

Classroom Management Made Easy... With a Good Deal of Planning!

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It's mid-year and perhaps you need a change in your classroom management, or just need a few ideas to help you through the long winter months. You might also be someone who creates year-long plans and might see a few ideas to help for next year. Whatever your needs, I find it helpful to read good ideas, think about them and implement them as I see they might fit within my classroom plans. It is helpful to remember that high expectations, consistent routines, great planning and engaging students in their science learning are some of the key parts of the recipe for effective classroom management. I hope you find some of these ideas useful.

As an educator, you have specific expectations for your students. Sharing those expectations and including them in your classroom rules help remind your students of what you want for them and from them. In my classroom I call the classroom rules the **Winning Behaviors**, and I state them in as positive a fashion as I can. I include high expectations for both affective behavior as well as academic behavior because I am looking for the best from my pupils. Whether it is self-respect, respect for each other, being good listeners, learning to share, developing good questioning skills, or other great hopes you have for your students, sharing those ideas, both in writing and action, focuses pupils to accomplish their best possible.

Consistent routines, ones that are repeated in the beginning and used throughout the year, create a comfortable, predictable classroom environment which helps each day flow well. You probably have openers for the day and those are part of your routine. If you do not, think about how you can start your day with your students where they take responsibility for some of the business work of the classroom such as collection of homework, notes from parents, etc.

Keep in mind what routines you want for your science classes as well. This may sound obvious, but how do you plan for distribution of lab materials, collection of lab materials, signals for students to share with each other and signals to listen to you or others? All of these are very important and in particular for science activities since materials often must be shared with other classes and students should collaborate with each other like scientists do in the real world.

Distribution of materials is made easy if you have a self-contained classroom and have access to lunch trays or something similar. You can organize the materials for each student group ahead of time and cover them with a cloth or paper. When you are ready to transition to science for the day, the

materials are already organized on the tray and ready to be distributed to each student group. After completing the inquiry activity the students can reorganize the materials before returning the trays. If you share these materials with other teachers at your school, they would need to replace the consumable items before they use the trays for their students. To make it fair, have your colleagues take turns organizing and purchasing the materials for the trays.

If you teach science as a core subject in either middle or high school, then you have other options for distribution of materials. You can have your groups organized in such a way that there is a materials technician in each group who gathers and returns materials as needed. If that would not work well for you, you can set up your work areas so the students rotate from one area to the next. Each area or table has the directions as well as the materials needed for that section of the inquiry activity. The students are told in advance the amount of time they have to investigate at each table. When the time is finished, the students rotate to the next table, and this is repeated until all areas have been discovered by all students. This is a very effective way to offer different experiences without the expense of purchasing six to eight different sets of all materials since students rotate.

Communication routines promote good classroom management as well. Whether you lower your voice, use hand signals or arm signals, having a specific method for returning the students' attention to the whole class makes for ease of sharing and keeps transition times down to a minimum. Most importantly, though, before you can have students investigate and discover through inquiry-based activities, you must plan, plan, plan. Probably the most important part of classroom management is planning. After the first few days or weeks of school you probably have a very good understanding of your students and their needs. Keeping in mind that plans that reach across the different learning modalities help reach more students effectively, plan for different approaches to the same student-learned outcomes. You might find it helpful to plan time for students to share one-on-one rather than with a group or the whole classroom. Some students feel more comfortable sharing this way. You might need to assess students at the beginning of the lesson. Try using hand signals for specific answers or give students small white boards on which they respond individually and show answers when asked. Keep the students thinking, keep them engaged, and most importantly . . . over plan! I always tell

educators to plan, plan, plan . . . and then plan some more!

Good planning goes hand-in-hand with effective lessons which truly engage the students. Sometimes you have to really struggle to get students to think, but remember, the more they think and express what they know, the better you can assess what they know and what needs further explaining or investigating. The BEST WAY to manage your students is to keep them engaged and keep them interested. It sounds like a daunting task, and sometimes it can be, but YOU CAN DO IT and it will make a difference for your students. Science learning is critical for our future and is also such a fun way to get students thinking about the “what ifs” of their own lives.

Keep your expectations high, be consistent in what you want from your students and communicate your wants to them, and most importantly, plan in detail what will best engage your students in their investigations and learning. Continue to enjoy your school year...and keep science in the forefront. Focus on excellent classroom management. It is good for you...it is good for your students...and it is good for science.