Preventing Children from Becoming Squirrels

Comprehensive Classroom Management Plan

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**Introduction:**

What is classroom management? Tracey Garret defines class room management as all of the actions teachers need to take to provide students a space conducive to education. An effectively managed classroom is one in which the teacher is able to prevent or resolve conflicts and distractions, keep students engaged, and build supportive relationships with the students (2014, pg 3). To do this is not a simple task and requires teachers to devote a considerable amount of effort and time. Ideally, the teacher will set up a system of management that students easily conform to and allows the teacher to focus more on the educational aspect of teaching. To create an opportunity for students to have a successful learning career, teachers must maintain effective classroom management.

Initially, the main focus of classroom management is to create a set of rules and procedures for the students to follow that prevents conflicts and distractions. It is far better to prevent the distractions from happening rather than having to deal with them as they happen. Setting clear expectations and procedures creates an opportunity for students function collaboratively and in an organized fashion.

The next major step is building relationships with the students and their parents. Parents can be an excellent resource when it comes to learning about the student’s needs and also helping resolve any behavioral issues. The more teachers can learn about the students and the more comfortable the students are with the teachers, the easier it is for teachers to understand what the student needs to be successful. It is imperative that students feel safe, important, and respected. Otherwise, students might withdraw from participating in the classroom or become problematic.

Unfortunately, it isn’t possible for a teacher to prevent all disruptions through good classroom management. At times, poor student behavior will need to be corrected. In these situations, it’s important that students understand beforehand the consequences of their choices and that the teacher enforces them firmly. Students need to be held accountable for their actions so that they learn certain behaviors are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

One last major strategy that teachers need to employ to keep a classroom well managed is to make the content relevant and manageable. If students don’t see any point to the exercises, they will quickly lose interest and become restless. Furthermore, if the exercises are two difficult or have poor directions, students will feel overwhelmed and struggle to stay motivated. Teachers need to ensure that their exercises have very clear instructions and that the tasks are manageable for their students. To do this, teachers will continually have to use formal and informal assessments to check how their students are doing academically.

 I believe classroom management is the foundation to providing a good education to high school students. If a class of high school students are not managed effectively, they will turn into a mob of squirrels that are impossible to educate. A teacher with poor classroom management skills could have the perfect lesson plan coupled with perfect explanations to their content, and it would fall on deaf ears. The time and effort spend managing a classroom will enable the teach to educate the students far more successfully. Personally, I feel that classroom management comes first and foremost, because without it, students will struggle to learn anything.

**Preparation before the School Year starts:**

 A major step towards a successful year is preparation before the school year begins. The way teachers set up their classroom is an important aspect of classroom management that should be given careful consideration. As a math teacher, I prefer the class to have a decent amount of open space that creates easy access to all of the students. As students work on problems, is extremely beneficial to wander around and quickly observe if they are comprehending the material or if they need any extra help. Furthermore, open spaces make it much easier for me to use my proximity to keep the students focused. According to Tauber “the single most powerful factor that governess the likelihood of a student fooling around is the physical distance between the teacher and the student” (1999, pg 92).

I also plan to have assigned student seating. Robert Tauber is of the opinion that anything teachers “don’t arrange to their advantage would ultimately be arranged to their disadvantage” (1999, pg 92). For this reason, on the first day of school I will number the desks and then pass out corresponding numbers to the students as they walk in. This would be their assigned seat for the start of the year. As the year unfolds, I will make any necessary adjustments to the arranged seating to minimize distracting behavior and also maximize the spread of knowledge throughout the classroom. I would also like to have the students broken up into groups of two or three so that it is easy for them to transfer to group work, but also not too crowded to cause distraction.

 Another important aspect to consider is the equipment and ambiance of the classroom. I will try to set up the classroom so that it has a comfortable atmosphere as well as comfortable seating. Some students are unable to stay still in one place for an entire class period. To combat the distracting fidgeting, I will ideally have the budget to provide some wiggle chairs that allow students to move around while still focusing on their work. Lighting and decorations also have a significant impact. It’s amazing what a few motivational posters and Christmas lights can do to create an inviting classroom. A smartboard would also make the math lessons far easier to teach.

