

Close to a Miracle

Unit A
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Stacy Hennessee's classroom was out of control. Then he experienced something close to a miracle. What he did is in the **Going Beyond** folder for Chapter 2 at EffectiveTeaching.com.

“I had been a teacher for exactly three weeks and never felt so ineffective and totally out of control in my life,” wrote Stacy Hennessee, a first-year lateral teacher who had spent only three weeks teaching Business Education/Computer Technology in a North Carolina middle school.

Starting class each day was one of Stacy's major frustrations. Time was lost everyday just trying to get his students started with bellwork; he had to practically yell at them to get their attention.

It was only September and already Stacy's dream was being crushed.

He had left a 30-year career in the corporate world to fulfill his dream of becoming a teacher. Three weeks into teaching, Stacy—like so many of America's teachers—was out of control in his own classroom. Then he attended a workshop in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where Harry Wong and Chelonnda Seroyer spoke.

He recalls, “As I listened, the proverbial light bulb went on. I was so excited I could hardly wait to go home and get to work on procedures that I thought would help.

“What I didn't expect was something close to a miracle.”

He Turned His Class Around

Now, his Title I school students line up in orderly fashion in the hallway before entering the classroom. Stacy recognized this as dead time that could be made useful with a beginning procedure. He began giving each student a slip of paper with the warm-up exercise and clear instructions on what they were to do when entering the classroom.

Stacy explained the procedure, practiced it, and asked if anyone was unclear. He explained that this was not a punishment but a way to make their class time more efficient. (A full explanation of how to teach a procedure can be found in Chapter 20.)

“Without fail, ALL of the students went straight to their computer terminals and began to do the assignment.”

He then implemented the procedure of raising his hand to quiet the classroom, explaining and practicing the procedure thoroughly with his students.

It worked!

The First Unannounced Observer

That day provided another first for Stacy in the form of an important observer—his school's assistant principal. How fortunate that the procedures had been well-explained to his students before the arrival of this critical observer.

The assistant principal wrote on the evaluation form:

- The teacher was in full control of the class.
- The students were studying for a state test.
- The time spent on task was at a high level.
- The teacher used praise appropriately.

Stacy went home for the weekend gratified and eager for Monday to arrive.

State Officials Observe

By semester break in February, Stacy had reread *The First Days of School*, along with numerous articles from teachers.net and his notes from the workshop in Chapel Hill.

He says, “My classroom was a truly delightful and wonderful place to teach.”

The structure in his classroom became even more important for his school when state officials arrived for a visit.

As Stacy was getting the students started on learning a new software application, his classroom had another unannounced visitor. This time, it was a state observer. Needless to say, the class flowed smoothly. His students were academically engaged and working together.

To Stacy’s surprise, one of the observers returned at the end of the day to request a copy of the lesson presentation. The state observer told the principal that he was very impressed with the quality of instruction and participation he witnessed in Stacy’s classroom. The visit would be featured in his report to state-level administrators as “the type of classroom that we should strive for.”

The kicker for Stacy was that the workshop helped him turn things around.

He says, “These were the same seventh-grade boys who had me ready to turn tail and run in September, abandoning my lifelong dream of being a teacher. I sincerely give credit to all of the Wong materials for giving me the tools that I needed to become an effective teacher.”

“I can’t tell you how many students told me that they had the best class of the year and that they had never seen me smile so much.”

“I believe that the Wongs have saved my dream of being a teacher.”

Never Too Late to Start Over

Unlike the beginning of his first year, when Stacy’s class and his life were ineffective and out of control, he was ready his second year.

Stacy started his second year of teaching with a first-day-of-school classroom management plan (script).

He says, “My second year started off without a hitch. The first-day script was magic. I left nothing to chance in preparing for the big event. My procedures were posted; I rehearsed the script until I had it exactly the way I wanted it; and the students responded just as I had hoped.

“I look forward to what I know will be a wonderful year! I will never again start the school year off without a ‘First-Day Script’.”

[Click here](#) to see his first-day-of-school script.

Believe in Positive Outcomes

Stacy refers to all of the wonderful things that happen in his classroom as “miracles.” Of course, they are not really miracles.

They are *outcomes* of good classroom management and constructive lesson planning.

[Click here](#) to listen to an interview of Stacy at the University of North Carolina.¹

Stacy’s students are now fully engaged in how the classroom is run as well as the lessons presented.

This same positive *outcome* can be yours. All you have to do is believe in your ability to do it. Then, just do it!

¹Alexander, B. (2008, Sept 11). [Podcast] ELA LIVE! Podcast 8: Interview with Stacy Hennessee. Retrieved 2008, December 8. <http://community.learnnc.org/dpi/ela/Podcast-7-Stacy-Hennessee.mp3>.