

## What Does a Good Classroom Look Like?

Is it possible to walk into a classroom and feel if it is a good classroom? Can you look at a classroom and tell if it is effective? Many educators will say yes, you can walk into a classroom and sense almost immediately if learning is going on. Good classrooms, at the most basic level, simply meet student's needs. This is not simply done as students have a large variety of needs and discerning what those are can take time. There are some common needs of students all good classrooms meet regardless of geographic location, grade level or teaching style. Good classrooms start with good teachers who are enthusiastic, engaging and make learning relevant while incorporating a variety of learning styles. Good classrooms also meet student's more basic needs such as a place to belong and a supportive community. There is a sense of ownership. Finally, good classrooms have clear expectations of the students, which provides structure and freedom to pursue learning. These criteria, combined with the unique personality of the teacher, students and school form an effective classroom and school community where all students learn.

Good schools are comprised of good classrooms. To understand what a good classroom is, it is important to revisit the role of the teacher and ask the question; what does a student need from their teacher in the ideal classroom? To begin, the teacher serves students when he or she takes on the role of learner, modeling enthusiasm. "It has been said that all true learning engages the emotions. People learn best when they feel some sense of excitement about what they are doing" (Ellis, p. 46-47). Tapping into emotions and sharing enthusiasm with students is very effective in the classroom. In addition, a teacher helps students make meaningful connections between what they are interested in and what is being learned within the classroom. As a teacher makes learning relevant to their students, it eliminates the nagging question; why do we have to learn this? Finally, in a good classroom a teacher reflects an understanding of different learning styles in their teaching methods and assessments. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory recognizes that children, as well as adults, learn in different ways. Multiple intelligences is more than a theory of intelligence; it is, for us, a philosophy about education with implications for how kids learn, how teachers should teach, and how schools operate (Ellis, p. 25). This recognition of differences in learning styles, communicates to students that their individuality is important and will be honored as the classroom learns in community with one another.

Every individual has basic needs that must be met in order to live a healthy life. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, there are five levels of needs that need to be fulfilled in order for an individual to self-actualize. These needs range from basic nutrition and shelter to more complex psychological needs such as love, belonging and self esteem. In order for children to become successful students, both in school and in life, their basic needs must be met. A good school is a community made up of smaller individual communities, classrooms. In order for students to participate in the community, they must be able to contribute both socially and academically. They must have a sense of pride and connection to their community. Their work must be valued and displayed through various mediums such as bulletin boards and student presentations. Students are able to participate in their community through a democratic system. When students are able to actively participate in their classroom, they develop a sense of ownership. Through this ownership and participation they become invested in their learning.

Educational professionals can tell a well-run classroom just by walking in the door. Each classroom reflects the unique qualities of the teacher and students but there are common threads among all of them. One of the first things that is apparent are the expectations. Everyone knows, understands, and abides by these expectations. This goes for the teacher as well as the student. There are no surprises. A good classroom maximizes the time spent on educational topics and minimizes the periphery details by following an established set of routines. These routines provide the structure so students have the freedom to learn. "If teachers and students believe that the work they are doing is important, almost sacred in a sense, then the idea of discipline is lifted up to a higher realm. If each individual believes that he or she is privileged to study great ideas and to work with others in the pursuit of those ideas, then self-discipline must logically follow" (Ellis, p. 30-31). This higher-level learning is possible because an environment of trust and order has been established. There is mutual respect and everyone has a voice. Good classrooms accomplish this by

establishing a clear, concise set of expectations early on in the year and holding students accountable to them.

In conclusion, a good classroom is a classroom in which the students are the priority. According to Scheurich, "High performance for each and every child, delivered in a passionately committed and loving way, is the only way" (Canestrari and Marlowe, p. 166). In a school environment, it is clear that the needs of the students are the focus when there is a partnership between student and teacher, and the teacher is serving as a guide and role model. Furthermore, in a good classroom, each student is valued and known authentically by their teachers. When a student is known by his or her teachers, their interests are acknowledged and connected with their learning. In the end, to honor the needs of the students, a good classroom endeavors to create a safe learning environment in which children are able to achieve academically and foster relationships of respect and responsibility within their classroom community.

### Bibliography

Ellis, Arthur K. Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Together: The Reflective Classroom. Eye on Education. 2001.

Canestrari, Alan & Marlowe, Bruce. Educational Foundations: An Anthology of Critical Readings. Sage Publica

### Outline

- I. Introduction: What does a good classroom look and feel like? What does a student need?
  - a. The role of the teacher and the role of the student are cohesive
  - b. There is a commitment to a classroom environment of trust, respect and dialogue
  
- II. What does a student need from their teacher?
  - a. A teacher who Inspires by modeling enthusiasm and taking on the role of a learner
    - i. It has been said that all true learning engages the emotions. People learn best when they *feel* some sense of excitement about what they are doing (Ellis, p. 46-47)
  - b. A teacher who makes meaningful connections between student interest and curriculum
    - i. Answering the question; why do we have to learn this?
    - ii. Reflecting an understanding of learning styles in their teaching
      1. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory; there are different intelligences (i.e. bodily-kinesthetic) and this is related to how children learn
      2. Multiple intelligences is more than a theory of intelligence; it is, for us, a philosophy about education with implications for how kids learn, how teachers should teach, and how schools operate (Ellis, p. 25).
  
- III. The role of a student
  - a. Important that basic physiological needs are met *through* self-actualization (Maslow's Hierarchy of

Needs).

b. Provided opportunities to succeed and contribute to their class and school community both socially and academically.

i. Student work is valued and displayed through various mediums such as bulletin boards and student presentations

c. Active role in classroom decisions; Students are invested in their learning- participatory decision-making (Ellis, p. 44), democratic community

#### IV. What does a good classroom look and feel like?

a. Clear expectations

b. There is both structure and freedom

i. Structure through classroom management

1. If teachers and students believe that the work they are doing is important, almost sacred in a sense, then the idea of discipline is lifted up to a higher realm. If each individual believes that he or she is privileged to study great ideas and to work with others in the pursuit of those ideas, then self-discipline must logically follow (Ellis, p. 30-31).

2. \*\*\* (Ryan) A good classroom maximizes the time spent on educational topics and minimizes the housekeeping activities by establishing a set routine and expectations.

c. Freedom to function as a team

i. Students are encouraged to discuss and work in collaboration

ii. A climate of trust (Ellis, p. 43) is established

1. Respect, everyone is heard, there is no fear of ridicule

#### V. Conclusion

a. A good classroom has....

i. a teacher who serves as a guide and model

ii. students who are valued and known

iii. a classroom environment that is a safe community in which students and teachers feel encouraged, learn, and build relationships of respect and responsibility.