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Class Meetings

By Kim Olver

This article describes the process of conducting class meetings with students in a school, however, there is great applicability for office meetings held with employees, and even family meetings as well.

Class meetings should be held regularly and not simply be used for addressing problems, although problem solution is a valid use of class meeting time. The purpose of class meetings is to increase students' positive involvement with school, the teacher and each other; solve class problems; learn to think; build confidence, specifically in verbal ability; and bring relevance and usefulness to classroom instruction.

In a classroom, there are basically three types of class meetings. There is the social-problem-solving meeting, concerned with addressing some social behavior in school or the breaking of some classroom rule. There is the open-ended meeting, which is concerned with useful learning and the open discussion of a stimulating, useful and provocative subject. Finally, there is the education-diagnostic meeting, which is concerned with how well the students understand the concepts of a particular part of the curriculum.

Teachers need to be somewhat directive in the first meeting and thereafter as needed. Rules need to be established prior to the first class meeting or can even become the subject of discussion for the first class meeting. These rules need to be maintained throughout or discussed as a class if a need arises to change or alter the rules. During class meetings, teachers must be warm and enthusiastic, keeping blame, punishment and criticism out of class meeting time.

Class meetings should be conducted regularly—not only when there are problems to be discussed, perhaps three times a week. Meetings should be conducted with students seated in a circle so everyone can see each other interaction is enhanced. The length of these discussions should be appropriate for the age of the students—roughly their age multiplied by two is acceptable. No one should be allowed to criticize or put down another student.

The open-ended meeting should be used most often, even in environments where problems and behavior issues are the rule rather than the exception. Any intellectually important topic, both related

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and unrelated to school, could be fair game for discussion. Students are asked to discuss any thought-provoking question. This question should have relevance in their lives and could be related to the curriculum.

Educational–diagnostic meetings are always related to the curriculum the class is studying. This type of class meeting can be used by the teacher to assess whether or not the teaching strategies being used are effective. Teachers can ask the students questions to determine how much they know about an area already covered in class. This should never be used to evaluate individual students but only as a way to determine what the students collectively do and do not know.

Educational–diagnostic meetings can be used prior to a unit of study to determine what the students already know; after a unit of study to determine what was learned and ideas for application; to examine the students' perceptions about learning specific information and its usefulness; or to evaluate specific learning or communication skills, possibly vocabulary increase.

Since teachers can have a vested interest in wanting their students to have mastered material the teacher has taught, it might be useful to switch classrooms with another teacher to conduct education–diagnostic meetings to prevent any teacher bias.

During social–problem–solving meetings, students are included in the problem–solving process. The teacher or a student would identify an issue that needs to be discussed and resolved and the students are a major part of brainstorming and contributing to find the solution with the teacher acting as the facilitator and leader. In this way, everyone in the class takes responsibility for problem resolution, while at the same time students are learning valuable life problem solving skills.

All problems pertaining to the class as a whole or to any individual student in the classroom are appropriate for discussion. A student can bring up a problem or the discussion can be initiated by the teacher.

Dr. William Glasser says, "The discussion itself should always be directed toward solving the problem; the solution should never include punishment or fault finding." The teacher conducts the meetings in a nonjudgmental fashion. He or she may reflect what has been said by the group but should avoid giving his or her own opinion. Students are, however, allowed and even encouraged to express their opinions. It is helpful for other students to hear how they are perceived by their peers.

In order for each student to feel important and heard it will be helpful to have a "talking stick" or some other object available. In this way, whoever has the floor to speak will also hold the talking stick. No one else is permitted to speak until the person with the stick is satisfied that he or she has been heard by the others. Then the stick is passed to the next person with something to say.

Class meetings are a wonderful way to give your students the gifts of confidence and problem solving skills. They also help share the responsibility with the students for figuring out solutions to day–to–day situations that arise in the classroom.

Kim Olver has over 20 years experience in staff development and supervision and is an expert in

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leadership skills, staff relationships and diversity. Certified in reality therapy/choice theory/lead management/quality school concepts, she works with counselors, schools and businesses to apply these ideas.

<http://www.coachingforexcellence.biz/SchoolRT.htm>

Where Can I Get Clients From?

By Sue and Chuck DeFiore

The following tips have come from a wide variety of sources; some from other successful businesses we know, some from our Home-Based and Small Business Support Group meetings and some we've developed by trial and error.

Some of the ways to get clients are: contact previous employers; mailing lists; cold call your target market; attend group meetings and seminars for your target market (conventions for doctors, lawyers; computer seminars); attend local Chamber of Commerce meetings; join groups related to your target market; if your target market uses a specific system, for example accountants use the SafeGuard system, contact them and tell them that you are available to teach them how to use the system or you can do it for them. Knock on doors and call others in your line of business for overload work, or clients they have trouble working with. Send surveys to your clients. This will also help you to obtain testimonials. Do a general survey of your target market. This will give you better leads. For example, for my classes, I have a survey I use that contains, what type of equipment is being used, what type of programs they are using, and whether or not they do desk top publishing in-house. This survey gives me the name, address, and phone number of the person to send my class listings to, in addition, to determining whether or not they are a desk top publishing prospect.

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