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# Best Classroom Management Practices for Reaching All Learners

What Award-Winning Classroom Teachers Do

Randi Stone

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## CHAPTER 23

# Grantwriting Tips to Accommodate Learners' Needs

Teresa Morton Owens  
*Blountsville, Alabama*

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You want and need great things for your classroom. You're tired of using your own money to pay for it, and you don't want to ask your students' parents, because they don't have it to spare. Sure, you may get classroom instructional money to the tune of a paltry \$400 for the year, but how far will that go toward the purchase of technology items? How

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what they have, manage their belongings, and be willing to face a challenge and solve simple problems. Overinvolved parents often deprive their children of these experiences in their daily lives. Teachers can sometimes be a catalyst in these situations, and I can see no better place to start than in first grade where the academics kick in over and beyond their daily and family activities.

many businesses can start up with \$400 for the year? I don't know of any, other than the local lemonade stand. So you have a dilemma: You do without, pay for it yourself, or write a grant. It's your decision.

The plausible solution is to write a grant. In the next few paragraphs, I share some of my grantwriting tips with you.

Where is this money going to come from? Shop online for available grants. Be sure to check for deadline dates. Usually, it is a good idea to set up a calendar to remind you when a specific grant is due. I try to use a year time frame. I shop at the beginning of the school year for grants that I would like to apply to by the following spring. Then I can be aware of specific classroom needs during the school year. There are many grants available out there from charitable foundations. Do not get hooked into the scam of sending money to a phony foundation to get a list of grants. There are plenty of scams out there as well. Be cautious and use your brain. Always check out suspicious companies and foundations. Do your research.

After you have shopped for grants, the first step is to find out what it is that you need. Think big. Assess your classroom. Ask yourself, "What do I need to help specific populations of my students?" Do you have ELL (English language learners) or first-year English learners, students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), students who are shy, or students who are bullies? How much time does it take to interact with students to help them understand? What could you use to make it easier? Assessing your classroom population should be the initial focus, before research. Without knowing exactly what you are trying to accomplish and with whom, spending your precious and nonexistent time would be in vain. I usually target my research to a group that has a specific need. This allows me to plan a prescription. If my proposal is selected, I can also see and measure results more readily, thus making evaluation of my project easier to assess.

I have written grants to assist my ELL and ADD/ADHD kids by purchasing books on tape. A grant that enabled me to buy *Math Sharks* helped my students who had poor basic math skills. I even wrote a proposal to assist in purchasing paper for the copier machine to assist the math class, which used the Accelerated Math program. If you have a great enough need and can word the need well enough, your proposal will eventually be selected. It may take a few attempts. You can even

write to the grant foundation and ask how you scored. They will be able to give you pointers on problems with your manuscript.

Yes, you have to jump through hoops. If the directions state that all margins should be two inches, make sure you use that measurement. Pay attention to detail and first impressions. If they fax the form to your school, don't just write the information they asked for in pen! Take it from the fax, scan it, and start rejuvenating the form. Then type your information into the form using Microsoft Word. Save it. Proofread. Print it on quality paper. Be ready to do a fantastic job. Remember, someone on the other end has to pick up that paper and read it. Will they feel better about your paper if it looks nice? It shouldn't matter, but it does. Are you impressed when one of your students turns in an immaculate, well-written paper?

Once you've decided on your target area, do your research. How many boys? How many girls? Do they come from single-parent families? Do plotted scores from standardized testing show a decrease in ability level? Is your school a Chapter I school, where more than 50 percent of the students receive the federal free and reduced lunches program? All of these mark a specific need. Even if you have more girls than boys, creative proposals can get money to your classroom so you can teach this group better. Is there a need in the community that your school can adopt as a special project? Collaboration between community and schools is a great selling point for grant proposals. Plus, it benefits your students immensely to share with others from the community. Are there other teachers in your school who share the same needs? Research must prove your need. For instance, you can't say that you need a computer to help the kids in your room on writing if their scores last year were the highest in the district. But chances are, if you have an intense need for your students to be able to write compositions more adeptly, there is another teacher in your school who shares the same need. Collaboration between teachers also demonstrates to the foundation a willingness to complete a project.

After you've decided what you need and you have the data to back it up, start writing. It would be wise to set up a folder, titled "Grants," on your computer desktop. Then set up a file within the folder for each grant. It's also a good idea to scan all application forms and save them to the file. When filling out the necessary forms, never handwrite them (unless

specifically requested). After they are scanned, type the information directly onto them through the scanner and save it to MS Word. This way, if your grant is funded, you have access to exactly how you proposed you would carry out the grant endeavor. Many grant applications ask you to chart how you will assess success of the proposed activity.

Naming your grant proposal should never be done without thinking. Aside from the look of your proposal, this is key to making a great impression. A catchy title is often the best. One of my more creative titles came from my bizarre habit of inverting phrases. Taken from the phrase and popular film *Sum of All Fears*, I came up with "Combating the Fear of All Sums." This title helped to establish my purpose of seeking money to purchase math manipulatives for my class. Further, each time I typed the title, I used this font: Combating the Fear of All Sums. Be cautious, read all of the directions and requirements. If the grant proposal is to be printed in size 12, using Times New Roman font, make certain that you follow the directions to the "nth" degree. If it allows for creativity, using a font that further illustrates your point can be beneficial.

