



ELT Teachers’ Personal Philosophy Statements on Classroom Discipline

επιμέλεια έκδοσης

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Introduction

This book is the product of “*Classroom Discipline for English Teachers*”, a teacher development course offered by the ELT Advisor of Kavala for the primary and secondary state school English teachers of the same area. It was an eight - week blended learning programme on the topic of classroom management with an emphasis on classroom discipline.

We, teachers, often use the terms *classroom management* και *classroom discipline* interchangeably. However, the two ideas are different in the way(s) they are applied in a classroom setting. Classroom management is the responsibility of the teacher to provide procedures and routines. Classroom discipline is the students’ responsibility for following rules and facing consequences for breaking those rules.

However, in both classroom management and classroom discipline, the teacher sets expectations for the class. The students need to know at all times what is expected of them, and they need to know what the consequences are if they do not adhere to those requirements.

Research indicates that teachers who have poor classroom management skills will commonly use strict discipline to gain control over their students. Instead of students knowing what is expected of them and responding to procedures and routines, they are worried they might get in trouble. A classroom run by strict discipline might not result in a positive learning environment. If a student does not know what is expected of him/her, the chances he/she will misbehave increase, resulting in the need to discipline.

However, and despite our best efforts, we, teachers feel “hopeless” in certain classes due to discipline problems.

The final requirement of the course was for the teachers to write their personal philosophy statements on classroom management/discipline. In this book, the participant teachers’ personal philosophy statements are self-reflective essays of their beliefs about classroom discipline issues and classroom management in general. They also incorporate their own experience as teachers and as students, and often, they discuss how they put their beliefs into practice incorporating concrete examples of what they do or anticipate doing in the classroom.

Evangelia Gantidou – ELT Advisor

Enhancing student self-discipline through a process of promoting positive achievement and behaviour

by Eleni Aliataki

The need for classroom discipline does not emanate from a teacher's desire to control or exert power over a student. Rather, discipline should come from a desire to develop learner responsibility in a positive classroom environment and to maximize time and opportunity for learning. Moreover, I believe, the aim of education is to bring out the best of students' personality apart from providing them with academic knowledge and skills. Teachers need to create a safe, caring and stimulating atmosphere in which students' intellectual, emotional and social growth can be fostered. We should encourage them to develop their personalities in order to enable them to face the realities of life with confidence and teach them to be independent thinkers.

For this purpose I support an approach to discipline based on a combination of democratic and instructional theories. I believe that discipline should be taught rather than imposed and it should promote responsibility rather than obedience. My role as a teacher is to create a trusting environment in which I can facilitate learning and promote student empowerment and autonomy. More specifically, I agree with certain elements found in "Reality Therapy" developed by Glasser (in Charles, 2010). According to this theory teachers often need to help students learn to make good behavioural choices, so they can become responsible individuals, able to satisfy their needs in the real world. Students should be guided to acknowledge their behaviour as being irresponsible

and then take action to make it rational and productive. They should realize the effects their disruptive behaviour has on others and they should be helped by teachers to create plans to eliminate inappropriate behaviour.

Furthermore in accordance with “Choice theory” developed by Glasser (in Charles, 2010) the ultimate goal in the class is self-discipline and self-control. How can we accomplish that? By providing an attractive curriculum, by building and nurturing quality relationships among students, by providing a warm, supportive class climate. “Choice theory” places great emphasis on helping students achieve their five basic needs for love and belonging, freedom, fun, power and survival. Among my tasks as a teacher is to ensure a safe environment free of threat, where there is no uncertainty as to the limits and boundaries within the classroom. In addition, I hope to inspire creativity by motivating students to participate in enjoyable activities, to teach them co-operation by engaging them in team building activities and to give them a voice in class by encouraging them to take responsible choices. Therefore, I believe that self-discipline depends on the maturity of the students but it can definitely be promoted by the teacher.

To this end effective classroom management which clearly states and reinforces student expectations is a key aspect. From the very beginning I take the time to teach students to follow routines and procedures. This means that I dedicate the first lessons to explaining, demonstrating and repeating routines, because if students know and internalize them, this will help my lesson run smoothly. Moreover according to

Wong and Wong (in Charles, 2010) a few simple rules governing behaviour should be quickly and consistently implemented. If a code of conduct is established, the students know where they stand. For example with a class of high school students we can talk about a range of issues such as homework, attitude to mistakes and feedback, group work management, permission to leave the classroom etc. Apart from defining these rules, which should be reasonable and clear, the consequences for breaking these rules need also to be decided upon. The students' opinion should be taken into account when deciding on a code of conduct. When a code is the result of mutual agreement, it has considerable power. However, if there are divergent views about what is acceptable or not, the teacher should ultimately be firm about what to accept (Harmer, 2001). Finally, practicing these rules consistently and fairly should also be of primary concern.

I am also convinced that prevention is better than cure and I completely agree with Ur (1996), who supports that the teachers who are most successful in maintaining discipline in class are not those who are good at dealing with problems, but those who know how to prevent them from arising in the first place. The three preventative strategies she suggests are careful planning, clear instructions and keeping in touch. These strategies are in accordance with the instructional approach to discipline. The premise that forms the basis of this approach is that students will not engage in disruptive behaviour, when well-planned and well implemented lessons with smooth transitions and appropriate pace involve them in the learning process with activities that meet their interests, needs and abilities. I agree with two advocates of this

approach, Jones and Kounin (as cited in Charles, 2010), who have emphasised the need to hold students alert and accountable by using activities that keep them actively involved, as passivity tends to reduce their attention.

Moreover in order to maintain students' attention I reckon that it is useful to provide a clear structure for the lesson by stating an outline at the beginning of the lesson and/or making clear conclusions later on. Furthermore, I agree with Jones (as cited in Charles, 2010), who suggests in a teaching approach he calls *Say, See, Do Teaching*, that teachers should present smaller bits of information and then quickly have students do something with it. This "doing oriented" activity is preferable to the traditional approach, in which a large amount of teacher input produces cognitive overload in students. This results in a wish to disengage from the lesson, passivity and inadequate interaction between the teacher and individual students.

Additionally, as far as preventative measures are concerned, I am also in tune with Jones' (in Charles, 2010) suggestion for "use of incentives". Students can be motivated and learn responsibility by working properly to earn a reward. They often respond well to the anticipation of activities such as games for learning or review, listening to a song, viewing a video, or having time to pursue interesting topics with friends. Such activities can highly motivate students as they are both meaningful and entertaining..

Furthermore, in order to supply my students with comprehensible, relevant and interesting learning activities, I take into consideration certain factors that comprise their

profile such as their age, their interests, their cultural background and last but not least their ability. The right level of difficulty should be challenging without being confusing or frustrating. I always try to be compatible with my students' needs and preferences so I try to enrich the syllabus in ways that foster intrinsic motivation and stimulate their passion to learn. According to Marshall (as cited in Charles, 2010), "internal motivators" such as curiosity, interest, enjoyment, challenge should be promoted. Subsequently, when I plan my classes I need to bear in mind the need for flexibility and variety and provide my students with multiple opportunities that increase their potential for learning. I , also, occasionally involve my students in the choice of lesson topics and tasks as involvement offers them a sense of ownership and, therefore, increases commitment.

