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Classroom Management Plan

Classroom Philosophy and Vision

Last semester, I was asked to create a teaching philosophy for one of my classes, and I believe that much of that philosophy still applies to what I believe about education. The most vital parts, in my opinion, read as follows:

Unfortunately, many students find their social studies and history classes boring. This impression of irrelevance creates a disconnect between their interests and the curriculum they need to learn. How then will learning about the advancements of the Ancient Greek Empire, the fall of the Soviet Union, or the importance of becoming involved in their community stimulate their interests? As a potential teacher at this school, I have a philosophy and approach to the discipline that may encourage my students to become involved in, and enjoy, the history and social studies lessons they need to know.

In an ideal classroom, students would constantly be active participants within their own learning. We would be able to facilitate and reinforce the critical thinking traits that we want every student to obtain. However, this is rarely the case. Some students will maintain as passive a role as possible. They sit in the back of the classroom, allow others to volunteer and answer questions, waiting for the period to end. It is with these students that we must employ a wide variety of methods to get them involved. Therefore, by engaging students in multiple, and diverse, activities, they can show an interest in their learning and become active participants.
I believe that at times there are essential knowledge and skills that must be taught; in this, I have been influenced by essentialist philosophy. There will be times when discussions or activities will not be an option. Certain curriculum must be taught, or situations arise where too much time was given to specific topics.

However, the approach that has had the greatest influence on my teaching is scientific empiricism. This will be demonstrated throughout the year as the students read, analyze, and break down primary and secondary sources. Students will then formulate opinions - since they love doing so - regarding the topics that the sources address. However, the goal of this aspect of the class will be having the students be able to defend their arguments and opinions with factual evidence and historical authoritativeness found within the sources, as well as their own prior knowledge.

Teaching philosophies are fantastic, but they will only take you so far. An enormously large aspect of teaching is the interaction that will take place between students and fellow teachers. I once worked with a fantastic teacher, Mr. Gregory Reiff, who told me that every teacher must implement the 3 Hs within their classroom. The 3 Hs are: heart, humor, and hammer. Heart deals with the fact that the teacher must build meaningful relationships with his students and fellow teachers. Humor is just a tool to be used both in and out of the classroom. It can lift a student’s spirits and brighten their day. Hammer applies to the idea that the teacher must be ready and willing to come down hard on those students who break the rules or act inappropriately. Therefore, through use of various teaching philosophies and other methods, I believe I have the tools necessary to engage my students critically with the curriculum required for social studies and history courses.

The learning environment itself is another key aspect of any classroom, and must be addressed within any educator’s teaching philosophy. I believe that the classroom must be a nurturing setting in which a student’s creativity, intellect, and development of ideas and opinions can be encouraged. Each student has a right to an education free from ridicule and persecution from their classmates. Therefore, any mockery or disrespectful behavior towards another student will not be tolerated. It must also be taken into account that many students will have diverse social and emotional needs that must be met. These needs will be addressed primarily on a case-by-case basis since most scenarios and differences cannot be imagined until a teacher is forced to confront them. However, I find it makes for smoother class periods if a current and constant schedule of the week’s proceedings is kept in a readily accessible place, where it can be easily observed by all students. Furthermore, formats for note-taking and past homework assignments will also be provided in an easily accessible area within the classroom. Group work and discussion will be constant aspects of the course and students will be expected to participate in such activities. Those who cannot or are unable to participate in such activities will be given alternative assignments that better suit their needs in order to keep them on track with the rest of the class, but also teach them the required curriculum.

Over time, I have been subject to numerous educational theorists that offer a number of invaluable insights into the composition of the classroom environment. I believe that three specific examples from these theorists can further my teaching and help me run my classes more effectively. The first, and arguably the most important, is Kounin’s concept of “withitness.” This term applies to the idea that the teacher must know exactly what is occurring within his classroom at all times, and in doing so identifies the student who was misbehaving and immediately corrects the behavior in as quickly and effectively a way as possible so that instruction does not suffer. This idea plays very firmly into William Rogers’ concept of non-verbal messages. Oftentimes when a student is misbehaving, the teacher can correct the behavior by giving them a simple facial or eye expression that conveys their annoyance, assertion, frustration, etc. This can also be used by the teacher if he decides to place himself in close proximity to the student and commit a simple action, such as placing his hand on the student’s desk as if to say, “I am aware of what you are doing, and I am asking nicely that you knock it off.” All this can be done while continuing instruction. The last vital concept to be incorporated within the classroom is Alfie Kohn’s notion of mutual respect. I will talk later of respect that must exist between students and teachers, but Kohn mentions that classrooms must be a place in which students can disagree and argue with one another, but in as respectful a manner as possible. They must work closely with their fellow students but refrain from mocking or poking fun at other’s beliefs, ideals, and morals. These three fundamental concepts from three individual educational theorists are vital to the idea of constant classroom instruction and mutual respect that should be evident within every classroom.

Expectations/Rules/Consequences

The one expectation that I will hold regarding my students, and my classroom environment, is a rather simple one. It is one that I learned from a fantastic teacher in the Flagstaff Unified School District. He begins each school year with a serious conversation with his students about respect and the role that it plays within the classroom. Therefore, as a future teacher, I believe that respect is an integral factor within any classroom, and respect must exist between both students and teachers. I expect to have a similar conversation with my students, and I hope to establish the expectation, as well as the rule, that students and myself, will act with the utmost respect towards one another. As such, this expectation of respect will funnel into other typical rules within the average classroom: students will raise their hands when they wish to be called upon; students will not leave the classroom during instruction, except in the case of emergencies or front office reasons; students will not answer their cell phones, except in the case of emergencies; students will not use tablets or laptops to search the web, unless doing so for research or a class project. Others rules will be clearly established at the beginning of each school year, but all will be rooted in the overarching idea of respect. In short, before acting, students should ask themselves, is this the most respectful way that I can accomplish what it is that I wish to accomplish? The answer to this question will hopefully determine their actions.

