

# HOW TO PRESERVE YOUR STUDENTS' DIGNITY



by Julia G. Thompson

The inspirational words below have been copied with permission from Julia Thompson's blog. <http://juliagthompson.blogspot.com/>

**THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 2011**

## **HOW TO PRESERVE YOUR STUDENTS' DIGNITY**

Students are particularly sensitive people. They spend their lives in a push-me-pull-me world longing to be independent and part of the crowd at the same time. Whatever sets them apart from their peers in a negative way can be exquisitely painful.

With this extraordinary sensitivity in mind, it is easy to see how quickly an unintentionally demeaning word or deed can wound our students' fragile pride. The dilemma for educators is that we have to correct our students' behavior while protecting their self-image at the same time. While this is not always an easy task, it is one that is vital to the cooperative relationship that should exist between teacher and student. In the two lists below you will find advice on what you should be careful to do and what you should be careful not to do help preserve your students' dignity.

### **To preserve a student's dignity, be careful to**

- Take the student's concerns seriously
- Use a kind voice when talking with the student
- Be as patient and understanding as possible
- Listen carefully to your student
- Try to be as fair as possible when delivering a reprimand
- Ask sufficient questions to be sure that you have an understanding of the incident
- Work to resolve problems and not just punish the student
- Assure the student that you believe that the misbehavior will not happen again

- Make every effort to see the entire child and not be affected by brief moment of bad judgment

**To preserve a student's dignity, be careful not to**

- Call a student a name, even in jest
- Compare one student to another
- Reprimand a student in front of the class if at all avoidable
- Allow a confrontation to build in front of others
- Ignore a student who needs your attention
- Raise your voice
- Be sarcastic or insulting in an attempt to have the student learn from a mistake

***About Julia Thompson***



***As a workshop leader and writer, best-selling author Julia Thompson has taught thousands of teachers how to create student-centred classrooms, thrive during that important first year of teaching, motivate reluctant learners, prevent discipline problems, and sustain high expectations for the success of their students as well as for***

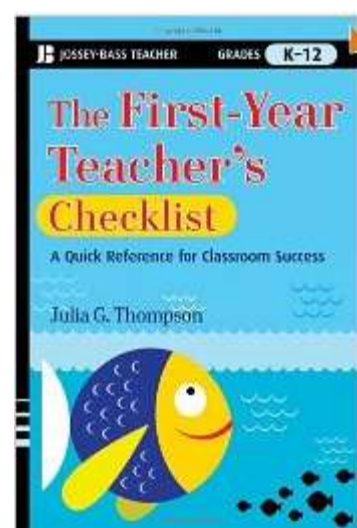
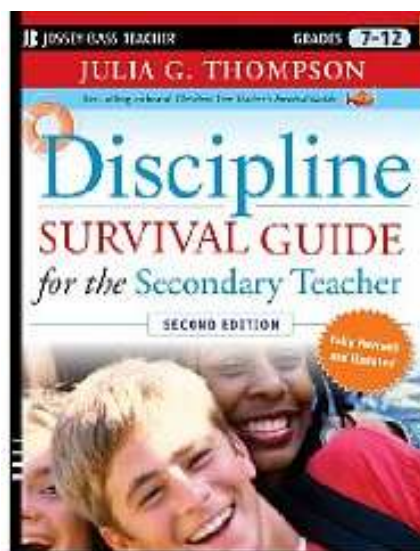
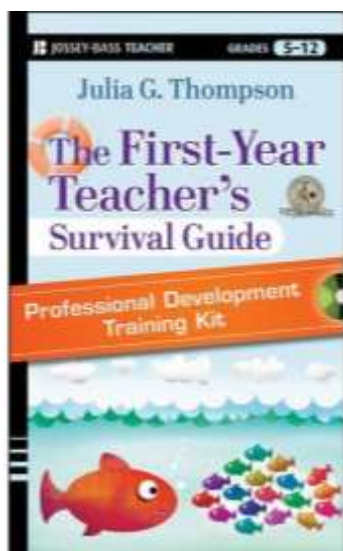
***themselves.***

***A practicing classroom teacher, Julia is the author of***

***several resources for teachers. In each of her books, she presents classroom-tested ideas, activities, and strategies designed to make each school day a successful one. Because she is a full-time teacher herself, Julia focuses her advice on the practical aspects of a teacher's busy professional life. She understands first-hand the realities of today's classroom. This extensive experience and the insights she has gained as a teacher trainer have shaped her beliefs about the daily challenges that can confront even the most steadfast teachers.***

