From assertion to conversion: Classroom management for 21st century teachers

Benjamin Halbkat
South Dakota State University, benjamin.halbkat@jacks.sdstate.edu

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As I have observed while out in the field for teaching experience as well as going through the educational system as a student myself, there have been recurrences of difficulties that can be connected between most classroom settings across many grade levels. Such difficulties come in the form of disruptions, lack of motivation, and behavioral issues that emerge between the students and the teacher. Teachers try their hardest to maintain a general order of the classroom in which students can prosper and improve their educational abilities; however, such disruptions to the lesson can prove to be detrimental to the flow of the lesson, social standing among the student body, and any relationships between the students and the teacher. Every teacher wishes that the classroom could be free of every distraction while fully engaging every student in the material at hand; however, many fall short and may even bring forth such issues. Within the teaching community, we understand what constitutes a behavioral issue and a disruption, the potential dangers they pose to learning, and how we can mitigate or prevent such events from occurring. My personal nature is not a stern one, so I cannot rely on the common strategy of being in charge via assertiveness; rather, I and fellow educators of similar nature need to hone and adapt to such situations. Thus, classroom management is a skill as necessary to any teacher, both new and seasoned and important as the content that he or she teaches.

Management in the classroom can best be understood by taking into account the mindset of the student body being educated. Students at the high school level are experiencing tremendous turmoil and changes to their daily lives. Some students may misbehave or call others rude names due to pressures at home. Their parents may work multiple jobs and require older siblings to watch over younger ones, or abusive parents may shape the students' actions at school (American Teacher, 2004). Hormones can fluctuate, effectively altering the behavior of students on a daily basis. Some students entering into high school are experiencing dramatic

changes in body chemistry as they go through puberty. These excessive amounts of hormones can cause male students to become more assertive in action while females tend to display an increase in risk taking (Peper & Dahl, 2013). Sexual drives within the students tend to override other areas of attention, and a teacher of the opposite sex can become subject to ridicule or unwanted advances. While looking into neurology, varying hormone levels can also affect a student's sleeping patterns, or circadian rhythms. Testosterone in particular is prone to causing male students to stay up later in the night and obtain less sleep (Peper & Dahl, 2013). Fewer hours of sleep during a time period of important physical and mental growth can hinder a student's ability to focus and retain knowledge. Although there is not much we as teachers can do to alter our students' physiology to better improve their learning, we can promote healthy lifestyles and routines.

Establishing routines and guidelines for students to follow is essential for maintaining an air of order. Rather than create the rules yourself and display them in a set-in-stone manner, have these guidelines be specific enough to not require many examples and have your students aid in creating these guidelines and routines for the classroom (Alber, 2017). When students establish guidelines based on their own expectations of one another, they can gain a deeper respect for the learning environment and the teacher. Rules and routines are essential for maintaining order, and giving students a purpose in creating these will show that you care and view students more than just as adolescents spending time in your classroom learning. One must be careful about how to establish routines and potential reward systems. Students who strive to answer questions to obtain a physical reward such as candy will only be driven to indulge their sweet tooth. Always be cautious about how one's students are being conditioned in the classroom. B.F. Skinner introduced the concept of operant conditioning, in which the behavior

of an individual will change in response to a certain stimulus. A positive reward will promote

greater responses to the stimuli, but these should be paired with acts such as verbal praises,

continuous practice, and increasing difficulty (Lynch, 2016). When students receive praises

based on their mental growth, they will seek to further improve themselves with boosts to self-

confidence.

Upon understanding reasons behind why students may cause disruptions or lack

motivation to learn, a simple method of preventing such incidents from happening is to get to

know the students. A simple 'hello' and asking how the day is going is enough to show that you

care about their well-being. Continuing this trend and further listening to their involvements and

personal lives while simultaneously sharing yours helps to strengthen those connections.

Students who feel connected to the teacher are then less likely to lash out or drift off out of fear

of disappointing their favorite teacher or missing out on an interesting lesson. A study conducted

with two data sets of students (400 and 1900 students, respectively) found that students react

more positively when taught subject matter that interests them (Kunter, Baumert, & Köller,

2007). Students are more likely to learn about a topic that they find fascinating and applicable to

their personal lives than material that has no relation to their perceived life (Cambria & Guthrie,

2010). Along with discovering interests in the students, applications of such studies in classroom

environments have already shown positive results. Although this portion of research was

conducted in an Iranian school, the majority of high school teachers were utilizing more teaching

management and teacher-student relationship strategies rather than organization and punishment-

reward options (Aliakbari & Bozorgmanesh, 2015). Students who were instructed under such

teachers reported enjoying the subject matter to a greater degree as well as stronger relationships

that helped to reinforce learning. Another study found that of 54 classroom management

interventions tested in 47 studies, 85% and 74% were focused on changing student behavior and improving students' social-emotional development, respectively (Korpershoek et. al, 2016). These interventions were more successful in improving the overall learning experience of the students compared to those aimed at altering teachers' classroom management, i.e. disciplinary actions and other means of maintaining stern order.

A common thread between these studies shows that students will react in a positive manner toward instruction and intervention strategies meant to engage them and help them become more comfortable in the classroom. I have observed too often the firm approach teachers take to show how they are in charge and control the learning environment; however, this does not promote a positive setting for learning. If anything, the students will begin to resent the teacher and go out of their way to push the boundaries of the guidelines set at the beginning of the school year. This constant battle can be mitigated and prevented mainly by an alteration in attitude toward the students and their learning. A teacher that goes out of his or her way to understand how each student learns and fits into the social web of the classroom will display a greater sense of caring toward such students. This needs to be the norm for how the classroom is managed. The days of strict policy should be replaced with a greater sense of improving the student experience within the learning environment.

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