

Classroom Management and Student Behavior

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As we begin to look at science classroom management techniques, we need to keep in mind a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil."

All teachers, regardless of years of experience, will encounter numerous discipline problems throughout the school year, especially in the science classroom/lab environment.

One of the first applications of effective classroom management begins with the establishment of classroom rules on the first day of school. These rules should be established by both the teacher and the students so that the students will have more of a "buy-in" of those rules they helped to develop. Listed in a recently published *New Teacher's Handbook*, issued by Impact II, The Teacher's Network, the following guidelines apply:

- Limit the number of rules; five or six positive rules are usually sufficient.
- Solicit students' ideas and suggestions for consideration as rules.
- Design rules that enhance student learning.
- State the rules in language that students understand.
- Determine, in advance, the consequences of keeping or breaking the rules.
- Print, display, distribute and sign contracted rules with the students.

Sometimes science teachers will have an individual child in the class/lab who does not, for whatever reason, behave in an appropriate student manner. These students need a more intensive, individualized approach; therefore, "behavioral agreements" (we used to call these behavioral contracts but have changed the wording due to legal ramifications) for disruptive students have met with a great deal of success. These "behavioral agreements" usually consist of a written, clearly defined and signed agreement between a teacher and a student, listing the acceptable behaviors for the classroom setting. This behavior agreement works best when a specific unacceptable behavior can be defined and evaluated in a brief time span—daily or period by period.

The science classroom/lab setting can create very unique situations where inappropriate behaviors abound. The "agreement" approach can be a very effective tool to use in this specific environment. The first step in this technique for a classroom/lab situation is to find out what the students' interests are. Then, by incorporating those interests into the agreement language, the agreement becomes very student-specific and the end results are usually much more positive, rather than when generic language is used.

Another very effective science/lab classroom

control technique, according to the *New Teacher's Handbook*, is the use of class meetings or discussions to obtain student feedback on various topics (including discipline problems). These discussions are an excellent way for students to become an integral part of your classroom control. The teacher's role in these discussions should be that of a facilitator, not as the classroom monarch. If students have an opportunity to express personal feelings and opinions regarding the rules and regulations they must follow, they will begin to develop ownership of those rules and are much more likely to follow them and accept the consequences.

Unfortunately, disruptive behavior will always be a part of a classroom whether science-based or not. Fortunately, there are numerous discipline and control techniques that teachers can add to their teaching tool-belt to make any K-12 classroom more manageable.

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