

Personal Classroom Management Philosophy

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A teaching philosophy is a set of beliefs and principles that combine to form one's teaching ideal. Within this process are theories and models that justify and evolve a philosophy. My classroom management philosophy begins with educating a student in the broadest sense possible. What this means is, I aim to teach students what is required to progress through their schooling career as the Australian Curriculum sets out as well as educating them socially, economically, and physically. To accomplish these four elements, I aim to provide the best resources possible in regards to learning materials, classroom environment, and educational tools.

Underpinning my philosophy are a range of theories dealing with the growth and development of a child, behaviours and motivation, and the teaching and learning process. My philosophy is broken into two parts; what I can control, and how I can assist. The control element looks at the aspects of classrooms that I can control and manipulate with ease. Firstly, there is the classroom which is a major factor in the teaching and learning process (Hannah, 2013). I aim to create a caring, safe environment which supports understanding, diversity, meaning, and communication (Salend, 2010). Secondly, the resources that can be provided are vital in student development and understanding (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2000). I aim to use a variety of quality tools and materials to provide context and allow for a range of investigative processes.

Lyons, Ford & Slee (2014); McDevitt, Ormrod, Cupit, Chandler and Aloa (2013) mention Paul Alberto and Anne Troutman's Applied Behaviour Analysis [ABA], based on B.F. Skinner's Behaviour Theory, which looks at the consequence of a behaviour to explain why the behaviour continues or fades. My classroom management philosophy centres around this theory in that I aim to understand why a behaviour occurs and what I can do change it if necessary. This change is brought about by manipulating my techniques as a teacher, the classroom environment or both. As the core of this theory is behaviour recognition and behaviour change it is important to note that punishment or penalties are counterproductive (Ching, 2012). Desired behaviours will be rewarded and negative behaviours (only as a last resort) will be punished. These behaviour modification techniques will be implanted at the least intrusive level possible. I aim to show what behaviours are desired by praising the good and strategically ignoring the bad. I want the children to work out what behaviours I desire by seeing how others are treated. I don't want to merely stop a negative behaviour, I aim to investigate the reason/s why and change those.

When looking at how I will teach, there are many theories that can be applied. The core theory concerning this part of my classroom philosophy is Vygotsky's Constructivism Approach. My goal is to assist students in creating understanding based on many factors

including social, academic, environmental, and family (Woolfolk and Margetts, 2013). Meaning making is at the core and I aim to encourage this by providing a myriad materials and contexts for investigation. Using parts of this theory I aim to integrate external elements into student education and understanding. This can be in the form of communicating with parents, interacting with environment (excursions, lessons outside), and implementing activities involving third parties and student lead projects.

The two theories mentioned above can be seen as counter-intuitive with ABA focusing on direct instruction to focus student attention (Lyons et al. 2014) while a constructivist approach takes a more collaborative view. Although these theories seem to be contrasting, I aim to utilise particular elements of each to build my classroom management philosophy. When constructing my philosophy, this conflicting problem was a regular occurrence. Another example of this is that I will aim to implement elements of Lee and Marlene Canter's Assertive Discipline Theory. This model aims to implement behavioural limits (which I will use in conjunction with the behavioural elements of ABA) and plans to encourage order and productivity (Canter, 1989). Where Assertive Discipline and my philosophy differ is the control. I aim to create a classroom where mutual respect and understanding reign. I recognise, however, that this is highly dependent on the year level and influencing factors on the children.

It is well known that the environment plays an important role in the development of a learner (Woolfolk and Margetts, 2013) and is a large part of the nature versus nurture debate. As an educator I aim to understand both sides of the argument and learn to recognise the influencing factors in the classroom including what potential influencers can be found at home and in social arenas.

As mentioned above, my classroom management philosophy is most closely aligned with Applied Behaviour Analysis, championed by G.F. Skinner with further work by Paul Alberto and Anne Troutman. The basis of this theory is the direct approach to behaviour management and that behaviours can be modified by manipulating antecedent conditions and the reinforcement of consequences (Lyons et al. 2014). ABA views behaviours as purposeful in that they aim to achieve, or avoid, consequences. The classroom plays a large role within ABA as it can be seen as the least intrusive form of behaviour modification. Although ABA posits the use of both positive and negative reinforcers, I aim to minimise the negative and strategically maximise the positive giving students' the responsibility to make behavioural decisions for themselves. Only if this fails then negative reinforcers will be used.