If we focus on language learning, teaching lexis and grammar are an essential part of any language programme. Students need constant exposure to language and comprehensible input but as it is stated by Harmer (2001), this is not enough in itself, unless there is some language study or opportunity to help them remember language facts. I provide my students with communicative activities alongside with grammar practice as major theories in language acquisition would agree that more communication means more language is acquired. Besides, since language is a social practice, there has been a call for the use of 'authentic ' materials rather than just being restricted to the artificial language found in textbooks. Certain materials need to be authentic in the sense that language is not artificially constrained. Authenticity is also important because it concerns the classroom interaction. The

more realistic the language, the more easily it can cater to the range of proficiency levels found in classes (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Therefore we should involve students in a wide range of class activities such as pair or group work, gapping activities, games, class discussions, authentic tasks and “real” meaningful communication like problem solving or consensus type activities. Mostly then can students give and receive feedback on performance. Everyone has the chance to come up with some ideas, thus developing stronger communication skills and confidence, they can share diverse perspectives and develop new approaches to resolve differences, they share roles and responsibilities. Besides cooperative learning teaches our students tolerance and helps foster their social development. For instance, I offer them the opportunity to participate in European school partnership programmes and enable them to connect with peers in European countries in order to work together on joint projects. I believe that learning can be enhanced and become more enjoyable when students are given the opportunity to discover and construct knowledge and practice skills in authentic situations, when they work actively with other people with whom they can use language purposefully and creatively. That could also result in having them entirely involved and immersed in the given tasks with no purpose to deviate.

However, the truth is that no matter how hard we try to be proactive in terms of classroom management, lesson planning and choice of methodology, discipline problems will definitely arise. Therefore, my response is equally important. It should be prompt and consistent with the rules and consequences

agreed upon. My primary concern is to avoid confrontations; I always try to cut short the incipient behaviour before it develops and spreads and react calmly and non-verbally without taking things personally, in order not to interrupt the flow of the lesson or distract other students. Kounin (as cited in Charles, 2010) uses the term “withitness” in order to describe the skill of being aware of what is going on in all parts of the classroom through proximity, eye contact and mobility. All the above can definitely contribute to my response to students’ misbehaviour without delay and preventing minor disruptions from becoming major. I also feel that using body language to get my message through amiably and clearly would be far more preferable to nagging and complaining. Jones (as cited in Charles, 2010) urges teachers to use body language and facial expressions in order to express seriousness, enjoyment, appreciation and personal connection. Some other techniques I employ are targeting my questions to disruptive students in order to involve them, giving them academic help, changing activities or pace, providing more opportunities for them to participate or reseating them.

In case of persistent disruptive behaviour my intervention would be direct, short and firm (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 1996). For example I make a short statement identifying the incorrect behaviour, an expression for the wish for good behaviour reminding the students of relevant rules and what is required, or an announcement of a reward for appropriate behaviour. I normally try to avoid getting angry and I express concern instead. Some other measures I take are warnings, loss of privileges, offering choices, making an offer they

couldn't resist or even parent conferences, in cases of persistent misbehaviour.

Parental involvement is another important factor that could contribute to my dealing with student misbehaviour effectively. I am also in favour of teacher-student private meetings as a way to get students to admit their misbehaviour, establish cause and effect links and discuss the most effective action for the future (Cohen et al, 1996). Targeting the root of the problem and not just the symptom could prove far more effective in the long run. For instance, a problem that results from an attempt to avoid failure should be addressed in a totally different manner from a problem that originates from attention seeking behaviour.

In certain cases when more serious defiance is involved, it could prove helpful to consult colleagues or the school's head teacher in order to develop common practices or action plans in promoting positive behaviour management or treating discipline problems. Besides, as the school is a community, there should be a coherent policy and cooperation among members of the staff should be promoted.

On the whole, the principles I should always bear in mind when dealing with misbehaviour are fairness and consistency as prerequisites to maintain my credibility. I also feel it is of utmost importance to treat students in a respectful way. I try select responses that do not threaten or demean the students' sense of self. I totally agree with Ginott's (as cited in Charles, 2010) perspective of classroom congruent communication, which is harmonious with students' feelings about situations and themselves. Teachers at their best confer dignity on their

students by respectfully treating them as capable of making good decisions. Teachers at their worst, label students, belittle them, and denigrate their character.

In conclusion, teachers are not only the authority in class but also facilitators for learning and a resource for the students to draw on. If they replace *criticism* with *positive influence* without disapproving, blaming, complaining, then it is likely to earn the students' respect and cooperation. If we try to listen, support and trust our students, we will be perceptive and we will manage to have an insight into their deeper hopes, fears, realities, and difficulties. If the above are accompanied with the use of appropriate teaching methodology and methods, only then can we engage our students and rally them to our side. That's what could make school satisfying for everyone.

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“Stir and settle”: the key points for a successful classroom

by Eleni Chatziandreou

After many years of teaching experience, I realized that the main goal of every teacher should be to encourage children to learn. During our years of university studies, we became familiar with many theories of language acquisition, but it is true that we were little prepared for the real classroom situation.

I am not afraid to admit that, before this web seminar, I wasn't able to see how essential is to have a classroom management philosophy in mind when I try to practice strategies, on a daily basis, in order to maintain a disciplined environment in my classes.

I believe that the need for discipline in a classroom is absolutely necessary. Some very well designed lessons, in terms of both content and materials, could fail if the teacher is quite permissive and allows minor disturbances to escalate in a situation where children do not pay any attention and the teacher is struggling to speak.

That is the reason, the model of management that will rule my philosophy, is the 'assertive' discipline one. By the term 'assertiveness' we mean stating clearly what the teacher wants to happen during his lesson, while respecting the rights of both children and the teacher.

The *assertive* discipline model is characterized by a clear structure and organization of the way classroom situation is conducted, in which the teacher is certainly responsible for.

Assertive by no means refers to authoritarian. An assertive teacher, actually, protects the children's right to learn. Of course in order for a teacher to substantiate an assertive profile in class he should employ certain management strategies. Below, I am briefly stating some other important measures that should be taken, in order to eliminate the occurrence of noise and trouble during the lesson as much as possible.

The first step, especially set at the beginning of the school year, is to take preventive discipline measures. This means that a teacher should: a) establish clear rules and procedures and instruct students in how to follow them, b) be clear about the consequences for misbehaviour, c) make smooth transitions between various activities, thus eliminating the 'idle time', where noise can begin, d) remove distracting materials from view, when instruction is in process.

I also find particularly useful for my philosophy the integration of lesson planning and class management, as it is explained by Maclennan (1987). Classroom management for the sake of discipline means advance planning in terms of 'content selection'. According to the author the linguistic content of the activities we plan to teach, on its own, cannot foster a smooth lesson. I believe, that if we identify the "stir" factor and the "settle" factor of the tasks we intend to use, any topic can be taught without major disruptions.

We need to stimulate and motivate our students with "stirring" activities but on the other hand, we need to provide in advance for "settling", calming down activities as well. The point is to break up our teaching time in activities that are

“stirring”, when the children seem uninterested, and “settling”, when our students are very exuberant or even careless.

So by providing a restless class with “settling” and calming tasks, we prevent the worse, that is the major disturbance. “Settling” means keeping the children as much occupied as possible. However, using “settling” tasks does not necessarily mean that we compromise their quality or that they do not keep children mentally alert.

We need to study in advance the possible “stir” or “settling” elements of the activities we plan to teach, and if we do that carefully, we reduce the need for on-the-spot management decisions.

Of course, no theory is a panacea and despite the teacher’s efforts, discipline problems always occur, and when they do, corrective measures need to be taken. These are: a) teacher’s reaction without anger or haste to problem situations, b) arrangement and consequences that are not humiliating or demeaning the child. Intimidation only reinforces the notion that violence is an acceptable form of control (Gordon, 1991). The truth is that only children can make the decision to behave well or conform to the teacher’s expectations. So, instead of forcing a student to behave well, a teacher needs to influence him/her in a positive way c) give rewards for improvement in behaviour improvement, d) follow drastic up steps (e.g. contacting parents, involving the headteacher etc.)

Despite the management strategies a teacher uses, his/her ultimate goal should be the development of the child’s ability for self discipline. This can be gradually promoted by the

teacher by getting the children used to the feel of an organized lesson. The point is to keep our students happy with the lesson and willing to participate. Even difficult children should be treated with patience; if we realize that very often the aggression that children display is the result of frustration they feel because, for example, a task is too difficult for them. Then, we do not punish the child; we simply change the task.

