



SMART CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

A Fun Way To Assess Your Class, Have A Good Laugh, And Build Everlasting Rapport

The secret to exceptional classroom management is a learning experience your students love and want to be part of combined with a consistently followed classroom management plan.

The two work together, with each making the other stronger. From **the first day of school** onward, as the good vibrations about being a member of your classroom grow, your consequences will become more and more unappealing to your students.

The widening contrast between these two core principles – that is, how much your students enjoy being a member of your classroom and how averse they are toward time-out – is the holy grail of classroom management.

No matter how difficult your class is, there is a point where these two leverage-creating forces diverge just enough that misbehavior, disruption, and unruliness all but disappear from your classroom. It's a certitude of classroom management you can hang your hat on.

One way to broaden this divide is to have more fun with your students. Fun can be defined in any number of ways, from learning games to storytelling to unplanned moments of humor and laughter.

As behavior improves and the gap increases, the options for fun become greater. Because once you prove to your students that you're committed to **your classroom management plan**, you have the freedom to do so much more with them.

You certainly don't want to organize a dance party the first week of school, but a few weeks in and it's green light all the way. One of my favorite strategies falls into this category. It's hilarious and effective and your students will love it, but it's not something you would try unless you're confident they're ready for it.

The way it works is that you would come to school . . . as someone else.

In other words, you would walk, talk, dress, and move like a character from a favorite book or movie or other association. For example, I live and teach in Southern California so once or twice a year I'd come to school as a surfer dude.

I'd put on a blond wig and board shorts and show up to meet my students at their line first thing in the morning. I'd explain that Mr. Linsin had car trouble and that I was the sub until he returned.

"Aloha, little grommits! I'm totally stoked to drop in on you! My name is Mr. Kahuna and I'm your substitute this morning. We're gonna have a rad time together, but I've never been a sub before, so you're gonna have to help this Barney out."

My goal for the next hour or so while playing the character of Mr. Kahuna was twofold. First and foremost I wanted to have fun with my students. I

wanted to create a memory and reinforce the message that although we work hard, we also have a lot of fun.

Students of all ages love make-believe, and they're quick to play along as I pretend not to know anything about being a substitute teacher.

Far from trying to take advantage of it – they do know, after all, that it's me under the mop of straw-colored hair – they become polite and gracious hosts, walking me (as Mr. Kahuna) through every expectation, every routine, and every transition as the morning progresses.

You see, the second part of my goal is to assess how well my students know and understand all that is expected of them. So, as Mr. Kahuna, I spend the morning asking questions and turning the tables by having them show me what is expected of them.

They model and explain in detail **the beginning routines**, how to check homework, how to form reading groups, the ins and outs of the classroom management plan, and even an overview of what they've been learning in their subject areas.

In a strange and wonderful way, it's like being a fly on the wall of your own classroom. It's a remarkably satisfying experience and a validation of your work to see your students swell with pride as they share the classroom they've grown to love.

During morning recess I'll pull off the wig and Vans sneakers and slip back into my regular clothes. When the students line up outside the classroom

after recess, it's business as usual. Mr. Linsin is back from his car misadventures and Mr. Kahuna is off in search of the next wave.

Before entering the classroom, I let them all talk at once as they excitedly share what happened while Mr. Kahuna was there. Although they know the truth in the back of their mind, it's much more fun to pretend that it was real – for me too.

For you're never too old for make-believe.

My eyes, my hope, my heart is in many ways the same as theirs. And so is yours. As teachers we should never stifle that part of ourselves that lives in the imaginary, that can empathize with the thought-life of our students.

Pretending to be someone else for an hour or so may not be for every teacher or every grade level. The lesson, however, holds true: **Bringing more fun into your classroom** builds effortless rapport and likability and blasts wide open the gulf between how much your students love being part of your classroom and how little they desire even a single trip to time-out.

The power to curb misbehavior comes not from harsher consequences or humiliating scoldings and talking-tos, but from the simple joy of being a valued member of your classroom.

. . . And just as the students settle into their work, as the room grows quiet and we exhale the excitement of the previous hour, a faint but unmistakable voice lifts above the traffic noise of the adjacent street.

"Later dudes!"