 Getting to know the students is another valuable mission that teachers can spend some time working on before the year starts. It’s important to have the names of the students learned early as well as any pertinent behavioral or academic information they can gather from the student’s previous teachers. This will enhance to teacher’s ability to build those necessary relationships with the students as well as allow the teachers the chance to learn any valuable information about their future students. Teachers can also take the opportunity to reach out to their student’s parents to help build the home contingency and collect any pertinent information the teachers have to offer about their students.

 Teachers should also have any materials they will need prepared and organized so that students will become familiar with where everything is at. For example, paper, pencils, stapler, batteries, Band-Aids, and other things that will need to be available at the beginning of school. This is also the time to plan how to collect homework assignments, provide a bathroom pass, store current assignments, or display future homework. I like to have everything visible but in a tidy manner. I will utilize see-through storage bins and open shelving so that it’s easy to find necessary materials. Getting as organized as possible in the beginning before school starts will make the start of the year flow much smoother.

**Rules and Procedures:**

I will begin establishing the rules and procedures for the school year on the first day of school. Rules and procedures enable students to function well as a group and prevents confusion and conflict during the semester. As a math teacher, I will inform the students that they are expected to arrive on time every day and immediately begin the bell ringer assignment that I will post on the board each day. I will stand at the door every day and great the students as they walk in as well as remind them that the warm up is on the board. This will prevent any confusion as to how class will begin and allow students to immediately jump in and start activating their prior knowledge in preparation for the lesson or assignment to come.

 To transition from one activity to another. I will stand in the same spot each time and notify the class that they have 30 seconds to finish what they are working on before I need their undivided attention. This is a great method because it respects the student’s time and the teacher’s time as well. Students have time to find a good stopping point or wrap up a side conversation that they would have continued anyways if they hadn’t been given any notice. During the last five seconds I will hold up my hand and lower my five fingers as the last few seconds pass. This will provide a second reminder and a visual cue for the class to give me their attention.

 I will also provide procedures for frequent activities that can cause disruptions. For instance, I will have one large bathroom pass by front door. Students will know that only one can go at a time and that they need to wait until they see the pass is returned before they can use the restroom. This will prevent students from wandering the halls together as well as having to ask all the time if they can use the bathroom. I think the size the of the bathroom pass would also prevent students from abusing their restroom privileges. I would also have a place where students can bring their late slips if they are late to class. If they don’t have an excuse they will need to talk to me after class is over to explain their tardiness. This way, when they are late, they won’t be interrupting class trying to explain their tardiness.

 At the end of each day I will take the last five minutes to remind students of any upcoming tests, tools they will need to use on their homework, and any other information that I need to pass along. Students will be expected to remain in their seats until class is over. I want to be sure that students are able to utilize every minute of the class period. If students remain in their seats until class is over, they won’t be moving around and distracting other kids are trying to work on their homework assignment or finish up the class assignment. I will also have the students present me with an exit ticket on their way out. This will help give me an informal assessment of how the students are doing as well as cement any important concepts in their brains.

 The school that I work at also has a multitude of overall rules that need to be enforced in each classroom. Students are required to have their hats off as well as their headphones out of their ears. Cellphones also need be silent and kept in the student’s pockets or backpacks. To make the loss of their cellphones more bearable, some teachers allow a “social media minute” where the students are allowed to pull their cellphones out and let the digital world know that they are still alive. Students are not allowed to verbally or physically abuse other students or teachers. Students also have to dress appropriately and are not allowed swear. Because Mount Edgecumbe is a boarding school, there are many more rules. At the beginning of the year, the students have an orientation week to learn all of the rules at MEHS. Students are also given a handbook that lists the rules as well as the corresponding consequences if they are broken.

 In the situation where a student is breaking the rules, I will be firm and objective. According to Robert Tauber, “there is a big difference between acting and reacting. To act is to be in command; to react is to have the situation be in command” (1999 pg. 257). I will not let emotions effect my decisions or demeanor. It’s important that the students understand that the consequences I enforce are not a personal attack, but rather the unavoidable consequence for their behavior.

