



How Teachers' Teaching Styles, Parents' Attitude, and School Management Affecting Students' Self-Regulating Competence

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“I forgot to bring my English textbook, teacher.” “I forgot to take my homework home, teacher.” That’s what we, as teachers, often hear from students. Other than that, most students are “passive learners”, and teachers often complaint about students nowadays is difficult to teach. Parents are often seen around school campus, carrying their children’s backpacks for them. Students, using the pay phones, asking someone at home to bring the textbooks or homework for them are also seen before the first period starts. Why is this happening? Can students take care of themselves, in regarding school matters, or, just simply daily routines?

The phrase “Self-Regulating”, according to Maryellen Weimer, the associate professor at Penn State University, “It’s not a mental ability or an academic performance skill; rather it is the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills.” (Weimer, 2010) Students need to have the ability to control themselves before he can learn in school. Lucky enough, I got a chance to be a part of New Taipei City Delegation, visiting schools and observing classes in the area of New Jersey and New York. Since there were 18 members (7 school principals and 10 teachers) in our delegation, we were divided into two teams, visiting different schools and observing students in different grade levels in Freehold School District, New Jersey, and we could get to see more interactions with teachers and students. The schools visits in New Jersey and New York were listed as followed:

10/06/2014	Freehold Learning Center	Park Avenue Elementary School
10/07/2014	Asher Holmes Elementary School	Robertsville Rd Elementary School
10/08/2014	Colts Neck High School	
10/14/2014	Fresh Meadow School PS 173	
10/15/2014	PS 244	
10/16/2014	Avenues World School	

We arrived early at the first school visit, the Freehold Learning Center. We were taken to an open area where all students were gathering, waiting for something. Out of curiosity, our delegation asked the school principal, Mr. William Smith, about the waiting. “Oh, the children are waiting for their teachers coming to pick them up, so they can go to their classroom.” “Waiting? Can’t they go to the classroom by themselves?”, someone asked. “No, they can’t. They have to wait for their homeroom teacher to pick them up.”

At around 8:35AM, the homeroom teachers all came to the room to pick up the students. This was what I saw:



The students were all lining up, taking turns to go to their classrooms. For the students that didn’t have the turn yet, they needed to sit on the ground waiting quietly. While we were there, the room was quiet, with only low talking voice. That’s a proof showing good self-regulating competence for sure!

As the visit went along, we had also talked to other school principals and superintendents. I had a brief interview with the school principal, Mr. Patrick Mulhern at Park Avenue Elementary School, asking about what I saw. He mentioned about the “Parent-Student Handbook” that’s given to every student at the beginning of school year. Parents and students are obligated to follow the rules and regulations in the handbook. “What if the students break the rules, or have disciplinary problems?” I asked. Mr. Mulhern thought for a while and replied: “Very few, actually. Most of the parents and students are able to follow the handbook pretty well. If there’s really a problem, the student will be send to my office, and I’ll inform the parents to come to the office to pick him up after school. But I’ll also talk to the parents in my office before they leave. The parents must understand that they are also accountable for the behavior issues that students have. We’re just here to educate them, but the parents need to teach them at home as well.” Of course, the parents! Parents need to get parts in school and respect the decisions that school made if a student did break the rules



and regulations! We felt thankful that Mr. Mulhern was willing to give us a copy of parent-student handbook as our reference. I read the rules and regulations within the handbook, something really caught my eyes:

Academic Expectations:

- Work to the best of his/her ability.
- Bring and/or use property any necessary materials, notebooks, writing instruments...
- Display an eagerness to learn and a positive approach to work.
- Participate actively in daily lessons.
- Direct all attention to the lesson.
- Prepare all assignments promptly, accurately, completely, and neatly.
- Prepare thoroughly for tests.
- Seek extra help/assistance whenever necessary.
- Cooperate with the teacher at all times and follow directions.

Within the handbook, there are also one section, “Code of Conduct”, in which students are obligated to follow:

Student Code of Conduct

- Prepare mentally and physically for the process of learning.
- Demonstrate respect for people and property.
- Take responsibility for your own behavior and learning.
- Share responsibilities when working in a group.



Fifth grade students were sharing ideas during class, Park Avenue Elementary School, NJ.



Answering math questions in class.

Dr. Danny Robertozzi, Superintendent of Linden Public Schools, New Jersey, had also shared the elementary school student handbook with us. On the handbook, it is clearly stated:

Appropriate Behavior

- Be prepared for class.
- Complete all class work and homework.
- Use class time properly.
- Take home and return necessary forms.
- Follow rules and regulations.
- Take care of and return all textbooks, library books and other school-owned materials loaned to them.
- Follow directions given by the teachers and staff.
- Demonstrate respect for self, others and the environment.

Out of my imagination, there's a rule for students to follow here:

Playground Rules

- Stay in assigned areas.
- No chasing each other.
- No fighting. (This includes “play fighting”)
- No name calling or teasing.
- Use playground equipment properly.
- Keep hands and feet to yourself.