So returning to my “assertive” model introduction, I will quote a Winston’s Churchill’s saying: “*Headmasters have powers at their disposal which Prime Ministers have never yet been invested*” . Though not headteachers, we have the power to monitor our classes. Even when we are dealing with children from dysfunctional families or children who are not willing to participate in the lesson, we can make the difference. We should be sure of ourselves and our students will always feel that. We are significant models for our students; we should never forget that!

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Classroom management: mix and match and be prepared to adjust

by Ioanna Chioni

As a university student, you come across many theories of methodology and educational psychology, and ways of promoting positive discipline in the classroom. Every theory, though, is presented as offering the best solution. However, when in the classroom, things are quite different to what is expected for the following reasons: the students themselves, the country's teaching system, the materials you have access to, the teaching hours (first or last), the physical environment and class dynamics.

All the above factors make each class unique and the teacher has to take everything into consideration. Moreover, each pupil is unique, and needs a personalized teaching approach. In my opinion, the teacher needs to be flexible and utilize a variety of method combinations so as to attract the students' interest; s/he has to teach interesting topics according to the students' interests and needs. S/he is required to consider that different students learn in different ways. Some students are auditory type learners, others are visual, kinesthetic and others need a combination of such types of learning.

As Chomsky (in Towel and Hawkins, 1994: 60) said, "there is Universal Grammar in all babies and as they grow, they learn themselves and form sentences". Based Chomsky's theory, Towell & Hawkins claim that there is curiosity and motivation from our inner selves that needs to understand things, which makes us learn. "Therefore, there is an inner desire to learn.

This is part of the child's innate biological endowment" (ibid: 61)

However, the majority of students are not interested in learning all subjects. That is why motivation is a key element to success. Theorists like Skinner, Charles, Dreikurs and Glasser believe that children need to be motivated, they need to be loved, to know that they belong in the class, to be praised and rewarded, as well as to understand when they've done something wrong. (Charles, 2014). The teacher, from the beginning, should display warmth to all students, without exception; consequently, the students will feel loved and accepted, and ultimately, they'll give back to the teacher. As a result, a good relationship between the teacher and students can be achieved, a positive atmosphere set, and effective learning can take place inside the classroom.

Speaking of the teacher as a role model, when it comes to classroom discipline, I support the Wong & Wong theory of the first days of school (in Charles, 2014), where the teacher needs to be optimistic but also show the students how to behave inside the class, where to sit and what to do. The teacher needs to set the rules from the beginning and establish routines on how the students are expected to react and behave. As Hargreaves says "those rules specify acceptable forms of classroom conduct and that they are either laid by the teacher or are arrived at by agreement between him and the students" (in Cohen, 2010 : 353). Additionally, I would get a written commitment from the students (Glasser, 1990). A "behaviour contract" during the first week of a school year, gives the students a sense of

involvement and a freedom of choice. It makes them more responsible and it contributes to the creation of a commonly accepted set of behavioural guidelines that the teacher and students have to follow. As Dreikurs (1972) suggests, “strive to maintain a democratic classroom that emphasizes group well-being. Such classrooms provide the best venue for promoting sense of belonging and helping students make positive choices and exercise responsibility” (ibid: 64).

Canter and Canter (1976) suggest that by using and reminding students of this contract, the teacher can set up a system of off-putting consequences. H/she can keep track of minor offences, organize them from less severe to more severe, and according to the seriousness and frequency of the offences, the teacher can reduce points, reprimand them privately, inform the school principal or talk to the parents. Initially the teacher can eye-contact, or move towards the students, using a certain voice (King, 2000). Finally, the teacher can remind the entire class about a class rule being violated as supportive discipline does, and therefore he can build a sense of unity.

Another important thing is a change of seating since “the physical organization of a classroom strongly influences learning” (Denton, 1992 : 29); it is important for the teacher to find the right place for each student, to create a “pleasant and cheerful, motivating and purposeful setting for learning” (ibid: 29).

Continuing with assertive discipline the teacher can also create a system of positive consequences. It is very important for the students to be encouraged in every effort they make

and be praised for that effort. The praise could be in the form of verbal encouragement, stickers for extra points, sending positive notes to parents, awards and even give the students privileges like a choice of educational tasks they enjoy, such as watching a movie, listening to songs or playing educational games. Those rewards will make students try. In my opinion, a good teacher should always continue trying and never give up on a student. The use of “*approve and praise*” system of “*reward and attractive power*” (Jones, 2014) can create a positive atmosphere in which the teacher is respected. For me, the use of humor always helps to break the ice and relieve the tension in awkward situations, while sarcasm and cynicism should be avoided at all times.

However, this award system should be used in moderation; the overuse of rewards could diminish intrinsic behaviour, while the use of private reprimand could help solve the problems and give the chance to the teacher to learn more about the students’ background, their economic position or any personal problems he/she faces and to help him overcome them. That could build their relationship and reduce any misbehaviour caused in class.

Also on the subject of the teacher acts as a role model; therefore s/he should always be well presented and dressed appropriately. S/he also always needs to use the appropriate teaching methodology taking into consideration, the students’ age, background, gender , and cultural background but s/he shouldn’t be sarcastic, or neglect her/his students. Every teacher needs to build his relationship with the students, needs to show interest, not only inside and outside the

classroom. Finally s/he needs to be in constant awareness of what all students are doing in the classroom all the time, and never be embarrassed to seek help from another colleague, parent or the school headteacher.

However, apart from being *proactive* there are instances where a teacher needs to be *reactive*. In my experience “The Carrot and Stick Method” (Kohn, 1993) can help a lot in class. A combination of being strict (even use penalties when needed) and using praise and reward in other cases requires a good management plan and a pure interest in “getting to know” your students. The words of an old teacher I once worked with became the gist of my philosophy: “*Students are like a fire. Remember! As a teacher, if you get too close to them, you will get burnt and if you are too distant like an iceberg, you will feel frozen and they will not come near you. Being always in the middle is the secret of being a successful teacher.*”

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Teaching: a mission never accomplished?

by Dimitra Chioti

I believe that classroom climate should enhance the growth of student personality and interest to learn. Teaching is not just a job but a mission that can never be accomplished to its full potential! It is an ongoing process that can bring fruitful results only when real effort is put by the practise of different theories and models. For me, the classroom is not a factory where students try to be productive machines. On the contrary, it is a democratic community where personality growth, need for knowledge, development of critical thinking, social interaction and tolerance of differentiation are promoted.

In my opinion, by developing a cooperative atmosphere, where students learn through personal involvement and experimentation, we can create an effective classroom which experiences moments inspired from real life. That's why, as far as classroom management is concerned, I support the use of learning groups (Wong & Wong, 2009), which are support groups being taught certain group procedures from the very first days of school, as well as social skills in the long run. More specifically, the roles, responsibilities and procedures that are expected to be followed should be initially explained and practiced as the first required steps towards success in teaching and learning. In order for a productive behaviour to become habitual, daily struggle based on strict routines is necessary. So, no matter how much I am in favour of the democratic approach, I believe that boundaries have to be set from the very beginning.

As for my role as a teacher, I think it is not restricted to merely being able to transfer what I have learnt myself about classroom management with an emphasis on discipline. I need to practice innovative methods of teaching in order to keep students' interest and motivation unimpaired. The teacher of today should be full of energy, close to his students' needs, ready to differentiate his teaching by offering a variety of activities.

Furthermore, I think it is significant to mention my goals to my students. Not only is content learning important to me, but also the acquisition of other skills as ethics, critical thinking, problem solving and self-confidence. At the same time, I have to discuss with them why I stand for these goals and how they can be met successfully.

Moreover, support, encouragement, trust, respect and care, clearly stated expectations (Glasser, 2015) and consequences should accompany teaching (Canter & Canter, 1999). Below I outline certain classroom practices and procedures that have resulted from my pre-service and in-service education as well as my teaching experience and are conducive towards a cooperative classroom.

