PHILOSOPHY OF DISCIPLINE AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Definitions

Discipline as a noun can be defined as: (1) control exercised over people or animals; (2) mental or moral training; or (3) a branch of learning. As a verb, to discipline can mean: (1) train to be orderly; or (2) punish.[1] Although discipline can be seen as something positive such as good mental or moral development, discipline in the public school classroom generally is viewed as something negative, that is, punishment by which teachers and administrators control students. But discipline, while often negative in its details, always should be positive in its goal or intent. In this sense, some synonyms for discipline would be "chastise, penalize, punish, rebuke, reprimand, reprove" by means of "authority, control, order, regulation, restraint, and rule."[2]

Management denotes the ability to manage or to: (1) have control of; (2) contrive; (3) deal with a person tactfully; (4) succeed with limited resources; or (5) effectively operate an object.[3] In the public school setting, management of a classroom involves having control of the students, dealing with students tactfully, and operating any equipment or materiels in the classroom. Sometimes it also may mean succeeding with limited materials, scarce materials, and even little patience. A teacher might say, "I barely *managed* to cope with this class today!" But

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[1]Sarah Hawker, ed., *The Oxford Mini-reference Dictionary and Thesaurus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 168.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., 378.

in a more positive light, synonyms for management would be "administer, be in charge of, direct, govern, organize, oversee, and supervise."[4]

The two concepts–discipline and management–are distinct but interrelated. Management would be the more inclusive idea of guiding, influencing, and directing students toward an educational goal in the classroom. Discipline would be the more specific use of control as a means to achieve success in the classroom, that is, to effectively manage it, and thereby accomplish the educational goal. Thus, while all discipline would be classroom management, not all classroom management would be discipline. Classroom management involves many skills like communication, organization, and personal relations, and these are not necessarily disciplinary in nature. Discipline also involves various skills but of a much different type, for example, regarding moral character development like fairness, firmness, tact, and patience. And these disciplinary skills have a more narrow focus, because their goal is to redirect the student from inappropriate behavior to useful, beneficial conduct.

The Issue of Motivation

The greatest difficulty in discipline or management in most modern school settings lies in the area of motivation. Why do adolescents go to school? Obviously, school attendance through high school is compulsory by law. For the majority of students who attend public school, no "real" incentive, like a monetary investment, exists. Emotional and psychological values

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[4]Ibid.

sometimes are attached to school attendance, but these incentives in today's materialistic world carry much less weight than previously. And the value of learning for its own sake holds relatively little power with adolescents, their peers, and even their guardians. Thus, the deterioration of traditional values pushes many educators to adopt alternative mechanisms to motivate students in contemporary educational settings.

In my mind, two responses are the logical outcome. Both of these move toward the fringes on any sort of management continuum. The first would be the bolstering of authority by tightening the control of administrators and teachers over their students. The second would be the abandoning of external controls by administrators and teachers in order to cultivate the inner motivations of their students. The former approach certainly sacrifices personal growth and development, albeit in a community environment, for order and restraint. The latter method accepts a measure of "chaos" to achieve the goal of internal, or perhaps spiritual, inducements. Most educators would opt for middle ground and seek a balance. But any mixed approach may force pragmatic implementation of one of the two "extremes" in order to bring about consistency and uniformity. Thus, the potential risks inherent in using one "extreme" method for discipline and/or classroom management may outweigh the pitfalls of a confused and uncertain approach to motivating students in the classroom.

Societal Motivators

Hidden Values. What is regarded as valuable or what people want and inherently are motivated to seek should provide solid direction toward selection of an integrated approach to

discipline and management in the classroom. Although people tend to be motivated by material

things, hidden values run deep in the human psyche. These values include a feeling of self-

worth, a need to belong, a desire to love and be loved, and the intrinsic motivation to explore and

grow by means of greater understanding. It is important to help students, and their adult guides,

tap into the power available for internal motivation that is integral to these hidden values. This

calls for a complex use of emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual inducements to

quicken or inspire the desires and needs of the student's inner psyche. The use of external

motivators or restraints, by means of an arbitrary stick-and-carrot method, should be limited to

worst case scenarios. Internal motivators are far superior to external motivators. But the

challenge for educators is to be consistent and thoroughgoing, especially because internal

motivators can be individual and subjective.

