# Becoming a *Legendary* Teacher

## A Guide To Inspiring Excellence in the Classroom

### William Freeman
### David Scheidecker

# Becoming a

## Legendary

## Teacher

*This book is dedicated to a true
classroom legend, my coauthor and
close personal friend, David Scheidecker.*

*During the writing of our book, David was
suddenly and unexpectedly taken from us to
be with our Lord. David had a passion for life.
He was a loving husband to his wife, Kathy, a
devoted father to his children Kelly and Damian,
an avid sports fan (loved his Chicago White Sox),
and a truly inspirational and motivating
classroom instructor.*

*This book is a window into David's world of
educational brilliance. David Scheidecker
defined: an educational LEGEND.*

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# Foreword

**W**hen I first entered the hallways of Reed-Custer High School and met the principal, Bill Freeman, I knew I was standing at the door of an opportunity. Just a few years out of college with a sincere desire to grow as an educator, I was fortunate to have "this door" opened for me in the fall of 1992. His words spoke of greatness: of who we were and what we were to become. From his interactions with students to the way he conducted parent meetings, one never doubted that the mission of the teachers in his school was to invent the future of education. As a new teacher, I was surrounded by professionals who embraced current research and applied best practice with a genuine enthusiasm that is rare in any group of employees, much less in the field of education. And with any "world class" faculty, you have leaders who inspire leaders.

As I prepared to begin teaching that first year, I soon learned that there was a legendary teacher who inspired this legendary leader. Dave Scheidecker led the English Department and chaired the Teacher Mentor Program in addition to leading a state powerhouse speech program. Dave also had a passion for baseball and fishing. The first passion saw him as a coach for the Reed-Custer Class A state championship baseball team and the latter was the second door that opened for me as an educator. I will forever cherish the days that Dave and I spent on the lake perfecting our casts while reflecting on the craft of teaching. I learned about his family, his joys, and his fears. I also learned that he and Bill were writing a book together. When Dave spoke of the book, *Bringing Out the Best in Students,* he would often reflect on former students and colleagues who helped him experience the joy of teaching. And no name came up more often than Bill

Freeman's. Their devotion to doing what was best for students was infectious and inspiring. And while I had the good fortune to work on Bill Freeman's staff and spend those lazy Sunday afternoons on the lake, I learned about legendary teachers through firsthand experience. Dave Scheidecker and Bill Freeman were servant leaders who practiced the craft of teaching with high expectations for themselves and those whom they served. Our faculty meetings were rich with inspiration and creativity. Capitalizing on our inherent gifts, they modeled two of the most critical qualities an educator can possess: high standards and an equally high level of support.

As demonstrated by the authors through their many years of service to the field of education, I was made keenly aware that the skills possessed by the legendary teacher are effortless and impactful. In the pages of this book, Bill Freeman and David Scheidecker offer the practices that distinguished them as legends to the thousands of students and faculty who had the honor of participating in their rich learning environment. Current students of the education profession and experienced teachers and administrators alike can find inspiration in the ideas and strategies that these two authors share in this wonderful book. Whether you are a student of Madeline Hunter or Robert Marzano, or an evaluator utilizing the ideas from Charlotte Danielson's work, you will find the pages of this book to reveal a practical approach to implementing best practices in the classroom. And it is these best practices from which true legends are born. Without a doubt, your exploration of this book will leave you and your protégés with a wealth of material to invent your own future.

As the years passed, giving each of us new opportunities, I had the great fortune of continuing to see Bill and Dave's impact on the educational community. Dave served as the Indian Prairie School District 204 advanced placement coordinator in addition to teaching advanced placement English and leading the speech program at Neuqua Valley High School. In addition, he opened the innovative 204 Frontier Campus, developing and administering a program that serves high school seniors. Bill continued his work at the college level, mentoring future educators at Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois. Upon the announcement of their second collaboration, *Becoming a Legendary Teacher: To Instruct and Inspire,*

I knew the educational community was about to celebrate another resource that speaks to the heart of teaching.

When news traveled of Dave's passing in December of 2006, one could only grieve at the loss of the legendary teacher. When Bill Freeman and the hundreds of colleagues, students, and friends gathered for Dave's memorial, we shared our many "legendary" stories and were deeply awestruck at the great depth of impact he had on those who had the honor of knowing him and his work. Bill Freeman's completion of the legendary work that he shared with his friend and colleague should become a part of any educator's essential reading. May you be inspired and continue to inspire.

*Mark Truckenbrod*
*Associate Principal*
*Neuqua Valley High School*
*Naperville, Illinois*

# Preface

## *Defining the Legend*

*Everyone knows a legend—the teacher who is successful at bringing out the best in students, regardless of the location of the school, the diversity of the students, the conditions of the facilities, or the availability of resources. At least one legend can be found in every school. This is a book about the characteristics that define the legendary teacher, about how you can recognize and acknowledge those characteristics in teachers, and about how you can foster the development of those characteristics in yourself and colleagues. Throughout the book, you will find hundreds of examples and strategies for becoming a better teacher—for being a legend.*

**W**'re into the second century of American public education, and if the press is at all correct, we haven't become much better at it. In fact, many people think we've gotten worse. Nevertheless, referendums continue to be defeated, classrooms continue to grow in size, and state and federal dollars continue to disappear. At the very same time, however, curricula continue to grow as education is given more and more responsibility to cure society's ills. Traditional families are a thing of the past, as, apparently, so too is school authority. (In *loco parentis* has changed from meaning "in place of the parents" to "the parents are crazy, too"!) The situation has so deteriorated that it seems many decisions are no

longer based on what is best for students but what is legalistically tenable. Left all alone in the front lines is the classroom teacher.

But surprisingly, despite the litany of what's wrong with public education today, there are teachers who not only survive in this environment, but thrive. There is probably not a school in America where there is not, at least, one teacher who continues to make a positive difference in the lives of children. Despite the financial pinch, despite the lack of support from a graying population, despite the changing demographics of the community, there is at least that one teacher who seems to make everything work—all the time; who inspires the slow learner, challenges the gifted student, and somehow gets the problem student focused successful on learning—all of the time. Where other teachers have struggled, have given up—this one succeeds. The programs and activities this teacher sponsors blossom while others shrivel and wither away.

*This teacher's presence is no secret—the community knows about him or her. At registration time, parents lobby: "I want my child in that teacher's class." Somehow, in spite of all that is wrong with education today, this one teacher has earned the respect of students (who otherwise don't like classes), the school (that seems diametrically opposed to ever recognizing merit within its own ranks), and even the community (that somehow believes schools have existed in a vacuum untouched by inflation since the 1960s). This teacher has become what this book is about, a legend.*

*Legends are life-touchers. They are the reason students want to go to school every day. In a time when role models are in decline elsewhere, legends shine brightly, daily exemplifying their values, making things work. This book is dedicated to those classroom legends, to examining what they have that makes them so preeminent in their profession, that makes them so important to the lives of so many children. This is a book about them.*

*The work is broken down, chapter by chapter, into what we think makes legends so very successful in their schools. We do not suggest that what is presented is causal in nature; rather, we see those characteristics described as correlative to successful teaching. They seem to be pretty much unvarying among the most successful teachers regardless of locale or grade level. We think they apply to elementary teachers, middle school teachers, high school teachers, and college teachers—and certainly to administrators throughout education.*

Here's the plan:

Chapter 1, "Piecing Together the Personality Puzzle," discusses the character traits, attitudes, and habits shared by legendary teachers.

Chapter 2, "Nothing Succeeds Like Success," presents the strategies that legends use to ensure student success.

Chapter 3, "Establishing High Expectations," describes methods of creating and maintaining standards for student performance and helping students achieve at those levels.

Chapter 4, "Practicing Skillful Communication," enumerates practices of effectively communicating with students, parents, and community both in and outside the classroom.

Chapter 5, "Defining Instructional Protocol," presents an approach by which teachers can maximize their own efforts, eliminating counterproductive practices.

Chapter 6, "Winning the Crowd," examines how teachers can sculpt a solid image of themselves and their efforts, engendering more support for their efforts.

Chapter 7, "Understanding Practices and Assessments," looks at how legendary teachers are analytic in their approach to improving their own skills.

Chapter 8, "Motivation," presents strategies for motivating even the reluctant student.

Chapter 9, "Motivating High Student Achievement," attempts to offer insight into the debate about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the ramifications for the classroom teacher.

Chapter 10, "Recognizing and Promoting Excellence," proposes additional practical concerns about reaching students.

Chapter 11, "Developing Powerful Classroom Management Skills," introduces the fundamental competencies necessary for teachers to have to maintain a successful learning environment.

Is it possible for any teacher to become a legend? The question is so hypothetical as to be virtually meaningless, but what is meaningful is the belief that by careful study of the characteristics of these legends, by

dedication and determination, every teacher can improve his or her effectiveness in the classroom, his or her ability to be a life-toucher. We have seen that kind of success often over the years, in brand new teachers fresh out of college and in very experienced teachers with decades of experience. Whether you will be a success in the classroom, whether you will make a difference in a child's life, in short, whether you become a legend, depends on one thing and one thing only—"YOU!"

Before we turn you loose into our book, we'd like to share a simple story with you—a real experience we had several years ago. One of our better friends was the plant manager of General Foods' facility that manufactured Gaines dog food. He was an important man in town, well respected and handsomely rewarded for his efforts—six figures at a time when most teachers had just broken five.

On many weekends, we made plans to meet him at his house before we headed out to one of several local golf courses, his house being on the way. Weekend after weekend, we'd get to his house only to have to wait, impatiently and not very graciously, for him to get home. He'd be doing volunteer work at the local YMCA or setting up a youth basketball program through the United Way or arranging visits to hospitals through his church—regardless, he wasn't there and we weren't playing golf and while we supported these noble efforts— it was Saturday and he had apparently failed to understand that our golf time was sacrosanct.

Finally, one Saturday when we had waited for the better part of an hour, we had to ask, "What's with all this charity work? Saturday is golf day, remember?"

"Well, guys," he responded, looking only a little guilty, "I'm not as lucky as you—I'm not a teacher."

"Lucky?" we both asked, not being able to see past his six-figure salary or the Mercedes he was driving.

"Yeah, lucky. Look—I make dog food for a living. I make certain the dog food is safe and well packaged and sells well, but I make dog food. You guys are teachers. You make people. .. . And every chance I get I have to do something else to put meaning in my life ... you know, so my life makes sense."

Step 1

*We're not foolish enough to believe we can produce a simple 10-step procedure by which you achieve teaching excellence. Teaching is a diagram far more complex and difficult than that. But we do believe there exists a set of correlatives shared by many teaching legends and that*

*conscious knowledge of and adherence to those correlatives may indeed make you a more effective teacher.*

**Step 2**

*Individual teachers must be attuned to what works for them, what fits their teaching style—for teaching, more than any other profession, is about style; it is an art. Legends find their own stride, are in harmony with the rhythm diagram of their classes. They understand that there are no quick fixes, no simple answers. They have often dedicated their lives to their profession.*

**Step 3**

*Instead of offering you a simple-minded panacea, a new paradigm, we suggest instead that you invent your own, and that doing so is made easier by the concepts presented within this book. Borrow from everyone. Steal unashamedly. Our belief is that every legend is his or her own invention.*

**Step 4**

*We invite you to be creative. We invite you to invent or reinvent yourself. We think that what we have to offer herein will make that imminently possible. We, like you, are makers of people, and we challenge you to make the best people you can, by being the best teacher you are able to be. It is the world's most important challenge.*

This is the sentiment we hold most dearly.

This book is written for the people we believe do the most meaningful work on earth—it's written by and for teachers.

## Final Note: NBPTS

The authors recognize the contribution the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has made to education in America and encourage teachers to consider seeking their NBPTS certification. In that vein, our text includes "key" symbols whenever we think our discussion is particularly relevant to one of the Five Core Propositions of the NBPTS.

This "key," for example, indicates that we believe the discussion at this point is particularly pertinent to Proposition 3 of the Five Core Propositions. We hope this reference system assists those educators working to become National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and gives a general unity to our work as well.

# The Five Core Propositions

**Proposition 1: Teachers Are Committed to Students and Learning**

⟨ NBCTs are dedicated to making knowledge accessible to all students. They believe all students can learn.

⟨ They treat students equitably. They recognize the individual differences that distinguish their students from one another, and they take account for these differences in their practice.

⟨ NBCTs understand how students develop and learn.

⟨ They respect the cultural and family differences students bring to their classroom.

⟨ They are concerned with their students' self-concept, their motivation, and the effects of learning on peer relationships.

⟨ NBCTs are also concerned with the development of character and civic responsibility.

**Proposition 2: Teachers Know the Subjects They Teach and How to Teach Those Subjects to Students**

⟨ NBCTs have mastery over the subject(s) they teach. They have a deep understanding of the history, structure, and real-world applications of the subject.

⟨ They have skill and experience in teaching it, and they are very familiar with the skills gaps and preconceptions students may bring to the subject.

⟨ They are able to use diverse instructional strategies to teach for understanding.

**Proposition 3: Teachers Are Responsible for Managing and Monitoring Student Learning**

⟨ NBCTs deliver effective instruction. They move fluently through a range of instructional techniques, keeping students motivated, engaged, and focused.

⟨ They know how to engage students to ensure a disciplined learning environment and how to organize instruction to meet instructional goals.

⟨ NBCTs know how to assess the progress of individual students as well as the class as a whole.

⟨ They use multiple methods for measuring student growth and understanding, and they can clearly explain student performance to parents.

**Proposition 4: Teachers Think Systematically about Their Practice and Learn from Experience**

⟨ NBCTs model what it means to be an educated person—they read, they question, they create, and they are willing to try new things.

⟨ They are familiar with learning theories and instructional strategies and stay abreast of current issues in American education.

⟨ They critically examine their practice on a regular basis to deepen knowledge, expand their repertoire of skills, and incorporate new findings into their practice.

**Proposition 5: Teachers Are Members of Learning Communities**

⟨ NBCTs collaborate with others to improve student learning.

⟨ They are leaders and actively know how to seek and build partnerships with community groups and businesses.

⟨ They work with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development, and staff development.

⟨ They can evaluate school progress and the allocation of resources in order to meet state and local education objectives.

⟨ They know how to work collaboratively with parents to engage them productively in the work of the school.

*Note:* NBCTs = National Board Certified Teachers.

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**T**hank you to Corwin Press, especially Allyson Sharp, for your patience and support during the difficult time after losing my friend and colleague, David.

Thank you to my family (my wife, Carol; daughter, Mindra; and daughter-in-law, Kara), educational colleagues (Mark, Don, Addie, Jamie, John, Karen, and Susan), coworkers (Gwen, Amy, Michele, and Ray), and friends for your unwavering support, understanding, assistance, and encouragement.

Because of you, my commitment for completing this book in David's honor is now realized.
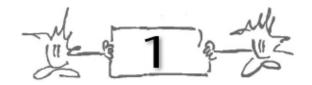
Thomas "Buck" Wall
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# About the Authors

**William Freeman** was a middle school social studies teacher for 11 years and a high school principal for 22 years. During his tenure as principal, he taught classes in philosophy to high school students and instructed as an adjunct professor in the educational, administrative, and business master's degree programs for Aurora University and Olivet Nazarene University. Having retired in 2006 from the public sector of education, Freeman continues to work as an educational consultant and an adjunct professor, and he holds the position of professional development specialist for the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies at Olivet Nazarene University. In addition to his background in instruction and administration, he has been a North-Central Accreditation facilitator and a trained administrative analyst. His special area of expertise is in effective instructional techniques and strategies. He has written curriculum for gifted students at the middle school level, created a philosophy curriculum for high school students, and written several instructional modules at the university level to improve classroom instruction and administrative performance. He is a frequent motivational and educational speaker at leadership conferences and instructional workshops. In addition, he has been a baseball, basketball, and track coach, as well as an athletic director, class sponsor, and student council advisor. He was selected as the outstanding administrator in the state of Illinois, recognized as an "Administrator of Merit" by the Illinois State Board of Education, honored as an Illinois Lincolnland Legend, and awarded the Willis E. Snowbarger Award for Teaching Excellence by Olivet Nazarene University.

**David Scheidecker** was a high school English teacher for 35 years and served as a department chair for more than two decades. He was his district's academic facilitator, overseeing its gifted and advanced placement programs. Most recently, he served as the dean of an alternative senior campus where students finish their high school graduation requirements while concurrently beginning their college degrees. His professional activities included serving as a reader for the advanced placement English Literature and Composition and English Language and Composition exams, acting as a consultant to the College Board at advanced placement workshops, and speaking at school districts across the country in various in-service capacities. Scheidecker worked extensively in curriculum design and revision, objective-based protocol, student motivation, testing, and reading and writing across the curriculum. In addition, he coached baseball, football, and wrestling; directed plays, forensics, and debates; and headed his school's mentor program. He was also recognized as a "Teacher of Merit" by the Illinois State Board of Education and was the holder of a master-teaching certificate following his National Board certification.

# 1

# Piecing Together the Personality Puzzle

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*The chicken-and-egg dilemma has its parallel in education. It is the question of whether good teachers are born or if they may be made. There are countless examples of naturally intuitive teachers who were almost legends when they first walked into the classroom—seemingly able to inspire and instruct, but in the same breath—no true greatness is possible unless one is willing to learn, to improve. Are legends in teaching born or made? Our conclusion is that such a question is probably moot. More important, we believe it's better for everyone involved if we were to assume that greatness could be cultivated. This book is predicated on the belief that there are traits, even personality traits, that anyone can improve upon to enhance his or her effectiveness as a teacher—his or her efforts to become a classroom legend.*

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## A Collective Scenario: The Legend Defined

### Act I: Reality Rears Its Ugly Head

The classroom clock must be broken. Its hands refuse to move. Beads of sweat form on the young teacher's increasingly furrowed brow. Shortness of breath attends the questions, "What am I doing here!? What made me think I ever wanted to be a teacher?" As he looks at the pile of papers he will have to tackle at home this evening, after he's attended the open house, after he's helped his wife with the dishes, after he's wrestled though his own children's homework, he begins to understand why his all-knowing parents responded with a quizzical "teacher?" when he announced the career path he had chosen for himself.

Just about the time a midday career change becomes a real possibility, the bell rings, sending all the children, but especially the two most aggravating fourth graders in the world, to lunch, thus avoiding what could only be a mutually destructive confrontation wherein he would seriously advocate some gene pool skimming. These are devil spawn the kind Will Rogers never met. They would have driven Mother Theresa beyond her vows. But with the bell, they're gone, and now, at least, he has lunch—a 30-minute "duty-free" time, his only respite from the inexorable conflict of wills others call teaching.

## Act II: The Shock Heard "'Round the World"

As he enters the cafeteria, overwhelmed by a sea of children either screaming at one another or pushing one another or giggling at one another (and for the overachievers—all three simultaneously), the weariness of the classroom is transformed into general despair. Despite the deafening noise, he accelerates his pace so he can get quickly through the cafeteria line, gulp down his Tylenol-laced lunch in the teachers' lunchroom and still have a moment's peace before the bells beckons him to the next level of hell.

As he battles his way into the lunch line, he is taken aback by the sight of the two renegades from his last class standing patiently in line, engaging in polite conversation with another fourth-grade teacher—and no—she's not armed—yet still the two balls of nonstop motion and brashness are standing quietly talking. Amazingly, their hands hang innocently at their sides. Their lips rest quietly unfurled from their perpetual snide whorl.

He pauses to take in this image with all its theological implications and is aware that his feelings fluctuate from

wonder—"How does she do that?"

to awe—"Look, they're actually listening!"

to anger—"He said 'Please'—that little son of a gun said 'Please.'"

and finally to suspicion—"Who is that lady and how does she do that?"

## Act III: Epiphany—of Sorts

As the conversation continues, despite his resentment, our teacher can't help but be aware of the positive interaction that is occurring, and unwillingly (and perhaps even unconsciously) he begins to wonder how any teacher could ever have a constructive relationship with those two yahoos. Turning away from the dialogue, he enters the lunch line, gets his food, and heads toward the faculty lounge with a pair of queries riddling his mind:

1. What kind of meat is this really?
2. What special powers does that teacher have that makes her able to tame feral fourth-grade beasts?

The answer is probably not a better pedagogy.

The answer is probably not a more interesting curriculum.

The answer is probably not more and more modern technology.

And the answer is not that the teacher with whom they were so politely interacting is a pushover who lets children run rampant. He knows her to be a demanding teacher with high standards. Instead, the answer (and this is not necessarily a terrible thing for him to come to grips with) is that the teacher for whom he was filled with wonder has a very different personality from his own.

*Personality* is generally defined as the set of an individual's distinguishing character traits, attitudes, and habits. Personality, simply put, is the single most significant feature that distinguishes one individual from another, or, in the setting of a school, one teacher from another. There are certainly as many types of personalities as there are teachers in any given school, and just as obviously there is no single, specific type of personality, no single personality trait that may be deemed preferable in all situations, for all students, all the time.

One may be tempted to assume we're describing a charismatic, outgoing, attractive young teacher, but the fact of the matter is that legends are rarely all of those and may be none of those. The legend may be retiring, may be soft-spoken, may be popular among his or her peers, or may work as a loner. The legend may be a veteran of extracurricular activities or a first-year teacher whose contact with students is limited to the classroom. It may be that the legend is a home-grown alumnus or someone new to America, still finding his or her own path of assimilation. The legend may share ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic with the students, or the legend may appear to have very little in common with the students. The legend may be a product of the local community college and nearest state university or come from hallowed ivy halls. Regardless, every school seems to have at least one, often more—the instructors who somehow have the personality that builds relationships and trust, those most able to make a difference in the lives of children daily.

For our discussion we have chosen to break down this larger, perplexing concept of personality into four areas of discussion:

1. A necessary disclaimer

2. Desirable character traits

3. Strong attitudes

4. Developing good habits

## A Necessary Disclaimer

Admittedly, this is not a very impressive way to start a book on education, but as we coaxed this chapter from our brains onto the page, the previous scenario troubled us because the first few drafts sounded as though they promised a panacea to education:

**Clarification 1:** We don't believe in panaceas to any complex problems.

**Clarification 2:** We do believe in education.

What especially bothered us as we considered personality was the adage that opposites attract. If that's true, and there are a bazillion personality types (which is, incidentally, about as close to a mathematical analysis as

we get in this work), then the sad truth is that no one teacher's personality could ever appeal to every type of student. Follow this logic:

< It must be assumed that each student brings to class a very different personality of his or her own and a very distinct set of needs.
< It also must be assumed that every teacher can fill those needs to some degree.
< It is, however, impossible for any single teacher to present a personality that will be attractive at all times to all students.

While admitting that no individual teacher can have a personality that is attractive to all students all the time, one must recognize that every teacher can make certain that his or her personality avoids any traits that would preclude learning for any students. Although it's safe to assume that no teacher may be embraced by every student as the "Next Coming," we may hope that no teacher is feared as the "Principality of Darkness" either.

Acknowledging that, there is an important administrative directive implicit here. The school as a whole is best served when administration seeks to bring in a wide range of personalities and not a single type. Certain personalities do not serve certain types of students, and if an administration goes out of its way to hire one type of personality, then it may be assumed that one sector of the student population will not be well served. The faculty, like any individual, is far healthier when it is well rounded.

This is why, then, we chose to open our discussion of legendary personalities with an examination of personality. It is our contention that the teacher's personality is the single most significant trait in promoting educational success, in motivating students. The teacher, we think, is far more important to the education of his or students than any prescribed pedagogy, technology, curriculum, facilities, or textbooks. We believe teachers matter most.

How does one's personality become the key to opening the door of motivating students, of touching lives? We return to the belief that it is in the best interest of education to operate under the assumption that legendary teachers may be developed, that it is possible for every teacher to nurture personality traits that will help him or her establish an environment more conducive to the learning of all his or her students. This, then, is our next task—an examination of the various aspects of a teacher's personality that are most conducive to student success.

# Desirable Character Traits

Almost every adult in America can identify a favorite teacher who had a tremendously positive effect on his or her life. We may not have a favorite plumber, a favorite lawyer, or even a favorite proctologist, but most of us have a favorite teacher. Each of us can look back to that one teacher who, more than anyone else, motivated us, cared for us, taught us, and helped us grow. If we were lucky, we had two or three favorite teachers—legends in our minds.

When asked to identify a word or phrase that best describes their favorite teacher, most adults' lists include the following:

| | |
|---|---|
| • informed | • exciting |
| •creative | • positive |
| •compassionate | • challenging |
| •understanding | • dedicated |
| •interesting | • encouraging |
| •patient | • funny |
| •honest | • fair |
| •even tempered | • friendly |
| •happy | • nonthreatening |
| •inspired | • caring |
| •original | • organized |
| •intense | • respectful |

We all know that the teacher who can exhibit even half of these traits any time after the middle of September can walk on water—but for the rest of us, the list of descriptors can be broken down into four major areas of concern students really have about those who supervise their education:

## Concern 1

Surveys appear to suggest that students are attracted to classrooms where the instruction is informed, yet entertaining (e.g., "creative," "funny," "friendly," "interesting," "happy," and "original").

Students are not always looking for the easy way out. (That's a concept they don't master until somewhere in the middle of their junior year in

college—remember?) By and large, they wish to learn and tend to respect the teacher who makes learning enjoyable. The legend's classroom is exciting. Students are challenged to do well, in the expectation that they will. The coordination of instruction, practice, and remediation prior to measurement is such that interested students can and do succeed. As a result, the legend's classroom often looks and feels different from other classrooms around the school.

When one enters this room, he or she knows that what follows is categorically unique from the other experiences of the day. It is a fun and exciting place where learning occurs. In this classroom, humor is as prevalent as content. The fun or excitement is what makes learning easy and sometimes almost accidental. The legend may present material with a comedic sense, or with a dramatic flair, or cloaked in mystery. The presentation does not dissolve into stand-up comedy, but there is a great deal of appropriate laughter intermingled with a wide variety of learning. How clearly can we say it? Learning is fun and exciting here.

In addition, legendary teachers often appear to be great storytellers as well. They weave magical stories in their classrooms with personal anecdotes, true bits of historical information, or wonderfully delightful stories, especially for younger children. Such narratives are not time wasters, but strong devices for making points, for teaching morals, for helping students see connections, framing the story in the eyes or knowledge base of the students.

- < Humor can be used in a mnemonic fashion: "When he saw I had trouble spelling 'recommend,' my father reminded me that one 'sea' is enough for anyone, but we all love M & M's. It works to this day."
- < Drama may be used to appeal to students' conspiratorial nature: "Roanoke, as we studied, is the lost colony in American history. If you were an investigator there, what clues would lead you to come up with a theory on what happened?"
- < Storytelling is a wonderful approach at the elementary level as the teacher communicates the need for faithful reporting as she tells the story of the boy who cried wolf to an audience that never heard it before and will be caught up in the excitement of the story and readily see its lesson.
- < Mystery can be presented in the form of a challenge: "We know that the Constitution requires people who run for the presidency to be natural-born citizens of the United States, but of course, while George

Washington was born in America, he was not born in the United States. Who was the last person to run for the presidency not to have been born in what was the United States?"

(By the by—to prove this is a successful technique, we'll satisfy your curiosity—the answer is Barry Goldwater, who ran for president in 1964. He was born in Arizona in 1909, and Arizona did not become a state until 1912.)

Make no mistake, the legend does not rely on gimmicks: there is no list of clever activities that can be memorized, no definitive source of entertainment, but the successful teacher does seek to make the learning process enjoyable, interactive, hands-on, and original, ensuring that no child is ever allowed to fall behind or slip between the cracks. The teacher's personality makes this possible. There is a very definitive attitude about the classroom climate and exact knowledge about the very nature of learning. The more boring the class, the less learning that occurs. This concept is well exemplified in the following anecdote.

One of our student teachers was not having a great deal of success once she took over the class. The students begged the supervising teacher to come back because, they claimed, they weren't learning anything. They could not, they maintained, force themselves to pay attention. They liked the student teacher—she was nice and all, but she was just soooooo boring.

The supervising teacher was empathetic to their feelings and wanted to address their concerns with the student teacher but was not prepared to tell her that she was, well—boring. As an experienced professional, the supervising teacher had been prepared to make suggestions about lesson plans, about pacing, about discipline, about reaching closure, about individualizing instruction—but not how to be less boring.

Matters grew steadily worse, as they often do when not confronted; the student teacher started experiencing behavior problems. One day, after school, the supervising teacher told the student teacher, "We need to talk." They sat down at a table, the silence awkward as the supervising teacher sought the right way to say what needed to be said. Finally, the supervisor simply asked, "So, how do you think it's going?"

The student teacher paused for a moment and then reflected, "I didn't know a teacher had to put a show on every day for these kids, and honestly, I don't think I have my act together ...yet."

Despite the student teacher's previous shortcomings, it was at that moment that the supervising teacher knew she'd be all right.

> **LESSON:**
>
> Every day is a fun-filled, exciting adventure in the legend's class.

Concern 2

Students look for a learning environment that holds challenges for them to learn but is safe from ridicule and failure (e.g., "informed," "patient," "nonthreatening," "motivated" "challenging," "encouraging," and "positive").

All students seem to share two commonalities: all love to succeed and all love to learn, but when the learning experience is laced with repeated failure, shame, discouragement, and accusation, learning is an experience to be dreaded. For the sake of one's own self-esteem, one's self-image, the embarrassed student often distances himself or herself from the system in which he or she fails. Thus instead of resiliency, the teacher is met with apathy, and instead of perseverance, the teacher may eventually encounter hostility.

If students are challenged with significant learning tasks consisting of skills relevant to their lives, however, and enter them assured that their sincere effort will not result in failure or humiliation, then they are far more likely to pursue the task earnestly. No student minds being challenged to think, but every student (every person for that matter) very much minds feeling doomed to failure. To be a legend, a teacher must practice those traits praised by students. It means being patient, nonthreatening, and encouraging. This can easily be achieved when the teacher shows that he or she is willing to share the responsibility for disappointing results: "We could have prepared better for this, maybe with more examples or better review."

As much as possible, the successful teacher encourages and rewards effort as well as success. For example, many middle and high schools operate on a 90% (A), 80% (B), 70% (C), 60% (D) grade scale. That leaves a 59-point range of failure. When a student's work is unacceptable (e.g., it's wrong, off topic, etc.) but is a very legitimate effort, then even if the teacher cannot pass the student and must assign an "F," he or she can still give the lion's share of the 59 points. Lower scores should be reserved for half-hearted efforts.

At the elementary level, efforts should always constitute a portion of the grade, and it is in our humble opinion that no legitimate effort should meet with failure. We are not advocating social promotion, and we're not totally

denigrating the philosophy behind the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, but we know that effort counts, and when students abandon effort, all is lost.

Additionally, in the legend's classroom, it's okay to be wrong, because everyone realizes that the search for the correct response is far more valued than the response itself. In the legend's classroom, making an honest effort and volunteering answers—thinking—are more highly valued than embarrassment of being wrong is to be feared. We repeat—thinking skills are more highly valued than embarrassment is feared. If you can make that a truth in your classroom, you are on your way to being a classroom legend. In the legend's classroom, effort is what matters, what is rewarded, what results in success.

In the legend's classroom, the observer will likely find the following behaviors:

- < Questions are validated before being answered: "That is a very insightful question!"
- < Wrong answers are validated before being corrected: "That answer took some good thinking; you've made a mistake, but you did some good thinking."
- < Effort is highly recognized as success: "This is a superb effort, very well thought-out."
- < Simply following rules is recognized: "Thank you for raising your hand before talking."

The legend knows that for all children to learn, his or her first job is to make the classroom an ESZ—Emotionally Safe Zone. The further a classroom is from being an ESZ, the less likely learning will occur, especially for struggling students.

> **LESSON:**
>
> Your children must believe this: "To ask a question is, perhaps, to be a fool for a moment. Not to is to be a fool for life."—Chinese Proverb

Concern 3

Students wish to view their instructors as Professionals, models from whom they may learn (e.g., "motivated," "intense," "wise," and "dedicated").

The most successful teachers love their fields. Students might make fun of their dedication—"Old Man Freeman loves, eats, and breathes physics"—but deep inside, they admire their passion; they envy such commitment. Science teachers seem more like scientists than teachers inside the classroom. Vocational people are professionals in their field, working outside the classroom as well. Language Arts teachers are readers and writers, and physical education department staff enjoy good health and recreation. Elementary teachers appear to love long division and make a point of doing problems by hand in front of children, not with a calculator.

Legends are not shams. They love their areas of expertise and communicate that love to their students daily. The legend's real reward isn't on payday; it is every day when the teacher's passion proves contagious to the students. That is the only big-time return on anyone's investment. Here is an example of this legendary teacher's contagious passion that was passed on to one of his students:

> *A gruff, older teacher of 25 years was in his room working when a young substitute teacher came up to him after school, absolutely beaming. "Remember me?" she asked.*
>
> *Politely, he admitted that he didn't. She told him that she was a former student of his, but that didn't jog his memory. He still did not remember her and kindly told her that.*
>
> *Unperturbed, she told him her name, as though revealing a secret, but he still had to say he did not remember her from class.*
>
> *Like a trooper, she was not deterred by his memory lapse and admitted that she had given her married name, and then gave her maiden name. But that didn't help either, and the older teacher could only look sorrowfully at her.*
>
> *She graciously allowed him his poor memory, admitting that it was many years ago that she had been his student. As she named several of her classmates, the older teacher had to confess he remembered them well, along with others she hadn't mentioned.*
>
> *Her face darkened, and somewhere between tears and anger she said, "I took all your classes. You're the reason I became an English teacher."*

And yet, both of us have heard teachers tell students that they didn't like something they were about to study. We've heard them tell their students, "we have to get through this stuff before we can do something fun." We've heard them tell their students that they only have to know something for an

upcoming test or, worse, for some nationally normed test to be taken in the spring. Unfortunately, passion and love of learning are not the only contagious attributes. A teacher can just as easily undermine any chance of motivating students toward real success.

When teachers approach every day with passion and commitment, they not only instruct more effectively, they also, however unintentionally, inspire.

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**LESSON:**

When teachers approach every day with passion and commitment, they not only instruct more effectively, which is to say motivate more effectively, but they also, however unintentionally, inspire.

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Concern 4

Students seem to desire teachers who are sensitive to their needs and the exigencies of the existence within which they must operate (e.g., "compassionate," "honest," "understanding," "even tempered," "fair," and "caring").

Over the years we have had the opportunity to work with a number of student teachers. In virtually every case, there comes a time when the student teacher comes up to his or her supervising teacher and presents the same dilemma: "On the one hand, I want to be sensitive to the kids' needs, but on the other, I don't want them to think I'm an easy mark for believing every story they concoct."

The quandary is simply this: do you wish to be popular or respected? The response to this question is not an easy one, and it presents a situation that most educators face at one time or another in their careers, but that doesn't make finding a response any easier. Perhaps the best strategy for arriving at a response goes something like this: if we can admit that we cannot be perfect—ever—then our course of action is more evident. Given the choice, how do we choose to err?

< Would we rather be the teachers who are never fooled because we never buy any story and never give any student a break? or
< Would we rather be the teachers who occasionally have the wool pulled over our eyes because we prefer to trust students and deal with them from the premise that they are inherently truthful?

The best people are honest, compassionate, and understanding. The best teachers are, too. Admittedly, neither choice is really desirable, and the thought of students pulling a fast one and laughing about it (and us) later is not attractive, but having to choose, the legend would rather be viewed as a sucker than a cynic.

*When dealing with students who are in trouble for breaking a rule or for failing to turn in an assignment, we would be wise to remember what it last felt like when we were pulled over for speeding by an officer of the law.*

*At that moment, we did not desire justice or moral righteousness; what we craved was mercy and a second chance. When that officer finally let us go with only a warning, we were forever grateful—or at least grateful for a week or 200 miles—whichever came first.*

We do not suggest that legends may be characterized by their naiveté, but wouldn't it be nice to be viewed more often with gratitude by students? Repeat offenders are, of course, dealt with sternly and quickly, but the legend understands that students make errors in judgment and are willing to give them a second chance, accept the dubious excuse, and be human. At least once—maybe twice.

The elementary teacher even has a learning moment when a young child offers a lame excuse. Often, at the grade school level a false pretext is readily transparent. At this point, the legend has the opportunity to do some important moral instruction, hopefully in a kind manner and not a belittling one. Here, of course, is one of the failings of NCLB—it ignores the tremendous contribution of educators to the affective and moral domains. More so than the high school teacher, the elementary teacher, by displaying the ability to listen and show great patience, can use a situation such as this to help students grow. We do, after all, make people.

No one is perfect; the world can't function in only black and white. One must be flexible enough in one's exercise of authority so as not to appear brutal and uncaring. The fact that a child has made up an excuse, no matter how implausible, is indicative of his or her desire to appear to have done the right thing. This then is a commonality between teacher and student, a starting point from which to go forth.

**LESSON:**

> The legend never forgets that justice is not only blind, it is compassionate. The human condition never precludes the need for mercy.

When weighed together, these four areas of concern clearly present students' expectations for the environment in which they most readily learn. Caring teachers are the ones who are willing to massage their own personalities in those directions, and that, not coincidentally, is a neat segue to a discussion of attitudes.

# Strong Attitudes

One need not travel far into any profession before he or she hears someone say in one breath, "What potential!" and in the next breath, "But he's going nowhere with that attitude." Such an opinion does nothing more than echo the old saw, "Attitude is everything." What kind of attitude should a teacher carry into a classroom every day? It would appear that most legends share a number of attitudinal commonalities.

## Looking for the Best

Effective teachers are always looking for the best in everyone. They are not confused with reports of past success or failure as determinants of future achievement. They do not confuse an older sibling's abilities with those of a younger brother or sister. They do not bring prejudices into the class based on socioeconomics, race, gender, ethnicity, or any other demographic trait. Every child is approached as a unique and special individual, and every individual begins every day with a clean slate. In short, every child in the legend's classroom receives tender loving care.

Legends begin the morning and end the evening believing in the efficacy of what they do. More so than any other teacher, legends believe that attitude, more often than not, determines success. The question of attitude is of such preeminence in education that we are willing to offer this: teachers "burn out" when, and only when, they have resigned themselves to being burned out. It is a conscious choice—but so is attitude.

## Taking Risks

Effective teachers are competitive risk takers. The very best teachers share one important quality. They want to be the best—not at the expense of others, not by denigrating their peers, not by playing the flatterer to administration, but in the positive pride in their own success. Legends do not fear outside audits of their work; they welcome them as an opportunity to shine. Legends do not dread classroom observations; they relish them as a time to "strut their stuff." Legends seek meaningful feedback about their performance. Legends are not afraid to seek feedback from the entire learning community, especially delighting in the chance to interact with parents at conferences or open houses.

As a result, legends are risk takers. They willingly pioneer new pedagogies and approaches, not afraid to temporarily stumble, knowing that they can recover quickly. They do not use the same tests year after year in the same old units. Legends are as much into their own growth as they are into the students' growth. At the heart of this behavior is a very simple conviction, one that often looks like ego or pride to others, and that is the certainty that they can teach anyone anything, and are, consequently, unafraid of failing. This confidence is contagious and students leave the room believing in the same. A mark of such legends are that children often come to these teachers for help in classes other than the ones they have with the legends— they too believe in the legend's ability to teach.

## Being Fair

Effective teachers are doggedly fair. There are no favorites in the classroom, and it becomes immediately clear to all students that all rules apply with the same consequences to all students, all the time. Most students, kindergarten through senior year of high school, operate within a very simple value system, one that demands fairness. Children express grave moral outrage when they simply utter the words, "That's not fair." Children expect teachers to be impartial, although they fear that some have pets. They expect that punishment is appropriate to the crime. Although they will argue for no punishment, at some level they understand a fair one. They expect that teachers' interaction with them will not come from any prejudices.

The ramifications of these expectations are numerous albeit singular in nature: neither students' academic success in the class; nor their excellent or less-than-excellent behavior; nor their involvement in extracurricular activities; nor their parents' last names; nor their race, ethnicity, or gender; nor any other outside circumstance will earn them preferential treatment

from the teacher. No teacher can overcome the student (or parent) perception that he or she exercises biases in the classroom.

In relation to our earlier discussion, this overwhelming sense of impartiality on behalf of the teacher is a key component in creating ESZs. A very effective practice that any teacher can use to create this sense of impartiality is a simple one. Whenever a teacher finds it necessary to verbally discipline a student in front of others, it is very important that the teacher comes back to that student without much time having passed with something positive. The teacher may have just been forced, in a stern voice, to remind a student, "Jill, I just told you to stay at your desk until dismissed. Now please sit down." Jill has two choices: acquiescence or rebellion. It is important that in the next few interactions, the teacher comes back to Jill as though nothing had happened, to show Jill that there are no hard feelings: "So, the pioneers come to a river too deep to wade and with no boats. What do they do? Jill, you always seem to solve tough problems, what would you have them do?" Jill may be surprised you came back to her as though you weren't mad, or she may still be pouting, but the important thing is that by coming back to her with a smile on your face, you've shown your impartiality. You are, it is obvious to all, fair.

To demonstrate how important this sense of fairness is, and how important it is for teachers to maintain it, let's look at another example. We have already suggested that the classroom teacher has much to learn from sponsors of extracurricular activities. But such sponsors and coaches face the additional challenge of not seeming to be partial toward their team members. We know of one high school legend who was also a debate coach. As the semester drew to a close, several students with high "B's" in the class stayed after school one day to talk to her, to see what they could do to raise their grades to an "A" before the final exam. She listened attentively and made some suggestions on how they could study better for the final and how, if they did really well on the final, she might be able to give them "A's" for the semester since they had all shown so much growth lately. Before they could leave, with their hopes raised ever so slightly, she said to one boy—"But Brian, not for you. You'll have to earn the "A."

Brian was the captain of her debate squad, and the teacher had explained early in the debate season to her entire squad that if they were in her class, she could never do anything that could be construed as favoritism. She was right. Knowing she could not be perfect, she lived by our precept—if you can't be perfect, you have to choose in which direction you will err. This legend understood that while she could give a break to any number of

students based on effort and improvement and any other number of extenuating circumstance, she should be very hesitant to do the same for students who were on her debate squad. She understood that no teacher could ever overcome rumors of giving preferential treatment.

## Appreciating the Pull and Tug of the Class

The most effective teachers do not resent the students that make them be their best. To the contrary, the opposite may be true. The legend knows that any teacher can achieve a degree of success with well-mannered, like-valued, highly-motivated students. These apples of education's eye could be placed in a library and 12 years later emerge well educated, ready for college. Great teachers are not needed to produce high college entrance exam scores for these academic wonders. It is the average achiever and more importantly, the underachiever who truly *need* the great teacher. It is with a great teacher that these students can most significantly make a difference. Conventional wisdom suggests that greatness is defined by adversity and the way in which it is met. Our heroes don't overcome advantages—they overcome tragedy, challenge, and obstacles.

Legends live this simple truth: actions need not always follow feel-ings—in fact, they may precede them. The fact that the teacher may not wish to have a particular student in class, that he or she may not wish to teach a given unit or even an entire class, does not mean the teacher has to act on those feelings. Instead, by acting as though he or she appreciates the student, the unit, or class, the teacher may begin actually to develop positive feelings, and in turn, engender them in his or her students. Legends do not resent the difficulties of their profession; instead, they embrace them, and in doing so, overcome them. That attitude is lived daily by any school's most effective teachers. The legend understands that every teacher draws a tough schedule occasionally. Every teacher finds the most challenging student(s) in his or her class at some time. In any given year, a teacher may find that he or she eats lunch at 10:30 and then teaches five classes in a row. In any given year, the teacher who adores third grade may return from summer vacation to find that next year she'll be teaching first grade. Legends are flexible and professional as they roll with the punches; they make gallons of lemonade when handed lemons.

Having said that, we do not expect that all teachers do their undergraduate work at Pollyanna Tech and their graduate work at Mary Poppins U. We can be realists about this. We have to admit that there are disappointments inherent in our profession. Often, it's true that the squeaky wheels do get the oil, and flexible professionals willing to help are exploited by thoughtless administrations, but the fact is that a positive attitude is an integral part of our triangular definition of the most desirable personality for successful educators.

The final, and perhaps most important aspect of the concept of attitude, is that it is the most obvious of the attributes to students. A poor attitude cannot be hidden for long, if at all. A good attitude, on the other hand, cannot be hidden at all. It permeates every aspect of the job—to students, other teachers, administrators, and the entire educational community.

## Developing Good Habits

All thus far discussed leads to the final segment of our three-sided definition of a legend's personality: the habits of great teachers. It is possible for one to have tremendous character traits and a very positive attitude and still fall short of being a legend if the third and final piece of the personality puzzle is absent. The positive attributes of both character and attitude are meaningless unless they find expression in the daily habits of the teacher.

It is only in the behavior of the teacher that the positive attitudes of the legend are manifested. To ensure that these positive attributes are evident to students, the legend goes out of his or her way to display the following habits:

- < First, the master teacher makes it apparent that he or she works as hard as, if not harder than, the students to assure their success. The legend works nightly to prepare, just as he or she expects students to do.
- < Second, the legend is professional in the manner in which he or she relates to students. Despite the fun students may have or the work they may do, the teacher does not lose focus on the professional-client relationship that must be maintained. The legend may be friendly, but he or she does not work to become a friend of the students. There is a difference.

< Third, the legend is punctual, appropriate in dress, and organized. The legend is professional. The teacher's daily preparedness leaves no doubt about his or her dedication and commitment to the success of all students.

All three of these habits are essential to the legend's success. Without them, a teacher is nothing more than a charlatan and has no right to demand the respect and support of the parents or the hard work of the students. Only when the teacher is prepared, professional, and diligent may he or she ask the students to give the kind of effort necessary to succeed. Only then can the teacher motivate students, and if education is not based on successful motivation, then teachers are superfluous to education, and any of the computer programs developed to replace teachers are just as good.

Likewise, the best teachers don't have good or bad days, at least not many of them. Instead, they have good and better days. Their dealings with students are not a reflection of their personal feelings, their health, or their marital circumstances. Rather they are a reflection of their commitment to their students regardless of personal concerns or problems. They are always polite and never lose sight of their real job—seeing to the education of their charges.
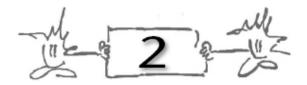
Every day a student walks into the classroom of a legend, that student knows he or she will be treated with respect and concern. The student knows that the teacher has prepared a meaningful educational experience; there are no "free days" in a legend's class. Students know that they will be held up to appropriately tough standards, and they will have to work hard to succeed, but more important, they know that the teacher will be working just as hard to see that success is realized. This is true from the kindergarten class through the advanced placement (AP) calculus class. This is universal among legends.

## Conclusions

The whole, in this case, is greater than the sum of its parts. The legend does more than combine the traits, attitudes, and habits herein described. He or she is more than that total. The master teacher is outgoing; he or she is personable, exciting, and energetic. The legend is dynamic, and the sheer force of his or her will allows the legend to be effective beyond the norm.

Other teachers may work as hard, may plan as diligently, but they never put all the pieces together as successfully as the legend.

Are good teachers born or made? We come full circle to admit truthfully, and a bit unwillingly, that the marvelous combination of characteristics of the legend is probably, if not innate, then most certainly nurtured long before the teacher ever applied for a teaching position. Acknowledging this, however, we must return to the contradiction we first proffered and suggest again that it would be best if we acted as though legends could be made. We are better off, as a profession, fostering these characteristics, traits, attitudes, and work habits in all our teachers. Doing so will exert a tremendously positive influence on education in America. It reminds us of something mothers have been telling children for a long time. Being the best you can be isn't a destination, it is a journey. It is an education.

# 2

# Nothing Succeeds
# Like Success

*Perhaps because he or she is a legend, the master teacher is successful, or perhaps because he or she has always been successful, the master teacher is a legend. Regardless of the direction in which the two influence each other, the fact remains that the master teacher is an overwhelming success. It is this cyclical relationship to which this chapter is dedicated.*

**E**ven casual observations make it clear that the legend is a success because he or she experiences success, and the legend experiences success because he or she is successful. Is this sufficiently obvious? Believe it or not, we don't think so, but perhaps what we really mean may appear more cogent by presenting this chapter's four main points:

< Establishing the analogy
< Developing professional pride
< Living in the loop
< Building the partnership

We believe that success doesn't just happen, that it is the result of willful action and reflective decision making. Our underpinning analogy lays the foundation for what we think is the approach all teachers must take toward

becoming a legend. Likewise, we feel success is predicated on a fundamental, competitive, internal pride, and consequently a looped pedagogical approach to teaching. Last, success is determined by the scope and depth of partnerships the teacher is willing to build with the entire educational community.

## Establishing the Analogy

There is in this chapter, and throughout the entire book, an initial analogy that forms the groundwork for much of our philosophy on education as well as the notion of the legend, and that analogy involves extracurricular programs in the schools, or more specifically, the behavior of the most successful sponsors and coaches. As a result, we'd like to propose an examination of head sponsors and coaches from an interesting and, we hope, fresh perspective.

> *We're **not** concerned here with the battle between curricular and extracurricular or between nonathletic and athletic extracurricular activities. We are also not concerned with the value of fine arts, clubs, or sports in the school. All have their supporters and all have their detractors. Instead, what we **are** concerned with is the approach taken by many of the most successful sponsors and coaches: what they do, based on what we perceive as some significant similarities to the classroom teacher's situation. We believe that an objective examination of the sponsor's or coach's situation when compared to the experience of the classroom teacher will generate some germane conclusions. We think this is just as true in the elementary school as it is in the middle or high school.*

What we found is that successful afterschool music programs, speech teams, student councils, chess squads, cheerleading groups, reading series, and athletic programs share a number of commonalities with education that suggest some lessons for the classroom teachers. To make this point, we need to begin with the identification of a significant similarity as well as several important differences between the two situations.

## A Significant Similarity

With only a few exceptions, sponsors of afterschool activities and athletic coaches, like classroom teachers, deal with the same student population: thus they draw from the same demographics, the same community, the same home environments, and the same parents. Therefore, the success or failure of an extracurricular program may be measured, to a degree, against the same student population as that school's classroom teachers.

## Several Significant Differences

Sponsors of afterschool activities and athletic coaches, unlike teachers, are not assigned students by a master schedule but must recruit them. The head coach or main sponsor is responsible for the popularity of his or her program. The coach must attract and retain students to the program and keep their interest or the program faces dissolution. In short, sponsors and coaches, unlike teachers, must never stop selling the value of their program, not only to students but also to parents, communities, and school boards. Coaches and sponsors alike must continually justify the considerable amounts spent on their activities and frequently must spearhead efforts to raise additional funds.

Without the guarantee of their program fulfilling a promotion requirement, sponsors and coaches face the prospect that, tomorrow, important team members may quit or transfer to another school. Afterschool programs, unlike regular classrooms, face the terrible potential of waning interest and support. Thirty second-grade students in the afterschool reading program in October can easily dwindle to six by February. In short, what coaches and sponsors must live with is the knowledge that at the next board meeting, the board may cut their budget or eliminate their program. If students complain about the program and parents consequently lose faith in it, the sponsor may find himself or herself out of a position the following year.

Those wishing to argue may suggest that some programs, like a dynamite football program, have such tremendous community support that the comparison to the situation of the classroom teacher is made invalid, but to those we would offer that such coaches and sponsors whose activities are popular in the community and widely supported must also produce results annually or face replacement. High visibility activities, such as a good basketball program or a state-recognized art program, may attract more students, but because those sponsors and coaches operate

under much higher visibility, they must produce or face replacement, and that brings another host of problems.