6) I find the following classroom rules especially crucial to be agreed upon from the very first days.

- Entrance and exit from the class (e.g. settling activities, lesson reviews).
- Tardiness and Attendance.
- Communication skills (for speakers, audience members and interlocutors).

- Heading of assignments (both in-class and homework).
- Discipline scenarios (i.e. for teasing, cursing, fighting, mobile use, physical and psychological abuse, drug use, safety issues).
- Physical codes and signals of communication (like physical touch, raising of the hand, other messages of body language, facial expressions).
- Tone of voice (e.g. being soft).
- Tidiness and neatness (of the class and desks).
- Seating arrangement.
- Noise levels allowed.
- Instructions on how to deal with serious cases of misbehaviour (consequences).

In addition, I feel responsible for my lessons and for helping my students become successful learners, so I commit myself to certain values like:

- Modelling the expected behaviour and teaching empathy .
- Being fair and treating students as equals.
- Criticizing only the behaviour not the character.
- Clearly explaining anything concerning behaviour and learning.
- Making learning challenging, purposeful and fun.
- Respecting students and their right to be involved in the learning process.

- Apologizing when making mistakes.
- Being firm.
- Avoiding humiliation.
- Practicing positive attitude.
- Ignoring minor offences.
- Being proactive so as to avoid dealing with consequences.

However, above all, I strongly believe that teachers need to focus on the students' inner motivation. Self-awareness, self-control, freedom of choice and independent will are only some of the factors that we, as teachers, should work on in order to achieve high standards for mature-made students who do not want to hinder the learning process.

Last but not least is the fact that we need to reconsider our personal classroom management theories through constant reflection. All we have to do is to be loyal to our values but flexible and open-minded at the same time, keeping in mind that 'The sky is the limit'!

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The art of classroom discipline: tricks and tips for teachers

by Dimitra Dalpanagioti

The departure point for every personal philosophy statement of classroom discipline should be the teacher's view of what "Classroom Discipline" means and how it can be achieved.

For me, a disciplined classroom is that in which the students have clear, attainable objectives in their minds, so that they become motivated to remain concentrated during the lesson and do their best to achieve the set objectives. Real discipline occurs when the students have the opportunity to misbehave, but self-consciously choose not to. Even when they do misbehave, they themselves restore order, since they have internalized the necessity of discipline. It becomes therefore apparent that the ultimate goal of every teacher is to educate students to become responsible and autonomous learners that can regulate their own conduct, both inside and outside classroom. Obviously enough, then, discipline is not an event, but rather, as Morrish (in Charles, 2013) aptly puts it, it should be viewed as a process that takes time and requires training, while the results are not immediately visible.

In order to foster a classroom environment that is conducive to learning, I follow a three-phase classroom management model with focus on discipline whereby I mostly try to be proactive but I am also aware of the fact that I need to be reactive after the occurrence of misbehaviour instances.

One of the basic proactive discipline strategies that I adopt is the establishment of rules (i.e. acceptable behaviour), limits

(i.e. non-acceptable behaviour) and expectations, while also teaching the students how to follow procedures and routines, like transitions from one task to the next, or how to pass and out assignments. Harry and Rosemary Wong (2009) and Morrish (in Charles 2013) strongly insist on the necessity of this step. more specifically, the former are firmly convinced that misbehaviour results from the negligence to teach certain procedures, while the latter argues that the first two weeks of each school year should be devoted not to academic work, but rather to the training of the students to regularize the above procedures. Nonetheless, I find Morrish's notion against negotiating rules with the students –even if at an early stage– too austere and inapplicable in the setting of the Greek learning environment. As far as I am concerned, I always try to involve the students in this process through discussion and creative activities, like collages and posters, because in this way they become more engaged and understand that regulations are for the best interest of the group, and not only beneficial to the teacher. In addition, a sense of community and emotional safety is fostered, the importance of which has been repeatedly stressed by Abraham Maslow (1943) in his hierarchy of human needs: the need for emotional and physical safety should be fulfilled before proceeding to more advanced stages of learning.

Another preventing action for fostering discipline is to provide differentiated instruction according to each student's level of language acquisition, their learning styles and other parameters. Especially with regard to the students' learning styles, Gardner (1983) has identified several of them and calls for differentiated instruction approaches. Bearing in mind the

motto “one size does not fit all,” I try to accommodate the students’ varied needs, abilities and learning styles. At the same time, I make clear that each effort is acceptable, as long as the students do their best, and that everyone’s best differs. As a result, mutual respect between the students and me, and among the students as well, is built, and the students are reassured that I act to the best of their interest.

When instances of misbehaviour arise, I tend to follow Morrish’s (in Charles 2013) advice not to ignore small instances of indiscipline, because these are bound to develop into larger ones. Other strategies I use involve closing the physical gap with the off-task students, keeping eye-contact with them, remaining mobile and extending what Jones (1990) calls the “action zone” or “T-zone,” namely the area in which the teachers are more likely to interact with the students.

Moreover, following Fay and Cline’s “Love and Logic Principles” (2007), I avoid reacting with anger and haste, while adopting a humiliating, ironic or judgmental attitude toward the students is under no circumstances among my options. In addition, I keep in mind Morrish’s (in Charles 2013) suggestion that emphasis should not be placed on punishment; rather than ending the incident of misbehaviour with a reprimand, I always model the desirable behaviour and have the students repeat it in an acceptable manner.

Finally, after an event of misbehaviour, especially in cases of repeated misconduct, I discuss with the students and try to discover the reasons underlying their attitude. Sometimes I ask undisciplined students to reflect on their behaviour by

keeping a diary, or by filling in questionnaires. Last but not least, I keep the parents informed of their children's conduct, and make it clear to them that we have common goals, namely the students' academic success, emotional development and well-being.

Taking everything into consideration, the aforementioned stages their strategies are intended to guide the students towards self-discipline, personal responsibility and decision-making, the ultimate goal being the autonomous regulation of their conduct, both inside and outside the learning environment. My philosophy of classroom discipline is a work-in-progress that will evolve as I evolve as a teacher, and it is time and professional experience that will confirm its effectiveness or cause it to be reconsidered.

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The Holy Grail of classroom management

by Marika Dimitriadou

1. Introduction

Ever since I entered the classroom as a teacher I have been searching for every professional's Holy Grail, that magic, secret combination which would allow me to navigate successfully in the job realm by responding efficiently and effectively to professional demands, and at the avoiding compromising my personal ideology and philosophy in relation to the purpose, structure and overall aim of the education system. In the past, I was constantly looking for that sparkling teaching trick that that would turn me from a university graduate into a teacher and enable me to, successfully, transfer knowledge to my audience and build strong relationships with my students. Gradually, and occasionally painfully, I have come to realize that there is no hidden recipe, no magic trick that applies as a doctrine in keeping my students happy, content and, at the same time academically successful. Respect, trust, fairness and care for all students in an honest and authentic way, seem to be the attitudes that work best. Yet, before even attempting to establish a motivating environment in classrooms, I had to rearrange my priorities, find common ground between the demands of my profession and my beliefs and come up with a personal philosophy about teaching and learning.

It is evident to any teacher who enters a classroom that in order to facilitate the teaching-learning process, he/she needs to find a way to establish effective classroom management aiming in the creation and maintenance of a positive,

supportive and orderly learning environment. Each of us needs to devise a teaching and classroom-management plan for learning. Ideally, we should be able to plan activities in advance and organize our classroom environment in such a way that it helps learners feel accepted, appreciated and cared for. Moreover, we need to establish and reinforce all those positive practices that will enable learners to make the best of their class experience. It takes time and effort to create bonds of learning, but if we have the learners' best interest at heart and mind, we can achieve it.

