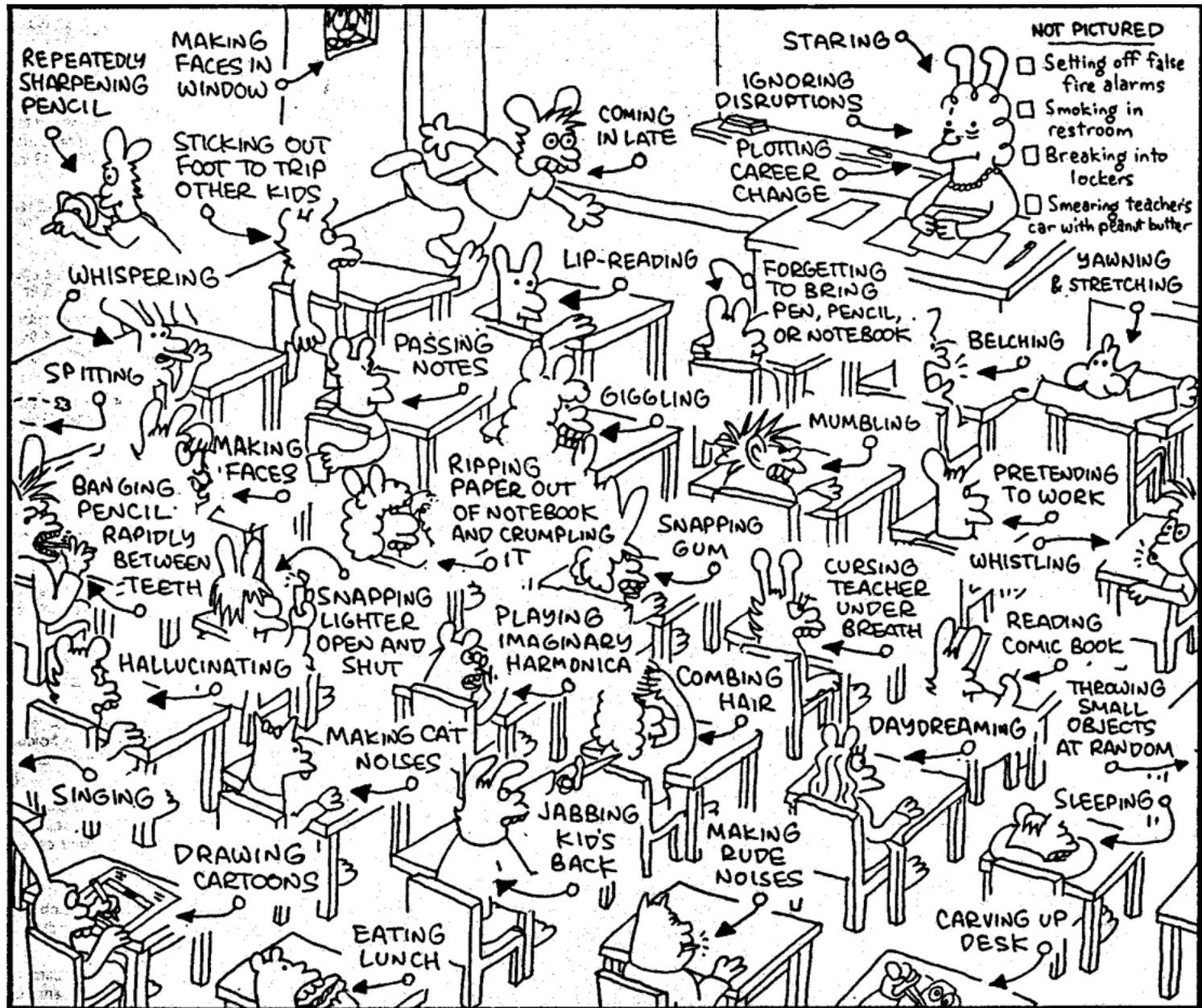


IMPORTANCE OF A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE

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“Imagine spending several hours everyday in a place where you felt like a nobody.” What a powerful statement. The primary responsibility of an educator should be to assure that no child ever feels like they are not worthy contributors in their classroom. Each child must feel a sense of belonging within the classroom. Learning is not merely the absorption of material by a student. It is a combination of many factors. Classroom layout, a child centered classroom, positive behavior management techniques, mutual trust, a safe learning environment, lack of bias, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to draw out each child’s special talent to make them feel like worthy

contributors.

A class room must have a positive climate. The children must feel a sense of security. The atmosphere must be conducive to taking safe challenges without fear of ridicule. A positive environment is the building block in developing a child with the positive self efficacy to take safe challenges. If a child fears shame and ridicule from peers and teachers, they will avoid taking risks to protect themselves from embarrassment. Within my classroom, the environment is structured to encourage positive self concepts. A piece of mirrored paper is placed at a child's eye level on the wall. Above the mirror is a simple piece of paper that says, "Look in here to see the coolest person in the world". The children love to stare in that mirror. The intent behind the statement I wrote for the mirror is to remind all the children that look in it that they are valued members of my room. The mirror was decorated by all the children to give them a feeling of ownership. A poster with six classroom rules is displayed on the wall. Below my poster sits rules developed and handwritten by the children. Again, the intent was to have student involvement in rule setting and give the children a feeling of ownership. The learning environment is the most important lens in a classroom.

