

SHAPING RESPECTFUL AND RESPONSIBLE LEARNERS

by:

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In a classroom of thirty to forty or more children, each child carries with them the imprint of their home, community, and daily experiences. Some come with gentle words and quiet hands, already practiced in saying “po” and “opo.” Others, understandably, arrive with louder voices, unfiltered emotions, and a tendency to act before thinking. It is in this rich, sometimes chaotic mix that a teacher is tasked not just to teach lessons but to shape lives.

Respect and responsibility aren’t subjects taught in isolation. They’re woven into the way a child borrows a pencil, lines up for recess, or reacts when corrected. In Philippine elementary education, instilling these values is both essential and incredibly challenging. Many of us grew up in a time when respect was demanded through fear. Today, thankfully, the Department of Education’s Child Protection Policy outlined in DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 firmly reminds us that fear has no place in the classroom. Instead, we are called to guide with compassion and consistency.

Many children come to school already carrying burdens family problems, poverty, neglect, or exposure to harmful behavior. A teacher may only have them for six hours a day, but those six hours can be transformative. Still, we often meet resistance, attitude, or even aggression. It’s not disrespect for the sake of being difficult. Sometimes, it’s survival behavior or a need for attention.

This is where positive discipline steps in not as a strategy, but as a mindset. The kind that gently teaches consequences, not punishment. That calmly redirects instead of humiliating. That takes the time to explain why a behavior is wrong, and how to make it right. It's about modeling the respect we ask for speaking kindly, listening fully, and acknowledging feelings without condoning poor choices.

Children first learn respect at home. Or not at all. If a child sees their parent yell at a tricycle driver, insult a neighbor, or ignore rules, no amount of classroom reminders will stick without reinforcement. That's why shared responsibility with parents and guardians is vital. Our learners thrive best when the values taught at home and school mirror each other. DepEd has long encouraged this partnership, home and school working hand-in-hand but in practice, it often feels one-sided.

Still, teachers persist. We write in the communication notebook. We send gentle reminders through text or messenger. We hold parent conferences, hoping to find allies in shaping the character of their child. Sometimes, we succeed. Sometimes, we don't. But we keep trying.

Every time a child learns to say "excuse me" before speaking, returns a borrowed crayon without being told, or apologizes on their own after hurting a classmate we see the seeds taking root.

Respect and responsibility aren't learned overnight. They're shaped slowly, like clay in warm hands. Teachers provide the structure. Parents, the foundation. And the child, with time and love, becomes the finished work: a learner ready not only for academics, but for life.

References:

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