

INDYPENDENT READER

toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old . . .

Published on *Independent Reader* (<https://indyreader.org>)

Home > Love or Fear In the Classroom

Love or Fear In the Classroom

Contributed by:

Renard Barton[1]

Monday, February 25, 2013 - 00:00



*(Renard Barton, a former student of Iris Kirsch, is a guest columnist for *Future Imperfect: An Education Report for Tense Times*[2]. Iris Kirsch will return to her column on March 11th.)*

As a teacher, it is better to have a loving classroom environment than a fearful classroom environment. Of course there are pros and cons to both. But from a little research it is possible to determine whether one outweighs the other. Although it is the teacher's job to determine how they are going to run their classroom, it is generally better for student achievement to have a loving classroom environment.

Niccolo Machiavelli stated in Chapter XVII of his book *The Prince*:

“

Turning to some other of the aforementioned qualities, I say that every prince ought to wish to be considered kind rather than cruel. Nevertheless, he must take care to avoid misusing his kindness. Cesare Borgia was considered cruel; yet his cruelty restored Romagna uniting it and restored it to peace and loyalty. If this result is considered good, then he must be

“ *judged much kinder than the Florentines who, to avoid being called cruel, allowed Pistoia to be destroyed.*

If this scenario is viewed in the case of a teacher, it would be the same principle: not wanting the students to take advantage of the teachers' kindness, to be considered a kind and/or nice teacher, from the students' perspective. When a student misbehaves, the teacher gives no consequences to the student. This could be detrimental for the student in the long run. The student might get out of trouble for the time being, but without the consequences that are supposed to be supplied by the teacher, the student may feel like they can get away with anything.

An article [3] from rightwingnews.com states:

“ *However counterintuitive it may seem, Machiavelli's timeless advice is just as applicable today as it was almost 5 centuries ago when he wrote it. One only has to look at the situation the United States faces today to see the futility of trying to make nations [love] us.*

The article continues, explaining how “love” and “fear” affect the cooperation of people of the United States. The government makes decisions to determine the fate of their own and of other nations. These decisions may not be easy to make, but someone has to make them or even more casualties will occur. In the teacher scenario, the teacher is the “government” and the students are the “people”. Decisions the teachers make greatly influence how well the students perform.

Being a teacher is extremely hard and can be very stressful. There are students who always cause trouble and are very disruptive. Teachers are forced to stop teaching the class to deal with them, taking up valuable class time. Teachers have the risk of being threatened by their students. Of course, children make idle threats but teachers should always take precautionary actions. Also, teachers can be stressed out from teaching ill-mannered children, grading over hundreds of student papers, and meeting deadlines.

Like Robert J. MacKenzie, Ed.D. stated in his book *Setting Limits in the Classroom*:

“ *Structure is the organizational foundation of the classroom. It paves the way for cooperation and learning by clarifying your rules and expectations and by defining the path you want your students to stay on. In a well-structured classroom, many conflicts and behavioral problems are prevented because children know what is expected. Rules, procedures, and daily routines are clear. There is less need for testing.*

A structured classroom environment is a good tactic for teaching.

There are some benefits to having a fearful classroom environment: the classroom is quiet, people can concentrate, students can know that there is little to no time taken away by disruptions, and there is less stress for teachers and some students. A quiet classroom is a hardworking classroom. Most of the time when a classroom is quiet there is a lot of work getting done. That is because people can concentrate. If people concentrate, they are focused and can maintain more of the knowledge being taught.

In a fearful classroom, students know that any student who causes disruptions will be dealt with swiftly. A fearful classroom environment gives off less stress to teachers and some students. Less stress for teachers because they do not have to consistently ask for the attention of the class. Less stress for some students because there are students who get angry and/or irritated when the class is disrupted.

However, in addition to the pros, there are cons to having a fearful classroom environment. It is not always good for group work, there is limited emotional involvement of students, students get “put out”, class seems to drag on for a long time, students can fall asleep easily, and finally, most importantly, students may feel threatened. An article from the ASCD website [4] states:

“*The intentional creation of fear in the classroom remains one of the most widely used strategies for managing student behavior and encouraging academic achievement. But fear compromises our ability to learn.*”

Similarly, an article from the Edutopia website states:

“*When fear predominates, classrooms can look orderly on the surface, but it is the order of prison. [Underground,] perhaps, there is rebellion. Sometimes there is also overt misbehavior, to express frustration or even get oneself put out of the noxious environment.*”

The teacher’s demeanor may be menacing. Students see that and may not ask questions, which means the best quality of work is not put forth. But also from reviewing the quote, the student that may feel threatened may do something to get put out in order to not deal with the teacher.

