

Confessions of a Christian Teacher

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Teaching is my passion. I enjoy delving into my bag of teaching strategies and skills to enhance a lesson for my students. I am thrilled when my students beg me for another Bible story, ecstatic when they break into applause and accolades for a peer who has at last mastered the spelling list or aced the times tables quiz, and awed by the enthusiasm of a student who wishes to do a second or third science report when only one is required.

I simply love teaching! I confess, however, that there have been times when I have been tempted to defect to the “other side”...you know the one: the public school. There, with my qualifications and experience, the salary and retirement options would be impressive. Counseling, testing and learning assistance for my students would be readily available. There would be guaranteed release time for preparation, grading, collegiate discussion, or just a simple bathroom break and, of course, there would be tenure...all so tempting!

My classroom has the usual students who can be pigeon-holed into a variety of academically labeled categories which I so vehemently distrust: the gifted, the challenged, the reluctant learner, the underachiever, the self-motivated, the unmotivated, those with ADD, ADHD, obsessive compulsive disorder, border-line autism, oppositional defiance, and the main streamed. Of course there are also the more mundane societal labels: the wallflower, the social butterfly, the chatterbox, the self-proclaimed brainiac, the diabetic, and the average. Add into this mix the disturbingly labeled “classroom bully” and such a potentially volatile class keeps me so occupied with classroom management that time to teach is minimal. The result: I’m often tempted to kick into automatic survival mode. Survival mode is unacceptable, however, because, as James 1:3 suggests, I (the teacher) will be judged using a stricter set of criteria than others.

What I need is a “super glue” that will create a bond so tight among my students that all of these labeled differences would meld us into a kind, caring, compassionate class. My goal is to model respect for God and for each other, knowing these are key factors to a successful learning environment with minimal interpersonal problems.

To do this, I begin class with an expanded prayer time, making it the focal point of our day. We now talk about what prayer is and what it can do. We discuss our responsibilities to one another. We agree that everything anyone says is important. We write our prayer list on the chalkboard where it stays for the entire day. We take as much time as we need so everyone who wishes to can share. We learn to ask reflective questions about comments others make. Most importantly, we learn to empathize with one another and reason how and why a peer may feel a certain way and thus act on these feelings. I say the morning prayer mentioning every child’s thoughts and concerns. At noon and after school when my students pray, they often take the opportunity to repeat many of our morning prayer requests.

It is amazing what I’ve learned about my students during this time. I now have a broader understanding of the personal challenges each one encounters. I’ve seen their faith explode and their relationship with God and one another blossom. Extended prayer time has drawn us closer together as a school family. Prayer has turned out to be the “super glue” that bonds our class together.

At the end of the final day of last school year, as the children were running around on the playground, we teachers were musing over the end of another school year. A group of little girls came to where we were and quietly requested, “Can you ask the boys not

to follow us?" When we questioned further, I was surprised at their response. "We want to have prayer time together and we don't want the boys to bother us." After suggesting a place where they could have their prayer group, safe from the boys, we watched as every little girl in the K-4 classes sat on the grass together and held hands for their student-initiated prayer circle. And so ended the final recess of our 2007-08 school year.

Among the three teachers watching, tears flowed and voices choked with emotion as we attempted to verbalize to one another how we felt just then. In the end we just sat in sniffling silence.

Now I have another confession: there was no financial or material reward that I would have exchanged for the feeling that filled my heart that afternoon, as I watched my students finish the school year, bonded together in prayer. I, a Christian teacher, am in a Christian school where I am at liberty to facilitate and promote prayer. I am where I belong.