



Being Courteous & Tactful

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We all share the commonality of embarrassing events or hurtful actions in our lives.

While it is unrealistic to assume that you, as a teacher, can prevent similar embarrassments from happening to your students, you can gain control of events and actions within your classroom. Being courteous and tactful models a type of classroom etiquette that students are likely to mimic.

What does it mean to be courteous and tactful? It's demonstrating skill in dealing with difficult or sensitive situations; a sense of responding thoughtfully, rather than reacting. Moreover, being courteous and tactful suggests that comments, questions, and responses are appropriate, in good taste, well chosen, and nondiscriminatory.

Courtesy: Act in a Way That Builds Others Up

This simple rule provides a firm foundation for creating a courteous classroom environment. The rule suggests respectful behaviors such as revering personal differences, resolving issues in a peaceful manner, and avoiding ridicule. As an art teacher you can model this tenet by:

1. Incorporating into your teaching examples of art and artists from diverse and varied cultures, places, and times;

2. Exploring in sensitive ways the intent or meaning of culturally diverse artworks (e.g., sacred objects should not be duplicated as art projects);

3. Avoiding confrontational language to extinguish inappropriate behaviors ("When you use a softer tone of voice, I am ready to listen" is a much better approach than "Stop using that loud voice!");

4. Eliminating any sort of mockery including sarcasm. ("That's quite a work of art you have there" is not an appropriate response to a student who has not followed instructions.)

The bottom line for maintaining a courteous classroom is making sure that you and your students are alert and responsive to the interests, beliefs, and needs of each other.

Tact: A Character Trait

Tact is a virtue of good character that suggests a person is deeply considerate of the feelings and beliefs of others. To be tactful requires a sense of understanding of what is appropriate and proper when dealing with others. How does this translate for classroom application? Here are a few guidelines:

1. Learn to read indirect clues from students. Body language—a silent form of communication—actually speaks with a loud voice. You probably can "read" a smile or a frown, but what about a student who

crosses arms across his or her chest or leans away from you? A tactful approach would be to consider the situation and then respond in an appropriate manner. If body language is interpreted to be a product of boredom, steer the discussion to a new topic. If body language suggests that the student is upset or disbelieving, ask the student to contribute to the discussion from his or her point of view.

Practice: Be on the alert for other nonverbal clues, such as eye contact or lack of eye contact, fidgeting, and head tilting. Consider how to redirect attention in subtle, but effective ways.

2. Diplomacy is another form of tact. Being diplomatic suggests that you manage negotiations in such a way as to prevent ill will. Diplomacy also suggests compromise. Diplomatic relations in the art classroom are evidenced in various ways. An indication of a diplomatic teaching approach is to guide student discussions about art in a manner that values multiple perspectives.

Practice: Contemplate classroom situations that require diplomacy. How will you handle students who monopolize discussions? How will you deal with conflicting opinions?

3. Kindness implies helping someone else in a selfless way. The underlying intention of kindness is the internal or intrinsic reward; that is, the act of being kind is in and of itself the incentive.

Kindness takes many forms: a pat on the back, speaking an encouraging word, listening, helping with a heavy chore, or sharing your time with someone. Kindness is ingrained and best taught through modeling; it is not something that can be forced. True kindness is effortless.

Practice: Ponder how you can incorporate kindness in your classroom. How will you help students to develop a sense of kindness? ☺

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