**Safety and legal requirements**

Because MEHS is a boarding school, teachers are able to have a significant influence on the students’ lives. The general consequence for misbehavior are restrictions and demerit points. Depending on the action, students can receive up to 10 days restriction. When a student is on restriction, they are not allowed to leave their dormitory after the academic day. To make sure students stay in their room, they are required to sign in every 30 minutes.

Furthermore, students have to apply to become a student at MEHS. If a student continually misbehaves or has a couple of major screw ups, then they are sent home. Students are allowed to accrue 30 demerit points before they are sent home. At 10 demerit points, the student’s parents will be notified. At 20 demerits, the student and his/her parents have a meeting with the academic principle, residential principal, and the superintendent and come up with a plan of action to keep the student from accruing anymore demerit points.

Teachers don’t have to resort to demerits and restrictions however. For example, if students are having issues with abusing their cellphone privileges, teachers can confiscate their phones for a couple of days. Students quickly realize that spending a class period without their phone is much easier than spending the weekend with out. If students habitually show up late, teachers can have them come after school and make up lost time. This encourages students not to waste class time because it will encroach heavily on their free time after school. If students aren’t turning in assignments or are not being distracting during class, teachers can enroll students in the teacher tutorial program where students are required to meet with their teachers after school during prearranged times. This gives teachers an opportunity to talk one on one with the student and try to address the issues and come up with a plan.

There are a lot of specific rules listed for students along with the corresponding consequences. In general, students are expected to act responsibly at all times. This means, among other things, being self-disciplined and showing consideration for all members of the school and local community.

              The safety procedures for a few major emergency situations are laminated and posted in a visible place in each classroom and MEHS. If there are intruders on campus, MEHS will initiate the A.L.I.C.E. response. This acronym stands for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate. Teachers are trained how to use the A.L.I.C.E at the beginning of the year and then hope that they never have to use it. We also have protocols for fire emergencies, earthquakes, and because we are coastal, tsunamis.
**Planning and Conducting Instruction**

 The first step in planning instruction is to understand the audience. I will try to learn as much as I can about my students so that I could make the content relevant to them. This can start before the school year begins as mentioned earlier, but it is an ongoing process that needs to continue throughout the school year.

 In order to get to know my students, I’ll have to build a relationship with them so that they are willing to tell me about themselves and how they are doing. As a class, I’d start out the year by telling the students about myself, and then asking them to share something about themselves. This would be an icebreaker that will help me learn about them but also hopefully make them a little more comfortable in class. As the semester progresses I will keep tabs on my students and what they are up to. For instance, I’ll ask them about their weekend plans and then ask them the following week if they went through with their plans. Also, lots of students are involved in extracurricular activities that I would try to attend or stay updated on. Then, when I see the student in the hallway or before class, I could complement them on a job well done or wish them luck on an upcoming competition. This should help build relationships with the students as well as help me understand their interests.

 Once I have a grasp on my student’s interests, I will start tweaking my lesson plans to make them relevant to the students. These changes could be as small as rewriting a homework assignment from how fast does a car need to go to get from point A to B to how many miles per hour does Charlie (a student involved in cross country) have to run to get his goal time of 16 minutes for the 5k. The changes could also be much larger. For example, I could have students design fish drying racks using non-standard measurements such as arms, hands, and fingers. Changing the presentation of the content and having the students apply it to create something familiar and useful in their lives will be much more engaging. Creating an engaging lesson should improve student focus as well as prevent distracting behavior.

 I will also acknowledge the culture diversity that will be present in my classroom. Some projects will be completely uninteresting to some students and super exciting to others. Whenever possible, I will try to provide the students with options for what project they want to pursue. This gives the students the opportunity to select something relevant or interesting to them rather than cramming everyone through one program designed for one culture.

To ensure that students are paying attention during lectures, I will call often on students to answer questions as I work through problems on the board. I will be sure to give back lots of positive affirmation so that the students don’t feel embarrassed or frightened to answer the question. I want to ensure that students feel confident to respond and that the classroom is a safe place to ask questions or provide the wrong answer. If student produces an incorrect answer, I will follow Jere Brophy’s advice and instead of providing an intensive criticism, I will quickly indicate the answer is false with a simple negation, and then either provide them with more information, an explanation, or call upon another student (1986, pg 36).

