Building a Classroom Management Plan for Inclusive Environments: From Fear to F.E.A.R.

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Abstract

Inclusive education is here to stay. However, teachers remain fearful of their ability to deliver and assess curriculum and related activities for a diverse population of students. Current literature suggests that effective classroom planning includes four activities: a focus on planning to prompt and sustain student on-task behavior; an engagement of students in the learning process by building a sense of belonging and contribution to the classroom experience; a calculated arrangement, physically and administratively, of the classroom environment to facilitate participation and management of all students; and a reflection on what was tried, how it worked, and what adjustments are necessary.

Keywords

inclusive education, behavior management

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Idol (2002) speculates that teachers have "looming fears" related to educating and managing diverse student groups. For example, teachers believe that including students with special needs will force them to drastically change their teaching format; that students with disabilities will require extensive diversion of their time and resources away from other students; and that students with special needs will require behavior management practices that are unique, complicated, and never ending.

The emerging education literature indicates that the F.E.A.R. model that highlights four pillars of proactive inclusive practices can replace the fear associated with diverse classrooms:

Focus: prompt student attention to the learning task through teacher preplanning

Engage: increase student motivation and social development through building a sense of belonging and contribution

Arrange: organize and administer the learning environment to accommodate all learners

Reflect: evaluate outcomes for planned lessons and activities, problem solve, and adjust

Focus

Keeping students focused on the learning task is important for two reasons: first, time on task is highly correlated to achievement (Good & Brophy, 2003; Ornstein & Lasley, 2000); and, second, time on task reduces classroom misbehavior (Good & Brophy; Kounin, 1970). The keys to focusing student time on task behavior are instructional strategies (i.e., differentiation, cooperative learning, jigsaw methodology, scaffolding, and assessment) and within lesson communication.

Instructional strategies

Differentiation

The essence of instruction in today's classroom is differentiation. Choate (2000) defines differentiation as "systematically varying the learning, content, product, and… the teaching and learning process to match the unique learning profile of individual students" (p. 36). A number of models for differentiating instruction in classrooms are available (see Tomlinson, 1999; Wood, 2002). Importantly, each emphasizes that variations in the lesson related to the amount of work required, the time allocated to complete the exercise, presentation format, type of response required, and assistance needed are critical. (See Box: *Key Operational Principles of Differentiation*)

Key Operational Principles in Differentiation

The key operational principles in differentiation encompass the following:

Focus on your class: What are the academic, behavioral, and social strengths and weaknesses of your class? There are several steps involved in answering this question. First, establish baselines that recognize the developmental milestones and readiness levels of all students. Second, survey interests of the group. Third, collect data on academic achievement and skill levels and analyze the profile. Fourth, observe, question, and assess the classroom behavior and preferences of all students as the school year unfolds. Collecting data, analyzing performance levels, assessing, and adjusting for the various needs and skill levels of students are recognized dimensions of effective differentiation (Choate, 2000; Idol, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999).

Focus on key ideas: Tomlinson (2003) states that to establish essential ideas, teachers focus on what students should know (i.e., the facts, vocabulary, and basic information that is essential). Then teachers focus on what should be understood (i.e., the concepts that are critical to mastery and transfer). Next, teachers clarify what students should demonstrate or be able to do when a lesson is complete. Finally, teachers ask and answer the essential questions that will guide instruction for all students (i.e., how will I organize instruction, motivate, and assess *all* students?)

Focus on presentation: The key to differentiating instruction is variety. While there is a daunting number of learning preferences and styles (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 1997), a focus on utilizing oral, visual, and tactile learning opportunities is key. In addition, Sternberg's (1997) analytical, practical/ hands-on, or creative thinking options or Gardener's multiple intelligences are worthwhile options (see Armstrong, 2000). Regardless of the options considered, the key is variety. An important consideration is to help students develop their own strategies for promoting learning and to help students learn and utilize accepted strategies that promote understanding and retention. Content areas such as literacy, mathematics, and the arts have skill sets and strategies that energize, solidify, and sustain learning and mastery. In addition, students often require temporary support such as scaffolding in the early stages of learning in content areas. Include higher order thinking (see Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) in all lesson plans. Higher order thinking enhances learning through the exploration of meaning (i.e., how to apply, analyze, and evaluate new knowledge). Finally, do not forget constant practice, review, and feedback.

