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**Introduction**

Considering classroom management is essential to being a successful teacher and bringing about successful learning for all students in the classroom. Having a plan, considering student differences and creating a classroom that is safe for all students assists in ensuring that learning may take place day after day. But as Dollard and Christensen explain in their 1996 article “teachers in schools today are challenged on many levels as they try to organize and maintain an orderly, harmonious, and stimulating learning environment,” (p. 1), and this continues to be true eighteen years after their article was published.

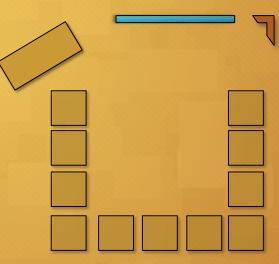
My own philosophy of teaching includes that students should feel safe and be a part of the process for the construction of rules in the classroom, which aids in classroom management. I believe students are able to learn best when they believe that the classroom is in some ways their own, and not just something inflicted upon them. I am also of the mind that all students deserve an opportunity to learn in the way which suits them best. This includes being able to show their learning in a variety of ways as well as being able to have a subject presented to them in a number of ways. Choices for students is important, but so is being able to as a teacher create a definitive grade for each choice and, when necessary, eliminate choices to hone students’ skills. I am also building this off of the experiences I have had as a student teacher in rural Alaska, specifically Perryville, Alaska which is a native village of one hundred people, all of whom are at least half Alutiiq.



Perryville, Alaska

**Preparation Before the School Year Starts**

Even before students are in the school, a teacher should be considering how the classroom will be run. This includes considering where students will sit when they come in, if they will move their desks around for different activities, if there will be any other spaces where students will sit or work during class times and how technology will be used in the classroom. In an English classroom it is also important to consider where free time or independent time books will be placed (or if a classroom library is even possible). The walls of the classroom should be welcoming, interesting but not distracting. For my own classroom the students would be in a semi-circle to encourage group discussion and also make partner work easy to break into without the necessity of moving desks around every time. This also allows space in the middle of the room for activity and for students to be able to see the front of the room with ease. Those who want to be closer to the board or projector can do so, and those who are in the back are still clearly visible to the instructor. The above graphic shows a classroom with only eleven desks, but this can work with more desks as well. Creating a good atmosphere is also important, as discussed in Samuel’s piece on teachers decorating classrooms from 2003. She states “many teachers have spent hours transforming bare-walled classrooms into spaces riotous with color and personality. The money for the transformation often comes from their pockets. But it’s worth it, they say, to create a room where they and their students feel at home,” (Samuels, 2013, p. 17). Therefore I would want to include things like a vocabulary wall (to be added to throughout the year as we find neat words) and a quote wall which can have inspirational literary quotes (which can also be added to as time goes on). Having space open for student work to be displayed is also a great way of showing students their part in the classroom and gives them a chance to show off work they are especially proud of or that they did very well completing. Before the school year starts is also a good time to envision how class will run and to plan for those transitional moments in the classroom by making sure there is adequate room and any necessary supplies.



An Imaging of the Classroom

**Policies/Procedures/Rules**

It is almost always the case where things go smoothly only when there are clear rules in place. For the classroom it makes the most sense to create rules which the students feel agency over, hence including students in the rule creation process. This does not mean that there will not be structure and guidelines put forth by the teacher, as Wong and Wong explain “It is extremely important to realize that many students come from disorganized, unstructured home environments, where chaos abounds. Neglected children crave structure and guidance. Give them a well-managed, organized classroom with clear daily practices and routine procedures, and they will respond positively,” (2014, p. 2). Once students understand an established pattern of procedure they will have an easier time being productive in the classroom, and hopefully will also feel that sense of safety that is also being attempted. There is also no reason to cluster students’ minds with a lot of rules, but it is instead better to come up with a few rules which encompass several large ideas. One of the ones which truly captures a lot of other rules in its net is “be respectful”, which applies to the self and others. When students talk over each other or put themselves down a teacher may gently remind them that a rule of the classroom is to be respectful. While including students in the creating of the rules, teachers may also have students sign said rules as a promise to do their best to attempt to uphold them, even on their bad days. But students may also be reminded that everyone, truly everyone, has bad days. It may seem to complicate matters to include students in the creation of the rules, but as Dollard and Christensen explain: “as students are given more responsibility for their own behavior and learning, teachers are relieved of the burden of playing police officer or jailer. This is an act of trust on the teacher's part, one that engenders trust on the students' part, and one that will help to consolidate a caring and safe relationship within which learning can occur,” (1996, p. 3).

Our Class Rules

1. Be respectful of yourself and others

2. Come prepared

3. Be safe

4. Ask when you need help

5. Have fun!

Example of Rules for My Own Classroom

To enforce both the rules created and procedures for various things that may happen during class time it is worth the effort to have students act out these things, both good examples and bad examples, so they may see how things should (and should not) look throughout the school year. This may include having students calmly put things away in case of a fire drill or practice how they should behave should you have to step out in the hall to speak with another teacher or the principle. It may also include coming into the classroom procedure, leaving the classroom procedure and how to behave when there is a guest speaker or another student is presenting. While practicing may feel silly, it can be a fun way to really understand what is expected of students when things really happen. This can also be a good time to establish a “we need to be quiet now” routine, such as holding up one hand until all others do so, which can then be used throughout the school year if the volume level in the classroom ever gets out of hand (students may want to use such a thing as well).

