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Introduction

Although colleges and universities try conscientiously to prepare fledgling middle level teachers for handling classroom management, try as they do, it seems this is one area of teaching that just has to be learned on the job.

Classroom management is about trial and error; it comes through practice, patience, teamwork, flexibility, quality mentoring, willingness to seek help when needed, and a huge dose of humour. Each teacher's particular personality influences his or her teaching style. Sometimes, the best inspirations come from planning and thoughtfulness. However, most come from sheer, dumb luck.

This book does not offer the one solution for all situations—it is a free-flowing discussion of ideas, based on my experiences, to help the middle years classroom teacher get through daily rounds of uprisings, hostage situations (with demands), commotions and chaos. (Please note that some of my examples are really humorous asides and should not to be taken literally.) Most of the strategies can be easily adapted and effectively implemented by any middle years educator.

Readers will readily realise that the book's strategies reflect my personality; you must discern which ideas fit comfortably with your personality and teaching style. Never try to be someone you are not in the classroom. Practise patience. Seek out excellent seasoned teachers—a wealth of knowledge.

Rule #1: Engage Them

Mr Berckemeyer, I need to walk around the room at least ten times an hour. It helps me focus.

Middle level classes would be radically different if every adolescent entered puberty at the same date and time. Imagine teaching young adolescents and saying, “OK, in five, four, three, two, one—everyone has now left childhood; welcome to young adolescence!” However, it just does not work that way; adolescents are on their own timelines. See *Promoting Harmony: Young Adolescent Development and Classroom Practices*, Third Edition by Strahan, L’Esperance and Van Hoose (2009) for a detailed description of the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of young adolescents. Suffice it to say: middle years teachers’ lives do not lack for moments of high drama brought about by their students’ development.

As adolescents go through changes, they experience increases in twitching, a constant need for movement and rapid mood swings. They can go from having vast amounts of energy at their desks to sleeping on the floor. You can assign a silent reading activity and then watch a young adolescent male make the most unique facial expressions while his arm is swinging around in the air. Seemingly unable to control his body movements, he lets out a gigantic, loud sigh that could cause a tsunami halfway across the world. If you summon the courage to ask him whether he is all right, he looks at you and says, “WHAT”. He is totally clueless that he has released an enormous amount of energy in a short period of time. Teachers must help adolescents understand that the vast changes they are experiencing are entirely normal.

If mobile phones are allowed in your school, remember to turn off your own mobile phone to model the importance of class time and show that the rules apply to everyone. If all students have access to phones with cameras, have students use their phones when lessons would be enhanced with a camera. Mobile phones can be used as learning tools when students are illustrating projects, texting answers and doing research.

Using technology with purpose

Before using any type of technology in the classroom, research it thoroughly and have a specific purpose that you can state clearly for students. Focus on acceptable use as well as restricted use.

- Have multiple things going on in various areas of the room. Use two overheads in separate parts of the room; run scrolling text “updates” as you give instructions.
- Use and have students create their own iMovies, podcasts and interactive whiteboard presentations to convey content and lessons.
- Take technology classes or find other ways to stay current with the latest digital devices and programs.
- If your students have access to these technologies, create homework lessons that require using mobile phones or the Internet.
- Investigate how your students are using instant messaging to do homework and school projects. Are there specific issues that you need to address?
- Have students use wikis to create collaborative projects; once information is posted, it can be updated and expanded, and the wiki documents who modified the project, when and how. Glossaries, study guides, supporting documents and much more can be available to students and parents anytime on the web.
- Have students use instant messaging and blogs to support the classroom content as they share information and their creativity with others.

Channel Adolescent Power

Mr Berckemeyer, I will not sit down, and you can't make me!

This chapter discusses the two sides of student power; they sometimes seem driven to use it in negative ways but then amaze us with their capacity for empathy and helpfulness towards others. I will delve into issues of procrastination, suggest a unique strategy for holding students accountable for class work, and provide a lesson in empowering students to make choices and work at their own paces.

Negative power plays

Children of all ages struggle with power issues, and power plays are a factor throughout a young adolescent's life. Have you ever thought, "Middle years students can be the meanest and cruellest people on the face of the earth"? They can kick a friend's backpack all the way down the corridor while calling her an inappropriate name. Feeling guilty, they drop a dollar in the bucket for a world disaster relief effort, and suddenly all the guilt is gone.

Examples of negative student power plays:

- Procrastinating: they exercise their power as they take as much time as possible to complete a two-minute activity.
- Wandering around and looking for something to do or someone to bother
- Tapping or hitting someone with a pencil, ruler or any available object
- Acting like they did not hear the question