Discipline Essay, Research Paper

Discipline is more than keeping a group of children or young people quiet while being talked to. Preserving good

behavior is certainly one aspect to discipline, for learning it in an atmosphere of confusion is difficult. Children have

to learn to conform to the rules of behavior needed in a classroom. Teachers have the right to ask for a quiet class,

keep the students in their seats, and have the right to discipline them if they do not cooperate. When a teacher

expresses his or her thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in direct, honest, and appropriate ways that do not violate the

right of others, and when the message does not humiliate, degrade, or dominate the one being talked to, he or she is

using Assertive Discipline. In order for a teacher to maintain control of his or her class they must use Assertive

Discipline.

In order for a teacher to have his or her needs met, they can influence the behavior of the children. Without influence

a teacher is “powerless” and will become “burned out.” (Canter, 2) There is no simple answer to why this happens.

A number of complex factors have combined to create an environment in which teachers are having trouble in

getting personal and professional needs met. Until the past decade, the teacher was looked at as the main person in

the classroom by students and parents. The teacher, simply because of their role status, had respect and authority.

Thus, the teacher was a “powerful” figure in the eyes of the students and could easily influence the student’s

behavior, often with just a look, smile, or a threat.(Canter,3)

All of that is now changed. Today, a teacher has to earn the respect of both the students and their parents. A

teacher’s basic techniques of influence, or discipline, is no longer as effective as getting the desired results. The

discipline approaches of the 1950’s and 1960’s do not work with the students of the 1990’s. In addition, the teacher

cannot rely on the strong support of the parents anymore. Many parents are openly questioning, the education that

their children are receiving, and do not feel they want to support the needs of their child’s teachers.

Teachers cannot get their needs met in a classroom unless they have an effective method of discipline in which they

thoroughly understand and comfortable utilize. An assertive teacher is: “One who clearly and firmly communicates

his or her wants and needs to his or her students, and is prepared to reinforce their words with appropriate actions.”

(Canter,9) When a teacher is assertive, and clearly and firmly communicates their wants and feelings to a child, they

send a clear message. This message simply states: “I mean what I say and say what I mean.”(Collins, 155)

Lee Canter, a child guidance specialist, has found that while most teachers make lesson plans as a routine matter,

very few make discipline plans. Planning is essential to teaching well. Lesson planning is second nature to teachers.

Lesson plans are part of a professional routine, and are done almost automatically when the need arises. However,

planning for discipline is an entirely different story. The vast majority of teachers have learned or have been exposed

to the steps involved in planning discipline programs, especially those to be used specifically with disruptive

students. Because of teachers’ frustrations, all we often hear is their complaining about how difficult the students

really are.

Such complaining may help to relieve the strain of dealing with difficult students, but it in no way helps to solve the

problem. Planning your discipline efforts, and utilizing assertive principles, are as essential to teaching as a lesson

plan. (Charles,128) Discipline planning will structure and guide classroom management efforts the same as lesson

planning for academic efforts. Discipline plans are important and helpful to all teachers. Charles, urges to make

discipline plans according to the following steps: 1) Identify any existing or potential discipline problems. 2) Specify

the behaviors you want the students to eliminate or engage in. 3) Decide on negative and positive consequences

appropriate to the student and situation. 4) Decide how to execute the negative and positive consequences.(Charles,

129)

Discipline planning is the systematic applications of the assertive principles the teacher exhibits. It involves focusing

your attention on any existing or potential discipline problems you may have. These discipline problems may

involve an individual student, or a group of students, or an entire class.

Having good discipline enables the teacher to deal assertively with their students. He or she will know how to

maximize their potential influence to get their needs met, with more difficult situations it may be useful for the

teacher to engage in problem-solving and discipline planning with peers, school psychologist, principle or anyone

who may be familiar with the students or have successfully managed similar problems.(Canter,22) One final area

needed for discipline planning are special activities. Special activities are those activities the students do not

consistently engage in, for example, field trips or assemblies. A day or so before such an activity, the teacher must

have some basic discipline planning. Once again, the teacher must determine the behavior wanted and not wanted,

the limit – setting and positive consequences, and how the program will be started.

The assertive teacher recognizes the fact that he or she has wants and needs and has the right to get them met in the

classroom. The teacher is also aware of the limitations and realizes that they have the right to ask for assistance,

whether it is from the principle, parents, or peers.(Charles,37) The assertive teacher should be aware of the child’s

need for warmth and support.

An assertive teacher is aware that a limit setting response must be delivered in as effective a manner as possible. Eye

contact is very important when trying to get a point made. Whenever necessary, the teacher plans how to back up

their limit setting statement with appropriate consequences. This is done in order to maximize the influence that his

or her response can have on the behavior of the child.(Canter, 28)

Whenever required, teachers should be prepared to back up their words with consequences in order to motivate the

behavior of more difficult children. He or she is aware some children need more support than others and is prepared

to give that child as much as they can. (Canter, 32)

The children learn to trust and respect an assertive teacher. The children clearly know the parameters of acceptable

and unacceptable behavior. This gives them an opportunity to choose how they want to behave while knowing fully

what the consequences will be for their behaviors. This does not mean that every child will like an assertive teacher,

and does not mean that every child will behave. Some children may still decide not behave for any reason. All that

an assertive teacher can do by his or her behavior is try to establish an atmosphere where he or she maximizes the

potential for a positive teacher – child relationship.

The major area where being an assertive teacher helps a child is when the student has special needs or problems.

This when a teacher needs to step things up a notch and become more assertive. Some teachers may lose track of

their assertive potential, but they have to teach the child how to behave in the appropriate manner. (Canter, 46)

One problem area where a child needs assertive discipline is when he or she is confronted with peer pressure. This is

when the student’s fellow peers force him or her to do something, like throw spit balls or make funny noises to win

the approval of others. This problem can be solved by confronting the child and telling him what he or she is doing

wrong. This problem can also be solved by giving out a punishment like, writing on the chalk board or may be

standing in the corner with his or her back turned to the rest of the class. If all else fails, the teacher may want to call

the child’s home and plan a conference with the student’s parents.

Though most teachers feel threatened and overwhelmed by parents, especially if they are pushy or manipulative,

they need to take a stand and thoroughly explain the situation going on with their child. (Rich, 145) The teacher has

to be assertive with the parents and the child. The teacher should not down grade the problems they are having with

their child. Instead they should tell the parents the way things are. For instance a teacher should not call the child’s

parents and say, “we have a little problem with your son,” when in actuality, the child had a violent tantrum. The

teacher should let the parents know that they need their cooperation to discipline the child at home for his tantrum. If

the teacher does not tell the parents what they truly feel then the child’s tantrum will be even worse the next time.

The corner stone of assertive discipline is the potential positive influence teachers can have on the behavior of their

students. ” Hand in hand with influence goes responsibility.” (Canter, 57) When teachers accept the consequences of

their potential influence they accept the consequences of their potential influence they accept the responsibility to

choose, or not to choose, to utilize this potential for the best interest of both themselves and the students.

Assertive teachers recognize the responsibilities they have for the children. They know they cannot assert

themselves and get their needs and the children needs met. They know they can have the impact on their classrooms

if they choose to do so. Other teachers choose not to accept the reality of their potential influence. Thus, they are

confronted with the following situations: they place themselves in a powerless position. They view themselves as a

helpless victim at the mercy of the students, their parents, the principle, and the school system. Such teachers

become the complainers. They complain about everyone and everything that “victimize” them. (Charles, 120) They

end up blaming all of their problems on others, and never on themselves.