Applied Behaviour Analysis is a model that largely fits in with my philosophy as it aims to utilise all aspects of a classroom to modify behaviour. Along with using the classroom as a

tool for change, it also encourages the use of data collection and baseline reference points. Understanding the behaviours is vital in the success of this model. ABA also offers the opportunity for children to test their responsibility and accept the consequences of their actions. Doing this will allow students' to self-manage their behaviour.

During my pre-service training I was fortunate enough to view several preventative and corrective strategies based around my mentor teacher, Mike's, philosophy and the Parkfield Primary code. Parkfield Primary uses a virtues program which outline a different virtue every fortnight and it is expected that the students uphold them. When the virtue is observed, a reward is given in the form of a gold slip (merit award). Running parallel with this program is the school's code of conduct of which a section is highlighted each day. Discussion with teachers provided me with anecdotal evidence that the virtues program and the student inclusion in the code of conduct has had a positive effect on the school. Reports of bullying and playground incidents (including fights, negative actions, anti-social behaviour and language) has significantly decreased over the past year. During my three weeks at the school not one incident was seen. This whole school approach to behaviour management is tied into many aspects daily school life. The class I was in was year six and with the recent change with year seven being the first year in high school, much more responsibility was placed on this comparatively younger year six group.

An example of this relates back to responsibility aspect of my mentor teacher's philosophy and the whole school approach. Students across the school, but in particularly year six, have certain responsibilities which include, but are not limited to; recycling collection, correspondence between classes, lunch time supervision of grades two, three and four, and lunch time activities for the years five and six. The year six students are in charge of many aspects of school activities. This responsibility is put on these children to ready them for high school life. Of particular interest were the routines associated with sports and lunch time activities. An example of this is students are not allowed to play team games unless a 'student umpire' is booked. It is the responsibility of the student umpire (year six student) to provide the equipment necessary to play and supervise the activity. All year six are rotated in this position throughout the term. When talking with teachers about the success of this practice, all said that lunch time is given to the students to handle and the feedback was positive from the student umpires. Routines such as this were found everywhere throughout the school from year three students pulling the bins around the school collecting rubbish to year five and six students monitoring the use of school computers.

In the classroom, Mike exhibited several forms of corrective strategies in line with his personal philosophy. After each measure was taken he would then explain to me why he

used it and his desired outcome/s. The class in which I was placed had three students that required ongoing preventative and corrective strategies. An individualised behaviour plan was implemented on these students with collected data throughout the year and any information during the previous year. These plans were simple and consisted of only a few key points which, when executed, modified the behaviour of these students. When work was being done Mike would often sit at the table at which one of these students was sitting and monitor their work. This allowed him to guide the student without the child thinking he or she was being singled out as Mike interacted with the others that were seated at the desk also. This ties in with the abovementioned Applied Behaviour Analysis component of least intrusive measures. Another aspect of these individualised plans was to treat the troublesome students with firmness. What this means is that if a student had a trivial question (I lost my book, I don't have a pencil sharpener), Mike would provide a curt response forcing the student to think about what they could do to remedy the situation. On every occasion that Mike used this technique, including the two mentioned before, the student thought about it, went back to their seat, and solved their predicament. Mike would discuss with whole class about issues like this. He would inform them that in high school the responsibility lies with them.

Included in the individualised behaviour plans, but important on its own, is Mike's use of question and answer techniques. More than just tactical ignoring, Mike would get desired results by using a combination of strategies. Let us look at the three disruptive students again. When questions are asked of the students, Mike will often have them discuss with each other about the answer. He would then choose a student to provide a response. This technique was regularly used and explained as a way to ensure that those students who never put their hand up to answer were involved in the response and meaning making process. Mike also had a seating plan for when these sessions took place on the mat. The disruptive students were always seated next to a student who excelled. This ensures that when discussion took place, these students were always involved. In regards to the corrective aspect, Mike would use tactical ignoring and follow it up immediately with praise for a student who was doing the right thing. This allowed students to see what they needed to do to attain that praise. Mike made clear that praise should be given in a five to one ratio.

My experience at Parkfield Primary and in Mike's year six class confirmed a lot of the theory experienced throughout my studies. It was interesting to see what theories, models and taxonomies looked like in the real world. It was also valuable to see that parts of my philosophy and goals that I would set were being used by experienced teachers. With more experience my philosophy will evolve and change dependent on my class, but it is good to know that the theory gap between study and work is not large. Seeing my thoughts and

ideas being used in a classroom setting and being able to implement my view when opportunities during lessons conducted by me was a valuable learning experience.

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