CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT. BECOMING A SKILLFUL TEACHER

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Abstract: *Classroom management can be defined as the complex learning environment created and maintained in order to supports instruction and increase student achievement (Brophy, Perspectives on classroom management, 2000). Good classroom management is the main reason for building a good relationship with students. There are few reasons for building positive personal relationships with students: making students feel important and worthwhile; making the classroom environment pleasant and safe; making teaching fun for both the teacher and the students. Teachers may relate to students in a variety of ways, according to the particular situation he/she meets at a certain point. The art of being a good teacher implies matching the way of relating to the student and establishing friendly, but appropriate relationships. Recent studies have shown that students who like and respect their teacher perform much better than those who dislike or have an affectively neutral position with the teacher. Classroom climate represents the wide range of feelings, beliefs and expectations students have and the resulting behavior. Saphier and Gower (1997) define three major strands of classroom climate: community and mutual support, risk taking and confidence, and influence and control.*

Keywords: *classroom management, positive climate, learning community.*

Building appropriate and positive relationships with the students is a major objective for teachers who want to create a learning environment that is genuine, interesting and purposeful. One of the most difficult things for any teacher, be novice or expert/veteran, is establishing a positive climate classroom in which all students feel included/accepted, irrespective of gender, cultural and social background differences.

In order to relate to students as persons, considering them as an important part of the entire learning-teaching process, teachers need to focus on them as individuals, to see and interpret students' responses and actions, to enable them to assimilate new concepts (information processor). Another important factor is relating to students as feeling beings with goals, dreams and fears (personal, one-to-one level). Teachers should always match the way in which they relate to the needs of the students and the circumstances of classrooms. A good teacher knows how to establish a relation with a student in different ways, at different times. The better a teacher can match the way in which she/he relates to individual students and to particular circumstances, the more productive and smooth relationships will be with all her/his students. Effective teaching involves blending firmness and caring, with warmth, respect and trust.

Strategies for Building Positive Relationships

Modeling students' behavior is one strategy for building positive relationships. Provided that we only emulate people we admire, like and respect, teachers must first establish and build good relationships with the students. The natural result of this relationship with the students is the capacity to influence and shape the students' behavior. The more the relationship deepens, the more powerful the effect of the modeling process becomes. In order to have a *model student*, in the classroom, teachers

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must be *model educators* first. Politeness, promptness, enthusiasm for teaching/learning, consideration for others, anger control, honesty, and fairness are only some traits in a long list which would describe a skillful, model teacher.

There are two possible ways to establish an appropriate relationship with the students: the first one is providing them opportunities to know you as a person. The second one is the teacher's openness to his/her students' concerns and feelings regarding the entire learning-teaching process. In their book, *Comprehensive Classroom Management*, Vernon and Louise Jones (2000) describe three levels of openness for the students-teacher relationships:

Complete openness: teacher shares a large range of personal concerns and values.

Openness related to school: teacher shares only feelings regarding school.

Role-bound relationship: teacher performs instructional duties, sharing no personal feelings or reactions.

Deciding on the level of openness is a matter of personal choice, preference, and professional judgment. This is extremely important because the line between teacher and student is blurred when disclosing too many personal details about the teacher's private life. Teachers are not students' parents or their friends. It is of utmost importance to maintain our role as *teachers* because our influence is clearly felt when we act within our role as teachers.

A positive climate for learning can be created/developed by keeping a positive perspective without over dwelling on student misbehavior or inadequacies, and by appropriate teacher praise. Poor performance should not be ignored because students need corrective feedback so that they know what to improve and how to improve. Still, it is a major objective that the learning climate remains positive, i.e. students should look forward to the class. Students expect to learn and to get help when they are in difficulty. Teachers can establish an appropriate climate by communicating positive expectations to students and by praising good performance, even using some rewarding in special circumstances.

In order to communicate efficiently their expectations (Good and Brophy, 2003, chapter 3), teachers can:

- Identify appropriate instructional goals and discuss them with students.
- Communicate acceptance of imperfect initial performance
- Convey confidence in the students' ability to do well
- Display an encouraging attitude that generates student confidence
- Avoid comparative evaluations that may be completely discouraging for students, generating failure instead of accomplishment of objectives.

Constructive criticism and improvement suggestions can also be used with efficiency. However, teachers should focus on a student's accomplishment, not on his/her effort. Students have to deserve praise, and obtain it through hard work.

Building a classroom community encompasses a broader idea of the way in which students relate to each other and to the teacher. The quality of the relationships among students affects both their behavior and their academic achievement.

Saphier and Gower (1997:359) define *community and mutual support* as:

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> An individual's feelings in relation to group feelings of acceptance, inclusion, membership, and maybe beyond into friendship and affection. *Risk taking and confidence* represent an internal, personal dimension that is influenced significantly by the reaction of others to one's behaviors. Put-downs and sarcasm, however subtle they may be, reduce one's confidence that it is safe to risk thinking and trying […]. *Influence and control* represent the dimension of class climate that pertains to personal efficacy, defined as one's power to produce effects.

These three major strands of classroom climate are important for student learning, improvement, and achievement. Classroom climate is not the only variable that influences students, but it influences them directly, visibly. If the climate classroom is safe for students, the learning process is accelerated.

Conclusions

The classroom community should be focused on cooperation, not competitiveness. Structuring situations cooperatively results in students' supporting, helping, and encouraging each other. Cooperation that fosters interdependence is an essential attribute of a learning community. It also generates group bonding and cohesion (Jan Fisher in McLeod, Joyce, Jan Fisher, and Ginny Hoover, 2003:72).

Students' poor or successful academic achievement begins in the classroom; the personal connection students have with the teacher, and their peers from the learning community play an important role in their development. Teachers influence and change their students' behaviors and achievements in ways they may not be aware of. This is the main reason beyond teachers' struggle to establish a positive and caring classroom climate.

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