

Entry 4

Analysis of Classroom Learning Environment

Bluemont Elementary

Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport

In my classroom, there was a broad range of students from Kindergarten through 6th grade throughout the day. With each of these students, I have the opinion that the students deserve my respect and that I should receive that same respect from them. With my Kindergarteners, this respect was displayed in manners and attention – lack of respect resulted in a reduction of fun activities or other discipline. The students understood that there were responses that I gave – whether crossing my arms when being upset or giving them a look that said that they were not being respectful to me as a teacher or to their peers. As the students got older, up to my 6th graders, the flexibility of the classroom and their freedoms were a reward of respect and trust as long as they were respectful of me. I was always available to talk to the students if they needed. I also was able to establish this atmosphere by learning names quickly and being able to call on students. I quickly found that the students that interacted with daily in such a positive manner were my best students socially, even if they were not the most successful in the actual class work. I also made an effort to say hello to students in the hallway so that they felt they were more than a student in the music classroom, but also a person throughout the building.

In order to foster positive student social interactions, I gave lots of opportunities for students to work together in groups. By collaborating and coming up with ideas, they were able to develop friendships and cooperation. In the music classroom, a lot of music-making is team-oriented, which allowed for the chance to build respect and uplift students. This was especially important in my 1st grade class where I was working on using their singing voices and had many opportunities where students were asked to sing responses to me individually. If there had not been a level of peer trust and respect, these students would not have participated so well. I encouraged students when they were struggling with the confidence to sing, which then caused their peers to encourage them even more. We always gave positive feedback when people would sing in class because it was a hard thing to do and deserved praise.

Establishing a Culture for Learning to Encourage Student Engagement and Responsibility

A culture of learning is one that brings students to find self-interest and worth in the subject matter and it's application to their lives. In the case of the music classroom, students listen to music every day. So in the general music class, my goal was for students to actively interact with music on a daily basis. This could include singing, dancing, playing instruments, or anything else you could imagine. Though the focus of the students was on their learning the concepts, my introduction and application of the concept was always surrounded by musical experiences. This could mean singing high versus low pitches, analyzing the music in a movie that they hear, composing music, moving to a steady beat, or many other possible strategies.

Students take the most responsibility and pride in what is occurring in the classroom when they feel that it is personal. Therefore, it was important to me to allow all students individual opportunities to demonstrate their creation and understanding of the concepts. This could be answering questions, drawing, or composing. The students are capable of learning, but the real ownership and achievement occurs upon the application.

Managing Classroom Procedures

When students were in my classroom, one of the routines that I expected was that they come in quietly and be ready to learn. At the elementary age where they only see me a couple times a week, I understood that they quickly wanted to run up and give me hugs, and they knew that this was allowed, but that if they started to tell me a story I would have to redirect them to their assigned seat so that we could start the class.

Some of my classroom management involved being overly prepared. At the elementary age, transitions to get instruments, move into groups, form a circle, or start a CD is a chance for the students to talk, fidget, start to play with each other, bother their neighbors, or pick a fight. Therefore, I made sure to have all equipment organized before the students walked in the door.

When distributing materials, I would either be giving instructions while giving them the materials (such as asking them to put their name on the paper), or else I would give instructions first and then work quickly to distribute the materials. With the kindergarteners, I was more likely to do the distribution, but with older students, I would often assign students the job of passing things out or collecting things so that I could continue to monitor behavior and instruct.

When transitioning, I would often ask students to move quietly. Something that I tried to work on throughout my time student teaching was to ask students to be doing something while we transitioned, or to play music myself that they were listening to. Students are easily engaged in music, whether singing or dancing – so what better way to use the content than as an organized transition.

Encouraging Appropriate Student Behavior

Student behavior is best managed through clear classroom management. This starts with established rules and discipline that the students understand. This is followed by firm, clear-cut and consistent response to behavior that does not follow the rules that have been set. For my students, the rules were simple. First, don't talk when the teacher is talking. Second, participate and do your best in every activity. Third, Respect your peers and the objects in the room. Fourth, Have fun. None of these rules are particularly difficult, though they do require reminding, especially at a young age. With the older students, the first rule was the most difficult to keep in check. With the younger it is more of the second and third.

When monitoring student behavior, it can be difficult to catch everything. Kindergarteners have a tendency to tattle a lot, which can be difficult when I don't see everything that occurs in a classroom of 20 6-year-olds. Therefore, my rule was, if someone tattles, we both say sorry and do better to keep to ourselves next time. When dealing with talking – it is important to set expectations and keep them high. When students are talking, this can be dealt with through silence, proximity, or a direct statement.

Organizing the Physical Environment

When organizing the room, it is important to have a large open space. Students will be moving and dancing often and need to be free from large obstacles. It is important to keep instruments, books, and other things organized along the edges of the room and set parameters for what parts of the room they are allowed to be in when moving.

The projector is in the front of the room, as well as the piano and the stereo. This allows for the chance to access all necessary items without any worries of students in their normal spots being out of my line of sight. There is also spacing between the rows of the students to allow for room for me to walk through and address individual needs. With books in the front of the room in a bookshelf, they are easy for the students to grab.
