

Classroom Environment: The Essential Components

Penney Johnson

Grand Valley State University

Harry Wong writes that effective teachers have well established classroom management techniques (2009). This is straightforward and especially commonsensical. The challenge as a teacher is to find what management system works best for your material, students, school and community. What a teacher does to manage their classroom directly effects learning according to Wong. As teachers, we must be mindful of our actions within the environment as well as experts in our subject matter. After investigating many classroom management styles, I came to the conclusion that my future classroom environment will contain eight characteristics. They are addressed below in no particular order.

My classroom environment will be organized and clean. Each item will have its place. There will be a procedure for daily events. Students will know where to hole-punch their notes, what to do when they are absent, where to access homework documents, what time we review bell-work, where to get an extra pencil or piece of paper, where they sit, when to listen, who to partner with in formation A, B, C, and D, what their teacher likes to be called in Spanish and English, etc. This environment shows professionalism and respect for learning and students alike. A surgeon would not operate without sanitizing the environment; there for a teacher should not attempt to motivate learning without a clean and organized classroom.

My classroom environment will be inviting. Each day I want to invite students to learn something new. By standing at the door to greet them each day I am connecting with them and inviting them into the culture of learning which is my classroom. Learning is a journey and it is amazing. If we want students to take a trip with us, we must convince them to come along. By standing at the door and personally greeting each one, I am extending an invitation to them. Wong wrote, "Effective teachers have the power and the ability to invite students and colleagues to learn together each day in every class." (2009)

My classroom environment will be safe. Learning is risky. It challenges previous knowledge of our world and can turn our lives upside down. It can be stressful. Especially with developing adolescents, I want to assure that my students feel safe to take risks, ask questions, and make mistakes without others

laughing at them. Making mistakes, especially in a language classroom, is essential to learning. Bullying, fighting, and harassment have zero tolerance.

My classroom environment will keep high expectations for learning and behavior and they will be communicated clearly. When setting up classroom expectations, some teachers who follow the program, “Capturing Kids Hearts” allow for student input. This leads to clear understandings by way of discussing what is appropriate in a classroom setting. I plan on using this example to set up behavior expectations for my students. It helps get their buy in while I am still able to guide them in making high expectations for their learning as well. In my classroom, everyone can receive an “A”.

My classroom environment will be positive. Wong writes, “It takes just as much energy to achieve positive results as it does to achieve negative results. So why waste your energy on failing when that same energy can help you and your students succeed?” (2009) The power of positive energy feels exponential. If I have a positive attitude, I am more likely to spread it. Once spread to others, learning becomes more likely. When you are negative, the brain is less receptive to new information. Smiling and laughing help the brain absorb more information. In a study by Leflot et al. researchers reported that the teacher’s reduction of negative, supposed corrective behavior remarks predicted children’s increase in on-task behavior and decrease in talking-out behavior (2010) In other words, focus on the positive.

My classroom environment will teach empathy. Helping others view situations in multiple perspectives fosters empathy. Eventually this leads to less time managing possible conflictive situations in the classroom. By looking at “the other’s situation” not only are we helping create peace in our community, but we are helping our students become globally aware and prepared to manage more than one cultural perspective. In an article by James Melamed and John Rieman, conflict resolution takes place when multiple perspectives are respected and there are no absolute truths. (2000)

Teaching English as a Second Language allowed me to grow as a person and as an educator. It forced me to see the world through the eyes of a different culture, along with its set of morals and values.

It made me realize that not only do other cultures have different values in general, but that their vision for educating their students is distinct as well. In particular, it helped me realize that each individual learns differently based on their strengths and weaknesses along with their personal history and that without valuing each individual's strengths and weaknesses, the group cannot unite and become a strong whole. The teacher's job is to get to know how to best treat a class or individual and find their learning styles in order for success to prevail for the entire class. This philosophy will help guide me in my future classroom, helping to create a global community of learners.

My classroom environment will promote students to manage their learning. Instead of being centered on the teacher as in the model based on behaviorism, my classroom will promote students constructing their learning experience. Students will need to collaborate with each other and myself while using sources online to complete their learning objectives. Twenty-first century learners must be prepared to guide themselves through a myriad of constant information and decipher what is important. My classroom will provide them with sufficient guidance, but also expect learners to be teachers to their peers and in control of their learning.

Finally, my classroom environment will nurture good relationships among students as well as good relationships among students and myself. As in the management system "Capturing Kids Hearts" suggests, the classroom members should feel like family. If I greet a student at the door and they do not seem to be having a good day, I will check in with that student and make sure they leave my classroom in a better place if possible or at least with a plan to get themselves to that better place. Flip Flippin writes: "If you have a child's heart, you have their head." (2012)

Most recently, employed at Waypoint Charter Academy as a behavior specialist, I was responsible for helping students make positive decisions about their behavior in the classroom, and motivating them take ownership of their education and success. The demographics of the school are challenging to say the least. Ninety-eight percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch,

the majority of them come from non-traditional families (i.e. single parent households), and so many live abusive, neglectful situations. Most of these students attend WayPoint because they didn't find success in their home school or have chosen to get out of an "unsuccessful", sometimes dangerous district. To put it lightly, I had my hands full.

Working with these "at risk" youth taught me that positive student-employee relationships are crucial to the success of the educator and that of the student. Observing students with various problems in the classroom, I was able to pin point the root of many of the behavioral issues. In the majority of the cases, the students referred to me, felt that the teacher didn't care about them or didn't know them. Typically, their inappropriate behaviors were an attempt to express their dissatisfaction with the way they were being treated. The teachers I worked with were amazing, but the students often carried a lot of baggage into the classroom which meant any wrong look or word could be interpreted negatively. And certainly, with so many intense situations in the lives of the students and a history of mistrust with the educational system, sometimes the teachers had a very hard time developing trust with the students. The teachers who did have the most success with their students had taken the time to really get to know their students, and treated them with the utmost respect. I feel that I was one of those adults able to gain the trust and confidence of these youth, and help them obtain their educational goals.

Developing great relationships with the students mattered the most. It was an intense job, as I was trusted with many stories of abuse, neglect, violence, and heartbreaking stories. Somehow, by letting the students know I cared about them every day, they were able to gradually open up to me. This process took months, and by the end of the year, I had forged very fulfilling relationships with these students. Once they trusted me, they would actually trust guidance. Their success in the classroom measured higher than at the beginning of the year. But, mostly, they went from seeing teachers, administrators, and the "authority" as the enemy to seeing some of us as their allies. For me, this was a major victory for them personally, and for society as a whole.

References

- Flippen, M. (2010). Capturing Kids' Hearts. In *Flip Flippen*. Retrieved October 31, 2012, from <http://flippengroup.com/education/ckh.html>
- Harry, W., & Rosemary, W. (2009). *The First Days of School* (9th ed.). Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications, Inc.
- Leflot, G., van Lier, Pol A.C., Onghena, P., Colpin, H. (2010). "The Role of Teacher Behavior Management in the Development of Disruptive Behaviors: An Intervention Study with the Good Behavior Game." *Abnormal Child Psychology*. 38:869–882.
- Malemed, J., & Reiman, J. (2000). Collaboration and Conflict Resolution. *High School Magazine*.