



How To Sweep Excitability Out Of Your Classroom

Toes tap, knees piston, eyes dance about the room – the air hangs heavy with uneasiness and distraction. The students can barely contain themselves, all but bursting to talk and move and burn off pent up energy.

Even when the classroom is quiet, the enveloping tension can be felt palpably by anyone walking through the door – a staff member, perhaps, stopping by to pick up a child for testing or a music teacher coming in for his or her weekly lesson.

The classroom teacher, however, is in the dark – the last to know. He (or she) is acutely aware of his struggles with classroom management, to be sure, and can clearly see how excitable and prone his students are to trouble.

But what he doesn't know is that he is the cause.

What he doesn't know is that his tendency to become stressed and uptight is rubbing off on them. Because he is with his students every day, in the trenches, he is unable to see the relationship between his disposition and their misbehavior.

This phenomenon is one of the most common causes of misbehavior, but it can be hard to recognize in your own classroom. An outsider may be able to feel the tension in seconds, but for the classroom teacher it's just another day of rushing around, talking over students, and putting out so many fires.

The solution can be most clearly demonstrated by that music or art teacher who comes by once a week (or who welcomes your students into his or her own classroom). The very best of these specialized teachers have grown so accustomed to this phenomenon and its negative effects that it's the first thing they look for.

It's the first order of business upon taking over a class buzzing with restlessness and excitability. He or she must calm racing hearts, dissipate nervous energy, and restore peace to the classroom *before* starting the lesson. Only then will the students be open to learning.

Only then will the teacher be free to teach.

The surprise is how simple this is to do, taking nothing more than an awareness of how important it is to carry yourself with unhurried and unruffled purpose.

Leading your students with clarity and conviction, speaking softly but confidently, responding to misbehavior with grace and aplomb . . . your calm assurance will settle over your students like a Scottish fog.

Just being in your presence can cause a marked change in behavior, body language, and academic comfort.

You can also reverse excitability in the moment by taking a page from that seasoned music or art teacher. As soon you notice agitation, nervousness, or irritability rising up in your students, take a break from whatever you're doing and sweep it out of your classroom.

Simply ask for your students' attention, and **for the next 30 seconds or so just breathe** – slowly and deeply. Don't say a word. Don't move around the room. Be still. Smile pleasantly. Let your eyes fall upon each student for a beat or two.

After this initial exhalation, share a lighthearted story. Tell an amusing joke. Regale them in the hard-luck hiking trip you took over the weekend. Just visit and enjoy their company.

Allow the calm, positive energy to fill up your classroom, sweeping away every last remnant of excitability. Watch as it billows out into the hallway and whooshes toward an open door.

Wait for shoulders to relax, furrowed brows to slacken, and appreciative eyes to rest on you.

Now they're ready to learn.