Focus on assessment of strategies: Differentiation that remains dynamic and meaningful requires constant assessment. Whether standardized instruments, criterion-reference tests, or authentic assessment options are used, testing for understanding and skill retention is a primary function of the teacher practicing differentiation.

Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning (see Choate, 2000; Idol, 2002) can facilitate active learning, promote social interaction, help develop social skills, and promote academic skill development (e.g., problem solving, communication, etc.). A review of the components of various options and models suggest that most effective cooperative activities include the following characteristics:

Heterogeneous grouping socially, academically, and behaviorally

Group member interdependence: members are responsible for their own learning and the learning of others in the group

Face-to-face interaction: group members have the opportunity to explain what they are learning to a group

Individual accountability: assessment of each member of the group individually

Interpersonal skill development: a combination of skill assessment and training prior to the group experience and on-going assessment and instruction while the group is functioning

Group evaluation: group performance (i.e., participation and outcome) is assessed regularly.

(See Box: *Key Operational Principles of Cooperative Learning*)

Key Operational Principles of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is effective when it:

Minimizes student movement: Desk arrangement, supply and materials storage, location of student's with disabilities, and an opportunity for the teacher(s) to move easily and quickly for assessment, monitoring and problem solving purposes are critical elements of the cooperative learning classroom. Cooperative learning teachers often consider establishing groups early in the semester and do not move groups within the classroom very often throughout the school term.

Minimizes transition time: Teachers who use cooperative learning as a supplement for whole class activities modify class procedures and rules to facilitate quiet and distraction-free transitioning to cooperative learning. Prior to these activities, teachers state and reinforce movement procedures and rules.

Minimizes start-up problems: The key to cooperative learning is preplanning. Researchers (Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2000; Leighton, 2003; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003) suggest the following to promote efficiency in cooperative learning:

- Make accurate and complete information available to the class at the start of the cooperative lesson. If the cooperative lesson includes peer tutoring, the teacher has organized the activity and expectations and presented this information to the students prior to movement or at the start of the group lesson. Startup activities promote immediate engagement and student interaction within prescribed procedures.
- Assign roles to group members and remind group members of their role and responsibilities often. Group roles usually include a timekeeper, a "quiet" monitor, a secretary, and a leader.
- Teach skills for working in groups and remind and cue students often. When skill development is connected to lesson expectations and/or cooperative learning objectives and to implementing group rules, the impact of skill development is increased. The following skill development options are recommended for diverse classrooms:
    - Social skills: listening, sharing, giving support
    - Explaining skills: describing and seeking explanations
    - Asking for help
    - Giving help skills
    - Leadership skills
    - Teamwork skills: following group routines, significance of roles, task completion, etc.
    - Set rules and post

Maximizes teacher movement, interaction and assessment: Students need feedback on rules, roles, on task behavior, adherence to the objective of group activity, group performance, and so forth. A second gain from "floating" and interacting is that the teacher models for students how to give and receive help (how to ask what others think, how to praise, etc.). All are elements of effective cooperative learning activities that lead to student development.

Maximizes heterogeneous group assignment: The group mix (i.e., the skill and achievement level of the members), is critical. While group makeup is usually based on high, average and low levels and include a variety of gender, race and cultural options, a few caveats are noteworthy: First, avoid extreme variations in group mix. Promote difference in skill and achievement levels, but keep the group mix close in both levels. Some argue (see Good & Brophy, 2003) that the mix not include an "average" or in-between level. In-between students have been found to participate less in the group experience. In any case, establishing group composition requires a trial-and-error mentality. Second, avoid placing students who have problems with each other in the same group. Third, keep group sizes within the range of four to six students.

