

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Part One

“Discipline: A Reality of Teaching”

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As a senior at the University of Pittsburgh in 1969, I was finishing my student-teaching obligation in the Pittsburgh Public Schools system. The experience was a disaster. My cooperating teacher at the high school did not appreciate my inability to deal with discipline problems in the classroom.

I received a “B” as a student-teacher, which was considered unheard of in those days. Moreover, my cooperating teacher wrote in his evaluation form of my teaching ability: “Bill Welker might be able to teach in a rural one-room school house...but nowhere else.”

Not a very flattering start in the educational profession, but I brushed it off figuring my cooperating teacher didn’t like me from the start.

Nonetheless, I graduated and decided to immediately apply for the “Master of Education Program” at Pitt. The physical education department had an accelerated one-year master’s program that was very appealing to me.

At the start of the 1970 fall term, I was running out of student loan money I received that summer. Being married and with our first child (Billy) on the way, I had to find a full-time day job, pronto.

Thank goodness all my graduate classes were in the evening hours during the fall and spring terms.

With the grace of God, I was offered a permanent-substitute position as a physical education teacher at Philip Murray Elementary School in the Pittsburgh Public Schools System. My first professional teaching assignment was unquestionably a baptism of fire.

Through the grapevine, I learned that the teacher, whose position I was taking, was on medical leave due to a nervous breakdown.

Hmmm.

What was I getting myself into?

The school was located in a very rough neighborhood. The first two weeks teaching gym class I tried to implement teaching strategies I learned in college – be understanding, compassionate, and loving. To use a slang expression: “Ain’t none of it worked!”

I knew I had to change tactics or my first position as a professional educator would be a teaching nightmare. Then I remembered what worked on me as a grade school student.

On Monday of the third week, I went to the school office to discuss my dilemma with Principal Kisick. Here’s pretty much how the conversation went decades ago.

“Mr. Kisick, I am having discipline problems in my gym classes.”

He bluntly stated, “I know, and I’m thinking about firing you.”

I responded, “I understand. But before doing so, would you allow me to bring the five or six most difficult students I have in my classes to your office and paddle them myself. If you paddle them, it will not help my problem. It has to come from me.”

He answered, “Ok, let’s see what happens.”

It worked, and I had no more problems after doing so the rest of my days at the school; the students now knew I meant business in the classroom. And the principal respected my guts to make such a decision as an idealistic, neophyte teacher who saw the light.

It was the only time I had to perform corporal punishment my entire career in education. Why...because I also learned how to play the role of a didactic dictator my plebe year in the profession. There’s only room for one leader in the classroom, and that’s the teacher.

Nothing I learned in the teacher-education classroom compared to what I dealt with through practical experience in the “teaching trenches.” I learned how important classroom control was to teaching students.

This was the beginning stages of developing my educational philosophy: Student discipline is a must in the classroom that all great teachers possess. I don’t care how brilliant a teacher may be in his or her area of expertise. If he or she can’t control the classroom, nothing will be learned. This is the gospel truth in every K-12 educational environment, be it urban or rural.

The significance of classroom discipline was an educational epiphany for me at the beginning of my career that I lived by until the day I retired.

Editor’s Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He was selected as a “Teacher of the Year” by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. Most recently, Dr. Welker was inducted into the West Virginia University College of Education and Human Services’ *Jasper N. Deahl*

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