Summary of Theory: Discipline with Dignity

Discipline with Dignity is a management theory that was developed by Richard Curwin and Allen Mendler. "Discipline with dignity equips teachers and administrators with classroom skills and techniques that enable them to spend less time dealing with behavioral problems and more time on positive interactions with students and on instruction"(Gurcan Tugba). The goal of managing a classroom is to create a space where behavior problems do not occur. The Discipline with Dignity process is set up to create a positive classroom community which focuses on respect.

The classroom has a meeting at the beginning of the year to set up a social contract, which the students and teacher will adhere to throughout the year. The social contract starts out with five basic principles that will be the basis of the rules. Next, there are two flag rules that are non-negotiable decided by the teacher. These flag rules are meant to keep students safe. The class will decide on three more rules to go on the contract. For each rule the students will come up with a range of reasonable consequences that will be followed if a rule is broken. Each person will sign the contract at the bottom. The point of the classroom meeting and creating the social contract together is to create responsibility and respect in the class. "This model is a responsibility and empowerment-based versus
obedience-based discipline model, which creates an atmosphere of democracy, encouragement, hope and warmth where clearly defined limits (with student input) and skills in resolving conflicts are taught and applied” (Gurcan Tugba). The model is the basis for key elements in which students can grow and mature.

An example of how the social contract is set up is:

Principle 1: Respect
Rule 1: Be an active listener
Consequences:

1. Repeat what was said
2. Make up missed information on your own time.
3. Write an apology to the teacher/person that you disrespected

When students are repeat rule breakers they are given an individual behavior plan. This plan is set up to help the student think about the behavior choices he/she has made and how him/her will change their behavior choice next time. “Children are allowed a chance to take ownership for their actions by involving them in the process of understanding and questioning rules, guidelines, limits, and consequences” (Dodge, Nizzi, Pitt & Rudolph, 2007). This behavior contracts will allow the student to make positive decisions for themselves.

Using the Discipline with Dignity model consistently will create a mutual respect and community within the classroom. This will help keep the focus on
learning rather than combating behavior issues. The needs of each student and teacher will be met using this theory.

Resources