



SchoolMedic's

Field Guide to Elementary Classroom
Management

by

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Chapter 1: Atmosphere

Love

It is unfortunate that the English language only has one word to describe love. There are so many “loves” that the word itself seems inadequate sometimes. Love for a spouse, love for a sibling, a parent, cheesecake, a movie, the definitions can be endless. I would like to focus on a definition of love that would best describe the atmosphere that you desire for your classroom.

Think of love as a verb, an action. This type of love is not self-serving; it is the antithesis of it. This love is sacrificial. Love your students in this way, and it will change your classroom.

There are times when a student will drive you nuts. Don't let the day end without mending that relationship. Only let what comes out of your mouth be that which is helpful and builds up others according to their needs, and benefits those who listen. You do realize that everyone is watching and listening to you all the time right? Anon, an Ancient Greek author of many profound quotes stated, “Integrity is when you do the right thing even though no one is watching.” How much more should we focus on getting it right as teachers!

When a student invites you to come to her recital, go. Play with them at recess. When a child speaks to you, stop all that's going on in your head (and around you) and focus on what that child is trying to tell you. Remember a conversation from yesterday where he was concerned about something at home and ask him how it went. Just go up to a student and talk about something that interests her even though it makes you yawn. This is sacrificial love.

Be careful though. It's OK to say no sometimes. Just don't make it a habit. Strike a balance on how much you give. If you don't, you will surely burn out. Just follow your gut on when to engage. Make the most of every opportunity to reach out in love.

Consistency

Fairness. Kids always seek it. Children want a world where everything is in order and most of all, predictable. You must be ever vigilant to this fact. Remember you are being watched and evaluated as to your actions. Even though you try to be equitable, the students will eventually finger someone (or more than one) as the teacher's pet. Although this can not be avoided, your job is to minimize it.

Establishing an environment that streamlines the class objectives and maximizes learning can be accomplished by setting up a classroom that literally runs itself. A system of rules outside of oneself is the key to effective management. These rules, once in place, allow you to consistently apply praise and punishment according to your classroom laws. Later in the book, we will discuss a system that I developed through trial and error that will help you to establish an environment that limits confrontation and improves the individual sense of what it means to be a good citizen.

Ben Franklin said, "He that would live in peace and at ease must not speak all he knows or all he sees." It is an obligation of the teacher to exhibit fairness. However, out of love, sometimes we can and should bend, but not break our own rules. Many times I have had students that were unruly. I would, in secret, cut them some slack on occasion. Why would I do this? It was to simply show a merciful side. I felt that this quality was important to exhibit. Did it work? Yes, sometimes. However, you mustn't employ this tactic too often for fear that the student will think you are a pushover. Like anything else, strike a balance.

Follow Through

Here is where you gain, or lose credibility. Idle threats are very destructive to your standing in the students' eyes. In one of my favorite quotes from President Lincoln, he remarked, "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt." The tongue is a dangerous tool. You don't have to react too quickly to any situation that doesn't involve the safety of you and the students. Sometimes it is best, trust me I have learned the hard way, to let some transgression sit for a while before taking action.

That being said, a good rule of thumb is to, "Say what you mean and mean what you say." Have the courage to follow through on whatever you have committed, through words, to do. *Do all that you said you would do.* This is one of the core principles of English common law and is very effective for setting the tone in your class for a successful year.

Conflict

There have been reams of information written on the subject of conflict. I can boil all of this down into a four word sentence that will de-mystify this subject forever when dealing within the realm of teacher-student relations. *Don't engage in it.* Many students thrive on the fact that they can get a reaction out of an adult. Many of them are experts at this game with their guardians. Often the conflict is not always worth the consequences that will undoubtedly knock your standing as the "adult" down a few notches. The Proverbs state, "A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult."