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## Part One

# Setting the Pace

### Chapter 1

#### **Knowing Your Own Rhythm • 11**

It is necessary that teachers figure out who they are and determine an educational mission. Then they can set up a classroom conducive to their goals. This chapter offers some food for thought as teachers begin the process.

### Chapter 2

#### **Developing a System for Classroom Management • 21**

Dealing with classroom management issues is always a key concern for new teachers, as well as those trying to find better ways to create a thriving learning environment. This chapter offers different perspectives on classroom management, as well as many insights about how successful teachers do it.

### Chapter 3

#### **Parental Involvement • 59**

Keeping pace with individual students is far more expedient and successful when parents are part of the process. This chapter is a guide for getting parents involved and keeping them involved, while not letting them overpower the school's mission or authority. Activities for helping parents deal with their children are included.



**A** successful classroom environment will be different for different teachers. One classroom does not fit all. Keeping pace with a classroom full of diverse marchers first requires that teachers become acquainted with their own distant drummers. It is important that teachers learn to trust their own “inner voices” and use them to guide all they do. It is vital early on to get a sense of self and a sense of purpose.

## Will the Real Teacher Please Stand Up?

*When I was in Year 7, I had a teacher, who shall remain nameless ... (okay, Mrs Waggoner). She was just about the meanest, strictest teacher I ever had. She ran her class like a commando camp. We were terrified of her.*

*One day I had to take a note from one teacher to another teacher who was in the staff room. I approached with caution fully aware that I was invading sanctified ground. There was so much laughter in the room the teachers couldn't hear me knocking. I opened the door and was struck dumb by what I saw. Mrs Waggoner was in front of the group royally entertaining everyone. She was laughing and smiling. I almost didn't recognise her with a smile on her face. Feeling*

like Pandora, I ran out of there in a shot! When I told my friends about Mrs Waggoner's behaviour, no one would believe me.

Why were we never given the gift of Mrs Waggoner's laughter and her humour? Had someone told her, as I was told my first day, that "You can't smile until after Christmas" or "You can always get easier, but you can't get tougher! If you go in there and are nice, those kids will eat you alive!"? Some teachers wrongly assume that they have to fit a certain model in order to maintain control and set up a learning environment. Nothing could be further from the truth.

## Be Who You Are!



**T**his above all – thine own self be true; and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.”

– Shakespeare

The greatest gift teachers give to their students is themselves.

*I think one reason that I did not “burn out” after teaching so many years is that early on I decided to be myself in the classroom, in faculty meetings, at parent conferences, and wherever I was. Unless you are a schizophrenic, it's just too hard to maintain a dual personality. So figure out who you are, and go with it. Just keep getting better at being you.*

Researchers have been studying characteristics of effective teaching for the past century. While there are universal qualities regarding a teacher's sense of self and subject matter knowledge that definitely contribute to being an effective educator (Brophy, 1989), there is not research to tell teachers how they ought to **be**.

## 20 Basic Effective Teacher Qualities

### An effective teacher

- is fundamentally a kind, caring person who listens
- possesses a deep understanding of the subject matter
- is self-confident
- believes they can make a difference
- has good communication skills
- is creative and interesting
- has an open mind; is willing to try new things
- is generally optimistic and positive
- has a curiosity about the world
- is resourceful
- has a sense of humour
- is flexible
- shows tolerance and is not judgmental
- is able to organise time and materials effectively
- can be described by the students as “with it”
- is energetic and determined
- demonstrates professional and personal integrity
- has patience and persistence
- is willing to “go the extra mile” for students
- acts as an advocate for all students

*I am instantly attracted to random teachers who are smart, witty, quick and entertaining. But some of the most effective teachers I have known have been the quiet nurturers, the deep analytical thinkers and the highly structured sequential class managers. My point is that once you get past the fundamental characteristics common to all good teachers, the rest is about figuring out who you really are and maximising those qualities to help you better relate to your students.*

*It is my belief that if you dance, you should dance with your students. If you can sing, then sing for them. Whether you love to write or play sports or collect things or keep pets, let the kids in on it. Share with them the wonderful qualities that make you who you are. I used to let my students see my old report cards (after I had carefully applied Wite-Out® to certain teacher comments about my excessive talking and refusal to follow rules). Students are very curious about you, and letting them in on who you really are will help you build a community of trust and mutual respect. (Use discretion about how much you share. If you supplement your teaching habit by pole dancing at a local bar, you might want to keep that to yourself.)*

## **Promoting a Classroom Community**

Careful thought should go into such decisions as what is put in the classroom, how things are arranged, all of the ambient touches added, how rules and consequences are set up, teacher and student attire, the structure of lesson plans, assessment techniques and virtually everything that has to do with how a teacher chooses to teach.