Human Relationships and Role Models. A critical part of societal motivators for young

people today involves the complexity of human relationships generally and selected role models

specifically. There has been a noticeable decline for youth in the importance of traditional

authority figures, like parents, teachers, ministers, and civic leaders. Alternative, non-traditional

role models have multiplied, and the dynamics for young people include strong feelings of

"connectedness" to but elusive, shifting attachments to these newer role models. Youth struggle

to establish and know their own personal identity, and this is true especially when their

developmental models are so complex and so numerous. On the surface, this observation would

seem to favor an eclectic approach to discipline and classroom management. But, to the

contrary, it is a reasonable empowerment of young people for them to coordinate their own

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personal development, namely, their career progression based on their own abilities, goals, likes,

and dislikes. Based on available opportunities, they should be able to pick and choose whom

they apprentice to. Many adults would suggest that adolescents are not capable of this type of

intelligent freedom of choice, and in a few instances this may be true. However, the reality

remains that the majority of young people have these choices made for them, so perhaps they

never have been given the chance. We still live in a very adult controlled society. For the sake

of developing internal motivators, the risks of allowing young people to choose must be taken.

Information Revolution. A third observation about societal motivators comes from the

recent and ongoing information revolution via computers and the internet. An unlimited amount

of data about any academic subject or craft is available to anyone who has acquired computer

skills, so the potential is enormous. And the possibilities to develop internal motivators for

students to engage the internet to assimilate such information are many. The fact that internet

use is done primarily by the individual but can be adapted easily to directed use enhances its

utility for student-motivated learning experiences. The ongoing but evolving technology of

computer-based learning and its applicability to discipline and classroom management simply

cannot be ignored.

A Student-Directed Model

While it is true that the teacher is a supervisor and a guide in the classroom setting, the

primary responsibility for controlling student behavior rests with each individual student. No

instructor can coerce student behavior in an absolute sense. A modified student-directed model

for coordinated discipline and management in the classroom uses peer review, or peer pressure, to apply and ensure compliance to standards that the class chooses collectively. For this to work properly, respect among peers, mutual trust, and the development of a true spirit of comradery toward educational goals are important keys. Any class rules, for example, ones that do not hinder students from exploring their world and thereby dampen internal motivation, should be agreed on by the class members themselves. In this way, the students "buy into" the program, and their own inner wants push and drive the process of learning. They are involved and committed rather than detached and disinterested. As a result, a structure for learning is created that is an extension of each student's own being. It is a part of them and not something forced on them by an authority figure.

With a student-directed approach, inner thoughts and feelings are most important, and these usually find expression in overt actions. These inner thoughts and feelings must be given voice. Students should be encouraged to express their opinions, their desires, their feelings, and they should be able to do this freely without censure. Too often young people are shut down by adults, so their feelings come out in negative reactionary ways rather than as something natural and wholesome. And variations exist among students. Unnecessary conflicts can occur unless these variations are discussed by the students, and the differences can be many. But an open and transparent understanding of such variety will enhance the growth of adolescents both intellectually and socially.

Patient Use of Direct Intervention

Because the main objective for any internal motivation system is gentle and patient

cultivation of the student's own compulsion toward responsible living and learning, the teacher

must suspend direct intervention as long as possible when problems occur. Except for possible

threats to safety, or perhaps the destruction of property, most disruptive actions do not require

immediate reaction. Most educators, however, favor a quick response, reestablishment of

control, and the denial of a student's opportunity to understand his/her own actions, the rationale

for such, and the chance for growth. Unfortunate as well is the mark of behaviorism on student

attitude, that is, they want to get away with something by violating a rule or regulation. This they

do mostly, I believe, to establish their independence and preserve their dignity as persons who are

capable of creative action. It may be a sad commentary on a system that views compliant

behavior that is rigid and sterile as a good thing but condemns aberrant behavior that can be

dynamic and quite ingenious as something to be avoided at all costs. In this respect, young

people who are shut down quickly may experience an important part of their personhood being

ripped away from them.

A Modeling Approach

An alternative to coercive, watchdog intervention in the classroom is use of a modeling

approach for prevention of unacceptable behaviors, support of the student and his/her personal

development, and correction toward the achievement of an educational objective. Modeling is a

sociological process based on identification, observation, and reduplication. The model is the

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standard for imitation. The student, in the classroom setting, identifies with the teacher, so this bond is crucial. The classroom environment, although artificial and not a true arena for learning in its broadest sense (e.g., the whole of life's experiences), provides the setting for socialization. Identification, which effects socialization and reduplication, is dependent on close and repetitive observation. Actions, attitudes, behaviors, skills, and tasks demonstrated by the model must be observed. It is critical, even in the limited classroom environment, that the model demonstrate an interpretation of reality. Too, the model's actions must be understandable and attainable to be effective. Such role models will give the student an important pattern for reduplication. This type of approach–a modeling method–is the very best, in my thinking, for classroom discipline and management. To be excited about my subject and to interpret it so that students can make application to their lives is crucial. How I conduct myself in the classroom, not only concerning the subject but toward others also, is important. While direct intervention might be needed for extreme situations, the impact of good modeling for students will go a long way toward good discipline and management in the classroom.