

Unit 2

Classroom Management

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Gaining and Maintaining Motivation

Every student is interested in something. The important task for the teacher is to be able to identify these interests and then to incorporate them into his instructional procedures. For example, for a creative-writing course, how much more interesting it would be for a car enthusiast to write about the thrills of being a race car driver than to write about an assigned topic. In addition, the teacher can create interests that are related to the objective. Excellent ways are the use of games and a variety of techniques to make the subject “come alive”. For example, instead of reading about ant colonies, bring an ant colony encased in glass into the classroom. Few students can resist watching those small creatures busily burrowing through their tunnels, carrying those huge loads. Sometimes the teacher may use an unexpected technique such as allowing the students to write a test on their own and take their self-made test. When students do what they are interested, they pay attention and accomplish the task.

In order to learn something, we must pay attention to it. While there are situations in which we learn things that we are not intentionally trying to learn – the number of windows in the classroom, the color of the book cover, and so on – we certainly have attended to those things we did learn. Attention and motivation are closely related in a number of ways, and both have their primary effect on the learning process by influencing the amount of effective practice time that an individual spends on a task. First, the individual must attend to the learning task itself rather than to some other activity. Second, the individual often needs to be directed to the important or critical aspects of the learning task.

To help the student attend to the material or task to be learned, a teacher can use some of the approaches we have just discussed. If a teacher relates the objective to the student’s interest, so the learner is aware of the relevance of the task, student is more likely to attend to the task. Monotony is the enemy of sustained interest; teachers who try to vary their presentations stand a much better chance of holding their students’ attention than teachers who use the same techniques all the time. (Shuell and Lee 1976, 130-131)

Dealing with Classroom Problems

The word “discipline” in an instructional setting often implies punishment. To others, it involves good supervision. However it is defined, it revolves around respect for others, as well as for oneself. It implies a respect for reasonable rules, for the property of others, and for the needs of other people.

Discipline assumes reasonable and mature behavior. In the classroom and workshop, it is essential, just as it is the workplace. Learning and effort are possible only in a disciplined instructional environment.

In a survey, it was found that some teachers and instructors had few disciplinary problems. Others had a great many. When the two groups were compared, it was found that instructors who had the fewest problems shared a particular set of characteristics.

Instructors and teachers had few disciplinary problems if they:

- Interpreted and enforced the rules fairly.
- Knew their subject, and were up to date with current practice.
- Knew the needs of their trainees and students.
- Felt secure in their relationships with trainees.
- Were sincerely interested in people and instructors
- Behaved in a professional manner as instructors.
- Used persuasion, reason and good interpersonal relationships as the foundation of their leadership style in the classroom.

In other words, successful teachers and instructors were fair, consistent, and competent in their dealings with people. An overbearing use of authority and coercion must be avoided.

Good lesson planning will reduce the probability of behavioral problems. So will group activity and participation.

(Davies 1981, 121-122)

Classroom Management

Effective classroom management consists of teacher behaviors that produce high levels of students' involvement in classroom activities, minimal amounts of student behaviors that interfere with the teacher's or other students' work, and efficient use of instructional time. These criteria have the advantage of being directly observable.

Classroom management should be viewed as one major dimension of effective teaching, rather than synonymous with it. Teachers also provide instruction, evaluate students, choose curriculum, promote self-adjustment, and influence student attitudes. Hence, effective teaching encompasses varying degree of different tasks. But the centrality of classroom management to the teacher's role, as well as its relationship with learning, make it worth our while to inquire further about teacher behaviors that produce well-managed classrooms.

Teacher behaviors for well-managed classrooms were;

Overlapping: teacher's ability to attend to more than one event or issue at a time.

Smoothness and momentum: aspects of the teacher's movement through different activities. Smoothness in moving through a lesson means not interrupting seatwork or an instructional sequence with irrelevant or tangential information, and not becoming diverted by behaviors or events that are not interfering in any noticeable manner. Momentum refers to avoiding behavior that slows down a lesson.

Group alerting: the teacher's attempts to keep children attentive when not reciting. That is, "on their toes" and with the group.

Accountability: how well the teacher monitors and maintains student performance during recitation.

Valence and challenge arousal: the teacher uses a motivational comment.

Variety and challenge: the child is presented with varied activities or task demands.

(Anderson 1989, 159-160)

General “Truths” for Classroom Management

Some of the most pervasive discipline cases arise when the teacher is unsure of his status in relation to his students. This difficulty might be traced to the teacher’s lack of interest in and knowledge of his students. It has been belabored by many that he is unlikely to be able to identify with the need of his ghettoes learners. He doesn’t understand why they behave as they do, and the students return his ignorance. Classroom order is his problem, not theirs. Confronted with this threatening situation, a new teacher is likely to select either of two inappropriate courses of action. He may become rigid and overstrict with the students, seeing every encounter as a test of his authority. By being firm with his students he is preserving the fabric of society. He may also be making life very hard for himself. Another teacher may attempt to become a “true friend” of his students. “Call me Joe, not Mr. Sullivan.” He says jovially. He may attempt to use the students’ vernacular, which he is likely to do self-consciously. He may be so lenient that he is unable to direct the class’s attention when necessary for instructional purposes.