Jigsaw Method

The Jigsaw Method is a particularly efficient and effective group learning vehicle to aid students' master curriculum material by encouraging teaching, listening, engagement, and empathy within work groups (Leighton, 2003). These goals are achieved because the jigsaw methodology requires each member of the learning group to play a pivotal role in the completion of the learning task.

The key steps of the Jigsaw Method are (see Leighton, 2003):

1. Form heterogeneous learning teams

2. Form expert teams with representation from each learning team
3. Develop the expertise of the expert team members
4. Expect team members to share expertise in the original learning team
5. Assess individual achievement

Scaffolding

The essential focus of scaffolding is that the teacher directs a learning exercise that is difficult for the learner until the student can learn and apply elements of the learning experience on their own (Bruning, Schraw, & Ronning, 1995). A distillation of scaffolding conceptualizations results in the following common steps (see Good & Brophy, 2003; Larkin, 2001; Schunk, 2000):

1. Teacher models/teaches skill required
2. Teacher supports/assists as the learner increases skill competency; teacher expands student's skill area
3. Teacher gradually removes supports as the learner's skill competency increases
4. Teacher gives feedback on performance to learner throughout the learning experience; reinforces main ideas
5. Learner achieves independence

Assessing Outcomes

Novice teachers often believe that assessing children with diverse needs requires specialized training and years of experience. In reality, most teachers automatically consider instructional and assessment strategies that will "fit" students they have in a given grade or class. In addition, the following assessment considerations fit for a wide variety of disabilities (see Friend & Bursuck, 2002; Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 2001): (a) Test questions and/or directions are presented in an alternate way; (b) test questions include alternate ways to respond; (c) test time allocations, scheduling, or location (e.g., private, etc.) are adjusted; (d) provision for specialized equipment is provided based on the IEP; and (e) a proctor (i.e., someone to read directions and/or questions) is provided as needed.

Communication

Question-and-answer activities play a role in promoting effective classroom management (Good & Brophy, 2003; Sadker & Sadker, 2003). Well prepared question-and-answer activities in class lessons increase student engagement and sense of belonging in the instructional experience and help teachers to react constructively when students fail to respond appropriately or opt to respond not at all. The critical strategies are wait time for responses and teacher feedback.

Wait time for responses: The recommended wait time for responses to questions is three or more seconds. During the wait time teachers should maintain eye contact with the responder. Good and Brophy (2003) argue that the discipline involved in waiting for a response and probing if the answer is deemed inappropriate increases active participation and the quality of participation and responses of *all* students including the child with special learning needs.

Wait time for feedback: First, teacher feedback can clarify, verify, support, and personalize student answers to questions. In addition, teacher responses to answers involve the whole class in the learning experience. Good and Brophy (2003) suggest that teachers should follow student responses by asking one or more of the following question types: (a) What do you mean by that? (b) How do you know that? Example? and (c) How did you determine that?

Teacher feedback can include praise for responses given. Good and Brophy (2003)

conclude that praise in these circumstances can be contingent on the answer given (i.e., praise what is correct) and the effort and strategy used to arrive at the answer. In addition, teachers should give feedback on what needs to be corrected to achieve the right answer next time. Effective feedback can motivate students to participate fully, especially the less able students, and can teach and reinforce learning for *all* through a focus on effort and strategy.

Engage

Recently, belonging has been identified as a critical element in how children approach and sustain effort in the classroom (Aronson, 2002; Schunk, 2000). Stipek (1998) reminds us: "Students will not be motivated to engage in the most intrinsically interesting tasks…if they fear humiliation or rejection from their teachers and peers" (p.186). Albert (1996) concluded that in-class cooperation is more likely when students have a sense they belong to a class and are making a contribution to that class. In addition, a student's sense of belonging (i.e., the degree to which they perceive acceptance and rejection) plays a role in the amount of energy, focus, and commitment they devote to achievement (Harrist & Bradley, 2002).