Jot down brainstorming ideas regarding the activities, procedures, and requirements of your proposal. You will revise this list by excluding any idea that doesn't fit into your topic or cannot be backed up with your rationale and data. Next, place the items in order. Usually this order is dictated by the granting foundation.

After you have checked the order to present your information, start writing. I always type the title or question that I am addressing in bold at the beginning of the paragraph or section. I then emphasize any direct answers to the topic by placing them in bold as well. Usually some demographic data illustrating your school setting are required as an introduction. This is pertinent to formulating a need. Your plea for assistance must be evident in all of your writing, even if your school is in a high-socioeconomic area. You must write to the topic. Perhaps male students outperform their female counterparts in geometry? Even in upper-income areas, a grant is feasible as long as it demonstrates a need.

Following the opening section, most granting institutions require that you state your proposal. Be specific. Make sure that your answer precisely addresses the question. Usually rationale for your request will come in a later section. When you are providing your rationale for your proposal, use research to back up your request.

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After you have accomplished the task of providing your evidence, you will be asked to provide a budget for your acquisitions. Check current catalogs for the most recent prices. If the price tends to fluctuate, check with the vendor about possible price increases. You may even be able to get a discounted purchase price, buying in classroom quantities. Most grants require an itemized budget. Be sure to include shipping and handling costs in the total amount.

Usually the final chore in writing a grant proposal will be for you to provide an effective form of evaluation for the activities you have selected. This does not always require some type of test data. Often it can be a survey or an informal assessment of the degree to which you've experienced success with your planned activities.

Finally, keep your responses to the directed items within the limited number of words or pages as stipulated by the proposal instructions. If your response does not adhere to the specs, it will be eliminated. Proofread your proposal carefully, leaving no misaligned columns or misspelled words. Make sure you include the correct number of copies. Most institutions require signatures of your principal and superintendent. To acquire these can take a few days, so plan ahead and make sure you are within your time line, as laid out by the requirements of the grant. Foundation or granting institutions often require you to send a specified number of copies of the complete proposal. Do not fold your document into a legal-size envelope. Place your paper flat inside a large manila envelope.

Print out your addresses on self-adhesive computer labels with your printer. To ensure that the address label doesn't get wet and become illegible, cover them with wide transparent tape. Most institutions will send a notification that they have received your proposal. This will ease your worry about whether it met the required date of receipt. Beware: Some grants set the deadline date according to when it is received at the office, whereas others place the postmarked date as the cutoff. Some grants are submitted via e-mail and file sharing. Make sure you meet the exact time. Does it have to be in to the office at 9:00 A.M. Eastern Time? Check out whether a certain time zone is specified.

After you have completed your task, don't spend all of your time worrying about whether you will receive the grant monies. Put it on the back burner and concentrate on your kids. Be aware of specific needs to which you can tailor another grant opportunity. Always plan for the

### Parent Conference Planning and Note Sheet

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Example of student's unique quality:
2. Past problems of the student to be updated at the conference:
3. Academic strengths of the student:
4. Academic weaknesses of the student that should be discussed:
5. Parent input on student's academic performance:
6. Academic goals for the student for the rest of the year:
7. Social strengths of the student:
8. Any weaknesses in the area of social development the student has:
9. Social development goals for the student for the rest of the year:
10. Parent input regarding student's social behavior:
11. Additional issues parent wishes to discuss:

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## CHAPTER 5

# Organizing Homework Collection

Betsy Ann Wandishin

Casco, Maine

Jody always sits in the front of the room with a smile on her face, ready to start the day. Her pencil is sharp, and her math book is out, but something is missing: her homework. Of course, the teacher never figures out that her homework hasn't been handed in until she gets home at night and begins correcting her sets of papers. Mrs. Ryan's frustration increases as she fills in her grades for the assignment and realizes that she is missing not only Jody's assignment but those of four or five other students as well. She sighs and wishes once again that she had a system that allowed her to know in a more timely fashion which students had not handed in their homework for that day. When she returns to her classroom the next day, she will then have to take more precious time to hunt down and collect the late papers and sit down and correct them. Wouldn't it be nice to have a system of homework collection that completely removes the teacher from the process and makes students

responsible for their own recording and organizing? The following strategies will help classroom teachers streamline their homework collection process and make students the organizers.

### Helpful Tips

- Take a classroom attendance sheet or make your own spreadsheet with students' names for rows and blank columns across the top.
- Glue each sheet to a different-colored file folder, and write each subject heading at the top or bottom of the folder.
- Laminate the file folders and cut them out.
- Use overhead projector markers to write homework assignments on folders at the top of the columns.
- When students enter the classroom in the morning, they bring their homework to a designated table and sort it according to the subject folders. They put their homework in the folder and check their name in the appropriate column.
- If homework is not complete, students put a circle in the column and then fill out a "Homework Owed Slip."
- Homework slips must be signed by a parent and missing homework returned the next day.
- Folders can be rinsed off under the faucet at the end of each week.
- "Homework Honor Cards" can be used for students who occasionally miss an assignment. These cards have one "No Homework Pass" for each month of the school year. When circumstances prevent a student from completing an assignment, they may choose to get their card punched.
- I award students who complete all homework assignments in a week with a fair ticket. We keep the tickets in a bucket and each week I do a drawing. Winning students can choose from a variety of prizes in the classroom treasure chest.

