

# Educators Need To Go “Back To The Basics”


Stacy M. P. Schmidt, California State University, Bakersfield  
David L. Ralph, Pepperdine University  
Bruce D. Buskirk, Pepperdine University

## ABSTRACT

*Educators have a responsibility to not only their students as well as their institution but to society as a whole to provide the best education possible for each and every student. The burden placed on educators is heavy but the implications are boundless. Therefore, it is vital for educators to be good at what they do. Surveys of schools across the United States indicate that a substantial group of educators at all levels lack the skills in basic education. It is necessary for educators at all levels to successfully master the five basic guidelines of teaching in order to be successful. The five guidelines for all educators are:*

- #1 Know your Subject, Don't be a Know it All*
- #2 Be “With It”*
- #3 Be A “Tech-Y”*
- #4 Be in Control of the Class, not Controlling*
- #5 Be Friendly, Not their Friend.*

## INTRODUCTION

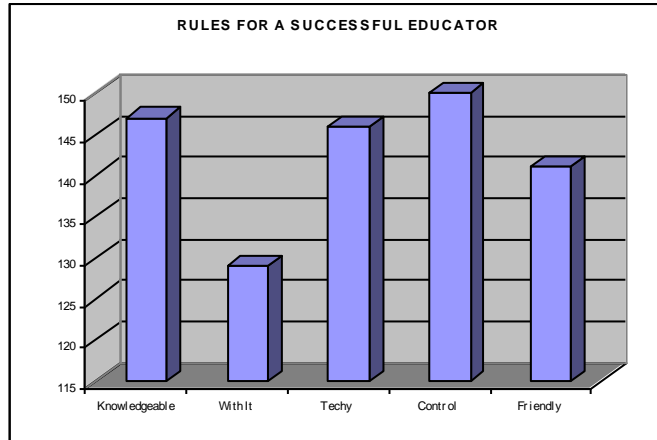
 Educators at all levels need to go back to the basics. Successful educators are becoming harder and harder to find. Top educators, administrators, and students have indicated that there is a need for educators to take another look at the job they are doing. One hundred and fifty teachers, administrators, and teachers across the United States of America were surveyed on the key to being a successful teacher. The survey resulted in responses from fifty administrators, fifty teachers, and fifty students. The fifty administrators consist of a variety of administrators, which include University and College Deans, Chairs, and Directors as well as Elementary, Middle School, and High School Principals and Vice Principals. The fifty teachers consist of elementary, middle school, high school teachers, and college/university professors. The fifty students are made up of students from all levels of education including middle school, high school, and college/university. Each individual indicated a range of elements that are key for teaching. Five common threads were apparent in the survey responses, which have been categorized into five basic rules for teachers.

As a result of the survey, it has been determined that there are five basic rules to teaching that all educators need to adhere to in order to be successful in the classroom whether you are an educator of elementary kids, high school students, or university undergraduate or graduate students. Surveys from Deans, Chairs, Principals, and students from all grade levels have revealed a set of core rules and guidelines for classrooms (See Chart 1). The five basic rules for educators to live by are:

- #1 Know your Subject, Don't be a Know it All*
- #2 Be “With It”*
- #3 Be A “Tech-Y”*
- #4 Be in Control of the Class, not Controlling*
- #5 Be Friendly, Not their Friend.*

Deans, chairs, principals, and students concur that these basic rules are a necessity in all classrooms.

Chart #1

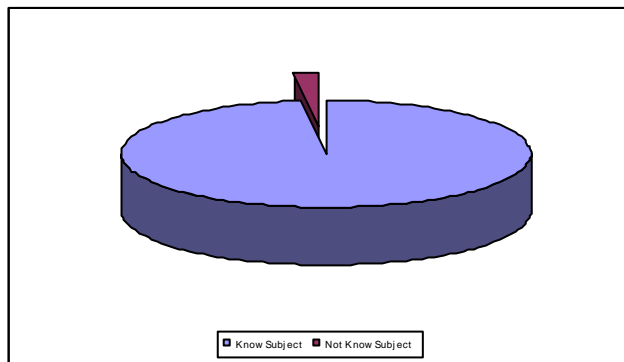


**#1 KNOW YOUR SUBJECT, DON'T BE A KNOW IT ALL!**

There is nothing worse than an educator that teaches students erroneous information. Everyone would agree that teaching a child that two plus two is three would be a horrific injustice for that child. That is no different than teaching the student any bit of information that is erroneous in nature regardless of how minute the information might seem to be.

