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Application Problem #1- Discipline Model

Tough Love: Running a tight ship while having fun along the way

As teachers we are tasked with the ability to create a safe and enriching learning environment for all students in our care and classroom management is the main vehicle by which we accomplish this important responsibility. At the heart of classroom management is discipline and the procedures or ways in which we foster and encourage appropriate behavior in those young children. Over the course of my observations in the field, carefully examining my cooperating teacher's discipline, and over viewing available discipline models, I have come to acquire my own discipline style. My field experience and time spent in my cooperating teacher's classroom have significantly influenced my views, and therefore before jumping into my discipline model it is important to mention that the particulars of this model may likely change in the event that I receive a position in a younger or older setting than my current placement in 3rd Grade.

My cooperating teacher told me within our first few days of meeting that she likes to “run a tight ship, but also have some fun” and it is from this phrase that I have coined my discipline model “Tough Love: Running a tight ship while having fun along the way”. I have heard many a time that “teachers are the best thieves of good ideas” and I am grateful to have found such an excellent role model in my cooperating teacher. My model stands on the higher end of the spectrum of teacher control, with the teacher acting as an interventionist. Though the majority of the model is founded on interventionism and high teacher control, there are a handful of elements that pull from models in the medium control or interactionalist portion of the continuum. The core of my beliefs on discipline stem from Jones' Positive Classroom Discipline, Skinner's Behavior modification, and Lee and Marlene Canter's Assertive Discipline. These

interventionists have crafted teacher-centered models, in which the teacher has a heavy hand in discipline. Discipline ought to be in the hands of the teacher and it the teacher's responsibility to make expectations and standards of behavior known to students (Canter). It should be emphasized that the rules are in place to keep the classroom environment safe and that they are not meant to squeeze the fun out of learning, in fact they are there to help allow for fun to take place in a safe manner. In addition to making expectations known, teachers ought to create incentives and punishers because according to Skinner's theory on behavior modification behavior is shaped in a great deal by the events that take place after its occurrence. Following his theory, positive reinforcement (in the form of praise or treats) should be a result of appropriate behavior and punishment should be a consequence of inappropriate behavior. While rewards and punishments are important to my model of discipline, these rewards and punishments are useless if they aren't implemented consistently (Canter). Additionally, Skinner has found that a variable schedule of reinforcement, in which treats and praise are handed out in an unfixed manner, reinforces behavior better than if treats are given each and every time a child acts appropriately. Though punishment is made known to students in my model of discipline, I place more of an emphasis on positive reinforcement and have so-called "last resort" plans for children who misbehave, causing my model to align best with Jones' Positive Classroom Discipline.

As one can gleam, the "Tough Love" model predominately values high teacher control and although teacher control is important, my discipline beliefs also value the fact that students must realize that their choices are not made in a vacuum with no impact on others. Rather their choices affect those around them and they must be made aware that they are responsible for their actions, whether good or bad. Interactionalist Gathercoal purported that the classroom prepares students to become responsible citizens in the post-graduation world. Though I do not agree

with the entirety of his philosophy, specifically the fact that students can do entirely as they please if their actions don't impede upon the rights of others because in my opinion 3rd grade students necessitate a bit more guidance, his citizenship preparation fits nicely into my model.

To implement the "Tough Love" model of discipline a positive reinforcement behavior system with rules and expectations would need to be created. On day one of the school year, the teacher would need to sit down with the students and discuss the classroom rules. Students would have the opportunity to discuss rules they think are important, but it would be the teacher's ultimate responsibility to choose the rules and make expectations clear. It could be explained to students that the rules are in place to create a safe learning environment and that students have a choice to either follow the rules and act appropriately or choose to misbehave and act inappropriately. It should be made clear to students that they can receive positive reinforcement for good choices and consequences for bad choices because we are all responsible for our choices.

My cooperating teacher has developed an excellent system of positive reinforcement on the basis of tickets and treats, that I would like to implement as part of my discipline model. Students receive tickets if they are making good choices and they write their names on the tickets and place them in the "Good Citizen" jar. Throughout the day, if the class is making good choices as a whole, then tickets are pulled. Two tickets are generally pulled at the end of the day, so long as the class has been generally well behaved throughout the day. Probability plays an important role in the behavior system because those who have more tickets in the jar have a higher chance of being picked and when a ticket is pulled the student may pick either an edible or non-edible treat. Giving tickets to children not only impacts the behavior of the rewarded child but also encourages those around the student to check their own behavior and make good

choices. When giving tickets Mrs. Miller will frequently say “Thank you for making good choices”, encouraging the student and their classmates to make good choices throughout the day. There is a punishment system in place in which students move their numbered sea stars from the green basket to yellow and to red, depending on how many times the student has been asked to stop misbehaving, but I have rarely seen this system in use because the children want to be good. On my first day in the classroom I would have guessed that the consequences would be need to be used more frequently, but have been stunned by the amazing behavior in the classroom. The students want to behave, not only to receive a higher chance of having their ticket pulled from the jar, but more importantly because they want to make good choices and understand the impact their bad choices have on the class. A handful of children can make the difference and prevent tickets from being pulled, and therefore the students work together to behave well so that tickets can be pulled from the jar. As mentioned before I am grateful to have been placed in my cooperating teacher’s classroom and feel that I have been able to gain many tricks of the trade and countless insights from her teaching.