

The Importance of Involving Learners in Establishing Classroom Discipline

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Résumé:

Le présent document souligne l'importance de sensibiliser les apprenants à la formation d'une classe pacifique en ce qui concerne le maintien de la discipline et la promotion d'un environnement d'apprentissage confortable. Les enseignants rencontrent des comportements antisociaux qui perturbent leur travail régulier et nuisent à la fois au processus d'apprentissage de l'enseignement où de nombreux enseignants ont été déconcertés dans de telles circonstances..

Mots clés: impliquer les étudiants, la gestion de la classe, la discipline en classe, les apprenants proactifs

Abstract

The present paper highlights the importance of getting learners involved in the making of a peaceful class in terms of maintaining discipline and promoting a cozy learning environment. Teachers daily encounter antisocial behaviours that disrupt their regular work and impair both the teaching learning process where many teachers stood baffled in such circumstances.

Key words:

involving students, classroom management, classroom discipline, proactive learners

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to show the importance of involving learners in establishing classroom discipline through regular and ongoing classroom meetings because the researcher believes that once behavioural issues are considered as shared tasks by teachers, counselors, school board and learners, there

will be a great likelihood that they will not take place.

Regular and ongoing classroom meetings at the beginning of the school year are effective means that allow time for both teachers and learners to learn life skills which have the same importance as academics. In this context, teachers are advised to schedule and hold classroom meetings where they explain the benefits of being together and agree about the attitudes, the norms and the rules they need.

Learning social skills and all what it takes to live together in a classroom cannot be attained if only few learners are involved. For example, conflict management cannot be learned if learners meet once or twice because the time they spend together in schools is not enough compared to the one they spend at home. Classroom meetings are synonymous to communication and the exchange of ideas that create the order that ensures the freedom as well as the well being of all the people involved.

Classroom discipline is not uniquely related to teachers only but also to learners and getting them involved will improve the classroom well being . Teachers will no more suffer alone and feel more secure if their efforts are commonly shared by their students. Students naturally fear students and like listening to them if the case is violence and disruptions. Students sometimes impose order and good moral conduct upon the agitating students and oblige them to keep silent and be disciplined. Hence, the pie needs to be commonly shared between teachers and their students to ensure a well disciplined easy going classroom where learning can occur and can benefit the maximum of recipients.

Classroom discipline

According to Magdalena Sulich (2004: 33)

The word discipline is understood today to mean conforming to rules, to supervision's orders, and to demands of community or an institution. Even its derivation is inseparably connected with education; it comes from the Latin word « discipulus », which means students. The Latin word refers to the way of treating students.

Hence, any violation to discipline creates disruptive behaviour which according to Harmer can take several forms:

1. Constant chattering in class
2. Not listening to teacher-student

3. Refusal to do any homework
4. No involvement in the classroom activities
5. Frequent lateness
6. Constant rudeness
7. Permanent complaint Harmer (1998: 130)

Harmer (1998) maintained that students misbehave as they cannot always be easily controlled, and much will depend on the particular group and the particular teacher. Students often test teachers by disobeying rules and causing disruption. They sometimes resist overtly teachers' authority, and this prevents teaching and learning which should be taking place.

How to establish Classroom Discipline?

The first requirement that teachers should take into account is to be attentive to their learners' needs, wants and desires. Here, teachers should stop lecturing or what learners consider as preaching and give them the opportunity to decide about the importance of topics and even their gradation. Even if this cannot be achieved mainly because of the existing curriculum, still listening to what learners have to say will help a lot in getting rid of a lot of troubles.

Involving the total class in designing classroom rules is a crucial element that helps know the different issues that may result into problems that teachers should deal with at the expense of teaching learning process. For Girard (1995:1) "A peaceable classroom or school results when the values and skills of cooperation, communication, tolerance, positive emotional expression, and conflict resolution are taught and supported throughout the culture of the school". Moreover, "Students engage in learning when they recognize a connection between what they know and the learning experience" (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002, p. 124).

Classroom socializing

Traditionally, teaching is equated with socializing; therefore, a classroom is a place where not only learning takes place, but rather a place where learners set up relationships and learn how to belong to a group. In other words, in the classroom, learners find out how to socialize by means of internalizing the norms, rules and the behaviour of the small community they live in.

In this case, the classroom can be a place of social education where succeeding in learning how to live in is to learn how to live in a society

because the ultimate goal of education is to produce responsible, thoughtful and enterprising future citizens.