It is just an analogy and therefore has the limits inherent to all such comparisons, but still we find some parallels sufficiently incontestable to draw some significant conclusions. By looking at some of the common practices of successful sponsors and coaches, because they do deal with the same general population as classroom teachers, we can, in fact, identify some implications for the types of behaviors that the successful teacher, the legend, will also share to make his or her classroom more successful.

# Behavior 1: Program Promotion

Because of the nature of the position, the coach or sponsor must promote the program vigorously, from pep assemblies to posters to camps to letters home (made all the easier with Listservs and Web sites). No sponsor can assume that somehow students will inherently be interested in trying out for the play or joining the chess team or reading three extra books over the summer. The sponsor knows that the first job of successfully sponsoring a club, activity, or coaching a team is selling it to the public. What is ironic is that most sponsors *and* coaches often sell their programs in terms of academics. It is impossible to find a music director who cannot recite the positive link between participation in music programs and success in schools. Question a drama teacher and you'll hear how being in a play improves the study of literature and reading. Elementary read-a-thons are done solely in the name of academics. Every sponsor of a fifth-grade chess team will tell you how playing chess improves critical thinking and is tied to math skills. Even coaches promote the number of scholarships their programs have earned players to help them further their education.

## Implications for Teacher Behavior

Every K-12 teacher needs to assume that his or her first responsibility is selling the class. Every teacher's first job is motivating stu -dents and their parents. Many of the promotional steps taken by a sponsor should be imitated by the classroom teacher. Every way in which a coach builds enthusiasm for his team must be copied by the classroom teacher. The legend never tires of having "pep assemblies" for his or her materials, celebrating their successes, and reminding everyone of the importance of the materials that are covered in class.

If a child ever asks, "Why do we have to do this?" the teacher has already failed. If the answer to that most valid, most justifiable question has not been answered first, before instruction begins, then the likelihood of success occurring in the classroom is slim. The first thing every teacher should do is explain exactly why students are doing what they are doing. A legend clearly understands the instructional vision and the path to take for his or her students to achieve mastery-level learning in the classroom.

We'll talk more about this in our model for motivation, but let it be stated now: before teaching can start, building excitement for the material must be accomplished. This is every teacher's initial concern. Having said that, how many of us are guilty of assuming that because students are assigned by a computer to our room that they come ready to learn, motivated to learn, and even caring if they learn? Legendary teachers assume none of these things.

Here is our first lesson from the land of the extracurricular: sell the program.

## Behavior 2: Organization

Organization is such an important issue that we dedicate an entire chapter to it later, but for now, suffice it to say that it has been our experience that the most successful coaches and sponsors are the most detailed and structured in their organization. Because of the limited time they have, their practices and schedules must be precisely organized, frequently down to the minute. Their programs appear to have an urgency about them, during the event planning, during the event, and even after the event. Their orientations are intense; their practices and rehearsals seem almost pressing.

These sponsors know that they may only have their children for two hours after school once a week, so those two hours must be organized. They can't have children sitting around bored. If you've ever been to rehearsals for a school play you'll find that long before auditions, the directors have planned a rehearsal schedule for each evening, by act and scene. They go out of their way not to require students to attend except for times they'll actually be rehearsing because they know bored students jump ship. Many directors even have a director's book where they have blocked the entire play— before they ever rehearse a single line.

Coaches can be equally impressive. While their seasons may last months, most coaches we've worked with have a plan for each night's

practice that is often broken down by five-minute sections. They know how much time they'll allot to warm-ups, stretching, sprints, drills, instruction, practice, re-teaching, and warm-downs. They carry clipboards with them so they don't run over and so they can take notes as the practice progresses. Often using student managers, they make certain that every device needed during the practice is set out, ready to use.

## Implications for Teacher Behavior

In contrast, the classroom teacher may seem almost relaxed, at times almost nonchalant about the business at hand. Students may giggle as the teacher tries to find the materials he or she wants. As schools grow more complex (and more crowded), this becomes an even greater problem for the teacher who shares a room in the large high school with two or three others, or the traveling elementary teacher presenting art from a cart. Today, in addition to lesson plans, grade books, and seating charts, teachers have to have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which are **specific and detailed plans to address the deficient learning areas found with special needs students,** medical records, 504 plans, which are specific and detailed plans to address the deficient learning areas found with students who do not, by definition, fall into the category of special needs, and a host of other documents on hand at all times. The more complex the system grows, the more likely it is that a teacher's organization will suffer and, as a result, the more likely that the education of the students will suffer.

We suggest that the legend shares the same intensity, feels and communicates the same urgency to succeed, to make every minute count as does the successful sponsor or coach. While the legend begins by daily selling the program, the next concern of the legend is to be organized, rehearsed, and directed—keeping the student on task and focused on the material to be learned, prepared to see that every minute of class time is engaging, enhancing student learning. The legend understands that once the period begins, the challenges faced are numerous, that there will be a bevy of unforeseen situations to challenge his or her success, but the legend knows that by being organized beforehand, he or she can handle all that arises.

Here is our second lesson learned from the extracurricular sponsor or coach: get and keep your ducks in a row.

## Behavior 3: Goal Orientation

On first reading, one might argue that our analogy to extracurricular activities or sports may break down here. You might wonder how the coach's fixation on 60 minutes of action, or the drama director's single focus on a two-hour show, or the chess sponsor's desire to make his team better chess players, can possibly relate to the complex goals of a daily classroom. For surely, isn't that what sponsors and coaches are about?

We don't believe it's that simple—on two accounts:

**Issue 1:** No sponsor or coach is just about winning. Most are about children too, about developing healthy competitive habits, about developing self-responsibility, and about encouraging inner discipline. We think most classroom teachers are all about these too.

**Issue 2:** The very best teachers, the legends of every school, are very specifically goal oriented as well. The legend must be even more concretely aimed at measurable goals than the athletic coach. The legend begins, like the coach, by knowing what success looks like. Because the legend's job is not simply to teach, but rather to see that students learn, the legend has a very specific concept of how success appears. All the legend's efforts work backward from a very clear conception of what success looks like, how it will be measured for the particular area or class, and what students will be able to do following instruction. The legend does not operate from a vague generalization about "student growth," rather, the legend works from a specific understanding of how the product of all of his or her efforts should manifest itself in terms of students' mastery of skills and abilities.

## Implications for Teacher Behavior

The legend is even more concretely aimed at measurable goals than the coach or sponsor. He or she knows there is a "Game Day" or "Opening Night" for him or her as well. The legend is goal oriented, and such orientation makes success much easier to achieve. This preoccupation with success must work at two levels.

At the first level, success (real success) must be measured at the individual plane. The movement toward authentic assessment, as opposed to the traditional end-of-the unit, forced-response test, is in the right direction. No teacher, and certainly not the legend, should accept the cramming of information into short-term memory for a test as successful learning. The legend assesses individual success at a much more instinctive level. He or she discovers if the skills, concepts, and methods of that unit

have been truly internalized. He or she seeks to discover if these are now tools the students can actually use. Having studied Locke's theory of democratic principles, the student can do more than merely cite a list of those tenets; he or she can determine which aspects of modern America are Lockian in nature. When learning the multiplication table, students can do more than just go through the 5s; instead, they can take a real-life situation, see the need for multiplication, and then do the math as well. Learning is measured at the application levels to demonstrate true understanding and grasp of material.

On a broader level, the legend is oriented to classwide success, even perhaps at the department level. Success at these levels can be measured in such diverse ways as the following:

- < The percentage of students who score at the C level or above within a class
- < Outside audits such as nationally normed, standardized tests, and, more commonly today, statewide minimal competency exams
- < College entrance exams such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and America's College Testing Program (ACT)
- < AP programs
- < Grades on final examinations
- < The percentage of students who succeed at the next grade level
- < Outside awards in interscholastic competitions
- < The number of projects satisfactorily completed
- < Portfolio assessments of actual performance

The issue of data-driven decision making is so important that we have added a chapter about this later in the book. Let it stand for now to understand that, like the sponsor or like the coach, the masterful classroom teacher is every bit as goal oriented.

The third lesson to be inferred from a study of good sponsors and coaches is that if you intend to "walk the talk," you need to be on the sidewalk that leads directly to student success.

## Behavior 4: Professional Development

Sponsors and coaches live to attend workshops and clinics. Given the choice, we suspect that most directors of extracurricular activities would rather see their equipment budget cut before losing the opportunity to

attend their beloved workshops. Social life at such workshops aside, these clinics are filled with professionals who have come to share techniques and success stories. Statisticians (in educational terms, clinicians) are not invited to speak, only successful sponsors and coaches who bring their methods and philosophies to share with others. World Series managers, NFL quarterbacks, WNBA coaches, and NCAA champions are presented as keynote speakers at athletic clinics; their words are coveted like manna from heaven. At drama and speech workshops, keynote speakers are often movie stars and television personalities. A workshop for sponsors of extracurricular reading programs will bring in local and nationally famous authors.

While it's true that these types of workshops and clinics offer a social opportunity where like-minded people are afforded the chance to compare scars and brag about their successes, what is more important is that all these sponsors see the value of taking what they can from the best, those who made it to the mountain top, those with the keys to success. Sponsors and coaches believe that such workshops help them increase their knowledge and subsequently improve, become more effective—become more successful.

## Implications for Teacher Behavior

Likewise, legends look toward other successful classroom teachers to unearth what they have done, their secrets. The legend seeks perpetual development, realizing that such improvement is not a destination as much as it is a journey; one never really *is* a success, one merely continues becoming one.

There is a conventional viewpoint in the field of education that suggests that every teacher is either climbing the ladder of professional excellence or descending it—every day throughout his or her entire career. It is impossible, suggests this viewpoint, to rest on a single rung, to simply maintain the status quo. Instead, one is either improving or slipping. Legends pride themselves in continuing to push, every year, every month, every day, reaching for the next rung of excellence.

What the legend does today as the school's best teacher will be inadequate tomorrow. He or she is a legend because of his or her devotion to perpetual growth as a teacher.

# Behavior 5: Flexibility

Sponsors and coaches have trouble ignoring their failures. The school play that flops is, well, a flop. There is no explaining away the failure. The basketball program that goes 3 and 21 over the course of a season can't be mistaken for a winning program. The PTA (parent-teacher association) pancake breakfast canceled for lack of interest is hard to write up for the newspaper as a glowing success. While it is true that these programs may have been well intended, and they may have been nurturing and understanding, the fact is that such goal-oriented, extracurricular programs must succeed at the public level to continue. Funding will dry up, interest will wane, and finally support will erode for the music program that is an embarrassment, for the chess team that cancels the second half of its season, for the intramural program with more forfeits than games.

As a result, sponsors and coaches understand that they are not allowed the luxury of any program rigidity. They must be flexible. They must adapt. Those who cannot adjust to the changing demographics of their population, those who cannot redesign due to budget cuts, those who cannot change—are gone!

Successful sponsors are flexible. They find what works. The way they treated kids 10 years ago no longer works, so they change. The way they communicated with parents in the past is now inadequate, so they change. The community contributions that used to fund their program evaporated, so they change. Because they must produce visible success, successful coaches and successful sponsors are flexible.

Unfortunately in education, the anthem (sung to the tune of *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory)* has traditionally been this: *Scores Don't Tell the Whole Story.* Classroom education, too often, may best be characterized by its inflexibility. This, when combined with a terrible tendency to treat schooling as if it were a mystical process, whose success cannot be measured, has allowed too many teachers to exist with no expectation for being held accountable for every child's classroom progress and success.

## Implications for Teacher Behavior

Successful teachers are the ones most interested in identifying their shortcomings and remediating them, rather than devising reasons that the results don't matter or even denying that the deficiency exists. This concept is covered more thoroughly later in the chapter about using data. Suffice it to say now, the legend works to discover his or her own weaknesses and then works twice as diligently to address them.

Rigidity of practice has no place in the successful classroom. The best teachers force themselves to use new assignments and new assessments when the older ones prove less than successful. Although *Hamlet* may be taught year after year in the legend's classroom, it is not taught the same way year after year after year. Parts of the lesson may remain the same— the successful parts, that is. Change does not occur just for change's sake, but every year there are changes. Tests that have been validated are good for a number of years, but nothing is sacrosanct; nothing is above being reevaluated and modified.

While this has always been true in education, today, being flexible is much, much easier. Tests from one year to another are easily modified electronically. Bringing in timely material in the past was a technological challenge—today it is a breeze, from sound bytes to images, to DVDs, and of course, the greatest agent of all, the World Wide Web and all of its resources.

Another reason flexibility in the classroom is an absolute necessity is the changing nature of our classes. Rigidity of instruction may have been the product of a culture that did not recognize diversity, did not allow for different learning styles, did not understand how the brain functioned, did not welcome self-determination by all children regardless of talent or ability. But those days, mercifully, are mostly behind us. What lies ahead requires an open-minded professional with a goal-oriented and flexible approach.

## Some Final Comments on Our Analogy

We acknowledged at the start of this analogy that it was, after all, only an analogy. Many logicians refute analogy as argument on the basis that the analogy is inherently flawed because no two situations are similar enough to warrant such an approach. While we wouldn't go that far, we will admit that the analogy has its limitations:

< The sponsor or coach, while drawing from the same population, deals only with those interested enough to join from the outside; teachers take whoever was assigned to the class.
< The sponsor or coach can often remove or dismiss troublesome elements; teachers rarely have that luxury.

- < The sponsor or coach may have a shorter season or only weekly meetings; teachers often go the entire year.
- < The sponsor or coach (sadly) may not have to include special needs children or make modifications for those participating; today, more than ever before, we teach everyone.

We understand these significant differences, but we continue to contend that the analogy is sufficiently acceptable to make our argument. There is much to be learned from those in education who work outside the classroom in a peripheral setting wherein existence from year to year is not guaranteed. They, as a body, demonstrate an aggressive approach to what they try to do, one that we inside the classroom would do well to learn from.

We also understand that "winning" at any cost is unacceptable. The basketball coach who calls a practice on Christmas Eve (We've seen it!), the drama director who asks the children to put the production above their homework (We've seen this too!), or the elementary sponsor who creates unmerciful competition within the squad and suggests that those who don't live up to expectations are to some degree a failure (And we've seen that!) are not models we care to learn anything from.

What we call for are legends—teachers immersed in nurturing students *as well as* seeing that they learn. Teachers who measure themselves *only* by their students' scores on nationally normed exams are only legends in their own minds. We stand, nevertheless, on the conviction that the wise classroom teacher has much to learn by looking to our best sponsors and coaches. Legends

- < Sell their material daily—before and while they instruct
- < Maintain an organization that allows them to maximize instruction
- < Set and remain faithful to measurable goals in the classroom
- < Are perpetually involved in professional development
- < Demonstrate flexibility when it is in the best interest of their students

## Developing Professional Pride

As described in Chapter 1, the legend is a complex individual with many personality traits, not the least of which is a driving competitiveness. The

legend wants, simply put, to be the best teacher in the school. The legend has professional pride.

The concept of pride, unfortunately, is a conundrum in the Western world. Ancient Greek playwrights prejudiced us toward it by naming it *hubris.* Holy works in many faiths added to that view by proclaiming "Pride goeth before the fall!" And finally, Underdog himself furthered that prejudice by telling us that our heroes should be "humble but lovable."

However, we ask ourselves this: aren't we supposed to act as though we have pride? Aren't we told to have pride in our work? Lee Greenwood told us he was proud to be an American. Isn't pride a good thing too?

We think the truth, not too surprisingly, lies somewhere in the middle.

The apparent paradox between the type of "good" pride in what one does and the type of "bad" pride that leads to downfalls is worthy of discussion. The classroom legend desires to be and takes pride in being one of the best (if not the best) teacher in the school. We call this "Motivational Pride." For legends, Motivational Pride drives them to want to be better than other teachers. It is a source of energy. It forces legends to examine themselves constantly, to find ways to be more successful. "Motivational Pride" is almost entirely from within. Despite what you may think, it does not feed on praise from others or outside reinforcement; it satisfies itself by recognizing that, finally, only internal acceptance truly matters.

This Motivational Pride manifests itself in some very observable, concrete behaviors and attitudes, all of which legends share.

Motivational pride drives the teacher to acknowledge
the efficacy of the educational process.

The legend recognizes that he or she is a part of what's going on holistically and that the success of students is a direct reflection on the teacher. Motivational Pride does not let the teacher distance himself or herself from how well the students do; consequently, the teacher is driven through this good pride to become a more effective instructor, while still encouraging and helping students in their other school endeavors.

This Motivational Pride doesn't let the teacher say, "I was fantastic today, but the kids were really slow—they couldn't get anything." This pride makes teachers realize that their success is only a reflection of their students' success. When students fail, so do the teachers. For teachers to succeed, students must be successful. Teachers are driven by Motivational Pride to see that their children learn.

Motivational pride helps the teacher make choices, because
it demands that the teacher's highest priority is the success
of the students.

Wanting to be the best easily lets the teacher look toward others to find ways to improve. The legend unashamedly becomes adept at "borrowing" techniques and strategies from other teachers. For example, the lab-exam format from anatomy suddenly becomes a new way to test poetry without running off 30 copies of 10 poems for all students, with students simply rotating from station to station. The vocational director borrows a reading strategy from the Language Arts Department to help the students learn more from independent reading. The regular fourth-grade classroom teacher watches the music instructor, who comes to class twice a week, and sees how efficiently he or she disperses and collects material, and starts to use those techniques as his own. Master teachers borrow from each other on a daily basis.

Additionally, one of the lessons soon learned by all teachers is that there is not enough time to do everything—not even close. Motivational Pride helps the teacher choose what to cover and what to omit—just as big a decision. The high school English teacher is a grammarian; he or she loves grammar but must come to grips with the fact that teaching diagramming would be too costly in terms of time to the host of other objectives that must be met. Our best third-grade teacher knows that with the constant influx of new students with little or no English language background or skills, she'll have to spend more time on phonics and less on her favorite creative writing unit because of changing needs and the desire she has to see all her students succeed. The middle school history teacher would love to help coach the new soccer team, but he knows to do so means either less time for his family or assigning fewer essays for his students, since he doesn't have the time to do all three. Motivational Pride helps him decide against the coaching. His students need to write as much as they do—not less—and his obligations as father and husband are nonnegotiable. It is Motivational Pride in each of these situations that helps the teacher make the choice he or she must make. The legend's first priority at school is the success of his or her children.

Motivational pride keeps the teacher working throughout the
evening to get the lessons done and the papers scored.

The legend is able to spend long hours at home scoring and preparing. He or she understands that "process scoring" (adding comments and suggestions for improvement and student growth) is far more productive, far more meaningful, than "product grading" (putting a check mark or just a grade on student work). "Process scoring" takes longer but the legend does not begrudge the time that is spent helping students grow.

This is true even in the face of a rather outlandish awareness: unlike any other profession, education rests on the rather ridiculous premise that teachers do one third to one half of their work at home— without reimbursement. Nonetheless, "Motivational Pride" gets the teacher through trying times and more importantly helps the teacher smile when some uninformed third party who has never worked six 16-hour days in a row smiles and says, "Well, at least you get three months vacation every year."

Despite these realities, the legend does not allow himself the hypocrisy of demanding that student work be turned in on time while he holds papers and tests for several weeks before scoring them and handing them back. Motivational pride drives the legend to get papers scored within 48 hours, just as research suggests, since work loses significant educational value if more time is taken to evaluate it and return it to students.

Motivational Pride impels the teacher to decorate his or her room more thoroughly and more often than other teachers, emphasizing key educational concepts and skills, because research suggests that such visual presentation of important information improves learning by reinforcing the lesson and creating more interest.

Motivational Pride makes the teacher want to act professionally, and one of the main tenets of professionalism is that the true professional bases his or actions on what research suggests is most effective. That's what it takes to be a professional and that's what it takes to be a legend.

Motivational pride demands that the teacher be absolutely
honest in dealing with students, parents, and other teachers.

Complete honesty, not only with the students but also with other teachers, is what makes Motivational Pride an acceptable characteristic. It is what separates it from the wrong kind of pride what we call "Egotistical Pride." While the teacher is in competition with other teachers to be the best, Motivational Pride forces the teacher to deal openly and cooperatively with peers. One would not want to be the best because of efforts meant to subvert others' successes. The legend wants to be the best among the best,

not become the best at the expense of others. What works is shared Motivational Pride schoolwide and the sense of teamwork permeating all interactions among teachers.

Motivational Pride is most visibly manifested in our never-ending efforts to see the students succeed. It is what takes us above and beyond the call, even of education. It is the pledge we made at our interviews; it is the tacit promise we make to every student: to take the student as far as we can. Are such promises, explicit or implicit, to be belied by other motives or behavior later? We think not. The legend is professionally proud and is in a healthy, friendly competition with peers to be the best in the school—more important, to be the best he or she can be.

On the other hand, Egotistical Pride is a destructive characteristic. Egotistical Pride is debilitating and competitive at a cutthroat level. It is never concerned about the entire school environment, or even about the students, operating instead only at the individual level. Its origin is in the insecurity of the teacher. It is derisive and dividing. It causes teachers to try to look good at the expense of others. It manifests itself with teachers who would never let students see them make a mistake. It is seen when teachers denigrate other teachers to the students.

At its least hurtful, debilitating pride drives the teacher to guard his or her techniques carefully, never sharing them. At its worst, it is mean spirited and targets others critically as a way to make itself look better. It drives students into critical opinions of others and builds cliques among faculties. It is not hard to win allegiance from children, but shame on that teacher who abuses the noble teacher-student relationship by actively cultivating that allegiance at the expense of others.

Honesty is worth a final mention. If it ever proves elusive to most teachers, it is most often because of good intention. No teacher would purposely lie to a student or parent—that is simply not an issue—but there are teachers who, well intentioned, hold out unrealistic hope to students and have trouble being completely honest with parents. All teachers, including legends, need to be wary of these two situations. Students deserve the truth, tactfully, kindly, privately maybe—but they deserve the truth. This is true for the kindergartner and the senior in high school. Likewise, while it might be easier to sugarcoat reality when talking to parents who have the highest hope and expectations for their children, it is again wise to be completely truthful. For all good teachers, and certainly for the legend, honesty is the only coin of the realm.

Motivational pride makes the teacher a risk taker.

Just as we suggested earlier that the legend works harder and longer, so too it only follows that the legend is a risk taker. Motivational Pride demands that the legend try new approaches, attempt to incorporate new pedagogies into his or her style. As technology has developed, there have been countless opportunities to try new programs, work with new techniques. The legend is not afraid to try new things.

Because he or she is driven by Motivational Pride and not Egotistical Pride, the legend has no trouble trying and consequently abandoning new venues. He or she can try a new approach, and if it is not productive, abandon it immediately. Motivational Pride allows a teacher to admit freely, "That didn't work." Egotistical Pride forces the individual to stay doggedly the failing course and blame others when it doesn't succeed. The legend may not be characterized by "wooden-headness." Quite to the contrary, as we suggested earlier, the legend is flexible. However, we must make an important point: the legend is also not whimsical. He or she does not try every new approach, every new reader, every new program, but when there is evidence that something new is effective and when the legend sees an unmet need in his or her classroom, then most certainly the legend is a risk taker. The legend matches pedagogy to student success, not personal preference.

## Important Conclusions

In an age where the politically correct "C" word is *cooperation,* we propose that the other "C" word, *competition,* is not totally wicked. In fact, when driven by Motivational Pride as we've characterized it, competition within a staff should most likely be viewed as healthy.

*We know of one school district where the top 30 students every year are asked to name their most "Influential Teacher" from their 12 years. The recognition is done with great pomp at a banquet run by a group of parents who constitute the district's Education Foundation. In what can only be seen as a very hale and hearty system, teachers from all grade levels are nominated. Students name grade school, middle school, and high school teachers. Often administrators, counselors, and librarians are selected, making one believe this is a solidly grounded district where everyone's contribution is viewed as significant.*

*At the same time, teachers proudly display the certificates they are awarded at the banquet. At retirement time, the number of recognitions a teacher has garnered is often listed among his or her accomplishments. At the same time, there is, among veterans, a competitive sense of how often they are recognized. The physics teacher is most often nominated since he has all the bright students and is an outstanding teacher, but when an English teacher garners more awards in a given year, there is a great deal of kidding—all very healthy—as they all compare kudos.*

We offer this as a single, very positive example of the kind of good-natured competitiveness that marks Motivational Pride. In this particular situation, it is widely acknowledged throughout the high school that teachers who teach the AP courses obviously have more of the top 30 students and therefore get most of the recognition; that's a given. It is also widely recognized and often confirmed that the teachers who teach at-risk or special needs students are rarely so honored, but everyone knows the work they do is probably more valuable to the district than those fortunate enough to work only with the gifted; that too is widely affirmed. Nonetheless, there is a healthy bit of competition as every year the school awaits to see who was lucky enough to be named.

In short, the most successful schools are those where healthy competition exists among teachers—not vainglorious Egotistical Pride but a healthy, humble, Motivational Pride that urges competitive cooperation, each individual proudly working to be the best while still working toward and enjoying the success of the entire team.

## Living in the Loop

"Living in the loop" is a concept foreshadowed frequently in this chapter and one that reappears throughout the book. The legend is most probably one of, if not the most flexible teacher on a staff, for the legend understands the fluidity of the educational process. Each year, different students arrive with different needs, different backgrounds, and different chemistries. What succeeded last year will not necessarily succeed this year or next year. Changes need to be made in what is taught and the way it is taught. As the legend grows, so does his or her pedagogical preference; his or her style changes in response to the varying needs and student chemistries of the classes, as we suggested before.

As a result of this constant state of flux, the legend soon learns that to be successful means to live in a loop. For the legend, education is a perpetual loop made up of several distinct steps: planning, executing, debriefing, replanning, and so on. Each step is interdependent on the others, and each is equally necessary to the existence of the entire loop.

## Planning

### Step 1

The loop begins with careful planning. Because the legend wishes to be successful and knows that, by and large, success is determined by measurable data, planning begins with the identification of the set of skills and concepts students must master by the time of assessment. This identification of goals is followed immediately by division of those goals or skills into sequenced learning units divided into a manageable pacing chart, one coordinated with the district's testing and grading policies as well as its schedules. Generation of a curriculum by any means other than backward from desired outcomes is an inferior system. Curriculum without targeted goals is not curriculum; it is just basic subject matter.

### Step 2

Once the target goals that will be measured have been identified, the legend proceeds to determine what instructional techniques in each of the units will be used, how student progress will be monitored and evaluated, what remediation techniques will be used for those failing to demonstrate proficiency of the material after the initial instruction, and what enrichment activities are available for those who master the material initially. These plans (not to be confused with the arrow-ladened "lesson plans" of previous times, plans that were nothing more than an agenda of teacher behavior) remain flexible; the legend alters them as necessary as he or she works through the set of units that are, in fact, the accumulated target goals of the course.

### Step 3

Planning sets as its first priority mastery of the identified target goals by the students. As a second priority, it aims at variety, challenge, fun, and constant reinforcement of previously mastered goals. It is always focused

and flexible, keeping in mind that the entire set of outcomes must be mastered by the time of the final assessment: hence, the structure and intensity that drive so much of the class.

# Executing

## Step 4

As the legend executes the plans, he or she does so with an eye more on student learning than on teacher performance. The orientation of every class period must be on mastery of the material, not its presentation. Lectures, projects, PowerPoint presentations, writing assignments, worksheets, and group work are all evaluated only as they serve to help the student master the identified goals.

## Step 5

Similarly, the orientation of every class period must be on the mastery of the material, *not* on the evaluation of student progress. The purpose of the class is neither to separate the students by ability nor to generate grades. Evaluation of student progress should be done only after it is apparent that the students have begun to master the material. Initial learning should not be evaluated. We feel that one of the major flaws of education lies in the dictate to generate grades on every learning experience. Although acquiescing to the concept of generating scores (to avoid a lengthy argument about the philosophy behind an ungraded school system), we assert that most classroom grades are not as much a picture of how well each student has mastered a goal but how quickly the material was learned. By the time of the terminal evaluation, many slower learners have such poor grades already that scoring an "A" is no longer possible. Instead, the concept of quick learning has become more important to American schools than thorough mastery. As the legend executes his or her plans, he or she makes certain to separate learning and mastery from assessment. Each requires its own strategies, and each must remain independent to validate the essence of both.

# Debriefing

## Step 6

The first two actions in the loop (planning and executing) are far from revolutionary. Okay, they're downright obvious! Almost all teachers follow them to some degree. It is this third procedure where the legend is most often separated from others. Following instruction and after measurement of student mastery of the course's target goals, the legend spends a great deal of time analyzing results. This analysis is done immediately following assessment. It is a lengthy debriefing period during which time the legend notes what worked exceptionally well and what didn't, which goals were met and which were not.

## Step 7

Detailed notes are made about the success of the unit. One of the best places to make these notes is on the answer key to the final assessment. By writing notes on the test itself, the instructor may be sure that important ideas are recorded (Why make the same mistakes next year?), forcing him or her to redesign the evaluation instrument the following term and not pull some tired test from a file and run it off year after year after year. Where there was success, the legend wants to be sure that the same procedure can be followed again. Where there was failure, planning is redesigned. Rather than bemoaning what students can't do, the legend prepares to compensate in his or her lessons for what the students are not able to experience or learn from their families, the community, or society as a whole.

# Replanning

## Step 8

Finally, there is the replanning. This is the step that completes the loop, and the legend is right back where he or she started. Having identified success, the causes for that success are made a part of the next term's strategies. Having also identified failures, the legend redesigns that section of instruction to lessen the incidence of failure and increase the success. It is in the latter that the legend must be the most creative, the most flexible, and the most determined.

## Step 9

Factors outside of the legend's control are totally ignored. Because we cannot lower the divorce rate of our children's parents, or raise those parents' socioeconomic levels, or increase the educational level of their mothers, or grant them all native-born, English-speaking parents, these issues are discounted. The legend redesigns those factors that he or she can control (and because he or she believes in the efficacy of education, necessarily, these factors must be the important ones). In a related matter, the legend has no qualms about taking problems to others for help. The legend's ego is subservient to his or her competitive nature to succeed. The legend realizes that it is ridiculous to ask students to try to do their best if the legend is unwilling to follow that same advice. So the legend replans under the belief that his or her efforts can result in improved learning for all students.

### Step 10

In a final consideration, the legend keeps this rule of thumb in mind as he or she redesigns instruction. For every item added, one item must be deleted. Time is of such essence to the teacher that continually adding material will eventually become counterproductive. The legend is just as prepared to remove material or activities as he or she is to add them.

## Building the Partnership

The final aspect of success involving the legend is probably the most important. Simply put, success breeds credibility and therefore trust. Success is the strongest element in building a sensible working foundation with students and the educational community. By being successful with students, the legend engenders more success. There is, in every school, that teacher for whom the students do the work. It might be the only class for which they do homework, but they do it for that one teacher. This teacher is the one who somehow gets everything done in a timely fashion, including completing forms for the central office. The concept that success engenders success is probably best exemplified in a story from the lore of professional baseball.

*In what is probably nothing more than an apocryphal tale, the great Ted Williams was batting late in a close game with runners on first and*

*second and no outs. Williams had worked the count full to 3 and 2. There was a second-year pitcher on the mound and a rookie catcher behind the plate. After shaking off several signs, the pitcher came set. He rocked back and fired a low inside fast ball that Williams took.*

*"Ball four," called the umpire, sending Williams to first and moving the lead runner over to third.*

*"Ball!" challenged the rookie catcher as he rose, turned, and took off his mask. "You have got to be kidding me! How can you call that a ball?"*

*The older ump, unruffled by the youngster's passion, slowly removed his mask and explained calmly to the rookie, "Son, I know that was a ball, because if that had been a strike, Mr. Williams would have hit it."*

The same is true for the legend in the classroom. The legend's reputation precedes him or her. Although the legend may be regarded as the toughest grader in the school as well as the most demanding instructor, the legend's classes are popular, and not without reason. As more and more of the legend's students succeed, both in his or her class and in subsequent classes, the more the legend's credibility grows and the more students and parents become attuned to trusting the legend's judgment and doing what is asked of them. People believe in the legend, so both the teacher and students succeed more frequently.

This, in fact, is so very true it forces a requalification of an earlier statement. Can first- or second-year teachers be legends? Probably not; their careers are simply too short lived at that point in time. To be a legend, there must be sufficient time for the legend itself to have grown. Such status does not demand a dozen years or several decades, but it does take some time. It never fails that sometime early in his or her experience a student teacher finally becomes frustrated with a lack of success, with the inability to do what the supervising teacher does so seamlessly and apparently effortlessly. (We know better, of course.) Again and again we've seen that student teacher approach his or her supervisory teacher with a loss of faith, disappointment, and even anger.

For years we met such feelings with compassion. We nurtured, we sympathized, we coached—but then we discovered a completely different approach.

*We saw a veteran teacher approached by her whining student teacher who was upset that he had not been more instantly successful in the*

*classroom. He lodged his complaint, whined a little, offered some self-pity, and, having presented his case, paused for the nurturing he thought was to follow.*

*After a longer than normal pause, his supervising teacher said, "I am offended by that!"*

*Now the student teacher was truly speechless. That response was so far from what he had expected, that all he could offer was "Offended? Why?"*

*"I'll tell you why," she said, "because of your pomposity!"*

*"Pomposity?" he muttered.*

*"Yes, pomposity!" she stormed. "Do you really think what I do is so easy that you could step in the classroom and do it as well in one week? Do you really think I haven't learned with time and improved with wisdom? Do you think you're that special or that I'm that mediocre?"*

Needless to say, he had no answer. Of course, the supervisory teacher was not trying to be mean, but she was making a point, and it's our point too: it takes some time to become a legend.

We have come full circle from what we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, that the legend is a success because he or she has been successful, thus increasing the likelihood of future success as well. Every victory the legend enjoys decreases the resistance he or she is likely to find in the classroom or community. When the legend's record points toward widespread success, students and parents "buy into" the program. With growing trust comes the increased likelihood of completed assignments, increased effort to succeed, and more frequent help sessions. These characteristics are the biggest reason for increased success. As the legend grows, parents begin to help, sometimes even unknowingly, by denying excuses at home, assisting with homework, and demanding success. The legend's reputation solves problems before they arise.

On a very simple level, the legend is the teacher who can tell the students to jump and be met with a round of "how high." legends know what works. They know how students will react to them in their academic areas of expertise. They know what bumps lie in the road ahead and when to swerve to avoid them.

Let's go back to our original analogy about extracurricular sponsors and coaches: students put themselves through nightly physical torment for the coach, through hours and hours of rehearsal for the director, because they

believe such agony will help them be victorious on the playing field and star on stage when the lights dim. Imagine how hard students would work if they could be made to believe that schoolwork would benefit them. They need not like the legend (but probably do); however, they must trust the legend!

Students trust the legend the way we do our doctors, our lawyers, and our accountants. Students believe that the legend knows his or her business and that he or she is acting in their best interests. These two beliefs are the stuff of legends. They are what make legends so much more successful than any other teachers. When these two beliefs exist in the students and their parents, then the real partnership for educational success has been built. Such a partnership between caring parents and respected teachers may exist sometimes for an entire school, but more important for everyone reading this book, it can always be cultivated at the individual teacher's level.

## A Touch of Reality

Here is one final word on failures: the reader may have sensed a rather hopeless idealism on the part of the authors (to which we reply that we all know that only hopeless romantics become teachers anyway, so why the sudden interest in realism?). We confess to a degree of idealism, having found that to be a far better vehicle than pessimism or nihilism, but we are not totally oblivious to the real world either.

Not even the legend reaches everyone. Our combined experience of over 60 years suggests simply that the sad reality is, not everyone can be reached.

Nonetheless, the legend believes that he or she can help mold and shape children's lives, and the legend takes pride in the product: caring, self-assured, intellectual young people. However, that pride and idealism do not negate the reality that not every student can be reached, or more likely at that point in time and place, wants to be reached. The legend enables more students to achieve and succeed, even if he or she is unable to help everyone succeed, and the verbs are what are important in this thought. Good teachers don't make students succeed but enable them to do so through inspiration, motivation, planning, and pedagogy. The legend enables far more students than most, but not all.

The legend doesn't necessarily accept these defeats gracefully, but they are accepted. No other teacher is so personally involved and responsible for students' success. No other teacher hurts so poignantly when he or she and the students fail, but realistically and unfortunately, the legend has failures too—just not as many, not as often, and certainly not as casually, as other teachers.

In the final analysis, students retain the rights of the individual, including the right to self-determination, and that means the right to fail. There are standards the legend can't compromise; there is a level of success a student must enjoy to succeed overall. When students fail, to a degree, we fail also, and the sad reality is that students do fail. Our only comfort in such a situation is that there are a lot of teachers in the school and maybe one of them can be a legend for the student we fail to touch or fail to reach.

## Conclusions

We end where we began (a little rhetorical legerdemain): the legend is a success because he or she experiences success, and the legend experiences success because he or she is successful. Through pride and competitiveness, legends force themselves to exist in a loop of planning and replanning. The driving force behind all that legends do is students' success. We have chosen to call master teachers legends because their success is predicated on the trust placed in them by students and parents alike. Over many years, master teachers have earned legendary positions in the school. Parents hope their children will have these teachers; they express those wishes frequently. Legends' status gains them more student and parent cooperation, which in turn makes them far more successful teachers than their peers.

Nothing succeeds like success.

# 3

# Establishing High Expectations

*There are those who argue that the successful teacher ought to be more concerned with the affective side of student development rather than with the growth of cognitive skills. To a degree, this attitude is extremely defensible, but to a larger degree, it is not. Bedside manner is often touted as being very important to a doctor's success, but how many patients choose the doctor with a more pleasant bedside manner over a doctor with a higher patient survival rate?*

*Likewise, when a parent sends children to school, it is not solely so that they develop socially with strong self-concepts, but so that they may acquire those cognitive skills necessary to succeed later in education and consequently in life. Those parents expect one of the teachers' primary purposes to be the development of cognitive skills. Of course, they do not wish for their children's teachers to be insensitive or disagreeable, but they do want them focused on learning as the principal function of the school experience.*

**O**bviously we both enjoy controversy. We must: why else would we begin by asking if legends in the classroom are born or made? Why

else would we propose to teachers and administrators that there are lessons to be learned by looking at our extracurricular coaches and sponsors? Why else would we now bring up NCLB?

NCLB, despite what you've heard, does not stand for "No Child Lower than a B." Here's our take on NCLB. We believe with all our hearts that education suffers terribly when success is solely measured by student test scores. Education is far more than that. As we suggested earlier, we make people, not computers.

In the same breath, it is clear to us that education fails when it is not concerned with the intellectual development of its children in a systemic program of skills building on skills. Well-adjusted, happy, contented children who can't read or write are not our goal either. We make people, not Mylar balloons.

We believe, not surprisingly, that the legend is concerned with the whole child—the affective and cognitive domains. Having said that, this chapter is dedicated mostly to the cognitive sphere, to the successful setting of standards by which to measure our students' growth, the creation of that same systemic approach to education that makes the kindergarten teacher and the high school AP economics teacher different spokes in the same wheel—inherently interdependent.

No area of discussion concerning the master teacher, the legend, could possibly elicit as much disagreement as the area of expectations and standards. Among teachers themselves there is a wide range of opinions concerning this issue. Teachers may feel abandoned when it comes to setting academic standards for their classrooms, or they may just as likely feel overwhelmed by the number of expectations forced on them. Questions abound: What can my children be expected to do? What expectations are realistic for these kids? How much homework can I expect my students to do? Am I being too hard? Am I being too easy?

Regardless of their predicament, we think our approach to setting expectations will hold out help to all. To do so we intend to look at the following concerns:

< Determining expectations
< Identifying pitfalls
< Publicizing expectations
< Maintaining consistency and objectivity
< Removing the excuses

# Determining Expectations

When we arrive at our first teaching assignment, our expectations for our students are characteristically inappropriate. Secondary teachers often begin by trying to teach their students what they have just learned, not at all remembering that not even seniors in high school are ready for what they just mastered. For the beginning high school teacher or middle school teacher, students can't seem to grasp simple concepts (as the teachers did during the college work they just finished), the students' work ethic seems nonexistent (unlike the hours the new teachers just spent finishing their final papers or the time they just put in on that day's lessons), and these students show absolutely no foresight about their futures (in great contrast to the new teachers, who just finished their first job search). Their disappointment swells to the point that they begin to wonder if they've made the right career choice.

First-year elementary teachers most often err in the opposite direction. So excited and so in love with their students, the first-year grade-school teachers may grow too close too quickly—thinking at some level that the secret to success is becoming the kids' friends— not realizing that friends don't set rules for friends, and the closer they become the harder it may be to set and enforce rules.

Both scenarios, albeit polar opposites and broad generalities, suggest the difficulties first-year teachers often face when it comes to setting standards and expectations. It is a time of great frustration.

In reality, the problem is that most of us entered the teaching field without a firm set of expectations of what kind of work the students should do, what we could expect them to grasp, or even what kind of effort we ought to expect of them in and out of class. The problem is made worse by the fact that many (most?) teachers were themselves good students and start their careers fully expecting that their students will share the same enthusiasm about achieving academic success in the classroom. It's sad to see that idealism destroyed so quickly and so thoroughly.

The first obstacle every teacher faces, in becoming a legend, involves setting appropriate expectations and standards for student behavior, success, and effort. How does a teacher begin to formulate realistic expectations for student work and reasonable standards by which he or she will evaluate the students' progress? We propose some answers to this question in a definite set of steps.

# Creating the Vision: "Where Are We Going?"

It is impossible to set realistic expectations for students if the teacher does not begin with a vision of the end product. The legend makes certain to start with such a vision: a set of realistic expectations of the skills and knowledge the students will have mastered by the end of instruction. The vision may be formed through the investigation of several sources of information:

1. Standardized, nationally normed exams

2. Standards that may exist within a state

3. Existing district information

4. Experienced teachers and administration

## Standardized, Nationally Normed Exams

A strong point of origin for the setting of any teacher's expectations is existing, nationally normed examinations. Tests such as the ACT's College Readiness Test for 10th graders (ACT PLAN), the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT), the ACT, the SAT, and all the AP examinations, as well as the many commercially available standardized achievement tests, are predicated on the simple belief that at a stipulated point in education, there exists a body of skills and knowledge that students will have mastered. It is only logical, therefore, to begin by identifying these expectations or standards and working backward from them. In addition, these standards are pretty nonnegotiable. What students are to have mastered by the time they take the SAT is not open to teacher opinion.

These exams don't just exist at the secondary level. There are just as many, although not as widely reported in the media, at the elementary level. The math and reading skills expected of fourth graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are again, nonnegotiable. Together, these established nationally normed exams set a very definite vision of what able students ought to know and ought to be able to do.

*A teacher of 11th -grade U.S. history, uncertain what to teach as he covers the nation's story, begins to formulate expectations for his*

*students by examining the U.S. history AP examination. That exam indicates that by the time students take the test, they are expected to contrast traditional views of World War II with revisionist views of the war in a cogent essay.*

*Now the teacher knows that in addition to merely covering World War II, he must do so in a fashion that will teach his students the concept of traditional views as opposed to revisionist perspectives, as well as develop in students the ability to express their ideas articulately in written form.*

*From this one item he knows will be on the exam, he now understands that he must cover the following:*

*< World War II*
*< Perspectives in history*
*< Revisionist history*
*< Argumentative essays*
*< Comparative essays*

*In short, the vision of what his children must know has been made concrete and specific.*

*A first-grade teacher in Florida finds that scores from the previous year's state-required tests indicate that counting in ordinal numbers is a skill with which children in Florida struggled. The implications are explicit: students at the end of first grade must not only be able to count in cardinal numbers but in ordinal numbers as well. Previous scores indicate that she can't assume students can do this or that they will learn it quickly.*

*In short, again, her vision of what children at the end of first grade must be able to do has become that much clearer.*

In both situations, debate about what children must be able to do, what they must have mastered, what they must know, is over. Certainly this is true for the first-year teacher, but it is also true for the teacher long in tooth as well: a vision of what skills children must possess is clear. As a result, expectations and standards may be set. That 11th-grade AP history teacher may be fresh out of college and may have assigned first one essay asking for a comparative answer and then a second. On each his students may have performed poorly and, without guidance, he may have assumed, "This is something they just can't do." But by examining the AP exam, he now

knows it is something they must be able to do. He can be confident in his decision in setting expectations and standards for his students; they are, per force, appropriate.

The first-grade teacher who has taught for a long time has slowly noticed that while her Hispanic students grasp counting in ordinal numbers relatively quickly, her English-only students do not. Traditionally she may have accepted that, knowing that the English-speaking students would pick up counting in ordinal numbers when they were ready, but by examining the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for First Grade, she now realizes she must develop strategies to help her English-speaking students catch up to her bilingual students in ordinal counting. It is not optional; it is mandated.

A very good, nonnegotiable starting point for setting realistic goal expectations and standards is through the inspection of nationally normed examinations.

## Standards That May Exist Within a State

In many states today, the movement toward accountability has gone hand-in-glove with the movement toward adopting objective-based curricula, and together the two movements have resulted in the publication of a series of academic goals for all children, K-12, in all areas of studies. In such a situation, the teacher need only consult the state's learner outcomes to formulate realistic expectations.

*In Illinois, the state's goals for education identify five outcomes in the area of language arts, one of which is that students must be able to interpret and evaluate a variety of written material. The goals suggest that by Grade 10, this would include the ability to recognize fallacies of logic.*

*Because this expectation already exists, it becomes incumbent on English teachers to include these goals in their design of lessons and their preparation of students. It is no longer a matter for debate. By the end of 10th grade, students should have been exposed to critical thinking skills, including Aristotelian fallacies of logic. The expectations have been set.*

*The state goal for language arts late elementary includes the provision that students ought to be able to edit documents for pronoun-antecedent agreement, adverb and adjective agreement, and verb tense.*

*Again—the expectations of the state are clear and the wise teacher would do well to adapt these standards as her own.*

The point is imminently clear. Another important place for teachers to go for guidance in setting standards and expectations is to their state board of education. The legends will do as little guessing or intuiting as possible as to what children ought to know and what it is they ought to be able to do. These first two sources are excellent, concrete specifications of standards that ought to be met for every grade level.

## Existing District Information

Most districts maintain copious longitudinal files concerning student progress based on years of standardized testing. In addition, many districts regularly update carefully articulated demographic profiles of their clientele. Finally, many schools keep longitudinal results of local assessments. All these provide a broad base of information from which the legend can generate reasonable expectations to meet the needs of students.

*By studying the past three to five years of scores from the Stanford Achievement Tests, a teacher may be able to identify recurring problems and areas of concern—areas that need more attention.*
*School and district report cards itemize specific skills that are tested and reported on at each grade level. This is universal from K-12.*

Once again, the point of emphasis is that when creating a vision by which to set expectations and standards, it is necessary to be as data-driven as possible. Standards are far more defensible to the student, the parent, and the community if in fact they originate from an informed source. Informed sources do *not* include the following:

< What's in the textbook
< What the teacher likes to teach
< What the teacher was taught
< What was always taught at that grade level

These first three sources, nationally normed examinations, state standards, and district information, all provide hard and accurate data by

which the teacher, new or experienced, may set standards for achievement and measures for accountability.

## Experienced Teachers and Administration

The first three sources are extremely important for setting standards, even for developing curricula, but alone they are not enough. They do not tell the teacher how much homework to assign or how quickly to expect students to master the material. In our previous example of the first graders being required to be able to count in ordinal numbers, the teacher knows that his or her students must do that, but how long should it take for them to learn? Is it something we do every week for 36 weeks? Is it something done earlier or later in the year? Is it a skill that should accompany counting in cardinal numbers or should it be taught separately later? Our first three sources to be referenced for creating and setting standards are important, but they do not provide the nuts and bolts teachers need to function on a daily basis in their classrooms.

Entering any new situation, the wise teacher (novice or experienced) needs to touch base with his or her peer group and administration to discover existing expectations. A department head may be amenable to passing on expectations to the teacher or another teacher at the same grade level. Likewise, the teacher may have been hired by an administration that has specific expectations in mind for that grade or class. The teacher may discover too late that he or she was hired by a school that has specific rules for homework—either limiting it or setting a minimum expectation. Before the teacher begins to cover the material in a unit, he or she may wish to find out if it's something that was presented in an early grade or if the teacher is presenting it for the very first time.

In any case, it is wise for the teacher to become cognizant of all these variables and set goals accordingly, not, initially at least, acting as the maverick. No teacher is hired into a vacuum. Instead, every teacher is hired into a complex social and cultural environment, and the sooner the teacher becomes aware of the strictures of that environment, the sooner he or she can begin moving toward becoming a classroom legend.

A final note about sources of information: consulting experienced teachers and administrators is perhaps the best method the novice teacher has for setting reasonable expectations for student work and for the evaluation of student work. Because evaluation of student work is an integral and often problematic part of any instructor's job, most teachers

are forced early in their careers to arrive at some philosophical approach to grading, one with which they can be comfortable. Collegial discussions are a primary method by which one can arrive at and occasionally check one's own standards of evaluation.

A conversation that every grade level, school, or department should have is the discussion of its philosophy about homework, testing, and grading in general. No beginning teacher should be left alone to develop what might be an unacceptable philosophy regarding any of these.

Questions to be addressed and answered include the following: What is a school's policy regarding rewarding effort? What is a school's policy for late work or makeup work? What is the policy for homework? How much homework is a teacher to assign? How little homework should be assigned? What is the prevailing thought on failing a student? Does the school allow social promotion? No teacher can intuit all these answers. It is very important that in an orientation to a new teaching environment, these issues are made clear. When they are not, and they often are not, the teacher must begin a systematic program to determine the answers. The answers to all these concerns are a part of setting realistic standards and maintaining successful expectations.

## Assessing Students: "You Are Here"

The next step, once the teacher is comfortable with a vision of where the students need to be by the end of instruction and has a general idea about how demanding the work should be, is to determine where the students are now. It makes little sense to design a curriculum aimed at the mastery of skills that students already possess. Similarly, it makes even less sense to design a curriculum aimed at the mastery of skills for which students lack sufficient prerequisite talents or knowledge to accomplish. The legend desires above all else at this stage to find out where the students are intellectually. This is possible by investigating a number of venues.

### Examination of Existing Data

To a degree, this has already been accomplished with the setting of expectations. As the teacher researches district information, examines the stated curriculum, and at the same time interviews peers and

administrators, he or she most likely will be able to create a fairly accurate profile of student traits and abilities. Many schools maintain portfolios of student work. An even cursory examination of the previous year's work will suggest where the students are in their academic development. In more organized districts, mentors or samples of student work catalogued into a building handout will demonstrate exactly what is considered exceptional, typical, and unacceptable work at every grade level.

"But!" you may ask dejectedly, "What about those of us not teaching at Shangri-La High?" Fear not! There are answers aplenty for the rest of us also.

## Ungraded Pretests and Surveys

Although administering pretests is a practice that finds itself more out of favor than in, it nonetheless remains a valuable tool for the individual teacher to determine the actual abilities of students prior to instruction.

*Knowing that students are expected to be able to identify symbols, metaphors, and extended metaphors in a work of poetry by the end of the term does not mean that the teacher needs to spend equal time on all three. Instead, the teacher may begin by giving an ungraded activity which he or she will use to determine if any of the students have already mastered these skills. The teacher may pass out a poem and ask students to write or discuss the presence of all three in the work. Analysis of answers may well reveal that students are unable to differentiate between symbols and metaphors but fully grasp the concept of the extended metaphor. Hence, the teacher knows where instruction needs to be directed.*

*The junior high industrial tech teacher, prior to beginning the "woods" project, may wish to start with a simple, objective, ungraded survey to see how many of the shop's tools students can name. What a shame it would be to start the project only to find that most of the kids couldn't differentiate between a plane and a nail set. Even further, what a greater shame if the project started with several days' lecture on the names and purposes of the different tools if the students already knew them.*

Pretests exist analogously to a doctor's examination. When the ailing patient enters the examination room, the expectations are crystal clear: the

doctor wants the patient to be cured, but prior to prescribing any course of action or medication, the doctor carefully identifies symptoms, determining, as nearly as he or she can, what needs to be remedied. Then, and only then, is the doctor ready to prescribe a regimen that will effect a cure.

Administering pretests or similar skill-assessing activities prior to initiating instruction allows the teacher to act in the same informed fashion, maximizing the effectiveness of the limited time allotted that particular skill or instruction.

A practice we definitely do not support is the rather outmoded concept of giving the final exam at the start of the semester. Such a practice, not popular today, really took as its goal the humbling of the children. This atrocious number was generated and at semester's end, when the real scores came back, insecure teachers used the improvement as evidence of their success. We think teachers can be much more productive in assessing students' mastery and needs than by using the same pre-assessment and post-assessment tool.

## Informal Class Interaction

Something as structured as a pretest or even a simple survey may not always be necessary. Sometimes class discussions, practice exercises, and other informal interactions with students may serve sufficiently well for the teacher to determine where the students are in terms of skills. Like the doctor who seeks to understand the patient beyond a mere list of symptoms, so too does the legend rely on informal methods of gathering data to create a broader picture of students, an understanding of their world, their backgrounds, their hopes, and their expectations. Just knowing what students can and cannot do is grossly inadequate for the legend.

The legend wants to know their feelings about the areas to be studied. Will he or she meet with enthusiasm or dread? Do the students equate study with success or failure? Do students find the work boring and does it appear repetitive to them? All these and many more such concerns go into the picture of knowing where the students are and how best to move each of them forward.

## Designing the Plan: "Are We There Yet?"

The next step, once the teacher has a vision of where the students need to be by the end of instruction and an assessment of where the students are presently, is to work backward from the end vision to the students' present level of mastery so as to determine a pacing scheme that will permit the students to progress toward that vision within the allotted time. More simply stated, the legend now knows where students are; he or she has determined where they need to be and thereby develops the most practical plan of taking them from point A to point B.

The legend begins to fulfill the vision by determining the pedagogical approach most appropriate for achieving the tasks he or she has set forth. An insightful knowledge of the students allows the legend to choose an instructional model that is most appropriate to the needs, talents, and preferences of those students. The legend continues developing the plan by determining a pacing scheme that will guide him or her through instruction, always cognizant of the expectations that constitute the vision and the position of the students as they progress toward those final standards and expectations.

It is at this point that the teacher is able to draw on his or her training and experience to fashion the most meaningful educational experience for students, all within the framework of working from point A to point B. It is here that the legend demonstrates how current he or she is with the latest educational thought and practices. It is here that the legend demonstrates the most professionalism. He or she *can* teach the subject.

# Remaining Flexible: "Whoops, Wrong Turn"

The final step in setting standards and expectations is flexibility. Flexibility for the legend is evinced in three significant arenas.

## Pacing Flexibility

Once expectations are set and instruction has begun, the students are assessed regularly and the progress from point A to point B is continually monitored. These regular assessments are used in a recurring reassessment and redesign of the pacing chart and lesson plans.

*Having determined that the class needs to learn all 206 bones in the human body prior to moving on to a study of the body's tissues, the teacher has allotted three days of activities for mastery of this knowledge. However, if the teacher finds that after three days most students still have not mastered the material, it is ridiculous to say that the allotted days are up and we must move on. Likewise, if the students master the material in one day, it is even sillier to return to it on the second and third days.*

The legend's schedule is flexible, responsive to student growth as it occurs within progress toward realizing the vision. An additional note is this: it is not necessary for every assessment to result in a grade. Assessments may be tests and projects and they may be homework and quizzes, but they may also be simple checks for understanding, like exit slips or entrance slips.

Assessments may not, however, be the ubiquitous and rhetorical "Okay?". Way too many teachers think that after presenting something or after practicing something they can look earnestly at their class and say "Okay?" and actually get reflective feedback. Of course, the response they get is usually non-engaging silence, which is meaningless feedback to the teachers. A better practice for the informal assessment of student progress, if we indeed must rely on student feedback, is the "thumbs-up" response. We first saw this in an elementary school but it works just as well at any level of instruction, including staff development. Upon finishing something, such as instruction, practice, worksheets, and so forth, the teacher calls out "Feedback." The command "Feedback" means that students face for-ward—no wandering eyes—all eyes are on the teacher. At the same time each student makes a fist and holds it against his or her sternum. The teacher then asks a specific "Yes-No" question such as this: "How many of you think you can do this without my help?" The teacher then gives the command "Vote." Students who feel they can answer to the affirmative raise their thumbs straight up. Those who cannot answer do not raise their thumbs, and those who must answer in the negative point their thumbs down. The teacher has immediate, private, visual feedback and can assess whether to move forward or reteach the material. This is the most effective method of informal assessment we've seen. Of course, the point of the feedback is to see whether to continue or reflect. Flexibility is the legend's mantra.

### Strategy Flexibility

Both within a single year and through several years, the legend is flexible and not married to any one activity or approach. When something doesn't work, the legend replaces it. Admitting shortcomings is not failure; ignoring them is. To be this versatile, the legend has to be the master of different modes of learning He or she must keep current with developments in education. The greatest temptation, as we've suggested once before, is to teach as the teacher is most comfortable learning or to teach solely as one was taught. Both options are inadequate today.

### Longitudinal Flexibility

The legend keeps track of student progress, not only during the year of instruction but in future years, to make sure that the original vision was accurate and the plan was efficient. When evidence suggests otherwise, the teacher makes appropriate adjustments. The legend is flexible.

# Acknowledging the Backbone: "Home, Sweet Home"

Finally, the legend is flexible but not wishy-washy. Pitfalls await every instructor as he or she sets and tries to maintain expectations and standards. These potential pitfalls are discussed next, but suffice it now to suggest that although responsive to feedback and continuing assessment of student growth, the legend does not let self-doubt worm its way into his or her thinking. Such doubt opens the door to outside pressures and cynicism, both of which undermine the process of expectation and standard setting.

Although flexible, the legend remains faithful to his or her vision. The legend finds inner peace in the belief that he or she is doing what is best for the students. Knowing that his or her standards and expectations are in the best interest of the students, the legend remains faithful to them and is able to open many doors of success for the students. This attitude is probably most succinctly exemplified in the following incident.

*Several years ago, at a baseball clinic in Chicago, Sparky Anderson (then manager of the Cincinnati Reds) was the keynote speaker. After his address, he took questions from the audience. One college coach rose*

*and asked, "Sparky, what do you think is the better way to teach catchers how to throw to second on a stolen-base attempt? The direct throw sometimes sails, ending up in center field, but the one-hop throw is a little slower, and the runner ..."*

*Sparky cut him off. Shaking his head, Sparky simply replied, "Doesn't matter."*

*The coach, having thought a long time over what he could ask, was obviously deflated by the response from the manager of the world-champion Reds. "How can it not matter?" he asked.*

*"Either way is fine," Sparky smiled. "What matters is not the method you teach, but that you convince your team that you believe it's the method that will work. Once you convince them of that-it will."*

We add this: The legend is never bull-headed. The legend does not believe in "My way or the highway." Having developed a template for success, and having seen the program achieve success, the legend remains true to it. Success, as we said before, builds success.

Here is a final word (and major caution) about expectations and standards. Our general feeling is that students will learn what is asked of them and will rise to the level of a teacher's expectations. Most teachers expect way too little of their students and reward far too low levels of performance. We find this is true in almost all classes, from honors to remedial. The following experience is pretty universal.

*Just out of college, in his first year of teaching, a middle school teacher decided to stress a great number of map skills. Besides the usual—find the equator, name the continents, and so on—he also made his students determine time zones and find ships lost at sea by their last known coordinates. He was overjoyed to find that the children did pretty well on the whole unit and loved the experience.*

*Several years later, the same teacher was looking through old materials, and when he came upon that first test he had given, he was surprised to find that many of the difficult tasks that he had originally required of his students had been abandoned. To his amazement he was shocked to find evidence that over the years, his expectations had fallen drastically, lowered to a far more readily achieved comfort zone.*

*It was at that moment that the middle school teacher first understood that the laws of atrophy apply to education just as they do to every other*

*force in the universe. It was his first glimpse into the unexpected erosion of expectations.*

Whether it is compassion for student self-esteem or merely the rationalization of tired teachers, there is a constant erosion of expectations and standards. As a result, it is an unfortunate reality that many of our students go woefully unchallenged throughout much of their education. Our overall impression of education in America is that much more can and should be demanded of our students. Our experience has repeatedly demonstrated that students will rise to our expectations and will achieve at our designated levels of success. This is why it is so important for teachers to set meaningful, challenging standards, and to stand by them.

## Identifying Pitfalls

Most teachers, most people involved with education for that matter, seem to sing two contradictory songs:

**Song 1:** Ain't High Standards Great?

**Song 2:** But Not in My Class, Not Right Now.

If everyone is in accord that we need to challenge our students more, that we need to hold them to higher standards of success, then why is it we seem unable to do so? It seems that far too often that we are plagued with social promotions, falling test scores, powder-puff courses, and a general inability to make the most of ourselves. Why is this so?

We'd like to suggest that the reason most certainly lies in the story of our middle school geography teacher—a natural atrophy of expectations. Despite their original intentions, individual teachers will find themselves at the mercy of any number of forces that work incessantly to undermine the standards they have attempted to establish.

These forces appear in many guises: would-be partners, well-meaning groups, and earnest individuals more than willing to help the teacher set and reassess expectations. Yet each presents a potential pitfall, an obstacle not only to setting high expectations and standards but also to maintaining them.

# Pitfall 1: Students

The teacher's first would-be partner in the area of setting standards and expectations is an unrelenting one, yet it is also the first major potential pitfall: students themselves. The teacher will face wave after wave of assertions from every class that his or her expectations are too high and standards too rigid. Students, both good and bad, both despised and favored, will as naturally bemoan what is expected of them as they will wear blue jeans and sneakers. They will initially, as if by oath, oppose any new teacher's set of standards. They will whine, they will unfavorably compare the teacher to other teachers, and they will present and misrepresent their parents' sentiments. They may, for the first time in their lives, do elective research in the library just to find proof that a class's expectations for them are unrealistically high. Each new class, each new student, brings attempts to lower the teacher's standards and a fervent hope to compromise the teacher's expectations.

This is customary in education, but so much not a surprise that it should be the least dangerous pitfall. Students will attempt to get every teacher to lower the bar until it is resting on the ground. We're sure this is not true for any of our readers, but many college students remember that the school they attended published an unofficial course catalogue which identified which teachers gave the highest grades for the least work. This is how many college students determined their schedules. Can we expect anything more from primary and secondary students? The obvious answer is that students will always seek the path of least resistance with the highest reward, earned or not. The legend is not swayed by students' attempt to make their lives easier.

## The Solution

This is a natural occurrence. Just as night follows day, students try to get out of as much work as possible. We will not begrudge them that, but neither will we pander to it. This pitfall is easily avoided if one is prepared to encounter it.

Whereas the good teacher is certainly sympathetic to students' concerns, willing to acknowledge the students' other commitments and priorities (and willing at times to be flexible in regard to them), the good teacher negotiates neither expectations nor standards with the students. Students

are our clients; they are not our peers. They have no set criteria of their own by which to decide what they should do or how well they should do it.

This discussion of the first potential pitfall in the setting of expectations needs to be tempered with two cautions. On one hand, we do not mean to give the teacher carte blanche to ignore the feelings and aspirations of students; but on the other, we suggest that the feelings and aspirations of the students do not determine expectations. Additionally, we bring back our caution about flexibility; we caution against a rigidity that does not allow for gaps in previous knowledge. If we all agree that 10th-grade students should be able to write unified, cohesive essays, but we find that our students don't know how to generate paragraphs, then we are surely wrong to continue with our plans without first covering the prerequisite knowledge.

The point is to develop a balance between expectations for student achievement and compassionate appreciation for student difficulties. Without this balance, the teacher is doomed. If the teacher is forever too stringent in expectation, uncaring of students' feelings, then he or she alienates those students with whom he or she had a chance to succeed. If the teacher is too compassionate to student concerns, eventually expectations erode to the point of insignificance. It is a delicate and challenging balance to maintain.

# Pitfall 2: Parents

The second force at work to erode a teacher's standards (and thus the second potential pitfall to the process of setting expectations) includes the parents and guardians of students (henceforth referred to simply as "parents"). Parents seem to fall into two categories: Parental Type I, the "Give 'Em Hell, Harry!" type, and Parental Type 2, the "Have You No Heart?" type.

## Parent Type 1

This group thinks teachers are too soft. Members of this group believe all children, including their own, are inherently lazy and not to be trusted. They feel that teachers waste too much time on "touchy-feely" activities and would rather we'd stick to the three Rs and "whip" the kids into shape. They're usually too busy to be involved with their children's education and

expect teachers to take care of any problems that arise on their own without bothering them.

## Parent Type 2

This group's interaction with teachers is always in the role of protector of their children. These parents attempt to place themselves between the evil teachers and the innocent children, whom they see as having been tied to the railroad track with the train bearing down on them, forever vulnerable and forever wronged. They agree with their children that our standards are too high. They defend their children's lack of success by blaming the teacher. They run for school boards often.

Okay, that was mostly tongue in cheek. We do recognize that both types of parents act out of love and compassion for their children, trying to do what is best for them. Their motives are not to be questioned, but the fact is that they confuse empowering their children with enabling them. The fact is that they believe they are better prepared than we (professional educators) to set the standards for their children's growth. The fact is that they very often take their children's failure as their own and react defensively.

As a result, these parents find their children's grades more important than what their children learn. They will be first in line to argue before the school board that the teacher who gives their children bad grades is incompetent and should be fired, and they will be first in line to hire a lawyer to sue the school because their children were not well prepared for later education. They will be last in line to see the contradiction of their own behavior.

## The Solution

As meaningful extensions of our clients, parents deserve the opportunity to have their concerns expressed, and teachers most certainly do have an accountability to them, but in reality, parents generally are not trained to be part of the process by which standards and expectations are determined. Through the school board members, parents' views may find voice. Although their advice and participation is always welcomed, in the final analysis, parents do not make good counsel for the setting of standards and expectations for two reasons. First, because their children are in the affected class, there is an inherent conflict of interest in their having any say about standards and expectations. Second, they are laypeople and not

professionals who have studied the issues of standards and expectations. Their views tend toward the uninformed.

Experience will affirm that most contact with parents is initiated by the parent after a problem has arisen, and most parents today enter into the interchange firmly convinced that the fault lies with the teacher. Their concerns are almost universally in the external measurements of success (i.e., grades) and its ramifications (e.g., honor rolls, class ranks, car insurance deductions), not in helping their own children reach their full educational potential. Despite their care and love, parents are not a source to which we should turn to set standards and expectations.

In the final analysis and especially for the Type 2 Parent, it is our job to protect the student from his or her own parents' low expectations. Graduating with straight A's from middle school, although a high priority for these parents when their children are 12 and 13 years old, is meaningless when they can't finish high school.

*We present our views on what we see should be the parents' roles in setting expectations and standards both as educators (for a total of almost 70 years) and as parents (for a total of just a few less!). We've sat on both sides of the table at parent-teacher conferences and recognize on which side we act professionally and rationally and on which side we act instinctively and emotionally. We do not mean to condemn parents who are involved in education; we do mean to suggest that parents, as a group, have an agenda that should preclude them from being active partners in setting educational expectations and standards. We know that most parents are good parents and act responsibly on the behalf of their children, but some of the greatest pressure to erode a teacher's legitimate standards will come from the other kind of parents.*

## Pitfall 3: School Administration

A third logical source to which a teacher might turn for assistance in setting expectations is the administration of the district in which he or she teaches. Generalizing about all administrations is not quite as simple as it is with students and parents, but perhaps if we look at two extremes of administrative styles, we can see how administrations that tend toward the latter style pose a serious potential pitfall for the teacher looking for direction in establishing expectations.

At one extreme, we have the strong, educationally oriented administration, one that has in place a system that is curriculum oriented, published, actively used by all teachers, measured, and centered around such practices as mentoring and professional collegiality. Under such an administration, the communication of standards and expectations is naturally accomplished for every teacher. Expectations are at the heart of the curriculum, the essence of measurement and assessment, and the source for pedagogical and curricular revision. In such situations, the teacher is not left afloat trying desperately to find any bit of land on which to set his or her standards; instead, he or she has an immediate, perpetual, and professional source for standards and expectations. This is the lucky teacher indeed.

At the other extreme is the weak, politically oriented administration that has nothing more than a knee-jerk reaction to whoever spoke most loudly at the last public meeting. In a district like this, practices are not research based, and in fact, no real educational concerns, directions, or expectations may be communicated. The administration is certainly not to be considered a source for expectations; the teacher may have to be political (or at least take tact to new heights) in defense of what the students really need. This is an unfortunate teacher, to be sure.

## The Solution

Under the strong administration, overt direction is given to a published, skills-based curriculum, and both internal and external measures by which accountability is maintained are identified. In such a case, the administration is a marvelous and accurate source of expectations.

Yet under the weak administration, we find nothing more than a total disavowal of any curricular concerns and no more consideration of expectations than some weak accounting of teachers' grades and occasional pressure to pass more students, fail more students, or balance the grades more closely to some dangerous curve. The more closely an administration resembles this one, the more the teacher is on his or her own to establish standards and expectations.

There is very little we can say about this latter situation. The legend in this school may be strong enough to be successful, not because of but despite a weak administration. The teacher new to education is not in an admirable position. While such disastrous situations are rare, they do exist and rarely give rise to the kind of legends to whom this book is dedicated.

# Pitfall 4: Peers

When we entered education, we knew that students would present the kind of pitfalls we have already discussed. We also knew that a lot of parents would be a challenge. Likewise, we knew, even in our training, that there would be strong and less strong administrations, but generally, the real surprise is to find that often our peers can be the source of eroded standards as well, and because that, in itself, is so surprising, this is an especially dangerous pitfall.

Sea level is the paradigm of mediocrity, and unfortunately, it is the physical nature of everything to be drawn down toward it, especially bodies at rest. This sadly explains many of our peers. (Our apologies go out to all those who thought this section would conclude with some good, old-fashioned administration bashing.)

When one turns to one's peers for guidance, and one must eventually turn to one's peers, then one must be prepared to encounter three different kinds of responses: good advice from another caring professional, bad advice from another caring professional, and bad advice from a tired cynic, at rest. We dearly hope (and believe) that most of the new teacher's interactions with established peers will be of the first variety. We can guarantee they will if the school or district is wise enough to have initiated and maintained a formal mentoring program. Yet, if it hasn't, we would be remiss not to warn of the second two types.

## Type 1: Good Advice

This category, without a doubt, encompasses the vast majority of teachers. Colleagues should be considered the best source for advice concerning setting standards and expectations. The first obligation in any collegial professional interchange should be a discussion of standards and expectations. It is important that homogeneity of both is maintained throughout a grade level or department and perhaps, even a school. For the beginning and experienced teacher alike, and certainly for the legend, the best source of information to help set standards and expectations is colleagues.

The new fifth-grade teacher ought to be asking her mentor how much homework to assign. The seventh-grade teacher who wisely used parts of a colleague's test on the U.S. Constitution should be comparing her scores to his. The freshman honors biology teacher should be checking with his

department chair to make certain his grade distribution falls within an expected range. The new teacher's best source for setting daily standards and maintaining challenging expectations is indeed his or her peers.

## Type 2: Bad Advice

The second category of peers is a bit more awkward to deal with. Often, bad advice is given in the guise of loving care for students. Simply put, some experienced teachers are worn down by years of pressure and have come to believe that expecting less of students is kinder. Obviously, little in education could be farther from the truth. No service is done to the student by allowing him or her to matriculate through school without the necessary skills to succeed. The educator's job is to see that students master a basic array of skills and internalize a basic set of information. No other consideration can be allowed a higher priority, regardless of how well-meaning or compassionate the teacher may be. Our bottom line is nonnegotiable: students must learn: This is the credo of the legend. Advice from this group concerning the question of setting standards and expectations must be taken with that proverbial grain of salt, or perhaps the whole shaker.

Education has taken some steps to prevent this well-intended but disturbing process. At the secondary level, department chairs are named and one of their responsibilities should be maintaining standards. We cannot imagine a higher classing for a department chair. At the elementary level, many schools have identified grade-level leaders, such as a lead third-grade teacher who may not assume the evaluative responsibilities of the secondary department chair but often does take on the job of monitoring standards and expectations. Other schools have instituted formal mentoring systems, and along with all other duties, the mentor is expected to help the protégé develop accurate standards and expectations. Kudos to those schools—we know of few other innovations that are so inexpensive for a school to implement and yet have such great rewards.

## Type 3: Cynical Advice

More dangerous is the third category of teacher a novice may turn to for help in setting standards and expectations. This includes teachers suffering from what is commonly referred to as "teacher burnout." We all know them. They are tired, and they are bitter. Walking by their classrooms, it is likely you will find them at their desks, barely awake—barely alive while

students are left to their own wiles. They find youthful optimism annoying. They no longer subscribe to the belief that education can make a difference in children's lives and find anyone else's willingness to work on behalf of students preposterous. They will counsel us toward ineffectiveness and inactivity. Luckily for us, these teachers are few in number and readily identifiable. Like the bob-white or the cuckoo, they are immediately distinguishable by their call, for theirs is always the song of cynicism. Fortunately, we know that cynicism is merely failure's imitation of pride, and the wise teacher, even the wise initiate, ignores this advice as much as possible. These teachers most certainly should not be a part of the process of generating or maintaining expectations or standards.

> *One young science teacher was as excited as any new teacher to land her first job in a middle school—not far from where she lived so it was especially exciting for her. She dedicated herself to doing everything as well as she could. She decorated her room meticulously and frequently, always making certain her room was decorated to reflect the units she was covering. She made certain to stay up late the nights her students turned in work, so she could complete grading and return the work within 48 hours, just as research says she should. In short, she worked her tail off to be the best she could.*
>
> *Imagine her surprise the day a peer, another middle school teacher, took her aside and confided in her: "I know you're trying to do a good job, but you need to know you're really making the rest of us look bad. You need to relax and become a team player."*

The anecdote speaks for itself. There are peers out there whose opinions do not matter.

## Pitfall 5: The Teacher

There is one final pitfall that needs our attention, and that is the teacher himself or herself. Caring teachers, dedicated teachers, find it almost impossible (emphasis on the "almost") to separate themselves from their students' success and failures. Good teachers care so much about seeing their students succeed, and they want their children to do well so much, that at times they may slowly begin to allow their own standards and expectations to erode.

We began this section by referencing again the middle school history teacher who was so surprised to find how much his expectations for students had sunk over the years when it came to the map skills he had originally taught. We know this teacher well and know how much he has always, without exception, cared about his students. His standards did not sink because of any outside influences, but the longer he taught and the more he identified with his students, the more likely he was to come under the influence of a very real force— his own compassion. He never decided to make his class easier. There was never a moment in time when he turned his back on his own expectations for student learning, but over the years, in immeasurably small increments, it had occurred.

We point this out only as a warning; but even legends, and this middle school, map-teaching, history teacher was indeed a legend, must be cognizant of the natural erosion of standards that comes from our own compassion, our own caring.

## Publicizing Expectations

Expectations for student achievement and standards for success are relatively meaningless if not shared openly with the students. We are not big fans of the hidden agenda. Courses should begin with a general overview of the expectations for students (in terms of behavior, personal productivity, and progress) and the standards for evaluation. This should be true regardless of the grade level. Couched in kinder, less assertive terms for the grade-school class, expectations need nevertheless to be shared at all levels. Throughout the year, every specific task or project should be initiated with an explanation or model of what success looks like and how evaluation will occur. We would go as far to say that every homework assignment should have included, implicitly or explicitly, a rubric for scoring, indicative of the teacher's expectations of the assignment, with clearly identified standards by which to judge success.

We find the following paradox delightful. Few workers in the world have so zealously negotiated the terms by which they will be evaluated as educators. The annual teaching evaluation is a finely crafted tool that is part of every association's contract, specifying every aspect of the evaluation and every ramification of every possible outcome from that evaluation. Teachers know exactly when they will be evaluated, how they

will be evaluated, what will be stressed in the evaluation, and by whom. They have left nothing to chance.

On the other hand (what we find to be the comedic side of the paradox) is the fact that in far too many classrooms, grades and standards are a total mystery. What teachers have mandated through law as their "rights," they have failed to grant to the students with whom we work, even as a mere courtesy. New complex grade-book software has made the situation even worse, as teachers themselves have lost control of their scores and now have them calculated by programs they don't quite understand.

How does a teacher know if he or she has communicated expectations clearly? It is not difficult at all actually; one need only to listen. What follows are some sample comments you might hear if your expectations and standards have not been clearly communicated:

> *"He still hasn't figured out what you want in the essays."* **(from a parent)**
>
> *"I studied the wrong stuff for the test."* **(from a student)**
>
> *"1 tried to help her, but I didn't know what you wanted."* **(from another teacher)**
>
> *"You obviously worked very hard on the project, but you missed the point!"* **(from the teacher)**
>
> *"What are we doing?"* **(from everybody)**

It is only when students understand expectations for them and the standards by which teachers will evaluate them that we may hold them responsible for their own success and progress. The legend does not work in clandestine darkness. The legend operates in the open light. Students should not be expected to intuit goals, standards, or expectations. It should not take students a few months or a few tests to determine what a teacher is "looking for." What is being taught must be the first concern communicated to the class. How it is being assessed is the second.

There are five major tenets that all teachers, and certainly the legend, should follow to make sure expectations and standards are being clearly communicated.

## Tenet 1

Expectations should be written out and visible to the students from the beginning of the course, the unit, the week, and every day. They are

repeatedly shared as the purpose of all activities.

## Secondary

Our goal in this AP English class is to see that each of you can score at least a "3" on the exam in May; we'll work toward that goal by practicing the objective parts of the test and rewriting all essays that would not receive at least a "6" according to the assignment's rubric, which will always be attached to every writing assignment.

## Middle

When we take our quiz next Friday, you should be able to identify the five characteristics of all mammals. On the quiz you'll be given the diagram of a mammal and asked to indicate where all five characteristics can be seen. If you don't get at least four correct, you'll have to come in for extra help after school.

## Primary

When we're done coloring the picture of insects, only the insects should be colored, not other animals, and if you did this well, all your crayons will be back in the basket.

# Tenet 2

Standards for success are never hidden. They are published periodically in the classroom and may even accompany important assignments. They may well have been learned by the students prior to any assessment.

## Secondary

The building's grade scale will remain posted in front for the year. It is nonnegotiable.

## Middle

All papers you write for this class must be written in ink, on one side of the page, and with a proper heading, as modeled in this poster, or they will not be accepted.

Primary

When I grade the long division questions, you will lose one point if your columns are not kept straight.

## Tenet 3

Whenever possible, expectations and standards are communicated in a positive fashion. Negativity is counterproductive to any attempts to have students meet expectations. Our favorite list of "expectation busters" follows. This list provides surefire ways to make certain students don't succeed:

< You're going to have trouble with this one.
< It's only a trick question if you didn't read the footnote.
< This is the easiest test we've ever had; if you don't do well on this, there's no hope for you.
< What's wrong with you people?

The minute the teacher introduces this "me-against-you" mentality, expectations and standards both become oppressive. They are values imposed on students, without their consent, with the sole purpose of culling the weaker of them, and students will resent the process.

The purpose of communicating standards is to help students succeed, to show them the way to achieve, to see their efforts pay off—not to tell them how to fail. The legend avoids negativity at all costs, while still maintaining and communicating standards and high expectations.

## Tenet 4

The legend charts or graphs students' progress, making growth concrete. Too often, their own progress remains intangible to students, and therefore, they tend to become disheartened, excluded from their own success. The legend is keenly aware that students are very short-sighted creatures, fragile in their self-esteem. They need honest reassurance of their own progress. We should not assume that they see their own growth. Remember as a child how much you dreaded family get-togethers because every adult always raved about how much you had grown, and the fact is, you never remembered becoming taller? The same is true in the classroom. Students

don't know they're improving, so while the legend always publicizes standards and expectations, he or she never misses the opportunity to remind students of how much they have improved. You can never underestimate the value of a student's feeling successful.

## Secondary

If you look at the front of your writing folders, you'll see that when you compare them to the sheet underneath from last semester, we're no longer having any trouble with fragments or run-on sentences.

## Middle

On the board is a diagram showing how your grades have improved so dramatically on the portfolios of your outside reading. Everyone's grade has improved. That's something to be proud of as a group and as an individual.

## Primary

After the fitness test we took in the fall, we all recorded how many sit-ups we could do. Now that we've done them again this spring and entered those new numbers, aren't you impressed that everybody improved? Can you see how much stronger you've all become?

# Tenet 5

The legend makes certain that in his or her class, all students participate at the same level of difficulty all the time, without excuses. There has been some tremendously insightful work done in the area of communicating expectations to students in the course of daily interchanges. A considerable wealth of research is available specifically about teachers communicating expectations as they correlate to student achievement. The Teacher Expectations & Student Achievement (TESA) staff development program is almost totally devoted to making all teachers effective communicators of high expectations without negatively communicating lower expectations to any students. In a quick overview, the basic principles of communicating high expectations impartially to all students include absolute equality in each of the following:

< *Frequency* (No group of students receives more opportunities to answer than any other group): The legend sees to it that all students are actively engaged in learning equally, all the time. The legend avoids teaching to the test.

< *Difficulty* (No group of students receives more difficult questions or questions at a higher level than any other group): Easier questions communicate lower expectations. Students at all grade levels pick up on that discrimination immediately.

< *Opportunity* (No group of students receives longer wait time or more help in determining a correct response than any other group): Children hate silence. The pause during which time they are to be thinking is anguish to them. The legend uses wait time to his or her advantage.

< *Expectation* (No group of students receives either verbal or nonverbal indication that the teacher has higher or lower expectations for that group than for any other group): It is, after all, a rather simple rule: any question may be asked of any student.

Simply put, every student is always equally held up to the same high expectations and standards regardless of the teacher's biases or personal expectations for that student's success. If we begin the class expecting that Black students won't work well at higher levels of learning, or assuming that children of broken homes will not handle pressures well, or suspecting that girls can't do math, or believing that football players will be rhetorically challenged, we will, finally and almost inevitably, prove ourselves right by communicating those beliefs to the students, and they, unfortunately in this case, still trust us enough to believe us. We must put those biases behind us; and even if we cannot, we must appear to have put them behind us by treating all children the same all the time.

When these tenets are followed, the legend is as continuous in communicating his or her expectations and standards to students as he or she is in seeing to the rest of the students' education. But more important, by communicating both regularly, the legend converts students into active partners in their own learning. Only then are they able to put forth their best efforts in achieving success. Logically, this entire process extends into the home as well. The better informed parents are about the expectations and standards of their children's classroom work, the better help they will be able to offer at home. Communicating expectations is every bit as important as setting them.

# Maintaining Consistency and Objectivity

In the emotionally troubled lives of students, in the socially convoluted experience of the entire school environment, and in light of the rapidly changing emphasis of educational thinking, there must remain the immovable rock on which students can steady themselves. That rock must be the classroom teacher. The legend is, perhaps as much as anything else, consistent and objective.

By consistency, we do not mean inflexibility, hopelessly stuck in the same rut year in and year out. We've already made that clear. The legend is not predictable. Being mechanical or habitual would, of course, contradict most of what the sections on personality and motivation have to offer. By consistency, we mean the following:

< The same system of rewards, punishments, and motivation is in place for all students all the time. Students will have a great deal of trouble achieving excellence if excellence itself is a shifting, vague concept. Likewise, if a class's chemistry is determined by the particular mood of the teacher on any given day, one would rightfully assume that that classroom will not be a very productive one.

< The same high standards and expectations are maintained for all students, all the time, regardless of the students, regardless of the period of the day or time of the year, and regardless of the class. Whether it is in AP calculus or beginning instruction in cursive, students know that the teacher is going to demand and expect the best of them.

< The same work ethic is required at all times for all students. If school is important, then every minute of every day is essential, and if the students don't sense that urgency about education from the teacher, we can hardly expect them to manifest it later. Likewise, every teacher should be cognizant of the fact that students have no respect for teachers who are easily talked into off-task activities or discussions (even though they may be highly sought at registration time!).

Every bit as important as consistency is the quality of objectivity, and we firmly believe that maintaining true objectivity is a far greater challenge to most teachers than they are willing to admit.

We all know the dangers of having favorites in a classroom. The image of the spoiled teacher's pet haunts us to this day. Stories of the coach or teacher to whose classes athletes flock for the easy grade do serious damage to the profession. On the other hand, it is ridiculous to think that whenever one meets a group larger than two people, one or two of them will not be favored over the others. It is absurd to think that a teacher won't have drastically more in common with some students than with others. Additionally, it is sophomoric to suppose that after grading a class's papers for half a school year, that same teacher would be unaware of the superior cognitive or syntactic abilities of some of the students in comparison with others.

That a teacher likes some students better than others is a given. That some students are more intelligent, creative, motivated, talented, artistic, and so forth, is merely a fact of life. What also must be equally true is that every student is treated and evaluated the same way in every situation; otherwise, the teacher has no claim to objectivity. Losing the students' perception of our objectivity is calamitous. Nothing could more impugn the underlying lesson of what we have to teach—that they are indeed masters of their fates, that they hold their own futures in their hands. If they perceive prejudice, bias, favoritism in the class, then they have been absolved of effort, because in their minds at least, life ought to be fair, and when it's not, what's the point in trying?

For the legend, maintaining an impeccable repute of impartiality is paramount to his or her success. One of the ways that a teacher can ensure impartiality is by using a seating chart. Keep track of teacher-student interactions (see Table 3.1) by fence-posting or using some other marking technique of the frequency and kinds of interactions that occur with students. This is a simple but significant technique to ensure equal opportunity and balance of rewards in the class. (It is a great activity to share with another teacher. Have him or her come into your class and keep the tally. Later you go into his or her class and do the same.) The results may surprise you.

**Table 3.1** Front of the Class (children in all seats)

| Row 1 | ReReQP | ReRePP | QPRePRi | RiPQQ | PPRe | PQReRi |
|-------|--------|--------|---------|-------|------|--------|
| Row 2 | QQR | QReQRe | ReQReQ | PQReQP | PRe | QQ |
| Row 3 | Re | QReRe | QRePP | ReQRe | QQRe | ReReQ |
| Row 4 | PRe | ReQR | ReReQP | RiReQ | QQ | |
| Row 5 | | QReQRe | PQReRe | PP | | Q |

*Note:* Each rectangular box illustrates a student sitting in class. Re = response offered; Q = question asked; P = praise; Ri = reprimand.

Regarding the chart in Table 3.1, this teacher is guilty of teaching to the test, across the front and down the middle. The class has dead corners where students don't receive as much attention. There are more reprimands the further we go back in the class, so do better students sit closer to the teacher? This may be the result of 20 minutes of class and raises some interesting questions for the teacher to ask himself or herself.

When evaluating students, use as many methods as possible to evaluate the work anonymously without losing sight of whose work is being evaluated. Typed work handed in by code numbers without names is a perfect method by which to achieve this goal.

The point is not to allow perceptions of students' abilities to affect the evaluation of their performance.

*Stephanie has been one of the brightest girls in the class all year; she is polite, hard-working, intuitive—a delight. So when Mr. Woodward reads her story about the most influential person she has ever met, he knows that she has really implied more than stated. He knows that implicitly she meant to develop the character more than she actually did overtly and gives her a good score.*

*Stephen, meanwhile, usually doesn't do very strong work and is actually rather lazy, so when Mr. Woodward reads Stephen's story, he is angered by its brevity and the fact that Stephen again did not develop his main character as thoroughly as he was instructed to do.*

In fact, Stephanie and Stephen may have written very much the same story with the same problem, but Mr. Woodward, because of past behavior, is unable to see them as equal. This is not any indication of any bias on Mr. Woodward's part, but a pitfall into which many teachers fall. By occasionally looking at works anonymously, it is a difficulty that can be

avoided. Here are some other techniques that teachers can use to maintain impartiality:

> < It is also important to evaluate students in random order. (For example, don't always evaluate Bob's work after Fatima's because whoever's work is evaluated after Fatima's always looks poor in comparison. Bob may alphabetically follow Fatima in the teacher's grade book, but it's not fair to always see his work in light of hers.)
> < Don't ever compare siblings' work, certainly never negatively but never positively either. In addition, if you've been around long enough, remember never to predispose yourself toward a student based on his or her parents.

> *David Scheidecker's father was a highly successful carpenter with his own construction company. When David entered woodworking class, the teacher, who had been there since the invention of wood, read the roster, looked at him, and said, "You're Dwayne's boy right?" David hesitantly admitted it. "Well then, that makes you the shop foreman."*

> *Little did the shop teacher know that your author did not know a hawk from a handsaw. It was a long and sad semester.*

> < Recognize situations where it may appear that there could be favorites from class. Are there students in the room who belong to a club you sponsor or a team you coach? Are there students you know from the local church, temple, or mosque? Are any of your neighbors' children in your class? Are there children of other teachers in your class? All of these are ripe with the possibility of favoritism.

The bottom line is a simple one: no one, not even the legend, can overcome the appearance of favoritism in his or her classroom. Please note: we did not say "favoritism," we said "the appearance of favoritism." Children demand little from us; they bring innocent but simple moral systems to school. When we violate the principles of those value systems, we destroy any intrinsic motivation they may have to learn. Although we tend to take such comments lightly or disregard them altogether, the child's plea, "That's not fair!" should be of the utmost concern to us.

When a child feels that the essential fairness of his world has been violated, we are in trouble. Thinking that there are favorites in the class is the greatest violation of that fairness. The legend works diligently to prevent that misperception.

# Removing Excuses

A popular word in education at this time, one that comes to us from modern psychological parlance, is *enabling,* a term used to mean the act of justifying, permitting, and even encouraging failure in others. The legend does not enable students to fail. Instead, if the legend believes in the importance of maintaining and communicating objective and consistent expectations and standards for all students all the time, then the legend must believe in the efficacy of his or her own system and must consequently remove all excuses for failure from the shoulders of students. Doing so involves three significant responsibilities.

## Responsibility 1

The first job of freeing students from excuses for failing is to make sure that nothing they bring with them to class automatically dooms them to failure. If a student cannot pass a course because of past failures, because of environmental or social disadvantages, because of learning disabilities, or because of any other handicap, then that child must not be placed in that class under any circumstances.

Consequently, any child in the legend's class is assumed to be capable of passing and is held up to doing all the work necessary to pass. No work is permitted to be left undone, and no work is acceptable if completed at what is judged to be inadmissibly poor quality, for any reason. The legend begins under the assumption that all will succeed; he or she does not operate under the theory that a certain number or a predictable percentage of the students will fail. All actions are predicated on that belief.

## Responsibility 2

The second aspect of removing excuses for failing is accomplished when the teacher accepts responsibility for the success of students. The legend assures students that they can pass and equally assures them that were they to fail, it would be as much the teacher's fault as theirs, and most important, that he or she will not let that happen. This is a testament to the efficacy of education; it is, in the vernacular, "putting your money where your mouth is." It has always seemed ironic to consider the number of teachers who pursue programs that plan to accept a given number of

failures. It makes much more sense to devise a program within which all students who do all the work will succeed. This is, after all, the age of the money-back guarantee. The legend should be able to stand in front of the class and announce, in all sincerity, that everyone who does all the work all the time will succeed in the class. If not, there is a problem in what is being assigned, studied, or assessed.

If this concept is actually put into effect, the teacher can look the students in the eyes and sincerely say, "If you do all the homework and pay attention in class, you will pass the unit tests; and if you pass the tests, you will pass the final exams; and of course, if you pass all those, you'll easily pass the course."

Too often, teachers fail to make that connective progression clear to students. If a student does the work of the unit but is surprised by the nature of the test and ends up with a failing grade, then a covenant of sorts has been broken. The work of the unit should be solely aimed at preparing the student to pass the unit test. Likewise, the unit tests, taken as a whole, should be aimed at preparing the students to pass the final examination.

# Instruction Should Prepare
# Students for Assessment

The legend does not lose sight of that simple truth; he or she lives by it. This is accomplished when the teacher acts as the coach by following a few simple rules:

1. Rare is the unit whose main goal is for the students to determine what is important. This ought not to be classified material. Let the students know what they must know.

2. Teach in the manner of assessment. Practice for any assessment, from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to AP tests, should be in the form the student will see on the exam. The testing format should not "throw" the student.

3. Simplify instruction and focus on what is essential. Know "mastery learning" and give credence to its effectiveness.

4. Place learning above compliance. We'll talk more about that later. The ramifications of this in our age of testing are many.

# Responsibility 3

Stop telling children what they cannot do.

Help them believe that with effort, all is possible.

Yes, we know ....

A practical word at this point is necessary: failure does occur. There is, as we have suggested, a fundamental responsibility on behalf of students to control their lives by the choices they make. This is a right that must be respected by the teacher. Students who fail to attend or students who do not legitimately attempt the work do fail, but for the legend, two things are true: first, this happens very infrequently, and second, the teacher shares the responsibility for that failure.

Significantly, none of the failures are the result of the fact that the teacher has prepared the student to fail—there are no built-in excuses, no glib rationalizations or justifications to explain failure. The legend shares in both the success and the failures of students. The legend recognizes that not every student can always be reached, but that every failure is, to a degree, reflective on him or her, on his or her ability to make a difference.

# Conclusions

The legend must build a reputation on a high set of expectations and matching standards that are continually and equitably transmitted to all the students all the time. Working from a vision of a final product back through well-paced techniques and activities that will accomplish that vision, the legend designs the course and sets the expectations for student achievement. While demanding the very best from students, the teacher continually models consistent and objective behavior, treating all the students the same all the time. The legend develops the course so that all potential excuses for failure have been removed. While sharing responsibility for the students' success and failure, the legend helps his or her students realize success, success on challenging, relevant material. The legend is keenly aware that success is only success if it is real, not artificially manipulated. Because the legend's success is assiduously authentic, he or she is able to build in students a vibrant self-esteem that will carry them throughout school and life.

# 4

# Practicing Skillful Communication

*The legend must be a communicator. The legend's talents as a communicator precede any other considerations of pedagogy or technique. To a degree, any dedicated teacher can master a set of skills, making him or her an effective communicator. Although being charismatic may be a tremendous advantage to the teacher, it is not synonymous with being a good teacher. What is synonymous is a sound set of interpersonal communication skills.*

**T**his chapter looks at the characteristics of the legend's communication skills. Just as any teacher can, to a degree, mold his or her personality to be more effective in the classroom, as suggested in Chapter 1, so too may any teacher develop a greater proficiency with communication talents. These include the following:

< Practicing sound presentation skills
< Maintaining high interest levels
< Interacting with groups
< Interacting with individuals
< Merging pedagogy with communication practices

# Practicing Sound Presentation Skills

Every teacher should be well versed in a few sound presentation skills. Unfortunately for most teacher trainees, these skills are rather inadequately covered in some general required speech course or methods course, and too often teachers enter education without a full understanding of the speaking-and-learning mechanism.

Our dissatisfaction with teacher-training programs goes back to our own preparation. In one of our methods classes, the teacher, who happened to be an assistant superintendent in one of the area's school districts, was conducting the class one evening and in his preparatory set raised his eyebrows professorially and asked, "All right, in review, why is it so important to learn your students' names right away?" He arched his eyebrows even higher and scanned the room for the first hint of a clueless student. His eye lit on a young lady near the entrance. He smiled and said, "You there, in the last row, by the door."

The irony, to which he was completely oblivious, was not lost on us.

Needless to say, teacher training programs have improved tremendously from those days, but nonetheless, let us assume the worst and begin this chapter by pointing out some of the basic premises of good communication.

## Premise 1: Intelligibility

The first postulate of sound communication is simply intelligibility (i.e., the ability to be heard and understood). The good teacher lectures and answers at a slightly louder than normal level. Everyone needs to hear what goes on in class, and a louder voice is harder to ignore than a soft-spoken one. This is not to insinuate that one shouts at the class; rather, one should maintain a strong volume for most of the work.

## Premise 2: Variety

The second aspect of a sound voice is variety. A good speaker is not *monotone.* By monotone, we mean any voice that routinely falls into predictable patterns of expression or lacks variety of any kind: pitch, rate, volume, or stress. Nothing, other than unintelligibility, can be a worse trait

for a communicator than a monotone voice, one that fails to demonstrate any significant variety of expression.

It is virtually impossible to inspire or motivate students if the instructor's voice puts them into a coma. In other words, if classroom boredom is the dragon we seek to slay, then as errant knights we need first to be blessed with a well-varied voice. It is our best weaponry. A well-modulated voice is possible for any speaker as long as he or she realizes two concerns.

## Concern 1

To maximize our communication skills, we must consciously use a wide range of vocal qualities. Variety—not for variety's sake, but integrally tied into meaning—makes a speaker excellent. At times we speed up, at times we slow down; sometimes we get louder, and occasionally we use dramatic softness. We are not afraid to use a high or low pitch, and we certainly understand how the stress of our voice can clue the student into what is important. The teacher who would become a legend has studied the professional speaker and the professional actor and has striven to master dramatic interpretive skills and, in turn, brings them to his or her performance in the classroom.

One of the key lessons to be learned from the actor is the lesson of silence. A pause, a moment of silence, can be a tremendous tool to establish mood, demand thought, or require attention. The legend intentionally uses a well-varied voice, modulated in such a way to enhance the goal of the lesson without drawing attention to itself.

## Concern 2

Knowing that our voices are well varied, we must also understand that vocal tricks do not work. Using a soft voice to bring an unruly class to order is much like dousing fire with gasoline. On the other hand, screaming to bring a class to order puts us on the level with the students, not in a position that demands respect. Vocal tricks do not work. What works is aiming for the well-modulated, intelligible, articulate, well-varied, natural conversational voice—the kind we would prefer to hear when we are sitting in the classroom.

# Premise 3: No Distractions

The third premise of effective speaking is one that, when violated, is done most unknowingly. An effective communicator is free of distracting

mannerisms, both physical and vocal. Such distractions provide the students with a much more attractive, albeit annoying, focal point rather than the lesson itself. Students will begin to keep count of the number of times the teacher says "um" or "okay" rather than focusing on the lesson itself.

Physical distractions can be equally mesmerizing to students, taking their attention totally away from the intended focus of the class. Such distractions include, but are not limited to, the following:

< Nervous tics
< Annoying gestures
< Repetitive movements
< Playing with clothes or hair
< Standing or sitting in the same place (never moving)
Vocal distractions include, but are not limited to, the following:

< Nonsense syllables
< Extraneous sounds made by the mouth, such as teeth sucking
< Repetition of a single word (e.g., "Okay")

To become a legend, a teacher must be aware of the mechanics of his or her own presentation. Frequent peer observation from someone trusted who will point out such flaws or, even better, frequent self-videotaping, can allow the teacher to see and hear what he or she may otherwise overlook. Keeping the attention of the students is requisite to an educator's success, and the first step toward that is to avoid offering any distractions.

## Premise 4: Visual Cues

Inherent in our discussion of communication skills is the belief that public speaking is just as much a visual performance as an audio one. Today's students are raised in a far more visual world than students from any generation before. The legend enhances the visual aspects of his or her presentations to draw on this fact. Good presentations are filled with meaningful gestures and movement that, like the vocal variations themselves, serve to reinforce the meaning and demonstrate importance.

The good presenter realizes that he or she must hold the visual attention of the students as well as their aural attention. The presenter makes certain that not all presentation is made from the podium in front. During the

presentation, movement around the room is consciously maintained so as to include every student—to make everyone feel that, for a time at least, he or she has a front-row seat. Like the effective voice, good gestures and movements are entirely natural and do not call attention to themselves. Brain research shows that student learning is also enhanced if each key point to a lesson is delivered in a different part of the room (e.g., front, back, or side). The brain remembers and recalls facts more readily when presented in a pattern or different locations in a classroom. Legends always remember to emphasize, punctuate, or amuse—yet always maintain focus on the key concepts of the lesson.

## Premise 5: Diction

A fifth consideration of good communication skills involves the diction of the teacher. This is a particularly precarious area. On the one hand, obviously, the teacher's word choice must be determined primarily by the vocabulary of his or her audience. The teacher who consistently talks "above" the students, who reverts to college jargon merely to impress or worse, because of an insensitivity to the abilities of the students, can be assured that his or her word choice does not empower much student learning. This danger exists just as much for the limited vocabulary of the grade school student as for the more extended vocabulary of the high school student. The prime directive regarding diction is that language selection is predicated on analysis of the listening vocabulary level of the students.

Advice about diction boils down to four tenets:

1. The legend speaks at a level of complexity readily accessible to all students in normal interaction of teaching or directing. He or she uses vocabulary that will be understood by listeners.

> *To explain to students that Captain Ahab "had not yet come to grips with the exigencies of his own existence" does little good for the students. To explain that Ahab "had not yet learned the limits of what was possible for him" does.*

2. The legend is certain that his or her speech draws on past experiences of the students; the legend seeks to be in the students' world, knowing what they have seen or heard. The legend adheres to the foremost tenet of public

speaking: audiences (especially children) want to hear about themselves, not about the speaker. The legend's speech is filled with references to the audience's lives and experience as they help create the learning experiences through the imagery of their words. The legend knows where his children live, emotionally and physically. He or she can relate to their worlds.

> *When the legend wants to reference a heroic act, imagine the points scored if he or she can refer to a hero of anime that the children watched only last night on television.*

3. Nothing is truer about the legend other than he or she is a master of the analogy. The legend is able to relate absolutely any content material to analogous situations with which the students are familiar. By thus drawing the new material into existing frameworks of past knowledge, the legend is able to guarantee that not only does learning occur, but the existential framework of past knowledge of the student has also been extended and may be drawn on in analogous form at a later time as well. In other words, not only does learning occur, but the likelihood of more learning at a later date has also occurred. This is not true when students are expected to learn outside the framework of their experience and materials do not become part of their existing framework of previous knowledge.

> *To teach about wave motion, the physics teacher brings in a slinky; to teach about Romeo and Juliet, the teacher begins with a discussion of modern gangs. The point is, the teacher begins with the lives of the students and works outward, often analogously, from there.*

4. The legend consciously attempts to increase the vocabulary of students by introducing appropriate and relevant new terms to instruction or direction, defining them, and reinforcing their use intermittently throughout the course. In doing so gracefully, the legend destroys students' notions (and fears) of "big words," teaching them that there are no such things as "big words"—just more exact words that actually simplify communication. Students learn that a larger vocabulary is nothing more than an efficient tool for precisely expressing thoughts, and what job isn't easier when the right tools are present?

> *In a discussion of Marxism, the teacher must introduce the terms "proletariat" and "bourgeoisie." They are introduced with*

*humor: "Here are the $50 words of the day." Then, in discussion, they are used with their definitions of "working class" or "blue-collar occupations," but more and more the terms are used independently, until by the end of the unit, they are a part of the students' vocabulary.*

*The middle school English teacher says, "So what you're saying is that the narrator is 'unreliable.' What does 'unreliable' mean?" (Students attempt answers.) "That's right—it means not very trustworthy. So how is Thomas an 'unreliable' narrator?" The term appears again and again in discussion and print. It becomes part of their vocabulary by necessity.*

*The bulletin board on one of the classroom walls becomes a vocabulary wall, where weekly words continue to be added in that area for the students to see. The vocabulary wall also provides a quick review learning tool for the instructor. The legend merely walks to the vocabulary wall, and as he or she points to each word, the students in chorus response or by individual response recite the definition. Daily practice with the students, if only for a few minutes, will greatly enhance the students' mastery of their working vocabulary.*

All four of these strategies help the legend use the most appropriate and effective language in classroom presentations. By doing so, two goals are reached: instruction is effectively concluded and the students' vocabulary grows.

Once one has found the level at which effective communication may occur, however, a final consideration may affect one's diction. Every teacher has an obligation to model correct, effective communication techniques. Speaking at the students' level does not mean reinforcing substandard English.

Listening to others is every child's first language experience and arguably the most important in fashioning language proficiency. If this is even remotely true, then teachers who reinforce substandard language or incorrect grammar do a disservice to the entire education process. Legends realize that whenever they communicate (verbally or in written form), they model communication skills the students will mimic. Therefore, regardless of the discipline, every teacher must be expected to communicate in standard, correct English.

Every summer we present a workshop for Advanced Placement English teachers in the city of Chicago. Those teachers in attendance are challenged by some of the greatest problems facing teachers anywhere. Almost annually the following discussion occurs: a very well-intentioned, caring, experienced professional (usually White) offers a thought that runs something like this:

> *"I'm troubled by telling my students that the way they talk, the language they use at home is wrong. I think it's hurtful and certainly not very accepting of diversity."*

He is, of course, to a large degree right to feel that way and harbor those fears. No one wants to tell a group of minority children that their language is inferior or wrong. How are they not to intuit that as a condemnation of their very culture? But no sooner does he ask that question, then he is answered immediately by several equally caring teachers (usually Black) who say something like this:

> *"Your job as their teacher is to prepare those kids for Fortune 500 companies, just like you would any other child. It does not matter the background or culture of a child; you should never be afraid to raise the standards and expectations. It is not a crime to error on the side of what is in the best interests of the children, no matter where they come from or how afraid you are to take it on."*

They are, of course, to a larger degree very right also. That is his job, to make certain that no children are limited in what they can do with their lives because of their math skills, their reading skills, or their speaking skills. His job is to teach the children the concept of standard English without denigrating them or their culture. Instead he must teach them that many people are bilingual, even within a single language. The way I talk while fishing with my friends is not the way I talk to my young children, and the way I talk at a job interview is not the way I discuss plans with my wife. We prepare all students for success at all levels and that includes language. The legend can reference the language idiosyncrasies or ethnosyncracies of his students—but he does not teach within them.

## Premise 6: Naturalness

The final aspect of a powerfully effective communicative voice is naturalness. The good voice is free of affectations. It does not imitate others; it does not try to impress with affected pronunciation or emphasis. In fact, if a key to becoming a legend in the classroom is establishing a trusting, one-to-one relationship with the students, then one's speaking voice must be real and natural.

To this end, eye contact with each individual in the classroom is essential. Every time the teacher makes eye contact, he or she draws that student into the learning situation, reinforcing the idea that the teacher and student are in the process together and that the teacher cares about the success of that student. The legend has a natural, easy, pleasant, warm presentation, making all the students feel as if they are being addressed individually in a caring, honest manner.

## Conclusion

Teachers wishing to improve their communication skills understand that everything about their voice, except timbre and pitch range, is subject to conscious manipulation. With study, practice, and conscientious effort, every teacher can become at the very least an acceptable communicator; and at most, with direction and dedication, an interesting, lively, attention-demanding speaker whose presentations are free of annoying characteristics and distractions. To be effective communicators, to become a legend, teachers must first be certain that their communication skills are vibrant enhancers of their efforts to focus on their instructional visions.

## Maintaining High Interest Levels

The legend is not blah, humdrum, pedestrian, tiresome, commonplace, stodgy, pompous, monotonous, flat, dreary, or dim. (Popular wisdom has it that the Inuit have 16 words for snow, a number that, according to linguists, tells us by its sheer magnitude how important that concept is to them. Checking any thesaurus, one can find at least 50 synonyms for the word boring, clearly indicating, with the same wisdom, how important that concept is to us.) Permitting a state of boredom to permeate the classroom is the kiss of death to the teacher, but it's not even that exciting—it is the handshake of death. It cannot be overcome. It is measured not in how much

learning occurs but in the number of classroom management problems that arise.

The saddest aspect of this is that no classroom need be boring. There is nothing about any curriculum that is necessarily boring. There are no boring topics. There are no boring objectives. There are no boring projects. There are, unfortunately, only boring teachers. All audiences scream out, "Entertain us, depress us, insult us, make us laugh—do anything but bore us!" Being banal, commonplace, trite, or ordinary is perhaps a teacher's capital misdemeanor.

The legend is not boring. The successful teacher is exciting, interesting, concerned, positive, stimulating, challenging, entertaining, and original. Just as in determining correct diction, mastering all these characteristics begins with audience analysis. The legend understands his or her students, has a feel for where they are, and is accurately able to estimate how they will react to certain messages. The legend is extremely empathetic to his or her students' situations. He or she understands that the workday of the high school student has the potential to be the most boring day on earth. Passive reception of what others deem important for six to seven hours a day is almost mind boggling, and for students in a block schedule, a 90-minute lecture is enough to make the valedictorian consider dropping out.

Let's say it one more time: the legend is not boring. Instead, the legend is the following:

## Exciting

To keep class from being boring, the legend is exciting by maintaining a level of emotional anxiety that makes inattention almost impossible. Such teachers shift gears quickly, unpredictably. The student never knows if he or she will next be called on to analyze a problem. Most important, the legend maintains this level of anxiety without ever being menacing. Students are anxiously involved but not threatened, for the legend has proven over and over to students that no one will be shamed or denigrated in his or her classroom.

The legend has raised students' FQ (Frustration Quotient—a concept far more important than IQ) sufficiently that they understand that mistakes happen and are perfectly acceptable—quitting isn't. Excitement about the learning experience saturates the legend's classroom.

## Interesting

Legends are interesting because they are interested in their specific content area. Interesting teachers are excited about what they teach. Interest is contagious. One need only stare at the ceiling of an elevator to see how contagious interest is. Soon, everyone else on that elevator will have sneaked at least a glance at the ceiling to find what it was that so fascinated the instigator.

Unfortunately, boredom is also contagious. If the teacher communicates a lack of interest, either unintentionally or (unimaginably) intentionally, students certainly will follow suit, but the legend, the master teacher, is passionate about the issues with which he or she works. In every interaction concerning the curriculum, the legend promotes high interest by naturally, unaffectedly, modeling high interest. Without effort, the legend is able to make any topic relevant to the lives of students. He or she is excited, and so are they. It's a simple truth: the legend loves what he or she does.

It's easy to recognize when school teachers are really excited by what they do by the reaction of the children. Kids will joke: "I really think Old Man Freeman loves the Civil War—Really!" Or they may act bewildered: "How can anyone like poetry by someone named Shelley?" Or they may sound angry: "I'm really sick to death about hearing why exercising is so good for you." But the fact of the matter is, each of these statements indicates that students are aware of the teacher's commitment to the material and that awareness will have deeply moving effects on them.

## Concerned

The legend is demonstrably concerned about what's going on in the classroom. He or she is convinced of and has communicated to students the fact that possessing the skills and knowledge under study will improve the quality of their lives by making them better people, by making learning somewhere else easier, or simply by making it possible for them to do better on the next test. For whatever reason, the legend communicates the advantages to mastering the material under study. He or she shares the skills or knowledge of the unit in the same fashion a friend would relate the experience of having seen a very enjoyable new movie. Legends, because they believe they can help students, convey love for and appreciation of the

set of skills or knowledge being studied. What is never in doubt is the legend's concern for all students to succeed.

## Intolerant of Negativity

The first three traits of the effective teacher are possible only if the teacher vigorously denies any hint of negativity or cynicism. It is impossible to make learning dynamic in the face of pessimism or disparagement. Both are the banners of failure, and the legend is more concerned with keeping them out of the class then he or she is with enforcing the housekeeping rules others spend most of their time with— rules whose penal qualities create such a strong "we-against-them" attitude that most students become honor bound to find the material disinteresting.

Negativity, cynicism, and apathy are education's true foes—not gum chewing, or hat wearing, or not having a red pen for grading. The legend knows the real face of his or her adversaries and dynamically bans them from the room. Students are not permitted to cast aspersions on what is being studied. Questions are always welcomed and honestly answered, but derision is not.

## Stimulating

By being intensely interesting and by recognizing the individual strengths of students, the legend is able to motivate students to go beyond the strictures of the prescribed curriculum. The legend uses his or her most effective ammunition wisely. Recognizing the strengths of students stimulates students to achievement in those areas. Certainly most teachers were at one time told they were good with kids. The seed took root, germinated, and sprung into a profession— the comment was stimulating. We imagine that most math teachers were at one time in their young or not-so-young lives told with admiration by someone respected that they were good at math. This admiration became stimulation, and certainly they became even better at math, and so on.

By being excited, by being interested, and by recognizing students' individual strengths, the legend stimulates students to greater effort and consequently more success. Through positive and upbeat communication, the legend stimulates students.

## Challenging

No one in the legend's class is too self-satisfied, too comfortable.

Were we to follow the students as they exited the legend's classroom, we would be able to see the impressions of the legend's hands indelibly imprinted on the students' backs. The legend pushes his or her students toward higher standards of achievement in all communications with them. No one achieves final success in the legend's classroom, but everyone is always succeeding.

The cautions here are obvious: push too hard and the students fall on their faces; push too lightly and they tumble backward. Our advice is this: if the safety nets to ensure student success are in place, and if the students have high FQs, then go ahead and challenge them. It's much easier to get people off their faces than to get them off their butts!

## Original

Despite promises to the opposite, originality is not for sale. Canned programs, by the mere process of canning them, are no longer original. Originality must be the offspring of the individual teacher's own intelligence and creativity. New ways to view concepts, new ways to learn, new group activities, new projects in the classrooms, new procedures, new seating charts, new materials, new dress codes, new ways to grade, and so on and so forth are the marks of originality. The legend is a master communicator because he or she is not predictable, and attention must be paid to the events in the classroom or the student will fall behind.

The first teacher in a building that put up the poster "Ya Snooze— Ya Lose!" made points with the students and commanded their attention that much more. This was not true for the fifth teacher in the building who bought and posted the sign. It also wasn't true for the first teacher the fifth year she posted it. Originality is a spring of success for the arid classroom. The legend is an original.

*The middle school geography teacher was truly inspired by the speaker at the in-service workshop. She'd been around long enough to hear a lot of speakers and rarely was touched by them—but this speaker was good. He gave ideas for "spicing up" the classroom— making education fun and exciting. His final comment was, "Sometimes you have to jump up on the desk to get their attention."*

*Our geography teacher took to heart his advice, until the next day, fifth period, when the students came into her classroom and innocently asked, "You're not going to jump up on your desk are you? All the teachers are doing that today."*

Here's a not so deep thought—originality is original.

## Entertaining

Last, and perhaps most important, the effective communicator is extremely entertaining, and because perpetuating a dramatic mood through a class for an entire year is impossible, then entertaining most often means humorous. The humor does not distract from, but rather augments, the class's efforts to learn. The room never becomes a three-ring circus, but it is a one-ring circus and the elephants and acrobats and ringmaster and clowns are all in the center ring.

Legends are clever, funny people. They need not be stand-up comedians, but they show a sense of humor daily. Legends laugh with students and make them laugh. They go out of their way to bring entertaining material to class. Most important, legends laugh at themselves, often and honestly. It is a precept of the legend's classroom that if students may be teased, so too may the teacher; if their flaws are open to criticism, then so too are the legend's.

But beware—although humor is encouraged in the classroom, disruption is not, and neither is biting sarcasm. Teasing may be, but only with delicate care. The legend intuits and then makes public the fine line between what is and is not acceptable humor and what demeanors will be viewed as negative disruptions to student learning.

All the considerations for the effective communicator, that he or she be exciting, interesting, concerned, dynamic, stimulating, challenging, and original, are more readily achieved when presented in an aura of friendly banter. Learning should be fun. Children should laugh every day, every period, a lot. Legends are tastefully and appropriately funny people who can bring a smile to the faces of their students.

## Interacting With Groups

Because most of the work done with students is done in the whole class setting, this is our first area of specific interest. Let us begin with this admonition: little in education has added as much to its productivity as the development of true cooperative learning. Any individual teacher wishing to become a legend must acquaint himself or herself with the principles of group collaboration. Variety is a must to the legend's classroom, and cooperative learning is a major tool toward the kind of variety and student involvement that leads to success.

On the other hand, unstructured "group" work is worse than no group work at all. Blindly putting people into groups and asking them to accomplish some goal is often more destructive than maintaining the normal classroom routine. The legend will most certainly use aspects of cooperative learning regularly in the classroom, but he or she will do so only after becoming well versed in the real dynamics of group learning. Here is a word of warning: doing cooperative learning the right way is a lot of work for the teacher. Besides the in-depth and detailed planning of the cooperative activity, it is especially time consuming during class time when the instructor must frequently monitor the small groups to ensure that they stay focused and on task. Be advised: it is not as easy as one might think to engage students in a cooperative lesson.

What this section is more concerned with is interaction between the teacher as an individual and the class as a group. It occurs in normal lecture time, during discussion periods, and in question-and-answer sessions. As broad as these different types of situations are, they share sufficient points of commonality to generate a number of guidelines that the legend observes.

## Guideline 1: Planning

Perhaps the first principle for interaction with the group interaction is planning. There appears to be a direct correlation between the number of people with whom the legend interacts and the amount of planning that goes into the interaction. Planning takes place both before and after interaction with students, yet its very nature is frequently misunderstood. For example, many teachers, especially beginners, think they have planned for a class when they identify the day's topics. Knowing *what* is to be covered is entirely different from having planned and practiced *how* it will

be covered. The planning we are discussing takes the form of the following:

< Identification of topics to be covered
< Design of how materials will be covered (lecture, group, discussion)
< Determination of how materials will be disbursed
< Rehearsal of presentation prior to the actual teaching
< Practice with any available audiovisual materials
< Formation of frequent methods of student assessment
< Creation of remedial activities for those not yet catching on
< Development of enrichment activities for those ready to move on

Although the beginner may have trouble making such rehearsals realistic enough to benefit the in-class interaction, they should be attempted. Such rehearsals will smooth out the presentation. Once again, it would be preferable to videotape rehearsal lessons so that teachers may view themselves.

## Guideline 2: Analysis

Equally important in terms of quality control of group interaction is the post-interaction analysis. We certainly understand that not everything we try in the classroom will work as well as we had hoped. A lesson may simply fail: The students may prove uninterested, the material may not be sufficiently covered, and learning is sidetracked; or the lesson may go brilliantly, students may become highly motivated, materials are covered quickly and painlessly, and learning occurs almost spontaneously. In either case, analysis of what occurred and why it occurred will direct the success of further interactions. This, again, is part of living in the loop as described in Chapter 3.

Certainly, it is permissible for a first-year teacher to fail in a particular class activity. It is far less acceptable for the teacher to continue to fail at the same kind of activity later in the year or in future years. Simply put, the teacher who will become a legend is a copious note taker—with one purpose in mind: this year's failures will not occur next year; this year's successes will.

## Guideline 3: Vision

There is another aspect to the legend as communicator in regard to the group. The legend communicates from a vision beyond the classroom. He or she communicates with awareness of its effect on parents, administrators, coworkers, noncertified staff members—in short, the entire educational and civic community. The legend realizes that nothing is said in a vacuum, and although not made timid by the awareness, the legend is cognizant of the fact that what he or she says will have repercussions in settings outside the classroom.

What is said in the classroom finds its way into the teacher's lounge later that same day, repeated in the home that afternoon or the principal's house that night. The simple truth is that there are endless ramifications of what we say in the classroom, and so the legend always communicates with the entire educational environment in mind.

As a result, caution is the guide. "Should I or should I not say this?" has a very easy answer: "When in doubt—leave it out!" The teacher, especially of secondary students, often develops a strong and almost adult-like rapport with students. Teachers joke in class. They tell stories. However, when teachers are tempted to strengthen their bond with their students by telling jokes that some might find slightly tasteless or offensive, they ought to ponder how comfortable they would be telling the jokes to the superintendent of schools or in front of the board of education.

## Interacting With Individuals

Our last area of concern is interaction with the individual. It is in these one-on-one sessions that the legend can gain the most meaningful ground as a teacher. It is here that students can be convinced of the teacher's sincerity and willingness to work with the student toward success. The one-on-one conference is not the time for sarcasm or for scoring status points at the expense of the student's self-esteem.

Successful conferences with students can be measured by a number of characteristics:

1. Mutual respect is established. Both the student and the teacher are aware of the honest intentions of the other. The two parties agree, in no uncertain terms, of the function, aim, and purpose of the discussion or meeting. This is equally true for discussions about problem # 21 on a

worksheet and a counseling session with a troubled child. There must be direction and intent for the interaction to succeed.

2. Successful one-on-one interactions are necessarily confidential. Nothing the student has to say is revealed without the student's permission, or in emergency situations, at least without his or her knowledge. The student must be informed of this unless previous dealings in the class have already established such confidentiality as a matter of course.

3. Once the legend has established the purpose and parameters of the meeting, he or she must see to it that the tenor of the interaction is set properly. The effective communicator in one-on-one interactions is a master at making the student feel comfortable. Whereas comedy is a masterful tool for group communications, it is better to be serious here, rather than commit a humorous faux pas. The student's self-esteem is at high risk in conferring with a teacher, whether student-initiated or not, and the legend must assure the student that he or she will not lose any of that esteem or any standing as a result of the meeting.

Likewise, the student must be assured of the earnest intentions of the teacher in these one-on-one meetings. This is principally achieved when the teacher maintains a serious demeanor. When asking the student to lower his or her psychological defenses, to open up, the teacher is asking the student to take a risk. It is for this reason that humor is usually inappropriate here, especially initially.

The success of these one-on-one conversations rests largely on beginning them correctly, with the correct atmosphere. The teacher is wise to begin exactly and pointedly in setting the mood and directing the conversation:

> *"Jared, you know we're here so we can discuss the problems you've been having in class."*
> *"Now, you should know, Rachael, that anything we say today is confidential; it stays in this room, unless you tell me something that I have to pass on to someone else."*
> *"Abdul, I think we can improve how class works if we can agree on some rules ... "*

4. Once the legend has successfully met the concerns of the first three items, he or she becomes the world's best listener. The legend is friendly and attentive. Responses are not instantaneous, but follow a period of thought. The legend maintains eye contact. The legend often writes down anecdotal notes documenting the essence of the meeting to ensure that all

concerns will be addressed after the meeting. The agenda, the pace, and the topics of the interaction are to be set as much as productively possible by the student. More important than the advice the legend can offer is the ear he or she provides— giving the student a format by which to work out his or her problems. The real role of the teacher in these meetings is as clarifier, organizer, focuser, summarizer, and only last, an adviser of options. The legend is cautious and careful never to say, "This is how I think you should handle this." Instead, the legend may offer options for the student to consider: "We have talked about several ways of improving your study habits—limiting the amount of time you watch television, getting more rest at night, eating a healthy breakfast, asking mom or a sibling for help, and so forth. Of those strategies that we discussed, which one do you believe you might want to try this week?"

First and foremost, the legend is a listener. To help focus the conversation, the legend is quick to use paraphrasing and focusing techniques. Doing so often lets the student find his or her own way orally, working through what he or she just said.

> *"So, if I'm hearing you, your real problem is not with the project itself, but with the people you have to work with?"*
> *"If we get a chance, we'll come back to the issue of your father, but for now, can you tell me again why you don't have time to complete our work?"*
> *"Okay, Taletha, but I'm still a little confused on why you were crying during arithmetic."*
> *"Try to tell me again, like it was a story about you."*

5. Successful one-on-one interactions are focused and as economical as possible. They need not aim at being overly brief, but they are not overly long. They are not terribly sketchy, but they are not repetitive. Care must be exercised in seeing that the interaction moves along toward its intended conclusion. Other issues are not to be introduced; both persons are dedicated to reaching resolution of a single issue. The legend must be prepared to refocus and to redirect the conversation back toward completion when discussion has stalled or wandered.

6. The interaction must end with a mutually agreed-on solution— perhaps a time and agenda for the next meeting or a contracted form of behavior or even a desired change in attitude. In fact, the two parties can even agree that no consensus was reached. Even this agreement adds closure to the discussion and validates both parties' participation. Just as

the meeting began with intent, the participants in the meeting must end with an evaluation of how well that intent was achieved and what the solution reached implies for both parties.

Individual conferencing provides the teacher with the greatest opportunity to establish the kind of personal relationships that can make any teacher a legend. It is in such meetings that trust is established, caring is evinced, and anxiety is dispelled. The unapproachable teacher has already compromised his or her own potential for success. Students turn to the legend not necessarily because they find the legend to be the most nurturing or most forgiving, but because they recognize in the legend the ability to be sensitive to their needs without risk. Teachers who are able to show such respect for their students are the ones who more quickly may command it back from them.

A last area of discussion that is very important in the area of one-on-one interaction is nonverbal communication. The wrong facial expression, the wrong posture, can belie anything words may accomplish. In fact, the expert speech teacher can verify that what we say is always secondary to how we say it. There are no words whose meanings are not determined more by the tone and stance with which they are spoken rather than the lexical meanings of the words themselves. "I like that sweater" can be complimentary or bitingly critical.

Likewise, posture and expression can undo anything words may attempt. The legend is aware of this and has studied the precepts of nonverbal communication. Just like a picture can paint a thousand words, the legend is careful not to undo physically the message he or she has worked so diligently to communicate verbally.

# Merging Pedagogy With Communication Practices

It is impossible to separate communication theory from practice. The method by which the teacher communicates is the method by which he or she instructs. Communication works in a broader sense to make the legend successful if he or she is aware of three remaining areas of concern.

## Genuine Communication

One of the first concerns of which any teacher should be cognizant is the reality of having established two-way communication with students. Too often, teachers operate under the misconception that they are communicating with students, when in fact they are not. "Communicating with" is not synonymous with "talking to." As the legend teaches, he or she maintains constant, real communication with the students. The legend does not ask, "Understand?" or "Okay?" and let silence be an affirmative answer. That is false communication. Instead, having finished presenting tomorrow's homework, the legend turns to students and asks, "Who can tell me what the assignment is?" Receiving an answer, the legend turns to another student and asks, "What did he just tell me, and is he correct?"

The legend does not allow a single response from one of the better students to be the yardstick by which he or she measures whether a concept has been mastered. Instead, the legend communicates with a representative sampling of all students and demands accurate paraphrasing and summarizing of what was to be learned prior to proceeding. The legend maintains genuine communication, not just the pretense of communication with the students.

## Accessibility

Communication between students and teacher, as well as between parents and teacher, is possible only if the teacher has made himself or herself accessible to both groups. Problems may be readily solved and feelings may be salvaged only if lines of communication preexist and have been well tested prior to a problem arising.

To make himself or herself accessible to the students, early in the year the legend will make available for student use at least the following:

< Office hours
< Work and maybe even a home phone number (E-mail address)
< Before and after school hours of availability (Planning period times)

This also brings up the issue of genuine communication. It is possible for Teacher A to offer all these venues of communication just as Teacher B does, but to do so in a manner that clearly communicates his or her expectation to not be bothered. When truly implementing these lines of real communication, the teacher takes away excuses for failure before they can be used. He or she establishes a working relationship that will result in

greater success for the student. Such a practice is more than simply good will; it is good teaching.

In addition, teachers must make themselves accessible to parents. They do this in the same fashion by which they established good lines of communication with the students. Legends do this by implementing and pursuing the following:

< A place and time at which parents may reach the teacher regularly

< A voice mail message with the evening's homework or unit due dates

< A Web page that outlines expectations and assignments (Regular correspondence home at the beginning and throughout the course)

< A reputation for dependably contacting parents when problems first arise

< A clear communication of the desire to include parents in the educational process in the classroom

By achieving these goals, the teacher will more often find parents to be true allies in the process of helping students succeed. Failure to make these lines of communication available may result in the loss of such allies, or worse, the creation of additional adversaries. More is said in a later chapter about dealing with parents.

## Multidimensional Communication

The last precept of any communication is a simple one. Oral communication is never enough. The principle here is simple. If the message is important (including rules, policies, changes in procedures, and lessons), then it should be communicated in as many modes as possible to ensure the intent and understanding of the message.

It is insufficient for the students to simply hear an announcement; if they can see it in writing or illustrated on a classroom wall, then the communication is far more likely to be successful. The legend is rarely satisfied with communication in only one mode of expression.

Here is one final warning—a universal from kindergarten to seniors in high school: Sending messages home through students never works. Don't bother, and don't bother offering it as an excuse. If parents need to know, it is the teacher's job to communicate with them directly. Messages through students are rarely delivered. With all the electronic venues now open to

teachers (Listservs, computer blackboards, Web sites), it is unacceptable for any teacher not to make use of them.

An informed parent is a "must" and hundreds of times more likely to be a cooperative partner and a dozen times less likely to ever undermine the teacher's integrity or the teacher's expectations and standards.

## Conclusions

The legend realizes that teaching is an interpersonal profession and, as such, demands conscious use of strong communication skills. It is an awareness that, to a degree, the teacher is a performer and must be sensitive to how his or her performance is received by the audience— the students and their parents. The legend recognizes that communication skills, although a boon to any professional, are a necessity to teaching. Much of the community's and school's judgment of his or her ability as a teacher will be a reflection of the legend's communication talents. As a result, the legend spends a great deal of time honing this faculty.

Similarly, the legend recognizes that such communication skills carry with them an ethical responsibility to be an effective communicator but not a manipulator. Elmer Gantry and Joe McCarthy had sound communication skills, but without the ethical sense that is demanded of our teachers. We must direct without propagandizing; we must inspire without proselytizing. The balance is a fine one, but one that must be maintained.

# 5

# Defining Instructional Protocol

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*After circling the classroom several times and having patiently looked over everyone's shoulder, making sure that each student has understood his or her homework assignment for tomorrow, the teacher begins to make her way toward her desk, a sanctuary sought during each class period. To be able to sit down and catch that breather before the next class arrives is any teacher's just reward after expending what seems to be the last ounce of energy with the present class.*

*As she sits in her chair, she takes a deep breath, closing her eyes for a brief moment. A great sense of satisfaction and accomplishment for what was achieved in that particular lesson settles gently, warmly, around her. A peek reveals that every member of the class is still diligently attacking the homework. Eyes close again and she continues to think quietly to herself, "This is the reason I became a teacher. The students are really starting to understand the material. They're even asking questions now. What a great day this has been!"*

*A smile sneaks across her face. Life is good and she is ready to put things together for the next class. She opens her eyes, and even though the students are*

*behaving, even though the lesson went well, the other reality of education shakes her by the shoulders as she looks at her desk:*

PAPERWORK!

*Scattered on the top of her desk are piles of depression: homework papers and tests that need to be graded, pink telephone notes from the office about parents she is to contact, a form to fill out from the guidance department, and mountains of busy work from the central office: insurance forms, certification forms, absence reports. A memo about a special schedule for an assembly at the end of the week is stuck in a textbook; curriculum revision due dates circled on her desk pad have long since passed. A pile of IEP's and student health notifications fill the top tray of her stack. There are progress reports to fill out, and to top it all off, tonight is her night to supervise the construction of the homecoming float. All of this is perfectly possible if she doesn't take time to sleep, eat, or breathe for the rest of the month.*

———————————

Little did our teacher know when she went into education that the actual teaching of classes would be the easiest part of her workday. No one told her that her nightmare would be the endless flow of paper across her desk, the endless electronic mail and spam to respond to or delete on her computer, the perpetual dates when work is due, or the continual barrage of meetings and other people's demands on her time. Add to this the need to prepare nightly for two or three different classes the next day, and the disorganized teacher is soon overwhelmed by it all, frozen into dysfunctionality by the demands of the school culture and it's environment, none of which anyone warned her about as she entered the education profession. She thought her job was to just teach the students in her classroom. No one told her that the major part of her responsibility was paper shuffling, electronic communication, form filling, event supervising, parent calling, and a hundred other out-of-class necessities.

The legend understands that an integral part of the teaching profession is one's ability to be organized. The teacher can climb to the top of the mountain when it comes to making classroom presentations but at the same time be drowning in an ocean of paperwork. Maintaining the balance between academic orientation and clerical organization is what allows the legend to control his or her time, the most precious commodity in the field of education.

We also know what the real problem is concerning organizational skills. Most people, regardless of how chaotic their private or professional lives may be, have convinced themselves that either they are not disorganized or that they actually function better in a state of indiscriminate disorder, one of the two great lies of America, along with "This Hurts You More Than It Hurts Me."

For these people, we have developed the following self-test. We ask that you be honest with yourself as you work your way through the inventory, knowing that if any two of the statements accurately describe you, then in fact, you have a serious problem with organization (in which case you may want to call our hotline number for help.... *Wait, I'm sure I have the number somewhere here on my desk ....*)

Here's our "Top 10" list:

You may need to organize and better plan your professional life if you have ever...

10. Spoken of time during the Pledge of Allegiance as "planning" time

9. Given extra credit to students for collating still warm test pages

8. Given a quiz over the book so you had time to finish reading

7. Counted taking attendance as a "math" activity

6. Wrote your last new test on a Coleco computer

5. Tried to convince students that transparencies were yellowed for effect

4. Described showing a video to your first period class as "previewing"

3. Turned your class over to a student teacher on his first day present

2. Had silent reading listed more often than any other activity in your grade book

1. Assured your students that all fourth grade classes covered the same material first and second semesters

Clearly, organization does matter and is a key element of successful time management. To understand better how successful teachers maintain a system under which they are able to function easily and effectively, it would help to break down the question of material and time management into four sections:

1. Mastering the Clutter

2. Time Management

3. Focus—Focus—Focus

4. Planning the Academic Day

## Mastering the Clutter

There are three key areas in every classroom that the legend makes certain are organized: the teacher's desk, the teacher's workstation, and the students' workstations. Organization, in our minds, may be defined as having classroom structure or a system in place that allows for efficient performance of all the necessary and required daily tasks. It affects all aspects of the working day for the teacher. The term does not mean that all teachers are "neat freaks," with everything labeled, color-coded, and always in its place; however, if clutter and chaos hinder efficiency and productivity, then neatness should become a priority. Being organized does not make a teacher successful, but being disorganized can definitely make one a failure, both as a teacher and as an employee.

### The Teacher's Desk

We all know that some students will be forever doomed to mediocrity and even failure because of their inability to organize their materials and hence fulfill their responsibilities. These students especially are in need of models for effective work habits. Most students do not see their parents at work and have no idea of how organized they are, so it falls on the teacher to be the model of effective work organization. The teacher's desk is the first place he or she can model effective organization and neatness, two

qualities often demanded of students. The desk is the most visible reflection of organization in the classroom, and it is our first chore to practice what we preach.

Jokes like "I know where everything is!" and "A messy desk is a sign of an organized mind!" are just that—jokes, a humorous way to mask a serious lack of organizational skills. Students who suffer from disorganization already believe they can wing it through school. They need strong role models of organization, and the legend is determined to be one.

## The Teacher's Desk—Top of the Desk

The desktop should always be characterized by orderliness and arrangement, all items in place around an open area left to work. It should not be a storage place for everything that is distributed during the day, week, or month. On the desktop, the effective teacher keeps only those items that are needed and used daily. A good rule of thumb is this: When in doubt, do without. Do not keep items on the desk that are better stored elsewhere. Keep in mind that individual papers dropped on your desktop have a life span of five days before they are lost to clutter and recollection.

A set of stackable trays on the desk is a good idea as long as each tray has a single purpose. The top tray may be exclusively set aside for papers turned in by students. The wise teacher does not allow work to be handed in anywhere else—just in the one designated tray. Early in the year, the lesson must be taught—"If you're turning that in to me, then it must be set on this tray and this tray alone!" Other trays stacked on the teacher's desk should have other specific functions as well. The stackable trays serve little purpose if they are interchangeable in what they hold. The teacher guilty of this has done nothing more than allowed the mess on his or her desk to be in three dimensions. The other trays may be used for storing memos, attendance materials, projects due that week, and so forth. The key to the trays is that each has a single function, and that designated function is respected at all times.

In addition, in many schools having one's own room is a luxury of the past. If you don't teach in your own room or if you teach in more than one room with a separate cubicle elsewhere, then being organized is absolutely tantamount to being successful. The more work stations you have or movements you are required to make during the day, the more structured your life must be.

## The Teacher's Desk—Dump Drawer

To help keep the desk clear of memos, papers, and mail, most effective teachers use a *dump drawer* or *dump tray* that is nothing more than a short-term storage location. The dump drawer or tray is exactly what its name suggests, a dumping ground for miscellaneous materials that arrive throughout the day at times when they cannot be dealt with immediately. Rather than clutter the top of the desk with these papers, or worse, let them become lost in other piles, the information is dumped in this holding drawer or tray. Of course, the concept of a dump drawer works only if it is conjoined with another practice—the *daily* [not weekly, monthly, or yearly] routine of going through all materials temporarily placed there and either finish handling them or filing them into a permanent storage place.

Whether it is at lunch, before or after school, or during a planning period, every piece of mail, every memo, every request, every form, every piece of paper that finds its way onto the dump drawer or file is dealt with in a timely fashion. In the ideal world, all teachers would follow the maxim, "Handle every piece of paper once." That is to suggest that one does not open his or her e-mail until time exists to answer all opened mails. One does not open his snail mail until he or she is prepared to deal with what might be in there. Likewise, the wise teacher goes through voice mails only when there is time to make returning calls.

We realize, however, that none of us teaches at Ideal School in Utopia, USA. Instead, we live with the realities of our situations and are forced to compromise the ideal with the real, so we use devices such as the dump drawer. That is not a problem as long as we religiously follow the daily routine of dealing with items placed there.

The routine is simple. As the teacher goes through the information in the dump drawer, he or she has only three mutually exclusive but all-encompassing choices of what to do with it:

1. Decide what information is not needed or wanted—at which point the item is thrown away immediately.

   *Important note:* **we have nothing but pity for those people unable to throw anything away, those teachers who adopt everything ever placed in their mailboxes as their own long-lost children. It was not by chance that after God created administrators he placed a garbage can in every teacher's room—and yes, each garbage can is positioned in close proximity to the dump drawer!**

2. Decide what information is something the teacher can process easily and quickly—at which point the item is immediately and thoroughly processed. Procrastination is wasted time, and the efficient teacher knows that time is too valuable a commodity to be wasted.

3. Determine what information is important and is better dealt with later —at which point the teacher will file it in a *tickler* file (Relax, it's not as exciting as it sounds) or write the information on his or her calendar blotter so that it can be referred to at a specific, later date.

If the routine is followed every day (Yes—consistency is a common thread in all areas of instruction for legends), teachers will become much more efficient paper handlers and more effective teachers as they free themselves from at least some of the drudgery of paperwork.

*Another important note:* **if you don't know this, you should: Many of you will work for administrators for whom successful and timely completion of forms is more important than how well you conduct your classes. Handling forms and reports in a timely manner in their eyes is a mark of a successful teacher.**

## The Teacher's Desk—Tickler File

The third option requires yet another step of organization for the teacher. Right below the dump drawer in the desk should be a *tickler file.* The tickler file is a teacher's long-term paper or hard copy storage organizer. There are various ways of organizing a tickler file, depending on how exact one wishes to be with information that is being stored for later use.

The simplest tickler file to organize is to take 12 hanging folders and label each folder with a month of the year. As the teacher receives information that won't really be needed or won't be acted on until later, the teacher places that information in the hanging file for that month. For example, say that in October a teacher receives a reminder that school improvement plans are due in February. That reminder is put in the February folder. Then, at the beginning of February or end of January, the teacher goes to the folder and is immediately reminded of what is due in February.

As is the case with the dump drawer, a tickler file is effective only if the teacher checks each month's folder as the month approaches. Failure to make these monthly inspections turns the tickler file into nothing more than a well-organized tomb.

For the really compulsive types, it is possible to carry this organization schema a step further. An extension of the tickler file is to keep 31 folders in front of the tickler file for the present month. At the end of January, the teacher takes the information from the February file and places it in the exact due date—the 1st through the 28th. As other items are received that are due that month, they are placed in the due date folder or the folder for the date at which the project must begin.

The point of the tickler file is simple. Paperwork should not be the teacher's first priority, and because his or her attention is focused elsewhere—teaching the children—then a system must be in place to help the teacher deal with those still important but lower-priority matters. No one can remember when everything is due or needed. These files are a method of organization by which one may master the clutter. Being organized, the legend is apt to spend more time in pursuit of quality education rather than scrambling to turn in forms.

## The Teacher's Desk—Rest of the Desk

In a similar fashion, other drawers in the desk or nearby files should be used for personal items, miscellaneous school supplies, and frequently used forms. Items should be clearly labeled, alphabetized, or placed in prioritized hierarchy, allowing the original plan of organization to be maintained. Without the luxury of personal secretaries, teachers must take the steps necessary to fulfill those duties as painlessly and as efficiently as possible.

# The Teacher's Workstation

The second area that demands organized planning is the teacher's workstation. Whenever possible or practical, instructors should have a workstation close to or attached to their desk. The workstation should be a place for items that don't belong on the teacher's desk as described in the previous section, but nonetheless remain essential to the working environment of the instructor. The workstation is the place for stacks of papers, computers, printers, projects, or research books.

Maintaining a workstation is no more complicated than placing an additional table next to the teacher's desk. Using the desk, files, and a work table, the teacher is more able to create a work space, which is essential if the teacher does not have an office space of his or her own. Too often,

however, teachers use their desk for everything, never really defining a work area and never defining an organizational scheme by which they may be secretary, accountant, correspondent, grader, and planner.

One final note about these two areas: the teacher's desk and the workstation are effective because they are used only when students are *not* in the class. Neither is a teaching area. The legend does not teach sitting at his or her desk. Effective teachers have separate teaching areas: a podium or lectern in front—perhaps another table—but the desk and the workstation are not teaching stations.

## The Students' Work Area

The last area that bears scrutiny in terms of organization is the students' work area. When we described the teacher's desk earlier, we suggested that there may be a single tray of the stackable trays on the desk into which all student work is placed. Without exception, work being handed to the teacher never goes anywhere else. The single tray is, however, a minimal concept. If at all possible, the legend prefers to maintain a separate student workstation. The student workstation might be a place where the following activities occur.

This could be the hand-in point for all work coming to the teacher for evaluation. Again, this is the only place students may turn work in to the teacher. It is never placed on the desk, never given to the teacher at the teaching station, and never accepted in the hallways. Those works are too often lost or forgotten in transit. All work is placed here.

This might be a place where students returning from absences pick up any graded work that had been returned or handouts distributed during their absence. Work to be made up (with dates written on it) may also be picked up here. This might be where teachers place notes that students are to take home. There could even be a monthly tickler file for students to check when concerned about missing assignments.

Most effective teachers have some method of dealing with absences in terms of content missed (not just handouts, graded work, or makeup work). Some teachers have students keep a class log recording all notes and discussion. Other teachers keep an index file of materials. Regardless, the student workstation is the perfect place for these materials. What the legend definitely wants to avoid is the student approaching him or her at the start of class and announcing, "I was sick yesterday. Did I miss

anything?" Classroom legends have a system in place and the student workstation is a marvelous place for that system to be anchored.

If students have access to their own writing folders, lab reports, art portfolios, sheet music, and so forth, then the student workstation is the ideal location for those as well. Teachers who keep classroom sets of books for students' use or extra pencils, pens, colored pencils, and markers may find the student workplace a wonderful location for those. Students who have work to make up in class may be able to use the workstation as well.

The student workstation is the optimal place for the posting of grades. Students typically check their grades as often as they are updated, and the legend posts grades at least weekly in an attempt to keep students not only current with their grades but also responsible for them. The wise teacher will take full advantage of this by also posting important reminders and notifications for the students here as well.

Last, the student workstation is the perfect spot to locate individualized activities. Remediation worksheets, projects, and readings could all be placed here with directions for individual students, thus avoiding the embarrassing distribution of remediation materials in front of the entire class. Likewise, the student workstation is ideal for enrichment activities such as extra-credit projects, academic challenges, and articles and books to read. The possibilities are limited only by the teacher's creativity and the needs of the class. The point is, the legend uses the student workstation to expose the students to as much additional material as possible in a private, sensitive manner.

All in all, the organized classroom might look something like Figure 5.3.

**Figure 5.3** Basic Classroom Floor Plan to Enhance the Instructional Learning Experience for the Students

Requisite to becoming a legend is the notion that the teacher is organized. Any organizational pattern for the room, like the one mentioned earlier, will work; however, arranging the room is not the difficult aspect of being organized. What is difficult is maintaining the discipline to adhere to the organization once it has been designed and implemented. We may arrange the best plan for our desks, workstations, and student workstations, but if they become dumping grounds, then all is in vain.

It is possible to maintain the necessary discipline by holding fast to two resolutions.

## Resolution 1

The first part is easy. The teacher must decide to follow the organization practices he or she has designed. The quarter or semester break would be a good, first opportunity to evaluate any set procedures and make necessary changes at that time, if the old protocol has proven ineffective or cumbersome, but otherwise, the teacher models efficiency for the student by sticking to the plan, religiously.

## Resolution 2

The second part is not quite as easy. The students must be trained to follow, without exception, the new organizational policies. This will, at first, be a real battle of the wills. It may help to place a large poster with the rules of the workstation directly above it. Large, boldly lettered signs should indicate where papers are to be turned in and where materials are to be picked up. (A great activity at any age level to help familiarize students on procedures and protocols to follow in the classroom is to devise a scavenger hunt highlighting the important rules and regulations. You can follow the scavenger hunt with a question-and-answer session or an open note quiz to once again reinforce all the important information.)

Likewise, the procedure for makeup work should also be posted. Students will encounter the class's makeup protocol daily, as well as the policy for handouts and absences in general. If any kind of portfolio work is kept at the student workstation, then directions for its use must also be posted.

The intent of a student workstation is twofold. Its primary function is to help the teacher be more effective through better organization. Second, and perhaps just as important, it serves to shift the learning responsibility to the students for makeup work, absence procedures, and portfolio management. Making students more responsible for their work ties directly into every legend's goal of increased metacognition.

The effective teacher, the legend, designs and adheres to an organizational policy. At first it will be a chore for the teacher as well as for the students. After that it will become a clash of wills to see that it is followed, but if both battles are fought and won (these are battles worth the time and energy to win), in a few short weeks the results will be a smooth, efficient classroom with much more productivity and much less wasted time.

## Time Management

To become a legend, a teacher must be an extremely efficient manager of time. The realities of our profession necessitate it. If this were true 10 years ago, then it is even more so today as teachers get larger classes, more duties, and more afterschool expectations. Until someone comes up with a 26-hour day, teachers will have to become wiser managers of their time.

We begin therefore with some general suggestions for managing time:

1. Clutter kills.

It will cost you time you do not have to waste.

We discussed this at great length earlier. Being disorganized immediately implies time problems. You'll waste time looking for things, making excuses for not finding things, and finally end up by having to redo things. No one is good enough to be effective and disorganized. Teachers get a choice. They can have the annoyance of being organized and disciplined or they may have the pain of lost time and regret. Legends choose the prior.

2. Limit your outside commitments.

Teachers often suffer from their own good intentions. They are most often "doers and people pleasers" and those who commit. As a result, they often compromise their own time with various outside obligations. Many centers of worship just assume school teachers will teach Sunday school

classes for them. Friends may ask teachers to tutor their children. Relatives you haven't heard from in years call asking for help with projects and papers. As committed citizens, teachers often get involved in political campaigns, community activities, and so forth. The point is, these commitments often preclude needed time to grade, plan, and take care of one's own needs.

3. Make deals at home with those who used to love you.

This is only slightly tongue-in-cheek. Forgive the cliché, but behind most legends in education there is an accommodating husband or wife and children. Achieving the status of a classroom legend is only possible with the support of those at home. The teacher who teaches from 8:00 till 4:00, attends a PTA meeting that night, and then comes home to plan the next day's lessons and score papers, does not have time to help with the dishes, the cleaning, and even with taking care of the kids that night. We don't advocate absentee parenthood, but the fact of the matter is that at times, it happens. It is a reality of the profession and one of the tasks a legend accomplishes is making certain that his or her family understands where the heart lies, even when the body is called away.

4. Within school rules, delegate chores to students as much as possible.

The issue of "within school rules" is of great importance. Can students take attendance? If so, let them. Can some papers be scored in the classroom by students? If so, do that occasionally. The image from the past of children cleaning erasers and slates is a perfect example of a teacher maximizing allotted time by letting students help when possible. It is still a good idea.

5. Maximize your free time: there's more of it than you think.

The legend is his or her own taskmaster. Choosing to be the best, the legend knows that what free time does exist is greater than one may first realize. There is time before school starts if not spent in the lounge getting coffee and catching up on last night's *Law and Order* or game of the week. Most teachers are given an instructional planning period and this too can be wisely spent—or wasted. Although most states' school codes guarantee a "duty-free" lunch, the legend understands that is a luxury he or she may not be able to afford. A "working" lunch is often the order of the day, a necessity to getting everything completed in a timely manner. Finally, there

is the time once school and its duties are complete. For this time we have some more small pieces of advice:

    a. Any long project is more efficiently done when broken with small breaks. Teachers who sit down with 45 papers to grade and never rise from the table while grading them are probably going to be much slower than those who grade five papers, get up, move around, grab a drink, and then go back to work.

    b. Each teacher should know his or her own limits. Work after 11 p.m. might be counterproductive—poor quality, slowly done. Getting to bed earlier and maybe rising earlier the next day to finish could be far more efficient. Likewise, a young healthy teacher might be able to do with four hours sleep one night and still be productive; the next teacher might need his or her eight hours to be effective at all the next day. It's important to know our own limits and needs.

    c. Mind-numbing tasks should be done earlier in the evening. The closer to bedtime these are attempted, the slower the work goes. Scoring an objective quiz is a marvelous last chore before bed.

    d. It's minor, but when every minute counts, consider this: an objective test with all the answers written in capital letters on blanks on the left margin of the page is much faster to grade than one where the kids write the answers on their own paper. When you provide the answer sheet, the blanks all line up and can be sped through with the key underneath. If all answers are printed in capital letters, you can grade that faster than a mixture of capital and lowercase letters. The mixture requires that at some conscious level you read the letters, but when all are capitals, it's sight recognition without decoding.

    e. Don't create extra work for you or the students. For example, don't assign a paragraph identifying the five causes of the Civil War. If all that's required is a list of the five causes, make the assignment a list. It's faster to grade than paragraphs.

    f. Whenever you have a subjective evaluation to make (e.g., an essay, a creative project, a bit of artwork, etc.), have a set rubric by which to score it. You'll anguish less and score more evenly and more quickly.

6. Learn electronic shortcuts.

Today, legends have bigger toolboxes and more tools from which to choose. The metaphor is a good one. The best teachers get the most work done the most efficiently and are able to do this not only because of superior abilities but because of superior knowledge of potential time-savers. They do not open their home Web page and type in www.google.com; they have the Google link on their link bar. Efficient teachers often now collect homework electronically and make comments on it with Microsoft Word's tracking ability. We've seen teachers typing their class lists into their electronic grade book, not understanding that those lists with all sorts of other information could be downloaded in the time it took to type one name.

We live in an increasingly electronic age and no teacher, without depending on others, can possibly keep abreast of all the possibilities. Legends are never too proud to ask for help. Students, in particular, are always quick to assist or come to the rescue as their technology knowledge appears to be innate and limitless. Knowing how or knowing the latest shortcut can save lots of time.

7. Steal everything you can from effective teachers.

Very much keeping in the vein of the previous bit of advice—the best teachers swallow their pride and never stop "bugging" their peers for their secrets.

> *A high school teacher new to a district was astounded to hear that all English teachers had to administer the district final exam that was made up of 50 multiple-choice questions and a two- to three-page essay during the final week of school and then have final grades turned in the following Monday.*
>
> *She went to a veteran peer and almost cried: "How do you score 150 final exam essays over one weekend, figure final grades, and turn them in on Monday? I couldn't possibly do that."*
>
> *"Relax," said the wily veteran. "Here's what you do: total up the points through the two quarters and add the points from the objective portion of the exam. Remember the essay part of the test is worth 50 points on our 1,000-point semester scale. Now, look at the final grade scale and determine how much of your students' final grade will be determined by the final essay. If the*

*grade will not be affected by a reasonable score on the essay, don't grade that student's paper until later.*

8. Do a time inventory if feeling hopelessly swamped or get used to feeling hopelessly swamped.

To begin an assessment of how well one uses his or her time, it is helpful to begin with a quick inventory of free time during the school day. The inventory is done by numbering the potential free time in the day:

Free Time 1— planning period during school

Free Time 2—before school

Free Time 3—after school at school

Free Time 4—after school at home

Free Time 5—weekends

Free Time 6—holidays

For one week, the teacher is to keep a diary of the activities performed during those six free times alone. At the end of the week, each page must be analyzed to see how the free time was used in that week and what can be done to maximize the time that is available. If, on analysis, one notices a preponderance of activities such as "coffee in the teacher's lounge," "wander the halls," "watch practices in field house," or "read newspapers or magazines in library," then the quick inventory suggests an easy fix, provided that the teacher is willing to add the concepts of being goal oriented, focused, and on task to his or her permanent vocabulary.

*Special note:* **This is not to suggest that all work and no play wouldn't drive the legend up a tree, but what is evident is that valuable time may be squandered on nonproductive activities.**

If the quick inventory reveals responses such as "waiting in line for the copier," "waiting to cut letters in the library," or "waiting to get on a computer," then it would appear that this teacher is on the right track but is still wasting time. It might be to his or her advantage to be better prepared so that these things could be done all at once one night a week, when the demand on the limited facilities of the school is far less. Most waiting comes from teachers having put off preparations until the last minute, at which time they have no choice but to stand in line with all the other

procrastinators. The legend not only desires to make good use of his or her time but has prepared to do so.

*Closely related note:* **Planning ahead relieves a great deal of the stress that compromises efforts and wastes time. The more the individual teacher can do to eliminate stress from the daily schedule, the more likely he or she will be an effective teacher.**

Finally (and this is a real possibility), if the quick inventory reveals responses that indicate carefully budgeted time wherein almost every minute of the day is filled productively but there still is not enough time to accomplish everything, then there obviously is a problem. Go back to number 2 and see what can be eliminated from the obligations that teachers face every day. The key here is simple: do not create the oceans that are drowning you. Find a more simplistic method or way that will better utilize your time.

