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Classroom Environment Reflection

I have been a teacher for 14 years. My current position has me teaching in a Catholic School system of approximately 400 students. Students in our system are very diverse. 85% come from a middle class family. 4% come from families that the government would consider wealthy. The rest come from families that are receiving some sort of financial assistance. Roughly 9% of our High School students are international students. We do not have any students with severe learning or physical disabilities. However, there are a small number of students that study and learn with the aid of an ISP. Most, if not all of the ISP.'s that I see in my studio classes are for students that need extra time for assignments.

I teach Physical Education for the K-5 students along with Health for grades 3-5. In addition, I teach High School electives in Physical Education and Art. The K-5 grades each have two classes that are around 18 students. The High School electives vary in size. The studio Art classes are usually around 12-15 students. The Physical Education classes can be anywhere from 12-36 students in size.

For this reflection, I want to focus on the environment in my High School studio Art classes. These 10 week elective classes can potentially pose a dangerous setting based on the materials and tools used. It's imperative that safety is a top priority in these classrooms. We use sharp tools, acetylene torches, a firing kiln, saws, drills, buffing machines and toxic acidic mixtures. If used inappropriately or carelessly all of these can pose a threat of injury.

Consistency is a key to managing the environment in our studio Art classes at our High School. There is another Art teacher in the High School, so it was important that we have the same classroom guidelines. She and I sat down and used Danielson's Framework for Teaching, Domain 2 as a guide and set up classroom policies that are clear and strict. The expectations of each student are clearly defined. Our policy plan gives each student responsibilities, such as cleaning their working space and tools at the end of each class period. We demonstrated the proper use of the materials and tools and made it clear that any usage different than what was instructed would require intervention. We both agreed that if the lessons were engaging and moved along quickly by setting fair but appropriate deadlines that the students were less likely to act inappropriately because they'd be more invested in the work rather than being off track. The studio elective Art metals does however present particular challenges in the management of some classroom procedures. The class often requires me to be one-on-one with a student in a separate room from the rest of the class. The casting machine and soldering torch are in a small room off from the main classroom. Monitoring classroom behavior is a challenge during these occasions.

We have two studio art rooms and their layouts are similar. We arrange five tables together to create one large working area. The cabinets and drawers are labeled with what is in them. Specific working areas such as metal buffing machines, drill areas and clay wedging tables, have the procedures and safety guidelines posted near them reminders.

Another main aspect of my classroom management is my rapport with my students. I want the students to know me and I want to know them personally. I am in a

very unique position in my system because most of the kids that I teach in High School are kids I've known since they were in elementary school and even younger. I've been privileged to see these kids grow up. I know them, and they know me. There's a level of trust and understanding that we have developed over time and it helps a lot in how they act around me and how I treat them. They know I care about them. I feel this is important because if they know and understand that I truly care, then they'll realize that any rules or guidelines I have for them in the classroom is because of no other reason than I want them to be safe and to succeed.

I've always made a conscious effort to not only allow but strongly encourage social interaction between the students themselves. I want them to talk to each other. I want them to collaborate. In fact, collaborative inquiry is a major component to almost all of my lessons. Here's an example: Last quarter I taught a studio ceramics class. The first student that finished our first project of the quarter, I took and did a one-on-one demonstration of the basics of using the potter's wheel. The next person that completed the project was then taught the basics of the potter's wheel by the student that I empowered through mentoring. I stood by and watched to fill in things that maybe were lacking in the instruction but the student's did the teaching. The subsequent students were taught by the student that preceded them. It's so interesting because the students are able to offer possible solutions to difficulties in working on the wheel that I may not have been able to because they have a completely different perspective of the machine. In addition, the students act more responsible because they earned some control. They were doing the instruction. They were actively engaged in what they are learning and how they were taught.