Consequently, it is in a teacher's best interests to enlist the parents as supporters and partners. Their role in helping the school maintain discipline is vital. "The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing; families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7)

Discussion

Teachers and Students relationship

Experience and reality at schools have shown many examples where teachers themselves provoke learners and do not know how to handle matters with them. Let us take the example of authors Nelson, Lott, and Glenn's case study which was achieved in (2000) and showed an example of a teacher who was openly hostile with her students. Whenever students misbehaved, she yelled at them, criticized them, and humiliated them in front of their classmates. Using fear tactics to gain control does not prove conducive to learning. Students generally shut down completely or amp up and yell back in these situations. You will generally have much more control, as well as credibility, with your students, their parents, and your superiors if you never raise your voice (Fischer, 2004).

However, For (Starr, 2005), students who are corrected in front of their peers often respond by acting out even more, because they are responding to that unconscious or conscious need for attention. It is ineffective to engage in disciplinary conversation from across the room.

The role of the teacher in creating a good learning atmosphere

To create a nurturing and healthy atmosphere that is conducive to learning and social education, teachers seem to disagree about the elements that lead to the success of the partnership that exist between them and their learners. Some think that establishing good rapport with their learners together with creating the right environment will suffice to ensure a successful enterprise. Others, however, strongly believe that managing effectively their classrooms is the first prerequisite to ensure the desired results. Another category of teachers thinks that school/classroom rules are the only factors that guarantee the proper functioning of educational institution.

For author Fred Jones (2000), the classroom needs to be divided into three distinct areas. The nearby red zone is where the students are actively listening and involved. The yellow zone, which is usually 10 to 15 feet from

the teacher, is where the students may be involved when they think the teacher is watching. Finally, he calls the back of the room the green zone, where the students are playing around or day dreaming because they don't feel engaged. When the teacher moves around, boundaries are changed in these groups, and the students who were in the yellow or red zones must start to pay attention . Thus, through mobility, the teacher is constantly disrupting the students' impulse to become distracted or disturb others.

To a great extent, what has been mentioned before inevitably leads to good results? However, there are moments when teachers and learners alike do not feel secure, and comfortable and hence, they cannot take benefits from the teaching/learning process because learners usually resist adults' attempts in having power over them. Teachers need to record learners' indifference for frequent rechecking. So ,effective teachers need to maintain a record-keeping system that allows them to keep track of student behavior in an efficient manner without wasting too much instructional time (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003)

Teachers are used to direct students and try to solve their problems themselves without involving them, or at least being attentive to their opinions about the best ways of solving their problems. By carefully planning lessons, knowing the students, having a discipline action plan, and learning from past mistakes, teachers can avoid their own exaggerated emotional responses to disrespectful students, as well as avoiding subsequent defiant out-bursts from the students (Fischer, 2004) .

In many classrooms, teachers print neatly classroom rules and post them where learners can see them in an attempt to deter them from misbehaviour. School officials and even counselors do the same thing by posting rules in halls, libraries and even in the schoolyard, but in vain because learners are likely to behave in ways that are not in accordance with the already existing rules.

The question we need to ask is why do learners deviate from the rules and the norms which school board and teachers are trying to apply? The answer lies in Wong and Wong (1998) saying, "What you do on the first days of school will determine your success or failure for the rest of the school year" (p . 3) .

One may opt for class meetings as an optimal solution to the problem. Hence,the most noticeable benefit of classroom meetings is that they enable the learners to be knowledgeable about the best ways of resolving conflicts and the best social skills to learn from and which serve not only to solve or

curb the intensity of problems they may face, but also to prevent them by developing their own arsenal of techniques and procedures.

The second benefit of classroom meetings is the atmosphere of caring, communication and mutual respect. Sometimes teachers question the very origin of classroom meetings especially when they do not see the expected results. Teacher knowledge of student thinking is critical. Gathercoal (2001) wrote, teachers need to listen and hear what students are saying as they conjecture and build arguments. Only then can they judge the quality of students' justifications and explanations.

Here, it is worth mentioning that even if the first meetings do not yield the desired results, teacher should not be deterred since it takes time for learners and teachers as well to learn the importance of resorting to solutions instead of punishment. Research is clear that the most effective teachers minimize wasted time and maximize the time that students are actively engaged in learning (Echevarria, Vogt, and Short, 2004) . So without planning classroom meetings regularly, learners will not develop the right skills and will not know what it takes to forget about the differences for the sake of the whole group.

Here, teachers are advised to help learners figure out the values that ensure the proper functioning of the classroom, but not to impose theirs. Once this is done, teachers can ask learners to compare their findings with those of their classmates to make themselves discover that , despite the fact they belong to the same age group ,they still have different representations of respect, justice, tolerance.....etc. At this stage, teachers can ask learners to spot the common values and look for the principal ones in order to have their own list.

Again, the teachers' role is vital because at this level learners may have forgotten or neglected some values that are essential for creating mutual respect and establishing the right atmosphere which are responsible for the success of the whole group. When teachers feel that they need to discipline students, it is often because there was a lack of procedures and routine in place (Wong & Wong, 1998) .The teacher's' role, here, consists of telling learners about the missing values they can add to have their own complete list in the near future to come.