9. Collect work when you can grade it—maybe not an entire class at once.

Have materials turned in when you can grade them. Secondary teachers: don't have all your classes write or test on the same day. It makes for a depressing pile that seems impossible to dent. Primary teachers: don't collect all of your students' projects before winter break. You need time to rest and relax, too, just like the students. Instead, have the projects due a few weeks before the winter break in order that the grading can be completed before the vacation period begins.

Best practices have told us for a long time that if you want student work to be a learning experience and not just an assessment exercise, then it must be returned to the students within 24 hours. This means that the wise teacher doesn't collect work the night she promised to volunteer at the local blood bank. This means that the wise teacher who has 30 students in his class doesn't have all the stories they wrote turned in on the same day. Some are turned in Monday, some of are turned in Tuesday, and the rest are turned in on Wednesday. This can be done randomly or it can be done with a purpose. What if the teacher let the overachieving students turn theirs in on Monday, a middle third of the students on Wednesday, and those who work more slowly or need more help on Friday?

Or, in this age where all classrooms are becoming increasingly overcrowded, what if the teacher didn't collect all homework for assessment, but only 20% of the class? Again, the teacher can randomly collect student work or do so with a plan. It comes from the teacher saying,

"I'd like to grade all your homework every night, but with the number of students I have, that's no longer possible—it's a choice the school board made—not me (careful with that statement if you are not on tenure), so we'll discuss the homework every day, but I won't grade everyone's every day." This is definitely not the case for major works, tests, or papers. All of those, of course, are graded every time.

The point is that the legend need not be rigidly dogmatic, collecting all work at once just because it is tradition. The legend has a specific plan of attack.

10. Investigate computer software or a personal digital assistant that reminds you of your day's activities.

If you can't hire a personal secretary, this is the next best thing. All of us need help remembering all we must do.

11. Reserve your own copier at Kinko's.

This was originally meant as a joke, but with the advances of technology, it is now possible for the teacher to have a printer at home that is also a scanner and copier. While none of us can afford to run off classroom sets at home all the time, in an emergency it is possible to do so. Likewise, if the home printer is also a scanner, that chance illustration, cartoon, or article we find at home can be scanned into electronic form for reproduction and use in the classroom. Of course, we encourage all teachers to know and abide by the copyright laws, especially concerning our book.

12. Don't believe everything you've read about the dangers of sleep deprivation.

This sounds rather Draconian and for that we apologize, but quite frankly, the legend knows how much sleep he or she needs, and in a pinch, how little he or she can get and still function normally. There are some long nights.

Our rule of thumb is this: expect right now that your time commitment to teaching in a 180-day school year (counting work at home) will match the 40-hour week for a person who works year round.

*Q—How do you get to Carnegie Hall?*

*A—Practice, practice, practice.*

*Q—How do you become a classroom legend?*

*A—Work, work, work—hardly a secret.*

# Time Compromise (A Bitter Pill to Swallow)

Central to time management lies the concept of time compromise. It is the hardest lesson we learn as we age, but one we must: there are times when it is impossible to do our best on any given project. To accomplish all the legend must in a day, the teacher cannot spend as much time as he or she would like on every lesson plan or on every student project.

The thoughtful English teacher would like to read every essay twice, writing voluminous comments throughout. The idealistic third-grade music teacher would like to spend three to four hours preparing an inspiring lesson on tonality. The devoted physical education teacher would like to have all the gear cleaned daily and prepared, including re-marking every athletic field. Of course, they cannot—not always.

Merely to survive, the English teacher must finish scoring the essays in three hours. Just to survive, the music teacher has to limit preparations for each class to half an hour, and that physical education teacher, just to preserve close to eight hours of sleep a night, will, in the time allotted only, have to do the best she can.

To do the best they can—to exist—teachers must learn to compromise their ideals with the realities of their professional existence. Each teacher may do only the best he or she can on any project in the apportioned time. This applies even to the legend. Time must be wisely allotted and then wisely used. That is the heart and soul of time management and why effective planning is so critical, but still teachers may be frequently left with the feeling that they haven't done their best. Regardless, that is the compromise that must be made to function as an educator.

In the business world, quality management would love to have a 100% success rate, but most are happy when they are able to maintain an 80% no-problem rate. Anything above an 80% acceptance rate is to be celebrated, not regretted. It becomes cost ineffective and counterproductive to fixate on achieving 100% success. Production would have to slow, inspections double, and while it might be almost possible to attain perfection, it would be silly to dedicate one's firm to that goal.

Did we just write that with NCLB "high stakes testing" always knocking on your classroom doors and shouting—"Time for your yearly Accountability Check!"?

The same may be said for education: striving for excellence is motivating, but striving for perfection may be demoralizing. Our advice is for the teacher to do the best he or she can in the time available. The review worksheet will be as varied, colorful, and exciting as time permits, but that is all it may be. We know it could be more varied, more colorful, and more exciting, but we all exist within limits.

A pursuit of perfection can be as debilitating as a lack of concern. We say this hesitantly because we know it is a sentiment that can be abused by the lazy or the unchallenging teacher, the one who is only in the classroom for the paycheck, but it remains a truth nonetheless. Even legends must take care of themselves. The day must have time for adequate rest, recreation, proper diet, and exercise. Driving oneself to an early grave is not a good choice, and it is not a choice the legend makes.

That's why professional compromise is a bitter pill that all teachers must occasionally swallow. As administrations put more and more children in our classes, as taxpayers demand broader and broader curricula, and as the government challenges us with more and more tests, the time we can spend to do the extra things, to make the room look that little bit better, to be the best we possibly can, is more limited than ever. This is a maxim that is sad but true.

Teachers who experience a great deal of success in the classroom know that they have to be a step ahead of their students at all times. Student boredom and subsequent disengagement occur the instant the instructor starts to lose focus or begins to drift during a lesson. This drifting can be circumvented only through systematic and exact planning of all aspects of the classroom enterprise. This is a truth, and the legend as a successful manipulator of time is very aware of it. To be the best, the legend has to be totally prepared. All students can tell when a teacher is "winging it" or "flying by the seat of his or her pants." Student interest, student respect, and student success will all suffer when they find a teacher ill-prepared to make the learning day a meaningful one. At some level the teacher has broken the student-teacher bond, and to at-risk students, this becomes an excuse that they too no longer must live up to their responsibilities for learning.

While this has always been true, it is an even more significant concept when applied to the realities of block scheduling. Block scheduling offers both benefits and liabilities.

The benefits include the following:

< Increased opportunity for in-depth work
< Increased opportunity for individualized work
< Increased opportunity for meaningful cooperative work
< Increased opportunity for guided learning and homework
< Increased opportunity for conferencing regarding progress

However, on the other hand, block scheduling carries with it many liabilities in terms of planning:

< A far greater potential for boredom and disengagement unless met with more varied and more kinesthetic activities every period
< A far greater demand for time management within the single period
< A far greater amount of preparation because of the first two characteristics
< A far greater potential for teacher failure.

If planning is an obligation in the traditional schedule, it is a vital necessity under the block schedule. It is virtually impossible for any teacher to function in a block without far greater planning and coordination of students, activities, goals, and measurement. For experienced teachers, block scheduling requires a complete paradigm shift in their educational approach; for novice instructors, it requires absolute dedication and readiness.

## Focus—Focus—Focus

Regardless of whether the teacher operates in a traditional or a block schedule, academic planning begins with the vision described in Chapter 3. Where will the students be if everything goes as planned by the end of instruction? What will the student be able to do or know? Because this text is primarily designed as an aid to the individual teacher as he or she strives to become a classroom legend, we will forgo a discussion of curriculum development. Needless to say, if an incoming teacher is handed an established curriculum with course syllabi and pacing charts, planning is much easier and probably much more efficient. When that is not the case, then the individual teacher must follow the guidelines presented here.

**STEP 1:** Focus on learning. One of the big pitfalls of many teachers is that they focus on teaching, when in fact, they should focus on learning. The

focal point of the classroom experience ought not to be what the teacher does, but what the student will be able to do following successful learning. This requires identifying core skills, essential questions, and mandatory knowledge. Call it what you will; the legend knows exactly the point of instruction.

**STEP 2:** Focus on pacing. The next step is to make a course syllabus that outlines the major concepts and objectives that will be covered in the class. The concepts and objectives are almost always divided into topical units, although the organization of the skills to be mastered is up to the individual teacher. Every teacher, no matter how good, who fails to focus on pacing, will wander and end the year just short of time. Put it this way: if the first-grade teacher falls three weeks behind, and the second-grade teacher does the same, and so forth throughout a child's education, then the child loses an entire year of schooling. Experience suggests that building in review days and testing days is mandatory. In fact, the wise teacher often builds in a few extra days with each unit of study. In education, one can always count on the unexpected: assemblies, achievement testing, remediation, and so forth. These "extra days" are never free days, and if they are not needed for anything, they may be used as enrichment days—but they too are task oriented.

**STEP 3:** Focus on pedagogy. Once the teacher has determined the course goals and pacing chart, the next step is to begin construction of actual lesson plans, plans that keep the students interested (not bored), make students active learners (not passive learners), and keep students meaningfully on task (not just busy). As a teacher begins to fashion a lesson, he or she would be wise to keep the following direction in mind: if students are engaged in significant learning activities, they should be able to answer any of these questions at any point in the unit:

< What am I doing?
< Why am I doing it?
< When will I be done doing this?
< How will I know if I have succeeded?

Presentation of all material should be done in light of these four concerns. If we are to ask students to take responsibility for their learning, then we must keep them fully informed of the educational process. When they are fully cognizant of these four aspects of the learning process, they

are more likely to see the big picture of learning, and their engagement is most likely to be high.

**STEP** 4: Focus on assessment. The final step in planning is the determination of assessment and suitable remediation. There are two important considerations about assessment. First, the more often assessment occurs, the more assured the instructor can be that no one is lost, wasting time in class. Likewise, smaller units of remediation will be necessary if the wise teacher checks learning along the way and not just at the end of instruction.

Second, the more authentic assessment is, the more meaningful it is. Likewise, it is important to note that remediation activities are more productive if they are along the lines of a different learning avenue than the original instruction. The more similar remediation is to original instruction, the less likely it will result in any improvement.

## Planning the Academic Day

We've included several sets of lesson plans in what follows. They are divided into those appropriate for the Carnegie unit and those appropriate for the block format (e.g., A/B Block or 4 Block). We add this warning for those of you who may be going from Carnegie units to the block: the only certainty in going from the traditional delivery system to a block delivery system is the assurance that if you think you can take two old Carnegie lessons and simply put them together into one block unit, you will fail. No one can do that. Teaching under the block means simplifying and prioritizing curriculum. It may mean doing less, but it also means providing more depth of understanding and doing it better.

## Carnegie Lesson Templates

As you consider designing lesson plans for the Carnegie unit, keep these reminders at the forefront in planning:

< Don't make them teacher oriented toward instructing (bad), and not even student oriented toward doing (better), but definitely about student mastery of core skills (best).
< Build in authentic assessment of the necessary incremental steps of mastery, not just a final assessment.

- < Whenever possible, steer clear of multiple-choice, matching, and true-false assessments.
- < Allow for remediation and enrichment.
- < Include alternative approaches that appeal to all learning styles.
- < Plan for learning at the highest possible level and don't rely on rote short-term memory recall.
- < Allow time to conclude and digest—"bell-to-bell" instruction is a nice buzz phrase, but ineffective in practice.
- < Allow for the students to write, tell, and explain what they have learned in class each day before you dismiss them for the day or at the end of the class session.

  Make them as "hands-on" as possible; students learn best by doing.
- < Make lessons fun.

## Block Lesson Templates

Remember all you were to do with the Carnegie unit and consider the following:

- < Include actual physical movement at least once during the block period.
- < Break every block period into a minimum of three different activity sections.
- < Greater use of group work is possible, but keep in mind the following:
  - ▫ Assigned roles
  - ▫ Individual accountability (no group grades)
  - ▫ Standards for success for all group work

## Conclusions

Many students find organization of their own materials and lives difficult for a host of reasons. The classroom teacher who models organization by presenting curriculum in an orderly manner enhances learning for all students, especially those who have difficulty processing information. An organized teacher sorts, labels, and connects facts so that curriculum has meaning and relevance. An organized approach to learning embellishes meaning and stimulates more facile retrieval of information at a later date.

In this age of nationwide testing and increased concern for students at risk, it must be recognized that both are greatly jeopardized by disorganized teachers. We have tests for which to prepare; they demand that we are organized in our curriculum, pacing, and assessment. They demand that we are well articulated between and within grade levels. Likewise, for many students, success or failure as a school often hinges on a core of at-risk students—borderline students who cannot be allowed, any longer, to fall through the cracks. These are the students most threatened by disorganized teachers. To protect the marginal students from failure, teachers must provide specific and clear assignments, rather than mindless busy work. Assessments must be given to students after those students have exhibited mastery in learning the content, rather than surprise assessments given when the students have not been properly prepared. Planned, scheduled time for remediation of important skills and content must be provided, rather than just moving on, causing the students to be helplessly lost with no hope of learning or passing the course.

The success of every teacher and therefore of almost all students is dependent on defining and following an instruction protocol. It is the atmosphere of stability under which student efforts will be maximized and results more readily achieved.

Finally, if everything in this chapter appears overwhelming and difficult for you to put into practice, remember one word and only one word—*structure*. If you are going to err in your planning of lessons or your method of teaching, err on the side of structure.

**Structure is the legend's best educational
friend and classroom companion.**

## PARTICIPATION LESSON PLANNING

*(With increased class sizes and consistently limited or decreased resources, many teachers have found that they can no longer have active participation among 35 students, so they instead randomly announce a "participation circle" —those students who will sit in an inner ring and be responsible for discussion that day. Likewise if the number of science stations or music instruments or art stands or computers is greater than the number of students this can be used—it is a way to keep track of which students were allowed to be participate in a given day.)*

**Monday:** Lesson: _____
Goal: _____
**Studens Participating:**
_____    _____
_____    _____
_____    _____

**Tuesday:** Lesson: _____
Goal: _____
**Studens Participating:**
_____    _____
_____    _____
_____    _____

**Wednesday:** Lesson: _____
Goal: _____
**Studens Participating:**
_____    _____
_____    _____
_____    _____

**Thursday:** Lesson: _____
Goal: _____
**Studens Participating:**
_____    _____
_____    _____
_____    _____

**Friday:** Lesson: _____
Goal: _____
**Studens Participating:**
_____    _____
_____    _____
_____    _____

**FOCUSED LESSON PLANS**

*Part I—Identify Desired Results*

**What are the essential questions, objectives or concepts of this lesson?**

**What will students be able to do after this lesson?**

**What evidence will there be of student mastery?**

### Part II—Plan Learning Experience and Instruction

What background info will students need to know for learning to occur?

What assesment will indicate that mastery of skills have occured?

### Part III—Standards

What federal/state/local standards will be addressed in this lesson.

**PACING CHART:**     Week# _____ Dates: _____ To _____

The purpose of this chart is to trace what objectives will be covered in what sequence with what amount of time. It is too small to be used for lesson plans per so, but is marvelous for developing a score and sequence of covering the objectives.

*Corwin Template # 4*

|  | MON | TUE | WED | THR | FRI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Class: _____ Per: _____ |  |  |  |  |  |
| Class: _____ Per: _____ |  |  |  |  |  |
| Class: _____ Per: _____ |  |  |  |  |  |
| Class: _____ Per: _____ |  |  |  |  |  |
| Class: _____ Per: _____ |  |  |  |  |  |

# MAKING 90 MINUTES MEANINGFUL TO STUDENT LEARNING

BLOCK TEMPLATE # 2

### Segment 1 – Review/Anticipatory Set (5–10 minutes)

> *Activities:*

### Segment 2 – Identification of Goals and Objectives (5–10 minutes)

> *Activities:*

### Segment 3 – Presenting the Material / Discovery (30–40 minutes)

> *Activities:*

### Segment 4 – Guided Practice (10–20 minutes)

> *Activities:*

### Student Movement (at least twice) is accomplished in what manner?)

> *Activities:*

### Segment 5 – Independent Practice (10–30 minutes)

> *Activities:*

### Segment 6 – Review/Closure (5–10 minutes)

> *Activities:*
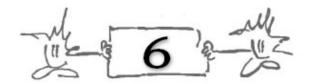
## TIME PLANNING FOR BLOCK SCHEDULE

BLOCK TEMPLATE # 5

1. *Gaining Attention/Opening (10–15 mm.)*

2. *First Segment: Review (15–20 mm.)*
   *Presentation (10 mm segments mixed with #3)*

3. *Second Segment: Activity (20–25 mm.) Guided Practice*

4. *Reteach / Enrichment / Review (5–10 mm.)*

5. *Closure and Anticipatory Set for the next day (10–15 mm.)*

**BLOCK DELIVERY SYSTEM**

Lesson Plan Form

BLOCK TEMPLATE # 6

Teacher: _____ Class: _____ Block: _____ Date: _____

| Selection/ Features | Objectives/ Skills | 90 Minute Lesson Plan | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | ☐ Minutes | ☐ Minutes | ☐ Minutes |
| | | | | |
| **Assessment Option** | | **Homework Option** | | |
| | | | | |

# 6

# Winning the Crowd

*In the movie* Gladiator, *Russell Crowe portrays the heroic character General Maximus Meridius. If you are familiar with the movie, you know that at one point, Maximus is taken by slave traders and sold to an ex-gladiator, Proximo. Proximo sees something special in this new gladiator, his ticket back to Rome. He takes Maximus, now called the Spaniard, under his wing, and they eventually go to fight in the newly restored games in Rome. Maximus wants nothing more than to kill Commodus, the new emperor, and avenge the deaths of his family, who Commodus had ordered to be killed. His sole purpose for winning in the Coliseum is for that one glorious moment. Proximo continues to befriend Maximus in Rome with advice on how Maximus can earn his freedom while fighting in the arena. His advice is simple yet profound. It does not matter how skillful he is in combat or how many men he kills during the games. The secret to gaining his freedom is for Maximus to "Win the Crowd!"*

*Is there a crowd to win as a teacher?*

**A**s much as we relish in detailing the templates for classroom .success, there is yet another integral part of the teaching profession that must be

addressed. There is much more to becoming a legend than walking into your classroom, closing your door, and engaging your students in the art of learning. As skilled a fighter as Maximus was in the arena, his skill alone could not gain his freedom. His ultimate triumph, freedom, could only be obtained by having the support of others in appreciation of his talents and skills. Being a classroom legend in education goes far beyond the interaction with your students in your classroom. It, too, requires a crowd or an audience that must be won. The students may claim you as a hero or heroine, but legendary status can only be obtained when you have touched the hearts of the entire educational community.

*Is* there a crowd to win as a teacher? The answer to this question is yes.

However, the simple answer yes is not enough, for our initial question is far more complex than it appears to be. Unlike the arena crowd that Maximus played to, the teacher plays to many audiences. This audience is unlike any other audience as it wears many different hats and is always watching and critiquing you, the teacher, as to your daily classroom and community performances.

Yes, there is an audience to win as a teacher, and this chapter will outline and describe the various audiences that a classroom teacher must acknowledge, address, and win.

## Identifying the Audiences

The audiences in the field of education take on much more than the obvious, that being the instructor's main audience, his or her students. The positive relationships that instructors create with their students within the classroom walls form the foundation that must be in place before a teacher can venture out beyond his or her classroom. Unfortunately, the majority of instructors live their entire instructional careers in the sanctuary of their classroom. Possibly, those teachers never felt the need to expand their professional horizon, or they were just content with being an average to an above-average instructor.

However, there are a select few in the teaching profession who can function outside the sanctuary and safety of their classroom walls. These instructors have learned how to play to all the educational audiences, which pays huge dividends of added trust and admiration for each of them. In a day and an age where accountability rules the learning galaxy, these

legendary instructors build more accountability, by winning the audiences, than any data-driven test score or assessment.

Who makes up the various educational audiences? The following list outlines the key groups that exist beyond the classroom walls that merit consideration, your time, and a plan of action if you indeed intend to become a legend:

< Your administration (principal, superintendent, board of education)
< Your peers and colleagues
< Your noncertified staff members (secretaries, custodians, etc.)
< Your students' parents or guardians
< Your community

## The Administrative Audience

*The young, confident, nontenure teacher walked proudly to the main office to meet with her building principal for her postevaluation conference. She was anticipating numerous accolades during the discussions and an overall instructional rating of excellent. She had prepared well for her formal classroom evaluation, and her self-assuredness, along with her stellar class performance on evaluation day, told her that the postconference would be yet another validation of her many instructional talents.*

*The postconference began as she had anticipated. The principal stated to her, "Young lady, there is no question in my mind that you have the skills to quickly become a master teacher." Her smile began to broaden and widen as those words were spoken to her. Her inner conscious voice whispered in her ear, "I told you, you were born to be a fabulous teacher."*

*Her pleasant smile turned abruptly upside down when the tenor of the conversation changed with the following administrative comment: "Despite your brilliance in the classroom, you are not seen or valued yet as a good employee and you must work on becoming a better one." Confusion settled in on her brow. Once again, her inner conscious voice returned: "Better employee?" "I thought this evaluation was about improving my teaching?" In a frustrated tone of voice, she responded to the principal: "What more can you possibly expect*

*of me? Didn't you just tell me that I was almost a master teacher?"*

The point of the nontenure story is painfully obvious to those who do not live the sheltered life within the four walls of their classrooms. This particular instructor has neglected to win the favor of her building principal, in areas that go beyond the classroom. The reason could be simplistic and easy to fix (i.e., volunteering to be on a committee, attending an extracurricular event, updating a Web site or homework hotline, attending all faculty meetings, etc.), or they could be far more complex and difficult to change because they have become a habit (i.e., being late for work, failing to report to a daily hallway duty, making continual negative comments about the school system in the teachers' lounge, being absent too often, etc.). Sadly, the importance of this dualistic role, teacher and employee, is not only missed by young nontenure teachers, but also by many veteran tenured teachers. It does not help if you are a good teacher and a poor employee, and it does not help to be a good employee and a poor teacher. The primary focus of attention at school for these teachers is that they don't embrace the need to be good in both areas, being a good teacher and a good employee. Consequently, either the students or the school is not getting 100% of these teachers' efforts. Their view of the educational process is often too narrow as they fail to see the big operational picture. Their immediate needs are fueled by and for themselves as a "me-first attitude." Instead of helping the school to move smoothly along, they find a way to bottleneck the process by not assisting the students or by not following the rules and regulations of the organization.

Legends, however, easily manage this dualistic role as they realize the importance of not only being a good teacher but being a good employee. They become good employees by finding ways to communicate with their administration. In fact, this two-way communication will become a necessary and staple response to winning all of the audiences. These instructors beat to a different drum, one of modeling accepted practices, following the rules and regulations, and attempting to always look for ways to contribute to the overall success of the school.

Legends also find ways for the administration to be aware of their classroom successes:

< The elementary teacher invites the superintendent to his or her classroom to partake in a Thanksgiving dinner.
< The middle school teacher invites his or her immediate supervisor into the classroom to see a special lesson on using a graphic calculator.
< The high school teacher invites school board members to the upcoming open house to see the art exhibits his or her students have on display.

After all, good and positive public relations for legends become even more powerful if someone else is patting them on the back or tooting their horn. Winning the administrative audience by being a good teacher and a good employee will open many more doors of opportunity for you, your students, and your school.

## The Peer Audience

*Before the young teacher could completely clear her mind of what her principal had just told her about becoming a better employee, he interrupted her train of thought with yet another candid observation.*

*"As long as we are talking about ways for you to improve, let me ask you another question. How do you think your peers or colleagues perceive you as they interact with you on a daily basis? Better yet, if your colleagues were to come down to my office right now, what would they tell me about you?" Paralysis began to set in as she sat helpless in her chair. Her voice a little shaky and quivering as she delicately responded with, "Well, I think they ... [the pause that followed must have seemed like an eternity to her as her mind was racing] enjoy working with me." The principal calmly replied, "Do you think or do you know?"*

Unfortunately, isolation and uncertainty to where one fits into the scheme of things at school is a reality for many teachers. They come to school, walk into their rooms, close their doors, and remain there until the day has ended when they pack up their things and walk out of the building to head home for the evening. True, they might informally nod to their colleagues as they pass them in the hallways or they might break into casual conversation with those individuals that share a common lunch time or planning period. Those routines are safe and basic for mere mental

survival, as adults need more than conversations and interactions with children during the school day.

There are also the planned educational interactions that take place at grade-level or department meetings or during discussions in one of the ad hoc committees that one is periodically assigned to during a school year. These encounters can easily be labeled as formal professional settings where discourse is clearly defined by the agenda or task at hand.

Whether the opportunities to interact with your peers are informal or formal happenings, the perceptions that your colleagues have about you as an educator are often set in stone not by your words but by your actions. Perceptions are powerful allies or enemies to an educator, and a legend is careful to build allies among his or her peers and not enemies.

The opportunity to lead by your actions clearly defines one's true character. Think back on your educational encounters and experiences with your peers. Who talked a good game and then never delivered the promises? Who were the cynics that always viewed the educational process as a glass half empty rather than half full? Who would not be flexible or helpful in time of need when there was no substitute teacher available? Who are the teachers that arrive last and leave first? Who ran the copier out of paper or drank the last cup of coffee and didn't refill? The who list, as you can imagine, is endless. Nothing kills a spirit or destroys relationships more than unfilled promises or knowing that someone is not carrying his or her fair share of the workload to positively impact the overall performance of the school.

Legends are able to communicate their intentions by building strong relationship bridges to positively connect with their colleagues. This is not done in a boastful fashion, with a great deal of flair; it is not done so that a favor will need to be returned at a later date in time. It is done with a genuine concern to make the daily routines better for everyone in the building. Even though time is a precious commodity, legendary teachers are willing to sacrifice part of their time to assist, to be helpful, or to be kind:

> < The elementary teacher may hear this from his or her peer: *I know that you are expecting an important phone call, if you need someone to cover your class for a period of time, I would be happy to do that for you.*
> < The middle school teacher may hear this from his or her peer: *You must have done a great job with your science experiment yesterday.*

*The kids were so excited with the results; they wanted to share the results of the experiment with me.* (The high school teacher may hear this from his or her peer: *The pep assembly that you planned was great. I could feel the school spirit in the gym. The kids really enjoyed it!*

Relationship bridges built to connect with peers need not be spectacular feats of architecture. Providing small simple gestures or a smile, keeping your promises, being a team player, and doing your fair share of the workload will build a foundation for your bridges that will pave the way to winning the respect of your peers and colleagues that even the fiercest storms will not be able to destroy.

## The Noncertified Audience

*What the young, nontenured teacher thought was going to be a good day in paradise with her postevaluation conference was quickly turning into a nightmare. She bent her head down attempting to hide the emotions now beginning to swell in her eyes. As she looked downward staring at the floor, another agonizing thought crept into her mind. She knew what was going to come from her principal's lips next. For the beautiful carpeted floor in the principal's office was a stark contrast to her classroom carpet that had been stained from her coffee spills, or the many discarded staples embedded in the carpet fibers, as well as the sea of pieces of paper scattered almost everywhere on the classroom floor. The picture she had painted in her mind of her classroom floor quickly identified yet another negative piece to her postevaluation conference. Her inner voice quickly changed its protective and reassuring tone and harshly barked into her ear: "And, you thought you had your act together. Better think again young lady. Your classroom must take hours to clean."*

*Much to her dismay, her principal began to reinforce her inner voice's stern warning with the following statement: "Since you are not sure how your peers or colleagues perceive you in the building, do you think you might know how the custodial staff feels about you in regards to cleaning your room? If you are struggling with this question, it might help you to know that the head of maintenance has shared with me on more than one*

*occasion that your room takes on average the longest to clean and straighten up each night." The non-tenured teacher sat motionless in her chair and stared straight ahead. She had been rendered speechless because she knew that everything that had just been said was absolutely true. Although she knew in her heart she was a talented teacher, she did not yet have her total act together.*

Many times throughout the school day there are numerous activities, chores, or tasks that fall into the capable and reliable hands of the support staff. These noncertified individuals are not second-class citizens or personnel, and their contributions during the school day should never be taken for granted. Even though they are not classified as a peer or colleague in the hierarchy of the personnel scale, the many faces of the noncertified staff members (e.g., custodians, secretaries, kitchen workers, grounds workers, etc.) provide the many necessary services and skills that maintain and keep the school running smoothly from day to day.

Even though these staff members can at times be taken for granted, winning the noncertified audience is oftentimes a more valuable commodity than most people realize. In fact, it could very well be the most prized and coveted audience of all to win. The following paragraph clearly points out why support staff members are worth your full attention as a teacher.

Noncertified employees frequently live in the community where your school is located. This allows them to have informal conversations with the many residents (taxpayers) they come in contact with as they shop at the grocery store, drop their mail off at the post office, get their hair done at the salon, or dine with their families at the local restaurants. Since everyone's topics of conversation usually center on one's place of work, can you think of a more powerful public relations vehicle than having firsthand testimony from a school employee about you as a teacher? More importantly, the question to be asked is this: "Don't you as a teacher want the public relations broadcast about you to be positive?" Without even paying a dime for advertisement, wouldn't you like to overhear at the gas station that the custodian that cleans your classroom speaks highly about you as a teacher. Don't think for one minute that the type of classroom you leave for your custodian to clean on a daily basis or the way you talk or interact with that person does not highly factor into his or her opinion of you as a teacher.

Examples abound in a school setting as to the "why" you need to interact and treat the noncertified employees with respect and dignity. Think of the school secretary, noted by most experts as the individual who runs the school despite the hefty salaries being paid to the school administrators. Do you think a positive relationship with the building secretary might help you at some point in time when an angry parent is on the phone or an unwanted salesman comes calling for you at school? Do you think that a secretary will be more apt to process your purchase order in a timely fashion if you have a positive relationship with her? Do you think that she will allow a few precious days to lapse before processing the paperwork for the materials you need for your classroom?

Moving from the main office to the cafeteria, what do you think will determine the amount of food that is placed on your lunch tray? Depending on your interactions with the lunch staff, can you expect a child's portion, the regular adult portion, or an extra handful of French fries from the servers? Your attitude toward the kitchen workers will no doubt be in direct proportion to your waistline.

As a coach, who do you turn to make sure that the soccer field is lined before the game? As a music instructor, who do you turn to for assistance to set up the risers in the auditorium for the Christmas concert? As a physical education teacher, who do you turn to when there is no hot water for the students to shower? As a classroom teacher, who do you turn to quickly to clean up a mess in your room from a sick child? There are volumes of necessary needs for a teacher. With those needs, there always appears to be foremost the need for someone on whom you can rely, a person who has an expertise or skill that you, as a teacher, may not possess.

The tasks and chores of the noncertified staff are essential, and yet their duties and accomplishments will not make newspaper headlines or give them the thrill of touching a child's life in the classroom. Their day-to-day routines are mostly mundane. They, like everyone else, seek those individuals that appreciate them for their roles and what they do, as well as those individuals that make their workload more manageable and enjoyable.

The legend recognizes that this particular audience can be easily won by providing positive feedback to completed tasks or by assisting members in their time of need:

< The elementary teacher might say this to a custodian: *Thank you for cleaning my room yesterday. It was a mess, and I'm sorry. From now*

*on, the students and I will pick up the extra papers off the floor and put the chairs on the desks before we leave for the day.*

< The middle school teacher can assist the lunch servers by saying this: *The children seem a little more rowdy than usual today. I will stand in the lunch line with them to see if I can calm them down a little bit for you.*

< The high school teacher may assist a secretary by saying this: *You appear swamped with interruptions. Answer the phone, and I will write passes for you so that the students can get to their classes.*

We know what you must be thinking at this point in time, have we completely lost our minds? Where does one find the time and the energy to be this ray of sunshine? If the primary purpose of a teacher is to teach the children, why on earth are we spending our most valuable educational resource, our time, on winning the audiences?

The answer to these questions is a simple one. No successful educator can be an island unto himself or herself. Time is not the enemy; the real enemy is a failure to see or to seek opportunities to extend acts of kindness or lend a helping hand. The legend must always be cognizant of how the little things that one does can help build trust and strengthen relationships.

A legend has the innate or learned ability to build and develop a network of contacts within the school setting, those individuals who can be trusted to get the job done, when needs arise, to enhance the entire educational process.

## The Parent Audience

*The building principal was a wise sage, as he began to sense that there needed to be a change in the direction of this particular post-conference. He felt the need to add a few more positive strokes to the conversation to bring his young and promising teacher out of her current stoic state. He restarted the debriefing session with the following: "It appears that I may have begun to overwhelm you with possible suggestions for improvement that you may not have considered at this point in time." His protégée wanted to jump up and shout, "You've got that right!" Instead, she continued to remain frozen in her seat along with her expressions.*

*He continued: "You know, there are also a few more positives to share with you during our conference. I want to commend you on your prompt and detailed communications with your students' parents." Her inner voice reappeared and stated, with a bit of sarcasm this time, "Big deal; doesn't everyone know that they should keep in constant contact with their students' parents?"*

The legendary instructor is keenly aware that his or her greatest weapon in instructional warfare with the students is to have a close-knit alliance with the students' parents. The reason for this alliance is summed up in two words: common sense. When the teacher and the parent are on the same page, it takes away the excuses of the child. Children are experts at pitting one side (parent) against the other side (teacher). Does this sound familiar? "The teacher won't help me!" "The teacher never explains anything in class!" "The teacher never told us there was going to be a test!" "The teacher doesn't like anyone in our class, especially me!" "The teacher always yells at us!" Parents' natural instincts are to protect their children, and when they hear those comments at home, it is a safe bet whose side they are going to be on during a school conference. If you learn nothing else from this chapter, keep this winning phrase in your long-term memory:

*You always "win" when you have taken away the excuses!*

Although it may indeed be true that teachers should know to keep in contact with parents, it does not mean that all teachers generally follow this golden rule. Teachers, by their very nature, have good intentions, but keeping in constant contact with parents takes yet another step or two forward in an extra commitment. In a time where most instructors are already overcommitted with tasks to accomplish on a daily basis, consistency in communicating with parents oftentimes slips through the cracks.

To make matters a little more complex, there are generally three categories of parents that every teacher will interact with during the school year. To simplify the categories, we list the types of parents as the following: the "good parents," the "bad parents," and the "parents that can't be found."

Good Parents

These parents are a breath of fresh air. They are supportive of the educational process, are involved in school activities, and believe that the classroom teacher is the professional in charge of their child's education.

These parents are a joy to be around, as they always view their cup half full.

## Bad Parents

These parents live under a dark cloud. They enjoy challenging the educational process, are not involved in school activities, and believe their child speaks the truth despite what the teacher has just told them. Their opinion is that the school system was unfair to them when they were in school and continues to be unfair to their child. These parents are difficult to work with, as they always view their cup half empty.

## Can't Be Found Parents

These parents exist (we think), but they never respond to phone calls or certified letters, and they never answer the door during a home visit. You can also count on these parents to never attend a school activity. It is hard to know if they value education, but their children do attend school. Most often, these are the parents you desperately seek to talk to but never get the chance to. As for their cup, we can only assume that they have at least one in their home from which to drink.

Many more descriptive phrases can easily be added to the aforementioned categories of parents, as well as a few more. The point is not necessarily how the categories are labeled or described, but what a teacher does to win the parent audience. What is the winning strategy to ensure that the parents remain in your alliance as you instruct their children? Does one strategy fit all? Do you need different strategies depending on the categories of parents?

If you are anticipating at this point in the book a monumental breakthrough discovery into the psyche of all parents, you may be deeply disappointed. The winning formula is not complex, despite the changing variable due to the type of parent. The golden rule for keeping your parents on your side is listed here. You don't have to rub your eyes to see if you missed anything. You read it correctly the first time. There is only *one* golden rule to follow for all the categories of parents.

## The Golden Rule—Systematic Communication

The Systematic Communication Rule is dependent on and linked to the various stages of parenting. Each stage of parenting has a little different twist to the type of communication that is essential and necessary. This is apparent when you realize that all parents vary in their emotional attachments to their children, depending on their current child's grade level in school.

Elementary school parents believe that their child is the most precious thing in the universe, and rightfully so. They are usually a bit naive at first and more than willing to do anything and everything to help their child be successful in school.

Middle school parents still feel, for the most part, that they are in charge and in control of their children. They still remain somewhat active in the schooling process, and they want the teachers to know that they are keeping a watchful eye on their child's education.

By the time parents place their child in high school, they tend not to be in charge or in control of their young ones. It is as if they, as the parents, have done their part to get their child to high school, and now it is the school's responsibility to take the child through the last few years until graduation. These parents become more distant, almost afraid of the educational process, as they expect their child to be old enough and responsible enough to handle his or her own problems and affairs.

Pay close attention to the following statement: "It does not matter what emotional stage the parents are in with their children, ongoing communication 'must' be consistent at every grade level; only the content of the communication changes."

The biggest mistake that teachers make when dealing with parents is that the older the child becomes, the less they feel the need to communicate with the parents. The teachers comfort themselves with the philosophy that at some magical point in a child's chronological age, the child should begin to assume more and more responsibility for his or her schooling. It becomes the child's sole responsibility for studying for tests and doing his or her homework. For the sake of an argument, we believe that more and more of the responsibility rests on the children's shoulders as they advance in age, but we never give up on the formula of keeping the parents informed. No matter the age, the child is not the parent. If you wish to win the parent audience, you have to place student responsibility as a skill in process for a student and not a skill that will be mastered by a student. This is the case even if the student is a senior in high school and is about to graduate.

Legendary teachers communicate the responsibility of learning by keeping their students and parents working with them as a team. Legends, once again, keep the following motto close and dear to their hearts:

*You always "win" when you have taken away the excuses!*

The systematic communication can take place in a variety of different forms or formats. The bottom line is that you dedicate yourself to making sure that you are consistent in your forms of communication.

## The Elementary Teacher

< At this age, the delivery system for sending information home to parents happens via a bookbag or backpack and folder, or by simply telling the students that it is important for their parents to receive the information.
< The information should be sent home on the same day each week. We recommend that this take place on Thursdays, as that will give the parents at least one day to call the school if they have any questions or concerns before the weekend.
< The information should include tips on how parents can actively be involved in helping their children from home (e.g., reading out loud to their child, using flash cards to help with multiplication tables, or outlining basic skills, manners, and disciplinary issues that will make their child more successful in school).

## The Middle School Teacher

< At this age, the delivery system for successful home delivery becomes a little more complicated. You can certainly attempt the elementary strategies, or you can begin to mail home letters or possibly use electronic mailings.
< The information should be sent home on the same day each week. Again, we recommend that this take place on Thursdays. Although not stated earlier, you want the parents to look forward to that particular day each week for updates. That becomes an integral part of the systematic communication.
< The information sent home should include the following: your classroom rules and regulations (classroom conduct becomes a more

critical component in learning at this age), tips on how parents can help their child with homework assignments or study for exams, and at the end of every month, a new monthly calendar highlighting the main topics, pages in the textbook, and when major projects will be due or major tests will be given during that month.

## The High School Teacher

< At this age, the delivery system for home delivery can be more difficult. High school students are always on high alert if they do not want their parents to find out what is happening in their classes at school. Letters in the mail need to be sent in generic envelopes. Use of electronic mail, home phone calls, or cell phone calls become almost the easiest way to make a connection. You might also be able to work in a reward system for students returning parent-signed informational letters. Just make sure that you have a plan in place for the "can't be found" parents. Those parents are just as elusive to their own children.

< The information should be sent home on the same day each week. Again, we recommend that this take place on Thursdays. If you want to build and continue to build trust with the parents, you want to make sure that you send home information on everyone. Do not only communicate with the parents of students who are getting low grades (Ds or Fs).

< The information sent home should include your classroom rules and regulations (this is where you want to emphasize the importance of three things: the need for excellent attendance, the proper amount of sleep each night, and involvement in school activities). You should also provide a course syllabus (outlining the major topics of study) along with your grading scale and an explanation of how you grade and evaluate student work. Since the high school academic subjects may at times be challenging for parents to help their children at home, you want to make sure that you set aside study sessions before or after school where the students can get extra time with you.

*Note:* **Many school systems have moved or are moving to electronic teacher grade books that parents may view via the Internet. This solves many of the delivery system problems for the instructor and certainly keeps the parents abreast of how their children are doing in school. Here is a note of warning: If you are going to win this audience, you "must" keep your electronic grade book up to date, as well as the**

**class or individual messages that you will enter for the parents to view. The key is, once again, systematic communication.**

No educator is limited to the suggested communication ideas outlined here. Teachers will always have their own system for communicating with parents. Some teachers might create a Web site, and others might use a telephone homework hotline, while others might provide students and parents with their home phone number. Some teachers will require their students to put their assignments in a journal and ask the parents to view and comment on those assignments.

The bottom line to winning the parent audience is for the teacher to build a safety net, which fosters positive relationships with parents so that they are both allies in making the student's educational experience a positive and successful one. A safety net allows the parents to trust your words and your actions while you systematically communicate with them on how you are interacting with and teaching their child. It does not matter whether you are building the safety net for good parents, bad parents, or can't be found parents; you attempt to foster positive relationships with each set of parents exactly the same, just like you attempt to treat all of your students equally each and every day in your classroom.

## The Community Audience

*The principal continued, as he interrupted her inner voice: "Your weekly newsletter that you send home with helpful hints on how parents can be an extension to the learning process at home is outstanding. Many parents have made a point to tell me that not only has your newsletter made a positive impression on them, but also how you call them on the phone and share good news and improvement-needed news (as you have named it), which has set you apart from your peers."*

*As the positive comments returned, it was almost like her principal was attempting to win an audience, her! He continued: "Not only are parents singing your praises, but the food drive that you spearheaded for the local churches has certainly elevated you in the eyes of the community." The young teacher began to squirm a little in her chair, and her eyes began to twinkle almost to the point of being noticed*

A veteran teacher approached the assistant principal in the hallway and stated to him, "I am extremely disappointed in the lack of news coverage for my student. As you know, she has just been selected to represent our school at the state spelling bee contest." The assistant principal asked, "Did you turn in your news article to the public relations director?" The teacher responded, in a very frustrated tone of voice, "That is not my job! I don't get paid to do the public relations here! I hardly have time to prepare lessons for my classes!"

Not every person in your community has a child in your school or in your classroom. Yet everyone who lives in the community has an inner pride about their schools. They all like to believe that their school system is a great place for all the children to learn and to grow up into responsible young adults. Everyone likes to brag about the success of the football team, the fine arts programs, or the school play. These programs are easy for people to relate to because they are visible programs for the school community. People come and see and participate in these programs as part of the "happenings" in their community.

On the other hand, few community members brag about the dedicated third-grade teacher, the compassionate and caring middle school math teacher, or the creative high school special education teacher, because their world, the classroom, is not visible for the community to see. Sadly, their names or their deeds are never discussed in the community, unless they take the initiative to publicize their student's successful achievements (honors, class projects, areas of study, etc.).

The community audience is not an ego trip to win for an educator. It is not sought as the final feather to put in one's hat. Rather, it is a platform from which to share the successes a teacher is having with students, teams, clubs, or organizations that many might not know or hear about unless someone takes the time to make the community aware of them. If you wait for someone to make it happen for you, you may be waiting for a long time.

A legend knows the importance of spreading good public relations "news" to the community. The good news might, in the future, help to pass a referendum. The good news might bring a smile to someone who has memories of being involved in something similar while in school. The good news might encourage other students to try a little harder to gain that notoriety.

What is the best way for a teacher to promote his or her classroom success stories to the community? It is often said that a picture paints a

thousand words. If that is even half true, the best public relation promotions of classroom success rest in pictures of the students receiving their recognition or participating in class activities. The digital age of cameras and the ease of converting digital pictures to a PDF format allow teachers to electronically send pictures to parents, to the local newspaper, to the yearbook staff, and so forth. There are a variety of ways to involve the community with the school or for the teacher's students to contribute to the community:

< The elementary teachers might invite senior citizens to have lunch with their students as part of "Senior Citizen Day," or they might invite community members to read to a group of students.
< The middle school teachers might have students partake in a citywide community service activity (e.g., food drive, community clean-up event, etc.)
< The high school teachers might assist the community by sponsoring student blood drives or organizing students to help serve as voting judges on Election Day.

The legendary teacher realizes that the community is also an extension of the school. These special teachers lead by example and attempt to make positive contributions to the community for which they serve. In promoting student success to be seen or heard by community members, the legend has indirectly begun the process of winning the community audience for himself or herself. As community members reflect in conversations about their schools and the student successes in their schools, the legendary teacher's name will begin to be synonymous with discussions on student success.

## Conclusions

*"Thank you for sharing those kind words and thoughts about me, as well as the areas I have neglected to see as important to being a good teacher ... even though it was hard to hear," she said (and smiled), as she began to regain her poise and confidence. The principal responded: "Because I see greatness for you in your future, I wanted to impress upon you how imperative it is for you*

*to work toward this goal: 'Winning all the educational audiences!'"*

*With confidence restored, she announced to her principal, "Thank you, I will work hard to achieve that goal." "Indeed you will," he replied with a pleasant smile. "You are on your way to becoming a legend."*

The air traffic controller in the tower has a definite primary responsibility. That primary responsibility is to give his or her full attention to the aircraft about to depart on the runway or the aircraft that is about to arrive. The success of that outgoing or incoming flight is dependent on the skills and knowledge of that particular air traffic controller. However, his or her responsibility does not stop there. The air traffic controller is also keenly aware of his or her secondary responsibilities. Every spare second is used to look at the radar screen while staying in constant contact with planes that are circling the airport. The air traffic controller must be proactive as he or she slows down incoming planes, moves planes to different altitudes if they are closing in on other planes, or radios current weather and wind conditions to assist the pilots. In essence, air traffic controllers do everything they can to communicate with all their audiences so that the passengers on the planes will have a safe and wonderful flying experience. Because they are consistent in their communication, the pilots trust the men or women in the tower.

The same holds true for legendary instructors. Their primary responsibility is to give their full attention to their students in the classroom. Certainly, the learning curve is greatly enhanced for the students if their instructor is highly skilled and knowledgeable in the course content. Like air traffic controllers, they are also keenly aware of their secondary responsibilities. They are not armed with radar or a fancy communication system, but they are armed with the com-monsense knowledge to communicate constantly and consistently with the educational audiences that surround them outside their classroom walls. Trouble and controversy will be adverted when the teacher is able to be proactive in his or her communications. It is imperative that the administrative audience, the peer audience, the non-certified audience, the parent audience, and the community audience be on the commonsense radar of the teacher.

The learning experience for a child will be a wonderful one, just like the flight of passengers on the plane, because the legendary teacher will have

won the trust and respect of all the individuals that he or she comes in contact with in the school and in the community. It is as though a bandage has been prophylactively placed around the teacher who has mastered these communication goals. If a problem arises, the teacher and her program have a cushion or protective shield surrounding them. The integrity that she has earned will tilt opinions to be in her favor. Public support will be there for her as the community, administration, and peers know the good and positive accomplishments of this teacher. The legend has then won the crowd!

# 7

# Understanding Practices
# and Assessments

*The new middle school principal addressed his faculty at the first staff development meeting of the year by sharing the following information: "Over the summer, I had a chance to review the student achievement data from the past three years of the state testing program. To help summarize my findings, I have also prepared a few illustrations, bar graphs, which will clearly show how our students have done in all of the assessed subject areas. The graphs will also compare our test scores to the average test scores of the students across the state.*

*The silence in the room was deafening. The principal continued: "As you can clearly see (as he proceeded to show each bar graph to his staff), there is not one academic subject area in which our students are achieving at or above the state average. We are now on the state academic watch list, and you did not make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) with the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) legislation this past year. He ended his presentation with forceful clarity in each of his carefully chosen words: "Without a doubt, there has been NO TEACHING and NO STUDENT LEARNING going on in this school the past few years!"*

*With the staff development meeting over, faculty members slowly exited the doorway and began their journey back to their respective classrooms. They could all hear the excitement in the children's voices as they passed the main entrance of the building. After all, it was the first day of the school. Isn't everyone happy and excited about the first day of school?*

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Accountability has become the dreaded and feared six-syllable .buzz word that impacts and influences the educational profession today, and it will no doubt continue to hold a death grip on educators for years to come. Are we just a tad bit biased in our description of accountability by stating that it holds a death grip on education? Rather than a direct response to that question, let us first pose a few other questions for you to ponder. "How do you think the staff members, in particular the excellent teachers, felt when their new building principal told them that there had been no teaching and no student learning going on in their school?" Would words like stunned, angry, embarrassed, humiliated, bitter, or the phrase, "How can you already judge us?" come to mind? Better yet, what kind of data must be collected and analyzed before a judicial sentencing of "no student learning" is rendered? Will any kind of data on any given child's test scores be an accurate and true measure of whether the child is actually learning? Will the assessment data gathered from the high-stakes tests be able to help educators accurately predict a child's future, five, ten, or fifteen years from now, on whether he or she will be a success or a failure in school or in life?

We know what you have been thinking: "Enough questions!" It is now time for us to share our wisdom and provide a few answers to all these questions and to discuss how classroom legends handle assessment data and the NCLB mandates.

Oh yes, we have just a few more simplistic questions for you to ponder, as the beginning of this chapter is about to unfold: "Is it possible or even realistic for 'all' students to be making annual improvement in their achievement scores? Will 100% of 'all' the students meet or exceed the state and national standards by the year 2014?" Thanks for being patient. We just had to get those last two questions off our chests!

# Why the Data?

There is a very logical explanation for the collection and analysis of tests scores or assessment data. There is an urgent need for governing bodies to place a score or a value on a child's ability to learn or to measure how much each child has been learning. We are very good at keeping score or a running tally in everything and anything we do, because our culture embraces being the best, or winning. The highest score or number wins. Statisticians enjoy using numbers, too, because numbers are not subjective. Everyone knows and will agree that the number 10 is a larger number than the number 5. However, not everyone will agree on what is the best way to describe happiness. Would you use the word heavenly or joyous, or describe a grin that spreads from ear to ear, or use yet a different word or phrase to describe happiness, such as being alone in a quiet place where you can collect your thoughts or in a crowded area filled with people, noises, and laughter? With all the different combinations of words or phrases, how do you judge or evaluate which one is the best or which one is correct? No more examples are necessary; it should be very clear that it is much easier to grade or score a math problem that has an exact black and white answer than to evaluate a descriptive essay, blended and mixed with gray area that was written by a student in a language arts class. Consequently, it is much easier for legislators, parents, and school administrators to talk in terms of concrete numbers.

There is an old saying that states, "Numbers don't lie." Data, through the use of numbers, allows for a specific lexicon to be established by which everyone can understand the ranking or the percentage level of how well students are achieving or learning in our schools. Schools with the higher numbers or scores on their achievement tests must be better than those with lower numbers. Blue ribbons are awarded and go to the winners, the schools with the higher numbers on the high-stakes test scores, while the non-blue-ribbon schools search for answers to be able to implement plans and strategies to raise their schools' scores. The pressures placed on these low performing schools and their teachers are immense and intense, because America embraces winners!

Consequently, it is not difficult to figure out mathematically the power behind the word *accountability.* If the highest score possible on a high-stakes test is 100, and the average *student score* on that test in the state is 55, who will the parents hold accountable when their child's score is a 30?

If the highest total composite score a school can achieve on a high-stakes test is 100, and the average total composite score of schools across the state is 65, who will the legislators, school board members, administrators, and parents hold accountable when they find out that the school's average score is 40? If you believe that the legislators, school board members, administrators, and parents are going to hold themselves or their children responsible or accountable for their child's or school's low-test scores, then you had better think again.

