

# Promoting Discipline & Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

## *A Question of Semantics?*

This article first appeared in the October 2009 issue of teachers.net.

### Rules vs. Procedures

Kerry Weisner responded to a post on an educational mailing that suggested having kids create **rules** in a classroom—as opposed to having the teacher create **procedures**—is a simple matter of **semantics**.

Notice the **profound difference** between the two.

Her post follows.

To me, semantics ARE the issue."

I can't comment on how your approach and my approach might be similar or different, but I can compare my OWN approach of using **DWS for the past seven years** to the approach I used before. See [\*\*Teaching Model.\*\*](#)

Like you, every year my partner and I used to have our students help develop classroom rules on the first day of school. *I found that this type of thinking created a **different teaching mindset** than the mindset created when I started to think about developing "procedures" instead of rules.* For me this turned out to be big. It was actually the semantics to which you referred that MADE the difference.

I find I'm **much more positive** in my own mind when I purposely view "misbehavior" as coming from "someone who didn't learn the procedure," as when I perceive the same behavior as coming from "someone who's not following the rules." **Having tried both ways, I greatly prefer teaching from the "procedures" mindset.** I find it a more relaxing and positive approach to working with people. It puts me in a "teaching frame of mind" rather than a "find a consequence for breaking the rule frame of mind."

Adopting a "procedures mindset" also focused my attention on the *need for repetition on any one procedure*--which might even be identical to a particular "rule" I used to have before. With a "rules" mindset, I didn't have a good understanding of this issue. Although I always taught routines, I didn't teach them well enough or provide enough practice to make them automatic for every child. Reading DWS information, which referred me to Harry Wong's book for understanding classroom management issues, (as opposed to discipline issues,) I found the following information. **Harry Wong** quotes research by Madeline Hunter:

For a child to learn something new, you need to repeat it on the average 8 times.

For a child to unlearn an old behavior and replace it with a new behavior you need to repeat the new behavior on the average of 28 times. 20 of those times are used to eliminate the old behavior and 8 of the times are used to learn the new behavior.

For the first time I began to see how the practice of teaching procedures would allow me to reach every child and especially help the most challenging students to become more successful. *(It also helped me to understand the value of thinking out my classroom procedures CLEARLY before I taught them.)*

One understanding I gained from my reading of Marvin Marshall's book was that creating procedures and standards (what I used to think of as "rules,") is the *responsibility of the TEACHER*, rather than the students. This was somewhat of a startling idea for me but it rang true.

*Marshall's view is that **classroom management** is the responsibility of the teacher, whereas **discipline** (in the sense of a person being in charge of his/her own behavior,) is the responsibility of the student.* In DWS, the teacher creates the procedures because that's the job they've signed on to do—to lead, to structure the room for learning, etc. He says that this is not the job of the child. (The job of the child is to make choices about their own behavior.)

If I think back to the days when I DID have kids help create the rules, I realize that I never really intended to give them the power to create the rules at all because usually I had several rules in my own mind already, before the first day of school. (In fact, I often had a chart all prepared that I could whip out once "we'd finished creating the rules together.") If a child came up with a rule I didn't like or I didn't think was reasonable or important, I didn't allow that rule to stand. I manipulated the conversation to come around to what I had in my own mind anyway. So, when I thought about it, *I realized that if the kids didn't really create the rules*, did I need to pretend that they did? Now that I have this clear in my own mind, **I have become a more confident teacher with greater understanding of my role.**

This is my current thinking: *It's MY job to create the classroom procedures.* By teaching the procedures well, I instill my expectations—that is, I expect that students will follow the procedures I have taught. By teaching procedures thoroughly (8 or maybe more times for the most challenging children,) I am actually teaching students how to be well behaved in my classroom because ***without this careful instruction some really don't know HOW.***

Now when it comes to discipline, that's a different issue. Kids are responsible for their own discipline. Why? Because I can't change another person, so it makes sense that the students have to be in charge of themselves in this way. That's the goal of DWS—to promote responsibility and the advantages of being self-disciplined.

So, in part, it might be semantics, but in part, definitely not... in my experience anyway!

Best wishes!  
Kerry in BC

More of Kerry's posts are at <http://disciplineanswers.com>

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