To increase student connectedness and achievement motivation in inclusive classrooms, the following are recommended (see Aronson, 2002; Dweck, 2002; Schunk, 2000; Weiner, 1994):

1. Focus on effort over success/failure outcomes; utilize authentic assessment;
2. Change student attributions for success and/or failure (i.e., promote the message that success is a function of student effort and failure is a function of the student's lack of an effective strategy);
3. Help students "adjust" their personal theory of intelligence; students who see their intelligence as fixed are less likely to approach and persist in new learning experiences; students who see their intelligence as changeable or correctable persevere;
4. Increase question and answer proficiency to include *all* students (see Sadker & Sadker, 2003);
5. Elevate teacher expectations for all students; a success/failure ratio of +1 success equates to increased self-efficacy or a sense that one can control and succeed in their learning;
6. Focus on learning goals over performance goals; and
7. Use cooperative learning experiences, (e.g., Jigsaw Method, etc.)

Arrange

Organizing and administering a classroom requires an analysis of the interplay between teaching options and the physical environment that contains the educational experience. In addition, the rules and procedures developed to manage the overall classroom experience, especially transition activities and seating arrangements, are critical.

Physical Arrangements

Effective teachers preplan the organization of their learning environment (i.e., desk placements [teacher and students], storage, displays, resource centers, and use of wall space). Important questions to consider include the following (adapted in part from Evertson et al., 2000, p. 2):

1. What will be the main types of instructional activities (e.g., small groups, whole class discussions, teacher presentations, student presentations, individual assignments, group projects,

etc.)? What physical arrangement will best support these activities?
2. Will students use equipment or materials extensively? Will these be shared among individuals or groups?
3. How much movement within the class is anticipated? What areas of the room will be involved?
4. How will students who use wheelchairs, braces, crutches, or other forms of getting around be managed? Will the environment be hazard-free for the visually impaired?
5. How flexible or permanent will the arrangement be? How often will the arrangement need to be changed? Daily, weekly, monthly?
6. What types of references or centrally located learning materials will the students need to access? How accessible are these materials to *all* students?
7. Students with behavior problems, susceptibility to distractions, and sensory impairments will be located where?
8. Will students who require special equipment or assistive technology have easy access to the equipment?

Rules and Procedures

Levin and Nolan (2000) argue that procedures help the students act and react in orderly or disciplined ways throughout the school day; rules on the other hand focus on behavior in general. The development of rules is a complicated and personal experience; however, effective classroom rules should pinpoint expectations and standards for behavior and consequences for misbehavior. All rules should include the following characteristics (see Levin & Nolan; Larrivee, 1999):

1. Reasonable
2. Few in number (no more than 5-6); clearly articulated (i.e., brief and expressed in language that is age appropriate)
3. Include a rationale and examples of behavior and expectations
4. Presented, modeled, and practiced with feedback
5. Posted
6. Describe consequences that are applied immediately and consistently when violations occur
7. Reviewed regularly, especially when activities that are new and/or novel occur and during transition periods where the normal routine of the class is disrupted
8. Changes in rules should include a start date and a justification that is told to the class prior to the implementation of change; all changes should be modeled and practiced

Educators often overlook procedures. Children with special educational needs who have difficulty attending to, retaining, or generalizing procedures can be a source of considerable frustration to a teacher if procedures are not carefully attuned to the class early in the school year and posted and regularly rehearsed thereafter. Guidelines for procedure development include (adapted from Smith et al., 2001):

1. Identify *all* situations in your classroom for which a procedure is needed
2. Explain, model, and practice procedures until mastery is achieved by all
3. Review procedures regularly, especially prior to transition periods in the classroom
4. Changes in procedures should include a teaching and practice session prior to implementation

Transitions and seating arrangements (the "zone")

Transitions are specific times when students are more likely to disconnect and behave poorly (i.e., before and during the early part of lessons; during changes from lesson to lesson or activity to activity; at the end of lessons; and at the end of class or class day especially if there is a wait time) (Good & Brophy, 2003; Grossman, 1995). Effective teachers recognize and plan for transitions by establishing rules and procedures and reiterating those that apply in a given circumstance.

