

Classroom Management for Successful Student Inquiry

From WP Baker, M Lang and AE Lawson. 2000. Classroom Management. Vol. 75, No. 5

Concerns

Time and Energy

- Difficulty monitoring 6-8 different groups
- Class period time constraints
- Not enough time to set up in between class periods
- Teachers not willing to go beyond the text

Classroom Constraints

- Too many students
- Too little space
- Too many interruptions
- Inquiry is too noisy
- Physical set up of room, tables, and chairs does not promote interaction

Reading Level and Language Skills

- Language barriers
- Students with limited writing proficiency have difficulty with lab reports

Student Immaturity

- Many have short attention spans
- Students do not stay in groups
- Lack of cooperative learning skills
- Students do not follow directions

Safety Concerns

- Overall safety with materials
- Students do not always follow safety rules
- Students who play, not investigate
- Restrictions on chemicals or animals in the classroom

Thinking Skills Required

- Students with diverse learning levels
- Students lack data collection skills

Solutions

Time and Energy

- Teachers should become familiar with lesson ahead of time
- Prepare all equipment in advance
- Plan ahead for clean-up/set-up and enlist student helpers

Classroom Constraints

- Rearrange desks
- Use a set-up conducive to monitoring (horseshoe or u-shape)
- Split the class and alternate stages of inquiry
- Explore team teaching

Reading Levels and Language Skills

- Plan groups to include a mix of levels, late students, and language skills
- Use peer tutors
- Use ESL resources for vocabulary and worksheets

Student Immaturity

- Teach cooperative learning skills first
- Give feedback throughout
- Monitor groups and provide feedback on roles
- Use predetermined signals for noise reduction
- Try team building activities or sensitivity training
- Begin with structured inquiries and gradually decrease structure

Safety Concerns

- Anticipate problems
- Teach safety first
- Enforce rules and consequences
- Have students develop their own directions based on objectives of the lesson

Thinking Skills Required

- Model data collection procedures
- Use thinking skills pretests
- Modify activities to meet individual student levels
- Try mixed ability groups

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Concerns

Sequencing

- Tardy or absent students
- Groups finish at different times
- Text use is required

Support

- Not enough supervisors or adults for groups
- No parent support
- Administrators are not familiar with hands-on learning
- Curriculum emphasizes reading and math, but not science
- No financial support

Materials Management

- Materials get broken, lost, and stolen
- Materials not in kit supplied with textbook resources

Solutions

Sequencing

- Allow students time to explore freely
- Work with tardy or absent students after school
- Assign peer tutors for tardy or absent students after school

Support

- Talk to administrators about needs in order to do inquiry
- Provide overview of needs in teacher/administrative inservices
- Point out that it is required for science assessment
- Bring parents in through letters home or science day activities

Materials Management

- Plan ahead for clean-up and set-up
- Enlist student helpers
- Use simple inventory control, like labeling items in kits
- Keep materials in a tub or box so students know where to return them
- Emphasize the importance of the material manager role