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First Impression: Positive Expression

Think About It

*A positive expression makes for the kind of first impression
That students will respond to in a positive way
So please ensure, please ensure that you're
Wearing a positive expression today!*

Do It

Oftentimes, new teachers receive advice from other teachers that sounds like this: "Whatever you do, do not smile until Christmas!" We wholeheartedly disagree with this type of advice. First impressions bear tremendous weight. They cannot be undone. If students walk into a teacher's classroom and see a serious, angry-looking teacher, they immediately become sceptical, guarded and leery of the idea of ever trusting this teacher. And even if the teacher eventually "backs off" of this type of behaviour, it is much more difficult to undo what has been done than it is to simply ensure a positive start from day one. Worse yet, if the teacher continues this "serious" approach with the students, it will be a long, difficult school year. The fact is that students need happy adults who serve as positive role models in their lives. You cannot help your students by being yet another negative influence in their lives. Therefore, it is vitally important that the first impression your students form of you is a positive one.

Today's activity is simple: Make a special effort to create a positive first impression on your students. The first and most important way to do that is to greet them with a smile. Since they are wondering what this year has in store for them in your classroom, be sure to tell them how excited you are to be teaching them and assure them that this will be a wonderfully successful year for the class. Tell of a few exciting activities you will be doing with them this year and act as enthusiastic as possible. When they hear and see that you are happy and pleasant, they will be happier and more pleasant. It's a win-win!

Done!

Your first impression on anyone becomes a lasting one. Today, you have ensured that your students went home with a positive impression of you. This bodes well for tomorrow and for the rest of the school year. Now remember that they are expecting the same positive teacher to show up tomorrow!

Permit Where to Sit

Think About It

Some students sit in a place that is simply not conducive to fostering good behaviour. That's fact. It's conclusive!

Do It

If two students who lean toward inappropriate behaviour are seated together, chances are good that behaviour problems will ensue. We've found that great teachers don't share one common way of arranging seating, but they all have clever ways of doing so. Some allow students to sit where they choose at first. This allows teachers to get to know the students and better determine proper seating arrangements. They tell students to sit where they would like. Then they say something like, "I'll be changing the seating in a few days and possibly every few weeks for cooperative grouping purposes or so that I can see everyone better or for other reasons so that the classroom is conducive to optimal learning!" Then, when they see a need, they make a seating change. However, this is done with subtlety. If two students are misbehaving, the teacher doesn't stop and say, "Let's change your seats." That would be much too obvious. Also, effective teachers often change several seats at a time and they always have a good reason for doing so. It's called clever psychology!

You may ask, "Why can't I let the students know that because they are misbehaving, their seats will be moved?" The simple answer is, "You can." However, you have just ensured that those students will misbehave wherever you seat them. Not a good outcome. Though we don't advocate ignoring all misbehaviour, we do advocate picking your battles carefully. And we believe that battles over where the students sit can be avoided if handled appropriately by the teacher.

So your simple activity for today is to decide on a clever way to change student seating whenever the need arises without letting the students know you are trying to avoid behaviour problems.

Done!

Feel free to use the method we've shared, come up with your own, or ask a fellow effective teacher for a clever idea for seating arrangements. Whatever method you choose, just remember to avoid making a seating change appear to be a punishment. And always make a seating change with a smile on your face!

I Really DO Want to Know About YOU

Think About It

*Teachers who know their students well
Enjoy better behaviour from bell to bell!*

Do It

One of the best ways of getting the best from students is getting to know them on a personal level – learning something about who they are, what they believe, what their dreams entail, what they like and dislike, etc. And one of the best ways to initiate getting to know your students is by giving them some type of interest inventory. You can use one of the many existing ones or create your own. We suggest using a simple one consisting of only a few questions asking students to tell you about themselves. Some have open-ended questions such as “I am _____,” “I like _____,” “I don’t like _____,” “I enjoy _____,” “I wish _____,” “I hope _____,” “I dream about _____.” Students tell a lot about themselves in such activities and you learn things you may have never learned otherwise that you can now use to better reach and teach each student. Therefore, your simple activity is to give your students some type of age-appropriate interest inventory. For very young children, the inventory may consist of having them draw a picture or two about themselves that they then interpret for you.