The legislative clout behind the word accountability really boils down to a nonnegotiable stance based on hard-line data from student scores collected from high-stakes tests. Assessment data was originally intended to be used as a guide or a reference point to assist teachers in helping them establish an accurate baseline score of how their students were learning by using an outside audit, a national or state achievement test. Scores were to be only for the eyes of educators (not for the newspapers) and to be used judiciously when developing action plans to assist students. Unfortunately, annual assessment data has turned into a public relations weapon used to rank and compare student and school achievement. The reporting of scores has turned into a media frenzy as the student and school scores are now being widely used to justify the competence of the classroom teachers as well as each and every school system. The national and state governments, assisted by the local community newspaper editors (who love to share with their readers what is wrong with public education), demand that all children show incremental improvement each year in their test scores. The general public has been indoctrinated into that philosophy, too, by not only making sure that their tax dollars are being spent wisely by school boards and the school administrators, but by also holding the schools and their teachers accountable for their children's academic progress as measured by high-stakes testing.

## Excuses

There often appears in our world today the need to blame someone or to point a finger at someone when achieved results don't align with the anticipated expectations. It also does not take a rocket scientist anytime at all to browse through the local newspaper to see the headlines that point directly to the reported test scores from his or her child's school and to then begin comparing that score to the scores from neighboring schools.

When vocal parents or community members (especially senior citizens) or possibly even school board members begin to question the scores and data that has been reported in the local newspaper or at meetings, you can imagine how the floodgates will open with possible excuses for why their particular school has lower test scores than the neighboring schools. Have you ever heard any of the following comments, sung to the tune of, "The test scores are higher in that school because...."?

"That school teaches to the tests," "That school has more money," "That school has better facilities," "That school has a higher salary scale and can recruit outstanding teachers," "That school has parents that are really concerned about their child's education," "That school has parents who have a lot of money," "That school has a supportive administration," or "That school is located in an upscale, white-collar, professional community." Rarely is a comment made or heard that echoes this sentiment: "That school has better teachers who are committed to their students and pride themselves on delivering educational excellence."

If excuses don't drive the conversations or discussions, then you probably will hear the reassuring voice of reason from the upper echelon of the school district, stating this: "We realize the test scores are not where we would like them to be at this time. We will analyze the data, see where our weak areas are, and dedicate the rest of this school year to address those academic areas that need improvement." Don't these words of wisdom resemble or sound like a mission statement that you see on a wall in the hallway of every school? These words mirror the pronounced action plan: "We are dedicated to providing the best education possible for our students, as we strive each and every year to increase the knowledge and skills of our students, which will allow each student to become a lifelong learner and a productive citizen." If the mission statement of a school has been on the wall for quite sometime, does it take NCLB, a legislative act, to finally get the attention of educators to improve the quality of learning for all students in their respective schools?

Excuses, alibis, or colorful words blended into promises for all to hear at a meeting, or to read in a newspaper, or to see framed on a wall, are not the answers when student assessment data is being examined. The classroom legend has a far better and worldlier perspective on assessment data. His or her talk is not about winning the blue ribbon with the highest test scores but about what teachers value in educating their students as they take the time to study the achievement data. The excellent teachers, the legends, do not need legislation or mission statements to actively pursue educational

excellence. Their mission, which is vested in their values and integrity, is to elevate the skills and knowledge of all of their students each and every year, regardless of whether high-stakes testing is in place.

## Insisting on a Single Profile

One of the keys to a legend's success in handling the NCLB mandates is the ability to put high-stakes testing into proper perspective. Legends do not panic or feel any added stress because of these scores. This healthy perspective on the assessment data defines their educational character as being a true professional. The profile that unmistakably describes a legend, as he or she sifts through all the assessment data, continues to be defined by a single all encompassing question. The legends always ask themselves, "Have I done everything I can for my students?" If they can respond to that question with a "yes," then they will no doubt sleep soundly. If they respond to that question with a "no," then there will be a few restless nights, as their minds will actively think and rethink their lesson plans for the upcoming days. No other descriptors need paint a more detailed profile of a legend. They all have a built-in sixth sense, which fuels their professional pride to constantly work on their teaching strategies and acquire more knowledge, which will in turn elevate the skills and abilities of all of their students. The epitaph for a legend's profile chiseled into his or her tombstone may very well read, "His/Her students were successful because he/she took the time to constantly evaluate and realign lesson plans and instruction to meet each of his/ her student's needs."

## Data Loop

It does not matter what region of our country, whether the compass needle points north, south, east, or west; the location of a school within a state, be it inner city, suburbs, or rural; or the grade level, be it elementary, middle, or high school, educational decisions today are driven by student achievement data and the belief that accountability for that data rests with the educational institutions. In fact, school improvement plans across the country are developed around one universal four-letter word: *data.*

Having to decipher the cryptic meanings of data can be like attempting to find a needle in a haystack, and at times it is even more complex than solving the Da Vinci Code. As you begin this journey of interpreting the numbers, we also pray that you don't encounter "paralysis through analysis" as you scan the assessment data hoping to find that missing link or the final clue that will pinpoint the path for you to take to elevate student scores. Keep in mind that the final path you do select is by far the most critical part of the decision-making process. Even the Cheshire Cat knew the importance of selecting the correct path, and he made it very clear to Alice that it would not matter what path she selected, if she did not know where she wanted to go. This newly discovered path or course of action will channel and consume your valuable educational resources for the upcoming school year. Consequently, you want the chosen path to be the correct path. You want it to be a path that was not determined by chance or random thoughts, but a path that was determined because it was well-marked by the road signs that you found on your journey. It is not a needle that you seek, and it is not a mystery to unravel; rather, the path is selected through an educator's use of his or her empirical and rational wisdom.

Within the inner lining of a legend's mind, there is also an innate data loop that continues to run through a full cycle each and every year. Just as there can be four distinct seasonal changes that occur in the outside world around us, there is a repetitive cycle of reflection that the legend uses when he or she works with assessment data. In fact, the very word, data, can be used as an acronym to one's further understanding of this cyclic loop.

## The Letter [D]: Define

The legend seeks a precise "defined" assessment instrument or instruments that will allow him or her to collect student data. These defined instruments are set in stone and not to be altered or changed from year to year. You can't begin to analyze student data unless you have a clearly defined assessment instrument(s) that you are religiously going to use from year to year.

It is also extremely important that the assessment instruments are defined and selected from two distinct areas. Those two areas of data collection are referred to as external and internal assessments.

An *external* assessment instrument is a test that is designed, administered, and monitored by the national or state testing boards. There is no local control of an external assessment and it serves, as mentioned

earlier in this chapter, as an outside audit to report on student achievement. The external assessment is important because it provides feedback in terms of hard data that cannot be "tweaked" or "manipulated" by an instructor or the school.

These external assessment instruments will vary by grade level, but they may include one of the following:

> < High schools may use the SAT, ACT, AP, PLAN, or PSAT.
> < Middle schools may use the Stanford Achievement Test.
> < Elementary schools may use the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.

Besides a few of the noted examples, the majority of grade levels will have at least one common external assessment to collect and compare the results of achievement data. That common theme throughout the various grade levels is driven by NCLB and is the defined testing instrument used by states in their annual high-stakes testing programs.

An *internal* assessment instrument is a test that is designed, administered, and monitored by an instructor or by the administration of the school. There is local control of an internal instrument, and it serves as an internal audit to also provide feedback on student achievement. The internal assessment is important because it provides feedback in terms of soft data that can be instantly reviewed by classroom teachers and administrators on how well students are performing and learning what is being taught as outlined in the course objectives or by the school curricula.

The internal assessment instruments will once again vary by grade level, but many will include one of the following depending on how advanced a school is in its curriculum development:

> < High schools may use semester exams designed by instructors.
> < Middle schools may use tests provided by textbook publishers.
> < Elementary school may use unit or chapter tests developed by teachers.

In a best-case scenario, schools will have developed criterion-referenced tests (to use as their internal audit or for their soft data) so that each grade-level teacher can assess student learning based on the school's curriculum. The school's curriculum would also be aligned with the high-stakes testing objectives, yet allow the teachers a degree of autonomy to develop lessons that will best fit the needs of all their students.

Whether the internal assessments are defined strictly by criterion-referenced tests or more loosely by semester exams, publisher tests, or unit tests, the legend realizes the importance of having defined assessment instruments that can be used as external and internal audits.

It is possible that external assessment audits will not exist depending on course content or grade level (e.g., physical education, health, chorus, band, music, art, etc.). If that holds true for a particular teacher, then it is important for that teacher to develop a trustworthy and reliable internal assessment audit or multiple internal assessment audits to help assess student learning.

## The Letter [A]: Analyze

The legend will take the time to carefully "analyze" the collected data. To simplify this analysis process and to conserve on the educator's most prized commodity, time, the legendary instructors will seek feedback from the assessment instruments in three specific areas:

1. How did the students or school perform (the number of students that are found in each quadrant) on the external assessment instrument?

   Number of students in the top 25% quadrant

   Number of students in the above-average 25% quadrant

   Number of students in the below-average 25% quadrant

   Number of students in the bottom 25% quadrant

2. How did the students or school perform (the number of students that are found in each quadrant) on the internal assessment instrument?

   Number of students in the top 25% quadrant

   Number of students in the above-average 25% quadrant

   Number of students in the below-average 25% quadrant

   Number of students in the bottom 25% quadrant

3. How does the data from these two instruments *compare* as to the number of students that are found in each quadrant?

   Top 25% quadrant: number of students external _____; number of students internal_____

Above-average 25% quadrant: number of students external _____; number of students internal_____

Below-average 25% quadrant: number of students external _____; number of students internal_____

Bottom 25% quadrant: number of students external _____; number of students internal_____

The feedback of information provided through the comparisons of the external and internal data is a simple and exact process. If the students are performing well on the external assessments and poorly on the internal assessments, or vice versa, the students are performing poorly on the external assessments but doing well on the internal assessments, then the collected data could be viewed as in conflict. A red flag should be hoisted atop the pile of your collected data and a review conducted of the teaching methodology, course objectives, curriculum, pacing charts, and student-teacher standards and expectations. Granted, it is probably not a common practice to find external assessments showing higher student achievement scores than internal assessment instruments (which may be caused by student apathy, poor student-teacher relationships, or a higher degree of difficulty written into course objectives and curriculum), but higher internal test scores will often be found when comparing the collected assessment data (which may point to the need of setting higher teaching standards or student expectations, reviewing what and how material is being covered and taught, or more importantly, ensuring that the curriculum is being aligned to state and national standards with key skills and knowledge being articulated from grade level to grade level).

If a teacher does not have an external assessment instrument, then we suggest that the teacher compare two differently defined internal assessment instruments. The focus on these two internal assessments would be to have one instrument deal with student content mastery and one instrument deal with student content application. The comparison should paint a clear picture of whether the students know the material well enough to be able to apply that knowledge to be problem solvers or critical thinkers. An easy example to illustrate that clear comparison picture would be teaching a child to swim. It is not enough for the student to have demonstrated mastery of the classroom knowledge (book stuff) by receiving a perfect score on a written swimming test covering the various swimming strokes and how to kick and breathe in the water if, once in the

pool, the student sinks like a rock to the bottom. The student must also be able to apply his or her swimming knowledge to be able to swim and not sink to the bottom of the pool.

Once the initial analysis and comparisons of the external and internal assessment data have been completed, the next step in seeking answers for the imbalance between the external and internal data results is best known and described as an item analysis. This is where the instructor reviews the individual test questions (one item or skill set at a time) from both the external and internal assessment instruments. Knowing exactly what each assessment covers in content and what the standards of expectations are for student mastery, the teacher will have a far greater understanding of what the data is pinpointing as to the exact skills or content knowledge that the students have not yet mastered.

This careful and detailed data analysis is not an admission that teachers should teach to the tests so that there is perfect or near perfect alignment in the comparisons of external and internal data or that the data shapes and forms the perfect bell curve, but teachers should certainly be aware of the political pressures and ramifications that abound due to reported and analyzed student achievement scores throughout the educational community. Teachers cannot bury their heads in the sand and pretend to live in their own little world, a sanctuary they have created for themselves and their students with their four classroom walls providing protection from the outside world. They must at all times be aware of the direction they are taking to improve student learning. Decisions today, tomorrow, and in the future are and will be driven by data. The legend, therefore, not only interprets data to improve teaching and student learning, but he or she also points out the weak areas in student achievement so that school improvement plans can be developed and implemented to increase student and school test scores.

## The Letter [T]: Track

It is keeping track of the student data results from year to year that continues to fuel the perpetual feedback or data loop for the classroom legend. Once again, there is never a need for added stress, to panic, or to become upset over any given year's assessment results, because the legend looks for significant upward or downward trends over a period of time in the data. No single year of test results should ever immediately signal success or failure in student learning. There will always be spikes and

valleys with any given tested group or class of students from year to year. In fact, the smaller the group of students that is tested the more likely that the test results will be skewed one direction or the other. The key in tracking the trends is to first establish a baseline student achievement score or a baseline number of students that will be located or ranked in each of the four quadrants of student performance.

The authors recommend the following formula for establishing a baseline score. It should be determined by mathematically averaging three consecutive years of collected data. It is not really until the fourth year of testing, where you can compare those fourth-year test results to the baseline average, that one can truly attempt to begin looking for a trend that may be developing in the student achievement scores.

It is also *imperative* that the defined external and internal assessments not be changed or altered during this period of time. This often becomes a point of frustration for teachers as the external and internal testing instruments that they are using always seem to be in a constant state of evolution. For true accuracy and meaning, you have to be able to average and compare the results from the same assessment instruments. You cannot average oranges and apples together and hope to have significant findings or draw purposeful conclusions. You have to average and compare apples with apples for the assessment data to reveal accurate or meaningful information.

To help keep comparisons and tracking in a simple format, the legend creates a simple line graph for his or her record keeping and plots dots, with each dot indicating the average student achievement, or a bar graph to represent the percentage of students in each of the four achievement level quadrants.

The graphs in Figures 7.1a and 7.1b illustrate two ways to visually and easily track student data.

**Figure 7.1a** Yearly Comparisons of Student Achievement Using a Simple Percentage Line Graph

Student achievement data "average score" for each year.
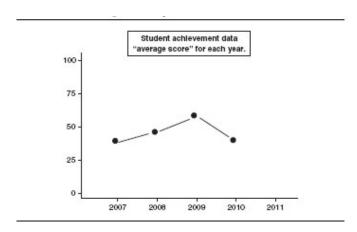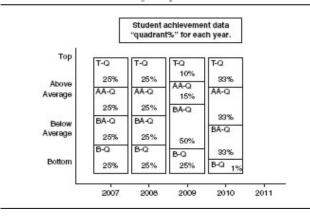
**Figure 7.1b** Yearly Comparisons of Student Achievement Using a Quadrant Percentage Graph Table



Student achievement data "quadrant%" for each year.

How might you respond to the following data summaries?

1. The three-year average for student achievement scores was a 65, and in the fourth year the score was a 64—or the score was a 35—or the score was a 73.

2. The three-year average student achievement score for a particular school was at the 65th percentile, and in the fourth year the school ranked in the 62nd percentile—or ranked in the 40th percentile—or ranked in the 80th percentile.

3. The three-year average of student scores placed 100% of the tested students equally into each of the four quadrants (each quadrant contained 25% of the students), and in the fourth year the top quadrant dropped to having only 10% of the tested students in it—or the top three quadrants now had 33% of the students and no students were in the bottom quadrant—or all 100% of the students dropped into the bottom two quadrants and no students were located in the top two quadrants.

All three examples (individual student scores, a school-student achievement percentile score, or a percentage ranking of students in one of the four quadrants) exhibit the three most common and most useful interpretations of student data. Either the fourth year of compared and analyzed results show no significant gain or loss in student achievement, or the results show a significant drop in student achievement, or the results show a significant increase in student achievement.

The emotions from the majority of teachers as they study the results parallel those findings, with either a shrug of their shoulders (and thinking to themselves—despite our hard work and efforts, we stayed about the same this year), or tears (and thinking again—we worked so hard and the scores fell off the table), or jubilation (and thinking once again—our hard work paid off, as our student scores skyrocketed). While all these emotions to varying degrees ring true for all educators, the legend is able to quickly synthesize the results and then put the world of data in proper perspective. These special teachers already know that they have worked hard and have put their hearts and souls into their lesson planning and teaching. Their emotions are not stoic, as they certainly take great pride if the data climbs upward. They also know that it does not matter if the data stayed about the same or dropped, for either of those two data feedback summaries sends an immediate impulse to their professional pride. They immediately begin their quest to research or seek out better practices to continue to improve and enhance the concept of building mastery learning of the skills and knowledge necessary to move the scores upward for all of their students.

Legends enjoy comparing their student's scores to the highest standards set by the state or the nation for students to achieve. Their student scores are viewed as an affirmation of their successful instructional abilities. They strive and expect to hit the bulls'-eye of the student achievement targets for all of their students with their teaching.

## The Letter [A]: Attain

It is this last letter, "A," representing the word *attain,* that clearly separates the legend from the majority of his or her peers. The ability for the legend to set realistic or reasonable goals that his or her students will be able to "attain" each year allows, once again, the legend to always keep a proper perspective on the pressures that seem to continue to mount with the NCLB mandates.

Is this realistic? Is it reasonable? Those words are not often found in the NCLB equation of setting high standards and expectations for student mastery of content and skills. Legends respond with their own equations based on data-driven decisions that best fit the learning formula for each of their students. The components of the legend's formula are found in the following questions: Where are each of my students now in regard to mastering the necessary content and skills? Where can I take them (to what level of mastery) "realistically" or "reasonably" over the next several months? Or, where can I take them over this year or over the next few years? After all, who knows the individual abilities (strengths and weaknesses) of each individual student "best" in any school across America: the legislators in the federal government who make laws from afar and have probably never set foot into a classroom, or the classroom teachers who see their children's faces each and every day as they interact and engage all of them in learning activities?

To further illustrate the concept of attainable (realistic and reasonable), ponder the following hypothetical objectives: Should a high school physical education teacher expect every child to be able to dunk a basketball by the end of their junior year in high school? Why not? Should a middle school math teacher expect every child to be able to understand perfectly all the math concepts taught in his or her Algebra I class? Why not? Should an elementary teacher expect every child to get a perfect paper on every spelling test? Why not? Is it absurd to have such expectations and standards? Yes, because we all know that those hypothetical objectives are not realistic or reasonable for all students to attain. Yet, it is realistic and reasonable to expect an instructor to study the collected data from the previous years, interact with his or her students to see where students currently stand in their mastery of grade-level skills and content, and then be able to set realistic and reasonable standards and expectations that will move students closer to achieving the target goals by the end of the course, the semester, or the school year.

However, didn't the administrator at the beginning of this chapter tell his staff that the data clearly showed that no learning had taken place as the school failed to make AYP? Yes, but didn't we say that a legend is able to keep student scores, the collected data, in proper perspective? The answer to this is yes as well.

Although instructors can be disappointed from time to time with student progress, as measured from any given assessment instrument, the legendary teacher remains steadfast in his or her principles. Legends know

deep down in their hearts and souls that they can hold onto one sacred and holy belief. That divine belief is that they have put forth monumental effort in their instructional lessons each and every day to positively impact the learning for each and every one of their students.

## Falling Through the Cracks

Unfortunately, the main focus of assessment instruments is to accurately measure the academic progress of students in only specifically selected tested areas of the core academic subjects (reading, writing, math, science, and social science). The tests are also under the premise that all students will follow a similar course selection pattern throughout all their years in school. That pattern of course selections (to achieve high test scores) would be for each child to take the most rigorous and demanding core courses, along with having for teachers those instructors who align their standards and expectations to the similar demands of those course curriculums.

What do you think the odds are for each and every child to be able to have that type of course selection or be able to have only those special kinds of teachers throughout their entire schooling? You're right; the chances are slim to none.

Does this mean that the educational system is flawed to some degree? Maybe. There will always be students and teachers who will fall through the cracks of our current educational system. For example, if the assessment instruments directly test only core subject areas, then how important are the noncore teachers? How do these teachers fit into the data-driven, decision-making process of high-stakes testing? If you have that question figured out, then how does the collected test data impact school improvement plans for legendary teachers who work with special needs students, or gifted students, or ESL students?

## Noncore Teachers

It is often difficult to be an elementary physical education teacher, a middle school music instructor, or a high school vocational family and consumer science teacher when it comes time to analyze the testing data. Selecting external assessment instruments is difficult at best, so most noncore teachers must develop sophisticated internal assessment instruments that measure their particular content area with a direct link in their internal assessments to assist the core subject area teachers. The direct

link that the noncore teachers have with the tested core curriculum is in three specific areas: reading, writing, and arithmetic. The legendary noncore teachers take the time to enrich the math, reading, and writing skills within their content or subject area.

"But, I'm not a reading teacher!" Does this sound familiar when reading across the curriculum is discussed at a faculty meeting? The same holds true when instructors also cry out loud, "I can't even balance my own checkbook and you want me to teach some math?" or "No one has ever been able to read my handwriting and you want me to help the children learn to write?" Excuses, excuses, excuses! Remember, we are not talking about ordinary or average teachers; we are talking about legends, who are the extraordinary and master instructors. They *always* find or make the time. The key point to remember in the last sentence is "find or make the time." The legends not only pride themselves with their expertise in their content area, they are not afraid to ask other teachers what they might add to their lessons to assist or enhance the most basic and fundamental skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic.

No matter what the grade level or the content area, the gifted non-core teachers are always building a student's vocabulary, assigning outside reading, and holding the students accountable for having read the assigned reading. They make students write in journals, do written reports, and have them reflect in writing what their opinions are by using a variety of prompts and topics. Students are also asked to work with numbers by making charts and graphs, if for no other reason than to plot grades, attendance, their tasks, or chores. The legendary noncore teachers not only build through their curriculum and course contents a more balanced and well-rounded student, they also enhance the student's skills in reading, writing, and math that are externally assessed via the high-stakes testing programs.

## Special Needs, Gifted, ESL Instructors

Before we talk about the teachers who work with the special needs, gifted, or ESL students, there is an important unwavering reality that must *never* be overlooked when working with these types of students. That reality is this: it is *not* the student's fault that they have a learning disability and may never attain academic mastery in a subject area, or that they are gifted in an academic area and might not fit in with the normal student population, or

that they come to school not being able to speak a word of English. With that reality point being stated, the legendary teachers who work with these special students still find ways to positively impact their students' lives. Their success formula in working with these students consists of the following components:

< They do not make excuses for the students' academic abilities.
< They set "attainable" goals that they expect these students to reach.
< They work with regular education instructors (especially if there is a team approach or Regular Education Initiative [REI] inclusion) to ensure that proper modifications or adaptations are put in place. The reverse is also true, as regular legendary classroom teachers will always work hard to collaborate and professionally respect the opinions and the instructional strategies that the special needs instructors advise will best meet the needs of these students.

In short, the legendary teachers in the specialty areas expect their students to show improvement and improve their knowledge and skills in their classrooms. No student gets a free pass; all their students are expected to learn. If you were to walk into one of their classroom settings, your first impression would most likely be the same as in any other classroom setting. The teacher would be teaching and the students would be engaged in learning.

## Conclusions

In solving a geometry proof, a student quickly learns to first list the information that is "given." In the world of education, teachers quickly learn that it is a "given" that decisions are going to be made in their school by the information "data" that paint the picture on how well students did on their high-stakes achievement tests. Consequently, the test scores do have significance and meaning. The high-stakes tests cannot be ignored; they are a reality, and the educational profession has to deal with it.

Although we are told and expected to be convinced that numbers "data" does not lie, a legendary instructor can put the reported results in a proper and professional perspective. True, the outstanding teachers see the reported scores like everyone else and react with a range of emotions from exhilaration to disappointment. But, they never belabor the documented

results. A much higher mission in their lives than the reported test scores drives classroom legends no matter their subject area or the academic ability level of their students. Since we have devoted this chapter to numbers "data," it would only be fitting to describe the higher mission of a legendary teacher by using numbers.

As children enter school each year, an assigned numerical level of knowledge or abilities that each child has already mastered enters with each of them on that first day of school. Aubrey might be at a level 20, Wills might be at a level 26, and David might be at a level 40. There is no upward numerical limit or ceiling to any child's skills or abilities, but there is a bottom or basement numerical level, that being a zero. If the high-stakes tests say that all students need to be at a level of 50 by the end of the year to make AYP, and Aubrey moves to a level of 36, Wills to a level of 41, and David to a level of 49, does that mean that their teacher or the educational process in that school was a failure? What if Aubrey only improved to the level of 21, Wills to the level of 26.5, and David stayed at the same level of 40? Would your opinion change, too, if you knew that Aubrey, Wills, and David were average students, special needs students, gifted students, or ESL students? Does the numbers "data" always paint the true picture of whether the child is learning, a teacher is teaching, or the school is not concerned with student achievement/learning?

Success in mission for a legend is not a numbered level of a student learning hierarchy; rather, success in mission to a legend is to have made a positive difference in each child's knowledge, skills, and life. Legends are driven by an internal flame of desire and passion to ensure that each and every child is moving forward and making progress.

Classroom legends do not waiver from their fundamental belief that they *will* make a positive difference in the life of each and every child.

# 8

# Motivation

*The no-nonsense, seasoned college professor was just about to finish his lecture on the importance of creating rubrics for establishing grading guidelines on student assignments to a bored, not too enthused or keenly interested group of soon to be student teachers, when he paused from his deadpan banter and abruptly changed his focus with this unexpected statement of practical "foreign" advice: "Actually," the tenor of his voice surprisingly changed to one of a fatherly tone, "the only problem that you will constantly encounter during your teaching careers will be your challenge to motivate and then to keep all of your students motivated to put forth their best efforts with their daily academic work."*

*As those words began to sink in and, for a change, actually register in their young minds, a lone hand slowly crept upward to question the professor. "Professor," the young lady waivered ever so slightly as her voice began to crack, "what would you suggest or what do you believe motivates students?" Her confidence began to strengthen as she quickly fired off another question: "Or, what advice can you give us on motivation before we start our student teaching assignments?" Clearly, the student's questions had brought all of her classmates out of their state of*

*slumber, as all eyes and ears now turned toward and zeroed in on the professor.*

*There was a brief moment of silent awkwardness as the professor broke all eye contact with the class; instead of answering the questions, he gathered his lecture notes and put them in his briefcase. The closing of his briefcase snaps broke the silence in the classroom. The professor then looked up and peered over his glasses as his eyes surveyed the class. His response had a demeaning, almost combatant attitude, as he began to answer the student's questions. "My job, as your college professor, is to prepare you and to point out for you the problems you will face and encounter as future teachers." He continued, "Your job will be to find the answers and the solutions to those problems." As those sentences froze the expressions of uncertainty and fear on the student's faces, the professor picked up his briefcase, and as he was about to quickly exit through the classroom door, he looked back toward the class and firmly announced, "Class dismissed!"*

———————————

**I**n all educational circles of discourse yesterday, today, tomorrow, and no doubt into the distant future, the most elusive, yet most sought after and talked about instructional strategy, is the key that will forever unlock the door to student motivation. Did the college professor fail to address the questions because he, himself, had not yet mastered the art of student motivation, and he had no clue or knowledge as to what the universal key was that would unlock the riddles and mysteries of student motivation? Or, was he really a wise old sage and knew that there will never be one pure motivational strategy or instructional method that would work each and every time for all students? Or maybe, just maybe, did his past experiences teach him that each and every teacher would have to create his or her own personal motivational formula or strategy, unique to his or her own persona and style of instruction? And, once they discovered their winning formulas, would it work from year to year or would they have to be flexible and

willing to adjust their formulas to meet the ever-changing needs of their students?

Does a secret motivational formula exist that will bring out the best in every student? Or is a universal motivational formula a hoax at best, much like the marketing jingle—one size fits all?

## Wondering? Perplexed? Anxious? Confused?

If the answer to successful student motivation were simplistic, there would not be an industry of motivational speakers and inspirational books to offer thoughts and ideas for educators to use in their classrooms. And, it is our opinion that all of the speakers and books that make their way into your school or onto your bookshelves do not spend enough time on the key fundamental concept in developing a successful motivational formula. That key concept or variable is YOU, the classroom teacher. The phrase, students are not motivated to learn, is actually contradictory to the root of the motivational problem. The major emphasis for motivating students should not first be placed on the students. Student motivation should be restated or rephrased to this: The best classroom instructors, legends, are self-motivated and passionately driven to seek and find ways to motivate and bring out the very best in each and every one of their students.

Common sense would dictate that there will never be one single award-winning motivational formula that every teacher can use that will work 100% of the time with every student. Even the legendary teachers have to tweak, add, or delete variables in their formulas from time to time depending on the students or the context that surrounds the learning assignments or projects. What is important to share in this chapter are the basic and fundamental motivational tools that legendary teachers have at their disposal. These special teachers have an array of strategies that they can turn to and implement at any time depending on the child, class, or situation, to ensure that they are doing everything possible to bring their students up to a higher standard than was ever thought to be possible.

However, before we begin our motivational variables discussion, it would be remiss to not address the all too present debate on the two dominant types of motivation: external versus intrinsic motivation.

For the sake of simplicity, external motivation is viewed as a reward system. The teacher promises a reward if the student performs the expected behavior or task. Intrinsic motivation is viewed as the inner desire of students to be able to self-motivate themselves. Without question, the ultimate motivational victory for all teachers would be to have a class full of students with a burning inner desire to excel in their academic work. However, it would be foolish for even a legend to disregard any means of motivation, as many teachers begin their motivational formulas and continue throughout their teaching careers to use an external motivational variable or two. In fact, the entire educational culture appears to a large degree to embrace external motivators by using weighted grading systems for more difficult courses at the high school level, displaying photos of "student of the week" in the hallways at the middle school level, or drawing names for perfect attendance prizes at the elementary level. External motivators permeate our society, too. Our most decorated and famous athletes and teams all shout that they are going to Disneyland after winning a championship. It is difficult at best not to be drawn into and overwhelmed by the world of external motivators. It should, however, be noted from the onset that our point of view is that external motivation in and of itself can be at times problematic.

# External Motivation

## External Motivation Problem 1

External rewards that flood the known classroom markets today— such as gold stars, stickers, candy, free days, movie coupons, and extra credit—are without question fun and enjoyable ways for students to be motivated and excited to earn. However, this type of motivation is not a permanent, lifelong student motivator. These types of motivators can build or lead to a dependency on rewards for effort, and they lead to the sometimes sad student question, "What do I get if I do my assignment?" This reward-based motivation does not develop into a lasting intrinsic motivation. It does not alter or create the child's attitude or work ethic that underlies the correct student behaviors and habits toward self-initiated learning. Rather, the external rewards system creates a pseudoconnection between student effort and results. Learning, unfortunately, finishes second to getting the

promised reward. The legend reverses the position of learning, to that of the highest level, by promoting learning and obtaining knowledge as the greatest reward.

## External Motivation Problem 2

As stated in problem 1, children of all ages often become more and more interested in the reward than they do about learning the appropriate course content or skills. Students appear to always want their ideal cyclic utopia of how learning should take place in school: work/get a reward, work/get a reward, work/get a reward, and the concept of self-motivation by the student is never conceptualized, as motivation never becomes an internalized habit or a characteristic student trait.

We hear the rebuttal that if there is no intrinsic motivation, external motivation is the only answer or solution to getting a student to comply with the educational task. Legends counter that statement as they feel it is their duty to help those children make the connection between what seems like an irrelevant task to complete, to something that is meaningful and applicable to their world, the big picture of their lives now and in the future. It is this desire to excel and to learn that the legend burns into the inner realms of their students' minds that creates the excitement and the habit of wanting to be a lifelong learner.

## External Motivation Problem 3

There are also many educators that strongly view external rewards as no more than a bribe. If teachers bribe children with external rewards to do their school assignments, then what is that saying about the assignments or activities that the teacher is assigning the students to do? Does a so-called bribe undermine the ultimate goal of wanting students to be self-motivated? Does it relay the impression to the student that the activity in and of itself is not important enough to be done without a promised reward? What happens when there is no one or nothing left to reward the students with to motivate them externally? Society, as a whole, has already learned to hold one hand out to get something of value for nothing, as if it were owed to us for being part of the human race. The legend teaches a higher moral value to his or her students by having them dig in with their own hands and to reap the benefits from their own personal efforts and desires.

## External Motivation Problem 4

Parents have related time and time again that their use of external rewards at home (dollar amounts for making the honor roll, having friends stay over, extending curfews, etc.) do not propagate continued appropriate behavior. These children, having been exposed to an overabundance of external rewards, are reportedly less generous and no more intrinsically motivated because of these rewards. These children are also far less likely to instigate any kind of activity that would benefit the welfare of others. The external rewards also help to perpetuate the "me society." If there is nothing in it for me, then I am not interested. The child will always have a tendency to think of themselves first. The legend models the role of being a servant-like teacher, by extending himself or herself above and beyond the normal expectations to make a difference in the lives of his or her students.

## External Motivation Problem 5

Last, external rewards can easily be viewed as teachers controlling and manipulating their students. By promising an external pleasure for a certain type of achievement or punishment (an aggressive and sometimes threatening style of motivation) for the lack of accomplishment or achievement, teachers are essentially controlling the minds of their students by painting the picture of the reward or punishment to be far greater than the acquisition of knowledge. And, if the reward turns instead to a punishment, does a teacher have to double the reward to motivate the students in the future? Or, will the students be willing to risk ever trying again if a punishment looms for not obtaining a desired result? It could also be easily argued that students' creative thinking skills and the ability for them to think and reason on their own will be diminished if they work for a reward as opposed to working toward accomplishing the task at hand. A legend always keeps a positive outlook and encourages students to find pride in themselves by the quality of their finished work.

## Intrinsic Motivation

So the question becomes this: "How do legends increase the intrinsic motivation of their students?"

To better understand the inner belief and value system of a child, one must first understand that most children view the ability to have or to achieve success in school as a result of one of two mutually exclusive factors:

1. Their own natural ability or talent.

2. Their ability to put in the time and effort to dedicate themselves to study and learn.

Unfortunately, all children have acquired a bad habit in always comparing themselves to other children. Without question, they always compare traits and characteristics that they don't have to children who have those traits and characteristics. It is almost a self-imposed, self-esteem setback for students, when they tell themselves that they can't be as good as the children that sit next to them in class because those children have more natural ability and talent or they work harder.

Knowing foremost that most students have a built-in default mechanism reply of, "I can't ...because so and so is better at it than I am," teachers must learn to avoid certain actions, statements, or strategies that can also further damage their students' self-image, which slows or completely halts the development of a child's intrinsic motivation. To be more specific, the following actions or strategies destroy the development of a child's intrinsic motivation and should be viewed as a "Top 10" list of things ***never*** to do when working with students in a classroom setting:

1. Value compliance over all else.

2. Value control and power over all else.

3. Devalue effort in the face of success.

4. Humiliate or embarrass students.

5. Appear indifferent to students' feelings and needs.

6. Reveal your biases or play favorites.

7. Distance yourself from your students' progress.

8. Change the rules.

9. Refuse to admit that you are wrong; teachers make mistakes, too.

10. Demean what is valued by your students.

It would be difficult at best to employ instructional strategies that would demand more effort from the child, or to make the child feel comfortable in using decision-making strategies, or for the child to prefer more challenging tasks, if the teacher constantly used any or all of these "Top 10" things never to do in a classroom. Even external motivators would cease to work in this kind of a combatant, dictatorial type of classroom environment.

Thus the basic fundamental question becomes this: "How do we increase the intrinsic motivation of our students?" The answer is simple: *"We (you, the teacher) meet their needs!"* Successful classrooms come from intrinsically motivated students, and students become intrinsically motivated when their essential needs are met. The five fundamental needs that are essential for teachers to foster and nurture growth in their students are listed here:

1. *Successful*—Students have the need to develop an increasingly positive self-image. Students must find or have success in your classroom.

2. *Knowledgeable*—Students have a need to know more about their world. Students must learn information and skills that they can apply to their world.

3. *Creative*—Students have a need to express themselves. Students must be able to have the freedom to be creative in their learning.

4. *Loved*—Students have a need to develop meaningful relationships with peers. Students must be able to feel personally connected with their peers.

5. *Responsible*—Students have a need to make meaningful contributions to their world. Students must have a sense of being able to contribute to their school and community.

These essential needs may only be met when there exists two realities in the classroom:

1. A pervasive attitude of trust permeates interactions between the student and teacher.

2. All instructional activities in the classroom are charged with value.

The first step then is trust. Trust in *you,* the teacher, and trust in the safety *you* provide all the students in your individual classrooms.

## Intrinsic Motivational Variable 1: Teacher-Student Relationships

In an earlier chapter, we discussed the importance of one's personality and how classroom legends use their persona to passionately engage and interact with their students to generate and bring excitement into the learning process. However, what we did not emphasize at that time was the importance and the ability of legends to create a safe learning harbor in their classrooms by developing respectful and trusting relationships with each of their students.

From the first day that the students enter their classrooms in the fall to the day the students depart in the spring or at the end of the quarter or semester, legendary teachers constantly work and strive to build strong positive interpersonal relationships with their students. These relationships are built on the premise that all students feel safe, protected, and personally respected by their teachers each and every day. The students do not have to worry about being embarrassed in front of their peers, making a mistake, taking a risk, feeling picked on, feeling ignored, feeling pressured, feeling isolated, or being asked to do something without the full support and helpful assistance from their teacher. The students quickly learn to respect and trust the legend because they know that through his or her professional actions (being a role model to all), the teacher keeps the students' best interests at heart. Legends are not only kind, compassionate, and generous with their time commitments to assist the students, but they gain the respect and trust from those students through their consistent willingness to display a warm smile, to have a sparkle in their eye, or to show a genuine love and understanding of keeping their instructional focus clear: "Do what is necessary to make the classroom setting a contagious educational experience each and every day, where learning is viewed as fun and is constantly an engaging process."

It is this sense and feeling of interpersonal connectedness that the students have with these life-touching instructors that is the initial or beginning stage of laying the foundation for intrinsically motivated students. The students do not want to disappoint someone who cares so

deeply about them. Most importantly, it is solely up to the teacher to develop this trusting and everlasting positive interaction.

Earlier, we listed the "Top 10" things to never do in the classroom. We now submit the "Top 10" list of things that ***must*** be done in the classroom. Remember, it is a teacher's *attitude* that appears to encourage trust by students and thereby increases intrinsic motivation:

1. Establish a caring, cooperative learning environment. This is essential to fostering intrinsic motivation.

2. Demonstrate quickly that there are no favorites in the class; your room is marked by impartiality and fairness.

3. Avoid demeaning comments. Many students are anxious about their performance and abilities. Be sensitive how you phrase comments and avoid offhand remarks that might prick their feelings of inadequacy. Good teachers never use sarcasm.

4. Be enthusiastic about your subject and never tell them you find the content boring.

5. Be seen as an advocate and part of the team's success and failure.

6. Know your students as people before you know them as students.

7. Work harder than they do and longer than they do. Always make or find the time to be available for them.

8. Hold high but realistic expectations for your students. If you act as though you expect your students to be motivated, hardworking, and interested in the course, they are more likely to be so.

9. Be honest about everything.

10. Become familiar with the tenets of TESA.

A new list begins with the author's "Top 5" things to ***avoid*** when engendering an atmosphere of trust in the classroom:

1. Providing answers when you give help. Give help on how to determine the answer, but don't give the answer.

2. Stagnating—vary your teaching methods. Variety reawakens students' involvement in the course and their motivation. Incorporate a variety of teaching activities and methods: role playing, debates,

brainstorming, discussion groups, demonstrations, case studies, audiovisual presentations, guest speakers, and so forth.

3. Creating intense competition among students. Competition produces anxiety which can interfere with learning. Reduce students' tendencies to compare themselves to one another.

4. Providing messages that reinforce your power as an instructor or emphasize external rewards. Avoid teaching by threats.

5. Being disorganized with lesson development and assignments, as well as showing little or no interest in students learning the subject matter.

## Intrinsic Motivational Variable 2: Classroom Success

If you have heard it once, you have probably heard these statements a thousand times from your students: "I give up!" "What is the use, I am already failing!" "I quit!" Statements or exclamations with that degree of frustration, uttered by struggling students, should be a direct wake-up call to any teacher worth his or her grain of salt. There can be no stronger direct feedback cry from a student to a teacher that the student's learning has completely shut down, been temporarily halted, or at the very least come to an impasse, than the verbal outcry of this: "I don't care anymore, and I no longer want to try!"

If motivating this student is going to be the antidote for this desperate cry for assistance or attention, then only one word can truly fit as the sole variable needed in this motivational formula to assist this kind of student: *hope!* We're not talking about a false hope, but a sincere expression of hope by the teacher (e.g., a little extra work, encouraging words to keep trying, additional help before and after school, or compassion for the situation or timing of the student's heartache). What seems to be impossible for this student at this point in time in his or her own individual learning process can still be accomplished, completed, or mastered. The student can still save his or her dignity if the teacher intervenes to turn a potentially negative or failing outcome into a positive or passing one.

This intervention is very similar to a magician's sleight of hand trick that all classroom legends have up their sleeves. To accomplish this trick, legends are to a certain degree flexible and willing to slightly bend the assignment, time frame or due date, assessment, and so forth, in order for

the unexpected to materialize right before the student's eyes. (This is not to be confused with changing the rules; rather, it is to be viewed as an instructional adjustment that allows student learning to still take place.) Just as a magician can pull a rabbit out of a hat, the legend can be quick to put another learning plan of action or instructional strategy in place when roadblocks or obstacles need to be minimized or removed so that the students do not jump ship, and so that they can still obtain a feeling of success or accomplishment.

The legend ensures safe passage on his or her instructional voyage with a consistent and nonwavering understanding that there is always hope. The motivational motto inscribed on the front of the teacher's desk proclaims this to be true as it states in big bold letters, "One should never, ever, give up!"

## Intrinsic Motivational Variable 3: Taking Away the Excuses

There is a parent-teacher conference that takes place at least once in an instructor's educational career where an angry or upset parent will use this conference time to accusatorily point or shake a finger toward a teacher or two. The cause of this anger is almost always directed solely at the teacher for two common reasons or perceptions that all parents have embedded in their minds about teachers in general: their son or daughter is failing or doing poorly in the class because the teacher does not like the child or because the teacher will not help the child.

The cause of this perceived dislike or lack of help can be described in various formats: the teacher moves too quickly through the material, the teacher does not respond to student questions, the teacher won't take the time to assist the student before or after school, the course material is too difficult, the tests are too hard, the teacher yells, the teacher is negative, and so forth; the list, as you can imagine, is endless. As you nod your head in agreement or a smirk as what we just wrote begins to surface into your conscious thought, feel free to shout out loud a few more of your favorite descriptors or phrases that parents say. Keep in mind that if any or all of these words of assassination were true, it would certainly reverse any possible learning from taking place in this teacher's classroom or hinder the educational growth of this particular child for years to come.

To lessen the intensity of these infamous parental battles or encounters and to set high legendary standards of instructional integrity and purposeful learning, the legend carefully and strategically motivates his or her students by unveiling his or her own personal "help plan" for high student achievement. This help plan is a step-by-step countermeasure to all the known accusations that follow the finger shaking and finger pointing at conference time. There is not a single legendary instructor who does not have a proactive motivational help plan in place that takes away the excuses of the parents and their children. This help plan goes hand in hand with building trusting and lasting relationships as well as laying the foundation of hope that is necessary when all else appears to be failing. Although motivational help plans vary from teacher to teacher, as they would from grade level to grade level, the following list highlights seven common themes that legendary teachers have or attempt to incorporate into their help plans:

1. Weekly communications to students and parents as to the current grade or progress of each student.

2. Weekly or monthly calendars that show when tests, assessments, or major projects will be given or due dates.

3. Set times of the week before or after school when special help sessions will be available to students.

4. Review sheets, reading guides, vocabulary words, spelling lists, and so forth made available to students or parents requesting materials or to be distributed to the class at the beginning of each week.

5. Written reminders on the chalk or marker boards as to the best time to talk or meet for additional help during the day.

6. Safety nets created for and distributed to students to assist them in their learning. This could range from reading guides, flash cards, color-coded notes to signify the most important material or content, practice tests, special times to help with makeup work from absences, and so forth.

7. Areas in the classroom where students can find enrichment or remediation work.

The bottom line to each legend's help plan is to put an end to student and parent excuses. If you hear an excuse, you must figure out the best possible

solution and include that solution into your help plan. Because you have outlined this help plan for the student and explained it to the parents, you have put much of the responsibility for success back on the student, whether the mom, dad, or the student realizes it. You are in essence telling the family that if your help plan is followed, the student will succeed. This act of placing responsibility on the student (with your help plan) alleviates the blame and excuses that are heard at parent-teacher conferences. This forces the student to look inward for work completion and effort. It is covertly an overwhelmingly and extremely motivating experience for that particular student, because no one ever wants the monkey (the blame or the responsibility) on their shoulders for failing. Students will almost always motivate themselves so as not to own the monkey, especially when a help plan has been laid out in which they are accountable and their parents are aware and involved in the learning process.

Yes, the extra effort by the teacher in putting together and orchestrating a help plan is a great deal of additional work. However, keep in mind that we are describing the variables of what the best of the best do to help create intrinsically motivated students.

# Intrinsic Motivational Variable 4: Assessments and Grading

Although remedies appear to be elusive at times for short- or long-term cures for student success in schools, a teacher's personal grading and assessment process is often one area that needs to be explored or reviewed. Is it possible that your personal grading or assessment system sets your students up for failure? To make matters worse, most teachers are unaware that their grading or assessment system might not be fair. A few examples will clearly illustrate common problems with grading.

## Closed Versus Open Grading-Point System

Although there are merits and sound reasoning for using both grading systems, in this chapter we are only concerned with ideas and thoughts on motivating students. A closed grading-point system rigidly outlines for the students, at the very beginning of a course or class, the assignments and their point totals. There is a preset total amount of points that can be earned or obtained. To keep the point system and this example simple, the students in this class will have five assignments, and they can earn a total of 100

points (20 points per assignment). If a student is now into the second month of a semester class, or seven months into a yearly class, and this student has earned 40 points to date with only 20 more earnable points possible, the student already knows that he or she will fail if 60 points (60% = failing grade) is the highest point total that can be achieved. Why on earth would a student put forth effort if the best that can be hoped for is a letter grade of F? Better yet, how about if the teacher states, in the second week of the quarterly class, that the project the students just handed in was worth 50% of their final grade? How motivating is that for a student who does poorly on that first project?

In an open grading system, flexibility exists in the course outline. The teacher does not lock in the number of assignments or the final point totals at the beginning of the course or class. This system is open and remains open for two very important reasons. First, the teacher has the flexibility to add assignments or projects (that sleight of hand magician's trick), and second, it sustains hope (that powerful motivating word) for the students that there is still time to master or be successful in the class. Better yet, how about if the teacher states, in the second week of the quarterly class, that the projects the students just handed in were poorly done, and then says this: "I want you to understand this concept, so I have decided to add another project for you to tackle that is very similar to the last one you completed"? Which point system favors student motivation? Which point system would students favor? Which point system do you have?

## Point Values on Assessments

How many times have you heard a teacher, possibly even yourself, state, "Take out a sheet of paper and number from one to five; it is time for a pop quiz"? Five-point quizzes or five-point assignments are common standards, almost considred to be a staple in the realm of daily or weekly student assessment. Is there a problem with a five-point assessment, or how about a ten-point quiz? The answer is yes. There is a point or percentage range value that is missing when calculating a student's grade that long term could possibly impact a student's final grade or the degree of a student finding success in your class. If a student gets four out of five answers correct, he or she is only awarded 80% of the points. A student receiving a score of nine out of ten is only receiving 90% of the possible points. On those two assessments, the only way a student can earn an A is to have a perfect paper! Not only that, a letter grade of B is not even possible on an assignment worth only five points. Even the famous bell curve would be

hard pressed to validate a range of scores if the letter grade of B was void or missing!

When setting up an assessment or grading system, it would be wise to ensure that all letter grades can be earned by your students. In fact, a general rule of thumb would be to create more questions rather than fewer questions. The greater range or quantity of questions that you put on your exams creates not only a better opportunity for students to exhibit what they have learned in your class, but it also allows you to create an assessment system that is fair from the standpoint that each child has an opportunity to earn the full range of letter grades on each type of assessment. How does this factor into motivation? Do you think a student will study harder if he or she knows the test is 10 questions long or 50 questions long? Remember, anything that gets students to try harder is worth implementing.

## Creating Assessments

We know what you are thinking right about now. Yikes! Fifty questions! Who has the time to create a 50-question assessment? Time has often been considered the number one enemy to the teaching profession, but legendary teachers always find a way to steal a minute or two here or there to accomplish any task they choose to tackle. And, 50 questions was an example!

What we would like you to highly consider as you put your assessments together is to vary the degree of difficulty of your questions throughout an assessment. From a purely motivational stance, you want the first several questions to be relatively easy. Then, sprinkle a few easy questions throughout the test, making sure that the last question or two is also easy. At no point in time do you want the students to feel that there is no use in continuing on, that the test is too hard, or that they can't do any of the problems.

Motivation can also occur by the instructor putting little notes of encouragement or advice between test questions or at the bottom of a page or footer: "Take the time to reread each question," or "I'm proud of you," or "All I ask is that you try your best," or "Check over your work."

We cannot recall a student in any of our classes purposely putting down a wrong answer when that student knew the correct answer. In fact, the golden rule to motivating students to do well on your assessments is to make sure that you have taught well enough that the students have mastered the material before you assess their knowledge or skill level.

Good test or assessment results do not come as a surprise to legends. The legends have thoroughly prepared their students, practiced numerous times with their students, have systematically reviewed with their students, and even given a few mock questions to their students before administering their assessments. Success is enjoyed and celebrated as a result of you motivating your students by having them achieve success in your classroom!

## Intrinsic Motivational Variable 5: Classroom Decor

In addition to developing positive relationships with their students, it is equally important for legends to create a positive, inspiring atmosphere in their classrooms. This atmosphere is the ambiance that is created by teachers and experienced by students every minute they are in your classroom.

When creating a positive, upbeat, and pleasing environment, we advise the following:

1. Keep the idea(s) simple, be neat, and make it attractive.

2. Make your key words in the quote or phrase stand out, using colors or size.

3. Remember that a picture paints a thousand words. Use visuals, pictures, and art work.

4. Change the decorations periodically: weekly or monthly or at the end of a chapter or unit.

5. Display successful work of your current students (e.g., stars of the month, high achiever club, tremendous efforts of the week, math whizzes, masters of pronouns, etc.).

The power of subliminal messages has caused the advertisement industry to invest millions when developing commercials and graphic designs. Do not skip or overlook this powerful intrinsic motivational strategy. "Just do it" or "Be like Mike" slogans never seem to fade or go away. Allow your students the opportunity to be inspired by the sights, sounds, and messages that you have created in your sanctuary of encouragement.

For the traveling room-to-room teachers or for those who have to share a classroom, this is certainly a more daunting and challenging task. However, it is not an impossible task. You can claim one of the classroom walls or a bulletin board, project something on the whiteboard or movie screen, bring in a picture or quote, or play a song or movie clip in the room you are teaching in that period or day. If you want to make a difference, you will find a way or a method to enhance your classroom atmosphere.

# Motivating Students: Some Final Thoughts

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, there is no "one" variable or strategy that will motivate each and every child. Each child has his or her own external and internal DNA triggers when it comes to being motivated. It is the legendary instructors that are able to locate and manipulate those triggers to bring out the very best in all of their students.

Before this chapter concludes, we would be remiss not to include a few general thoughts for you to remember and a few thoughts on keeping students motivated when they do reading assignments. We also provide one last bonus thought.

## General Thoughts

"Why do we have to know this?" is a *legitimate* question, not to be resented by any teacher:

< Because it's in the book!
< Because it's in the curriculum!
< Because it's on the test!
< Because it's in the state goals!
< Because I said so!

These are all *illegitimate* answers and destroy intrinsic motivation among all students. *You should never **have** to answer the question, because it should be answered every day that you deal with a topic.*

Motivating students means keeping it real, and that means always informing them of the topic's relevance to their lives. Explain the bottom

line impact of everything you do in the classroom. *Tailor every activity you can to your students' interests and goals, and make it clear daily that is what you are trying to do.*

You have no hidden agendas; you are trying to make class fun, exciting, interesting, and relevant. *Get up close and personal!*

The 2001 National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) found that faculty who positively interact with their students inside and outside the classroom have students who are more engaged, who use teachers as mentors, and who have a greater love for lifelong learning.

< Celebrate all sorts of diversity. The same NSSE 2001 report said teachers who addressed diversity and inclusion had more engaged students.
< Give students choices and options.

I know—welcome to the Department of Redundancy Department.

< Incorporate activities appropriate for all learning styles.

Too often educators teach from their personal learning style only and fail to engage all of their students.

< Demonstrate that you care by exploring their world. Can you converse on their media favorites, their music, and their sports? Do you know them as people or only as students?
< Be positive—energy sells!

## Thoughts on Reading

The real dichotomy of motivating students through reading is this: we want to help them make the reading experience productive, but we often end up making the reading experience unnecessary.

So... every suggestion I'm about to make comes with this warning: *make certain they are doing the reading! Assign the reading at least two sessions before it will be discussed. Give students ample time to prepare.*

With that said, use those two sessions to pique their curiosity about what they're going to be reading.

< Encourage students to annotate the reading by using the following methods:

- Inserting sticky notes
- Folding down corners of pages (dog-ear)
- Underlining or highlighting important passages or sentences
- Taking notes
- Circling appropriate areas

< Provide the following support material as needed:
- Study questions
- Vocabulary assistance
- Background information
- Author information
- Peculiarities to text
- Overview
- Reviews
- Related readings

< At all levels, the first discussions or questions about a work should be at the personal reaction level:
- "Did you like it?"
- "What didn't you like about it?"
- "What didn't you understand?"
- "Were you surprised?"

< Let students take notes from their reading and use those notes on the assessment. Be certain to collect the notes after the assessment to ensure that all are original and unique.

< Encourage what research tells us are good reading habits:
- Read in one sitting.
- Always annotate.
- Look for organization.
- Be ready to do a second read.
- Do reading homework first.
- Don't sweat the small stuff.
- Read with a dictionary.

< However—back to the warning!

With some frequency, follow a reading assignment with an assessment with absolutely no intervening instructions.

Students need to know they must learn from their reading.

## Bonus Thought

When attempting to meet your student's daily needs in the classroom, keep the following practices and thoughts in mind:

< Allow freedom of choice.
< Set mini or personal goals.
< Build a sense of responsibility.
< Allow peer tutoring (across grades).
< Use a suggestion box.
< Celebrate successes.
< Give hints or prompts—no answers.
< Provide an opportunity to improve or redo work.
< Love your kids.
< Remember—kids first and standards second.
< Use common language.
< Remember—learning is "we," not "them."
< Be proactive with parents.
< Remember—successes first, then challenges.
< Reward attendance and effort.
< Model successful behavior.
< Help students track their progress.

## Conclusions

Motivation will always have a direct correlation or link to the concept of a student being successful in your classroom. What must a teacher do to be able to make a child believe in his or her ability to achieve success? What is the hidden secret to student motivation?

Nothing brings a smile quicker to the face of a child than for that child to be positively praised for his or her efforts or achievements by his or her teacher. Successful students will continue to motivate themselves, fueled by the anticipation that they will continue to be recognized for their achievements and accomplishments. Success is contagious! Unfortunately, the opposite side to this story has a much different ending. It is sadly true

that when a student finds no success in school, his or her innate default mechanism automatically begins to shut down effort. "Why try? I am going to fail anyway," quickly becomes the student's battle cry or attitude toward school. Success can be a great motivator, and the lack of success can quickly eliminate any notions a student has of being motivated.

This is not to state that all students deserve the letter grade of A or that all students should be praised each and every day. Children seem to always know via their seventh sense when teachers are not honest or authentic with their intentions toward them. If students perceive or believe that their teacher does not care if they understand the course content or materials or whether they get a good grade or score on an exam, they will be quick to point out that their teacher is a fake, a sham, or does not have their best interests at heart. To a student, teachers' actions will always speak louder than their words.

The best teachers, the legends, constantly have their radar on, scanning not only the class as a whole but the pulse of each of their students when it comes to measuring the dose of success that is necessary to keep the class or their students motivated. These teachers do not have the Darwin concept in the back of their minds that only the strongest and fittest students can survive in their classrooms. They have not for one minute attempted to presort and preselect the students as to who will be successful and who will fail in their class or course. Rather, they take the opposite approach. Instead of giving at best a half-baked effort or quickly wanting to wash their hands of any personal reflection toward their own personal teaching abilities if students do not pass or do well in their classes, legendary teachers make it a point to intervene when necessity dictates, with a dose of success sprinkled with hope here and there throughout the year to constantly fuel the fire of motivation. No one can sit in front of a fireplace and expect a fire to burn or to last forever, unless they get up from the comfort of the chair every so often and add a log or two to keep the fire going. The same principle holds true for students. Just because you motivated your class or a student once or twice doesn't mean you have fulfilled your quota and that you can now just sit back and believe that you did your job at some point in time during the school year. When you stop adding fuel to the fire of motivation, then you, as the teacher, leader, or role model, have elected to let the motivational fire of each of your students go out!

**Legends always find a way to keep
the motivational fires burning!**

# 9

# Motivating High
# Student Achievement

*Not so long ago, a disgruntled boot camp drill instructor approached a private who was supposed to be performing a disciplinary activity. As the drill instructor neared the private, who had done absolutely nothing, the private snapped to attention.*

*"Private," began the drill instructor, "what were you supposed to be doing with that shovel you were just leaning on?"*

*"I was supposed to be moving the dirt from this trench to a pile on the far side of the field, Sergeant."*

*"That's right, but as I look here, do I see any dirt moved?" "No Sir, Sergeant, you don't!"*

*"And why have you failed thus far to move the dirt from this trench to that pile, Private?"*

*The private, a little more than a bit nervous, could only offer, "It didn't want to be moved, Sergeant."*

Since student motivation is, as we noted in the last chapter, the most complex and challenging issue facing teachers, we thought it was extremely important to dig a little deeper to uncover more of the key variables to once and for all solve the mystery of motivating students. Like

the reluctant private's defense in the opening anecdote, the sentiment, "I'm a good teacher, but the students just aren't motivated anymore!" (sung to the tune of *Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better),* is the swan song of American education.

The beginning of each new school year usually begins with a pep rally atmosphere to the new motivational *ism.* We find it amazing the large sums of money that are spent lifting the spirits of the teachers, when the real issue is addressing the needs and attitudes of the students. As you can imagine, the faculty audiences are, at best, skeptical of the new wave of thoughts, techniques, and information. Why shouldn't teachers be a little more than apprehensive of the unknown and sometimes untested inert ideas? Whatever the new *ism* that is about to be put into classroom practice without significant reinforcement or monitoring, and whatever strategies are being offered or recommended by keynote speakers and administrators (in varying degrees of rapidity), are often soon forgotten or ignored, and the problem of improving student motivation is sadly left unaddressed.

The real problem with motivation, of course, is that everyone is looking for a single and simple answer. Teachers search for that one pedagogy, that one theory that, when exercised, will make all students want to do their homework, come in for afterschool help, and score well on their tests and report cards. Unfortunately, and realistically, motivating students yesterday, today, and tomorrow will never be a singular or simplistic process.

However, a teacher wishing to be a legend can manipulate the educational environment in such a way to make student motivation a part of the regular classroom routine. This can be realized through examination of the following concerns:

< Establishing the foundation
< Adding grain by grain
< Building on the foundation

## Establishing the Foundation

We hold firm to the fact that motivation *must* begin not with the **-5** student but with the teacher. Our rule of thumb for motivating students is a simple one. The very first time, and every time after, that students enter the classroom, the legend must build and continue to build a strong personal

relationship with each and every student. Before motivation can take place, a strong foundation of mutual trust and respect must be laid. That foundation is possible only when based on personal relationships with every student. Whether in a traditional schedule where each day consists of as many as six or seven classes of more than 20 students each, in a block system of three classes of around 25 students, or in a classroom surrounded by 30-plus students all day, it's easy to imagine how complex and challenging it can be to build this strong foundation on an individual level. It becomes even more mind-boggling when considering the unique personalities and needs of each individual. In fact, it is the needs of the individual that must be fulfilled before learning will ever matter.

Not too many years ago, a junior high school teacher was given a slight change in his schedule. Instead of having the "8-1s" for homeroom, he was now assigned the "8-23s." The homerooms were ability grouped, and everyone in the school knew that the "8-1s" were the school's sharpest kids —go-getters, successes. Everyone also knew that the "8-23s" were at the opposite end of the spectrum—slow, challenged, and often unhappy.

However, the junior high school teacher was not at all deterred. He had not given up hope on anyone, and he announced to his homeroom students that, as he had every year with the "8-1s", he would end the school year with a weekend barbecue at his house for all his homeroom students. After a brief flirtation with joy, their faces slowly eroded back to their normal wary and weary expressions. He was at a loss. Never before had his offer for a party been so coolly received.

After homeroom, a single boy approached his desk. Unable to wait to hear what the boy wanted, our teacher asked, "Why was everyone so sad? Aren't you excited about the barbecue?"

"Oh, yeah, we like the idea, but after we talked it over, we knew you'd rather have the '8-1s' over. And, well, it's okay with us if you ask them instead," stated one of the students.

It was obvious, even to the teacher, that recognition for these children couldn't wait for their success in the classroom. It had to begin with recognition of them as people now, people who mattered. He had to address their fragile egos and their notions that they could not live up to anyone's expectations.

There is no better venue than one of repeated, sincere recognition of students' worth, not only as students but as human beings as well.

To become a legend, to make a difference in a child's life, one must build a foundation on which meaningful motivation is possible. Doing so is

the result of adhering to several general approaches.

## Approach 1: Convey Enjoyment

Although daunting, to say the least, establishing a personal relationship with so many students is not impossible because of a simple truth: students will always, deep down, want to be successful and want their teachers to approve of them. Building on this knowledge, the very first strategy for laying the foundation on which motivation may be built is that the teacher must, even on the very worst of days, convey to the students that he or she enjoys being with them and having them in class. A warm smile that greets students along with brief individual or group conversations with them about their activities, hobbies, music, or movies will help to bring the teacher closer to the students' personal world. It is very important that every teacher attempt to find a little time, even if it is just in greeting the student on the way into class, to try to touch the lives of every student in some way. Such conversations are not a waste of time; they are an investment in time.

As a self-test of how well she has accomplished this approach, the caring teacher need only look down any row in the classroom. As she comes to each student, she asks herself if she can name the topic of casual conversation she would cover while walking down the hallway with that particular student (other than issues related to class work). Looking down the first row, she knows that she could talk about this year's football squad with Adrian; he's a linebacker. With Kim, she'd talk about movies; Kim's almost as much of a movie buff as she is. With Sasha, she'd talk about dance, because she knows Sasha goes to dance lessons every Tuesday and Thursday evening. But with Megan, our teacher just doesn't know what to say.

Obviously, she has entered Adrian's, Kim's, and Sasha's worlds, but she has not touched Megan's. She may be nothing more than a teacher to Megan, a dispenser of information and discipline. The likelihood of successful intervention with Megan is far less than with the other three—so too is the likelihood of meaningful motivation.

The question of establishing personal relationships with students is further complicated by the normal demographics of any class. For argument's sake, let's begin by accepting this breakdown of a very positive, somewhat atypical class setting.

Fifty percent of the students come into class ready to learn, sharing with the teacher the same values regarding school, learning, and so forth.

Twenty-five percent of the students come into the class uninterested in what must be done that day, unmotivated to behave or learn.

Twenty-five percent of the students are fence sitters. They will follow the lead of the classroom, in whichever direction it may go.

The "common error" is for the teacher to spend most of his or her interpersonal time building stronger relationships with the first group of students, those in the "top 50%." Such efforts are clearly unnecessary. These students are already prepared to learn, already motivated. When effort is spent with the first group only, 50% of the students remain unmotivated to proceed. The fence sitters are still fence sitters, and the uninterested are even more uninterested because they have again been reminded that they are not in the inner group of appreciated or "favorite" students.

The relationships that matter most are the ones formed with the second group of students. There lies the opportunity for real success. As the teacher shows each member of the second group that he or she is interested in them, despite their reluctance to be motivated, then they become less uninterested and more like the "top 50%." Meanwhile, the fence sitters become more noticeable as being uncommitted and are far more likely now than ever to join in. All teachers benefit by forming personal relationships with their students; the legend is simply more aware of how establishing relationships with certain students can promote even greater success for the entire class.

Simply put, legends seek to redefine the roles of teacher and student. Legends attempt, by establishing personal concern for each student, to build cooperative relationships rather than the adversarial ones they may otherwise inherit if they just remain "teachers" to the children's "students." Legends make learning seem like more of a joint effort, with everyone pulling in the same direction. This attitude is possible only if the teachers have first reached out on an individual level to the students.

## Approach 2: Take the We Approach

The second strategy for establishing a motivational foundation is to inaugurate "safety nets" for the students. Too many times we've heard teachers blame students for low scores, explaining that lack of success was a function of the students' lack of effort. Seldom do we witness teachers' sharing the responsibility for their students' progress or lack of it. Unfortunately, when a teacher's first reaction is to separate himself or herself from students' shortcomings, the newly proclaimed division is immediately obvious to the students, and such a segmentation is derisive in nature—not motivational.

> *The teacher interested in motivation should be prepared to compare himself or herself with the school's baseball coach. If the baseball team wins 6 games and loses 25, then its record is 6-25. But more important to us, that is also the coach's record.*

In the classroom, for some reason, teachers tend to distance themselves from their students' successes and failures as if their students' records were not their own. That distance becomes a gap so wide that it may never be bridged again, and consequently, motivation becomes impossible.

The second step of building a foundation for motivation is for the teacher to abstain from separating himself or herself from the students and adopt instead a *we* approach to education. In the *we* approach to learning, the adversarial student-teacher relationship is replaced by a cooperative and collaborative one. Poor test scores or performance will no longer be followed by power statements such as these:

< "What's wrong with you kids?"
< "I can't believe that everyone did not get the first three questions correct; the questions were so easy!"
< "Doesn't anyone study anymore?"

Instead, they will be followed with comments such as these:

< "I thought I had prepared you better for the exam."
< "The scores show that we need a new plan of attack."
< "This is what we're going to do differently this time to help everyone get back on track."
< "What suggestions do you have to improve the results?"

The *we* approach of shared responsibility to education takes as its focus success rather than blame. It allows teachers to pick up the pieces after a failure while still safeguarding the dignity of students. By sharing in the responsibility for students' successes and failures, the legend has constructed a foundation on which motivation may be developed. No longer merely an external auditor, the teacher is a partner of learning, and that partnership inevitably leads to trust and respect—and that's when students can be motivated, for we want to please our friends, those we respect, those whose approval we desire. We care little about pleasing our adversaries.

## Approach 3: Build Safety Nets

That leads us to our final step in establishing the foundation for effective motivation. This step is predicated on two major observations about today's students.

### Observation 1

More than ever before, many of our students' lives are immersed in failures over which they have no control: failed relationships at home, failed jobs, failed health.

### Observation 2

Children, especially teenagers, are the most insecure people in the world, their lives vulnerable to a host of different pressures: pressures about dating, pressures about drugs, pressures about gangs, pressures about parents, pressures about clothing, pressures about sexuality, pressures about race, pressures about grades .. .the list continues to the most alarming "parental responses to their children are, overwhelmingly, always negative" and the newest attacks on children of all ages via "cyberspace bullying."

The conclusion to be drawn from these observations is that it is absolutely amazing that children will agree to take any further risks at all; yet, the biggest risk any students voluntarily take is when they decide to try at school.

When they attempt to succeed in their classes, they have, in essence, placed their self-esteem on the line. While they are endeavoring to define themselves as adults, while they face all the pressures itemized earlier, we ask them to try to pass our courses. The legend, the masterful teacher, is

sensitive to the nature of this request; the legend has not lost sight of the fact that growing up and maturing is the most precarious time of a child's emotional life.

Keeping in mind this state of perpetual anxiety that defines children, is it any wonder that so many have decided to drop out, at least emotionally, in terms of their effort? Therefore, the biggest and final step the legend takes to motivate students is to create safety nets so as to make the students less fearful of trying to succeed, less fearful of facing failure.

By high school, and unfortunately even by middle school in some cases, students' number one defense mechanism against feelings of inadequacy is to withdraw and make no attempt at success at all.

The teacher who wonders if motivation is a problem in her classes would be wise to take a self-inventory about her own concerns as a teacher:

> *Q: What was my biggest concern at assessment time when I began teaching?*
>
> **A: Worry about students' cheating.**
>
> *Q: What is my biggest concern at assessment time now that I've taught a while?*
>
> **A: Worry about students who don't care enough to cheat.**

Can we blame them? As adults, how many of us regularly pursue activities at which we usually fail (other than golf and marriage)? The conclusion is remarkably clear: it is little wonder that so many of our students refuse to be motivated. Their fear of failure in what might be a world full of failure is far greater than their hope for success.

Their logic is quite obvious and sound: "If I don't try and subsequently fail, I haven't really failed because I never bought into the system; however, if I try and subsequently fail, I've failed because I'm inferior or I am just not good enough (never have been and never will be)."

What children have an extremely difficult time coming to grips with is this: even if they fail a quiz, test, or a class—that does not label them as personal failures. The legend recognizes this student trait and helps lift their spirits and mend their self-esteem by the creation of safety nets. After establishing strong personal relationships, after establishing a sense of shared responsibility, the legend is ready for the final step in motivating hesitant learners.

With safety nets in place, students are less likely to view failure as a personal reflection of their own shortcomings, which makes them less

likely to fear failure. They are more willing to try in class, and that is what motivation is all about.

Safety nets come in two distinct forms: attitudinal and systemic.

## Attitudinal Safety Nets

The premise of attitudinal safety nets will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter, but the main focus of the class is in celebrating victories, not brow beating failures. Students' delicate self-esteem will be protected at almost all costs. Failures will not be publicized; they will be protected. If failure must be addressed, and of course it will have to be, it is at the conference level only—with strict confidentiality, and then in a positive or professional manner, focusing on what can be learned from the failure and how it can be avoided in the future.

The safety nets themselves are taught as much as the material of the class. The legend stresses to students that temporary setbacks are a part of life and the class and need not be feared. The legend shows students that failure is a challenge—a chance for greater success. The legend has convinced students that they will not be humiliated when they stumble, and they will never be embarrassed when they have made a good effort.

of course, as the students are quick to point out, talk is cheap. Attitudinal safety nets are really created by the teacher's execution of what he or she has assured students. If the teacher is sincere in wishing to protect students' feelings and demonstrates it repeatedly following every assessment and with their daily classroom interactions, then the students will quickly appreciate and believe in the presence of these attitudinal safety nets. They will become risk takers, willing to give a real effort toward learning and success if, and only if, the teacher has essentially eliminated the psychological risk from that effort.

## Systemic Safety Nets

After doing all that can be done emotionally to protect students from failing and, maybe more important, from fear of failing, the legend initiates a series of programs that either prevent students from failing or helps them rebound if they do occasionally fail. Such programs may include, but are certainly not limited to, the following:

< Guaranteed passing grades for anyone who does all the work all the time at a suitable level of effort and caliber—a form of mastery learning
< Ungraded pretests that students must pass before being allowed to attempt the graded tests
< Mandatory makeup exams for students scoring below the C level (Special note: Neither of us is particularly fond of the concept of a D grade in the traditional scoring rubric. One either succeeds—A, B, C—or one fails—F. We view a D much like an educational coma—an unnecessary compromise of standards and expectations.)
< Compulsory and weekly review sessions for people with averages below the C level

The options are virtually endless and fully amendable to the concerns of the individual teacher, the grade level of the student, the department, building, or district, but all are predicated on the belief that the first priority, the prime directive, in education is to see that the students master the material that they are to learn. That is what teaching ought to be about. Let us state that one more time, as the last sentence is the essence of being a legendary teacher in the classroom: *the **first** priority, the **prime** directive, in education is for the teacher to see that the students **master** the material that they are to learn.*

Once the legend has built a foundation for motivation by establishing personal relationships with the students and communicating a sense of shared responsibility for success, then it is only a matter of sealing the covenant with the students by initiating programs that actually help them pass. All these safety nets are covenants with students indicative of the teacher's commitment to their success, proof that the teacher is working on their behalf. Only then may the teacher ask students to take a risk by trying to pass their class. That is the only motivation that matters.

## Adding Grain by Grain

Successful motivation is not achieved with a single trick or concept. It is built by one grain of trust and caring at a time. To that end, the legend is very much aware of the nuances implicit within the learning environment. He or she realizes that education is nothing more than a culmination of individual gestures. What follows are several of these gestures that any

teacher can make. All are designed to develop strong personal relationships with students and to build safety nets for them.

## Be Available

We begin by including our home phone numbers, e-mail addresses, Web sites, homework hotline numbers, and hours of availability on the course-orientation material, newsletter, or syllabus. During the year, we encourage our students to call whenever they require assistance or simply need someone to talk to. Experience shows that students rarely use the opportunity to call a teacher at home, but when they do, tremendous motivation may be the con -sequence. In fact, even if no one were to use the option of calling during the year, by making the gesture, the teacher has scored motivational points toward becoming a legend.

## Give Cues

Prompts are a small technique that can be used to send the caring message of how deeply the teacher is committed to working toward the success of the students. During class work, there are two easy ways to get students to focus on important points. The first is through verbal clues given during the discussion or lecture. "This is important; get it down in your notes!" or "That would be a good test question!" are two examples of easy prompts for students to follow. The reinforcement and repetition of your prompts by Q and A, choral responses, or by having students quickly repeat (echo back) your important notes are essential in the overall learning process.

These interactions indicate to the students that there is more going on in the class than merely dispensing information. They also strengthen the impression that there is a collaborative effort occurring and that the teacher's main concern is the success of the students.

## Use Visuals

Another good technique is to become more visual in nature. When using the chalkboard, overhead, or handouts, the teacher can color code the information. This is a very effective method for targeting the important information whose use or recall will be measured later.

For example, one could use black for ancillary material, blue for information that may be included on tests or quizzes, and red for material that most certainly will be on examinations. Any such strategy serves two purposes: First, it is a motivational builder because it communicates continued caring and team effort. Second, it serves the very real function of teaching organization and prioritizing skills to the students. Any visual or mnemonic device helps the student process information in an orderly fashion, increasing everyone's likelihood for success.

"But," you say suspiciously, "a few may complain that prompts and organizational hints are merely ways to spoon-feed students." Critics will maintain that students should have to determine on their own what is important when they are studying—that they need to learn everything before the test, not just what the test covers. Such critics accuse us of encouraging teachers to "teach the test."

To them, we reply by referring to our discussion of educational priorities. Complaints such as these come from people who believe that their first priority as teachers is to sort students by grades, and we admit, nothing is more effective in accomplishing this than by giving no direction concerning assessment. Of course, when failing to do so, we by default end up sorting students not by what they could have learned about the topic under study but what they might have garnered based on the following:

< The study skills they already possess
< The past knowledge and life experiences they bring to class
< The type of home lives they may have
< The degree of peer support they enjoy outside of class
< Their ability to intuit our intent

They have measured these aspects of the students' lives, but they have not measured what students could have learned, by what we might have taught them. When teachers give no direction toward assessment, when teachers choose to keep that information concealed, their tests measure note-taking skills, prioritizing skills, test-taking skills, but not necessarily what the curriculum suggests the students need to master. Teachers, therefore, are not that important in the educational process.

This trial-and-error approach toward learning is really a trial-and-failure approach. Many of our students today are not as emotionally prepared to learn by this method as perhaps we once were. It is an approach that not only fails to motivate but also destroys student initiative. The week before

the school's football squad takes on its arch rival, no one accuses the coach of teaching the test when he has scouted the opponents and has the team scrimmage against the opponent's offensive and defensive formations. They do so to avoid surprises on the following Friday. We need to become our students' coaches.

Avoiding surprises on the test is a motivational tool for the teacher who is willing to be a student's coach. Preparing the students for what will be evaluated on the test and how it will be evaluated is only fair. Doing so enhances that feeling of mutual trust and respect so essential to any motivation. Approaching an examination with the Darwinian "Let's see who figured out what they were supposed to learn this unit and flunk those who didn't!" destroys the team concept of teacher and student working together. It creates an adversarial relationship—one definitely not conducive to motivation.

The legend helps students zero in on what is important. The legend helps students master basic knowledge and skills without disguising them. The legend does not teach the test. We are not suggesting a compromise of the principles we presented in Chapter 3, but the legend does teach "toward" the test. The difference is not slight; the line between the two is clearly unequivocal.

> *Motivational teaching: "You will have to know the noble gases for the test."*
>
> **Teaching the test: "You have to know helium and neon."**
>
> *Motivational teaching: "You should know at least five causes of the Civil War."*
>
> **Teaching the test: "Memorize these five causes of the Civil War."**
>
> *Motivational teaching: "You will be expected to graph equations on the test."*
>
> **Teaching the test: "The answer to 12 is B."**

The legend recognizes that time is a precious commodity for everyone today, including students. If students spend two hours studying important terms from Chapter 12 the night before an exam and then are tested on the graphics at the end of Chapter 13, they will quickly stop putting forth effort in that classroom. That teacher has reinforced students' nihilistic view of education (and life) to destroy any reason to be motivated.

These are just a few suggestions, but the concept is clear. To become a legend, a teacher must successfully motivate students. Motivation comes in

the guise of strong personal relationships, shared responsibility for success, safety nets, and continued efforts to enhance the likelihood of success of the students to help them learn what is important in the class. It is built patiently one grain at a time; once destroyed, it may be impossible to reconstruct.

# Building on the Foundation

The most important aspect of motivation after the legend has built the strong foundation and continues to add to it grain by grain is student success. As discussed at length in Chapter 2, success breeds success. Here are two bits of real observational genius:

> < Seldom do students name as their favorite class one in which they are doing poorly.
> < Everyone will succeed in something in school.

When the students sense that they cannot be outstanding in any school-sanctioned venue (i.e., academics, sports, extracurricular activities), then they will go elsewhere, places we (and society in general) would prefer they wouldn't go.

The legend recognizes that every student should be able to succeed in the classroom and experience a sense of self-worth and importance through educational success. In fact, the elusive concept of self-esteem is really spelled S * U * C * C * E * S * S. The only way true self-esteem is built is through making people successful.

In turn, the implications for motivation are clear. In becoming a legend and in motivating students, the teacher does everything in his or her power to ensure that students are successful.

> *This is accomplished at the very start of the school year by making sure that the first assignment is the type of assignment on which everyone can do well.*
>
> *Throughout every unit, work is incremental, beginning with exercises with which everyone can succeed.*
>
> *Even with assessments, there will always be questions at the beginning, middle, and end of a test where students will be able to find success.*

The legend recognizes the fact that students are motivated more by success than by failure. Students can be taken further if they are succeeding along the way than if the unit begins with an exercise that does little more than show everyone how little anyone knows. Grades should not have to be raised throughout a unit. They should begin high, and everyone's goal should be keeping them there. In many classrooms, unfortunately, this is not the case.

Another important blueprint for building on the foundation is twofold:

< Student work must always be evaluated by the teacher immediately. It is hypocritical to enforce due dates for student work when the teacher can return graded material at a later, arbitrary date. Instead, knowing that work not returned within 48 hours has little learning value, the legend makes sure everything is returned the next day. The work is fresh in the students' minds, and learning can continue when the work is returned.
< Likewise, class grades are regularly posted and updated. Both of these practices demonstrate the work ethic for the student and reinforce the shared responsibility approach in the classroom.

The teacher has shown, through both issues, that he or she will work just as hard and responsibly as the students toward a very simple common goal —success. This cooperative and collaborative effort is without question motivational.

Regularly posting grades (e.g., once a week or after every major grade or assessment) serves another motivational function. If we truly expect students to take responsibility for their own learning and success, then they must know where they stand. Besides ending the guessing game about how students are doing, posted grades anonymously by code number shifts responsibility for progress onto students' shoulders. As the course, semester, or the end of the year draws toward a close, students can see how well they must do to earn that grade they so much desire. Correctly or not, grades are students' paychecks, and students should know how much they're making and how often they will be paid.

In addition, they begin to develop a work ethic as they see how their grade is affected by success and failure. They can begin to form some direct correlations between hard work and better grades. It is difficult to collect dividends if you are not regularly or systematically putting money

(for students, developing a consistent and religious work ethic) into your investments.

Getting work back to the students regularly the next day and keeping grades posted at least weekly are two strong motivational strategies that direct students to even more success.

Another motivational device is visual recognition of excellent work, as described in our next chapter. Repeatedly using visual recognition works motivationally in a very strong fashion. Almost any student of any age can do a decent parody of rap music. Students are able to do this not because all are musically talented, but because they are inundated with examples of rap music. So too does the legend inundate the classroom experience with examples of excellent work.

The last, and perhaps easiest, aspect of the educational environment that can be manipulated to increase students' motivation is the physical. Bulletin board displays, posters, walls of fame, and samples of good work are just a few of the many visual motivators that can surround students every day in class.

In medieval times, the church realized that the common man was not going to be able to follow the Latin mass and would spend much time in church gazing around the sanctuary or daydreaming, so the church came up with the idea of stained glass windows. Such windows not only beautified churches but also depicted Bible stories to those whose minds wandered and who probably could not read.

In the same manner, the legend does not miss a chance to surround students with informative, interesting, motivating material relevant to class work. Anyone walking into the legend's room knows not only the subject matter of the instructor but also what unit is being studied. The walls are covered with posters, student work, inspirational phrases, and enrichment materials. The classroom walls, ceiling, floors, and windows become the teacher's aide. Such manipulation of the learning environment is yet another example of building on the foundation for motivation.

## Conclusions

To become a legend, one must clearly have the ability to motivate students. Carefully groomed personal relationships, shared responsibility for success, and safety nets combined with numerous motivational strategies are key ingredients in winning students over to the teacher's side. As we

stated at the outset of this chapter, there is no single, simple answer to motivation. There is no magical theory, silver bullet, or secret strategy. What motivates is a visibly strong work ethic that allows the teacher to show the way by modeling successful work habits for the students. The legend communicates with students that he or she does care and is passionately committed to their success. The legend repeatedly goes out of his or her way to do the little things that help make the student successful.

A simple smile can brighten a day, a warm and pleasant thank you for working hard can lift one's spirits, and a brief note on a paper stating that you are excited to see how well this student is doing or improving can increase one's self-confidence by volumes. The K.I.S.S. theory (keep it simple stupid) is not only practiced but mastered by the legendary instructors. As we continue to stress throughout this book, motivation doesn't begin with the students—it begins with the teacher, becomes a shared mission by both, and is finally, "solely," adopted by the students.

# 10

# Recognizing
# and Promoting
# Excellence

*Walking down the hallway at school several years ago, a volleyball coach stopped the athletic director to raise more than a mild concern about her athletic program. She questioned him in a nonpleasant tone of voice why someone hadn't been promoting two of her most successful athletes. Her challenging statement went something like this: "I can't believe that no one, including you, has put an article in the newspaper about Cheryl and Kelly! Don't you or anyone else in this school care about my volleyball program?"*

*At a faculty meeting, a staff member proudly explained how he used bonus points or extracredit assignments to promote the idea of doing more than the minimum with his students. The words had no sooner left his mouth when another staff member quickly went on a vicious attack: "That sounds to me like you are attempting to bribe the students to do their work!" The onslaught of words continued, "Isn't it your job to motivate the students—make them want to learn? What's the real lesson you're teaching here?"*

*Several years ago, a middle school teacher made out a purchase order for various supplies for the upcoming school year. Included in her order were several sheets of scratch-and-sniff stickers. Weeks later, her request form was returned with almost everything approved— only the scratch-and-sniff stickers had been redlined by the business department. The business manager attached a note. It read, "Those items are for elementary teachers! Your students are too old to benefit from such a request!"*

**A**re these enough examples of how the educational world can easily turn to the dark side? We think so too, but the message is profoundly and significantly loud and clear: educators, too often, fail to understand the power and significance of recognizing and promoting excellence in their classrooms. It would seem that the major myth of education is that the students should bring to the class an inherent love for learning (and especially a love of learning in each teacher's chosen field of expertise).When the students don't, that is a problem. So goes popular wisdom that is beyond the teacher's sphere of influence, isn't it? Or, is it? Sadly, most teachers at this point in time throw their hands skyward and complain, "What can anyone expect us to do with a classroom full of unmotivated pupils? How can we teach students that don't care?" Or, better yet, "How can we teach students that don't want to be here?"

### The answer is quite obvious and straight forward. We cannot!

We cannot teach them until we have motivated them to care. The legend differs from many other teachers in this especially. The legend takes on the responsibility for motivating students. If the students are unmotivated, it is because they have not yet been motivated, and that too is a major part of the legend's job. Motivation is such an important facet of becoming an educational legend that we have continued with this chapter to give more examples and ideas on how to connect and motivate students. This chapter deals with a specific kind of motivation: *recognition of success.*

Teachers are, without a doubt, the least commercially crass people in America. The classroom is as far as one can get from Madison Avenue, but that is not to say that there are no lessons for us in the business world. In almost every industry to which one turns, one finds that outside of operating costs, the biggest investment is in marketing. It often outstrips even research and development. Why is this? The answer is simple: American business is based on motivating consumers to purchase products, and its success in doing so is unmatched in history. Business promotes itself.

That lesson learned, the legend understands and uses the power of recognition by promoting success, wherever it occurs, in the classroom. A closer look at recognition reveals how the legend is able to use it effectively to further motivate students and achieve even greater success. To be a successful device, recognition encompasses four major standards:

< Making recognition visual
< Safeguarding the honesty of recognition
< Keeping recognition measurable
< Extending recognition beyond the classroom

## Making Recognition Visual

*His name was John Gorrie!*

The man who did more than any other human being in promoting recognition of excellence in education invented the refrigerator in 1844.

There are not many homes in which the refrigerator does not serve a far greater function than the preservation of foodstuffs. It serves as a place to display schoolwork, graced with anything from report cards, magnetic calendars, gold stars, smiley faces, and hymns or letters of personal praise, to A+ papers. For every refrigerator so decorated, there is a proud little (or not so little) girl or boy who three, four, and five times a day sneaks a peek and a grin at the visual proof of his or her self-worth.

What most elementary teachers have always known and practiced is the fundamental art of successful recognition. Yet what we at the secondary level frequently fail to understand is the basic canon of such recognition— it must be visual, something more than a passing comment of "nice work" or "good job." When a student has something in hand that he or she can

take home, put in the locker, show to a friend, use as a book mark, or possibly see on a wall, that student is rewarded a hundred times more than the recipient of verbal praise. What is stressed here is that the reward, the recognition, is visual, and whether the student elects to have it displayed for all to see or hidden away where only his or her eyes will see it, visual recognition has longer and therefore greater capacity for establishing self-esteem and increasing the likelihood of further success than mere aural plaudits.

The token or artifact of recognition may take any form as long as it is visual. Here are some examples:

< A certificate
< A rubber stamp
< A golden seal or star
< A prize pencil
< A framed picture
< Any trinket or toy
< A cartoon
< A can of pop
< A simple smiley face
< A decorative ribbon

Regardless of its form, as long as the value of such recognition is defined beforehand, its visual representation will accomplish the goal of rewarding outstanding effort or identifying success and motivating its recipient and others toward further achievement.

Without a doubt, the cynic now is asking if such recognition is only for the young. Will adolescents scoff at such recognition? The answer to such skepticism may lie in the following examples.

For over a century, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America have recognized the need for visual, physical recognition. Thus, the scouts offer merit badges as proof of accomplishments.

College football teams across the nation offer stars, logos, and sometimes even skulls for their players to paste on their helmets as proof of their success.

When we first approached students with the idea of a "wall of fame"—the posting of names of individuals who reach a certain level of success, say 90%, on major assessments—we too were a little dubious of how students would react to it. But soon the efficacy of such a program of visual

recognition was made clear. Every student in every class, including the AP classes, believed having his or her name placed on the wall was a matter of grave importance. If one thought he or she had unjustly been left off the wall, the student complained; sometimes parents complained. Students spoke of preparing thoroughly enough to "make the wall." The wall of fame, as a visual recognition of success, had achieved its purpose—it rewarded, it motivated, and it made the abstract (student growth) a little more concrete.

Recognition of success is not juvenile—in fact, it is what we all expect from life, and the wise teacher, in a nonthreatening manner, takes full advantage of this most common human desire.

The key point to remember is that the legend *takes the time* to recognize students. The legend never assumes that someone else will take the time to validate his or her students' efforts or successes. The legend knows that we all grow best from our successes, not our failures, and that regardless of how small, every success must be celebrated. Criticism can be verbal; it can be short-lived (in fact, it's best if it is), but recognition for the job well done should be long lasting and permanent. It's why we keep scrapbooks. We enjoy looking back and remembering our treasured memories and times of our successful accomplishments. We don't want to let any of our victories slip away. The successful teacher knows that and capitalizes on the universality of that feeling by providing visual recognition for all means of success and victories. Such recognition is not done whimsically. It operates carefully within the considerations set forth in the remainder of this chapter.

## Safeguarding the Honesty of Recognition

Although other teachers may attempt to use visual recognition of student success, their efforts may never seem to come to fruition. This may be especially true when they violate some of the basic principles of using visual recognition.

## Promotion

One of the factors that may separate the legend from other teachers is not necessarily the type of recognition awarded, but how the recognition is

*promoted* by the legend. The legend knows that the key to successful recognition is in the promotion of the award. The legend promotes the award and therefore the program, and by doing so lends a great deal of prestige to the recognition itself.

< It is promoted throughout the classroom.
< It is promoted throughout the school.
< It is promoted in the home.
< It is promoted throughout the community.

When a student takes home that special recognition, he or she will find much more praise if his or her parents have already been informed of the worth and merit of such an award; otherwise, they are somewhat at a loss about how much or what kind of praise to lavish on their child. Not only has the legend designed a strong system of reward using visual recognition, but he or she has also promoted it so that when a child is recognized, others may appreciate the value of such recognition.

A perfect example of how such promotion is accomplished is the varsity athletic letter. One need not ask many athletes of any sport what the requirements are to letter in that sport before receiving an accurate answer; it is an award to which most sport participants aspire. Because they believe they can achieve it, they know the standards they must reach to win the distinction. Likewise, the school recognizes what a letter signifies, as does the community at large. The desirability of the letter and its value are possible only when the award itself has been expansively promoted.

Regardless of whether it is a schoolwide program such as varsity athletic letters or honor roll or a classroom honor, the award itself, along with the standards it satisfies, must be promoted and publicized to achieve true merit in the eyes of the students.

## Value

Inherent in the discussion on promotion is the concept of the recognition's value. Unless the award is valued to some degree, it will achieve none of the functions for which visual recognitions were designed.

The value of visual recognition, regardless of its form, lies in adherence to several principles, the first of which is honesty. Its final worth is subject to the same kind of supply-and-demand machinations that determine price in the world of commerce. If recognition is awarded for completion of any

task, regardless of how modest, then the marketplace (classroom) is soon flooded with what are now rather worthless means of visual recognition.

This is nowhere better seen than in the availability of computer-generated certificates. At one time, a certificate of achievement was a very impressive award. It had been prepared by a local printer, often was framed, and was taken home with a great deal of well-deserved pride. Whether presented in the athletic, academic, attendance, or behavior venue, certificates were highly prized by students and parents. But with the proliferation of personal computers, the ease with which one could generate personalized certificates has lessened their value. The third certificate for good spelling sent home in the first quarter of the year lessens the value of the first two, and soon the certificates, if taken home at all, are not accompanied by the pride with which they once might have been.

The awards must be honestly presented to truly deserving students who have met estimable levels of success. If they are not awarded according to high enough standards, they lose their value again because of the frequency with which they are awarded. The lesson here is clear: if the visual recognitions are bestowed too freely, they lose their value.

## Meaningful

The legend is well aware of the concerns for value, but he or she is also aware of the opposite concern: if awards are not made frequently enough, they may lose their meaning. If, according to the standards by which these visual recognitions are awarded, they rarely appear and then only regularly to one or two of the better students, they lose their meaning for the entire student body just as easily as if they are awarded too frequently.

If such awards are viewed by the students as impossible to achieve for most, then it will be necessary, according to the rules of student self-esteem, to devalue them—for that which is unobtainable must, according to one's ego, be demeaned.

Determining how and when to award recognition for work well done is a high wire the teacher must walk, demanding rigorous balance, an equilibrium painstakingly sustained by the legend.

## Balance

To return to the analogy of commerce, the legend constantly reads and studies the marketplace of the classroom as well as the consumers that make up that marketplace so as to maximize the effectiveness of a visual recognition program. When self-esteem is low and students aren't making academic progress, the legend might offer a special promotion to invigorate the marketplace. Awards might be offered for a certain percentage of improvement on a makeup test. A key homework assignment might be highlighted by offering visual recognition for success on it.

Regardless of the strategies employed, the important aspect is that the legend maximizes the effectiveness of visual recognitions by manipulating the frequency with which they appear so as to maintain their value in the classroom. It is only then that they most effectively serve as a tool of motivation and a source of self-esteem; however, at no time does the legend lower standards just for the sake of giving recognition. Such a combination of both flexibility and constancy is why students respect and admire the legend the most. When the student needs to be fired up, but still has to meet the standard of success that was set for excellence, the earned recognition will have its most cherished value.

## Keeping Recognition Measurable

The old saw "What gets monitored gets done" is a sentiment everyone needs to cherish deeply. If a teacher wishes to make sure that a program of student recognition occurs and succeeds, he or she must have a system in place to measure its effectiveness. The procrastinators in education will always want to do it. They'll be excited about how they will institute it. They may even draw up plans for implementing it. But as the realities of other expectations and duties press on them (also having been postponed until later), such a program will never be realized or implemented.

In the meanwhile, the legend will have created a program for visual recognition, determined a timetable of implementation, and designed a system of feedback by which to evaluate its success and make subsequent modifications of the program as it is being used.

The first aspect of a recognition program design is the planning. Rather than starting in a void, it would be wise to look for a model by which to design the program, and luckily for us, a very successful model of recognition already exists. That model is found in the video game industry.

Virtually any video game (for the sake of good taste, we ignore that genre of video amusements whose fun comes more in the element of negative destroying rather than positive building) has a number of consistent elements:

< Colorful graphics exploding on the scene
< Well-defined levels of achievement
< Consistent rewards
< Potentially long-lived recognition
< FUN!

## Colorful Graphics

Video games are colorful and stimulating; the teacher's visual recognitions should be also. They should feed on the interests of the day: academic and athletic teams' successes, current hit songs, popular movies, commercials from television—all related to the class, of course. If certificates are awarded, they should be colorful, with graphics and style. Entertaining pencils, pins, and so forth are the rule of the day. The first improvement video games made after the innovative but monochromatic Pong was the inclusion of colorful graphics; teacher recognitions should do likewise.

## Well-Defined Levels of Achievement

The levels of achievement must be well promoted, and to be well promoted, they must be well defined. In video games, levels of achievement are clearly publicized on the screen. Players compare themselves based on the levels and the point totals they have achieved; with the attainment of each new level, bonuses are awarded. The exact same situation exists in the legend's classroom. Standards are set forth by which achievement will be recognized.

For example, the teacher may do any or all of the following for an upcoming test:

< Award a designer pencil for scores of 85% and better.
< Place names of those scoring 95% on a wall of fame.
< Allow students with perfect scores to design their own "boaster poster."

< Recognize anyone whose score is an improvement of 10% over the previous test with a certificate of improvement, suitable for framing.

**Special note: This final type of recognition may seem to be at odds to our earlier discussion of external motivation versus intrinsic motivation and setting high academic standards, and to a small degree it may be, but by its extremely finite nature, it is an acceptable, temporary compromise. A slow-starting student may earn one or two of these but soon graduate to the other levels of recognition to continue to receive any awards.**

Of course, recognition need not stop there. Special recognition for those repeatedly achieving high levels may be defined as well. The point is to define clearly the multiple and diverse levels of achievement worthy of recognition. Video games offer players a chance to type in their names next to a high score. One need not be around children and games long before seeing how effective a motivational tool that is. One need not have much imagination to imagine how much more effective such devices in the classroom can be.

It is in this area that the question of standards must again be addressed. As suggested earlier, recognition loses its value if it is too easily or too rarely won. The teacher is expected to set legitimate standards by which to award such recognition, but at the same time, he or she is expected to be prepared to evaluate the success of the program and perhaps be willing to redefine the levels of achievement necessary for achievable success to be recognized.

## Consistent Rewards

Video games deliver on two promises: instant and consistent recognition for success. It matters neither who plays nor when. Success is always instantly recognized. These two concerns are also integral to the program of recognition in the classroom. Once the program has been designed and the standards of excellence have been clearly defined, the next part of the design is probably the most difficult—the delivery. Consistency is the key element at this level. Nothing will destroy a recognition plan more quickly than for the students to perceive the teacher to have backed out on a promise or to have failed to come through with the anticipated reward.

After the levels of achievement have been defined and promoted, it is incumbent on the teacher to see that recognition always follows success.

Likewise, lack of instantaneous reward is another flaw that can cause the demise of the program. As in the case of returning graded tests or homework, once a day or two has passed and the recognition has not occurred, the students' perception must surely be that it just wasn't an important activity, success was not really meritorious, or worse, the teacher doesn't really care. For a program of recognition to be effective as a builder of self-esteem and, therefore, a motivator for future success, the issue of consistency is not negotiable. Every success is met with consistent and instantaneous recognition—always!

## Potentially Long-Lived Recognition

The final component of the video game industry to be transferred to the classroom is to make the visual recognition potentially long-lived. Generating a sense that this achievement could be appreciated for years by future classes gives the recognition a worth surpassing all else that could be done within the confines of that school year alone. This can be achieved in any number of different venues:

< A permanent wall of honor
< A hanging plaque
< A showcase of individual or class pictures
< Booklets with records of achievement

This list is limited only by the imagination of the teacher. Likewise, along with being long-lived, the visual promotion should be personalized whenever possible to the subject matter or the task being recognized. The more unique, the more special and long-lasting, the more effective the recognition becomes with students, especially if there is the chance that the success can be seen by many others.

## FUN!

There is not a child alive who is not mesmerized in front of the television screen playing video games. As soon as a child is old enough to manipulate a controller or joystick, the fun of playing video games often becomes a religious daily routine. Why is this? There is no penalty or death sentence

if they fail to collect all the hidden objects, or score the most points, or cross the finish line. The enjoyment comes because they really only compete against themselves, and they can readily see improvement each and every time they play the game.

The legend also quickly realizes that learning must be fun and the classroom a safe place to have fun learning. Legends promote effort and become role models for going the extra mile or putting their own special touches on finished products. Legends also have the patience to see that children do the work correctly and, at the same time, allow students to see how they are improving in incremental steps with their skills and knowledge during the course or throughout the year. The steps of realizing achievable success are extremely important for all students, but this especially holds true for the student who rarely achieves or gets a pat on the back. A child enjoys the legend's classroom because it parallels the success formula of video gaming: colorful graphics, well-defined levels of achievement, consistent rewards, long-lived recognition, and fun.

A plan of visual recognition is an essential tool that the legend uses effectively to honor students who have dedicated their time and talents to meet the standards of excellence that have been set in the classroom. Promoting academic successes and recognizing accomplishment are unfortunately Achilles' heels in education today. We all know it should be done, but there never seems to be enough time in the day to do it. Students enjoy competition (especially competition that recognizes winners and does not discredit losers), and they enjoy being recognized for their success, especially when the recognition is well earned. All teachers need to capitalize on those shared feelings.

## Extending Recognition Beyond the Classroom

The farther recognition is promoted beyond the single classroom, the more effective a device it becomes. Once the teacher has implemented classroom levels of recognition and promotion, the greater challenge remains: "How does one promote those successes outside the classroom to the school and community?" A little extra effort will pay large dividends if the teacher takes the time to delegate some of the responsibilities to the students for this part of the recognition plan. By delegating responsibility for at least

part of the communitywide promotion to the students, the teacher has apportioned ownership to the class itself, and with ownership comes commitment.

## Schoolwide

In the school community itself, congratulations in daily announcements can give schoolwide recognition, if, and only if, permission by the recognized student is given. The problem with this approach is its inherent weakness in not being visual and, therefore, being very short-lived. To promote the program outside the classroom, the main focus or effort should be toward creating impressive visual displays in well-traveled hallways. Such displays can be centered around a theme or a logo, displaying records, student work, and pictures. They serve notice to the entire school of the successes of the classroom and the students. They meet all the requirements for successful recognition promotion.

## Communitywide

The last step is to promote a recognition program to the community as a whole. Again, the recognition or promotion must be visible. An article in a local newspaper by itself will be lost in the other school news, but an article with a picture or colorful graphics will definitely stand out. In addition, the legend understands that the electronic media holds strong potential for recognition campaigns. Local radio stations and often local television stations actively search for stories involving successful students; such stories help the stations fulfill their mandated Federal Communications Commission community-service requirements. Finally, many local businesses are willing to sponsor a limited number of rewards such as coupons or free merchandise (if dispersed by the teacher in a meaningful manner) to successful students. The legend makes use of all community-oriented possibilities.

Aside from the benefits to the recognition program, such multimedia campaigns serve a more important function as well. Parents, especially at the secondary level, continually complain about being left in the dark in regard to "positive" happenings in school. Too many times, rumors about bad situations are the only topics of conversations in the grocery stores or the post office or in the editorial articles in the local paper. School strikes,

taxes, suspension records, taxes, expulsion cases, taxes, and the dreaded high-stakes testing (NCLB) results: these are the things by which schools are known to most of the community.

Educators have never been very good at promoting their success stories to the community. At times, schools seem embarrassed to tout their own triumphs. Pressure may exist not to celebrate strong teachers' successes because of undesired pressures that might be placed on peers who have not manifested such victories in their classrooms. Clearly, however, this is a skewed value system. We ought to be more concerned about building the self-esteem of the students and the positive image of the school than fearing to affront the less successful teacher.

Those concerns aside, the final part of the program is to extend the recognition of student success beyond the classroom: first to the schoolwide community, then to the public in general. It is then, and only then, that the benefits of such a program may be truly realized.

## Conclusions

At the very foundation of the legend's approach to education is the belief that if we expect our children to succeed, then we ought to recognize that success. More time and effort should be placed in celebrating victory than in lamenting failure. The adage that we learn from our failures has its merit in terms of effort and concepts such as failure quotient, but otherwise, the adage may do more harm than good. The need for recognition is implicit in the following story.

Several years ago, there existed an average (if not lackluster) sophomore English student. He wasn't a troublemaker, but he wasn't much of an academic success either. He was part of the great gray majority: not strong enough for classroom kudos and not weak enough for special services. He was merely getting by, slipping through the cracks.

He was, however, a basketball player, a good basketball player—a starter on the varsity basketball team. That particular season happened to be a very good one, and as the team approached the playoffs, it had put together a 20-game winning streak. The streak, unfortunately, came to an end with a heartbreaking loss to one of the state's top-rated teams. After the loss, the boy was asked to do an interview by a local radio station, and in response to the interviewer's questions, he reported his feelings about the loss as well as his analysis of the game.

The next Monday, before class began, he was pulled aside by his English teacher, who went out of her way to compliment him on the articulate, intelligent fashion in which he had represented himself. He, of course, could not even have imagined her listening to the ball game, much less complimenting him, but that recognition was a pivotal moment in his development, after which his grades and his attitude about school (even English) changed dramatically. It had become, like the basketball court, a place where he could win recognition. It was another place in which he now believed he could succeed.

We learn best when we believe we can succeed. We learn to believe in ourselves, in our own abilities. We form higher expectations for ourselves. We panic less quickly, assured that we will, in the end, succeed. The legend knows more than anyone that success breeds success, and such a belief ought to be at the heart of an extensive recognition program that identifies and celebrates students' victories and achievements.

In the movie *The Polar Express,* the importance and meaning of Christmas for a young child was revealed when the train conductor punched the word BELIEVE in the child's train ticket. The secret to Santa and Christmas was only for the child to BELIEVE.

Legends also realize the importance and meaning of this same word, BELIEVE. As children walk out of a legend's classroom, there is an attitude that each child should carry out into the world: a belief in themselves. The legend will post this word above the classroom door, write the word on student assignments, or even use the word as a group cheer before the students depart their classroom ...

**BELIEVE!**

# 11

# Developing
# Powerful Classroom
# Management Skills

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*The first-year teacher was extremely anxious, and if the truth be known, more than a little nervous to begin her first real day of teaching with students in her classroom. She couldn't even come close to remembering how many times she tossed and turned in bed last night, praying for a few hours of sleep or at least something to take away the butterflies in her stomach. She had thoroughly convinced herself that she had done everything possible to make a good and lasting first impression on her students. She had attired herself professionally, planned—in fact, possibly over-planned—for the day's lesson, and had arrived at school an hour before the students would be walking into her room, just to make sure that everything was perfectly set and ready to go.*

*She proudly took her rightful position and stood by the doorway, warmly greeting the students as they entered the room. She even took a fraction of a second to breathe a happy sigh of relief. Everything was going as planned, everything was running smoothly, and she was certain that this was going to be a day to remember.*

*The tardy bell echoed throughout the school building to signal the beginning of class and to also "unfortunately" truly signal a day for this teacher to remember. Less than 20 minutes into her lesson, those same butterflies from the night before started to return in earnest. Time after time she asked softly and politely for the students to quiet down, to stop visiting with their neighbors, and listen to her. Even her resorting to the clapping of her hands, flicking off and on of the light switch, or speaking in a more angered tone of voice did not seem to harness the chaotic energy in the classroom. In fact, the atmosphere in the classroom had almost become game-like. Whatever the teacher tried, the students were ready to counterpunch, and the countless punches were quickly beginning to do damage. Frustration was vividly painted for all to see on the teacher's face.*

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Along with frustration comes panic, and the young teacher .resorted quickly to pushing the panic button and playing her trump cards. Yes, detentions were about to be issued in mass if the nonsense did not stop, and students were definitely going to be sent to the office. Not even 20 minutes into her first day and the students had already figured out what buttons to push to drive this young teacher to the brink of disaster.

Unfortunately, the best laid plans do not always guarantee success. There remains finally, and most importantly, the issue of control. Nothing thus far discussed in our book matters, if the teacher does not have control of the learning environment itself. The issue of control is a challenging one. Some teachers are able to master control easily and others struggle their entire professional lives with it.

The fact of the matter is that classroom management could be, perhaps should be, a book unto itself, but what we try to do here is offer some positive comments based on our observations of the most successful teachers, the legends, for whom control never seems to be a real issue. Perhaps what we offer can make a difference for others, enabling them to a make a difference for their students. After all, we are all teachers and we'd

love to put the striped shirts and whistles away once and for all and someday just be able to focus on our teaching.

The opening scenario in this chapter depicted the woes of a first-year teacher who will quickly have to earn her first two military stripes (command and control) if she is going to have any chance of surviving in the classroom. Unfortunately, the earning of military insignia (patches or medals—the medal of course would be a purple heart) is not only for beginning teachers. Teachers of varying degrees of classroom experience and longevity in the teaching profession are always confronted with new enemies and challenges to learning each and every year in their classrooms, no matter the grade level. From the children who thirst for either positive or negative attention, to the classroom bully, to the group of mean girls, to dealing with minority children that do not fit in the school's culture or the neglected and picked on child, to cell phones and text messaging, to gang recruitment, or to the lethal combination of students that all happen to be in the same class at the same time, classroom management, creating an environment where learning is sacred and thriving, is a constant challenge.

How challenging is it? It is the *constant struggle* for balance, a very thin and fine line of when or when not to cross it when making classroom management decisions. Final decisions usually come from one of two mind-sets: either the teacher makes decisions based on his or her desire to remain popular, or the teacher makes decisions based on his or her desire to remain respected by the students for taking appropriate actions to control their classroom. Although every teacher would love to be both popular and respected, popularity will come as a direct derivative if you first center your decisions on being respected because they are consistent, fair, well within your set of classroom rules, and help to maintain your established learning environment in your classroom. Remember, once the learning environment is jeopardized, threatened, or headed in the wrong direction, *you*, the teacher, must take a stance.

We believe that all children, deep down in their hearts, have innate knowledge of right and wrong. They know when a classmate is out of order or out of control. What they wait for (whose side they are going to be on— teachers or the students) is to see how the teacher initially handles the misbehaving student. If the teacher deals with this student in a way or fashion that allows the student to maintain his or her dignity, the students in the classroom will side with the teacher. If, on the other hand, the teacher is cruel, embarrassing, hurtful with sarcastic remarks, or degrading in his or her tone of voice and choice of words—even if the student was in the

wrong—many of the students in the class will side with the misbehaving student and not with the teacher. Their thought, now imprinted in the never forgotten section of their minds, would be this: "No one should ever be talked to or screamed at like that." Even though the student was in the wrong, the teacher has now become the classroom villain. The classroom environment is fragile, and it can change in a blink of an eye depending on the interactions and interpersonal exchanges between teacher and students.

To guard against the swing of student and classroom actions or emotions to the dark side, the hit song, *R-E-S-P-E-C-T,* made famous by Aretha Franklin, *must* be the teacher's first line of defense and best guideline on how teachers respond to classroom disruptions and problems. Most teachers post classroom rules, and most lists of rules include the same phrase, which is simple and to the point: treat *everyone* with respect. Who could argue against that rule? But, how many teachers practice what they preach? How many teachers actually walk the talk, rather than just talk the talk? And, what does respect actually mean? By definition, respect means consideration or thoughtfulness. It also means a feeling or attitude of admiration and deference toward somebody or something. Or, it can mean the state of being admired.

The legendary teachers, however, put a little different spin on the word R-E-S-P-E-C-T by remembering the significance that each letter in the word means to them:

> *R*—*The legend is **Responsible** for maintaining a positive learning classroom environment.*
>
> *E*—*The legend makes sure that **Every** student in the classroom is treated fairly.*
>
> *S*—*The legend **Stops** inappropriate behavior quickly and decisively without destroying a child's self-esteem.*
>
> *P*—*The legend, above all else, keeps everything in the classroom moving in a **Positive** direction.*
>
> *E*—*The legend is able to show **Empathy** when a student or the class is having a bad day.*
>
> *C*—*The legend is **Careful** not to make quick judgments or accuse someone without full knowledge of any given situation.*
>
> *T*—*Legends are **Trusted** because they consistently do what they say they are going to do—their words become actions.*

Before we get into the depths of this chapter, it is important that we share a few fundamental "golden rules" for you to remember in regard to having good classroom management skills. Besides treating everyone with R-E-S-P-E-C-T, it is important to remember the universal Golden Rule. Yes, this is the famous golden rule for all to put into daily practice:

< "Do unto to others as you would have them do unto you."
< Error on the side of less rather than more. Fewer classroom rules and regulations are far better than a list from here to China for the students to follow.
< Do not make a rule that you cannot enforce and follow yourself. Remember, you are the role model in the classroom.
< Make sure that your classroom rules are written down or posted in the classroom and not just stated verbally once in a while to the students. You can imagine how students have selected hearing when it comes to things they should or should not do.
< Send parents or guardians a list of your expectations and standards for your classroom routines. It is imperative to have parents in your corner of the room when their child is breaking one of your "known" rules.
< Share your rules and regulations with your administrators. This will often give you the benefit of the doubt if someone questions what has gone on in your classroom, as the administrators will be an informed audience and will not have to guess how your classroom operates.
< Admit that you are wrong. If you do happen to make the wrong decision (and, that will happen from time to time), the best remedy is to openly admit it, apologize, state that you have learned a valuable lesson from this experience, and that you will not make that error in judgment again.

It would be easy for us to state that if you practice and do everything we have written in this book about how legendary teachers perform their professional craft, classroom management would be a given, "something easy to do" and not something that would require a great deal of effort or time. To some degree, that would be true.

Instead, for our final view of legendary instructors, we want to examine in greater detail their successful classroom management skills. It is the orchestration and management of the class that to a large degree determines

student success. To further examine classroom management, we have divided the issues into four major topics:

< Maintaining a student orientation
< Sustaining a learning environment
< Teaching how to learn
< Defusing threatening situations

## Maintaining a Student Orientation

Above all else, in the classroom, the legend maintains an orientation exclusively aimed at student learning and student mastery. Close examination suggests that to a degree, a component of the problems that plague education stems from a lack of direction, or more appropriately, from a confusion of direction. The nonacademic responsibilities thrust on the teacher are many and diffuse, but more important, the social concerns voiced most often by parents, administrators, and the popular press tend to cloud a teacher's real instructional objectives. Education is repeatedly held up as the panacea for every one of society's ills. If something is wrong in America, it can be improved initially (and most economically) through education. Thus, we are not surprised to find many teachers adrift when it comes to their true orientation. Our concerns in this area are best exemplified in the following personal experience.

> *When my son was a freshman in high school, he had a great deal of difficulty in his history class; his grade wavered between a C and a D. As the semester continued, I tutored him more and more at home. As one major test approached, we dedicated ourselves to his success on it. We studied long and hard. By the time of the test, we were both ready for it.*
>
> *When he came home from school on test day, he reported rather optimistically that he thought he had done well. The test was given on a Wednesday, so on Thursday and then on Friday, when he said it was not yet graded, I wasn't too surprised. Even though, as we pointed out earlier, research has shown for years that only materials scored and returned within 48 hours have any learning value for the students, a wait of up to a week or two was not uncommon in my son's school.*

*Finally, 10 days later, my son returned home from school, rather dejectedly. With some shame he admitted that he had earned a D. I was furious with him. What was his problem? Didn't he care about his grade? Didn't he see how this could affect his future? (Fortunately, **I** am much more rational as a teacher than I am as a parent.)*

*As I calmed down, he explained that he had really scored a B on the test, but that his grade had been lowered 14% for having failed to put his name on the first page, hence the D. My anger toward my son dissipated quickly, and I was soon on the phone making an appointment to meet with his history teacher.*

*Now, before I continue, let me admit that his teacher was a veteran teacher, held in solid esteem by the school and her colleagues. I have no doubt that everything she did was done with regard to values she had developed as a teacher in response to the overwhelming demands placed on all of us. She was caring and intelligent, and although I was sure she was wrong, I was certain she had tried her best to do what she thought was in the best interest of her students.*

*When I met with her, she was reluctant to let me see the test. She did not let tests out, she explained, because that would mean she would have to make new tests every year. When she finally relented and let me see the test, I noticed that not only had my son's grade been reduced from a B to a D for not putting his name on it, but the test had no blank line on which to do so. My complaint about hidden agendas and my argument that no one was ever required to put one's name where there was no blank line fell on deaf ears. I finally left— no longer as angry as I was sad. Here was a lady dedicated to her profession, making all the wrong decisions because she had lost what should have been her true orientation. Clearly, her priorities as an instructor had evolved into the following.*

**Priority 1:** Saving labor—More important than how well the students learned was maintaining a system that kept work for the teacher to a minimum. Tests could not be used as learning devices because that meant she would have to make new ones.

**Priority 2:** Training students—In the teacher's mind, her first job was to train the students to be socially responsible. Following the rules about

names was, in her mind, worth 14% of the entire test grade.

**Priority 3:** Generating grades—It was evident by punishing my son's score that the teacher's job, as she saw it, was to sort the students by perceived abilities. Categorizing students by grades was more important than anything (except for the first two priorities).

**Priority 4:** Teaching students—Somewhere, buried beneath all her other misguided priorities, lay her intent to teach the children social studies.

Every action in the sequence of events showed that student learning was, in reality, this teacher's lowest priority, the least important consideration in her hierarchy of duties. Our contention in this book is that the legend does not share these priorities and instead bases every decision on how it will affect student learning. Doing so accomplishes two things immediately:

1. It makes every decision eminently easier. All facets of a situation are now weighed against one orientation only: what is best to ensure that learning occurs? This absolute orientation to one priority simplifies a teacher's life considerably.

2. This orientation makes every decision much more defensible. Working backward as we have from a set of terminal outcomes, every decision in the class, from curricular to disciplinary, is now not only made but absolutely defensible in light of the orientation to learning.

The legend preserves this absolute focus on student learning. In the legend's class, all decisions are made from this orientation. Decisions regarding homework, seating, discipline, classroom routines, grading, group work—absolutely every aspect of the educational day—are made in light of this focus.

## Sustaining a Learning Environment

Once the teacher has assented to this absolute orientation to student learning, the next step is merely the logical extension of the first. The regulations and rules of the classroom must be determined *only* as they affect the learning environment. It matters not to which school of discipline one ascribes; what does matter is that every rule and regulation that drives the class has been clearly made with the learning success of the student in mind. This, in turn, has three major implications.

< First, every restriction of student behavior is justified only in terms of the degree to which that behavior would otherwise interfere with learning.

< Second, every punishment must be meted out only as it will affect learning positively later in the course.

< Last, every student must be convinced of the reality of the first two standards.

When rules and consequent punishments are designed and applied with these three standards in mind, the number of discipline problems existing will quickly decrease. We would all do well to understand a basic truth about public education. Forget mandatory attendance laws, students are in school voluntarily. Here's proof:

< It is ridiculous to believe that we could physically make 1,000 students attend school every day.

< It is equally ridiculous to believe that one teacher could make 20 junior or senior high school students sit in a classroom and behave for 50 minutes, not to mention an elementary teacher working with 30-plus students who sit in a classroom together *all* day without misbehaving.

The reality of the situation is that our command over the students derives from their voluntary submission to our authority. This voluntary behavior, therefore, indicates that to a very large degree they have already bought into the system and into the belief that getting an education will serve their best interests. If, in turn, they see every rule and every act of discipline performed for the sake of their learning, they will most certainly accept such actions more readily. On the other hand, behavior that does not interfere with learning (not social training, but learning) is, therefore, not the concern of the teacher or school.

We offer a further word about discipline here, one that is more fully developed in the last section of this chapter: every rule that is enforced and every disciplinary action that is carried out must be done dispassionately. Because the legend has already attempted to dispel any adversarial relationship between teacher and student, and because both rules and discipline are totally learning oriented, their enforcement is never accomplished in anger. Instead, they are done almost reluctantly at times, but they are done and they are done uniformly.

In addition to the simple rules and regulations for operating the classroom, a more important consideration is the emotional environment that is established. When one watches students enter the legend's classroom, one gets an overwhelming sense that the students shed emotional baggage at the doorway. The legend has succeeded in creating an ESZ (Emotionally Safe Zone) in the classroom. To have achieved this, a number of steps must have been accomplished:

1. Students must have learned and recognized that the legend's classroom is not an arena within which they can build reputations by acting up or getting away with any prohibited behavior. They've learned that everyone is treated equally and fairly, and because everything done in class is for their benefit, they and their peers begin to view misbehavior as being costly to them all. Because they get away with nothing, they soon stop trying, and the educational environment has moved one step closer to being an ESZ.

2. Being wrong in the legend's classroom is not a sin. Being passive or uninvolved is—but not being mistaken. In fact, the legend rewards risk takers for asking questions and venturing opinions. The legend encourages active participation by rewarding it. Of course, the reticence of the shy student is recognized and respected, but shyness can be an incredibly debilitating handicap, and work must progress to overcome it. The legend's classroom makes such progress possible.

3. Students have learned that their self-esteem will not be threatened in this classroom. The legend is able to balance a degree of anxiety about learning with a larger degree of safety so that every student knows that he or she will not be humiliated as a form of discipline. Students know that everyone is equal in the legend's classroom. There are no favored students, and individuals are safe from emotional attacks by other individuals or groups. Likewise, the teacher is as subject to teasing or joking as anyone else. Students quickly learn that they are valued in this classroom.

As a result of these steps, the students seem to discard their emotional defenses as they enter the legend's classroom. One senses that students are almost relieved to enter this class, because here they can again be children without playing all the games of popularity and status that dominate their home lives and the social interactions with their peers. This sense of

emotional freedom is the cornerstone and foundation to the entire concept of sustaining a learning environment.

## Teaching How to Learn

Once the teacher has oriented all classroom activities to student learning, there remains a final step, a last fine-tuning of all instructional activities, and that is the differentiation of what to know from how to learn it and how to use it.

The legend is concerned with the subject matter of instruction, but he or she is more concerned with the process of learning that occurs. Dispensing information to students is not the practice of the legend.

As we have become more of a consumer-aware nation, we have found most professionals responding to our desire to be informed. Our dentists tell us step-by-step what they are doing and why. Doctors and nurses that used to hide our own charts from us now tell us fact by vital fact what they perceive and what they note. Even at the auto service department, careful records are kept of every transaction and attempts are made to keep those of us who are not mechanically challenged abreast of what needs to be done and why.

For some reason, however, education has not kept step with this trend. Teachers do not, by and large, spend enough time promoting their subject matter in real terms to the students. "Why do we have to learn this?" is a legitimate question, one that not only deserves an answer but that should be answered before it can be asked.

So we must construct a new approach to learning, one that accepts and responds to the feelings of the students prior to the dispensation of information.

### Phase 1

Every new unit, every venue of instruction, should be preceded by a justification of its presence. The students are our clients and should be an integral part not only of the instructional process but to a degree its planning. Informed clients are much more likely to join the successful completion of the project voluntarily than disenfranchised students who have been asked to trust the system. The first step in teaching students how

to learn is to teach them why they must learn. Only after they have acquiesced to this may the instructor successfully move on. In terms of the learning environment, students who have bought into the need to know will necessarily display better behavior and stronger effort.

To understand this, one need only ask about the kinds of discipline problems the driver education teacher faces—the answers are obviously "minor and few." The reason is not that driver education teachers have different students; instead, it is that two of the most important premises of education have already been fulfilled:

< Driver education students know why they must learn the material.
< They want to learn it.

Although we may have trouble making cell mitosis as applicable to students' lives as driver education, we must try. Frankly, if we can't make it relevant to their lives, maybe we ought to rethink its role in our curriculum. For 50 years, research has told us that teaching standardized sentence diagramming in English does not improve students' reading or writing abilities; instead, it makes them better grammarians. Of the 120 students that the average English teacher sees in a day, how many will go on to become grammarians? Clearly, the first step in teaching learning is justification of the material to be learned.

## Phase 2

Although the first step is relatively obvious, and almost every teacher is forced to accomplish it with a degree of regularity, we suggest that it be accomplished exuberantly and daily. (Okay, *exuberantly* might be a little strong, even for us, but we can at least insist on *willingly.)* The second step is one that may be completely overlooked: teaching the students how to learn the material. We'll make a blanket statement here, but it is one we believe we can stand behind. No material should be introduced without accompanying instruction on how to learn it. Such instruction should be logically constructed to fit the students' preexisting knowledge base. If no preexisting knowledge base exists, then you need to create the learning experience with the students. As much as possible, it should be experience referenced or kinesthetic in nature (because we remember that to which we can relate because of past experience and that which we move in space more than we remember things for which we do neither). As much as

possible, it should be made concrete rather than abstract, specific rather than vague: examples are more memorable than concepts. If a picture paints a thousand words, then an experience paints a thousand pictures.

Let's take a look at some illustrations of this second step at work.

< To make learning experience based, one enterprising junior high biology teacher made arrangements with parents to bring students' pets into class. The menagerie ranged from dogs and cats to lizards, turtles, birds, and fish. When each child was in a group where there was one pet, the directions were given: identify things that the students physically had in common with the animals. Once these lists were completed and displayed so everyone could see them, the instructor categorized the animals as either mammals or nonmammals. Then he announced that people were mammals. The students were then asked to identify those things they had found that were true of the animals that were mammals but not the nonmammals. The list they finally produced was the list of distinguishing characteristics of mammals. The one-day project was used to teach the concept of scientific classification of living creatures along with the distinguishing features of mammals. The episode clearly related to past experience (it involved students' pets) and prompted their desire to learn.

< When introducing a unit on non-Western stories, one English teacher began by dividing the class into five groups. Each group was given identical scrap pieces of construction paper, scissors, and tape. Each group was also given a set of directions indicating how to construct a model home from the materials. What the groups didn't know was that each one was also given one special direction. One group was told that good houses never had like color pieces of paper touching each other; another was told that the house should get progressively lighter in color the higher it went; another was told it should get darker. One group was told that all pieces should be cut into triangles and that all pieces should be taped only on the outside of the house. Once everyone was done, each group was asked to rate each house according to how well it followed directions. Of course, each group rated its house best, thinking all the others had violated significant directions, not knowing other groups had been given different directions. From this rating, the concept of differing values, morals, and taboos was introduced and the unit of non-Western stories began.

&lt; When first introducing stocks and the concepts of investment, one junior high teacher gave the students $1,000 in "class" money and told them to invest it in the stocks of their choice. The class then played the market for the next month. Students were told that their grades would be determined by how much money they had at the end of the project. Halfway through the unit, the teacher inserted brokerage fees for any transactions made. During the last week of the trading, the teacher began to leak information to a few students before trading on what the market was supposed to do that day. When others found out what was happening, the teacher introduced the concept of insider trading. (Once caught in his dealings, the teacher admitted that grades would not be determined by how much class money had been earned or lost.)

Such innovative techniques are not always available, obviously, but at the very least, the teacher needs to break down the intended skill into a set of behaviors that can be readily followed. One teacher taught sentence fragments and run-ons with this sequential method:

**Step 1:** Write down the number of independent clauses (ICs) indicated in a sentence by their punctuation.

**Step 2:** Find and label subject-verb combinations (SVs), each of which indicates a separate clause in the sentence.

**Step 3:** Identify ICs and subordinate clauses (SCs) knowing that all SCs are just ICs begun with a subordinating word.

**Step 4:** On the left hand, hold up fingers to represent the number of ICs indicated by the sentence; on the right, hold up fingers to represent the number actually found.

**Step 5:** If the left hand equals the right, the sentence is correct. If the left hand is greater than the right, there is a sentence fragment; if the right hand is greater than the left, there is a run-on sentence.

**Step 6:** Correct the imbalance by changing the sentence to indicate more or fewer ICs or by increasing or decreasing the number of ICs present.

one teacher began with an examination of the 1998 Super Bowl, where Green Bay was a prohibitive favorite to win over the Denver Broncos. Green Bay had the better defense, the better offense, the better record, and more all-pro players. Everything that could be measured pointed clearly to

a lopsided Green Bay victory. As we know, Denver did the unthinkable and won. How could this be? the teacher asked. Most students could offer some theories to explain the upset. Having finished with their responses, the teacher then introduced the concept of the Revolutionary War. How could the Americans have defeated the much more powerful British? The stage was now set for learning.

The point in all these examples is clear. The legend makes the material relevant to the students' world and teaches the student not only what to learn but how to learn it. Rather than worrying about the rapidity of learning, the legend is concerned with the quality of learning. In each example, the legend attempted to draw on what the students already knew to take the learning further. In all examples, the legend attempted to make learning kinesthetic, knowing that students learn more by manipulating their environment than by passively absorbing material. Each example shows a teacher attuned to how students most effectively learn.

The legend is especially sensitive to the feeling of defeat that students can experience when they don't learn. This feeling is quick to arise when students begin to sense that learning in a particular area is somehow intuitive, somehow an innate quality. That belief, of course, lies behind a student who says, "I never really got math!" It is even more solidly behind the parent who offers as an excuse, "Well, his father never could spell either." Both of these comments attest to the belief that certain types of learning are inherited, inborn, or congenital. The legend is the first to show the student that he or she can learn; teaching this is far more important than teaching what to learn.

This final concept is not at odds with the learning orientation discussed at the beginning of this chapter. What the legend knows is that by teaching students why they should learn and then teaching them how to learn, learning of the material itself will occur more quickly, more efficiently, and more permanently. The legend understands this nature of learning. Without question, the connection that the legend makes with the students by teaching them what to learn and how to learn it brings a true sense of peace and tranquility to the classroom.

All the oars of learning are in the water at the same time; the teacher who is at the helm, steering this classroom ship to safe passage to the island of mastery learning, is not apt to ever uncover a plot of mutiny on board that ship.

# Defusing Threatening Situations

One of the worst college professors we ever had surprised us one evening by making the observation that in almost every situation wherein a student erupted in class, the fault lay with the teacher. At first, because we had little respect for this professor, we were willing to reject this out of hand, but over the years, the wisdom of what he said has proven itself to be true —almost without fail. It is our belief that in most situations in which student behavior becomes absolutely unacceptable, the main precipitating factor has been the teacher. Of course, in today's troubled times, this is not always so: teachers do not precipitate drug-induced frenzy, gang violence, or psychotic conduct, but they can be responsible for many of the other problems that interrupt learning in the classroom.

It is best to remember that we are speaking of any situation where a teacher must stop a behavior that is disruptive to learning and discipline a student. Anywhere along that spectrum lies the possibility of a student's violent outburst in response to the teacher's action.

This possibility of angered response exists largely because of five perceptions on behalf of the student. By addressing these perceptions, the teacher may greatly reduce, if not eliminate, the likelihood of a violent reaction from a student.

## Perception 1: Inconsistency

The teacher has been perceived as being inconsistent. Because perceptions are more important than reality in situations like these, it is necessary that unmitigated objectivity is maintained in the application of discipline. Treatment of all students is open and according to set procedures. When new situations arise for which there are no precedents, no decisions are made until the situation has been thoroughly analyzed. (In other words, leave rash decisions to dermatologists.) Most important, to avoid the charge of inconsistency, rules and regulations must be applied to all students equally despite their reputations and community or political connections, well earned or not. If Jose must have a pass to enter class late, so must Lily. If Joel may not use the washroom during class, neither may Latisha. If Anthony gets an extra day to turn in his assignment, for no legitimate or apparent reason, then everyone else in the class should have

the same privilege. Everyone is to be treated the same. There is never a hierarchy or rank as to who gets special privileges or considerations.

## Perception 2: Unfairness

The teacher has been perceived as being unfair. One key to defusing this misperception is to have consequences for action clearly spelled out beforehand. Another is to involve the offender in the determination of the punishment. A third way is to have the punishment fit the crime: one minute late to class today—how about arriving a minute early tomorrow? A final approach is to make the punishment as rehabilitative as possible, rather than punitive.

Here are some fundamental principles to follow to make sure that discipline is not viewed as unfair:

< Punishment should *not* be associated with grades (that is a completely separate issue).
< Punishment should *not* be degrading in nature.
< Punishment should *not* be associated with more homework being assigned.
< Punishment should *not* be classwide for the misbehavior of one or two individuals.
< Punishment should *not* be done in the heat of anger; the student is far more likely to see it as unfair than if the punishment is meted out coolly by a rational teacher.

## Perception 3: Humiliation

The third key to defusing possibly violent situations is to adhere to the precept that discipline is never to be demeaning, neither in the nature of the punishment nor in its delivery. If students believe they are being humiliated, then they must defend themselves, and rightfully so. Humiliating the student is a ridiculous premise by which to modify behavior. Whereas good-natured teasing, even friendly satire or sarcasm, may have its place in the classroom, among friends, the confrontational situation is no place for any of those. Maintaining the correct, professional, businesslike, dispassionate tone is everything in such a situation. Now is not the time to be sarcastic or even to try to use humor. It will be misunderstood.

## Perception 4: Battle of Egos

The fourth key is really a summation of the first three, and it suggests that a disciplinary scenario is never to be perceived (by teacher or student) as a battle of egos. Behavior is not a negotiable item. Expectations of proper behavior have been spelled out early in the course and have been agreed on (or at least acquiesced to) by everyone, including the students. The legend realizes that control is as much based on prevention of problems as anything. He or she is sensitive to the feelings of the students and realizes that the only time students lash out is if they are backed into an emotional corner and emasculated. (This explains why and supports the fact that classroom outbursts are most often traditionally committed by male students.) The legend does not engage in emotional battles with a student, because emotional battles must end with either the degradation of the student or an emotional outburst.

## Perception 5: Saving Face

The legend fully realizes how important the concept of "face" is to students, especially to teenagers. If they perceive that a teacher is attempting to rob them of their "face," then they feel the teacher has stolen their self-esteem or forced them to try to defend it by attacking the teacher. There is no reason to follow this course of action. Instead, all issues of discipline are to be dealt with quietly, personally, without humor, and without public shame. We understand that it is a battle for many young teachers not to feel so personally threatened by students that they become emotionally involved in discipline situations, but it is a detachment that must be mastered if one is ever to be a legend.

The legend probably has many fewer discipline problems than other teachers; the legend's class is run more efficiently and more strictly than others. This efficiency and this strictness are not the result of the legend's ability to control students emotionally, but because in the legend's class, students know they are emotionally safe from harassment and they will be treated consistently, fairly, without shame, and with respect. Being respected is as important to the student as it is to the teacher.

## Conclusions

There are two familiar philosophical gospels that are practiced and preached within the inner circle of teacher behaviors at the beginning of every new school year. The first philosophical gospel is this: "You have to start the new school year by being really strict, showing the students who is in control, and making certain that the students know you are the boss." That philosophical statement is interestingly followed with another timely gospel: "Later on in the school year (no one really knows the exact time frame for later on in the school year), you can begin to lighten up and not be so mean or strict with the students." Read those two philosophical gospels again, and then repeat the reading of both statements one more time. Might these two practices be the biggest cardinal sins or the worst advice ever given to a teacher in the educational profession?

*If*—and this is a big *if*—*if* you show R-E-S-P-E-C-T to your students, *if* you follow the golden rules, *if* you maintain a student orientation, *if* you sustain a learning environment, *if* you teach students how to learn, and *if* you can defuse threatening situations, *why* would you ever think of having to change your actions, rules, expectations, or standards with your students during the course of a school year? Better yet, how will the students know which teacher you are during the year if you begin to change your classroom management behaviors? Will you still be the strict, nonbending type of teacher or will you become the laissez-faire type of teacher? Will the students experience Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde in the classroom? No one reacts well to change, and if you begin to lower your standards or expectations, the students will ultimately end up losing in the game of learning.

Remember this: no teacher, not even a legend, can succeed in classroom management if orientation is not maintained toward student learning or if a learning environment is not maintained. The opportunity for learning must exist as a requisite to learning. Once this is accomplished, then the legend begins by teaching the students why they must learn and how they are to learn. Merely teaching what to learn is no longer (if it ever was) an acceptable goal for teachers. To succeed today, learning must be divided into thirds: why it should be learned, how to learn it, and what is learned.

Years ago, when computer-assisted education was first pioneered, its backers promised that one day teachers would be superfluous because computers would take our places. It is true that if our job were nothing more than to present the information to be learned, computers probably would be the vehicle of choice. Of course, dispensing information is not the teachers' only job. Computers are not learning oriented; they do

nothing to provide a learning atmosphere, and they certainly do not show why or how to learn. People can do all these, and the legend most certainly does.

Finally, as our last chapter comes to a close, a wise and seasoned principal used the following question as his last question to prospective teaching candidates during the interview process. The final question of the interview was this: "If you don't already have children of your own, at some point in time you will most likely have a child of your own who will someday walk into a classroom and take his or her assigned seat and wait for class to begin. When your child looks up from his or her desk there will be a teacher standing there. Would you like to be that teacher standing in front of your own child? Would you like your child to have a teacher like you? Why or why not?"

True to form, legends would *never* hesitate with their response. With a resounding "absolutely, YES!" Legends would certainly wish to be their own child's teacher. They dream and pray that every teacher their child has is defined as a legend.

*Why is this so?*

Legendary instructors take it upon themselves the sole responsibility to make a positive difference in the life of each and every one of their students. The legends are the molders and makers of dreams. The legends light up the lives of children. The legends, most importantly, inspire and motivate children to BELIEVE in themselves.

**There is no greater profession than**
**that of being a teacher—a LEGEND.**

# Epilogue

**W**e are totally committed to the efficacy of education. It is our belief, based on a combined 50-plus years of teaching, that the teachers who have been clearly identified and defined throughout our book as legends, become the cornerstones by which excellent instruction is modeled, copied, and emulated. The legend influences the total classroom environment that maximizes a meaningful and fulfilling learning experience for all students.

It is "totally" a win-win situation. By striving to become legends, teachers win not only from the increased support from students, parents, and administrators, but from the self-satisfaction of inner joy, knowing that they have made a difference in the lives of their students. Students win because they have been challenged to learn more than they ever thought possible, and to their surprise, they had fun doing it. Of course, the community wins because this dynamic educational partnership, legend and student, tends to bring out the best in everyone throughout the entire school system.

How does a teacher know that he or she has attained legend status? As we suggested initially, success is a journey and not a destination, but a teacher might suspect he or she is on the right track if something like the following were to happen.

Several years ago, in early spring, an experienced English teacher was standing outside the teachers' workroom talking with several other teachers when a senior (Tom) came up, excused his interruption, and asked if he might have a minute of the English teacher's time. The teacher had worked with this student as a freshman on the baseball team and had him in class for a semester when the boy was a sophomore, so he had no idea what the student wanted to talk about. Nonetheless, the teacher agreed, and the two went to his room. Once there, the conversation unfolded quickly.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Tom* | Listen, I hate to bother you, but this will only take a second. |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Teacher* | No problem. What can I do for you? |
| *Tom* | Well, I wonder if you've heard any of those rumors about what happened at that party last Saturday? |
| *Teacher* | Yes, I did; some of the students were caught drinking, weren't they? |
| *Tom* | Yeah, that's right. Well, the word around school is that I was one of the ones picked up. |
| *Teacher* | I hadn't heard that. |
| *Tom* | The thing is, I just wanted you to know that it isn't true. I wasn't there. I don't drink. |
| *Teacher* | I'm glad to hear that, but I don't have anything to do with it.... |
| *Tom* | I know, but it's important to me that you didn't think I was like that. |
| *Teacher* | I don't. |
| *Tom* | Good, 'cause it matters to me what you think. |

What is evident here is the respect that this teacher has earned at that school. We are life touchers, and to have touched a life that deeply is a great reward, one not possible in most professions. One needn't have taught too long before the letters from former students begin to arrive. They are never many in number, but they are enough to keep any teacher going.

As you strive to become a legend, we hope that your rewards grow as ours have. We hope you too receive those letters and notes from students, that you are the one student's stop at the school to see years after they've matriculated elsewhere. We hope that someday each of you will be stopped by someone in a public place and be introduced to a significant other as, "This is the one, the teacher I've always told you about."

There are many things amiss with public education, and there are many drawbacks to becoming a teacher, but there are rewards too. Why become a legend? Why dedicate a life to being a master teacher? Perhaps this story will put everything into perspective:

*In ancient times a king decided to find and honor the greatest person among his subjects. A man of wealth and property was singled out. Another was praised for his healing powers, another for his wisdom and knowledge of the law. Still another was lauded for his business acumen. Many other successful people were brought back to the palace, and it became evident that the task of choosing the greatest would be difficult.*

*Finally, the last candidate stood before the king. It was a woman. Her hair was white. Her eyes shone with the light of knowledge, understanding, and love. "Who is this?" asked the king. "What has she done?"*

*"You have seen and heard all the others," said the king's aide. "This is their teacher!" The people applauded and the king came down from his throne to honor her.*

We were called to teaching because we love what we do and because we are hopelessly lost in the belief that what we do matters. It matters a lot. But you already knew that, didn't you? We hope that what we have said will make your professional life even more rewarding than it already has been. Thank you for reading our book, and thank you for being a teacher.

Remember, as you begin each day in your classroom, your number 1 goal should always be to make a significant positive difference in the lives of all your students. Be the teacher of knowledge, understanding, and love.

**Be a LEGEND!**

# Appendix 1

## Practical Advice 1—Teach metacognition.

1. Involve kids in making a plan to learn.

2. Evaluate the plan as it progresses.

3. Assess the plan at the end of a unit.

4. Redesign the plan for the next experience.

## Practical Advice 2—Teach inductively.

Whenever possible, don't teach the rule. Help students discover the rule for themselves. By doing so you have accomplished the following:

1. Raised anxiety

2. Gained ownership and autonomy

3. Experienced problem solving

4. Displayed intrinsic motivation

For Example—a Spelling Rule

Why does "worship" become "worshiping?"

*but "begin" become "beginning?"*

Why does "cancel" become "canceled?"

*but "occur" become "occurred?"*

Why does "temper" become "temperable?"

*but "regret" become "regrettable?"*

Hint 1—It has nothing to do with long and short vowel sounds.

## Practical Advice 3—Teach deductively.

Whenever possible, give the students universal rules and show them that they apply to all members of the population.

1. This increases intrinsic motivation because it is challenging and logical.

2. This is the primary pedagogy for teaching the laws of mathematics, especially for geometric proofs. Familiarizing students with the way these deductions work lays the groundwork for future success in math.

For Example—a Simple Biology Lesson

Major Premise: All mammals have hair.

Minor Premise: Whales are mammals. Conclusion: ?

If it's a legitimate syllogism (deductive argument), then it has to be true—yes, whales have hair!

## Practical Advice 4—Whenever possible, don't teach merely what to learn; teach students how to learn.

No lesson is complete without instruction on how to learn it. Break everything down to the simplest of steps and check for mastery along the way. *Presenting a reading list and syllabus is not teaching.*

Don't wait for the final assessment to address a student's failure to have mastered the material.

For Example—a Rather Simple Illustration

1 4 9 2 1 7 7 6 5 0 1 7 4 7

1492 1776 501 747

1 4 9 2 1 7 7 6 5 0 1 7 4 7

For Example—a More Complex Illustration

Here's the grammar rule: never use the preposition "like" when you should use the subordinating conjunctions "as if" or "as though."

This is simple, right?

Is the "like" in the following sentence used correctly?

A sweater *like* the one she has is exactly what I was looking for.

or is this "like" used correctly?

She acted *like* she was his mother when she told him to sit down.

What if I taught you this instead: whenever you see the word "like" in a sentence, see whether "as if" or "as though" fits instead.

If they make sense, use one of them instead of "like." If they don't, leave "like" alone—it's correct!

Now can you tell if "like" is used correctly?

A sweater *like* the one she has is exactly what I was looking for.

or, how about this one?

She acted *like* she were his mother when she told him to sit down.

## Practical Advice 5—Whenever possible, have the students design the review.

Let students make up the review test or worksheet.

(Don't let them leave out material that might be on the real test, but let them write the review.)

1. They get the experience of thinking like test writers.

2. They get to choose what's important.

Be careful the first time!

## Practical Advice 6—Let students use a cheat sheet while taking the exam.

You make the rules, but you might let them use one side of a 3 x 5 index card with anything on it they can fit by their own hand.

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## Practical Advice 7—Let students test alone, in pairs or trios, and pick their own partners.

They get choices, but you make the rules. Examples follow:

Pairs get -4%

and trios get -8%

or individuals get +4%

---

## Practical Advice 8—Always use graphic organizers.

Research tells us that 50% or more of your learners will be visual learners. Research also tells us that another 20% or more of your learners will be spatial learners.

*Special hint:* **Make students copy the graphic organizer. The act of drawing it will impact the kinesthetic learners far more than just seeing it.**

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## Practical Advice 9—For younger children especially, but not exclusively, incorporate anything to be learned into original, creative writing.

Children can write or tell a story about anything. Let them have fun while they incorporate what it is they are to learn, correctly into their stories.

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## Practical Advice 10—Have students keep track of their own progress.

For older students, use a journal or portfolio to record their feelings before, during, and after a unit—not all have to do it and perhaps you allow them not to share it with you or others.

For younger students, use K-W-L: a simple chart with "K" being "what I already *know* about the unit, "W" being "what I *want* to learn from the unit," and "L" being what I *learned."* Fill it out at least three times during the unit and talk about it in class or in conferences.

## Practical Advice 11—Use a graffiti wall.

Set aside a space in the room where students, at their leisure, may write questions or comments about the class. Other students (or you) may answer them. Do this anonymously.

## Practical Advice 12—Be sure to follow assessment guidelines in order to challenge students and downplay rote memorization.

1. Essay tests, graded holistically, show better understanding than objective tests.

2. Fill-in-the-blank tests are the next best—but *never* give a word bank.

3. True-false tests are better if students have to explain why "false" statements are not correct.

4. Multiple-choice tests can be good if one detractor represents the most common and frequent student error. Math tests may use "none-of-the-above."

## Practical Advice 13—Allow students to participate in in-class debates.

All kids love to argue. On any subject at any grade level with any format, a debate can be a great way to look at all aspects of a subject and indirectly

teach critical thinking, problem solving, speaking, and listening skills.

## Practical Advice 14—Whenever possible, build in measures to reward effort and knowledge aside from a one-time performance or test.

one grade is hard to defend and also invites excuses on why a student did poorly on that one measurement.

> The very best assessments of a skill are *multiple* and *varied.*
> Here's a humble example from a college speech class:
>
> 50%—my evaluation of the speech
>
> 25%—the average of three student evaluations of the speech
>
> 25%—my evaluation of the three critiques written by this student about other students' speeches

## Practical Advice 15—Whenever possible, have kinesthetic learning incorporate visual and auditory skills.

The value of flash cards is in the manipulation of the material to be learned. They work.

Whenever possible, make learning "hands on."

## Practical Advice 16—Have students write brief comparisons among "unlike" items, especially when the items seem to be strangely juxtaposed.

Elementary—Now that we know what an island, an isthmus, and a peninsula are, how would you describe yourself in your family? Are you an

island, an isthmus, or a peninsula?

Secondary—Will history judge President Clinton as being more of a Peter the Great or Ivan the Terrible?

## Practical Advice 17—Whenever possible, pique their curiosity.

Make it suspenseful.

*What president never went to school?* Make it a challenge.

*Who is the last man to run for president who was not born in the United States?*

Make it tantalizing.

*—Victoria Woodhull*

## Practical Advice 18—Include self-evaluation in the final assessment of any student's work in a unit.

Much like the speech example, I will make a test add up:

75%—raw score

5%—their self-score

20%—my evaluation of their self-analysis

## Practical Advice 19—As much as possible, use heterogeneous, cooperative groups for learning.

But keep in mind the following:

1. Maintain individual accountability in the final assessment.

2. Downplay preplanned roles, and use the group interaction time for gathering information and ideas.

3. Change groups frequently, attempting to have four student in each group.

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## Practical Advice 20—Remember that nothing works all the time for all students.

The more you attempt, the more options you'll present to all your students, and when given the chance, they'll gravitate to the learning venue they appreciate the most.

# Appendix II

## Homework—Point 1

Here are homework guidelines for you to follow, according to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education:

Grades 1-3: no more than 20 minutes a night

Grades 4-6: no more than 40 minutes a night

Grades 7-9: no more than 2 hours a night

Grades 10-12: no more than 2½ hours a night

## Homework—Point 2

Does homework promote learning? Quite a bit of evidence suggests that it does not.

Homework appears far more effective in promoting efficiency in accomplishing a task already understood than in mastering a new concept. In short, it's better as practice than as learning.

**Caveat 1:** Homework is a good and necessary venue for memorization work.

**Caveat 2:** Homework is a good and necessary venue for reading. However, the too familiar experience with homework is either

I don't know how to do this—and doing five more questions about it doesn't change the fact that I still don't get it!

or

I get it! I get it! Why do I have to do it five more times?

# Homework—Point 3

Hearing the command to "study" as homework is probably the most frustrating assignment any student can get, since so many of your students don't know how to study.

Studying without knowledge of how one learns can be the biggest waste of time any student will experience. Teach them how to study. Give them options other than staring at the open book. You can have students do the following:

< Use flash cards
< Rewrite material to be learned
< Make and listen to tapes
< Write quizzes and take them
< Copy text and annotate it
< Read material aloud
< Study with other students, siblings, or parents

# Homework—Point 4

Every school should have a policy on homework, and that policy should be communicated with all parents regularly.

Everyone involved—parents, students, teachers, and administrators—should be able to quote the homework policy from memory.

In addition, every teacher must have a system to deal with absences. It must address the following:

< How is missed work communicated to absent children?
< Does all missed work have to be made up?
< How long does a student get to finish makeup work?
< How do absences affect the student's grade?

In terms of motivation, here is the most important rule we can follow:
Never vary from your own policies. If the policy is faulty, live with it now and change it for the next course, semester, or year; but for now, you live with it.

# Homework—Point 5

Especially at the elementary level, teach your parents how to help with homework.

   < How much should they help?
   < What should they provide at home for their children's homework?
   < When is it too much help?
   < May they call you with questions?

# Homework—Point 6

A pattern of homework that is followed rather faithfully makes it easier on everyone.

   In certain areas of the country, Wednesday night is church night and most teachers give less homework.

   Some teachers give no homework for weekends and holidays; others use those times for bigger projects.

# Homework—Point 7

This is for new teachers especially—Don't underestimate the time it will take slower students to complete the work.

   On the other hand, be prepared to give the message to some parents that their children are overachievers and should not spend the time they do on homework.

# Homework—Point 8

Make certain, and then double check to make even more certain, and then have another teacher look at the assignment to make absolutely certain that the purpose and directions of the homework are crystal clear.

   Even if family members spend a lot of time and effort on a homework assignment, that assignment is worthless if it is the wrong assignment or

they have incorrect information to ensure successful completion of the assignment.

# Homework—Point 9

When possible, let homework be started in a guided setting in class to ensure that the students are on the right track and know exactly what to do. Remember, homework does not teach; it only reinforces what you taught that day in class.

# Homework—Point 10

Variety in homework assignments fulfills one of the tenets for increasing intrinsic motivation and makes the work less like drudgery.

But variety also increases the likelihood of misunderstanding or faulty products. It's a very thin line.

# Homework—Point 11

Feedback is essential for motivation.

Homework systems that merely check off completed homework destroy motivation, especially among younger or struggling students. Make sure that you always give meaningful comments in your feedback.

# Homework—Point 12

This is for secondary teachers only: coordinate due dates for homework, projects, and tests online through a write-only school calendar.

It does not have to be binding and it need not be available to students or parents, but this may help us avoid overloading kids on any given day.

# *Create Your Own Personal Icon*



**R**ather than your name or signature placed on school forms, graded papers, or hall passes—why not create your own personalized icon?

For years, this smiling-faced iconic little man with two shoes, spiked hair, and outstretched arms was known throughout an entire school and community. This little man represented me and depicted my vision toward my responsibility of being a professional educator. Happy, always smiling, with arms reaching out to lend a helping hand or to help make a difference—this icon was readily recognized by my students, faculty, staff, and parents. It continues today to bring a smile and fond memories to those who see it.

No matter the age of the child, and even adult learners—to them my icon will always represent a positive and meaningful learning experience.

# One Final Story

## Your Signature

Think for a moment about your own personal handwritten signature. What do you believe that your signature really means or signifies about you when you sign your name to a document or a piece of paper? Can you, for even one minute, begin to imagine how many times teachers reminded you to make sure that you put your name on your paper before you handed it in? Your signature not only identified the assignment as yours, more importantly, it also stood for the quality of your work. After all, the assignment had your name on it.

Signatures can take on other meanings, too. Doctors can easily be identified by their signatures, because you can't read them. When you sign a check or a credit card slip, you are clearly stating that you are good for the money. We also know that John Hancock signed his name big and bold on the Declaration of Independence, because he wanted his signature to stand out in order that King George III would be able to read his name without using his glasses. If you are a golfer, each golf course has a signature hole, which can take on a dualistic meaning of the most challenging hole or the most scenic hole on the golf course.

> *A signature story is a story worth repeating and remembering. As our book comes to an end, we share with you our signature story.*

Several thousand years ago in the Greek city-state of Athens, one of the main activities of the people was to philosophically discuss the ever-changing world around them. In fact, on every Friday evening, many

citizens would gather in the center of the town and ask their most thought-provoking questions. As the story continues, there appeared to be one individual (who we call the scholar) who always seemed to be able to respond correctly to even the most puzzling of questions. As his vast knowledge continued to impress, more and more people would come to witness his responses to questions on Friday nights. As you can imagine, the scholar's fame and popularity continued to grow. At the same time, there were also individuals who became jealous of the wise man's status. Time and time again they attempted to pose questions that they felt the scholar could not answer, but every Friday night, the wise man always had the correct response.

Then one day, one of the jealous men came up with the perfect question to stump and erase the legacy of the scholar. He would come Friday evening and ask the scholar if the small bird he held in his hand was alive or dead? If the scholar responded that it was dead, he would open his hand and the bird would fly away. If the scholar responded that it was alive, he would crush the small bird in his hand and show that it was dead. Finally, the perfect question to end the scholar's reign of popularity was to be delivered.

Friday night came, and by now hundreds of people had gathered in the center of town to hear the scholar respond to questions. The scholar asked, "Are there any questions?" The jealous man stepped forward and stated his question. "Scholar, there is a small bird in my hand; is it alive or dead?" There was an immediate hush, and an eerie silence among the crowd of people hung in the air as they anticipated the scholar's response. The scholar turned to the jealous man and did not hesitate for one second with his answer. He stated, "Young man— what you have in your hand is what you make of it!" Let me repeat his statement one more time. "What you have in your hand is what you make of it!"

In the beginning of our book, we asked a question: "Are legendary teachers born with exemplary skills and knowledge or can they be taught those skills to allow themselves to become legends?" Throughout this book we have described the necessary characteristics and traits needed to be able to achieve legendary status in the teaching profession. You now have that knowledge. What you do with this knowledge as it pertains to your professional career or your instructional future is clearly in your hands and your hands alone.

You are in charge of your signature. What will you want your name to stand for? What will you want your signature to tell the world about you?

Who knows? Maybe you will be fortunate enough to not have to sign your name. Maybe instead, your legacy will be recognized by a simple drawing of a smiling face, which has two feet, spiked hair, and arms stretched out to positively make a difference in the world in which we live.

# Index

# Notes

Please feel free to use the following pages to jot down notes on your own stress mastery techniques, tips you've gotten from other teachers, and what works and what doesn't work for your stress level.