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### Homework Owed Slip

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Missing Assignment(s)	Original Due Date	Last Date Accepted

I understand that this work needs to be completed by the last date acceptable.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

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next grant proposal. Keep a pad handy where you can jot down catchy phrases, special problems, or special equipment needs. On the pad, note all grant opportunities and deadlines. Most education periodicals have a section dedicated to grants. Begin to collect data required for grants from various schoolwide committees. Having these data at hand will keep you ever prepared for the next all-night grantwriting session and will ensure that it's in the mail on time.

## CHAPTER 24

# A Shared Responsibility

Eric Stemle

*Evanston, Wyoming*

Each spring as my students are preparing for their final exams, I give them an additional but important assignment. I ask them to write a letter of self-evaluation addressed to me in which they describe their learning throughout the course. Their evaluations often focus on curricular lessons but just as much on life lessons they have acquired from their experience. A consistent thread runs throughout these letters from year to year, a feeling that together we have created a unique environment. Although I am ultimately responsible for the direction of my classroom, my students report that it is a collaborative effort that creates a strong sense of class. Our success together depends on the commitment made by each and every student, and it is that support for the mission of the class that makes our brief time with one another extraordinary.

Students tell me that when they enter Room 218 at Evanston High School for the first time, they notice that it's different from other rooms in the building. For one thing, the desks are arranged in a circle instead of rows. For another, their teacher stands not at the front of the room but rather in the entrance to greet them with a handshake. It is from that



moment of introduction that I seek to build our sense of class. For the remainder of the term, ours is a class like no other, and our approach to classroom management revolves around the idea that we share responsibility in the room. From that first day, I remind my students that “we are all teachers in this room, and that includes all of you. We are all learners in this room, and that includes me.” That premise underlies all decisions that we make in the classroom.

The first few days of the course we spend getting to know one another and setting expectations for ourselves as a class. Along with class building and team building, we talk about the dreams we have for our learning and our personal growth. We then discuss ways to create an environment that will help reach our goals. We brainstorm possibilities and decide what’s possible given the established procedures of the school. We seek to achieve a balance between individual comfort and a challenging learning structure, and although the kids enjoy throwing out some outlandish ideas in their brainstorming, they eventually arrive at a consensus that sets the stage for exploration the rest of the year.

As the semester proceeds, we develop a shared management scheme, and that includes participation. Because we’re all teachers, there is no focal point in the room for student attention. True, I am the lead teacher, but when we are discussing matters in the circle, I sit among peers. The focus is on whoever is addressing the group, and that person is identified as the one in possession of the koosh ball. There are just a few basic rules regarding the koosh. For one, we only give it to someone who requests it—no surprises to the side of the head! For another, we toss it gently. The idea is to facilitate discussion, not to practice our fastballs, so we make every effort to throw the ball so that it can be caught. The koosh ball plays an integral part in our classroom management. Because we’re all teachers, there is not a single person in charge of who speaks and who doesn’t. Classmates call on one another, and my only interference may be to remind folks to look for those who have their hands up and haven’t held the koosh during the period. Occasionally a class will fall into a pattern with a handful of kids participating, and at that point I suggest that they find ways to involve more people in the proceedings. When discussions bog down, I may also pose questions and ask students to discuss their thoughts with a partner for a short time. This gives the kids a chance to explore the

question in a more intimate fashion, to try an answer before presenting it to the circle.

As teachers, we realize that we have a responsibility to be ready for each class, to share what we know, and to encourage our classmates to share. This commitment helps us manage the classroom when it comes time to discuss a reading selection. In their evaluation letters, students say that they feel a strong sense of obligation to their colleagues to be prepared to discuss because they appreciate the opportunity to share their views, to teach. Early on, I tell my classes that I will not threaten them to be ready for discussion. Kids say that when they first hear this, they expect an easy time, free from homework or preparation. This notion changes as the semester evolves, as we grow closer together by sharing ideas and stories about ourselves. In time, the kids say that they feel a duty not just to me but to everyone else in the class. Of course, we’re talking about teenagers, and there are times when some kids aren’t prepared for a circle discussion. At this point, we have a brief class meeting to review our commitment to the class. This works only if we have taken the time to build the sense of class from day one, if everyone accepts the idea that this is a special class that provides great opportunities for self-expression.

The concept of a class full of teachers extends to cooperative teams as well. One of our uses for teams is to critique writing, and as teachers, students realize that they do more than just edit partners’ papers. By sharing their drafts, students can also teach writing to their peers. In a team of four, each writer has the chance to read three introductions, three conclusions, and three arguments. While I provide students with guidelines and exemplars on each assignment, in teams they view models created by writers who are engaged in the same stage of the process that they are. This once again reminds students that they have much more to do in the classroom than absorb information—they are active participants.

