Dealing with Resistant Students in Language Classes: Solutions

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with teaching English and conducting a lesson. It discusses about the problems of working with students, especially, resistant students and finds out solutions to this issue.

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As we know that teaching and dealing with students in learning is one of the difficult thing teaching process. In addition, there are different type of students who have different personalities. The most difficult work is to deal with resistant students. While stress caused by common core concerns has dominated the recent education landscape, dealing with 'Difficult' Students remains the number one source of constant tension for most teachers.

Continual exposure to students who won't behave or produce can quickly erode both confidence and well-being. As a new school year approaches, the guidance offered by six 'pillars' can help you stay at the top of your game by dramatically influencing even your most challenging students to want to behave and achieve. Each pillar is explained followed by a few hands-on suggestions. Add or substitute other methods within each pillar to reflect your style and preference.

Strategies for growing closer to your most challenging students:

1. Trust - build trust so that you can build a real, working, functional student-teacher relationship. The vast majority of teachers care deeply for and about their students. Yet by middle school, less than half of all students believe they would be missed by their teacher(s) if they didn't come to school. Perhaps we need to be more demonstrative in showing the caring that is in our hearts. Make it a top goal to be cheerleaders for your students, particularly those students whose actions make others want to turn away from them. Recognize them when objectionable behaviors are not happening. Thank them for their cooperation and make time to ask how they managed to look after themselves. Create a classroom climate where students help and even "cheer" for each other. One simple thing you can do to get started is to have students finish these sentences:

One thing I do well at school and if asked I could help somebody else with is_____.

One thing I do well at home and if asked I could help somebody else with is_____.

A strength most people don't know about me is_____.

When I need help I_____.

2. Engagement - make the learning compelling. A frequent complaint by students when we are teaching subject matter content is "When are we going to ever use this?" Many students fail to see the relevance between our content and their lives. When they don't, they may become bored and uninterested. Students who have learned to value school because they see the connection between a good education and success in life can tolerate boring classrooms. Otherwise, they don't. Motivation and discipline problems are often the result.[1]

Make it a goal to begin each class with something that grabs their attention and then try to connect it to the lesson you are teaching: a great story; an existential question; a joke; an experiment; an interesting photo. If you cannot find a way to make the lesson relevant, at least connect with your students for a few seconds every day around something you know they find interesting (Hint: Music, Sports, Video Games, and Money are virtually always of interest to kids).

Show your knowledge and/or ignorance (i.e. Mara, I caught a little bit of Lil Wayne the other day who I know you listen to, and to be honest, I couldn't understand his message. Help an old guy like me understand what I'm missing?)

Rarely will a student refuse to engage when you capture their attention and interest.

3. Personalization what you emphasize. For example, cultivate responsibility on a student-by-student basis. Children are not born responsible. It is a skill they need to learn. The best ways to promote responsibility are with involvement, ownership, and choices with limits (i.e. you can answer any five that best shows you understand the main causes of the Civil War, or you can create a song with clean lyrics that includes the main causes).

Get your students involved in making decisions about as many things as you can. Try to avoid immediately giving them your solutions or consequences and instead ask questions leading them to think on their own. Find ways to give your students choices they can handle, celebrate with them when their choices work out and hold them accountable when they make mistakes.[2]

For example, "Jose, it looks like you thought you could get by without doing any work. The results of your test show that the strategy didn't work out. So let's look at what you can do to get the practice we both know you need to be more successful. I have a few ideas (don't share them right away) but I bet you do as well (encourage students to first come up with their own solutions and then try to help them anticipate what the consequences of their choice might be).

Then ask, "What do you think?"

4. Positivity - build momentum. Nobody starts school expecting to fail. Yet failure is probably the number one in-school factor that causes students to become disaffected, uninterested, unmotivated, and disruptive. Challenge your students to get better every day in your subject than they were yesterday. For example, "You got the first three correct and that is good. I am proud of you. But let's see if you can do it two days in a row. Good luck."

Create and modify assignments, quizzes, tests, and behavioral expectations based upon this premise. Build an "APPP" for success. These are the keys: *Appear, Prepare, Plan* and *Practice.* Get your kids to understand that "getting better than you were yesterday" is the daily standard of success. Great teachers make it between hard and impossible for their students to fail. They convey an attitude of success: "Don't ever expect me to give up on you and never give up on yourself."

