

American education's silent killer

By **DELORES L. McCOLLUM**

IMAGINE . . . a confident pre-service teacher, a delighted veteran teacher, a principal with few behavioral referrals, a student whose day is pleasantly productive, a parent who smiles a sigh of relief upon hearing their child's response to the question "and how was your school day?"

The tie that binds together these scenarios is effective classroom management training. Unfortunately, for most pre-service and veteran teachers, it is the course that never existed in their educational experience. Despite billions of dollars and millions of pieces of legislation on every aspect of education, an integral part of education is absent from the agenda of policy makers, unmentioned in TV discussions, and invisible in the teacher education curriculum of many colleges and universities. Effective classroom management is the heart and soul of education. Its absence is similar to hypertension, and the effect is just as devastating.

Hypertension is called the "Silent Killer" because it is asymptomatic and often hidden. By the time symptoms appear, controllable problems may have begun to morph into serious ones.

Like hypertension, the lack of classroom management training is a silent killer that is undiagnosed, unaddressed and mislabeled. Children are accused of being "bad" or "unwilling to learn", when the real problem may be a teacher who has not been taught how to manage a class effectively, or active-

ly engage the students.

Twenty-first century children are being taught by twentieth century adults using a nineteenth century model. One of the ways to close the gap between the model and today's student is by providing pre-service and veteran teachers with authentic, positive and effective classroom management training.

Reasons for the lack of classroom management training courses vary. Historically, teacher candidates have been prepared on the assumption that they would be teaching 22 children who were all but "dying" to learn. Classroom management training embedded in methods courses taught by college professors with little or no K-12 teaching experience is ineffective. It leaves new teachers unprepared for the real world of the classroom. They begin with a dreadful disadvantage and rarely catch up to the demands of their new career.

The evidence is clear that classroom management training threaded through the curriculum is insufficient at best. It needs to be a "stand alone" course and take the same prominence that computer literacy did in the late 1980's and the infusion of technology in teaching does now.

The benefits of classroom management training include improved teacher preparation and performance, reduced teacher attrition, and engaged, energized students. Authentic increases in student achievement and test scores are other benefits. In a class that is well managed, more time will be spent on teaching and learning, with less time spent on distrac-

tions. Teachers who are trained well in how to manage their classes create healthy learning environments and develop relationships with and between their students that are built on mutual respect, transparency, and honesty.

Effective classroom management training reduces the incidences of bullying because teachers are able to detect inappropriate or disrespectful behavior and address it before it escalates. They are equipped with the skills to protect the victim and the accused while working to reach the root of the problem. Excellent classroom managers know how to address problems, preventing them from mushrooming into major disasters, and reduce the office referrals that plague building administrators. Not only can effective classroom management training de-escalate potentially explosive situations, it is far more effective than the hollow and usually futile "Zero Tolerance" policies. It can interrupt the "school to prison" pipeline that sucks in too many of our children, stunts their development, and clogs our justice system.

Effective classroom management must be part of the core training of our teachers. None of us can escape the consequences of how well or how poorly we train the teachers who teach our children. Until this issue is addressed, there will be no meaningful or enduring transformation of American education.

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