# Discipline is the Key to Effective Learning

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I have been involved in education for 25 years, spending equal time in the trenches (classroom) and behind the "firing line" (administration).  Both of my parents began their careers as classroom teachers and retired as administrators.

Being raised by strong educators exposed me to the performance-enhancing properties of learning environments that have clearly defined behavior standards and clearly defined progressive discipline guidelines.  High standards for behavior coupled with strict enforcement of discipline policies are the building blocks for effective classroom management.

I vividly recall my third-grade and seventh-grade classrooms.  Both classrooms we chaotic, not conducive to teaching or learning.  I further recall that a great deal of classroom time was consumed by teacher engaging in "lengthy" dialogue with the two or three students who broke the rules.  The misdirected energies of the teacher deprived me and other students of quality instruction.

That's why so much of my summer was spent in tutoring sessions with my parents.  Fortunately for me, our household had the resources to accommodate my educational needs.  Unfortunately for others, their needs went unmet.

I also recall other teachers who appeared to be on a "natural high" while engaged in instruction.

They were able to weave anecdotal stories throughout our class activities.

Their ability to introduce new concepts, almost effortlessly, camouflaged the fact that we were actually "learning."  Their classrooms were fun and challenging at the same time.

These teachers also understood how to seamlessly move from the opening morning greeting to the Pledge of Allegiance then to the "Red Robin" reading group and on to the "Blue Bird" Spelling and Phonics lessons.  Their classrooms were harmonious breeding grounds for teaching and learning.  Their successful classrooms were the by product of a well-executed lesson plan and a discipline.

As a student of learning, I observed that most successful teachers were intelligent, patient, caring and organized.  It became crystal clear that students who were part of an organized and well-managed classroom received greater opportunities for learning.  Student/teacher discipline problems and classroom disruptions only mirrored the lack of skill that a teacher had with group dynamics and classroom management.

The current education debate concerns itself with "Bridging the Achievement Gap," "Improving Schools" and "Improving Instruction."

My concern is that the efforts to create better classroom environments and classroom training for teachers may have been placed on the back burners of "Leave No Child Behind."

We all agree that the purpose of education is to help prepare students for success in school and in life.  But we also know that children cannot develop and learn in chaotic classroom environments.  There must be a sense of order in our schools.  Adults who have a keen sense and understanding of how to establish good relationships with students are best at demonstrating effective classroom management skills.

The annual Gallup Poll and the recent Public Opinion research report have identified the "lack of discipline" as the most serious problem facing the nation's education system.

We ought to pay attention to what people are saying.  Today, classroom teachers face many challenges aside from providing clear and concise instruction from state-mandated curriculum standards.  Teachers must be familiar with behaviors that produce effective classroom management.  They must be familiar with approaches that establish and maintain positive, orderly classrooms.  Engaging in misbehavior is sometimes a response to academic failure.

In all of our die-hard attempts to improve schools, we must also keep our focus on the importance of training teachers on how to create classroom environments that are conducive to keeping all student academically engaged.