

Appendix C: Sound versus Faulty Assumptions

Much of the practical as well as emotional dysfunction that we experience in the area of classroom management stems from our faulty assumptions about our role as the teacher. Here we examine a few of them.

Faulty Assumption: *I have to choose between being strict or easy.*

Why is it faulty? — This is a false choice. There is a third option: be effective. Attempting to be strict (4-Style Approach) or easy (3-Style Approach) will be inherently stressful, and neither will be particularly effective. Choosing either a 1-Style or 2-Style approach will lead to effectiveness and eliminate the need to think in these terms.

Faulty Assumption: *I have to choose between being nice or mean.*

Why is it faulty? — Effectiveness has little at all to do with our being nice or mean. It has everything to do with our level of consistency, clarity and our use of effective strategies. Trying to be either mean or nice is born out of fear. Any strategy that is fear-based will eventually breed dysfunction. Students work hardest for those teachers they like and respect. Gaining respect through being mean and feared loses effectiveness over time, limits our ability to bond with the students, and depresses the motivational level in the class. In the end it is simply counter-productive. So when you hear the advice, “Don’t smile until Christmas,” offered by someone with good intentions, you might want to disregard it.

Faulty Assumption: *It’s me against them.*

Why is it faulty? — It is simply not true. Seeing the students as the enemy is a mental projection. If you believe they are against you, they will be against you. If you believe that they are on your side, and you let them know that you are firmly on their side, they will be, whether immediately or eventually.

Faulty Assumption: *It’s the students’ fault.*

Why is it faulty? -- In most cases, the *conditions* of the problem behavior and classroom dysfunction are manufactured in large part by the teacher. While maintaining a clear expectation that each student is responsible for his/her own behavior, we must not lose sight of the fact that we make the weather. And while we will promote functional behavior by helping student learn to be accountable for their actions and choices, our effectiveness will be directly related to the degree to which we they take responsibility for the conditions in the class that are contributing to problems. Therefore in operational terms, much of our stress will come (unnecessarily) from taking on ownership for our students’ behavior. Correspondingly, a great deal of our ineffectiveness will come as a result of our externalizing the cause of the problems (and for how we feel as a result) to the students, and (mistakenly) blaming them for the lack of function in our class.

Faulty Assumption: *Being passive-aggressive will work eventually.*

Why is it faulty? -- Indirect means toward “getting back at students” is a cowardly and ultimately ineffective strategy. If the teacher fears confrontation or following through with what they have set out, the social contract is destined to fail, and dysfunction will result. Moreover, no amount of complaining about our students to others (i.e., commiserating in the faculty lounge, or to friends and family) will improve the students’ behavior.



Chapter Reflection 2-j: Spend an afternoon in the typical faculty room at lunch or during a break. What topics tend to dominate the conversation? How much of the conversation is spent speaking ill of students and complaining about their behavior? Why do you think this is so? Do you think that it is contributing to better teaching or student performance?