The management of our classroom goes far beyond my control. Because I share teaching duties with all of my students, we build the environment together. As the kids say in their final letters, our class challenges them because they sense a commitment to one another: to prepare, to share, to encourage one another. By giving up authoritarian control of the classroom, I make way for my students to become more responsible to their classmates and, more important, to themselves. Kids say that

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because they have frequent and varied opportunities for expression, they develop a more open approach to the ideas and opinions of others. What better environment for learning could we ever create?

### Helpful Tips

Managing a classroom without coercion requires patience and faith. Not only must I have faith in my students and be patient with them, but I must also be patient with myself and believe that I can accomplish my goals.

This means waiting for our class to evolve as an organism, to become a dynamic force that lives together as it learns. This is difficult because while some students are quick to trust their classmates, others take longer, and some may never develop that security required to share. As a class, we discuss the benefits of hearing all voices, and although that can be a challenge in a room of twenty-five to thirty people, we seem to get it done. With reticent students, it may involve private conversations or messages in journals in which I encourage participation or seek information so that I may better help the child. As always, we seek a balance between helping kids feel relaxed and challenging them to take risks.

Of course, even with patience and faith and preparation, there are times when our classroom of teachers does not function smoothly. Kids may seem bored, or they may not come ready to participate fully in the class activities. This can lead to frustration on all of our parts, and here is where I take the lead. It's usually a matter of reminding them of what we agreed to do at the beginning of the term. On my "off" days, I do this with a definite edge to my voice; on my "on" days, I do it with a sense of humor. It's fortunate for me as well as my students that I have far more good days than bad!

## CHAPTER 25

# My Weekly Newsletter

Veronique Paquette

*East Wenatchee, Washington*

**M**y first year of teaching was an incredible year of learning. I had just completed my student teaching and had been offered a position as a kindergarten teacher. In no way was I prepared for this grade level. My teacher training had focused on elementary education. The elementary education degree began at first grade; we never discussed kindergarten, which was the territory of the early childhood folks. I quickly overcame my fears and jumped headlong into my new position. I was excited and thrilled to be working in the school district where I had been a student.

Fortunately, my master teacher was an incredible woman who guided me through many of the discoveries of a new teacher. The best part was that she herself had taught kindergarten for many years and eased me through many days of happiness and frustration as a beginning teacher. The commencement of the school year went off without much struggle; the children were excited, I was excited, and the greatest secret was that they had no idea how absolutely terrified I really was. Children are so forgiving. I did everything I was supposed to do. The children and

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best and discover new things when they are allowed to be curious, think, explore, experiment, ask questions, imagine, and dream.

Since 1988, my classroom has had the acronym SMILES, INC. It stands for Success, Motivation, Incredible experiences, Love, Encouragement, and Support, which produces Incredibly Neat Children! Each day in SMILES, INC., the students recite a daily oath that holds them accountable for doing their personal best, following the rules, and choosing to make the day a good day. This procedure works because the students make choices to make our classroom environment a safe, secure, positive place. SMILES, INC. is a success. I have had parents tell me that their children do not want to stay home, even when they are ill. I have had them say that their children would go to school on Saturday and Sunday if I offered it. One parent told me that they were going to Walt Disney World for a vacation, and it would involve an extension of the school's spring vacation by a few days. Her daughter was not happy about missing school. The little girl asked her mother whether they could take Miss Roller with them. I did not go on the trip, but the little girl called me from Florida to tell me she missed me and that she loved me.

We have a funeral to bury "I can't" in the school courtyard. This is done the first week of school because these two words keep us from accomplishing all we can. This experience helps the students get rid of the negative, and it helps them focus on the positive. The students and the teacher write down several "I can't's." A funeral is planned, sometimes with or without a minister, and the "I can't's" are buried in the school courtyard. A big rock with "I can't" written on it reminds everyone not to use "I can't" again. Those words are replaced with "I can," "I will," and "I want to."

After leaving the courtyard, the students and the teacher return to the classroom to write down goals for the first semester, the school year, and for life, using the positive words "I can," "I will," and "I want to." Then we take action to try to achieve our goals. These goals are kept in a special file folder and given back to the students on the last day of the school year. The students are amazed at how many goals they have achieved. A parent commented one day while she was volunteering in my classroom, "I can't is working! My daughter won't let us use 'I can't' at home either." My students are expected to write at least

## CHAPTER 27

# Ideas to Help Students Thrive in a Stimulating and Successful Learning Environment

Pam Roller

Galveston, Indiana

It is my firm belief that teachers make a difference by being role models, setting good examples, and instilling a desire for students to learn each day in the classroom. Creating a stimulating and successful classroom learning environment enhances lives! Within the classroom setting, teachers have a choice and an opportunity to make today better than yesterday, and tomorrow better than today. I have a passion for creating a learning environment that allows each child to experience a great deal of success because success breeds success. Students learn

one or two things in their journals daily for which they are grateful. No matter what happened at home the night before, in the morning before school starts, or on the way to school, my students have it instilled in them that they always have something to be grateful for.