By giving your students an interest inventory, you have accomplished nothing less than the following: (1) You have learned something about each student and (2) You have shown your students that you are interested in them as individuals. Don’t ever underestimate the power of such an activity, regardless of age level or subject matter. All great teachers strive to connect with their students and understand as much as they can about each.

Done!

After giving your students some type of interest inventory, don’t just file those away. If a student mentioned a special talent, begin conversing with the student about that talent. If you pick up on something that is really bothering a student, offer your support. USE the information in these inventories to help you better serve your students.

Some teachers post the results of the inventories in their classrooms, but only after securing permission from the students. Students are people and every person has a story. Let them tell their stories!

An Official Invite for Back-to-School Night

Think About It

*When parents feel welcomed and know you're not someone to fear
At concerts, meetings and other school functions, they're more likely to appear!*

Do It

We will not argue that it is often difficult to get some parents to attend school functions. We WILL tell you, however, that great teachers never give up on trying to involve parents in the education of their children. One of the ways they do this is by making a special effort to make parents feel welcomed, wanted and valued.

A particular high school always had low attendance for back-to-school night. The teachers argued that it should be cancelled. The new principal refused to buy into the philosophy that parents of high school students won't attend school functions. He reminded the teachers that at sporting events, the stadium and gym were always filled with parents. Therefore, they decided to try an experiment. Instead of sending out the typical memo reminding parents of back-to-school night, each teacher made a phone call to his or her home-room students' parents. The call sounded like this, even if leaving a message: "Hi, this is Ms Simms, Ashley's teacher. I wanted to thank you for allowing Ashley to be in my class. It's a pleasure to teach her. I also wanted to personally invite you to attend our back-to-school night so that I'll have the privilege of meeting you. It's next Wednesday at 6 p.m. We'll treat you to some great refreshments. Hope to see you there!" So many parents attended that they had to bring in additional seating!

Try this with your own back-to-school night. Convince parents that you feel privileged to teach their children and make every effort to help them feel welcomed in your school and in your classroom. Consider the fact that even for those parents who do not attend the function after receiving your phone call, you have still initiated positive contact. This will increase the chances that they will be more open to working cooperatively with you in the future.

Done!

We often receive feedback from teachers who are amazed at what a difference these simple phone calls make. Not surprisingly, we never hear of anything negative coming out of this activity. All great teachers make various attempts to involve parents. They know they have nothing to lose and only parental support to gain!

Classroom Management, Part 1

Think About It

*Since to teach a student anything, you must first establish control
Then devising an effective management plan is a most important goal!*

Do It

Classroom Management. What is it? Is it the same as discipline? Not exactly. Discipline is one important piece of classroom management. An effective management plan involves everything the teacher does to ensure that the classroom runs smoothly and efficiently, to the point of appearing effortless. Appearing effortless, of course, is an illusion!

All great teachers are effective classroom managers. They put lots of thought and effort into how they arrange the desks, set structured rules and procedures, plan effective lessons, pace activities, manage time and so on. They know that no matter how well they know their content, they can't teach any of that content until they can manage their classrooms. They know that without management, discipline problems arise and student achievement suffers. When a teacher is disorganised, the students follow suit. When a teacher is inconsistent with following through on consequences when students break rules, the students are inconsistent in obeying the rules. If a teacher allows his or her mood to determine the severity of a punishment, students see the teacher as unfair and become less likely to follow any of the rules. They also view the teacher as wishy-washy – someone who can be controlled by students. In classrooms of teachers who exhibit poor management skills, very little learning takes place. Though we could write an entire book on classroom management, our goal here is merely to help you take a look at your own management plan and improve upon it if necessary.

Today's activity is to look at your current management plan. Do you have one? Do you know what your rules are and do the students know? Have you begun to set your expectations, letting students know of those expectations? Have you begun setting basic procedures with your students? Over the next three days, we will help you to devise that plan, one step at a time. Therefore, it is important to know what is already in place. And it is vital that you realise the importance of a structured management plan.

Done!

Once management is in check, all else seems to fall into place. Student behaviour improves, student participation improves, student achievement improves and the classroom hums like a well-rehearsed choir! Is your choir humming?