As someone who also believes that technology should be used in the classroom, I would include procedures for using technologies based on what is available. If, for instance, I plan on letting students use applications on cell phones, I would have a rule that all cell phones must be placed on the desk, face down, unless it is actively being used for a classroom activity. Students who misuse their technology will know the consequence for doing so is technology not being allowed to be used by anyone. If this were to occur, phones would remain face down on desks, but would not be permitted to be touched during class time. For laptops and tablets similar rules may be put into place, letting students know they are in control of whether or not technology remains a tool in the classroom.

**Safety and Legal Requirements**

Too often some people seem to forget that students, while young, are freethinking people who are both emotional and complicated. Because of this, students have bad days, or live in bad situations and need to be able to still feel safe in the classroom, even while the teacher manages their behavior. Managing behaviors of students can be difficult, but it is for the benefit of everyone involved. Sayeski and Brown explain a three-tiered approach in their 2014 article on the subject of managing behavior, the first tier being preventative, the second being first-line interventions and the third being intensive, individualized interventions. In order to use such an approach Sayeski and Brown explain that the first step is understanding how behavior expectations are being conveyed in the classroom, and making sure expectations are being conveyed in a clear, positive manner and in a consistent fashion. Ways that Sayeski and Brown suggest doing this include established rules and routines as previously mentioned in this classroom management plan and response cards for the students to look over (2014). If expectations of behavior are muddled students will have an even harder time behaving appropriately. The second tier then focuses on the first offenses of poor behavior, which may be dealt with quietly simply by standing near the student or reminding the student of the classroom rules, which the student would have signed. For the final tier two questions are asked first, “Why is the student behaving like this? What socially acceptable behavior can we teach to address this same need?” (Sayeski and Brown, 2014, p. 125). From these questions solutions which work for the student and the teacher may be pulled, such as social skills instruction, which may also require the assistance of other teachers and professionals. Showing students how to deal with their emotions in a different way and discussing appropriate ways to interact with others is sometimes required as some students do not get sufficient social learning in their time outside of the classroom.

It is also good to spend time practicing how students should deal with emergency situations in the classroom. If students practice these things it will be less likely they will respond poorly should the situation actually arise. Practicing the school’s plan for fire drills, accidents and attackers during the first week of school lets students experience what they will need to do. Some schools may have other things to consider, such as here in Perryville where there is a tsunami plan to practice as well as fire drills. After practicing these types of events, having an open discussion with students about these types of events is also a good follow up. Letting students know that their safety is important is valuable and helps set the stage for a year of considering student needs and safety.

**Student Diversity**

In every classroom there is a wide variety of students. Some may be of different ethnicity or religion; others may have different learning styles or abilities. For each of these students the classroom should still be a safe, positive learning environment. When explaining different ways to view students Dollard and Christensen state in their 1996 article that “This concept of viewing the child in a holistic fashion is key to developing child-centered curricula those that are relevant, interesting, and take advantage of the student's natural curiosities and past experiences. Further, this relationship draws upon, rather than directs, a multiplicity of perspectives. When students and teachers feel included, they feel valued and important,” (p. 2). When applying such an idea to a full classroom, it becomes clear that each student has his or her own curiosities to pull from, and each needs time and room to explore. More than just ethnic, diversity also refers to different levels of ability, and special needs students as well as English language learners need different things from the classroom to succeed. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that students with disabilities should be in the least restrictive environment possible for their education, so many will attend the regular classroom. Altering assignments as necessary per Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or as otherwise needed gives students the chance to show their learning in a way which is within their abilities. When possible, pairing strong readers with good understanding of the material with English language learners will help both students come to understand the materials better, and if all students are in pairs or have the option of being in pairs this may also allow for classroom camaraderie.

In some ways it may be easier to help and incorporate solutions for students with disabilities or English language learners since the education system now sets out to help those students be able to succeed. Hochweber, Hosenfeld and Klieme discuss in their 2014 article the idea of expectation bias, or an anticipation by teachers of how well students will do based on a variety of factors, “Expectancy-based bias can be of considerable size, among others, in specific judgmental situations. Particularly relevant in the present context is the situation’s cognitive demands,” (p. 291). This does not mean teachers feel minority students will always do poorly and Hochweber, Hosenfeld and Klieme even note that “teachers’ achievement ratings were higher for poor and minority students than would have been expected from their test scores,” (2014, p. 291). Each student, regardless of their lot in life or other factors which may describe the student, deserves their fair chance in the classroom.