If they write down what they are grateful for, their attitudes change from negative to positive. School is often a safe haven for children. I cannot control what happens to my students beyond my classroom, but while they are in my care, I choose to create a happy classroom climate that enables students to love learning and to feel loved, accepted, and included.

Creating an extraordinary environment excites and stimulates learning. Part of my classroom looks like a jungle and includes a life-size tree house with a hammock, several seven-foot trees, lots of realistic-looking stuffed animals from the rain forest, a lagoon, and classroom pets, including a tortoise from South America, a talking parrot, a tarantula, a hedgehog, fish, and frogs. The other part of my classroom has a room-size space shuttle simulator with a mission control center. In addition to focusing on the basic skills and state standards, my students are stimulated by growing lots of plants, watching chicks hatch, and growing their own butterflies; they learn valuable lessons by watching our ant farm, and taking care of pets teaches them responsibility. I truly believe that students understand more when they are actively involved in the learning process.

My classroom is child-centered, and each child is showcased for a week with a bulletin board called "Under the Kapok Tree." Just as the great kapok tree is important to many plants, insects, and animals in the rain forest, my students are important to me and in their world. They bring in photos of themselves and their family, as well as personal treasures and other items that are valuable to them. Attached to the bulletin board is a special paper with a list of nice things each of the classmates said about them. They can keep it forever and remember, on a day when they are feeling lonely or sad, that they are loved.

Parental involvement is a key factor in the success of my students. I teach many of our "at-risk" and academically and behaviorally challenged students. Several of their parents have had bad school experiences or feel intimidated by educators, and they choose to stay away from school, even when it comes to their own children's education.

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Through God's grace I have reached all the parents of my students over the years—not just at parent-teacher conferences but by including and involving the parents in my own School On Saturday Program. School On Saturday offers my students and their parents an opportunity to engage together in meaningful and fun learning activities. I integrate the curriculum using a hands-on approach and apply what the students are learning to real-life situations.

By using their imagination, they have simulated Space Shuttle missions, designed landings for a Mars egg drop, flown to the rain forest, went snorkeling in the high school swimming pool to learn about the ocean, gone horseback riding, canoeing, and so on. I am a world traveler and a lifelong learner who loves to share with my students, colleagues, and community. For twenty-eight years, I have planned an imaginary trip around the world. My students learn words from five languages, wear costumes, sing, and dance. Students write their parents to invite them to travel around the world with us. The room is filled with displays and mementos from around the world. The parents and their children board an imaginary jet, and they learn together as they travel the world. Food is served representing different countries. This is the finale of the school year. By this time, not only are the students and their parents hooked, but I have grandparents attending as well. One year, a little special education student could never get her mother to come to school for anything. Before the year was over, her mother chaperoned a field trip and brought Grandma to our trip around the world. Once inside my classroom, the mother and grandmother didn't want to leave and expressed why it was difficult for them to come to school. They felt illiterate, and it was easier for them to stay home than to face teachers who did not understand them. If you can understand children, you can reach their parents, and that enables success.

Even though many of my students are "at risk," they are challenged to learn the basic skills and meet the state standards. I have great expectations for them with a vision of each of my students reaching his or her fullest potential. I will go the distance for each child. A fascinating learning environment is created for my students. Each year, I challenge myself to come up with some outrageous project to help my students learn and remember forever. I try to find out my students' interests and incorporate what they like into our reading and writing curriculum

whenever possible. When the students realize you care enough about them to show an interest in the things they like, teaching is easy and learning is fun.

My students learn the importance of encouragement. I tell them the greatest thing they can do in this life is to encourage someone and that this will make the world a better place. My students not only encourage one another, they cheer one another on throughout the day, on a daily basis, all year long. It may sound silly, but it really creates an atmosphere of positive feelings and gives hope to those little guys who would rather give up.

It does not matter which area of the curriculum I am teaching; interesting is what I do, and I use all five senses if possible. My students learn by doing. They are constantly engaged in the learning process, and I instill in them that when they participate in the learning process, they understand information better and remember it longer. Here is an example. I spend a great deal of time teaching phonics. It is the foundation of learning to read. I want my students to know that reading is not just in books and on worksheets, so after learning all of the vowel sounds and vowel combinations, I have taken my students on a shopping trip to a local supermarket. To have money to shop with, we made our own lip balm and sold it. We went to the supermarket, and the students shopped for items using their decoding skills to purchase groceries needed for the Ronald McDonald House in Indianapolis. We also bought sheets and towels at Wal-Mart. Before this experience, my students did not get the connection that to buy things from the store, they had to be able to read the packages and labels. We were allowed to take a field trip to the Ronald McDonald House to deliver our items and see the house that love built. It had an impact on my kids.

