

Friday, November 30, 2007

Teacher Survival Strategies

"Don't Smile Before Christmas," Not!

In days of yore, a popular teacher "professional development" book title was, Don't Smile Before Christmas. Sidebar Don't Smile before Christmas: The Role of Humor in Education William and Mary: Don't Smile before Christmas: The Role of Humor in Education 'Don't smile before Christmas' and other useless advice to NQTs Link to Google Search for Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) Note: Apparently this book is out of print, but references to it abound in the "public mind" and in the "Teaching Thought Space." The idea for this book was that an effective teacher was mean and "drill-sergeant tough. The teacher ruled (no pun intended) with a sculpted piece of wood in his or her hand ("Spare the board, spoil the school year.")

Despite this advice for Industrial-Age classrooms of the 20th Century, this strategy was a throwback to the days when a plantation overseer kept the involuntary and captive labor force in perpetual servitude and under thumb.

The philosophy underlying this strategy is "control at all costs," "keeping little fingers busy to keep them out of mischief" or, "quell fomenting rebellions in the bud." The "Smile-Adverse" Teacher's Role Besides masquerading in the role of plantation overseer, teachers of the "Smile-Adverse" ilk labored as planters. These teachers' mission was to plant potent seeds of knowledge in the barren, infertile minds of their students.

Of course, students had their own description of the fertilizer that spewed, non-stop, rat-a-tat-tat from the "noise-generating appendage" that seemed to dominate the teacher's face.

The teacher's goal under such a system was to "cover material," similar to laying tile; leaving no textbook page unturned. Of course, what the teacher was actually covering the floor with was the same fertilizer that less-than-reverent students joked that they needed "hip boots" for. Students' Motivation Since the "Don't Smile" philosophy assumes that students "don't want to work," the teacher that buys in to this belief system expects that "pounding learning into "walled-off student brains" will be an uphill challenge." Such a teacher expects that their authority will be challenged, and that student cooperation will be minimal. Since the teacher is the only force that puts coherent content together and disseminates it, the teacher expects to "hunker down" and do all of the preparation and development work by themselves. Finally, this teacher must battle students for attention time in class by squelching all disruptions. Only the teacher has a right to talk. Only the teacher recognize another speaker during class time.

The "Don't Smile" philosophy forces teachers to "go it alone," forces teachers to pretend to be experts in all content area subjects (sometimes even in the area of running a student's life). Advice giving without listening to a student's story is a hallmark of this approach.

Another relic of the obsolete "Don't Smile" approach is the "know-it-all, "expert-in-everything-I-survey" teacher. This "attitude-liability" came to a head with the advent of persona computers and the "technology integration dictum."

The Internet trashed the last vestige of this counter-productive mind set, since the knowledge-base of any student exceeded a lifetime of mind-cramming by any teacher with a few deft mouse and keyboard clicks at the Google Search or Yahoo Directory site.

Every pearl of wisdom could be cross-check in seconds, and relevant (even controversial) rebuttals could be launched against the teacher's "Know-it-all fortress-facade." The result: Walls of academic isolation by "knowledge superiority" tumbled.

The "Know-it-all" teacher, if one exists in modern, Internet-connected classrooms is a throw-back, and (no pun intended), that's what school districts need to do, i.e., throw them back, they are not "keepers." Today's Requirement: Real People, Real Listening, Real Partnerships Times, they are a changin.'" And, almost no one believes in the "Don't Smile Myth" nowadays.

The modern curriculum is project-based, cooperative learning, problem-solving and decision-making, creativity and communications oriented; exactly what students that hope to become employed in our Information Economy need to succeed.

Multiple Intelligences and Higher-Order Thinking are the new classroom learning modalities, and the integration of thinking in the building of knowledge is the new learning paradigm.

"Don't smile before Christmas, Not!" Smile when appropriate, and likewise frown.

Focus on what is good for students and what is good for teachers.

Listen to your students and get to know them as people. Talk to your students and let them get to know you.

Be real!

Be a keeper!

Today's education needs you for who you are, for your skills and for your abilities. Make sure that your attitude toward students is up to the task.

Believe in your students. Trust their abilities. Facilitate their learning.

Turn students on to learning and enjoy the roadtrip with them.

Smile!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00

Outstanding thoughts! I too have come to this conclusion. I recently wrote about this idea on So You Want To Teach?. Check out You Better Smile Before Christmas!
Anonymous on Dec 9 2007, 16:13