Recognizing one’s own biases and doing one’s best to ignore them during the school day is very important. This may mean noticing that one does not respond well to a particular student and working actively to change that behavior. It also means giving students a new slate every day, not holding grudges for the student’s bad days and instead starting each new day with the idea that the student deserves a fresh start. Encouraging positive outlooks towards others in the classroom can be done by being a good example of how to behave. In the English classroom one may also use a variety of literature to show students the importance of other cultures, lifestyles and beliefs and also to show the humanity of other groups of people.

**Community Resources**

In the community of Perryville it is sometimes difficult to see what resources are available. However, the village does offer several resources which can and should be utilized in order to enrich learning of the students. One major resource is simply the landscape of the village, which can be used to explore science, Alaskan species and even just to inspire writing assignments. With a little organization a beach walk may be organized during which students may be shown the washed-up jellyfish and exotic black sand that almost always grace the beaches. While students here see these things all the time, they may not understand just how interesting and education it can be to explore one’s own place of living. Perryville also has many elders who have been life time fishermen, a popular profession in Alaska, who may be persuaded into the classroom for discussions on fishing issues, how Alaska has changed and what it means for those elders to be able to live in a rural area. Perryville School also has a few itinerant employees who visit every semester and are always willing to come into the classroom. One such visitor is the special education teacher, April Lefever. While she does visit for the needs of the students on IEPs, she can also be persuaded to come read to the class, discuss her experiences in Alaska and talk about diversity. Another itinerant employee is the school counselor, Kasie Luke, who visits less frequently but often stays a little longer. She always volunteers to come into the classroom, so using her expertise in any lesson can be a treat. She is also able to talk to students about less comfortable subjects such as depression and home problems, and making sure students know and are comfortable with her does them a great service. Knowing about these kinds of teacher-to-teacher resources and also considering the other teachers in your building as a resource is a good idea, especially in rural areas, but truly everywhere. Clark’s article discusses the overwhelming factors of being a new teacher and also mentions that “School leaders who assign the most challenging students and most difficult courses to beginning teachers without sufficient supports are not recognizing the inherent danger to these new teachers or to the students they teach. Collaboration allows for camaraderie and synergy,” (2012, p. 199). The idea being that new teachers are often especially challenged and that considering other teachers as resources will help those teachers to blossom and stay in the profession. Lastly, Perryville has a community center, known as the Katmai center, which holds events and has a group of locals which run it. The Katmai center can be used as a classroom resource when it comes to organizing events such as a potluck or bingo night where students can raise money for travelling or support the community in which they live. While this may not be purely academic, it does help students see their community in ways besides being a student, which could translate into senior projects or even fundraisers for class trips.

**Planning and Conducting Instruction**

When considering assignments for students, giving them space to show their learning, or using differentiation, allows for the students to feel more ownership over what they are doing. There are several different types of differentiation, including differentiation by skill level and interest. These two work very well in the English classroom where there may be several assignments for a single unit of study. Giving students choices for how to show their learning, such as a choice board or even just two or three different options allows for students to become more interested in what they are doing. Pairing low achieving students with high achieving students can also help both learn more about particular subjects. The low achieving student gets one on one explanations, and the high achieving student practices explaining the concept which solidifies his or her learning. Making time for such projects and activities allows for all learners to feel more confident about what is being taught and what they are required to know by the end of a unit.

It is also valuable to think of the entire semester or even school year as a whole with specific plans and outcomes that will be achieved by the yearend. That way when teaching a poetry unit one may also be easing into the idea of reading a longer form poetic text such as a play, which could then be the next unit. This allows for seamless integration of units, but also makes it easier to be sure that all standards are hit through the school year, which is especially important considering the shift to standards based curriculums. While each unit when planned as the year unfolds may be very good on its own, it does help to know that each pivotal idea will be built on so students may see their learning as a cohesive entity. However, even with a year long entity compiled, having flexibility is important as opportunities may arise which students will appreciate being given a chance to explore. Keeping this in mind, leaving a little wiggle room is a good idea, as long as a back up plan is in place so that one is not then left scrambling should no such opportunity arise or extensions be needed.

I am also personally a fan of incorporating technology into the classroom in relevant, interesting ways in order to show students how things they use every day are relevant to their educations. In different classrooms this may take the form of projecting interactive slide shows with video and activities or if possible letting students use an application on their phone to answer reading or other types of quiz questions to start the lessons. Alaska has a wide variety of levels of technology available for classroom use, but any available technology may be used in the classroom if first carefully considered as previously outlined in this management plan.

**Summary**

As much planning and organization that one brings to the classroom environment, it is still important to remember patience and a good attitude to go along with the plan. This helps to manage unforeseen events. As previously stated, all people have bad days, but leaving the bad day at the door and facing the students with a positive attitude allows for the plan to go smoothly and for the day to be a good one, even if it is still a “bad day” for the teacher. But admitting to your mistakes lets students know that even you, the teacher, the person who is paid to be there, is only human, and being human is a beautiful thing. So take the plan, follow the plan, but when something unexpected comes up, let that happen without losing sight of the real goal: to give students the best education possible.

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