The code of conduct in Linden Public Elementary Schools varies on the severities and number of offenses. Listed are just some often seem offenses: (Linden Public Schools, 2014-2015. Link: http://www.linden.k12.nj.us/?page_id=170)

Violations	First Offense	Second Offense	Third Offense
Disobedience	1 day out of school suspension	2 days out of school suspension Parent Conference	3 days detention out of school suspension
Disrespect	Verbal Reprimand/ Conference with Principal	1 day loss of recess	2 days loss of recess Parent Conference



Disrupt school work, school activities, or function.	Conference with Principal One day loss of recess	Parent Conference with Principal Two days loss of recess	Parent Conference With Principal One day out of school suspension.
Unauthorized use of cell phone, MP3 player and others	Principal will confiscate and return to parents	Parent notification one day loss of recess, Principal will confiscate	Parent notification Two days loss of recess, Principal will confiscate
Unsafe Physical Actions: throwing, Pushing	1 day loss of recess	2 days loss of recess, Parent Conference	2 days out of school suspension
Fighting (include play fighting)	1 day out of school suspension (2 or 3 days depending on severity of fight)	3 days of out of school suspension	4 days of out of school suspension
Threat	5+ days out of school suspension, police notification, possible expulsion hearing, counseling.	Same as First	Same as first

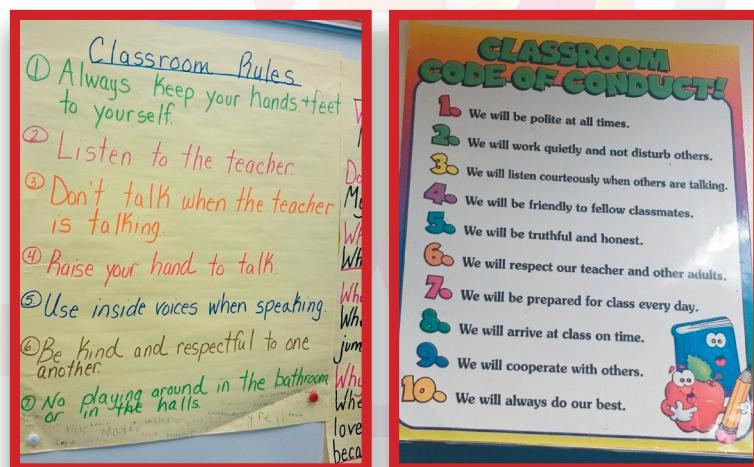
Suspensions may sound serious, but I also find this paragraph extremely important:

“Most out-of-school suspensions are an indication that the severity of the student’s behavior requires parental involvement, responsibility, and cooperation to affect a change in the student’s behavior.” Parents, too, play a crucial part in students’ disciplinary issues, and need to supportive, work closely with schools and shows respect to the teachers.

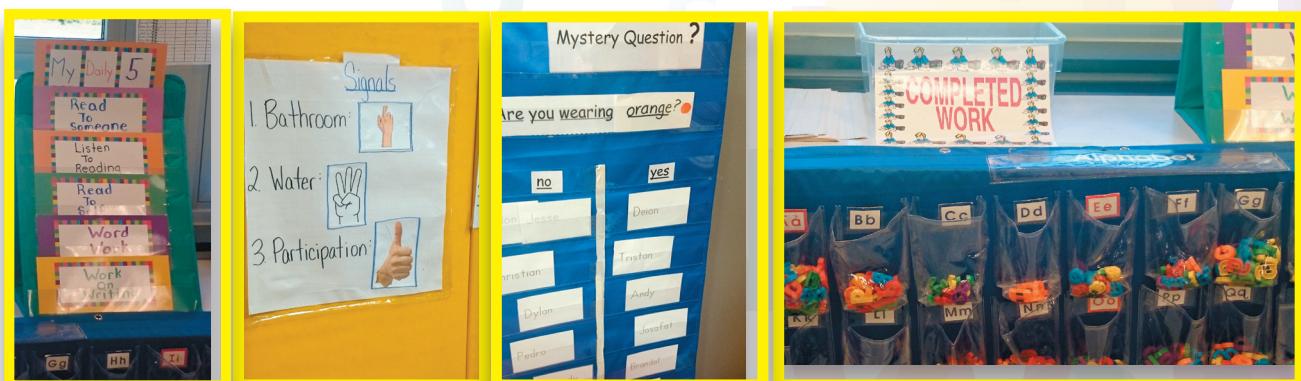
This plays a crucial part in developing students’ self-regulating competence, since the parents are there just to assist, not doing everything for them; they’re responsible for their learning.

During my classroom observation in New Jersey and New York, I had noticed

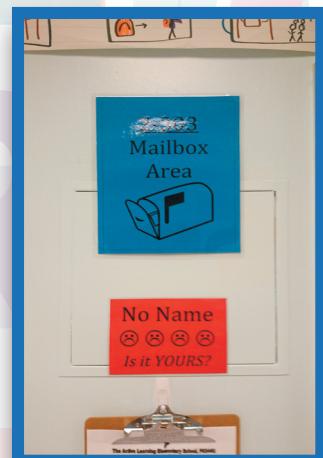
that teachers didn't need to use microphones in class. They could easily teach a classroom sized up to 30 or more students, but could talk in their normal voice. Teachers showed warm and supportive attitude toward students, and students showed respect to the teachers and their peers; they could talk in a soft voice even when they were having group discussions. While I was observing the classes, I saw many displays and areas that helped to remind the students what to do or behave in class.