Learners' role and classroom discipline

Learner's involvement in the teaching learning process is the true dialogue that aims at finding solutions to real and particular concerns of all learners and is the key to the success of all classrooms meetings. This does not mean that teachers' contributions will not be welcome at this stage .On the contrary, teachers may suggest their own concerns to be added to those of their learners' in an attempt to solve them. Once both teachers and learners engage seriously and collaborate to figure out the best ways to solve the most common problems, learners will understand the value of being together and the respect of differences. It is then imperative that teachers start the school year by treating everyone inside and outside of the classroom with equal respect . Self-esteem will be most evident in classrooms where students receive the right kind of positive meaningful feedback in the form of appreciation, not empty praise (Katz, 1993) .

At the beginning of the school year teachers start organizing classroom meetings to enable learners to know each other.

This can be achieved through activities where learners introduce themselves by the use of cards and posters which contain all the necessary information which help the different members of the class to gain closer knowledge about their classmates. Teachers can also ask their learners to think about the classroom values that must be shared and respected by all. In order to do this, learners should be divided into small groups and work on the values they think are important for the classroom well-being. Students should have the chance to utilize and apply criteria for evaluating their own work, thus strengthening their own self-esteem (Katz, 1993)

Inviting learners to construct collectively their proper classroom rules is another way of ensuring the success of everyone because learners will think about all the possible rules that guarantee the respect of all and protect their right. Engaging your students in establishing overall classroom rules and procedures is often a successful way to encourage student involvement (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003) .

Teachers may start asking their learners about the rules that must be respected so as to have a healthy and relaxing atmosphere, they can even ask them about real examples concerning moments of disobedience and make them think the eventual consequences. By dignifying students' efforts, teachers in the classroom create an atmosphere where students feel welcomed, valued, and respected. Glasser (2000) even went so far as to suggest that

teachers adopt seven connecting habits—caring, listening, supporting, contributing, encouraging, trusting, and befriending .

This can take nearly an hour and here teachers are requested to add their own list of rules by providing examples of non- compliance and without forgetting to remind in indirect ways their learners that they are the guarantor of both security and the transmission of knowledge in their classrooms.

At this level, learners are asked to put under different headings and categories their rules concerning respect, communication, collaboration and acceptable behaviours. At the end of this operation copies of the rules learners have come with will be printed and distributed to all learners who need to sign them. When the learning environment is structured, instruction is scaffolded, and there are opportunities for students to experience success, then student frustration can be alleviated (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004) .

Teachers and parents as well have to sign their copies. By doing so, they all know about the rules and in this case we believe that there will be little room of disciplinary problems since the rules in question stemmed from the learners and were not imposed on them by authoritative figures that are ignorant of their needs and priorities.

It is equally important to notice that the list is never final at the beginning of the school year. It is rather provisional that needs regular and constant changes in order to cope with new and unseen circumstances. So, in case of unsettling moments that learners did not experience before, teachers and learners may organize shortest meeting in order to discuss the new issues and try to find the best ways of resolving them. These unexpected problems that learners must deal with for the first time constitute a good occasion for them to show the social skills they have learnt so far for resolving conflicts and finding solutions to new issues.

William Glasser wrote a lot about holding class meetings in order to develop discipline on a whole-class starting point (e .g ., Glasser 1998a, 1998b, 2000) . Rather than teachers imposing discipline over the class, Glasser believed that students are rational and capable of controlling their own behavior if given the chance (Allen, 1996) . If the teacher helps the students learn to make good choices, it will produce good behavior . Teachers should not accept excuses for bad behavior, but instead ask the

students about the choices they have, why they make certain choices, and how they feel about the results (Allen, 1996).

This in its turn will give them a sense of responsibility and will make them take the initiative when they need to participate in the elaboration of the new rules that are the fruit of mutual exchange and the communication between the different members of the class. Hence, it is recommended from teachers to teach students to discover acceptable ways to behave in areas where they are having difficulty . In these ways, educators can emphasize to students the expectation that they are people who can manage life's realities and demands and that they are worthy of happiness (Walz, 1991) .

Conclusion

Although there are several elements that are necessary for the success of learning and teaching, classroom discipline is a vital element in any teaching learning situation. It is true that textbooks, teachers and methods are of great importance, and should be given due consideration, but without classroom discipline they would be of little or no importance. Nowadays, classroom discipline is a problem that threatens our schools in different ways. Researchers in Algeria and all over the world are aware of this problem and referred to it in different ways: school violence; discipline problems and conflicts, and antisocial behaviour. Indeed, it is high time to get students involved in sharing teachers' fight against disruptive problems and in setting discipline that ensures effective classroom management.

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