



## Teachers, Mount Up & Regulate

October 26, 2022 by Educator Barnes

If you grew up during the 90s as I did, you probably know the song “Regulate” featuring Warren G and Nate Dogg. Early in the song, you hear, “Regulators, mount up.” In other words, get control before you get controlled. I assert this same energy can be directed to the classroom. Teachers either regulate or get regulated. A few weeks ago, during a sermon, my pastor John Ramsey asserted that some parents allow themselves to get punked by their children. He inquired how children, who do not pay any bills, are running a household and not

the parents. This same line of thinking can be applied to teachers. Why are students' poor behavior choices allowed to hijack instruction in the classroom?

It is important to note that many college education programs did not prepare teachers to manage behaviors. As more research is being shared about the neuroscience of learning (the relationship between the nervous system and learning), college programs have the opportunity to support teachers who will be entering the profession soon. According to the book "Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective, 8th edition," the prefrontal cortex of the brain develops slowly. This part of the brain controls judgments and impulses. Knowing the why behind students' poor choices is not enough; teachers need to know how to use the information.

Knowing that children's brains aren't developed enough to consistently make good choices means teachers need to create structured environments to prevent students from having an opportunity to become emotionally unregulated. Routines and procedures are crucial. About this time of the year, people begin to slack off on those routines and procedures. There is a reason Old G teachers would tell rookie teachers not to smile until Christmas. In other words, they said hold the line and hold it firm until winter break. If teachers lose control or never gain it during the first semester, they have a long and arduous trek during the rest of the school year.

Regarding routines and procedures, teachers need to think of every aspect. Some aspects may have to be addressed in the moment because kids can be unpredictable. Teachers should have a plan for going to the pencil sharpener, getting supplies, going to the restroom or locker, passing back papers, lining up at the door, engaging in class discussion, and implementing progressive discipline for students who disrupt learning.

What is progressive discipline? This means the discipline builds over time, and students do not automatically have a preselected punishment waiting. For example, when I was in school, a fight was an automatic five-day suspension, no exception. It didn't matter if you were protecting yourself from a bully and did not have one mark on your behavior record; you would get the same punishment as the bully, who may have already gotten into ten fights during that school year. It also means the punishment should fit the crime. For example, if a kid throws a paper airplane, an appropriate response should be to ask the student to pick up the paper and not throw another airplane. If the kid does that, then leave it at that punishment.

When a child is unregulated, teachers must not add fuel to the fire. They must show and coach the student on how to work through their emotions. Telling a student to calm down does not make them calm down. Telling a student, "Let's take five deep breaths together" gives the student a tangible action to calm down. As much as possible, teachers must find a way to help students work through their emotions.

Dr. Traci Baxley author of "Social Justice Parenting: How to Raise Compassionate Anti Racist Justice Minded Kids in an Unjust World" noted in her book how she decided to stop kicking a kid out of her class and instead worked with him to find a way to help him regulate. She provided an area in her class for him to go to. This only occurred after she kept the student physically by her, and he began to trust her. Once he trusted her, he could share that sometimes he knows when poor behavior is coming over him. That's when the area in the room was created for him to go to regulate.

Finally, safety comes first. I am not advocating for teachers to tackle students who are physically putting the teacher or other students in danger. That is a highly emotional state that can bring harm. Once that child is in a place where they can listen and not be physical, then the child might be open to learning how to respond in non-violent ways. If a student harms a teacher and other students physically and is removed, the administrators should not let that student re-enter class during that same learning block. When administrators do that, they heighten the anxiety and stress of the teacher and the classmates and ultimately impact learning. Learning is the main focus of school.

Teachers, let's mount up and regulate these classrooms.