

The Work of Resurrection

-December 2020-

"Hurry then, take up this work of resurrection, never forgetting that the special end of your institute is, before all, to sanctify youth."

-Basil Moreau, Christian Education, 1856

A classroom is a bowl of emotions. Everyone has their "stuff" and it's not like there is a place to check the baggage before we enter the room! And we all know that if we are not attentive to the emotional needs of our students (and ourselves!), the culture of the place can become very unfocused, confusing and stressful in an instant - this student makes a sharp criticism of the teacher, then the teacher reacts angrily, another student then innocently asks the teacher for an extension on a paper, but the teacher refuses without even listening to the reason for the request because she or he is so angry, then because trust has been broken in the classroom, this group of kids feels no guilt about cheating on a homework assignment, and the cycle continues to go on and on. Indeed, once that train leaves the station, it takes a long time - weeks, sometimes months - to reclaim the culture of a classroom and put it back in a positive direction. It is therefore crucial that Holy Cross Educators are sober to the delicate landscape of the adolescent psyche, especially because of the way that it may trigger things that we carry around in our own subconscious.

Here are some concrete ways to run a tight ship that will help to create a *resurrectional space* in the classroom where everybody feels safe, connected, relaxed, valued and where significant learning and real relationships are possible:

- Stand at the door. When kids are entering or exiting the classroom, greet and bid farewell to each of them by name. Let them know that you are guarding that space and making it safe. (There was a certain St. Brother Andre who spent his life at the door of a school doing just that!)
- Be prepared. Plan every course, unit, topic, and lesson in the most detailed way possible. When the kids see that you are offering a maximum effort, they will respect you. There is a good kind of vulnerability here: when we show that our students and our work is important to us, it creates an opportunity for trust (instead of the old 'me vs. them' classroom mindset).
- Be organized in the classroom. Have due dates written on the board, the schedules for the day and week posted, and good routines, such as taking attendance the same way every day, introducing class the same way every day, making announcements the same way every day, etc. Take the guesswork out of the picture! Human beings feel so much more relaxed and willing to engage in relationships when life is predictable.
- Be a good listener. We can do this by learning how to translate what kids are saying or what they mean through their behavior. Most kids just want acceptance, so hanging in those conversations, being patient, and not being reactive creates a trustworthy channel of communication.
- Be fair! Kids have no leverage in the world and they depend on adults and authority figures to be fair, but that is seldom the case. Be the one adult in their lives who really listens, asks the right questions, weighs a decision, and makes a judgment that appeals to the common good, not just what's easiest or best for the teacher.
- Be honest! The moment a teacher lies is the moment trust is broken for the whole semester or year. When we did not grade a stack of tests because we were having problems at home or we were stressed about an observation and just needed the evening to clear our minds, we can acknowledge the students' disappointment and commit to doing better the next time without falling into the trap of telling a white lie.
- Be human! When we make a mistake we should own up to it. When we snap at a kid because we are having a bad day, we really should apologize directly to her or him the next day. Though we become vulnerable by doing this, we will be seen through new eyes from our students.

Being committed to our students at the level of this seeming "minutiae" will quietly change the culture of our classrooms, hallways, offices, gymnasiums and cafeterias. Indeed, "as women and men with hope to bring," we shall "move without awkwardness among those who suffer," and out of this great devotion, all of the negativity and heaviness of our schools, our communities and our world "shall be swallowed up in victory" (*Constitutions*, 118). Let us therefore not be afraid to pay attention to these details that will become the very bricks of the kingdom!