

How to Rid Your Classroom of Excitability

Spend a day visiting classrooms at your neighborhood school and you'll find many buzzing with tension. It's a disconcerting sensation that hits you the moment you step through the door, making you all but gyrate with heebie-jeebies.

For students, who are unable to escape its long-fingered grasp, it manifests itself in excitability.

It causes them to divert their attention and fidget in their seats. It overwhelms them with the desire to move and talk and tap and annoy. It makes focusing on school a battle of willpower all but the most determined student is bound to lose.

If pressed, most teachers will tell you that their students are the cause, that excitability is a phenomenon they bring with them to school, that it's normal for them to be squirrely and distracted much of the time.

But it isn't true.

A consistently tense and excitable classroom is caused not by students, but by their teacher. Sure, your students may show up to class with unrestrained energy. They may have more than a few anxious thoughts vying for their attention.

But they feed off of you. They take their cue, in disposition and temperament, from you.

The truth is it doesn't matter how wound up or distracted they are when they enter your classroom, if you can maintain a calm, confident demeanor, then any and all misbehavior-causing excitability will vanish into the halcyon air.

Here's why:

Students respect it.

A consistently calm personality shows a leadership quality lacking in most adults students come in contact with, and they immediately respect it. They're so used to dealing with fast-talking, stressed-out teachers that when they encounter one who possesses a warm, unhurried vibe, it has a powerful effect.

It soothes frayed and hyped nerves. It engenders easy confidence. It sweeps excitability right out of the classroom.

It rubs off.

Students tend to take on the personality of their teacher. Outsiders can see this just by spending a few minutes in their company—even out of your presence.

If you're frequently harried and rushing around, if you talk loudly and without adequate pause, if you're prone to react emotionally to misbehavior, then your nervous energy will rub off on your students, who will all but quiver with restlessness.

It has a mysterious effect.

Good or bad, your students will emulate the energy you give off. Even when you're silent and unmoving, if you're internally nervous, your students will *feel* it and react to it in ways that make managing your classroom more difficult.

By the same token, your calm, consistent presence, and nothing more, can have a profound and immediate effect on behavior, listening, learning, and so much more.

Freedom to Be Yourself

It's good to be prepared.

It's good to visualize your lessons, to think deeply about your objectives, to mentally rehearse your responses to misbehavior before your students arrive. It's even okay, and normal, to experience feelings of nervousness about what the day may hold.

But once the morning bell rings, you have to leave it all behind. You have to push all your fears and worries and uncertainties out an open window, letting them eddy out into the wind.

Like a great performer standing in the wings, waiting her turn for the lights to come up, you have to shut off any and all thoughts of failure, of what may or may not happen, of variables out of your control, of performance, of voice, and even of self.

For anxiety and stress have no place in a well-run classroom. They are saboteurs of the highest order, spawning excitability, misbehavior, unhappiness, and a teacher wound too tight to be effective.

The moment you let them go is the moment you open yourself up to freedom—freedom to laugh, to love, to inspire, to show your passion for teaching, and to build the kind of influence that changes lives.

You're good enough, right now, to be the teacher your students will always remember. Just how you are. But they have to see the real you, and not the one shackled by classroom tension.

Before you know it the curtain will rise on another day of school, offering you the magnificent opportunity to step into the spotlight and show your students who you really are—your uniqueness, your charisma, and your commitment to being the right teacher, in the right place, and at the right time.