I believe that mere implementation of a discipline scheme is not sufficient for the creation of a positive learning environment in a classroom. Personally, as a teacher, I sensed from an early stage of my career that I needed a more extensive plan, including a wider range of applicable principles relating to teaching practice. Before devising such a plan, I needed to decide what kind of teacher and person I wanted to become. I realized that fairness, trusting relations, mutual respect and responsibility were to become the basic values of both my character and my classroom management philosophy. I felt that in becoming the teacher I aspired to be, I should become a motivator and a facilitator, a person responsible to ensure that no learner in my class would "be left behind". In short, since I hoped to become a good teacher, I needed to become a better person first.

The need to turn myself from just an individual with a degree in English language to an actual teacher that would be fair, respectful, patient, consistent, helpful and tolerant, led me to

the formation of a classroom management philosophy that is based upon the following principles:

2. Creation of a learner-friendly environment

The attempt to create a safe and positive classroom community should aim for an environment that “is a place in which students feel cared about and are encouraged to care about each other. They experience a sense of being valued and respected; children matter to one another and to the teacher. They have come to think in the plural; they feel connected to each other; they are part of an ‘us’ and as a result of this, they feel safe in their classes, not only physically but emotionally”. (Kohn, 2001: 101). Once manage to create such an environment in the classroom, in physical terms and teaching practices, then respect, trust, positive reaction, involvement and willing participation are built up day by day. It is most helpful to adopt a same-side attitude, work with learners and listen to their voices with the ultimate goal of enhancing their school experience.

3. Learner involvement in decision making about content and method

Involving learners in the formation of a more learner-friendly syllabus never failed to pay me back in terms of positive responses. It is useful to allow learners to have a say about the content of the material they will be taught. Authentic material and communicative activities, not only enhance learners’ linguistic ability but, at the same time, lead to pragmatic competency and self-regulated behaviour.

Language is meant to promote and ensure communication, and as such it should provide learners with the necessary tools to reach this goal.

The application of supplementary interventions to the official curriculum is a difficult task that needs great care in relation to the limits of legal consequences. Although it is difficult to “serve two masters” (the learners and the curriculum requirements), reasonable negotiation with learners can do the trick. Learners can suggest material and content that is closer to their needs and interests, and the teacher can incorporate it in the syllabus without crossing boundaries set by the curriculum. This turns learners into willing participants with increased motivation. At the same time, their positive involvement in classroom activities minimizes the appearance of disruptive behaviour.

4. Thorough and well-organized preparation

I strongly believe that good knowledge of the material to be taught, thorough planning with a flexible attitude, clear orientation and communication of the aims to be achieved, variety of content and adaptation of material to learners’ skills, interests and abilities facilitates the learning process. When we plan for teaching, we need to plan for learning. Furthermore, it has proved useful to always have additional material prepared, that could be used in cases that necessitate modification of the assigned tasks. In this respect, I totally side with the point of view which supports the idea that teachers, who are organized, consistent and thoughtful in designing learning tasks help their students learn more effectively than those who opt to come into class less

prepared. “Research indicates that effective teachers organize their classrooms and design learning activities so that most management problems are prevented rather than stopped once they occur”. (Jacobsen et al.,2006 : 40) This kind of practice helps in the creation of a teaching-learning environment where responsibility becomes a key element and encourages students to respond accordingly, focus on set goals, perform willingly and abstain from misbehaviour.

5. Interesting, consistent and systematic instruction

Another issue that I always try to keep in mind and pay special attention to, is to be consistent and systematic in instruction because “critical to academic achievement and appropriate classroom behaviour, is the amount of time in which students are involved in academic tasks”. (Patterson,2010,p.9)

“Consistent routines help students learn expectations for working both in classrooms and in preparation for activities within the larger school community, and beyond. Teaching students in advance how to handle simple academic and non-academic routines increases independence and reduces the need to interrupt teachers and peers. In establishing routines, teachers need to lead by example.” (Patterson, 2010 : 8)

Occasionally, learners may feel bored or uninterested if they are not involved in clearly-set learning tasks. Effective learning occurs when we implement procedures and techniques that have been carefully selected to foster learners’ needs, interests and abilities. As put by Mc Lean (2012), “there is a clear need for the content of language teaching

materials to involve the learner – relate to his needs, interests and moral values” (ibid: 33).

Furthermore, a variety of motivating and interesting activities, can teach learners the value of group work and cooperation with peers towards a common goal, encourage critical thinking and can greatly affect the involvement of learners in academic tasks. Collaborative problem-solving tasks facilitate the creation of a sense of bonding among learners since they need to work together for the successful completion of assigned tasks, contribute to group effort, acknowledge and value their peers’ sharing of resources and ideas and build interpersonal relations of respect and trust. Such an attitude can provide assistance to learners to keep task-focused and manage themselves both in terms of accomplishment and behaviour.

Finally, feedback and formative assessment techniques keep learners active and concentrated. When they know that consistent teaching, clear expectations, monitoring and help provided by the teacher is meant to facilitate their learning, they become more cooperative and are less likely to display disruptive behaviour.

6. Formulation of a commonly-accepted contract about behaviour

Another practice that I greatly value is the formulation of a set of mutually-accepted rules that will be applied in class in order to regulate behaviour and increase learners’ responsibility regarding their conduct. My students (or pupils – depending on the kind of school I work in) and I, after careful deliberation, reach a consensus about the rules

(agreements) that we will apply in class and define what is accepted and what is not. We, also, agree upon the consequences (and **not** the types of punishment) that will follow when they are not consistently applied. As suggested by Albert (1996), we call the outcome of our agreement a “contract” or “the classroom Code of Conduct” which actually specifies how everyone, including the teacher, is supposed to behave and interact. Both the teacher and the learners are responsible for their behaviour, the application of the rules included in the mutual agreement and are accountable for any breaching of “the contract” (Albert,1996)

This ‘contract’ includes a set of ‘agreements’ (rules) about responsible behaviour that are “worded simply, are limited in number, posted in the room for easy reference and reviewed periodically”. (Charles, 2010 : 227) It is important for everyone to clearly comprehend the content and aims of the contract, and for the teacher to ensure their consistent application. As stated in Kagan’s Win-Win Discipline theory, a teacher should try “to promote the progressive development of a number of life skills that help students live more successfully. Examples of life skills are self-control, anger management, impulse control, perseverance, and empathy. Teachers are urged to teach these skills as part of the curriculum and exhibit them at all times, especially when responding to misbehavior”. (ibid: 232).

7. Effective and prompt remedial response to misbehaviour

After twenty years of working with learners of various age and language competency levels, I have realized that despite well-meant intentions there will always be cases that disruptive

behaviour will occur in class. In such cases, I have decided to act promptly. At times I need to deal with misbehaviour proactively in order to prevent disruptions. In such cases preventive structures include reviewing class rules regularly, asking learners to keep their part of the agreement by applying the rules responsibly and with consistency, and helping them in getting accustomed with class routines help them engage willingly in class activities. In other cases, I need to intervene at the moment of disruption in order to put an end to the instance of misbehaviour and help students focus their attention on our primary goal, the lesson and the learning process. And other times still, I have to apply follow-up structures that “provide training in a life skill such as self-control or relating well with others”. (ibid: 230)

Moreover, I always try keep in mind that “a consequence should make sense, be a logical ending for an action. It should be the effect of behaving inappropriately. Punishment, on the other hand, is punitive in nature. It does not necessarily serve learning, but rather gets even. It sends the wrong message. Children are in school to learn. Part of learning is making mistakes, both academic and social”. (Bunbar, 2004: 40).

Parental involvement and cooperation is, also, of major importance in my philosophy. Parents and guardians can become invaluable allies in the creation of positive classroom conditions. Getting them actively involved creates a sense of bonding between school and society that can help improve the quality of both teaching and learning.

