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Reflection on “When the Chips are Down…”

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I wasn’t really interested in seeing this particular video. When you sent me the options, I had decided that I wanted to see the “Last One Picked, First Picked On” because it dealt with helping students with disabilities develop social skills. But as fate would have it, this video was the only one checked in at the Marion County Library from the options you presented.

I wasn’t even sure what chips had to do with disciplining students with special needs. Yet, now I’m glad that this was the only one checked in because I learned some valuable information. Plus, I know for sure that I plan to be in the classroom next fall and have already started thinking about and developing answers to questions, using teacher language, which will likely be asked during an interview. Many of the things he mentioned, I do effortlessly but now understand the teacher jargon plus what and why they work. I couldn’t help but think that these techniques not only work for students with special needs but with all students.

I often hear teachers and adults express their frustration with students behavior in which they expect the student to change. But it isn’t the student who needs to change; it’s the adult in the situation. Oftentimes, this is hard for teachers and even parents to hear. Yet it is so essential. I learned this from my own experience.

Mr. Lavoie outlined the following three things that he said parents or educators possess that allow them effectively interact with students:

#1- They have an expansive knowledge base. This means that they understand and know how the students they work with function and why they function that way. Many times I see teachers who have spent years working with elementary students struggle when working with middle and high school students because they don’t understand that these students function completely different than elementary aged students.

#2- Posses strategies or techniques for different situations. In the video, he highlighted one of the best strategies that I’ve ever used in my career working with students. He called it the broken record technique. It’s one of the things I learned a long time ago as a parent and an educator; never argue with a child. It takes up too much time, you get caught in a power struggle and it’s counterproductive. Instead you repeat your expectations to the child calmly, repetitively repeating the expectation that you have for them. I have seen this distinguish many situations almost instantly.

One of the biggest mistake that I use to make as an educator was yelling. I would get my blood boiling yet it seemed like the students just weren’t hearing me. One day, I decided that from here on out, I will not to yell anymore. From that, something amazing happened. First, I felt more in control. I also noticed that there were fewer and fewer instances in which I even needed to yell. Finally, I began to notice that the students seem to actually hear me. This was one of the best professional decisions I’ve made in my career of working with young people.

#3- A Philosophy system on the way you will teach and handle students and situations. In this segment he talked about the importance of classroom procedures and schedules for everything from how you pass out paper in the class to how your students exit the class. This is especially important for students with disabilities like autism who crave predictability.

He also mentioned how agendas can actually create a sense of partnership between the teacher and the students. Teachers can create a sense of urgency by challenging student to keep moving to cover all the items on the list each day. They can also use it as a means of motivation to keep the class on task by putting the activity that they really want to do at the end so they would be motivated to get through the material.

In addition, I learned two new teacher jargon words—preventive and corrective discipline. Preventive discipline is those things you do to prevent misbehaviors. For instance, teachers can do this by creating an environment of clear expectations, rules and structures. Many students with special needs lack internal structure and are environmentally dependent. As such, teachers should create environments that foster student success.

Corrective discipline, on the other hand, is more complicated because you are charged with trying to change the student’s behavior. This can be especially difficult if you regularly use negative reinforcement as opposed to positive reinforcement. The difference is because a negative consequence only stops the behavior for the time being yet positive support has the potential to transform student behavior.

Still though, the most attention-grabbing part of the video was at the end when he introduced the idea of the poker chips. I loved how he used this analogy to show the importance of providing positive words and actions to build up students, especially those with special needs who already see themselves as deficient because of their challenges. This section strengthened my commitment to consciously focus on the positive that I witness from students and affirming these successes with them regularly.

I have already decided that I would like to watch his other videos as well. I enjoyed and appreciated how he delivered the content in an easy to understand, immediately useful manner. I’ve also decided to review this video again before I actively start my job search to help remind me of key terms and ideas that I can use to express my thoughts on the subject of discipline because I’m sure that it will come up in every interview.