 However, adjustments need be made to take into consideration any special needs students have. For example, some students have a significant phobia to speaking out in public and it wouldn’t be appropriate to call upon them during class. For these students, I might have them answer a few questions on a piece of paper rather than verbalize their answers. Other students will have major gaps in their education, and need to be given special assignments that fill those gaps so that they can continue with the course. For those students I will reduce the amount of current homework, and give them the supplemental problems that focus on their educational gaps. Obviously, I won’t have a solution for all students with special needs, so I will take advantage of information their guardians or counselors can provide to come up with a plan to accommodate the students.

**Collaborating with Educational Stakeholders**

Parents are probably going to be my number one outside resource when it comes to classroom management. To effectively use the parents as a resource however, I’ll have to build a relationship with them as well. At the start of the semester, I will take the initiative to reach out to all of the parent’s and introduce myself. I would like to have a short conversation with them to inform them that they shouldn’t hesitate to call should they have any questions throughout the semester. I would also try to use that first call to determine if their student needs any special considerations. I will then wrap up the conversation with a promise that I’ll be in contact throughout the semester to let them know how their student is progressing. This will open the door to future calls, especially if I need their help with a behavioral issue in class.

 If I do need the parent’s help, I’ll start out the conversation with some positive aspects about their child before I start explaining the issues I’m having. I want the parents on my side, so it’s important that they don’t feel that I just dislike their child. I also feel that it is important for the parents to know which areas their child is succeeding in. Hopefully, this way the student will also have some positive affirmation from their parents while they also learn which behaviors have not been acceptable.

 I’ll take advantage of the counselors and principals as well. Counselors might have a lot of insight as to why a student is behaving a certain way as well as some suggestions on how to correct it. If I am unable to handle a child, then I will certainly turn to the principal for help. I will also use the principal’s observations of me teaching to gain insight on how well I am managing a classroom. Having that outside perspective and experience will be an invaluable resource for discovering any weaknesses in my classroom management and finding ways to improve.

**Cultural and Community Resources**

 The community can be an excellent resource when it comes to making the course content relevant to the students.

1. I will try to incorporate some guest speakers who use math extensively in their work. These guest speakers could be nurses, construction workers, engineers, or even firefighters. It’s easy for me to tell students why math is important, but it’s far more effective for the students to here from “real people” about how math is used on the job and in their life.

2. A great field trip idea for students here in Sitka would be to take the students to the Sitka Sound Science Center. Although it sounds like it would be better for a science class, a lot of math is used to understand the collected data and to create models that will predict future patterns.

3. We also have a canoe carver that students could visit. A possible project for them would be to take some measurements of the canoe, estimate its weight, and determine the amount of water it will displace as well as how many people it could safely carry.

4. Another great field trip idea would be to take students to a construction site. They can get a visual on how Pythagorean’s theorem is used to determine if the angles are 90 degrees, as well as how to measure wood to be cut. They would also get an idea of how cost estimates are created and how the price changes of materials can dramatically affect over all cost.

5. Sitka is powered by a hydroelectric damn that students could tour. Students could gather information about how many kilowatt-hours of electricity the damn produces and how much water needs to flow to power the town. Students could also make estimates of how much water flows into the lake that powers the damn when we get 1 inch of rain.

**Summary:**

For me, this management plan will serve as a reminder of the different strategies I have learned for managing a classroom. Although the title suggests that it is a comprehensive management plan, it is not. In no way do I believe that I have encompassed all the strategies for classroom management that I will have to utilize. As I begin to implement and apply the strategies outlined in this management plan, I believe I will find some are very effective while others might be discarded. This management plan is an excellent start, but I will always have to reflect on my interactions with students and continually make adjustments to my management plan. I will certainly use the formal evaluations the academic principle has to offer me to find problems and improve my class room management skills as well as any feedback from the students or parents.

Resources

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