Classroom Rules and Code of Conduct in Park Avenue Elementary School, NJ.



Displays and areas for early finishers. (PS173 and 244, New York.)



When students turned in homework with no names on, this was where they would go~ put on the clipboard. (PS244, New York)



While in New York, we had a chance to stay in a school for a full, complete day, so all teachers could be very clear on how a day went in school. So we went to a blue-ribboned school in Flushing New York: Fresh Meadow School, PS173. I chose to observe a second grade classroom. The class schedule looked as followed:

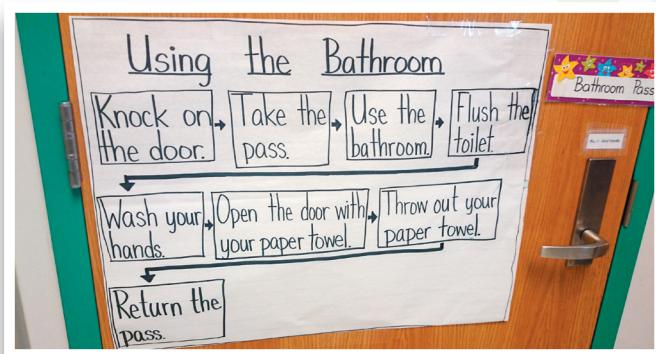


The class schedule in 2nd grade classroom, PS173

As I looked through the class schedule, realizing there's no recess between classes. The homeroom teacher told me that students didn't have recess time except for after lunch. If they wanted to go to the bathroom during class hours, they needed to have a bathroom pass given by the teacher. Students need to show the bathroom pass to the teacher in the hallway, than the teacher would let the student going into the bathroom. In addition, during the lunch break, some members in the delegation also asked the school principal, Dawn Boursiquot, about bathroom pass, recess time, and other excuses when students were not in class sessions. "Where there's a student, there's a teacher to look after him. We never let any single student to be out of our sight. Even now when they're out at the playground after lunch, there are teachers to look after them." the principal said. That's really shocking to know that teachers are responsible for student safety, even during recess. After lunch, before my partner and I could begin our introduction about Taiwan to the 2nd graders, we experienced a so-called "The soft lockdown". When we had no idea what's happening, teachers nearby called us to go inside their classrooms. During the period of soft lockdown, all

the people must stay indoors, with the doors locked and lights out. All people must stay quiet and squat down. While my partner and I stayed with the students indoors, almost all students showed high self-restraint ability. Only a few students couldn't stay still for too long, but after the teacher calmed them down, they had no trouble to stay quiet until the lockdown was lifted. When my partner and I could finally begin our introduction, the 2nd graders had been waited for more than half an hour. As my partner and I took turns on teaching the class, students showed great participation and love to answer the questions we asked. What an unforgettable experience we had!

On the following day, when we visited PS244 in New York, I found a “Rule” on going to the bathroom in the classroom.



Other than that, schools in New Jersey and New York encourage students to pair up and do the “Partner Talk”. As they paired up, there’s only a low talking voice, even with more than 30 students in a classroom.



Poster showing how to do partner talk.

As mentioned before, teachers often showed a warm, encouraging, but firm manner when teaching or talking to the students. Students knew exactly what teachers expected of them: to be responsible on his behavior and work, also showing respect



to others during partner talk or other team work. When a mistake was made, teachers and parents showed encouragement to help the students to “try again”. Parents can get involved in his child’s learning by becoming a member in the school’s PTA (Parent-Teacher Association), or attending the school’s open houses, which is intended to facilitate parental participation in a school, or to work closely with the teachers, so the parents can clearly know how his child is doing at school. Parents cannot be left out at any part of his child’s school education. Parental help and involvement are important, but not overly interfere with teachers’ teaching or school operation.

The delegation returned to Taiwan on Oct.18th, 2014. When I began working on the 20th, I began to implement more encouragement words with my students. When there’s a group showed high self-regulating competence, I would give immediate praise by saying “Group two, you’re doing great. I really like the way you behave.” When other groups hear the praise, they immediately lowered their voice, with their back straight and show high spirit in learning. So I believe that what students really need in turns of developing self-regulating competence is learned through positive and appropriate languages given by teachers and parents. Modelling is also very important for students to follow. Bad language is not allowed in my classroom, and students have never heard me saying it. Believe it or not, the frequency of students saying it is decreasing as well. Self-regulating competence is a learned process, and that’s why we, as teachers and parents, need to show them the right way. I will keep reminding myself to use more positive words in encouraging students’ learning, and they will definitely become better and happier learners with high self-regulating competence!