

Classroom Management - You Are in Charge!

Pauline Finlay-Molloy*

Do

1. Be consistent as much as is possible. If you know a child has ASD or Conduct Disorder or a diagnosed learning disorder then you might have to modify your reaction to what is happening. Read about each child in the first month of school so that you are aware of all strategies used with each child. Make your own notes to remind you of each child's strengths and needs and if there were behaviour issues in prior years.
2. Consult other teachers for assistance when you are in doubt. You can't be expected to know it all. They may have much more experience than you do.
3. Listen carefully and calmly and ask questions if you are unsure.
4. Do plan so that all learning styles and needs are met.
5. Use nonverbal cues when necessary as they are less stressful on a child and less distracting for other students.
6. Speak to parents and/or guardians and get their take on things. Usually whatever way he/she is behaving at home he/she is doing the same in school.
7. Read books and journals on Classroom Management.
8. Find out what the motivators are. Each child is different. Ask parents if you can't figure it out. Just ask the child and he/she will tell you what interests him/her.
9. Try small behaviour charts in an agenda or a sticker once a day or even one for morning behaviour and one for afternoon behaviour. It won't take you too much time, nor will it take children and parents long to see progress. Children do like to see a visual representation of their progress.
10. Arrange your class so that children have an opportunity to work with a variety of classmates. I try many different arrangements every year. I give them choice sometimes and other times I decide. I like to have two boys and two girls in each group but that is not always possible. I have lots of group work so boys will end up working with two or three other boys at times and the same for girls.

11. Give choices: you can do your work quietly and have some time for drawing or you can go down to the green table and do the work. Choices let the children think they are in control and they have to make a decision so they can handle making what is believed to be the best decision for them.
12. Get children up for a few minutes exercise every hour. It can tie in with their work. If you know how to spell this work, spell it and do five jumping jacks. If you do not know how, listen very carefully then do three squats.
13. Do use creative teaching strategies so neither you nor the students are bored. There is no excuse for a teacher not to have a load of different strategies. They are everywhere, in books and on the internet and presented on PD (Professional Development) days.

Don't

1. Be hasty to jump to conclusions and condemn children before they have had a chance to explain.
2. Call home for every incident. Pick your battles. Depend on the seriousness of the incident. Did the child bite? Did the child throw a desk at another child?
3. Give up on a child. He/She needs one adult who cares. You may be that adult!
4. Tell a child you are disappointed in him/her. Good self-esteem and self-mastery are key components of success in school. You are an advocate for him/her so if you give up on a child, you are not helping make matters better.
5. Discuss the child with all teachers in attendance in the staff room or in a grade level meeting. Other teachers do not need to hear you rant. Discuss the child with the principal, guidance counsellor or special needs teacher-someone who can help you and him.
6. Emphasize all the negatives during ISSP meetings. Parents need to hear the good as well and each child has something good. Find it before the meeting.
7. Put the child down in front of peers. Take him/her aside and speak in a cool and calm voice and explain what you need clarification on.

8. Assume the parents will help. Most will but you will get some who are so busy or too preoccupied with marital problems or other to worry about homework or a little mishap at school. You take the parent's place so deal with it. Inform the parent, of course, but remember that they don't expect you to solve problems that occur at home and you can't expect them to handle problems that occur in your domain. They do need to be informed though. That is your responsibility. If anger and physical aggression are a part of the incident, an ISSP meeting may need to take place. If the child is in danger of being given detention or is expelled, the parents will need to understand what is going on. Most minor incidents you need to handle on your own, with help from the administration, special needs teachers and/or guidance.
9. Assume the prior year's teacher got the problems with the kid. Sometimes there are personality clashes and a teacher will not always listen or understand. Most teachers do understand but there is a handful who do want the upper hand and feel they do not have to help the kid, if the child is being rude or disrespectful. You may be the one teacher who gets the kid, understands him or her. You may make a difference in his/her life!
10. Stay on a lesson that is not working. Change it, modify it, or go to something altogether different.
11. Be embarrassed if a kid doesn't like you or asks to be moved to another class. It may be just a bad day or something may have happened at home that morning to upset him/her.
12. Forget that every child can be successful, to some extent, if motivated. So work on motivating him/her right from day one. I always tell my class "If you're not having fun, then I'm not having fun" and try to include at least two fun activities every day. It makes all the difference if learning is fun.
13. Give up easily. There will be kids who will try your patience so don't lose it. By remaining calm you stay in control. Don't let a small child make your day miserable. You are the adult. You have been trained. You remain in control and at the top of your game by having a bag of tricks to use no matter what comes your way!

* Pauline Finlay-Molloy is a tenured teacher and has been teaching for more than two decades. Teacher Interns are very interested in the subject of classroom

management. The fact is that the interns want to know “practical things” which can help them to manage classrooms. In our own studies (Singh, A, et. al. 2001, *Classroom Management: a reflective perspective*, New Delhi: Kaniksha Publishers. See Chapter 5, “Voices of Teacher Interns *Do’s* and *Don’ts* in Managing Classroom”, 77-92) in this area, we observed that “in a self-reflective manner they [the teacher interns] wanted to know: what are the sources of their fear? What made them so fearful [of classroom management]? What should they *do* to survive the Internship semester? What should *not be done* if teacher interns want to survive the Internship? In this chapter, the Interns with whom we worked (all levels of schooling), identified more than 50 sources of phobia/ nature of phobia, more than 180 things teacher interns should *do* to survive the Internship and about 70 things the Teacher Interns *should not do* to survive the Internship. The Interns in our studies also thought that classroom management skills at primary/elementary levels of schooling are very different from skills required for managing classrooms at the high school level of teaching. The Teacher Interns we taught in 2009, also have the same observations. Therefore, I asked Pauline, and Jeanette Laaning and Carmen Rowse , to write down a few *do’s* and *don’ts* of classroom management at the primary/elementary level of schooling based on their long years of teaching. (Amarjit Singh).