[1]. Gresham, F. (2004). Establishing the technical adequacy of functional behavioral assessment: Conceptual and measurement challenges. Behavioral Disorders, 28(3), 282–98

[2]. Engelmann, S., &Carnine, D. (1983). Theory of instruction: Principles and applications. New York: Irvington.

Praise them when they do well, with your focus being on the effort and the strategy they used. For example, "Carter, you did well because you kept at it and tried three different ways to solve the problem."

Stay away from praise for factors over which they really have no control (i.e. "See, you did well because you are so smart!").

Do the same for yourself! (i.e. "I got through to Laurie because I took the time to focus on her interests.")

5. Safety - make sure they feel intellectually, creatively, emotionally, and physically 'safe'. Be very clear about the details you expect your students to follow for a safe and smooth functioning classroom.[3]

Among other things that may be specific to your subject, these should include how to enter the classroom, where to find the assignment, what to do if a pencil breaks, how to get permission for a drink or the bathroom, how to walk through the halls, line up and take turns.

It is important that these procedures be both explained and practiced. When you notice a procedure being followed well, point this out. Reinforcement always helps.

Perhaps the most important procedure that relates specifically to 'difficult' students behavior is to let all your students know that it will be rare for you to stop class to handle somebody's misbehavior for two reasons:

1. You have no interest in either embarrassing the student or yourself.

2. You will not sacrifice instructional time to handle misbehavior.

Let your students know that virtually always you will see the student after class or during a more private moment and it will be then that you will either give a consequence or otherwise figure out a solution with the student. Tell your students,

"If and when somebody breaks a rule, it may look as if I am ignoring what they did. I don't ignore bad behavior but I am not always going to stop class to deal with it because that would waste too much time and possibly be embarrassing. So understand that if you break a rule, there are consequences, but most of the time those will be given after class or when it won't take away from everybody's learning."

When something happens that demands a response but you want to postpone taking action say something like, "I know you all just heard (saw) what Ethan did and most of you are probably wondering what I am going to do about it.[4]

6. Help them rebuild what they consider 'fun' - the more you enjoy doing what you do, the more students will *want* to be around you. Enthusiasm is contagious, so be animated when you teach and have fun with your students and the curriculum. Laugh with them!

Watching 'difficult' students pursue knowledge that interests them is an exciting, dynamic experience. The idea of learning being 'fun' may be a new concept for them. Help them grow their 'learning is fun' muscle while also helping them understand that there are different *kinds* of fun as well.

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[3]. Gresham, F. (2004). Establishing the technical adequacy of functional behavioral assessment: Conceptual and measurement challenges. Behavioral Disorders, 28(3), 282–98

[4]. Brophy, J. (1983). Classroom organization and management. Elementary School Journal, 83(4), 265–85

Of course, not every lesson is 'fun,' but you can even add an element of fun to a boring lesson by announcing in advance how boring the unit is likely to be!

Don't hide from them (I have yet to find a really interesting way to teach_____so the next fifteen minutes are likely to be really boring but also important for you to pay attention. By the way, if you can think of a more interesting way to teach_____after class let me know because I'd love to find a better way).

Challenge them to be last to 'moan and groan during the lesson' (if you think it is necessary although the challenge is usually enough, offer some kind of reward like winner gets five extra points, a special smiley sticker, or an extra bathroom pass) but at the end, allow for some brief "moan and groan" time. Permit yourself to be one of the loudest! They'll love it when you show that you can out-groan them.

There are lots of ways to make your class welcoming, relevant, successful, involving, safe and pleasurable and it all starts with you! Connect these six pillars to your daily curriculum and interactions. Your kids will benefit and so will you.

Effective teachers discipline with encouragement and kind words much more often than rebukes or reprimands. The goal is to help students feel good about themselves and their behavior in the classroom.[5]

Inevitably, though, misbehavior happens. When it does, keep the collected wisdom of experienced teachers in mind:

✓ Take a deep breath and try to remain calm. It's natural to be overcome with frustration, resentment, and anger. But when you are, you become less rational, and your agitation becomes contagious.