If students can read and write, they can succeed. When we are growing plants, hatching chicks, learning metamorphosis by growing butterflies, watching ants work together to build colonies, simulating missions in space, recycling, traveling around the world, building kites, or designing bottle rockets, I provide hundreds of books for my students to read. They in turn go to the library to check out books on whatever topic we are learning. I require my students to write about the interesting things we do in class, but they do not mind because the experiences they have had are fascinating to them. Since 1995, my

students have participated in the Trucker Buddy International Program. They got to be writing pals while improving in grammar and learning geography through the eyes of a trucker. We mapped and graphed all the states he traveled and displayed the letters, postcards, and mementos from around the United States on a huge bulletin board. It was better than filling in blanks in a workbook. It gave us a purpose for writing, and it was neat to get responses each month. We were fortunate to have our trucker buddies visit our school.

During the past three years, my students have published four class books through Nationwide Learning in Topeka, Kansas. Each student authored and illustrated pages in the books. This experience gave them a great sense of accomplishment and culminated a year's work of applying reading and writing skills. It motivated them to learn and gave them a sense of ownership. Our books are available for checkout at our school library and at the county library. The school librarian said our books are always checked out, and the director of the county library showed great admiration for my students' contributions to the library. After the attack on the United States in September 2001, we honored our country with a book titled *Proud to Be Americans* and published a book called *We Can Save the Earth!* These two books were sent to the White House library. My students will always remember the hard work it took to publish the books, and they will be able to share them with their children and grandchildren someday. My students have also been selected to have their poems published in the *Anthology of Poetry by Young Americans* for 2002 and 2003.

Every year since 1991, I have collaborated with the sixth graders in our school. They have been paired up individually to work with my second graders as sixth-grade buddies. The sixth graders come every Monday and Wednesday morning for fifteen minutes. Together they practice reading the story we have in reading class for the week, practice vocabulary words, read library books, and practice the spelling words for the week. Because about 35 percent of my students are "at risk," I have to find different ways to help each child reach his or her fullest potential. This experience has provided each student with a positive person two days a week on whom they can depend to help them academically. When the sixth graders take turns reading stories with my students, it provides my students with someone else in their lives,

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other than their teacher or parents, who can read with good expression. I train the sixth graders to encourage my second graders.

The sixth graders have to fill out a buddy form before they leave my classroom, which holds them accountable for working with my students, and it makes them more responsible. Many of them write very encouraging remarks on the forms. The encouragement given makes each one of my students want to try harder, and they look forward to their sixth-grade buddy coming again. My students are held accountable for their behavior as far as listening and cooperating with the sixth-grade buddies. The forms are sent home each Monday and Wednesday so the parents can see that an extra effort was made helping their child with reading and spelling skills. For thirteen years, my students have been the winners in this learning experience. Their reading and spelling skills always improve tremendously. These are the students who would normally fall through the cracks if they did not have the consistent help from our sixth-grade buddies. My students score higher on state standardized tests with the regular help of a sixth-grade buddy than if they did not receive the extra help at all. It was hard for my students to read books for fun when they could not read well. Because of the extra time spent with the sixth graders, reading library books or books for the Scholastic Reading Counts Program, my second graders learn to enjoy reading for pleasure. The neatest thing to see is how excited the second graders get when they are able to read chapter books. The sixth graders are trained to ask the second graders questions throughout the books being read. This helps my students greatly with reading comprehension. In the Scholastic Reading Counts Program, my students read books, then take quizzes, by themselves, on the computer to check their reading comprehension.

Two-thirds of my students score above and beyond the points expected of them as second graders. My special education students and those with learning disabilities always go beyond what is expected of them as well. This is because I believe in setting high standards, having great expectations for my students, and involving the sixth-grade buddies in my class every year. Over the years, the sixth graders have designed their own games for the second graders to play. This experience gives the sixth graders an opportunity to be creative and is a fun way for the second graders to practice reading and spelling skills. The

games have been really interesting and unique and have included game boards and game markers or tokens to play the games.

The sixth graders have benefited as well, because they have had an opportunity to help make a difference in someone else's life. The sixth graders get to witness the progress the second graders made throughout the year. They are positive role models for my students. When we cannot meet for some reason (one class or the other was on a field trip), the students miss each other. The sixth-grade teacher has commented over the years that this experience has been valuable for her students as well as for mine. I am truly grateful for this teacher's willingness to let her students collaborate with mine. Over the years, many of my students have looked forward to becoming sixth-grade buddies. It has been wonderful to have former second graders working in my room as sixth-grade buddies. Having sixth-grade buddies has truly made a difference in the lives of my students.

At the end of the year, when I ask my second graders to write down the things we did during the year that they enjoyed the most, many have mentioned having a sixth-grade buddy; writing to our trucker buddy; authoring, illustrating, and publishing books; publishing poems; and having an opportunity to learn with their parents during School On Saturday. They always indicate how much they loved being in a class called SMILES, INC., where they were constantly engaged in a fascinating learning environment that motivated, excited, and stimulated them to think, question, imagine, dream, explore, and discover new things. Most important, they felt loved, accepted, and they accomplished many things.

