

Classroom Management Newsletter

Rules and Procedures - Part 2

When creating rules either with or without student input, Kohn (1996) challenges teachers to decide "in whose interest is it to require students to do this or prohibit them from doing that?" (p. 15). Yet some experts also believe rules should simply be followed. Morrish (1998) maintains that rules "exist only when those in a position of authority require compliance" (p. 61). There are rules and laws that govern daily life where any second guessing, or when discretion is left to individuals, will lead to impulsive actions (Morrish, 1998). Morrish uses the analogy of what would happen if drivers had the option of whether to stop at a red light or not? There are some rules that simply need to be obeyed instinctively - Gossen (2001) calls these "bottomlines" and Morrish refers to these as foundation rules. In the end, Morrish believes "children have to be trained to obey foundation rules without question and without discussion. That's the way it is in the adult world and that's the way it should be in the world of children" (p. 49). If foundation rules are ignored, however, it is imperative that educators have effective intervention strategies at their disposal in order to retain a productive learning and teaching environment.

Charles (2002) extrapolated information from his readings of Kohn and developed a list of criteria to determine "how defensible a structure or limit is" (p. 198).

Purpose

A restriction is legitimate to the extent its objective is to protect students from harm, as opposed to imposing order for its own sake.

Restrictiveness

The less restrictive a structure or limit, the better. It is harder, for example, to justify a demand for silence than for quiet voices.

Flexibility

While some structure is helpful, one must always be ready to modify the structure in accordance with student needs.

Developmental appropriateness

Kohn uses the example that while we need to make sure that young children are dressed for winter weather, it is better to let older students decide on such matters for themselves.

Presentation Style

The way in which restrictions are presented makes a big difference in how students accept them. Kohn cites a study that found no negative effects when guidelines for using art supplies were presented respectfully to students. But when the identical rules were presented to another group in a tone that ordered them to comply, the students showed less interest and did less creative work.

Student involvement

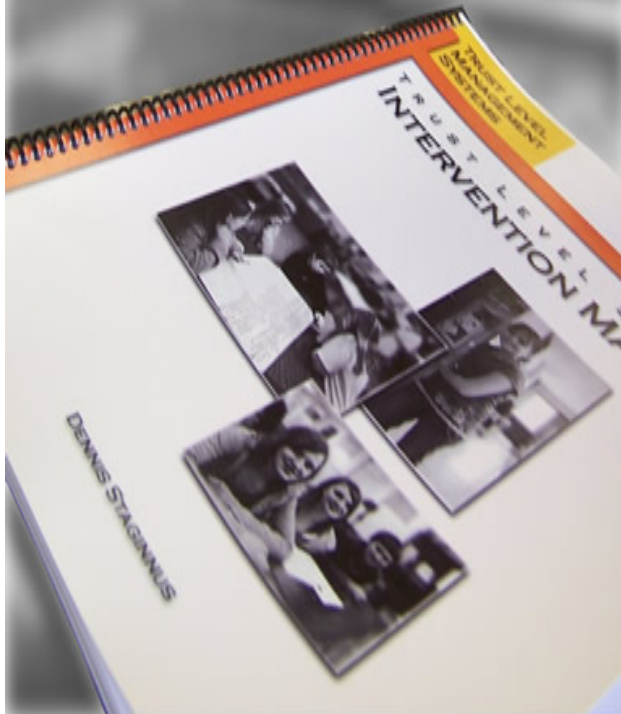
Most importantly, it is student input that makes structure acceptable. When concerns arise, the teacher can ask students "What do you think we can do to solve this problem?"

Next month: Considerations about Interventions - Part 1

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Quote of the Month

"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

- Johann W. von Goethe

Upcoming Events

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