A teacher must attempt to know his students. If he can attempt to understand some of the problems they are having—those that are typical for their age or frequent in their particular environment—he may be able to anticipate the kinds of difficulty he is likely to encounter and make probable decisions in a rational rather than besieged frame of mind.

(Popham and Baker 1970, 118-119)

Classroom Climate: Praise and Success

Classroom climate refers to the atmosphere in the class that affects how well the student learns. Each learning situation is comprised of many variables, each interacting with the student in a unique way. There are no “right” or “infallible” approaches to creating a positive classroom climate, but there are some factors that are particularly influential.

Praise

To be most effective, the praise must be clearly the result of the student’s actions/words not just a perfunctory “good” or “that’s right” this means that the teacher must really listen to the student, without really listening to what is being said. A useful technique to help develop listening skills is to paraphrase what the student has said, before saying “that’s a good idea.” This serves two purposes: it makes sure that what the teacher heard is what the student meant, and it assures the student that the teacher is interested enough to really listen. If praise to be an effective factor in classroom climate, it must be meant by the teacher and believed by the student.

Success

In order to provide the student with the opportunity to experience success, the teacher needs to carefully plan the instructional procedures to match the student’s level of cognitive development. Saying that success is very important does not mean, however, that failure is always “bad”. In fact, failure can be a constructive learning experience if it becomes successful failure. Students will inevitable experience some failure throughout their lives, and part of the teacher’s task is to help them cope with the reality of failure as well as with the failure itself. Keep in mind that by success we mean the student’s progress, not his right answers. A good teacher can help the student look at a mistake in such a way he learns much more than if he had merely memorized the correct answer. The teacher should help the student analyze why he made the mistake and how he can avoid repeating the mistake.

(Shuell and Lee 1976, 144-145)

Classroom Climate: Competition and Anxiety

Competition

Competition is usually a part of the classroom. There are really two sides of competition, internal and external. Internal competition, or self-imposed standards of excellence, can be an excellent motivating force. The desire to do better than yesterday or to strive for some future goal is a healthy and constructive form of competition, provided the aspiration is realistic. One way for a teacher to encourage internal competition is, of course, the use of criterion-referenced evaluation and mastery learning. But most competition in the classroom is external, in other words, the criterion for excellence is outside the person. The possible disadvantages of external competition are quite obvious: students can become frustrated with failure and “turn off” or withdraw. There may be times, however, when external competition could serve as a motivating force in the classroom. Create team competition rather than individual competition, so that no one person is the loser; try to make the teams equal in ability; do not limit the number of winners; and make the learning activity interesting enough so that competition is just the vehicle for learning and not the goal itself.

Anxiety

Not all anxiety in the classroom is detrimental; in fact, a moderate amount of anxiety actually facilitates learning, it is only when the degree of anxiety is extreme that it becomes debilitating. The role of the teacher then is to try to identify students who are blocked by excessive anxiety and attempt to create a classroom climate that will enable them to become less anxious and more productive.

Mastery learning and criterion-referenced evaluation are two ways to ease the stress of testing and evaluation by relieving some of the pressure. For example, the importance of time limits is minimized to allow for more careful thought, and the opportunity to retake the test reduces that “last chance to make it” feeling. By reducing the threatening atmosphere that surrounds evaluation, we can “open up” the minds of many individuals to all sorts of learning. (Shuell and Lee 1976, 145-146)

Incident-Related Management

Signals

When a student is mildly misbehaving, the teacher can signal him that he is under surveillance. Such signals might be a finger-snap, a knowing glance, or a wave of the hand. These signals should help the miscreant to control himself, but should be used in a way that does not interrupt the activities of the class. This means that the sign given is a little one, and not disruptive in itself, such as book slamming or handclapping may be. When a teacher makes a tympanic scene over a discipline incident, he removes the possibility of the learner's controlling his own behavior. Furthermore, if the teacher is very dramatic, his actions in themselves can be reinforcing to the learners, and they may misbehave just to get the teacher to put on a show.

Humor

Sometimes, when the incident is small, the teacher might well choose to make light of a student's misbehavior in a non-sarcastic way. By calling attention to the problem in a humorous manner, the teacher maintains good will and gives warning to the offender that he knows what is afoot. The humor used, however, ought not be too polished because the class's response to such a scintillating routine might be more disruptive than the actions of the misbehaving student.

Ignoring

Ignoring, not to be confused with ignorance, can often be purposefully used in mild disciplinary situations. To practice this method, the teacher must have the flexibility not to make every infraction punishable by his acknowledgement. In certain cases, ignoring misbehavior can work out well; for instance, when the teacher suspects the student is desirous of attention and is acting up so the teacher will deal with him. If the teacher feels that the problem will remain isolated to the single student, misbehavior can be ignored. But if the probability is that other students will be either disturbed or enticed by the situation, the teacher had better take some action.

(Popham and Baker 1970, 122-123)