

Class Deterioration in Elementary Schools

Teacher Awareness

Important Points.

- Make an effort to learn about the particular grade or class. Get a good grasp of the situation as quickly as possible.
- Do not criticize a problematic class' homeroom teacher. Instead, view class deterioration as a crisis affecting the whole school and offer systematic support accordingly.
- Pay attention to students and interact with them even in casual circumstances. By providing them with praise and positive interactions here, teachers can restore students' self-confidence and create a relationship of mutual trust.
- Approach the problem in close cooperation with the child's parents/guardians, the school councilor and any other related party.

Defining "Class Deterioration." (When Class Stops Functioning)

"Class deterioration" is defined as a situation where children refuse to follow their teacher's instructions, and as a result, the class cannot move forward. The teacher's normal problem solving methods are ineffectual and the class remains in a state where learning is impossible.

from the Classroom Management Research Group as commissioned by the Ministry of Education in March, 2000.

Warning signs.

-Mild-

- An increase in whispering and private conversations while the teacher is speaking.
- The classroom is dirty (garbage lying around, scribbles on the blackboard, disorderly bulletin board).

-Moderate-

- Students do not respond to the teacher's warnings and continue to show a rebellious attitude.
- Some students do not return to class after a break period or recess has ended.

-Severe-

- Students frequently speak out loudly and arbitrarily leave their desks during class. Lessons cannot proceed smoothly.
- Students often appear tired or down and are frequently absent from school.

Initial Response.

1. Understanding the Situation and Improving Communication.

Consulting administrative staff (principal, vice-principal) or head of student affairs.

- Accurately report only the facts and only what you personally know of the situation. Do this in writing if possible.

Getting a grasp on the situation.

Questions administrative staff and teachers should be asking:

- What kind of behavior poses a problem?
- Which students participate in that behavior and is there a particular student at the center?
- Which students are mimicking this leader?
- Are there other students whose influence can stop that kind of behavior?
- When and in what circumstances does that behavior appear? Are other classes similar?

Dealing with teachers who blame themselves for the problem.

- Many teachers feel personally responsible for any problems in class. Understand these emotions and lend a sympathetic ear to their problems.
- Discuss concrete techniques and strategies with which to approach the class, such as giving praise to the students who are doing well.
- Request support from a school councilor if necessary.
- Depending on the situation, taking time off for personal health may be worth considering.

Points of concern

- Administrative staff should make it clear that such problems are not the fault of any one teacher and encourage all of the teachers to provide backup support.
- In the case of students being loud during class, the teacher should consider underlying causes for the misbehavior early on, for example the presence of a developmental impairment or emotional instability, and verify those possibilities with the relevant institutions.

2. Analyzing Causes and Possible Counter-measures.

Holding an Emergency Meeting.

- The meeting should be oriented toward collecting and exchanging information.
- Allow homeroom teachers of affected classes to voice their opinions on the situation.
- It is essential for these teachers to examine themselves and reflect on their actions in order to adequately respond to the situation.
- At the same time, the purpose of such a meeting is not to place blame. Take care that it does not become so.
- Discuss different ways to deal with the problem. Divide responsibility and assign roles among the staff.
- Be sure to consider students' personal problems and family situations in addition to their behavior at school.
- If necessary, request the assistance of the school counselor or members of the

school board.

- Since 2006, schools without an assigned guidance counselor have been designated to receive one and are able to consult with a pre-assigned guidance counselor in this case.

Short to Mid-term Response.

3. Practical Approaches to the Problem.

Responding in tandem with other teaching staff.

- Work to make classes that are easy to understand and where students can feel themselves improving.
- Improving classes.
- Try team teaching techniques by bringing the vice principal or other teaching staff into class.
- If possible, try combining two classes or switching teachers between classes.
- Depending on the situation, try introducing a system where different teachers handle different subjects, for example by having a math teacher and a science teacher. The idea is to get as many different staff members involved with the students as possible.
- Dealing with students (especially those students at the center of behavior problems).
- Several teachers other than the homeroom teacher, for example a health teacher or counselor, should discuss the behavior issue with the student, and express their dissatisfaction and worries over the current situation.

Points of concern.

- The goal is to create a positive relationship between teacher and student.
- Consider concrete strategies to accomplish this in the long term as well as the short term.
- Administrative staff should systematically assess these strategies and the situation as a whole.
- Consider the number of classes that staff members are currently responsible for and take care that asking them to play a supportive roll does not place too heavy a burden upon them.

Responding individually.

- Dialogue with the student.
- Together with the student, try strategies such as identifying the problem, making a plan to solve it, and going over the classroom rules.
- Ask other teachers to join in as necessary.

Responding in tandem with parents/teachers and the PTA.

- Potential strategies include: allowing parents/guardians to observe class, holding meetings with them to explain the problem and the schools solution, and requesting their assistance in addressing the situation.

- Hold regular “open house” events, where parents/guardians can observe class. Show them connections between the school’s actions and changes in the students’ behavior. It is likely that this will make parents/guardians feel less anxious and increase teaching effectiveness.