The survey resulted in 98% of the respondents indicating that the key to being a successful teacher is knowing your subject area (See Chart 2). Eighty-eight respondents indicated that educators would often give erroneous information to students. A majority of the time this is a result of educators teaching outside their field of expertise. On the other hand, some cases were found where instructors provided false information in lieu of appearing stupid to their students. Educators tend to answer questions with an educated guess and pass it on as accurate information.

Chart #2



No one is expected to know every single little detail of their subject matter. On the other hand, instructors should be willing to look up, consult, and/or admit when they do not know something. In addition, educators that are

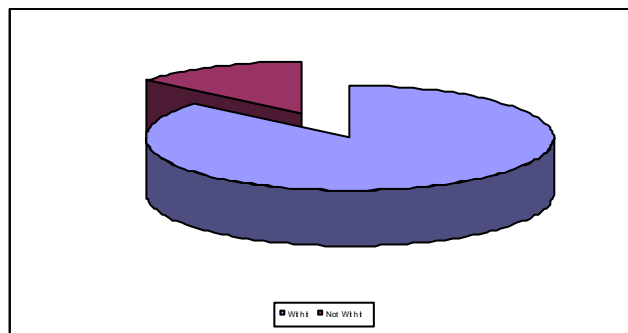
overly concerned with their credibility can turn the situation around. If a student asks a question the instructor does not know they can say “That is a great question. Anyone who comes to the next class with the answer with supporting evidence will receive extra credit.” Other options include admitting to the students that you do not know everything and that you still are willing and open to learn. Thus responding to the student by saying “That is great question. I do not know the answer to that question but I will research it and get back to you with an answer” or “That is great question. I do not know the answer to that question but lets see if we can find the answer”.

Furthermore, to know your subject you need to study your subject and have a clear understanding of the subject. You need to be proficient and an expert in the subject in order to impart your knowledge of the subject matter to others. Teachers that are staying a day or week ahead of the students and do not have a true base of knowledge in the subject area are ineffective. Therefore, to be a successful educator you must “*know you subject but don’t be a know it all*”.

**#2 BE “WITH IT”**

To know your subject you must stay current with the subject. Advances and innovations occur rapidly and frequently in the world we live in today. These changes occur in a variety of areas including, content areas, technology, tools for implementation, and/or teaching strategies. One hundred twenty nine respondents indicated that educators need to be life long learners in order to stay current with their subject (See Chart 3).

Chart #3



Strategies have evolved to include a variety of teaching strategies for the educator to incorporate into their classroom. The ninety-two surveys revealed that there is a general consensus that teaching by standing in front of the classroom and reading a text is ineffective. Subject matter often changes and more and more information is becoming available for educators to utilize in their courses. For example, medical advancements have led to new theories and practices in a variety of areas including cancer and aids. Advancements in technology and mathematics has led to the invention of the calculator and recently the graphing calculator instead of the slide rule, yet there are teachers that still use the slide rule. Marketing tends to be even more influenced for example, product placement has changed from store shelves placement, to mail order catalog placements, and now to internet stores. Technology has improved which allows educators to easily stay abreast of new findings across the continent as well as the world. It also provides a tool for educators to implement new strategies in their classrooms.

