handle my classroom. Students will have dealt with classroom management plans since their elementary years; they should understand what the minimum expectations are in the classroom. During the first week of school, I will post my goals for the classroom and myself; I will let then students know what goals I have for them. I then will ask students to write down the goals that they have for themselves. At the beginning of the second term, I will re-distribute the papers and have students reflect on what they have accomplished and/or what needs work. At the end of the year, I will have students look over their sheets one last time and let them reflect on how they can be better prepared for next year.

Students want and need to be part of the group to enjoy the benefits of positive relationships; illustrated by Glasser’s Choice Theory (1998) is the need for love and belonging. I learned this concept in the oddest of place, the lunchroom and during recess; although recess is not an integral part of the middle school system it does exhibit points which helps solidify Glasser’s need of love
and belonging. Students who are part of the group show respect to who is in charge, when the group has a slight violation they quickly remedy the situation and they demonstrate conscientiousness towards their surroundings. Students who are not part of the group tend to be more disrespectful and respond frequently with, “Well, no one cares”, they show a lack of respect towards their surrounding by frequently leaving items to be picked up by someone else.

Through supportive strategies, I must encourage positive relationships through positive surroundings. Glasser (1998) advocates the needs for freedom, power, and fun. Students should feel welcomed in the classroom, that this is a shared territory; I will let students express their opinions in the classroom during class discussions. These discussions although, will have limitations of two speaking chances until everyone has spoken, and I will not allow put downs or degrading comments. This will also help students communicate more effectively with their peers; thereby assisting in understanding respect to others regardless of difference, but also of beliefs. I want students to enjoy the power in the classroom given to them through choice. Howard Gardner shows that students learn best when they use their individual Multiple Intelligences (MI) to satisfy their learning experience. If a student has a musical talent, it is important that I allow them to express that talent with a tailored project. Finally, students need to see that learning is fun. Curwin and Mendler (1999) support the idea of individuality by pointing out that each student is an individual and that classroom methods must be flexible to address student individuality. As a teacher, I can employ other learning methods such as teaching others or learning by doing, which shown through research are highly effective methods of retaining information. Learning by doing and teaching others yield high expectations on students learning for not only individual’s sake but also the groups’.

Keeping students engaged in the curriculum while having high expectations for group and individual work creates a challenge in finding motivation within students. Pulling students back into the curriculum after they have “checked out” of the lesson because it did not capture their interests presents a daunting task. Alfie Kohn (1996) says that motivation is the key to the academic development of students; it is essential that students be on task to continue with progress. The curriculum needs to have meaningful and authentic tasks, which pull in the students by using hooks.
I believe that students are generally intrinsically motivated and this is not because they have the genuine interest to learn, but because deep down they have some interest or find some enjoyment in the topic. Within the first few weeks, I must find out what intrinsically motivates the student and then support the intrinsic motivation by providing a positive and supportive environment. I need to help students by fostering the development of self-respect to establish extrinsic motivation.

Establishing extrinsic motivation is a more difficult task, students for many years have obtained rewards offered for all types of work and behavior. Switching to a secondary educational approach where rewards are less frequent creates a more difficult situation. I must show students that they should not fear disappointments but rather embrace it as a chance for improvement. Extrinsic motivation must also be addressed within the first week because students must understand that within my classroom they will be rewarded by the “quality” of what is learned and not the sheer “quantity” that is achieved.

When students are engaged in the curriculum they will readily respond when they believe that learning environment is positive and supportive. By giving students meaning and authentic tasks, they are intrinsically motivated because of some interest in the topic and extrinsically motivated by the understanding that this will benefit their learning. Keeping students engaged in the curriculum is the responsibility of the teacher, I must have preventative strategies such as wit and quick thinking to keep my students engaged, I want to be able to stop the disruptions before they even occur. Since I will be teaching Social Studies, students need to understand that there are lessons outside of the textbook and it is possible to use various learning tools.

Once you have built the foundation that includes a positive environment, motivation, and engagement students will work more productively. Decision-making is a key factor of productive work. I believe that I should reinforce decision making through models of cause/effect and situations that cause a weighing of pro/cons. Students will learn in my classroom that tough decision need to be made such as during in-class work time, “Should we talk with our friends or get work done?” Or “Should I go to the basketball game tonight even though my project is not done?”
Adolescents face a lot of peer pressure and by teaching students an effective decision making model, it will help them began taking responsibility and understanding self-respect.

The combination of the above factors creates a strong foundation for learning communities. I was first introduced to learning communities when I was in college; students were enrolled in the same three core classes while living together in the same residence hall. Class enrollment was limited to just the students within the learning community, so that within these small groups they built networks, assisted each other on their homework and increased their motivation and engagement toward the curriculum. Middle schools use these methods with concepts like team teaching. It is important that I am the catalyst force in linking the family, school, and community so students are able to link their learning outside my classroom. This is achieved through communication with the families before the school year.

Establishing a repertoire with the student and their family will aid in keeping this classroom management plan afloat. Many philosophers and theorists establish that students want to learn, I want to promote learning, though the taking of risks and exploring beyond boundaries. By doing so students will undoubtedly make mistakes and frequently ask questions, but in a positive light students will be able to expand their understanding of abstract concepts, since they are entering into Piaget’s stage of Formal Operations. I want students to know that I am interested in them even though I might force them to make hard decisions. I remember during my adolescence I had a teacher who really cared, he made sure that I understood that academics came first but I should also do what I love, which was skiing. I had to earn my grades to keep up with two practices a day. He also had a good relationship with my parents because they were kept aware of how I was doing academically because my training left me with little time to keep them updated. I know when I enter in the classroom I will have students who emphasize sports over academics and it is my job to make sure that these students know that not only I care about their interests that but I am there to see them succeed academically.

A classroom management plan goes beyond the posted classroom rules and serves as an interpretation of how one follows through of the rules. Even though I feel ‘rules’ to be a negative
term, I see them to be more like goals to achieve daily as I strive for them to be positively stated. Implementing these goals will help students see that I strive for a positive environment that is caring and supportive. Students should understand that with a stated goal that there is a consequence (restitution) if it is not achieved. This is aligned with Curwin and Mendler’s (1999) Nine Principles for Consequence Implementation; this will help create my classroom where I strive to have discipline as a process and not a show, since it is important that I remain consistent and calm during infractions.

Like a classroom philosophy, which implements a model of teaching and changes as trends come and go, a classroom management plan is also ever changing. The quote at the beginning even though it is almost a century old states that there is no specific formula in regards to teaching. Classroom management methods will come and go, as new theorists will claim to have all the answers. Although, I am realistic in knowing that I have not thought about every possible incident, as each day will bring new challenges, I know that I am confident to face those challenges head-on.
References


