

Coach's Corner



Focus on Teaching

“Classroom management really means teaching self-control while building a caring community.”

—Linda Harvieux “On Building a Caring Classroom” (1999, 57).

powerful motivators that manage invisibly, especially, as Christian discovered, when students begin the day with them. Therefore, he applies his “catch them doing right” philosophy during an initial activity that reviews the previous day’s material. He continues “catching them” throughout the day with the practices:

- Check everyone’s work;
- Praise any effort, however small;
- No put-downs;
- Keep sharpened pencils handy;
- When correcting, comment positively first; and
- Ignore off-task behavior.

Christian strives to visit with every student to address individual needs. Making the rounds to students who are working has produced a more involved classroom and improved the quality of the students’ work. Rather than focus on off-task students, Christian gives attention to those working through feedback and praise for their efforts. An idle student may receive a gentle reminder or encouraging word, but Christian refrains from pleading, nagging, or threatening. Besides, he’s too busy responding to students calling on him to check their work and answer their questions.

When one student was slow starting her daily assignment, Christian monitored her from a distance as he circulated among students, providing feedback and praise. When the slow-starter finally began working, he made his way to her.

“I’m glad you are started, Monique,” he said. “The first problem is correct. Do you have a question about number two?”

“Sir, that is all I know. I’m not good at math,” she answered. Christian reassured her and

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Can an educator teach self-control and meet increasing curricular and accountability demands? Is there enough time to teach self-control along with everything else? Yes—if you keep the focus on teaching!

Meet Christian Auger, an educator who does just that. Christian teaches math at a high-needs, inner-city high school in South Texas where more than 80 percent of the predominantly Hispanic and African-American student population is on the free- or reduced-lunch program. In his classrooms, students learn how to behave as they learn academically.

Successful teachers blend instructional methods with classroom-management techniques in a manner that often renders classroom management “invisible” (McCarthy and Benally 2003). Praise and success are

worked through an example with her, pointing out that problems 2–5 were simply extensions of the first. Monique’s new understanding was evident, and he commended her: “Two minutes ago you knew one problem, and now you know five. This tells me that you are not only bright, but also a quick learner!”

Teachers create positive learning environments through a relationship-driven approach to classroom instruction (Rogers and Renard 1999). Prior to his emphasis on positive reinforcement, Christian had high failure rates and little evidence of skill mastery. Today, thanks to an instructional foundation built on rewarding any effort, no matter how small, students’ graded papers display well-deserved As and Bs.

“No matter what the students’ behavior,” Christian tells teachers he mentors, “I can be respectful of them. Whether or not they choose to cooperate and show respect to me, I still treat them with respect.” Teachers can carry a grudge or forgive; they can offer second chances. Providing students with continual opportunities for success is essential to effective teaching. Sometimes those chances for success, while keeping the focus on teaching, begin quite simply.

“May I offer you a pencil?” Christian may ask a student. He learned early on that the gift of a sharpened pencil eliminates a barrier to getting started and is one small step in building a relationship between teacher and student. Therefore, at the beginning of each semester, Christian purchases a \$10 box of 200 pencils. The opportunity for a positive interaction with a student makes the five-cent sharpened pencil a great investment.

Self-control and social skills are taught through caring, respectful instruction. Classroom management constructed from a foundation of positive reinforcement and within a caring community works.

So, set up your basic procedures and classroom rules, but remember to keep the focus on teaching. 🍏

References

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