This could mean not producing the best quality of work which, in turn, does not prepare students for succeeding in the U.S. economy. In group work, most of the time, there needs to be talking. In a fearful classroom environment, students may feel obligated to not speak no matter what the assignment may be. So the best quality of work may not be turned in due to communication failure.

Limited emotional involvement of students may not sound like a big deal, but it is. If students are less emotionally involved, then most of the time they cannot express their opinion fully. Putting students out of class might normally be viewed as good, but it must be viewed from the students’ perspective: The students that are being disruptive may just be having a “bad day”. They could come into the classroom the next day and everything might be fine.

In a fearful classroom environment, some students may feel that class seems to drag on for a long time. Students might get overwhelmed and stop working if they believe that the class seems to

drag on for a long time. If the classroom is not fully engaged or the classroom is super quiet, it may get boring and will have some students simply put their head down on the desk and go to sleep.

A loving classroom, on the other hand, fosters good rapport between students and teachers, interactions and communication, listening skills, more relaxed environment, students may genuinely care about the teacher, and it is a free-spirited classroom environment. Rafe Esquith states in his book *TEACH Like Your Hair's on Fire*:



With experience, patience, and lessons learned from failure, you can create a classroom based on trust. The students know you to be fair. You're dependable. The kids know that with you around, they're safe and they are going to learn something. A classroom based on trust and devoid of fear is a fantastic place for kids to learn.

A good rapport between students and teachers means that the students feel more comfortable in the classroom. With a loving classroom environment there are more interactions. Interactions with other students cause students to view different perspectives and create a better understanding of their own. In a loving classroom, the environment is more relaxed. This type of environment is ideal to help students develop communication/listening skills. Students in a loving classroom will be less hesitant to speak. Therefore, more ideas will be thrown out into the open and students hear those ideas and determine whether they are appealing.

Students may genuinely care for the teacher and feel so comfortable around the teacher that the student starts caring about the teacher's well being. In most cases, the teachers care about the students' well being as well. Most of the time in a loving classroom environment, the environment is free-spirited, meaning the environment is less strict. This type of environment is good because the students feel as though their opinion matters when the class has discussions.

Of course with the pros of having a loving classroom environment, there are cons: students may have to be told to do things more than once, class discussions may get off topic, and there are many distractions. More often than not in a loving classroom environment, it is never quiet. This is not good for numerous reasons. The classroom can get really loud at times and break students' concentration. Herbert Kohl accurately states in his book *Stupidity and Tears*:



Teachers are listened to more than they usually think they are, though listening, understanding, and obeying are three different things altogether.

Because the classroom environment is looser and less strict, students may have to be told things more than once. In these instances, teachers have to repeat themselves to get the class' attention. Being a loving classroom environment would normally be viewed as good, but discussions may get off topic. This means the teacher has to pull the students back into the original conversation which takes up class time, even though the off-topic discussions may teach about the "real world"; so it is not necessarily a waste of time. An argument can transpire from the discussion. The teacher has to intervene and take up more class time. But the argument may have transpired due to a miscommunication; a lot of words are misconstrued and misunderstood. Many distractions may occur in a loving classroom environment. So the teacher has to stop what they are doing and

manage the distraction.

The pros of having a loving classroom environment outweigh the pros of having a fearful classroom environment. Even though there is more concentration in a fearful classroom environment, there are more interactions in a loving classroom environment. Even though there is less stress in a fearful classroom environment, the loving classroom environment is more relaxed. So either choice is less stress. Having a fearful classroom environment will have students hate the class. Students are people as well and they do not want to feel threatened by the person that is supposed to be teaching them. Being a loving classroom environment but still having firm rules and consequences is the key. A loving classroom environment will give the students a sense of trust. If students appreciate the bond, they will not do anything to compromise it.

Students will eventually graduate and move on out of the public school system. But depending on what type of classroom environment they were in, determines where they will end up. A student from a fearful classroom environment may have less stress and concentrate more, but may have bad social skills. Social skills are important because of the networking process. A student from a loving classroom environment may have trouble staying on task and staying on topic, but may have great interactions, communication, and listening skills. These skills are vital because through interacting, communicating, and listening to other people, well-rounded perspectives can be made.

Source URL: <https://indyreader.org/content/love-or-fear-classroom>

Links:

[1] <https://indyreader.org/contributor/renard-barton>

[2] <http://indyreader.org/future>

[3] <http://www.rightwingnews.com/column-2/is-america-better-off-being-feared-or-loved/>

[4] <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109028/chapters/Eliminate-Fear-from-the-Classroom.aspx>