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Summary: This article discusses the implications of classroom culture on student expectations and attitudes. Over the course of one school year, the authors used a combination of video tape, field notes, and personal interviews to determine how instruction and teacher expectations shape culture within a sixth grade language arts classroom. Six adolescent girls discussed their frequent disengagement with class activities and how they negotiated classroom schema to benefit their detachment. The study also examines the girls' perceptions of themselves within the classroom culture and how their roles shape them as literacy learners.

Assumptions:

- Organization of literacy within the classroom shapes students' understanding of literacy.
- Student's construction of literacy is not solely determined by experiences in school.
- Literacy may be affected by social class distinctions in school.
- Classroom culture is determined by interactions between teacher and students.
- Patterns of classroom instruction lead to different instructional outcomes.

Results:

- The classroom emerged as a place where the girls valued procedures and rules.
- Girls' responses were consistent with their sense of obligation to "be good."
- Although they found ways to circumvent the teacher's authority, the girls were concerned about maintaining their status as good students.
- Their desire to avoid trouble was powerful in shaping classroom culture.

Conclusions:

- The teacher's approach was influenced by background as reader and student, beliefs and expectations about students, teaching, and literacy, state and district mandates, and her teaching practices.
- Classroom culture was characterized by two themes: routines and procedures and the uses of literacy for instrumental (testing) purposes.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Recognize the complexity of classroom culture and student perceptions.
- Seek professional development to build understanding of how aspects of classroom culture influence and shape instruction.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Support teachers' growing understanding of the influences of classroom culture on instruction.

- Provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to explore the inner workings of a literacy classroom and the forces that drive decisions.