***Julia's dedication to promoting excellence among her colleagues and to helping new teachers translate their dreams into successful practice is the focus of her work as an author of professional development resources and as a teacher trainer.***

***Books written by Julia and available to order from Amazon:***



**SATURDAY, MARCH 26, 2011**

## **How to Build Persistence and Confidence**

One of the most frustrating situations for any teacher occurs when seemingly capable students won't finish simple assignments or, even worse, won't even attempt assignments that appear to be even slightly challenging. Students who stop working at the first moment of perceived difficulty are even more perplexing because their lack of persistence is often confused with laziness. While it may be tempting to just advise students to keep trying, this advice seldom resolves the problem.

There are many reasons for the unwaveringly feeble effort that many students present at the first sign of a challenge. For many students, the fear of their work not being "good enough" is paralyzing. Rather than earn a failing grade from a teacher, they give it to themselves by just not doing the work.

Other students are so accustomed to overly helpful adults who respond to their learned helplessness with so many hints and clues that they do not really have to think for themselves. Unfortunately, this pattern of behavior is all too recognizable. These are the students who ask others for the page number rather than check a table of contents, ask dozens of anxious questions rather than read the text for information, of who put their heads down on their desks rather than work independently for any length of time.

Whatever the reason, it is possible to mitigate the patterns of learned helplessness. Below is a list of strategies that you can use to help your students develop into persistent and confident learners.

1. Start a unit of study by activating prior knowledge. Students who can connect new learning with previous knowledge will be far more likely to persist in facing learning challenges than those students for whom each concept in the material is unfamiliar.
2. Begin a unit of study or even smaller assignments within that unit with work that is easier than it will be near the end of the unit or assignment. Once students see that they can do the work, they will be less intimidated.
3. Break longer assignments into smaller, more manageable ones so that students won't be overwhelmed at the thought of a long task.
4. When students work in pairs or triads on even part of an assignment, they tend to do well. Working with a study buddy allows instant support when students are not sure of an answer or a procedure.
5. Nothing succeeds like success. Design activities where your students can shine, and they will want to continue the positive feelings generated by that success. Use differentiation techniques to reach as many learners as you can.
6. Help students see the connection between effort and success. Often less persistent students believe that good students somehow are just smarter or find the work easier than they do. Learning that everyone needs to work hard at times can be an epiphany for some students.
7. Teach students how to accurately estimate the time that it may take them to complete a task. Students who think that it will take them hours and hours to do their homework will be far more prone to quit than those students who realize that a shorter time commitment is required.
8. Offer plenty of rubrics, models, samples, and demonstrations so that students know when they are on the right track.
9. Have students set reasonable goals and work to achieve them. When students work to achieve a personal goal, they have a vested interest in working.
10. When you see students struggling with an assignment, use one of the most powerful questions in your teacher's toolbox: ask, "How can I help you?"

11. All learning should have a clear and pragmatic purpose. Students who know why they have to complete an assignment will be more willing to do so if they know how it will benefit them now and in the future.

12. Have students write their questions during independent work in a certain area of the board or on the Smartboard. Answer these questions at predictable intervals.

13. Formative assessments serve a dual purpose. They not only let you know what your students do and do not know, but they can be useful tools in making sure that your students know exactly how to proceed to be successful. Frequent small formative assessments can be very useful tools in helping students stay on track.

14. Teach your students that their work does not always have to be perfect to be acceptable. Sometimes “good enough” is really good enough.

15. Harness the power of peer pressure. Having students work together in a class challenge to reach a specific goal can encourage those students who are willing to shortchange themselves, but who don't want to let their classmates down.

16. Many teachers find that stopping periodically and having peers make brief checks of each others' work can help students stay on the right track.

17. School success is not a big, flashy event. Rather, academic success lies in a pattern of small accomplishments. Work with your students to help them internalize this idea through brief class discussions, reflections, and other shared conversations.

18. Some students benefit from seeing a visual representation of the sequence of assignments that they are required to do. A bar graph or chart with spaces to be filled in as students complete the various steps of a unit of study will make it easier for students to persist until they complete the big task.

19. Frequent praise and even more frequent encouragement will keep students on task far longer than brusque corrections will.

20. Careful and close monitoring of students as they work will allow you to catch problems when they are manageable. Small problems are not