The learning environment will dictate how well or poorly a child will learn. A major factor in the learning environment is the teacher's role. Teachers must take their position as a role model seriously. Through observing role models, children hone skills that will assist their successful assimilation into society. A class room that lacks a teacher that exhibits quiet control will see behavioral issues exacerbate. The outcome will be deleterious. Structuring a classroom so positive teacher student relationships develop will have a trickle down effect. Positive behavior will appear in venues such as the playground, parental interaction, and socialization with other children. My teaching style is direct. Supply the children with a warm and trusting class room environment. Explain the why, how, and where. Don't simply order children and respond with "because I said so". A teacher should be a guide, and fade into the background. The ultimate role should be a coach, not a dictator. I

would like to use the development of baby birds as an analogy. The baby bird doesn't know it is capable of flying until the mother bird pushes it out of the nest. The baby bird is nurtured, taught life skills, and then pushed out of the nest. The bird's wings flutter. It eventually succeeds in spreading its wings in flight. The mother bird watches from the nest. She doesn't physically intervene. The mother bird is present, and available if needed.

Mother bird wishes her baby to experience the taste of independence. The baby bird is enabled if the mother bird hovers over her offspring. Figuratively speaking, children learn through the same methods. My classroom is proactive not reactive. Every strategy I employ, from token reward systems, to earning special privileges are developed in the hope of developing internalized self control, and enhancement of individual and group development. Being reactive merely exacerbates behavior problems. Proactive strategies assist the child in evolving into autonomous and mature individuals. I am a facilitator. I have gradually eased responsibility to the children. Reactive and authoritarian behavior breeds a hostile environment. Autonomy is non-existent if the teacher attempts to portray a dictator. Power trips have no place in a classroom. In positive structured environment children develop internalized behavior mechanisms. In the fall, a class begins as a teacher lead environment. A good educator should ease into a child centered environment within a couple of months. The path should gravitate from teacher lead, to a classroom of students who are self starters. Children should be involved in decision making processes. These should include but not be limited to, student input in classroom policies, themes for academic units, and roles students will play in development of school projects. Involving children in the choice making process is essential in creating an autonomous classroom environment. Prevention is a key component in creating a positive classroom environment that is void of behavior issues. Build positive attributes, not negative self efficacy.

Developing classroom rules as a team, using inclusive social activities, and developing problem solving activities have proven to be an asset to avoiding

behavior issues in my class. My classroom is predictable and structured. I follow a rhythm of the day. The children know what to expect. I am open to feed back. Although structured, my curriculum has wavered by taking a class vote occasionally. Respect for individual learning styles, and personalities are nonnegotiable in my class. I demand respect. I model respect, and expect each child in the room to emulate my respectful behavior. Consequences for behavioral infractions are swiftly enforced. As an educator in a multiage classroom, a middle ground was developed. All age groups must benefit. Behavior management must be carried out in a form that the Kindergarten children can comprehend. Older children must not find my management system demeaning. Management of transition times has been learned through trial and error. Cleaning between activities is rarely an issue.

Through child and error a method was developed. I told the children I was closing my eyes and giving them one minute to clean the room. When I opened my eyes the room was spotless. The children were hiding. I heard sounds of quiet laughter emanating from various areas of the room. All the children were in view. I pretended I could not see them. I pretended to look for them in the toilet, complete with flushing. I looked for them in the sink. I turned the water on and mentioned out loud that I did not see children falling out of the drain. This caused a bundle of distant giggling. I continued my trek through silly areas that would be impossibility for the children to hide in. Hiding spots I searched were cubbies, cups, crayon boxes and more. I finally found my young charges by sneaking up with a loud “boo”. This one time game turned into a ritual. When I tell the children we must clean up in order to move on I am always asked if we can play “the hiding game at the end”. This enforces the idea that many behavior management techniques do not come from a book. They come from taking our students individual personalities into account.

Children learn from educators and educators learn from the students. Observing the children can result in squelching behaviors before they become issues. Accommodations and restructuring the class room environment can

quelch further outbursts. If a child resorts to attention getting behavior, giving the child a sense of power can make all the difference. I give the children special chores. They hold clip boards, carry my phone, carry my first aid kit, even help me do a head count. These small chores have given the children a feeling of ownership. That has made a world of difference. Brainstorming during group time enhances decision skills. Each child is given a question to answer. Each child offers a resolution. An example would be why we don't run in class. I pair older kids with younger ones during this exercise. This creates equality. If the younger child struggles with the question, the older child can assist with the answer.

The main goal is teaching the art of self monitoring behavior. Self monitoring allows the children to evaluate, record, reflect on their own behavior. Discipline is used in my program. I wish to reinforce that discipline is different than punishment. Punishment controls a child. It does not teach how to modify behavior. Discipline is individualized for each personality. Discipline teaches how to identify behaviors, and how to modify them in the future. An example of punishment is time out. Time out temporarily stops a child in their tracks. This punishment is merely temporary. Taking time to point out how a behavior affected another human being teaches empathy. Consequences for future infractions are discussed during discipline. I always make consequences clear and concise so a child knows what is expected in the future. Discipline should always fit the crime. If a child damages a project others have worked on, I expect them to repair that project. If a child has abused my personal body space rule, the repercussion would be more severe. Tokens and beloved privileges are taken away. Children are not mini adults.

We need to be the role models who act in a proactive manner. Children are controlled by their emotions. They don't think of consequences until later. Educators must provide a safe environment where children can hone their skills. My job is to have a part in development of future self sufficient adults, the future leaders of our country. I must model proper self control for the children to emulate. Children rely on me to show them the way. My mistakes

are permanent. White out will not erase my errors.

A thought to ponder:-o)

Mari N. M.Ed.

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