✓ Try to set a positive tone and model an appropriate response, even if it means you must take a few moments to compose yourself. Acknowledge that you need time to think, time to respond. "This is upsetting me, too, but I need a few minutes to think before we talk about it."

✓ Make sure students understand that it's their misbehavior you dislike, not them. "I like you, Jason. Right now, your behavior is unacceptable."

✓ Give the misbehaving student a chance to respond positively by explaining not only what he or she is doing wrong, but also what he or she can do to correct it.

✓ Never resort to blame or ridicule.

✓ Avoid win-lose conflicts. Emphasize problem-solving instead of punishment.

✓ Insist that students accept responsibility for their behavior.

✓ Try to remain courteous in the face of hostility or anger. Showing students that you care about them and their problems will help you earn their respect and establish rapport.

✓ Treat *all* students respectfully and politely. Be consistent in what you let them say and do. Becarefulnottofavorcertainstudents.

✓ Be an attentive listener. Encourage students to talk out feelings and concerns and help them clarify their comments by restating them.

[5]. Engelmann, S., &Carnine, D. (1983). Theory of instruction: Principles and applications. New York: Irvington.

✓ Model the behavior you expect from your students. Are you as considerate of your students' feelings as you want them to be of others? Are you as organized and on-task as you tell them to be? Are your classroom rules clear and easy for students to follow?

✓ Specifically describe misbehavior and help students understand the consequences of misbehavior. Very young children may even need your explanations modeled or acted out.

✓ Be aware of cultural differences. For example, a student who stares at the floor while you speak to him or her would be viewed as defiant in some cultures and respectful in others.

✓ Discourage cliques and other antisocial behavior. Offer cooperative activities to encourage group identity.

✓ Teach students personal and social skills — communicating, listening, helping, and sharing, for example.

✓ Teach students academic survival skills, such as paying attention, following directions, asking for help when they really need it, and volunteering to answer.

✓ Avoid labeling students as "good" or "bad." Instead describe their behavior as "positive," "acceptable," "disruptive," or "unacceptable."

✓ Focus on recognizing and rewarding acceptable behavior more than punishing misbehavior.

✓ Ignore or minimize minor problems instead of disrupting the class. A glance, a directed question, or your proximity may be enough to stop misbehavior.

✓ Where reprimands are necessary, state them quickly and without disrupting the class.

✓ When it's necessary to speak to a student about his or her behavior, try to speak in private; this is especially true of adolescents who must "perform" for their peers. Public reprimands or lectures often trigger exaggerated, face-saving performances.

When Personalities Clash . . .

Sometimes, despite our best intentions, we find ourselves actively disliking one of the students in our charge. The student may be rude, disrespectful, disruptive, obnoxious, or otherwise annoying. It's just human nature; some personalities clash. But instead of feeling guilty about our feelings, we can take positive steps to improve them, says school psychologist and teacher Shelley Krapes. Here are some of her suggestions:

✓ Try to understand where the behavior is coming from. Is the student distressed by a death, divorce, new baby, learning disability, or some other overwhelming experience? Speaking to the student's parents or guardian may shed light on underlying causes and help you develop sympathy through understanding.

✓ Help yourself manage negative feelings by reflecting on a past situation in your life where a similar conflict occurred. Discuss the situation with a friend or by writing your thoughts in a journal. Making and understanding these connections can help you let go of some of your current hostility or resentment.

✓ Use positive strategies when dealing with the child. One such strategy is addressing specific behaviors with precise language that describes what needs to be done. In addition, try to seat the student near to you or a helpful student, praise the student liberally but sincerely, give the student

choices to promote self-worth and feelings of control, be firm and consistent about your rules, and express displeasure with the student's behavior without criticizing the student.[6]

✓ Set a goal. If the situation between you and the child has not improved after two or three months of your best effort, it may be time to recommend professional/psychological/educational testing. Someproblemsareverycomplexandbeyondyourcontrol.

To conclude, resistant learners are one of the many challenges critical care educators face. The educator must be aware of the elements that contribute to learner resistance and work effectively to eliminate them. Efforts should be made to design programs that are outcome focused and provide direct benefit to each learner. When resistance presents, the educator must search for ways to secure the resisters' buy-in or minimize their impact. Managing resistant learners is never easy, but when the educator is armed with the right tools, their negative impact can be reduced or eliminated.

References

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