

Classroom Leadership

The common theme I found throughout all the reading we did regarding classroom management and leadership was to put oneself in the place of the student, to think and perceive as they do. Leadership comes through being proactive and creating an environment that encourages and directs growth and learning. Our job as teachers is to lead down a path and no one follows down a path after someone if they are not interested. Leadership implies taking charge of something productive; all the participants should be just that – participants. Creating a classroom in which all students feel comfortable and excited about expressing their own ideas and learning desires is my goal for a foundation to optimal learning potential.

I am a visual person. As a child, the more appealing a place seemed at first glance, the more time I would spend investigating it. I think this applies to most children. Creating a classroom that is visually stimulating not only attracts children, but reinforces all that they are learning. And just because something is visually stimulating initially, does not mean it will remain so. You can keep all the same elements of reinforcement while changing the overall appearance of your classroom so that children look forward to finding out what has changed or what is new. I would do this often enough and make a game out of it, hiding things I want to focus on in the new décor so that they have to seek and find each time the class is rearranged or redecorated. If used in the correct way, this method can also help children who have difficulty filtering out distractions because the distractions then become the desired object of focus.

Using visual aids has long been a staple in education. Even as adults, we tend to remember a lesson more clearly if it included a visual aid. The mystery composer is the perfect example of this. Not only is it a visual aid – it is interactive! It combines two of the most important tools of learning. Interactive games and other activities are essential, such as the games that accompany folk songs and playground chants or interacting with music through dancing and feeling the elements of rhythm. Association and visualization goes hand in hand with these ideas and often children will come up with their own explanations and visualizations that will help everyone remember (such as the boy who came up with the dotted note taking a bite out of the other note).

This leads to the other important aspect of creating a nurturing environment, which is helping children feel comfortable enough to express themselves. In fact, I think the ideal is an environment where they don't just feel comfortable, but they are always excited to express themselves and come up with new ideas. I find that to be one of the great challenges of teaching is encouraging and praising children for expressing themselves while still trying to teach them and get them to understand the principles they need. For me the answer usually lies in getting to know your students personally and understanding their personalities.

It is easiest to lead children and guide them through their growth if they start as your student early in their education. This is one of the reasons I enjoy teaching beginning flute students. As the teacher, I can guide what they work on and how they develop starting with a blank slate. Students that have had even a year of band or work with another teacher often have habits that will give them grief in the future, and that

could have been avoided with careful instruction from the beginning. Providing your students the foundation they will build on and that you will work with as their teacher enables you to plan for the future and connect all the concepts they are learning. It is much easier to lead students to a new idea if you know where you are starting with them. It enables you as a teacher to draw on what they already know and it is much less frustrating for the student.

The most important aspect of any kind of leadership is how well they know those they lead. It is hard for anyone to respect or trust a leader who doesn't know their name or take any interest in them. Military stories always hail the greatest leaders as those who knew each and every one of their troops and who was in the trenches with them and would willing do anything to protect them. Leading as a teacher is not as dramatic but it relies on the same principles. We have to know our students and what motivates them. In turn, they need to know us; we cannot be distant or aloof and expect children to respond to us.

They also need to know what is expected of them. Too often teachers underestimate students abilities because they aren't invested enough to find the source of what is really getting in their way, whether the impediment is emotional, academic, or otherwise. Working individually with a struggling student has to include mass amounts of love and patience, but that doesn't mean being a pushover. If a student understands consequences that will follow actions and that those consequences will be consistently delivered and will require effort on behalf of the student, it will be easier for them to recognize their own ability to control their behavior. This can apply to a misbehaving student, but can also apply to a student who not making a full effort.

Much of our classroom will depend on the students that fill it. However, as teachers we have the opportunity to affect those students. Every child comes with a predisposition and a personality, but children are also still learning to interact with the world around them. The environment we create in the classroom can help them to develop skills for learning and interacting with the world around them that will – hopefully – help shape the people they become.

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