Points of Concern.

⇒ Give due consideration to privacy concerns in matters regarding the students in question.

Mid to Long Term Response.

Improving on school policies to prevent reoccurrences.

⇒ Do not ignore small incidents in the interest of being kind to the students. Make it clear that there is a zero tolerance policy in place.

- Clarify standards of behavior.
- Keeping students and parents/guardians informed of school policies and expectations will build a relationship of mutual trust.
- Be firm and persistent.

⇒ Improving relationships among the students through hands on activities.

- Make use of the “Bonding Activities” project.
- Hold teaching training workshops where previous examples of “classroom deterioration” and teacher responses can be shown and discussed.

⇒ Maintaining a positive school environment.

- Graffiti and disorderly postings are precursors to classroom deterioration, and as such should be removed immediately upon discovery.

Improving classroom management.

Restoring mutual trust.

- Give students opportunities to feel confident about themselves. Look for good points in each student, praise them, and engage them in classroom activities.
- Reframe the students’ weak points as strong points. For example, describe a student as having a “strong will” rather than “stubborn.” Make all of the teaching staff aware of this strategy during regular teaching training functions.

What does understanding students involve?

- Understand the individual characteristics of each child.
- Understand what role or position that child occupies in the class.
- Understand how each child reacts to the teacher’s actions.

Improving teaching methods.

- Invoke student interest with hands on, problem solving teaching methods.
- Use small group activities to improve relationships between students.
- Change the classroom environment to make students more receptive to learning activities.

- Emphasize moral education and special activities, such as Sports Day or school festivals.
- Organize activities that teach students how to cooperate with others and not be self-centered.
- Promote activities that help students think and act independently but also create a feeling of unity throughout the class.
- Provide emotional support to those students who have experienced such “classroom deterioration.”

Involving the PTA.

⇒ The PTA can host events like parent and teacher training seminars.

- These events provide many great opportunities to involve parents in addressing classroom deterioration. Be sure to follow up on and maintain these important relationships.

Create a school atmosphere where teachers feel free to discuss problems.

⇒ A good relationship between teaching and administrative staff is necessary to this end.

⇒ Implement a program to strengthen relationships among teachers.

Act promptly and considerately in responding to these problems.

What steps can be taken immediately? Be proactive in finding solutions.

When managing difficult situations, we can start by asking “what can I do right now to address the problem?” Even if the task seems insurmountable, begin by doing what you can. Then, solutions will begin to appear.

In responding to a crisis it is important to be able to react quickly. A backburner approach is ineffective.

“Today’s customers demand immediate answers.”

It has been said that we are in the age of the “empowered customer.” Many veteran teachers will tell you that long ago parents didn’t complain so quickly about this degree of trouble with their children.

Additionally, people who complain assume that a response should be immediately available, and become even more irritated as they wait. Having been made to wait will become their next complaint.

In responding to accidents and complaints alike, schools and teachers need the ability to work under pressure and find solutions quickly. It is also necessary to recognize instances where the same circumstances that caused one accident or complaint could easily cause many others and formulate a strategy that can solve the underlying problem.

Handling complaints politely while under pressure.

When handling a complaint, confirm what happened and apologize unreservedly.

Attempting to defend the school or oneself in such a situation will just create further distrust.

If necessary, the school should explain the situation through a newsletter or other means

of communication. Attempting to put off dealing with the problem will make it bigger and more difficult to solve.

Three sources of conflict between teachers and parents/guardians.

School or teacher's action	How this is perceived by parents/guardians
Lack of sincerity in dealing with parents/guardians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School and teachers are not trustworthy. ▪ Teachers don't listen. ▪ Teachers don't do what they say they will. They do things as it suits them.
Insufficient or poor explanation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers treat parents/guardians as children. ▪ Teachers do not explain things so that I can understand them. ▪ Teachers explanations are too difficult, and I can't understand.
Confronted parents guardians emotionally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers make excuses and are not trustworthy. ▪ Teachers are not worth bothering with. Call the Board of Education. ▪ Trying to explain things to or work with teachers is useless.

Reiji Takashina. *Crisis Management Manual*. 2001.

Broken Window Theory.

The "broken window theory," originally postulated by an American sociologist, holds that serious crimes can be prevented by cracking down hard on minor crimes. If broken windows are not swiftly "fixed," then social order will deteriorate in the following way:

- If a seemingly innocent infraction is ignored, a broken window for example, then it will become a sign to nearby people that public order is not being upheld. The number of broken windows can be expected to rise until the building is in complete disarray and an environment for even serious crimes has been created.
- Minor crimes begin happening.
- As residents feel more and more that order is not being upheld, they feel more disconnected from the area and are less likely to get involved in improving the situation.
- Serious crimes begin happening.

From the Ministry of Education and National Police Agency.
Teaching Materials for Fostering Children's Awareness of Social Responsibility (from the Initiative for Delinquency Prevention 2006).