

Making a Positive Difference

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When I sit back at the end of the day, or reflect at the end of a school year, I ask myself: “Am I making a positive difference in the lives of my students?”

Jessie’s story

Jessie (not his real name) came into my life and classroom about 10 years ago. When Jessie first came to our school he was a very confused and hostile young man. His behavior was often irrational and he demonstrated an explosive temper at the best of times! He would often leave my classroom in the middle of a class period, cursing God and swearing loudly for everyone to hear. Sometimes he would go home in the middle of the day, without notice to anyone at the school. Other times he would run a few hundred yards, sit a while and return.

I determined early on that he felt he needed space, so I allowed him to have that space. Often I would go to him after he had calmed down, and I would talk to him. I did not do anything different in my classroom during that year. I continued to teach the same way I had always taught. Mornings always started with worship and prayer, followed by Bible study class, first period in the morning, etc.

It was sometime in February when I noticed that something had changed in Jessie. The hostile outbursts stopped. Jessie was calm in class. He stopped running away. Jessie began to ask questions during Bible class. He wanted to know more about this man who died on a cross for everyone’s sins. His questions were incessant! I knew Jessie was curious, but I was totally unprepared for what he asked me next: Jessie asked to speak to me in private. He wanted to know how to get to know Jesus better. Jessie asked me right there in my classroom, “Mr. McGuire I want to give my heart to Jesus, can you help me?” Jessie and I prayed together that day, both of us on our knees, me rededicating my life to Christ, and Jessie giving his heart to Christ for the first time.

Jessie’s parents pulled him out of school the very next year. Jessie told me of the struggle he was having at home. His parents didn’t want him reading the Bible. I don’t know what has happened to Jessie since then. Unfortunately, I haven’t seen him since. I know that when Jessie left, I urged him to never give up on Jesus, because Jesus would never give up on him. He promised me that he would not.

I’ve thought about Jessie many times since that day, and I have wondered, what made such a difference in Jessie’s life? Looking inward, I don’t think I did anything. I tried, and still do try to provide an environment where my students feel welcomed, safe, happy, and respected. This environment and the influence of the Holy Spirit, I believe, changed Jessie.

I try to create that environment by doing the following:

Establish a rapport with my students. This takes time, but it is a very important step in connecting with kids.

Be honest. Be up front and honest; this is crucial! When you make promises, *keep them!* If you don't keep your promises, your students will quickly lose faith in you. Model and give respect, and in so doing, you will hopefully earn the respect of your students.

Be yourself. Don't try being someone or something that you are not. Your students will see right through the façade to the "real you". Since they tend to figure you out anyway, why not start with the real thing?

Laugh a lot. This is my personal favorite. The laughter coming from my class is sometimes over the top, but they are sounds of camaraderie, happiness, and stress relief! Let your students see you laugh. It's not wrong to show your emotions, just not too much, too soon. Moderation is always the key.

Introduce an interest of your own to your students. This can create common ground, and helps to build rapport.

Exercise patience. Pray for it, and practice it with every opportunity that arises (and there will be many). This is a God given ability. You *can* do this. *With Christ all things are possible.*

Do Not Yell! Raising your voice to gain the attention of noisy group of students is *not* the same as yelling at Johnny because he's been pushing your buttons all morning. Leave Mr. Moody and Grumpy Granny at home. I know we all have times when things are not so rosy, just try to have some fun. You don't have much of a choice anyway, you're there, so make the best of it. Remember, **you set the tone.**

Never give up. You need to believe that you make a difference in the lives of the children that cross your path, year after year. Some may never tell you how you have impacted their lives, but some will, and when they do, you realize it is all worth it! If we lead them to the cross through a loving, caring school environment and the influence of the Holy Spirit, then we have done our best: we have done God's work.