

## Back to the Basics!

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by Ferrell Yeokum  
Discipline Matters

There is more to education than teaching and learning specific skills.

- “Education encompasses teaching and learning specific skills and also something less tangible but more profound: **the imparting of knowledge, judgment and wisdom.** (Emphasis mine)

This definition of “Education” from Wikipedia mentions teaching “judgment” and “wisdom” along and equal with “knowledge”.

Definition of Wisdom: “the quality or state of being wise; knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action; sagacity, discernment, or insight.”

*Cambridge International Dictionary*

What a wonderful goal to have for our youth! We expect our kids to learn Math, Science, English and Social Studies. We all know that they learn much more than that while at school. We know that they are learning from one another – and, of course, from all of their teachers and other important adults. Kids want to learn how they should behave. They want to learn how to make wise and sound judgment calls. They truly do. And teaching them such is, by definition, a part of their education.

Research and experience tells us that 80 – 90 % of all students are compliant. Compliant means that they seek to do what is right and generally wish to please their teachers. This leaves 10 – 20 % of students who are non-compliant. These students demonstrate little ability to make good judgment calls; to make good choices; to exhibit self control. These are students (children) who have not been held accountable for their actions. They have acquired some bad and ugly habits which are difficult to shake. Their home life is likely filled with confusion and bad example. They may come from homes with parents who were not raised to have self discipline and therefore are unable to impart such “wisdom” to their own children. They might come from broken or dysfunctional homes. They could even come from middle to upper class homes that are intact with both biological parents and yet not be held accountable for their actions/choices. Regardless of their background, these students have picked up bad habits and negative traits along the way.

I have had parents who want us to “raise” their children because they have not been able to or have simply not wanted to. I have had more than one conversation with parents of a misbehaving student inform me that “we don’t know what to do with him! We were hoping you would.”!

And now, these students are in your classroom. What now, Teach?  
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It is NEVER too late to help someone to see that their poor choices will have consequences. To be sure, there will come a day (called “adulthood”) when they will be held accountable. But you have them TODAY. What will you do? You are the teacher, the “life skills” coach assigned to “impart judgment, wisdom and knowledge”. Have you accepted your responsibility as a teacher to educate the students who come to you? They did not likely choose you as their teacher. Likewise, you probably did not choose them as your students. The law says they have to come to school and now they are in your classroom; and for the rest of the year (or until they move away, if you are lucky!). If your plan is to just survive through this year, guess what? More students exactly like these will return next year.

You have chosen this craft, this field, this job. You did not have to; you just wanted to help young people to grow and develop and learn; you didn’t sign up for this!

You cannot control them; only yourself. But you can “impart knowledge, judgment and wisdom”. And you can still enjoy this time. It will help if you have the right tools and use them effectively. The old saying goes “if all you have is a hammer, everything begins to look like a nail”. So, you need the right tools. The first tool is “Relationships”

My old college professor, Dr. John Anderson, used to tell us “You can’t learn from someone you don’t respect” One might earn a good grade from someone they do not respect, and move on. But without respect, nothing of substance is truly learned (remembered and used in life).

So, teachers of the world, you have chosen the noblest of all professions. Congratulations! Our hope and prayer for you is that you “live long and prosper” in teaching. You can only do that to the extent that you understand the rules of engagement as follows:

- Someone has to be the boss; there cannot be 2 bosses
- Relationship is the key
- Rules are necessary
- Hold them accountable
- All students CAN behave
- Be happy in your work

### **Someone has to be in charge**

I have seen classrooms, and so have you, places where the teacher was not in charge. The students were in charge. Little learning was taking place. The teacher begs and pleads for students to “be quiet”, “get to your seat”, “get to work”, etc. He/she is constantly repeating themselves (“I said turn to page 99”). Few are listening. Teacher; be in charge! Stay in charge and do not give up the charge to anyone. Then they will be willing to risk relationship.

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### **Relationship is the key**

Too many teachers miss this one. They just expect relationships to happen naturally. Get to know them. Be transparent. Tell them about you. Ask about them. “Takes too much time” you say? No, it truly saves time. Why? Because if you get to know them, your students will know that you care about them. They will have seen you demonstrate the interest, the caring. Then they will be ready to follow your rules.

### **Rules are necessary**

You need some enforceable rules that students will be able to follow. They have to be posted for all to see. They need to be practiced. They can be rules that the teacher made or that students helped to make. Make them as few as necessary. Make them as positive as possible (Instead of “No running” make it “Please walk”). Make them as simple as possible. Rehearse them with your students. Be sure they totally understand what your expectations (rules) are. Then, hold them accountable.

### **Hold them accountable**

The very first time and every time that a student disobeys a rule, the teacher must enforce a consequence. Every teacher must have a “bag of tricks” to draw from for imparting consequences. Let the consequences be known in advance. Fairness and consistency must be practiced at all times. Never ignore a problem. Meet every situation head on. When your students know that you will enforce every rule with every student every time, disruptions will go to almost zero and your reputation and effectiveness will positively increase. Why? Because they all can behave.

### **All Students CAN behave**

Unless there is some rare organic dysfunction, just as all students can learn, so all students can behave. Simply knowing this truth can help you to understand expectations, and expectations are important to your students’ ability to succeed.

How can we make this statement that ALL students can behave? Think of your worst class. Recall a day when you came to work ill. Simply telling your students “Today, I don’t feel well and I will not tolerate any funny business!” was enough to see to it that all students behaved. We have seen the same thing happen when similar threats to students were made on state assessment days or other special occasions. This proves that all students can behave. The reason why they do not on other days is that the expectation is not in place. Students will live up to your expectations, especially when you demonstrate that you will hold them accountable and when you operate your class with peace and joy. (Continued on page 4)

## **Be Happy in Your Work**

You do set the tone. You do. You have to. Every day. Come happy. Fake it if you have to. NO “Blue Mondays” or PMS or “burnt toast” days allowed! Paste that smile on your face. Abraham Lincoln once quipped, “I have come to the conclusion that people are about as happy as they decide that they want to be”. Your students will mirror your moods. Don’t be moody. Be consistent and be consistently positive and happy. Take a “mental health” personal day if necessary – OR – get out of teaching and choose some other profession. Maybe in a factory or some government job where not smiling, being cranky and moody are just fine.

These are as basic to effective teaching as a ball and a play book are to a coach. Frankly, they are also not difficult. Be wise. Make sound judgment. Use common sense. Teach!