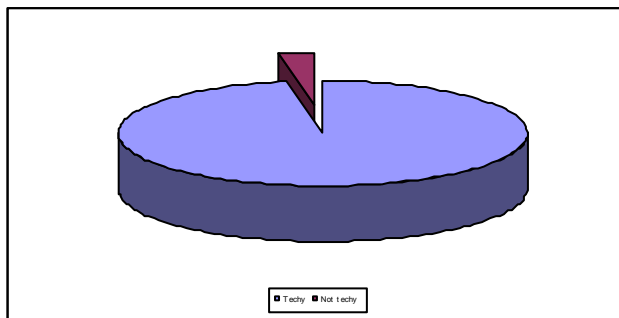
Students benefit from the use of real world examples in the course lectures, simulations, and case studies. This requires the educator to be aware of real world applications that are current and relevant to students. Using these current events will engage students as well as improve learning as students are able to easily comprehend, retain, and relate to issues that are current and hold familiarity for the students. For example, in a marketing class using cabbage patch dolls as an example about a product launch would not be as effective as an example about ipods. Thus, to be successful educators must be “*with it*”.

**#3 BE A “TECH-Y”**

According to Hinson and Laprairie (2005), “successful integration of [technology], it is essential that teachers have access to necessary resources.” Ten years ago technology played a minimal role in college classrooms and was almost non-existent in elementary and high school classrooms. Only the educators on the leading edge utilized and implemented technology in their classrooms. Today technology is the emphasis of many reforms as it plays a larger role in the classroom. In California, all new elementary, middle school and high school teachers must be certified in technology and their ability to incorporate technology into their classrooms. This is only a small percentage of the teachers actually in the schools. All veteran teachers and college/university professors are not required to be certified or provide evidence of computer proficiency. Leaving a gap in technology knowledge that needs to be addressed to ensure successful teachers in the classroom.

One hundred and forty six respondents indicated that technology if used properly can help the educator be not only more effective but more efficient as well (See Chart 4). Educators need to remember that technology is a tool not a teacher. Technology can be used to open collaboration and discussion outside of normal class time. Email provides a medium for communication between students and educators non real time. Online grading programs provide quick and efficient reporting to all stakeholders vital information including grades, attendance, and even conduct if needed. Technology has also provided a means to conduct simulations based on real world scenarios. Instructors have also used technology for modeling, advanced learning, remedial assignments, and posting as extra readings and assignments. In addition, the internet provides chat rooms and e-rooms for real time communication between students and between students and educators from anywhere that has internet access. Discussion boards can be utilized to hold discussions that are not real time.

Chart 4



Educators can utilize the internet to research information. The vast amount of knowledge and experience that exists in the world is easily available to the average educator through online resources. In addition, educators can also use it to verify student papers and check for plagiarism. Therefore, to be a better educator *be a “tech-y”*.

**#4 BE IN CONTROL OF THE CLASS, NOT CONTROLLING**

According to Goodwin and Judd (2005) “the effective teacher plans a variety of activities that are appropriate for learning and fosters student involvement and cooperation in all activities”. Educators should not be dictators in a classroom but provide opportunity to the students for input and feedback.

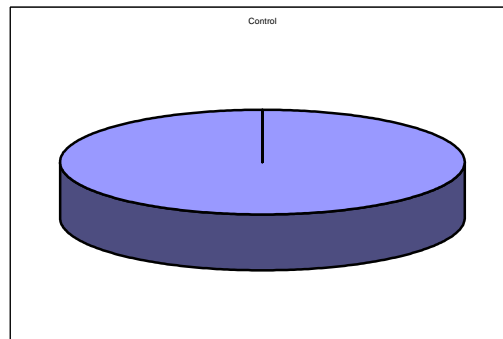
It is imperative that educators control classroom behavior. According to Techniques (Oct 2005), “bad behavior can disrupt the classroom and impair the learning process for all of the students in the process”. An educator must control the classroom by establishing guidelines and expectations for students and enforcing these consistently and fairly.

Techniques (Sept 2005) professes that “managing their classrooms begins on the first day of school”. By establishing clear rules the first day of class you set a tone for the rest of the course. Students receive a clear message of your expectations. Clear expectations provide students with the ability to meet your requirements.

All of the university and college professors, administrators, and students also indicate that a controlled safe environment is necessary for success. Students need guidelines on talking in class, cell phone use in class, and attendance. Students without control will not only hold side conversations but will often monopolize the course discussions with irrelevant material. Cell phones have created a new type of classroom disruption. Educators must have rules on not only cell phones ringing in classes but on students answering them.