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# Best Classroom Management Practices

for Reaching All Learners

*What Award-Winning Classroom Teachers Do*

Randi Stone

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## CHAPTER 12

# One Teacher's Journey to the Classroom of the Future

Carrie Jane Carpenter  
*Redmond, Oregon*

Does imagining the technology-laden classroom of the future put fear into your heart, or a lilt in your step? Most likely it depends on your experiences with technology. If you have failed miserably in front of a class of thirty-four "active" seventh graders as I did in my first attempt to use technology as a teaching tool, most likely your interest in technology has been snuffed out like a wavering candle in a damp and drafty room.

Some work of educational magic must certainly have occurred to take me from being a tech failure to being a Master Teacher for the Intel Teach to the Future Program and an Oregon Teacher of the Year. I have to give that credit to our district tech support people and my administrator. They believed me when I said I wanted to be a leader in my

school in the area of technology. They provided me with support when I floundered. And they didn't believe me each time I got frustrated and said that I didn't want to do "IT" (information technology) anymore.

I started as many teachers do; I took some summer classes to learn how to use technology. PowerPoint was my tool of choice. The class was so frustrating. I felt so stupid. But then, as I got the hang of it, I discovered that IT was fun! IT made my presentations look professional. I knew that a picture was worth a thousand words, so I used pictures to show the passion that I had for language arts. I could take my students thousands of miles away to the New Globe Theatre and hundreds of years back in time by projecting Shakespeare's words on the big screen for all to absorb. I couldn't wait to share my creations with my new students. I was going to look like such a capable teacher. Technology gave me power!

At least I thought I had power until the first day of school that fall. The mammoth projector hummed benignly but refused to project my PowerPoint work of art onto the dark screen. I was mortified. It didn't help that I had bragged myself up just a little to my students. I may have even insinuated that I had "mastered" PowerPoint, and it was now at my very beck and call.

My students were actually very patient. Several offered to help me, but I felt like a small, furry rabbit surrounded by a pack of hungry, drooling coyotes. No way would I allow these potentially judgmental—but knowledgeable—people prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that I, the teacher, was a failure.

Quickly, I swept technology under the rug. The huge lump in the carpet was easy to ignore, because I just went back to teaching along the friendly path that I had always used. IT didn't trip me up until I met with my administrator to discuss my yearly goals. I had successfully, if not guiltily, repressed my August excitement for technology. I had conveniently forgotten the goal that I had written with my very hand just a few weeks earlier.

Donna, my administrator, was eager to hear about the goal I had to lead our *entire* staff into the future of technology. I began to believe that I might actually die before I could get out the door of her upbeat office. And when an autopsy was performed, I would make headlines as the first person to succumb to the seduction of misled educational enthusiasm.

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I didn't want to lie to Donna, so I omitted a few details, and I hemmed and hawed. I smiled brightly as I promised to look at software and maybe attend a conference. After all, I had a good seven months to find some other goal to distract her from the false lure of technology in the classroom. The problem was that she wholeheartedly believed in me. She didn't know that I was really just a coward in teachers' clothing.

A few weeks later, our lab person, Leasa, brought me a star-spangled box titled "Inspiration." It was new software that Donna wanted me to try. My heart beat wildly. My hands began to sweat. I had never loaded software. Miraculously, it almost loaded itself. A screen appeared with a neat blue oval in the center. Hmmm, what should I try to map? Three hours flew by like three minutes. Finally, I sat back and looked at the mind map I had created using Inspiration software. The map illustrated everything I believed about education. At the top, I had written in an oval, "My students deserve the best teacher I can be." Toward the middle was an oval that said, "I must send my students into the world with the skills they need to be successful." Arrows jetted from that oval to list the skills of "reading," "writing," "speaking," "collaborating," "critical thinking," and "technology."

As I reflected on my work, a quote spiraled in and out of my thoughts. Albert Einstein said that "Teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift." I had been given an incredible gift, a gift that solidified my teaching philosophy and my purpose in just a matter of hours. By the way, the mapping of personal educational philosophy is an activity that I believe all teachers should undertake and revisit periodically, especially in those times when we lose sight of the importance of the work we do in the world today.

I truly felt that I must also give my students this gift of technology, especially my students from disadvantaged homes who would be far behind their wealthy peers if computers were not provided at school. How could I live with myself if I did not use my beliefs about teaching to guide the development of my curriculum? If I was a person of character who was honorable enough to deserve the title of "teacher," I must be unflinching in my zeal for learning. I must take risks and push myself to learn as well.

Not much later, I learned that I had been duped. Leasa came back to see how I liked Inspiration. Of course, I wanted her to see how



successful I had been, so I dove into deep water and shared my mind map with her. She was thrilled. Little did I know, but she was about to trap me into giving up a three-day weekend! Before I knew what hit me, I was attending the Instructional Technology Strategies Conference in Eugene, Oregon, over the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday of 2000. I listened to dynamic, impassioned speakers who showed me the classroom of the future. It was filled with interaction and choice, spontaneity and limitlessness. In the team sessions, tech people from our district surrounded me. They wanted a teacher's view on instructional technology. I spoke, and they listened. I talked about my failure. They offered me onsite tech support. My head was reeling, but never have I been more energized about my profession.

