

Classroom Management and Classroom Setup

Wow. This first experience in a charter school was unlike anything I have ever experienced in the public schools. I had been in a second grade classroom last semester, working with students on reading. I assumed then that the experience I would have in the charter school would be similar since they are the same age group. Nothing could be further from the case. I was shocked to discover a classroom where students not only were not behind, but many times were actually at least one year ahead, if not two. This classroom was astounding too because the students were silent. I'm not talking quiet when the teacher was talking, I'm not even talking quiet whispers from one child to the next. These students were silent!!!! As in, they did not talk when they walked into the building, they did not talk when they put away their backpacks, they did not even talk when they were finding a spot on the carpet before the teacher began the lesson.

Classroom management was evident from the very beginning. With almost fifty students (48) several times a day though, I feel like this is how it would have to be. When talking with my lead teacher, she said they actually spend TWO ENTIRE WEEKS working on procedures and rules. She said they will sometimes even have students file in and out of the classroom multiple times during this time period in order that in the long run they will not have to waste the time throughout the year. Likewise, the classroom is very structured. Students' items are very organized and it seems that every square inch of the classroom is used. There are cubbies for students' coats, bookshelves, and desk organizers, all to keep everything running smoothly. The desks are shared, so this seems quite important. This also makes changing desks far more difficult, so classroom management in advance seems like a smart decision. In the end, the management style is best summed up with the comment that my lead teacher made: "We believe that if we take care of the small stuff, the big stuff never occurs".

MonikaCraciunescu said:

Wow, it sounds like a dream classroom to me. But I must admit I'm a little hesitant to fall for the "great" classroom management as a facade for good teaching. I mean, two weeks for rules and procedures? I've heard of two days but that is a little ridiculous in my opinion. I think procedures are things learned over the course of a month not two straight weeks. Do they learn anything during those couple weeks besides rules? If I was a student, I would hate to be in a classroom where all we learned for that long was rules. Blah. I don't mean to be negative but it just sounds like another controlled environment where I believe the freedom of the students' thinking and creativity is brought down from a ten to at least a five. Being that restricted, even for young kids, gives off the idea of restriction in everything else. Maybe I'm being way too pessimistic. Maybe I'm completely wrong. I just don't like having a million rules. And I certainly would hate my kids to be silent. I mean, kids are loud and need to express themselves not hold every ounce of energy in for the sake of some rule. Of course, there are times when they need to be quiet (like a lesson) but when its a time where they can socialize or learn cooperatively then they should talk. I have a huge problem with those kinds of restraints and I don't feel like it benefits the child very much. However, I don't know what to say about their advanced placements except that it is a

charter school, and they do hold very high standards. Kind of intense if you ask me, for the students and especially the teacher. But I'm glad you enjoyed your visit!

karissa said:

No, I do understand what you mean. I thought the same thing too. My impression was that it is a solid two weeks of rules/procedures. And these are only second graders. So I wondered too if it was a bit extreme. I will say that they did a better job actually following the rules than many of the classrooms I've been in that had a month or so to learn the rules. I do agree though, with your point about going to the extreme. While it is helpful in the long term for not wasting time, it seems like at some point students might feel rebellious in the face of so many rules. So I'm not sure? I will say all the students seemed to really enjoy themselves, and dare I say it, actually fairly respectful of each other, the teacher, and the classroom. So I'm not sure. When should we limit students' natural responses if it means better skills in the classroom and better learning rates overall? I'm not sure.

meganntaylor said:

Yeah, I agree with Monika! Keep us updated as to whether or not your opinion on it changes the longer you stay in there. (Also, I've never been in a charter school, so I'm just going to live vicariously through your blog 😊)

Carrie Dayley said:

Isn't there a difference between obeying a rule for the sake of the rule and obeying a rule out of respect for the teacher, school, and classmates? Do they behave out of fear of punishment? I would hope that these young students understand why they are asked to behave in such a controlled manner and that they have choices. What about the students who learn better when they are moving? Of course, it is important that second grade students learn how to control their bodies. Are their minds allowed creative freedom? What kinds of activities do they do? I am eager to hear about how they learn and participate in lessons. I wonder, if a student felt restricted, after a while, would they act out in a big way?

missmollyjohans said:

Wow, that is really interesting Karissa. To tell you the truth, I don't know how I feel about this particular classroom situation. On one hand, I think it's great that the kids are able to follow directions well without goofing around and wasting precious teaching time. Coming from someone who kind of struggles keeping kids on track every once in a while, the time that is spent trying to reprimand students for not doing what is asked is both exhausting and frustrating when time is taken away from learning.

However, on the other hand, that 'goofing around' is what makes them uniquely kids. Through their interactions, even if it is not school related all the time, students are able to learn from one another and develop their speech, communication, ideas, etc. They can form stronger bonds with

one another and the teacher. Also, I feel as though I can learn more about a student through their interaction with one another. I don't know, I'm torn on this one...

Classroom Management Continued

So I have been to my classroom twice since my first post about classroom management and have seen a lot of what my teacher suggested in action. In the context of the classroom, a lot of the things she suggested makes sense. I found out that there is actually material taught the first two weeks, but that it is mostly review and is frequently interrupted by behavioral clues called "the interruption technique". Apparently this is when a teacher purposely interrupts a lesson with a question in order to casually teach a lesson in the form of a story from a set of 40 cards prepared in advance to show preferred behaviors in the form of hypothetical situations. This makes it easy for the teacher to say things like "Did I ever tell you about my friend named... who...". This concept was very interesting to me. Also, at the beginning of the year all the students are taught the rules with the reasons behind them. In fact, the guiding model for my charter school is the Harbor Educational Institute's Immersion Training manual. This manual details much of the classroom management techniques including how to do whole lessons/ units on rules and the things that can be learned from them. For instance, one lesson (taken from the Harbor Educational Institute's Manual) was:

Appropriate Hallway Behavior:

Anticipatory Set: Building maps, reference to situation

Objective: SWBAT demonstrate the appropriate hallway behavior

Purpose: Easier to reach destination, less chance of injury

Input: Have students generate a list of appropriate behaviors

Modeling: Inside classroom, rearrange to model hallway

Consequences: Warning, conference with parent

Check: Have students orally state behaviors, list behaviors

Guided Practice: Go into hallways and practice

Independent Practice: Each day students will demonstrate behaviors.

Another huge part of their curriculum base is encouraging good behaviors with positive comments meant to affirm or change behaviors. Some examples of this were:

- Would you rather have good friends or be the first every time?

- I like you too much to let lazy penmanship continue. Redo the assignment, please.

- I saw a leader in you today when....

All of this seems to indicate to me that these students may be kept under strict control, but there is less of a chance for rebellion because the students understand the reasoning behind rules and are treated well when they do misbehave.