In conclusion, the basic principles of my classroom management philosophy aim to create an environment that will make learners feel safe, respected and cared for. I have put various techniques to testing and I have tried to adapt them in different circumstances and contexts, but I always draw upon all the concepts and principles previously discussed. I believe that in order to promote learning in a learner-friendly and learner-focused environment, a teacher needs to be motivating, interesting, sensitive to learners' needs, responsible and consistent. The creation of positive relations, the use of interesting material and motivating instruction, focus on promoting and enhancing learning in relation to individual character strengths can all help to create happier and effective classrooms. There is no magic charm for any teacher in this constant struggle. But, it is very important to bear in mind "the need for all of us to consider learners as a whole and integrated human beings and respond to them as such" and deal with teaching of English "as a means of education, relating closely to the development of the learner's cognitive ability, rather than as simply the inculcation of a specific series of linguistic skills". After all, "If the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher" (Mc Lean, 2012).

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eleven-year old boy who seems to be the voice of her conscience and her harsher critic. She is a strong advocate of what Prof. Howard Gardner (Harvard University) stated in 1999 and fully presents the main idea that should permeate any teaching practice, by any teacher, in any part of the world: "I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place."

Teaching or imposing discipline?: a teacher's dilemma

by Zacharenia Dimitriadou

The world we live in is surely not a perfect one; thus, there is no perfect classroom and no perfect students or teachers. I perceive my role as a teacher as a serious one, and in the classroom, my obligation and responsibility is to be patient, fun, a facilitator of learning and create a positive classroom environment that will maximize the opportunity for learning for all my students. Students who find themselves in an insecure, irresponsible learning environment and are distracted by the misbehaviour of other students spend their energy trying to find ways to cope in this environment rather than focusing on their academic goals (Casteel, 2012). Therefore, successful classroom management that minimizes misbehaviour incidents is essential.

I believe that an effective classroom management strategy needs to have several components. First, it needs to involve a way to inform the students of classroom rules and expectations. Second, it needs to involve a way to remind students of the policy and implement school rules. Finally, teachers need to be prepared to deal with students' misbehaviour.

Classrooms run more smoothly when students are first taught routines for common learning activities and then the teacher consistently enforces those same routines by praising students who follow them, reviewing those routines periodically, and re-teaching them as needed. For me it is crucial to teach my students' self-discipline and respect for

themselves (Ur, 1999), their peers and their teachers. This means that, I should set boundaries and guide them from day 1; yet, they should determine their own behaviour based on expectations set in the classroom. For example, students should choose to respect other students and me in class when we are talking and not choose to be disruptive. I tend to be democratic rather than autocratic as I firmly believe that students need to participate in decision-making on class issues since it literally affects them. It is important to consider ways to promote acceptable classroom behaviour and to turn negativity into positivity which will ultimately lead to a positive self-image. My behaviour demonstrates love and respect for my students. This is my guide for coping with the nagging and whining when it arises and will also put an end to the constant warnings and threats. In a nutshell my students will be offered two choices: a) you can do this now and obstruct your students or b) you can do it during the break time.

In times of meditation I find myself in the dilemma between imposing or teaching discipline. I choose the second and since “prevention is better than cure” I tend to follow the guidelines below:

- Focusing on the do’s list instead of the don’ts.
- Being consistent.
- State clearly expectations and consequences.
- Make use of humour to stimulate students or to let some steam off.

- Be aware of what is going on in all/most parts of the classroom and intervening quickly and early (“withitness”) (Kounin, 1977).

My ultimate goal is the promotion of a learning environment conducive to learning. Maybe I am not able to prevent all of the petty misbehaviours, but I try to make my students realize the consequences that their disruptions have on others: they impinge on other students’ rights to a good education and they deviate teachers from focusing on the academic needs of his/her class (Seganti, 2014).

I try to treat my students with fairness, justice, respect and honesty (Coloroso & Varga, 1990). This means that I try to a) criticize the behaviour and not the students themselves, b) treat all of them equally regardless of sex, age, nationality and learning level, c) treat them as individuals and not as a group, d) listen to all sides before a “verdict”, e) apologize in case I am wrong and f) will make learning engaging, challenging and fun.

Intervention on the level of instruction is also essential and varies according to my students’ level. Smooth transition between activities prevents behaviour problems. Good students who finish their task before the others will be given something extra so as to prevent them from being disruptive. I am in favour of group and pair-work and I try to create situations which require them to think critically and make decisions (Cagnarith & Klein, 2007). Communicative language teaching (CLT) is also a good choice as it emphasizes the teaching of integrated skills in content and task-based activities who involve students in real-world situations and

expose them to a large amount of authentic language (Richards & Scmidth, 2002). Students motivated to participate in their learning are less disruptive as it is very difficult to be actively engaged in academics and to misbehave at the same time. When teachers expect and require student participation, they increase the odds that these students will become absorbed in the flow of the activity and not be dragged into misbehaviour (Heward, 2003).

Reflection on my own strategies and performance is constant in order to strengthen my weaknesses. As teaching is an on-going process, my classroom discipline philosophy will hopefully, continue to grow and evolve towards an overall good classroom behaviour that facilitates student learning, personal growth and positive classroom climate.

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My personal philosophy statement on classroom management

by Maria Koukourikou

Schools are living entities reflecting certain values and shaping their own personal identity through their students, the teaching staff and the whole environment surrounding them. In this context teachers operate on many and diverse levels with an emphasis on their pedagogical role. Part of this role is to ensure that students are in a clean, safe and pleasant environment where learning takes place. In order for learning to be conducive though, there should be a minimum level of disruption which requires a good management plan on the part of the teacher. I prefer the term classroom management to that of discipline because the former carries a more positive and preventive connotation whereas the latter echoes mostly corrective.

School is a community on its own right where students come not only to learn but also to socialize. At times it is difficult for them to differentiate among these roles. My model of management strives to combine these varied traits of adolescents and if possible take advantage of their explosive temperament.

In order to accomplish this I try to cover for what Glasser (2014) calls their five basic needs: survival, belonging, power, fun and freedom To this end I want students to feel part of the class group, without the fear of the teacher's punishment. So in the first few weeks of the school year the students and I try to establish some rules of conduct. As part of a community we should all know what is acceptable and what is not as well as

what the consequences will be in each case (Coloroso, 2002). It is important is for the teacher to be fair and consistent with the students treating them the way s/he would like them to behave (Canter & Canter, 1976).

As far as classroom physical environment is concerned, it is certainly better when we work in a clean, airy and not overcrowded place but this is a factor beyond my control. We just try to make the room beautiful with their projects or posters they like. The sense of belonging is accomplished by the use of their first names and the reassurance that they can come to me at any time and talk about any of their concerns, whether they are about the lesson or personal. It is comforting to see that they are willing to share their worries with me and this kind o relationship also improves their attitude towards the lesson.

What is more, the element of fun is integral when dealing with children of all ages so, whenever possible, I begin or end the lesson with a song or game which on the one hand motivates them and on the other makes them look forward to English. A factor of undesirable commotion is physical and mental fatigue so when they look exhausted they are given the benefit of choice. Instead of sticking to the lesson plan students get involved in the decision making and they choose the type of activity they want for that period, whether it is a vocabulary game or reading a cartoon (Kohn, 1996). Of course this type of flexibility demands very good organization on my part which takes time and effort not always available. But throughout the years a good bank of activities has been created. Along with the freedom of choice, involvement in the class procedures

gives students power and makes them feel useful. This sense of power is intensified when some of them are assigned with tasks like arranging the desks, bringing in the books or the laptop and other similar responsibilities

A rule of thumb I frequently use in class is to try and have the troublemakers on my side from the very beginning. I usually achieve this through a private talk with them; I explain how important they are for their classmates and the fact that they act as role models to them. This power they feel they have over everybody else, makes them more sensitive to my request, which is to help me out whenever there is noise and mischief. However unorthodox this may sound it actually works in most cases and it has helped me resolve some difficult problems with troublesome students.

