

COMMENTARY

Classroom Politics: The 'Hidden Curriculum'

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These days we talk a lot about objectives, subjects, timetables, syllabuses, benchmarks and technologies. These are all important issues and what we can see and hear and talk about the "overt" part of a curriculum. But what we do not see is just as important, and perhaps more: it is the hidden or "covert" curriculum, and this is made up of what people - teachers, students, parents, administrators - bring to it, in terms of their beliefs, attitudes, expectations and motivations. It seems to me that this "submerged" curriculum is largely unknown, rarely spoken about, and very often underestimated.

The beliefs, attitudes and expectations of teachers are one aspect of this hidden curriculum which can also be taken as classroom politics. Classroom politics is a very difficult and controversial topic not often discussed, but felt by every student and teacher as well at one time or another.

I believe that teaching provides teachers and students the opportunity to gather in a sacred place—the classroom—in the quest to become, in every sense of the word, better people. In this setting, students and teachers carry out social performances other than the demands of the formal curriculum. These activities define the sociology of classroom. "Hidden" underneath the academic performance, the

power relationship between the teacher and students define the classroom politics. In this article the following are few things to think about in the areas of teachers' values and rules to follow for a better classroom dynamics.

Studying hard isn't always enough to get the grades students think they deserve. In some classes, the grades of students may not solely be based on how they do on their tests or exams, rather, they have to perform in class to impress the teacher. One of the issues of classroom politics is then to get noticed by the teacher. It takes a little extra work to get noticed in class. In large classrooms, it can be a challenge for the teacher to remember students' name and face, but there are many ways, good or bad, to have a notice of a student in class. But we have to make sure that the notice we take should come through the right way and it must not be a false impression on both the teacher and the students side.

All those students who stand at the desk talking to the teacher while you are busy making your way after class are the ones getting the chance of being noticed. Some of them might not have much to say, and the teacher knows what they need and who they are. If you are a student, however, don't be the one that always has to talk to the teacher after class. Don't stay if you do you have something interesting to say, ask or add to the conversation

Show your care about the class even if you don't. Sit near the front, avoid distracting

classmates, sit up straight, and make eye contact. Listen for verbal clues, and watch for non-verbal clues. For those less engaging classes, make sure you get enough sleep; nodding off is a big no-no.

Ask questions and contribute to the discussion. These show your teacher that you are grappling to have knowledge of a particular subject and are synthesizing new information. Make sure you are paying attention to what is being said by classmates so that you don't need any further repetition. Reference their contributions in your own words when appropriate. However, don't talk just for the sake of hearing your own echo.

On the hand, teachers, (any person, for that matter) have also an ego and they like to be listened to. Audience reaction is a way they gauge the quality of their presentation. Think about it on a personal level. If someone begins to talk while you are talking, then you get the impression they do not care or what you are saying is not important. Another aspect is that talking in the audience is distracting to those around! Actually, it may be a boring lecture, but do not openly let on. It is always better to be polite.

Another situation wherein classroom politics operates is while students ask questions. Always raise your hand before speaking. Don't hesitate to ask questions if

you don't understand something. Your teacher will be more than happy to help you. This implies that you want to learn and that you strive to do well in school. Just make sure you don't ask questions boringly too often. It is good to ask questions, but sometimes you should use textbooks or other references to help you. You could always ask another student, although it isn't encouraged as much. Ask the ones that are meaningful but not frivolous.

Bear in mind that everybody likes to feel wanted (not in the criminal sense). You can be sure that you are making the teacher feel important. This will make the class go easier and be more interesting. Ask questions that maneuver around positive attitudes. For example, do not just pop up with a negative remarks - it makes people defensive. Start questions out this way, "Teacher, could you help me out. I am not clear on...." Or, "That is interesting, but I am not sure of the idea that..." Most teachers are fond of helping their students - that is their business and is directly related to their daily bread as well as their professional responsibility. Please do not say, "I do not agree with any of this nonsense because I believe..."

Students should remember to keep a positive attitude. That means no complaining, whining, or frowning. Teachers (as well as others) find it easier to get along with a positive person. Negativity spreads, as positive does.

Teachers are annoyed by the students that make the exception the rule. There are always exceptions to the rule and studying infinite personal experiences tends

to prove nothing. Students should avoid going into long explanation neither to approve nor disprove, for example, how the teacher's last fifteen minutes of lecture did not apply to their experience. Lectures are generic and the student (teachers, too) who use the classroom as a therapeutic forum are heading for trouble. Classrooms are not clinics.

The classroom politics doesn't suggest a student can not disagree with a professor or have interesting experiences to share. In fact, disagreement and discussion is the foundation of knowledge, but there is a way to do it that benefits everyone. Never argue a point made by your teacher unless you have done something thorough research on the subject. Although arguing a point, if done right, can win you points, nothing will make a worse impression than being shot down in class. Do however ask questions if you feel like a subject isn't made clear. There is nothing wrong with getting along with someone you disagree with. It is the basis of friendship on every level in every form of relationship. The classroom is one among social relationships.

The values teachers attach to students' performance vary and in some cases it is subjective. But there is always a common boundary all would share. Most teachers like a student with a lot of confidence. Therefore, you have to show that you have confidence and don't have the difficulty to socialize. Teachers love happy students. It is important to look like your enjoying yourself (even if you're not!) and keep a positive attitude as well.

Punctuality, the seemingly forgotten art of arriving on time is a very

important trait for classroom politics. When it comes to school, punctuality also shows that you are serious about your education. And, believe it or not, teachers say that being on time for school is an important part of making a good impression.

Never call the teacher by his or her first name. The most respectable way to address a teacher is to call him/her, sir/miss or Mr/Mrs/Ms or teacher or *Gashe* or *memher*. Never address your teacher with slang, such as *aleka*, *getaw*, and *friend*. This shows cheekiness.

All teachers are different and class manners for sure vary from classroom to classroom. Most teachers will let you know the ground rules at the beginning of any semester, and you are expected to abide by those rules. If any confusion occurs over the semester, don't hesitate to meet with your teacher to discuss the problem before it escalates.

Make sure everything you submit is in perfect condition. Proofread your work and be certain that it makes sense. You should minimize any sort of errors and/or mistakes such spelling, mechanics, or grammar. Moreover, avoid any form of cheating in class or out of class when you do class works, tests, and project assignments. In order not to create a gap between you and your teacher, you have to obey all pertinent educational laws under the sun.



"I have learned since to be a better student, and to be ready to say to my fellow students 'I do not know.'"

William Osler (1849 - 1919)