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QUDWA 2017

EXPERT MASTERCLASS

Discipline in the Classroom

Sunday October 8th, 2017

Speaker

Elizabeth Green, Co-Founder, CEO, Editor-in-Chief, Chalkbeat, USA

Summary Paragraph/Key Points

This session explores the keys to good discipline in the classroom, and encourages people to understand that discipline is a skill that can be taught. Author of the 2014 book “Building a Better Teacher”, Green taught this Masterclass in a highly interactive style, encouraging ideas and participation from the room.

“What is discipline? Think of a discipline challenge you are facing in your classroom,” she prompts. In fact, it is the very definition of the word “discipline” which fuels the debate. Differences in opinion prevail, and Green moves on to share specific statements about discipline, to ask which garnered the most agreement. Some statements were clearly polarizing, however the statement which achieved the largest positive reaction was: “In the 21st century, students need to learn to think critically, debate respectfully, and work collaboratively”.

Green states that discipline is hard because teaching is hard. Quoting a piece of research from Hyman Bass and Deborah Ball (University of Michigan), “Making mathematics reasonable in school”, she demonstrates that:

1. Teachers have to understand **why** students are making mistakes.
 2. Teachers have to **correct the misunderstanding** that caused the mistake.
- If we apply this thinking to discipline, Green suggests that we can create a new order of peace and structure in the classroom, and challenges the room with the question: “What mistakes do students make when it comes to discipline?”. The answers are varied:

- Failure to manage boredom





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- Students are disrespectful towards teachers and their peers
- Students do not always understand the instructions
- Lack of engagement because of a failing on the side of the teacher
- Students do not always have “space to think”
- Students do not always grasp the academic basics
- Students do not always listen

Green argues that there are three broad categories of misunderstandings amongst students that cause discipline problems:

1. Noncompliance. She references Doug Lemov (author of “Teach Like a Champion”) who set out to understand exactly how successful teachers behave, in a comprehensive study of teachers across the US. He studied his “game types” from the classroom, and concluded that there are six levels of correction:

- **Non-verbal correction**, for example a hand gesture or proximity - this is the least invasive type of correction
- **Positive group correction**, for example “I’m really glad to see how many people are following my direction.” Lemov recommends that we “narrate the positive”, for example: “OK, here we go! I see pencils moving. I see those ideas rolling out. Jamie’s ready to roll. Keep it up, Marcus!” This approach builds momentum towards the positive behavior
- **Anonymous individual correction**
- **Private individual correction**
- **Lightning-quick public correction**
- **Consequence**, for example a student may have to stand outside the classroom, drawing a lot of attention towards the source of correction - this is the most invasive type of correction

2. Not knowing how to participate. A student may not always understand what is being asked of him, and is not necessarily resisting or defying the teacher on purpose. Lemov calls this technique “What to do”. Green describes “exquisitely specific instructions that master teachers use to help the students understand what is expected of them”. For example, teachers can tell students specific steps to take in a certain situation, by using clear instructions: “Open your folder, look in the left pocket your assignment. Take it out and place it on your desk. Now close the folder, and put it away.”

In her book “Teaching problems and the problems with teaching”, Magdalene Lampert tells the story of a student named Richard, who appeared to be misbehaving but in truth did not have the skills required to carry out the task. Green presents this as a case where specific instructions were appropriate “in the moment.”





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“Great teachers scaffold for days and weeks how to participate in the routines of the classroom. Every routine requires different levels of participation. It is about the scaffolding that the student requires to understand the task in exquisite detail.”

3. Developmental challenges. “One of the most challenging things for any human on earth, especially for a student with disadvantages, is learning how to engage with other people in the world,” states Green. She quotes Carol Lee who defines “developmental learning” as: “How students cultivate and sustain a sense of well-being, competence, facility in interpersonal relationships, and capacity to overcome obstacles.”

Green cites “classroom discussions” as “critical to help students develop as people, and gain the interpersonal skills to understand their feelings”. If a moment of disrespect occurs in the classroom, she recommends finding ways for the students in the class to talk about what happened, and engage with each other on a cultural level.

Green theorizes that the core problem of discipline is centered around the teacher’s response to the student – it all depends on what specifically they do not understand. She references different learning objectives and approaches for different problems.

- For disobedience, the learning objective is compliance and the approach is to correct mistakes.
- If a student does not know how to participate, the learning objective is to learn the relevant academic routines and share specific directions, whilst encouraging repeated practice.
- If the problem is developmental immaturity, the learning objective is linked to developmental skills and the right approach is to actively facilitate mistakes.

In response to her original question of “What is discipline?”, Green encourages us to think differently and return to our “discipline challenge” by asking ourselves, as teachers:

- What is my learning goal?
- What are students not understanding?
- How can I create a situation where students learn what they need to know?

MAIN TAKEAWAY: The core problem of discipline requires specific focus on what the student does not understand, the teacher’s response to the student, and the ongoing learning goal for both sides.

