Classroom management refers to the teacher's ability to direct, organize, and facilitate the learning environment and student behavior within a learning context. Curriculum and learning are influenced by how a teacher organizes and designs instruction and how he or she motivates and engages students. Several factors that influence the progressive and proactive management of a classroom's learning environment and student behavior are described in this entry.

Managing the Learning Environment

There is much to think about when arranging the classroom environment, arranging that includes not only the room, but also other contexts such as the media center, computer laboratory, and even places where field trips take place.

Beginning with the arrangement of desks and the creation of bulletin boards on classroom walls, the teacher manages curriculum and learning. A cramped classroom may cause friction among students. Ample space is needed for each student to promote respectful interactions. Aligning desks in rows will dissuade student interactions and collaborative learning, whereas groups of desks arranged together will promote conversations among students. When students' work is posted, they understand that it is valued.

The amount and quality of materials and equipment, such as books, paper, computers, and other resources, will help determine how a teacher manages the classroom. Substitute materials may need to be used if funding is not available, and outdated texts must be updated with newer resources.

Learning is affected differently when students are expected or choose to work on their own, with a partner, or with a small group. There are advantages to each. Working with a partner allows more opportunities for expressing one's voice than working with more peers in a small group. Working with several peers allows students to learn from multiple perspectives. Independent work gives learners a chance to explore their interests and questions.

An educator's teaching philosophy and expectations for students' learning will guide classroom management. When teachers perceive the learning environment as an opportunity to model engaged learning and to teach in ways that motivate students to want to learn, they manage the environment in productive ways.

Managing Student Behavior

Managing students is not the same as disciplining them. Discipline connotes rewarding or punishing behaviors. Although there are times when a teacher redirects and reprimands behavior through methods such as time out or withdrawal of privileges, classes are best managed through preventive, proactive approaches. Research shows that when teachers motivate and engage students, they encourage them to want to learn and channel their energies toward productive behaviors. Students are motivated by teachers who share their excitement about learning. Authentic tasks that are student centered or provide for student choice are highly motivating. Realistically, however, there are curriculum topics that may be state mandated or may not be interesting to learners. Providing rationale for why certain materials are required may help students develop intrinsic motivation for learning. For students to learn, they must be attentive to and focused on learning. Students are engaged learners when they are active thinkers who spend time on task, whether that task is reading something,
discussing a topic, or doing a hands-on activity. Also, when students become accountable for their learning, they engage in meaningful and purposeful learning. Students must initially be taught how to interact and learn in groups before they are expected to collaborate with peers in an academic capacity. A teacher effectively manages interactions among peers by teaching communication and social skills.

Evolution of Management Practices

Over the past decade, as the reliance upon evidence-based teaching practices has influenced curriculum and instruction, educators’ beliefs about and practices in classroom management have begun and continue to evolve. The one-room schoolhouse image of teacher-student interactions in which the teacher initiation is followed by students responding and the teacher evaluating their responses, typically calls for students to raise their hands and wait to be called upon. In this context, classroom management is evaluated by how quiet the room is and whether or not the students are listening, following directions, and waiting their turns.

However, educators have learned through research that approaches such as collaborative learning and student-centered inquiry foster student motivation and engagement with learning. The teacher’s role has changed. When collaborative learning is the expectation, classrooms are characterized by students interacting with each other, talking, problem solving, and moving about the room as needed to gather resources or consult other groups. Teachers act as facilitators and guides on the side rather than the sage on the stage or expert with all of the right answers. Therefore, classroom management takes on a different look as expectations shift.

As research continues to form new knowledge about teaching and learning, the concept of what it means to manage a classroom of students will, undoubtedly, evolve. Factors such as technology and diversity will play important roles in shaping what a productive learning environment is and what student behaviors are considered acceptable and desirable for learning.

See also

Accountability, Best Practices, Child-Centered Curriculum, Discipline-Based Curriculum

Further Readings


APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA