

A FEW HINTS

for Developing a Positive and Enthusiastic Classroom Environment

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Take a moment to think of your best learning experiences throughout your educational career. Can you remember the teachers who guided those memorable experiences? Perhaps you remember the teacher who stood at the doorway and greeted each student by name. Or maybe it was the teacher who offered real-life examples of complex problems. Chances are that the teachers you remember can each be exemplified by a passion for their subject area and a desire to actively involve students in their own learning.

How can you become that teacher who students remember with admiration and fondness? This article offers a few simple tips to keep in mind as you develop a positive and enthusiastic educational environment.

Tip #1: Show Your Love of Art Enthusiasm for a subject is manifested in a positive attitude toward its content. You must convey an obvious passion for art. Speak in affirmative terms about works of art and artists from diverse times and people. Challenge students to examine their own perceptions and philosophies about art and artists; to broaden their range of acceptance of what can be and who can be an artist. Offer opportunities for students to explore many types of art and art media.

HINT: Make an art timeline. Assign students the task of adding artworks to the timeline and providing details or insights about each object. Consider adding favorite artworks as well as artworks that students want to explore further. Avoid negative connotations such as least favorite or least interesting. Be sure to contribute to the timeline yourself.



Tip #2: Encourage Students to Be Academic Risk Takers

It is up to you to create a learning environment that encourages each student to be an academic risk taker. For instance, you'll need to make frequent eye contact, smile, move around the room, offer words of praise, and display student work

in the classroom to create such an environment. Most important of all, you will need to make your classroom a safe place to learn; a place where students do not fear being mocked or put down for incorrect or incomplete responses.

Honor sincere attempts to answer questions or give opinions. If the

answer is incorrect, provide a few hints that will assist the student with finding the right response. If the answer is lacking in completeness, restate the valid points and encourage the student to add to the response. Guide students to corroborate opinions with factual evidence.

HINT: Practice careful listening skills so that you are better able to guide students to deeper understanding. Always determine that you have accurately heard what students convey. "Do I understand what you said was ..." provides an opportunity for students to expand on answers that need clarification or additional support.

Tip #3: Learn Students' Names

Learning students' names during the first days of school suggests that you are attentive and caring. Besides helping you to gain control of the classroom, calling students by name indicates that you value each as an individual. In return, you will discover that students are more responsive to you. Addressing students by name removes anonymity and has a tendency to promote attentive and on task behavior.

One effective classroom management skill is to call on an individual student after a question has been posed. Practice posing questions in this format: "What ideas are shown in this painting, Manny?" This questioning technique holds the attention of the class because nobody is sure who will be called upon to respond.

HINT: If you have difficulty learning names or you have an impossibly large number of names to learn, try creating seating charts for your own reference.

Tip #4: Differentiate Instruction

Being responsive to individual differences in learning styles of students suggests that your teaching goal is to reach everyone with each lesson. You'll discover that students

are much more willing to be in charge of their own learning when you are sensitive to their cognitive needs.

Keep in mind that differentiation does not necessarily mean that each student has an individual plan. A realistic approach to differentiation can include modifying the speed that lessons are delivered (faster for some groups, slower for others), adjusting the amount of work required (for individuals or groups), varying the kind of media used, or tempering the overall content of instruction. Never suggest that any group has less or more ability or skill than another.

How can you become that teacher who students remember with admiration and fondness?

HINT: Keep the classroom lively by varying the way

lessons are presented. Try addressing various learning styles by using content-related videos, the Internet, or podcasts.

Closing Thoughts

This brief article is by no means complete. There are many other ways to develop a positive and enthusiastic classroom environment. If you have an idea, approach, or a special method that you would like to share with others, please submit your idea to *SchoolArts*.

HINT: Remember that gaps in your own knowledge are opportunities to model life-long learning as you seek answers with your students. ☺

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