By creating a safe environment, the educator is providing an environment conducive for learning to occur as indicated by all respondents (See Chart 5). A safe environment requires students to feel safe in all ways in the classroom. Students need to be free from fear of physical harm as well as mental harm. Students can feel threatened by other students as well as the educator, if the proper environment is not established and maintained. Therefore, *be in control of class do not be controlling*.

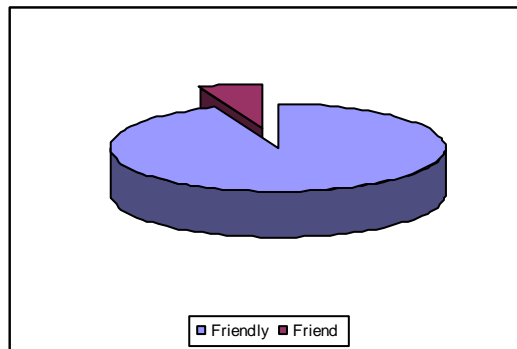
Chart #5



**#5 BE FRIENDLY, NOT A FRIEND**

Educators more and more are finding themselves crossing the line when it comes to relationships with their students. It is clear and evident from our study that educators are forgetting that they are the educator and responsible for the learning process in their classroom but they are not the companion or friend of the student. One hundred forty-one of the respondents indicated that teachers that try to be the friend of the their students are unsuccessful teachers (See Chart 6).

Chart #6



Being a pal or buddy to your students sends the students false messages. Students feel that their “friend” will be understanding and lenient. Their “friend” will forgive tardiness or misconduct. Then, if an educator enforces rules and guidelines the students feel hurt or that they were treated unjustly. Furthermore, students lack respect for an educator that is their friend. In addition, dating or more students by university and college professors has become more and more common resulting in unfair treatment of the students. Students have expectations from a professor they are involved with and tend to be poor performers but receive favorable grades. Other students not involved with the professor then feel that they are being treated unfairly and end up resenting the student and disrespecting the professor.

There is an extreme result to crossing the line. Over the past few years, the news has been plagued with junior high, high school teachers, and university/college professors that are having intimate relations with their students. This creates ramifications at all levels of education. These are unacceptable and create a learning environment that is ineffective as well as inappropriate.

On the other hand, it is necessary to exhibit friendliness towards your students as well as a caring attitude. Students do not live in a bubble where your class is the only thing that matters. Events and tragedies occur when least expected and it is our duty as an educator to be compassionate towards our students. Policies on attendance and assignments should be set but not in stone. Events will arise that require an educator to provide allowances for tardiness, absenteeism, and late assignment submissions. Educators need to feel like they are able to make these allowances based on special circumstances even though they contradict policies set for the course.

In addition, educators earn respect and admiration from their students when they show some interest in their lives. For example, asking an athlete in your class how the game went last night or a student that was applying for a job how the job search went. Little questions about their lives will show interest and caring on the educator’s part. Just be careful and *remember to be friendly not a friend.*

## **CONCLUSION**

Educators have a responsibility to not only their students as well as their institution but to society as a whole to provide the best education possible for each and every student. The burden placed on educators is heavy but the implications are boundless. Therefore, it is vital for educators to be good at what they do. Surveys of schools across the United States indicate that a substantial group of educators at all levels lack the skills in basic education. It is necessary for educators at all levels to successfully master the five basic guidelines in order to be successful. Educators must know their subject matter, stay current, utilize technology appropriate and effectively, manage classroom behavior, and be friendly but maintain a professional relationship with their students.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Author Unknown. (Sept 2005). Setting the Tone for the Year. *Techniques: Connecting Education and Careers*, 80, 8.
2. Author Unknown. (Oct 2005). Dealing with Bad behavior. *Techniques: Connecting Education and Careers*, 80, 7.
3. Goodwin, M. W. and Judd, L. (2005). Ensure Success As a Novice Teacher. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 41, 24-29.
4. Hinison J. M. and Laprairie, K. N. (2005). One Size does not Fit all. *T H E Journal*, 32, 26.