I will have four basic consequences in my classroom. The first time that a student breaks a rule, they will receive a warning, either verbal or non-verbal. The second time that student misbehaves; they will have to spend any recess time with me in the classroom, and will have to do so in complete silence. The third infraction will result in parent notification of the behavior, and a discussion of how to correct the behavior. The fourth, and hopefully final, infraction will result in a conference with the student, his parent, and me. If the misconduct continues or is too disruptive, further action will be taken, which may involve the inclusion of the principal.

More specific issues will obviously require greater attention. For example, students who use their cell phones, tablets, or laptops inappropriately will be asked to leave them in the back of the classroom for the remainder of the period, and they may pick them up after class is dismissed. Students who cheat on assignments or tests will receive a ‘0’ on the assessment. Cheating on minor assignments or homework will result in a ‘0’ as well as a warning regarding the behavior. Cheating on a test will result in a ‘0’ as well as notification of the cheating to the principal and the parent. Students who sleep during class will be reprimanded, but I feel that this is a situation in which humor can be utilized to avoid possibly uncomfortable situations. For example, I had a teacher in high school who once wound the clock forward to the end of the school day and removed every student from the class. When the student began to panic about the situation, the teacher would simply say “Gotcha!” and every student would return to the classroom. Needless to say, students learn rather quickly *not* to fall asleep in class.

I do believe that rewards within the classroom should be limited. When rewards are used frequently, students’ behavior reflects their desire to receive the rewards. Their reason for learning and correct behavior becomes somewhat skewed. This isn’t to say that rewards will not be used at all. Verbal praise will be used regularly when students behave correctly, and small items will be used as rewards during various learning activities, but outside of these, rewards will be used sparingly.

In order to correctly communicate my rules, consequences, and expectations for each of my classes, they will be included in the syllabus at the beginning of the year. Students will be required to look over the syllabus with their parents, and the students as well as their parents must sign it to acknowledge that they understand them. The first week of class will also be devoted to explaining and discussing the rules, expectation, and consequences and their place within the classroom.

Daily Procedures/Routines

Every day, when students are waiting for class to begin, they will line up against the wall once they see me open and wait by the front door. They will enter the classroom once I give them permission to and they will enter in a quiet and polite manner. As they file in, I will greet each student by calling them “sir,” “Mr.” or “Ms.” and their last name, if necessary. Once they enter the classroom, they will get the necessary materials for class out and ready. They will then turn in any homework that is due to the proper basket near the back of the classroom, next to my desk. Homework is due in the first five minutes of class. Any homework that is turned in after the fifth minute of class will have ten percent deducted from its overall score. Various scenarios and situations in which homework could not be turned in on-time will be handled on a case-by-case basis. After turning homework in, students will begin their bellwork which will consist of five short answer questions. The questions will either discuss content previously learned or content to be learned the same day. Five points will be given to each complete bellwork, but students who are talking or misbehaving will receive a grade of ‘0.’ Blank answers will be marked off as well. We will grade the bellwork as a class and then move into the main instruction of the class period.

Students will be expected to respect one another as well as the teacher, and follow all instructions during the class period. A more extensive list of classroom conduct can be seen above in the expectations section.

When class is complete, students will pack up any and all materials used during instruction, and will be dismissed by the teacher, *not* the bell. If students are seen packing up their backpacks while the teacher is still in the middle of instruction, the entire class will stay after the bell rings equal to the number of minutes prior to the bell the students started to pack their bags. Once the teacher dismisses the class, the students are free to go.

Instructional Strategies and Classroom Management

As any teacher, I hope to maximize learning time and minimize disruptions. I have already mentioned a few strategies prior that I wish to implement. Two of the most effective ways to achieve such feats it to utilize “withitness” and non-verbal messages. Obviously, “withitness” can be achieved only by understanding and respecting the class. This is usually an easy feat to accomplish, it just takes time. Once that is established, I can use non-verbal messages to discipline students in a quick and effective way without disrupting instruction.

As previously mentioned, I will also utilize discussions, debates, and groups work widely within my classroom to promote cooperative working and the exchange of ideas. However, some students will not be able to participate in such activities for a variety of reasons. These students will need to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Classroom Arrangement/Configuration

The desks in my classroom will be arranged in a U-shape, facing the front of the classroom. By arranging the desks in this manner, I hope to encourage discussion, debate, and group work as focal points of my class. Furthermore, I hope that arranging the desks in this manner will cut down on side discussion that take place during instruction.

I will put an assortment of thing on the walls of my classroom. First, I will be sure to display all the rules, expectations, and consequences in the front of the classroom. The clock will go in the back of the room for two reasons: 1) As the teacher, I can easily keep an eye on the time and how quickly or slowly my instruction may take, and 2) it prevents students from focusing on the clock during instruction and daydreaming/zoning out. As a future social studies teacher, I will also include the Declaration of Independence, an American flag, the Constitution of the United States, and various posters of historical events and educational concepts.

By arranging the desks in this manner and including visual representations of the rules and expectation, as well as visual representations of historical events, documents, and other educational concepts, I hope to encourage an environment that is conducive to learning and safe for every student.