For the most part I go to great lengths to avoid the explosion of large scale incidents through a well-planned instructional scheme and personal behaviour. Being aware that inability to understand the tasks or my misplacement of notes and CDs give way to general upheaval, I try to be clear, use my tone of voice constructively and prepare activities which are engaging and purposeful for the students (Kagan et al.,2004). They also argue that when the lesson is interesting, there is variety, and the teacher is willing to restructure or modify the tasks according to the students' needs, then behaviour problems are less likely to occur.

What proves equally beneficial is to be alert at all times and act quickly and quietly if possible (Ur, 2002). Proximity to the students, a meaningful glance or the use of body language can lead them back to their task. If that does not work I ask

them a question or request a chore in order to forget what they were about to do (Jones, 2007).

A trick that also works is seating arrangement. Most of the students act entirely different when seating with different classmates. Therefore an immediate change of seats stops the chitchat. Of course during pair or group work the noise levels are quite high and it takes a lot of training in order to get down to work instead of fooling around. The results are even better when the students see the outcome of their cooperative work. For instance hang their posters on the wall, listen to the song they wrote or watch the video they created. This sense of achievement keeps students quiet and motivated

Nonetheless, no matter how hard I try to make everything work, discipline problems can not entirely disappear. There are instances where I face excessive noise in class or the impertinence of certain students. In such cases there are some steps I take to avoid a major explosion. What I normally try first, I try to use a humorous remark to break the ice and make the troublemakers understand that I am not there to judge them.

In cases where I have to resort to a reprimand, it is not humiliating or sarcastic because with adolescents this usually backfires and leads to a personal confrontation, which should be avoided at all costs. Empty threats or yelling do not work either because they are received as hostility on my part; so I try to keep calm, not lose control and make clear that it is the particular behaviour I reprimand and not the student himself/herself. I also seek to talk to this student in private after class and understand what caused the particular

behaviour. Students often misbehave in order to attract attention so if I care about them or empathise with them the problem more often than not fades out.

I do not believe classroom suspension solves anything and I use this strategy only as a last resort. I prefer a talk with the head teacher and the parents so as to find a way out of this awkward situation. Parents should be willing to work with the teachers because they know their children and their reactions better and their help is invaluable. Adolescents demand our respect and our patience and if they realise we are trying to do so they will not let us down.

My personal philosophy of classroom management simply reflects a model of class I have in mind which has come up after years of experience and through trial and error. When considering the different theories in literature I used to consider them too ambitious and at times utopic. Having experimented with various techniques and following some tips though, I realised that I am not alone and I can take advantage of my colleagues' experiences too. No class is the same and no technique is guaranteed to work in all cases. Nevertheless every year I promise myself to build a good relationship with my students and instill my love for English in them. In this way I hope to motivate them enough which is the key factor for an effective and easy-flowing lesson.

It is not always easy to find the path towards a supportive and friendly school environment and sometimes I feel disheartened; however a friendly smile or a chat with the students urges me to keep trying. I have realised that if you show concern for your students and at the same time be firm

and decisive, they pay you back with their respect, which for me is the ultimate reward.

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My name is Koukourikou Maria and I studied English Language and Literature at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and I am about to finish my M.Ed in TESOL. I worked for many years in private language schools with children and people of all ages and all levels.

For the past 9 years I work at public High Schools, an experience entirely different from the private sector. My job is demanding but also challenging and exhilarating since children bear this unique quality of diffusing their energy and keen spirit to me.

**Does a teacher possess the power to make a child's life
miserable or joyous?'**

by Chryssoula Lazou

'As a teacher I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanised or dehumanised.'

Ginott (1971: 13)

Being an effective teacher is not an easy task. A teacher's role is a very demanding one which calls for responsibility, hard work, goodwill and lifelong learning. Proof of its multi-tasking nature is the bulk of bibliography one can find on educational psychology, classroom management, methodology and lesson planning.

My personal philosophy on securing and maintaining discipline in classroom relies on my belief that students should satisfy their need for belonging and being respected if we, teachers, are to instigate and promote self-discipline. Having recollections of my school years, some of my teachers used to foster and apply what Canter (1976) calls "assertive discipline", with a clear code of cause and effect without bearing in mind the specific inner reasons that causes

student misbehaviour. I believe that each incident should be dealt with separately and that no theory offers a complete solution; therefore, the best approach seems to be a synthesis of several principles and practices that fit the situation.

My view as a teacher is to promote meaningful, productive and lifelong learning bearing in mind the specific students' needs and expectations.

Being a warm supporter of Howard Gardner's ((1993) "Multiple Intelligences" theory as well as the usefulness of the implementation of differentiated instruction and co-operative learning, I am closer to humanistic approaches.

As Dreikurs (1972) suggests, discipline is best construed as self-discipline in democratic classrooms where students feel valued. Democratic teachers, are more likely to help students become self-disciplined since this kind of teaching involves positive leadership, friendliness, cooperation, guidance, encouragement, acknowledgement, helpfulness and shared responsibilities. Thus, discipline is based on mutual respect which motivates students to behave constructively because of their high sense of social interest and self-esteem.

- *if a child lives with encouragement, he learns to be confident;*
- *if a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself;*
- *if a child lives with recognition, he learns it is good to have a goal;*
- *if a child lives with security, he learns to have faith in himself and those about him;*

- *if a child lives with friendliness, he learns the world is a nice place in which to live, to love and to be loved.*

(Dreikurs & Cassel, 1972 : 28)

I work in a secondary school where I teach teenagers with different sociocultural backgrounds and ability levels. One of my main concerns is to be kind and fair to them and well aware of their needs and behaviours.

Consequently, if I am to be supportive and efficient I should always bear in mind the following:

- Adolescent issues such as physical and psychological worry, need for independence, rebellious behaviour and intention of testing the boundaries of rules and routines. Teenagers are seeking for understanding on the part of the teacher. As Charles (2010) points out, they are motivated and willing to co-operate with teachers whom they trust since they inspire security, hope and dignity. Confrontations are to be avoided and replaced with support and concern.
- Socioeconomic and cultural differences. Fontana (1985) indicates that students display antipathy to school since it seems irrelevant in terms of their future life chances. Thus, celebrating the notion of difference, promoting positive images of a diverse populace and treating students as individuals of equal worth is of primary importance in my classroom routine.
- Different ability levels in students call for different approaches. The criteria for success and failure need to differ according to each student's potential and expectations. Glasser (1998) also stresses that the sense of failure is one of

the most disheartening things that can happen to students. As an educator I feel that apart from encouragement, I should promote genuine success for all.

- Displacement-conflicting rules. Students might be ignorant of displaying_inappropriate behaviour because it is acceptable in another context, like their home, or by another teacher. What is permissible in one situation is frowned upon in the other. Of course, here comes the necessity of a whole school policy and the teachers' collaboration. Both classes and schools are organised communities that need to have clear and precise procedures that students need to follow (Wong, 2004). Hence, a whole school policy and collaboration among teachers or between the headteacher and the teachers is essential.

Thus, bearing in mind my students' needs as mentioned above, I feel that I can eliminate misbehaviour problems, by being proactive and reinforce positive learning environment acting as follows: a) promote explicit, meaningful, positive and agreed upon rules that are based on personal, moral, safety and educational considerations and are kept to a minimum (Glasser,1998), b) be fair and consistent in applying rules, routines, rewards and sanctions, c) find out and building on my students' preferred learning styles (suitability of material), d) give clear instructions to facilitate the learning process and eliminate frustration and feelings of failure, e) prepare the lesson thoroughly, using a variety of teaching techniques, f) motivate students and keep them involved, g) establishe good interpersonal relationships.

But what happens if still behaviour problems arise?