*It took me 10 years of trying various techniques to find a method I really liked for getting the attention of students who were busily working in small groups. I tried counting backwards, flipping the light switch, and whispering. None of those methods was satisfactory for me. I finally discovered the perfect solution in a toy store! I bought a child's xylophone. It makes a soothing, calming sound, and it gets the attention of everyone immediately!*

I've been using it ever since – even for my university students. I know it sounds like a little thing, but it has really improved my classroom environment. It works for me – I just wish I had thought of it sooner!



## Lion Taming 101

Despite common assumptions, a teacher does not have to meet students on the first day with a frown, a whip, and an upraised chair in order to establish order and discipline (even if all the other teachers are doing it). Students are much better served by a teacher who greets them at the door, shows them to their assigned seats, and gets them started on an assignment. Teachers can even smile while doing all that.

*I often say that my philosophy of teaching can be summed up in two words: “Whatever works!” Now, be very careful about how this philosophy is interpreted: I am most definitely NOT talking about stop-gap measures, arbitrary decisions or short-term solutions.*

*I show my preservice students a cartoon of an unusual classroom scene. In the background is a large cage labelled Mr Rattles. Inside the cage lurks a huge, fierce-looking snake. The classroom teacher looks sternly at a young man and says, “Tommy, I guess you have just earned yourself ten minutes in the cage.”*

*My students roar when they see it. Then I ask them, “Would that discipline technique work?” They, of course, tell me that it isn't feasible, not humane, not legal and so forth. Again I ask, “But would it work? Would ten minutes with Mr Rattles frighten Tommy into following the rules?” My students usually get a stunned look on their faces and answer that it might, indeed, work.*

*Then I ask them what they mean by the term “work”. Usually they say, “Well, Tommy won’t misbehave anymore”. It’s true. If stopping Tommy’s inappropriate behaviour was the only goal, it might work. However, making Tommy behave is just one outcome of the many things teachers must consider when making classroom decisions. It is vital that, as quickly as possible, a teacher formulate what he or she believes about the purpose of education and the long-term goals they hope to achieve with students.*

The teacher in the cartoon might nip Tommy’s behaviour in the bud, but has she promoted a classroom that is a caring community? Has she advanced Tommy’s requisite knowledge skills? Has she helped Tommy become a contributing member of society? Nope! To be truly successful, she is going to have to use a better classroom management plan.

Teachers must address key elements when planning classroom management strategies, but classroom management is about much more than discipline techniques. It is about everything teachers do in the classroom. It is important that teachers let their own classroom management style continually evolve until they learn what works. Even learning what not to do ever again is beneficial.

*Like the time I jokingly suggested to a very literal student that for his consequence he should, “go play on the little yellow line on the highway in front of the school”. Thankfully I caught him before he made it out of the front gate!*

All teachers should learn to trust their own *distant drummer*. As a person who has power with children, it is a teacher’s obligation to ensure that every decision and action is consistent with what students should know and be like (or are on their way to becoming) when they leave the classroom.



## Part Two

# Differentiating Instruction

### Chapter 4

#### **Teaching Those Who Hear Different Drummers • 77**

In a learning cycle lesson, students are asked to develop their own understandings through exploration, investigation and participation. Carefully guided questioning and application of new skills yield knowledge that is extremely personal and meaningful. This chapter explores the learning cycle, a constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

### Chapter 5

#### **Multiple Intelligences and Different Learning Styles • 101**

All students learn; but it is important to recognise that they learn at different rates and in different ways. The teacher's job is to capitalise on students' natural strengths to help them find their own best means for learning. This chapter focuses on brain research about multiple intelligences, learning styles and flow state.

### Chapter 6

#### **Learning to March in Formation – Cooperative Learning • 127**

The use of small group interactions in learning situations can lead to higher-order thinking, enhanced feelings of individual self-esteem and greater academic achievement. Cooperative learning is an effective instructional and assessment strategy that can improve student learning and promote emotional literacy among peers.

## Part Three

# Stepping to YOUR OWN MUSIC

### Chapter 7

#### **Building a Classroom Community • 153**

It is not always easy to merge a personal mission with the agendas of others. This chapter addresses the occasional dissonance between the cognitive and the affective domains in education. It speaks openly about everyday issues that affect teachers and offers suggestions on how they can teach to standards without losing a part of themselves in the process. The concept of emotional literacy is clarified and examined.

### Chapter 8

#### **Paying It Forward • 183**

Chapter 8 explains the importance of and gives examples for what is meant by *the heart of teaching*. Methods for integrating interpersonal and intrapersonal skills within the curriculum are offered.