



The Library Media Center and Responsive Classroom Practices

In books and articles on childrearing and the education of children, one constant seems to be the importance of consistency in a child's life. At H. O. Wheeler in Burlington, Vermont, we provide that consistency through a social curriculum called the Responsive Classroom. When children grow accustomed to their environment, they began to attain a sense of calm, assurance, and familiarity. An awareness of and comfort with the routines of their everyday lives allows children, and in this case students, to be better prepared to function and learn. The concepts and practices of the Responsive Classroom provide this familiarity of routine. To be a truly Responsive Classroom, the practices need to transcend the classroom to all aspects of the school.

Responsive Classroom is a social curriculum that was developed for schools and classrooms. The program connects academic and social learning throughout the day. Responsive Classroom has six major components: Morning Meeting, Rules and Logical Consequences, Guided Discovery, Academic Choice, Classroom Organization, and Working with Families. As the librarian, I focused on creating a good meeting place and implementing rules and logical consequences.

Maintaining Consistency

In order to ensure that students are responsible and caring learners, all aspects of the school community need to be involved. My focus for the first six weeks of school was to have the library more closely follow classroom routines in relation to the components of the Responsive Classroom. I established a meeting place for us to begin library sessions, erected a News

and Announcement board, allowed students to share or participate in an activity (usually created to coincide with a library skill), generated library hopes and dreams, and instituted traveling rules.

I typically see classes every other week for preset library lessons. There are also additional times for collaborative teaching and computer lessons with classes. This year I decided to see each class every week for the first six weeks of school so that I could help students establish their library routine. I saw each class for about half an hour. Discussions with teachers on how they were implementing the Responsive Classroom helped me adjust my planning and use those first six weeks to set up library routines and reinforce the school-wide Responsive Classroom themes.

Just as teachers meet their students at the beginning of the day, you should do so for library time. Greet them at the door, invite them in, and direct them to the meeting circle. There they focus their attention on the News and Announcements board. You will notice right away that establishing News and Announcements will smooth the transition from other activities to library time. It gives the students immediate focus and acts as an introduction to the day's instruction. Also during this time have the students either share or initiate an activity.

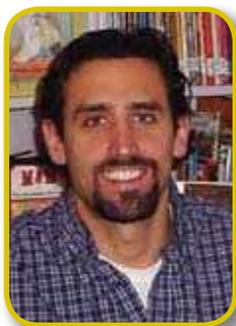
Rules Run the Ship

Part of every Responsive Classroom is setting up the rules and procedures. Rules are a very important part of any classroom. The rules set limits and allow students to feel safe. While teachers add their own flare to classroom management, all rules contain the same basic premise. Discuss your teachers' discipline styles with them. Determine the kind of language and the types of rules teachers are using and carry them over to the library.

After speaking with the classroom teachers, I decided to adopt the use of

Traveling Rules. During the first six weeks, the students and I made some basic rules for our meeting times. We discussed why rules were important and talked about how the classroom rules and library rules shouldn't be any different. I presented each class with a laminated plaque of their classroom rules. I erected a unit on the door into which they would place this plaque every time they visited the library. These are their Traveling Rules. To make them more cognizant of why they bring these rules, I placed a sign on the library door that reads, "I will be a library champion today." Each student is required to touch it prior to entering the library. I ran this process by the other teachers, and they too have used traveling rules. This approach gives the students the responsibility of living the rules throughout the school and fosters a greater sense of school-wide community.

I also thought it was important for the students to see the library as a classroom. I wanted the students to value time spent in the library and see it as purposeful. During the first six weeks, we review and discuss what the library can be used for and how it can help students throughout the school year. On one occasion I had the students share with the class their classroom hopes and dreams for the year, and then we discussed why they generate hopes and dreams in the classroom. I told them it was important that they feel they have accomplished something in the library by year's end. Thus, I wanted them to generate hopes and dreams for the library for the upcoming school year. The students came up with some great goals for the year and every single student's hopes and dreams are displayed outside the library. Following the creation of the students' hopes and dreams, we talked about the best way to accomplish them, which invariably tied into the rules created in every class; by following them and being a caring, safe community, goals could be attained. This really helped set a tone of mutual respect and clear expectations for responsible, caring behavior within each class group.



By Bobby Riley

“The concepts and practices of the Responsive Classroom provide this familiarity of routine.”

When Things Get Off Track

In the Responsive Classroom, one has meetings if a classroom-community problem arises. We use Responsive Classroom as a means to establish a better classroom environment but also to solve problems in the classroom.

The implementation of the Responsive Classroom has rejuvenated my teaching. I really feel that I have shared an important and meaningful role in creating a school environment that is orderly, respectful, and caring. By implementing these practices I have not

only strengthened relationships and the sense of community within my own classroom but have strengthened the school community as a whole. If your school is currently using Responsive Classroom, I recommend incorporating as many pieces as you feel comfortable with. If yours is not a Responsive Classroom school, I suggest reading up on the strategies and incorporating them into your everyday library instruction. ■

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Responsive Classroom

Responsive Classroom is a commercially published concept taught and disseminated by the Northeast Foundation for Children in Turner Falls, MA. They can be reached at (www.responsiveclassroom.org). A monthly newsletter is also freely available by subscribing on their Web site. The Northeast Foundation for Children also publishes many titles explaining and expanding on the concepts of the Responsive Classroom, a few of which are:

- ***The First Six Weeks of School***

By Paula Denton and Roxann Kriete
ISBN: 978-1-892989-04-8

This book stresses the importance of building community and setting the tone for the classroom environment at the beginning of the school year and developing the groundwork for the entire year. The book is written more for the classroom teacher; however, many of the skills and ideas can be incorporated into the instruction and time in the Media Center.

- ***The Morning Meeting Book***

By Roxann Kriete
ISBN: 978-1-892989-09-3

The classroom structure should be similar in scope and design to the rest of the areas in the school. This title will allow you to establish routines and activities in the library that are similar to what the students experience in the classroom.

- ***Rules in School***

By Kathryn Brady, Mary Beth Forton, Deborah Porter, and Chip Wood
ISBN: 978-1-892989-10-9

Describes how students can be invested and active participants in the rule making of the school and classroom environment. Easily translated into creating rules, hopes, and dreams for the library's year as well.

- ***Teaching Children to Care: Classroom Management for Ethical and Academic Growth, K-8***

By Ruth Sidney Charney
ISBN: 978-1-892989-08-6

A thorough resource for developing classroom-management skills and an environment that is aligned with the precepts of the Responsive Classroom.

If your school does not practice Responsive Classroom, these are still great titles for setting up smooth transitions into library time when students come to visit and establish a calming, safe, and caring learning environment. The whole school need not follow this concept in order for these titles to be of use.

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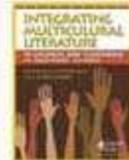
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