

“My Daughter Can’t Wait for Monday Morning!”: Child Driven Responsibility for Sustainable Education in Happy and Productive Classrooms—Bullying Sidelined

Martin J. Sterling.
Fraser-Sterling Publications.

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A rich, practical and well laid out resource is gold to a brand new teacher or recent education graduate. Even more encouraging with an exciting new resource, is the ability of the new teacher to put the presented information into practice and to observe the affirmative results that follow. The concepts and ideas presented in *“My Daughter Can’t Wait for Monday Morning!”: Child Driven Responsibility for Sustainable Education in Happy and Productive Classrooms- Bullying Sidelined* by Martin J. Sterling was a treasured find during my fall internship last year and is worth consideration for both new and seasoned elementary school teachers alike. The goals of Sterling’s work include facilitating a classroom of responsible, confident, caring and self-aware learners who understand concepts of community, accountability, ownership and mutual regard. I’m sure any educator would agree that the above principles are a common desire of many, if not all, elementary school teachers.

“We cannot separate how a child feels from how a child learns” (p.3) is a fairly summative statement of the philosophy Sterling presents in his book and the idea behind creating a four communities classroom. Sterling maintains that in this classroom environment students will be able to gain or preserve a healthy balance of self-esteem and mutual regard as they are guided towards a classroom ethic that values the importance of difference, caring for self and others, and an empowerment that leads them to contribute in constructive and positive ways (p.13). This positive and efficient environment, in turn, aids in a student’s all around ability to learn and develop to the best of their ability. *My Daughter Can’t Wait for Monday Morning!*, is a well laid out, thorough and easy- to- follow resource for classroom environment/management. Sterling provides many examples and case studies based on his experiences and implementation

of this system as well as working solutions to problems teachers may encounter with individual student behaviours. There are several pages of photocopy- ready material to help to maintain organization on the teacher's part including activities to introduce and support the community based classroom, assignment tracking pages and even a ready-made letter to send home to parents and guardians explaining the philosophy behind the community-based initiative.

As a new teacher- intern in a grade six classroom last fall, this system was a blessing, correlating well with the ideas and philosophies presented in my recent education classes. The concepts presented in my undergraduate studies, such as teacher acting as guide and facilitator, the practice of social and ecological justice (i.e., through the responsibility and care involved in building group communities) and principles of a democratic classroom, seemed to blend seamlessly with the concepts and philosophies presented by Sterling. It was encouraging to watch students take ownership for their groups and related individual responsibilities, as every student had the facility to feel a part of something; belonging to a team of which they were a valued and integral part. I watched as the natural leaders in each group encouraged more reluctant students to share their ideas and also to hold one another accountable for behaviours that were not contributing positively to the group. Of course, the accumulation of points for one's group with a negotiated reward at the end of two weeks helped to encourage positive behaviour among the groups; something they reminded one another about without the help of the teacher. I watched student excitement as they agreed and discussed a group name and then each contributed to the construction of the group banner. The process of group members deciding together who would be responsible for which role spoke to the sidelining of bullying, which Sterling presents as another key concept of this resource. Starting in the first week of school, each student, given a role or particular responsibility, was able to feel power and a sense of efficacy in taking charge of their given role in a fair and equal environment that was negotiated by the whole group. This sense of value and belonging within the group likely alleviates a need for power by those students who may otherwise resort to bullying behaviour.

Group and partner assembling for assignments were nearly effortless as students were able to gather quickly into the center of their communities to proceed with lesson discussion and completion. Of course, one is always going to have to plan for differentiation of a lesson or pull some students out for specific instruction but, in an integrated classroom setting, the community's classroom seemed to allow for maximum inclusion of all students, where

applicable. Students tended to feel more comfortable and encouraged to participate in smaller groups, to learn from one another and share ideas that they may not have been comfortable with sharing on the larger classroom scale. Such engagement clearly leads to a more positive and efficient overall classroom environment.

This resource could assist any educator seeking to create a holistic approach to classroom teaching practices and encourage a safe, supportive and positive learning environment. It combines principles of behaviourism, through reward systems, with aspects of social constructivism that support student engagement and contributions to classroom design and supports inquiry learning through the continual scaffolding of group work and self-management. As stated in Chapter 7: Creating a Community of Learners in *Becoming a Teacher* (Parkay et al., 2012), “The climates established by high-performing teachers are characterized by a productive, task-oriented focus; group cohesiveness; cooperative, respectful interactions among students; and frequent opportunities for student input regarding classroom activities” (p. 227). One will find all of the above principles present within Sterling’s system.

Sterling’s system does not impair the implementation of any curriculum and can clearly be adjusted to fit into any school or classroom. Of course, as a new teacher, this was my first experience implementing a classroom management/environment support system and one might conclude that perhaps my judgement is clouded by overzealous excitement at the prospect of having my very own classroom in which to replicate a community classroom a second time. Still, I encourage all elementary school teachers, fresh and seasoned, to have a look at “*My Daughter Can’t Wait for Monday Morning!*”: *Child Driven Responsibility for Sustainable Education in Happy and Productive Classrooms- Bullying Sidelined* by Martin J. Sterling and decide if a community classroom fits with your own philosophy of education.

References

- Sterling, M. J. (2012) “*My daughter can’t wait for Monday morning!*”: *Child driven responsibility for sustainable education in happy and productive classrooms—bullying sidelined*. Fraser-Sterling Publications.
- Parkay, F. W., Stanford, B. H., Vaillancourt, J. P., Stephens, H. C., & Harris, J. R. (2012). *Becoming a teacher* (4th ed.). Toronto, Canada: Pearson Canada.