At the conference, I met Justin, a nice young man from our district. I would soon find out that he had the patience of a saint and the ideals of a visionary. He was the instructional technology specialist for our schools. He offered to come to my class and help me use technology. Not only did he help me take my current unit and enhance it with technology, but also part of his job was to help me teach my students to use technology. The offer sounded too good to be true. I might add that this model of mentoring is one that has been successfully duplicated and that I also recommend.

A wind of change blew into my classroom. A buzz of excitement filled the room each day as we learned technology and poetry, hand in hand. When something didn't work, Justin fixed it. When I didn't know how to teach a tech skill, he effortlessly stepped into my teaching shoes. One Friday when I was exhausted and I even told him I never wanted to use IT again, he simply shrugged and said he would talk to me on Monday. Together we made a great team, and it is a partnership that I am happy to say is in its fifth year.

So that Monday came and my kids began their poetry PowerPoint presentations. Justin and I sat in the back of my room. We laughed, we held back tears, and we applauded at the conclusion of each presentation. I scored my students using our state scoring guide for communication. When the last student left the room, he turned to me and asked a simple, but profound question: "Did you have results like this when you taught without technology?" I felt a wave of shock overtake me as I realized the dynamics that had just taken place in that room. I looked at my grade

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sheet. All but one seventh grader had met the eighth-grade benchmark for communication, and that one student added to her presentation and met the benchmark later that week. Never had I seen so much enthusiasm for learning. Never had I experienced the power of students teaching students. Never could I return to my old way of teaching.

Both Robert Frost and I have found that "as way leads on to way," we look back with a sigh. As devoted as I am to instructional technology, I know that it is a difficult road to travel. Hardware is expensive when we lack money in schools. We feel lucky if the hardware lasts three years. Ultimately, should we purchase hardware instead of reducing class sizes? Instructional technology training is marching into an uncharted wilderness. It often does not teach teachers how to lead students from knowledge to application to critical thinking, or to troubleshoot for temperamental hardware. Technological bells and whistles take the place of authentic curriculum planning. Expensive software is seen as a quick fix and then discarded as just an illusion produced by smoke and mirrors. Finally, the Internet, the door to vast amounts of knowledge, is also home to quacks and dangerous criminals. Is it really worth all the trouble?

I have one more story to tell. It is about three students, a teacher, a superintendent, and a school board director. The superintendent and the director were in the building for a visit. The teacher, who was often referred to as a "gutsy broad" by her father, made a split-second decision to invite the superintendent and the director into her room to watch students use technology. After the students left, they discussed the learning that had been so apparent in that room. The teacher asked them to remember the last three students they had watched. She asked if they could identify which student was labeled TAG (talented and gifted), which student was labeled LD (learning disabled), and which student was just a typical eighth grader. They could not distinguish between the abilities or skill levels of the three students.

Of course, that teacher was I. Thinking back, I wonder who in their right mind would invite the superintendent and a director unannounced into a middle school classroom? Was I crazy? Or was I and do I continue to be convinced that dedicated teachers, sound teaching practices, and technology can level the playing field for all students? The choice is yours; I've made mine.

### Helpful Tips

- Remember, the relationship between the teacher and the students is the most important element of a successful classroom.
- Learning takes place in an environment of safe risk taking.
- Students are great teachers, so it's okay if they know more about the technology than you do. Give them the opportunity to shine in front of their peers.
- Technology is a tool that teachers should choose only when it is the best tool for the curriculum goals.
- When implementing a technology tool for the first time, choose a unit or lesson with which you already feel comfortable and enhance it with technology. It is difficult to master a new unit and new technology at the same time.
- Look for tech support people and tech-savvy teachers to help you. Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Be nice to tech support people. They don't sabotage equipment just to make your life miserable! Being part of a team and learning to laugh at your mistakes are fun.
- Talk up technology and involve your community. They often magically come up with computers, scanners, printers, and handhelds for you.
- Learning is fun and makes you young, so become a student whenever possible.
- Professional development doesn't have to be expensive; arrange for a tech-savvy teacher to show a group how he or she uses IT.
- Hold on to your hat! It is a wild ride that you just may learn to love!

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## CHAPTER 13

# Learning Through Love

Randy Heite

*Evanston, Illinois*

The most effective form of classroom management that I use for behavior modification was not learned in any of my college teaching courses. I didn't pick it up at any of the several teaching conferences I attended early in my career. I was not enlightened at an inservice day, or edified at one of our ninety-minute staff meetings. It was something I always had with me, just one of those things teachers never talk about. Come to think of it, it was a lesson one of my students taught me during my second year of teaching.

That second year had started with great enthusiasm and excitement. I made it through my first year of teaching kindergarten, and I had learned many of the do's and don'ts of teaching five-year-old children. I'll never forget Thomas standing with his head sticking out of the bathroom door shouting across the classroom, "I don't have ants in my pants, Mr. Heite!" He actually checked his pants after I had used an expression to describe the "ants in his pants" behavior during our story time. A lesson learned that first year? Kindergarten children will take things you say literally. You say it, and they'll believe it.