For those who use direct instruction or whole class instruction, Ornstein and Lasley (2000) remind us that there is an "action zone" in each classroom where teachers tend to focus their instruction, question-and-answer activities, and other forms of student involvement. Think of the zone as an upside-down "T" that spreads out from the teacher's desk. The T includes the row in front of the teacher's desk and the one or two columns of desks located in the middle of the class. Teachers who are not aware of the zone increase the possibility that students "outside" the zone will be overlooked or dismissed during the important exchanges that occur throughout the school day. Keep this in mind if you prefer to let students sit where they wish. The engaged, performance-oriented, and highly motivated students gravitate to the T. Why? That is the location in the class where they will participate more often with the teacher and where the teacher is more likely to engage them. Effective teachers plan seating to include a variety of students in the zone mix. This includes the distractible, potential behavior problems, and students who are disabled or considered at-risk.

Reflection

Today's students interact with their teacher, each other, and the curriculum in ways that require teachers to routinely analyze and upgrade their methodology. This process is called reflection. Rodgers (2002) defines reflection, generally, as an ongoing process of inquiry. Reflection involves three separate but interactive dimensions: problem solving, review of content and professional literature, and conversations with colleagues. The end game of the reflective process is to transform classroom experiences into a deeper and richer understanding of teacher behavior that results in more effective practices. (See Box: Overview of Rodgers' (2002) Four Phases of the Reflective Process.)

Overview of Rodgers' (2002) Four Phases of the Reflective Process

1. Presence to an experience: A willingness to see classroom events as events requiring analysis. These happenings might include a tried-and-true lesson activity that does not engage the class; the emergence of a new behavior dimension; a new student's difficulty adjusting to the rhythms and activities of the class; and/or a student who is ostracized from his/her cooperative learning group.
2. Describe the experience: Name the problems and/or questions that arise out of accepting and thinking about the experience. This includes avoiding spontaneous or uninformed interpretations and responses. Rodgers (2002) labels this activity the "discipline of description" or a dedicated attempt to collect and analyze the facts and/or evidence that surround the experience. When considering behaviors, effective teachers explore the behavior and what happened before and after the behavior (Larrivee, 1999).
3. Analysis of the experience: Generate possible explanations that grow organically from the data and evidence. Rodgers (2002) argues that teachers need to spend "enough time with the data of an experience…so that it can emerge in all its complexity" (p. 854).
4. Action/experimentation: Rodgers (2002) explains that the reflective teacher now articulates a response "based on knowledge and awareness of the learner, oneself, the subject matter, the context within which we all operate, and the dynamic interaction among all of these" (p. 855).

Conclusion

Today's classrooms are demanding environments. Teachers are expected to manage the academic and behavioral needs and development of a diverse population of students. Fortunately, an emerging literature that bridges theory and practice provides guidance to the teacher. First, the vast majority of students in today's classrooms do not require special attention in class. This is especially true if teachers think and plan proactively to focus *all* students on the learning task. Second, instructional strategies that increase the engagement of *all* students in the learning and social experience of the classroom are considered. Third, educators pay particular attention to how their classrooms are physically and functionally arranged. Fourth, teachers regularly reflect on their approaches, that is, assess their practices and outcomes, problem solve, check the literature, and upgrade their strategies to meet the changing needs of their diverse classes. In summary, the literature indicates that fear of inclusion can be replaced by the F.E.A.R. practices outlined in this paper and that these strategies are keys to effective classroom management.

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