As I have already stated, each student and each incident is unique and has to be dealt with separately. I need to be fair and consistent at the same time, so I handle such incidents according to importance. If they are of a minor, such as inattention or distraction I feel that interrupting the flow of the lesson and calling attention to the misdeed can cause a bigger problem. Non verbal communication such as eye contact, physical proximity, touch and gesture, facial expressions or just the tone of voice can communicate clearly my disapproval and call for the desirable behaviour. In case of disciplinary issues that are persistent, verbal reprimands, suspension or help from the authority should be used as a last resort. A short, brief and to the point intervention as well as a reference to the relevant rules (Good and Brophy, 1973) seems to be sufficient on most occasions.

If the disruptive behaviour is of a more serious form, then I try not to become emotionally involved and discuss with the students involved in private so as not to put them in danger of losing face. Evaluating the misbehaviour and linking cause and effect presupposes frankness on the part of the student. Most of the times, a fruitful discussion for the most effective future action takes place. It is important that we criticize the behaviour, not the student and sometimes a class discussion promoting behaviour modification that seeks a non punitive, positive approach as an alternative to the use of punishment is more effective since it has a positive ripple effect (Kounin,1958). Classroom meetings are also a superb vehicle for interacting with students and involving them in meaningful discussions (Glasser, 1998).

Needless to say that when confronted with incidents of misbehaviour, I try to examine my own responsibility. Most of the times, this may mean not being quite proactive, since, as known, prevention is better than cure. I try to identify my faults (organisational, methodological or pedagogical) so as to reassess my methods and techniques. In all cases, my personal thesis is that I inform all parties involved (colleagues, headteacher, parents) so that a holistic preventative and supportive approach is adopted.

All in all, classroom discipline is an element of classroom management that involves every aspect of school life. I believe that there is no theory is perfect. Each case is unique considering the student's personality and the inner forces that lead to such a behaviour. I feel that my duty and challenge at the same time is to ensure that my students meet their basic needs for autonomy, belongingness and competence so as to secure a healthy classroom environment that promotes knowledge, lifelong skills and personal growth.

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backgrounds and ability levels. Her firm belief lies on the theory of positivity, that is putting emphasis not on correcting misbehaviour, but on using positive techniques that meet students' needs, develop self-discipline and thus prevent misbehaviour.

Keep calm, be aware and teach on!

by Sophia Petridou

My philosophy regarding classroom discipline involves the creation of a disciplined classroom atmosphere as well as the prevention and treatment of misbehaviour incidents. In short, I wish to promote learning in a friendly, caring, cooperative and inspiring classroom environment where teacher behaviour, influences and determines the establishment of classroom discipline. The teacher should manifest assertiveness and respect towards the learners through a wide range of behaviour. Another aspect of classroom discipline entails clear, specific and decisive measures that should be taken before a disciplinary problem arises, during its manifestation and after its occurrence. In general, it is the teacher's responsibility to familiarize learners with classroom procedures and routines – the way the learners are expected to work – as well as discuss and determine what acceptable behaviour is and what could happen in case of minor or more serious instances of misbehaviour.

To begin with, the first weeks of the new school year play a crucial role in the establishment of classroom discipline. The teacher has to clarify that she is available to help anytime; she is also interested in learning all the learners' names so as to make them feel first and foremost important and noticeable. All children are considered promising young learners as they could contribute in class learning if they strive to do their best. The use of the target language as a communication language together with a sparing use of the mother tongue could expose learners to appropriate language

input and avoid cumbersome explanations and discussions in their mother tongue. Thus, the learners could take target language learning more seriously and attempt to use the language for real communication in the classroom.

Moreover, a class environment conducive to learning is created when the actual learners are faced with cognitively challenging and motivating teaching materials; the element of surprise and play invested in supplementary activities draws their attention, excites and makes them eager to take part in them. The use of realia, posters, flashcards, videos, songs, crafts, games and problem solving tasks could cater for the very young and young learner's need to play and the adolescent learners' need to be cognitively challenged. The above presupposes that the teacher has taken the time to set assertively, explain thoroughly, and extensively practice with learners the specific classroom rules and daily routines.

These rules and procedures could be reinforced by the teacher in terms of respective consequences. In my experience, learners do expect recognition, praise, or even a special treat such as a fun activity when they comply with the rules whereas they should be aware that their disregard for them would deprive them of something dear, an activity they extremely enjoy. Therefore, I need to be consistent in applying classroom rules and their corresponding positive and negative consequences (Appendix I: 49). According to assertive discipline proposed by Lee and Marlene Canter (in Charles 2014), what is required is a set of clear rules for class behaviour followed by positive and negative consequences. Moreover, they put forward a hierarchy of negative

consequences that becomes progressively more unpleasant if the learners continue to break the rules. In my opinion, the teacher should be the first to respect the rules and the learners.

Preventing a disciplinary problem from arising in the first place is also achieved by thorough lesson planning, clear explanations and attentive learner scanning on the part of the teacher. First, I devote time to prepare and organize my lesson. I sometimes find it extremely useful to share my lesson objectives with my adolescent learners by writing them on the board and discussing them so as to give them a picture of what we aim to accomplish creating a sense of purpose. Second, I wish to provide short, clear instructions with relative, comprehensible examples. Third, I constantly observe my learners by scanning each and everyone all the time to anticipate any minor, incipient, deviant activity. Ur (2004) advocates that careful planning, clear instructions and keeping in touch are three preventative strategies to be used before a disciplinary problem arises.

However, when misbehaviour is bound to occur, I rely on teacher proximity to prevent minor incidents from escalating into a larger problem. Therefore, I often approach a learner the moment he/she may misbehave so as to respond and act immediately. The learner, on the other hand, does not expect an imperceptible touch or a pat on the shoulder by the teacher and thus he/she is surprised and brought back to classroom reality. Jones (in Ur, 2004) considers proximity as a very positive response to learner misbehaviour which takes the least amount of planning, effort and time. Last, I try not to

use threats and I find Ur's (ibid: 266) "if you... then..." formula both assertive and explicit.

I sometimes tend to "explode" and raise my voice in a determined, strict, non-negotiable tone and leave no room for questioning teacher choice and decisions. However, I may also grant learners' requests and thus, take into consideration their feelings and wishes; simultaneously defusing the particular situation and avoiding the occurrence of misbehaviour.

In a case where a learner repeatedly misbehaves and disrupts the lesson, I insist on personal discussion after the lesson as to see what caused this misbehaviour. Such an incident could be considered as an unsuccessful attempt to satisfy one's need for belonging in the class and therefore the teacher ought to discuss this attempt in a non-threatening manner. I rarely resort to calling a higher authority –usually the head teacher – if the learner does not cooperate at all despite personal and class discussion regarding the particular behaviour.

My ultimate aim is to instilling self-discipline in learners. They should be educated to take responsibility for their behaviour. According to Choice Theory (Glasser in Charles 2014) they should be made more responsible and reflective on their behaviour by recognizing the behaviour problem and trying to resolve it by taking positive action; they are also expected to make choices regarding their behaviour and take part in meaningful classroom meetings. Similarly, Coloroso (ibid, 2014) states that learners should be helped to develop an inner discipline that is an inner sense of responsibility and

self-control. What is most interesting is that she suggests that the teacher should give ownership of the problem to the learner and assist him/her to resolve it: ‘How will you fix the problem?’ He/she emphasizes learner responsibility for solving behaviour problems and for following through the suggested solutions.

All learners need to feel a sense of belonging and it is the teacher’s daunting task to create the opportunities and conditions so as to facilitate learners in satisfying this need. In my view, the teacher should be let his/her personal philosophy of classroom discipline gradually take form through a process that takes lots of teacher time, effort and constant dialogue with oneself.

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Appendix I

Positive Consequences

- Games
- Crafts
- Songs
- Use the computer
- Create a Comic
- See a movie
- A treat
- A mystery reward

Negative Consequences

- *Non verbal Signal/ eye-contact*
- *A touch/ pat on the shoulder/ head*
- *A class verbal reminder of the particular classroom rule*
- *A personal verbal reminder of the particular classroom rule*
- *A personal talk*
- *A Class talk*
- *Office referral*
- *Parent Contact*

