



## 2. A Shared Vision Process for the Classroom

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On the first day of school, the teacher opens the discussion by asking: “What would you like this classroom to be like? How would you like to be treated here—by me and by one another? What would make you look back and say “This was a great class?””

The teacher, by doing this, is drawing the kids to actively say what they want from this class and from school in general. They might never have been asked before. But if they got drawn into this kind of process year after year, over time they would learn to think for themselves about what they want school to do for them. They would stop shifting the burden of deciding what school should be onto the adults around them: the teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents.

What would kids say during this first class discussion? Some might talk about the irritations of the past that they never had a chance to voice before. “When we do work, I don’t want anyone else coming over and taking stuff off my desk.” Or, “I want the teacher to be polite to me; I don’t want to be teased by teachers.” Or, “If I get answers wrong, I don’t want that announced to the class. I don’t want everyone knowing the

scores I get.” Or, simply, “I don’t mind sitting near other people, but I don’t want to be stuck next to the same kid all year long.”

In personal mastery terms, these are largely negative visions—they are images of something we want to avoid. So it might be up to the teacher to draw some of the students out further, to bring to light the positive visions that underlie their attitudes. The teacher might ask: “When you say you hate being teased, that suggests what you don’t want. But can you think of anything you *do* want? In the classes you liked best, or in the best classes you can imagine, what kinds of things happened?” If more prompting is needed, the teacher can say: “Do you think you should have to raise your hand to talk? What about when we’re doing math? How do you like to be treated then?”

Different students will say different things, and some kids won’t know what to say at all. But at least one message will probably come through: “When I talk, I want to be heard.” Out of that comes a vision for classroom etiquette and procedure for how they all want to be treated and how they feel a class should run.

This vision can be kept alive for the rest of the year by continually referring back to the ground rules that they co-created. From here on out, discipline is no longer just in the hands of the teacher. When there’s a transgression, everyone knows whether it’s serious or not—and how to respond to it. When there’s a report from a substitute teacher that the kids were rowdy, the teacher can use the vision as a comparison point: “OK, all of you contributed to this vision. What happened here yesterday? What should have occurred? How would you want to deal with it next time?” Self-discipline begins to click.