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Keeping Catholic Schools Vital

Once Upon a Time a family rented a room and complained that it was too small. The owners of the small room thought, 'How dare this family complain about their small room.' So the owners asked the family to leave. The room is now empty--but it is still too small.

“Our rooms” have been entrusted with God’s most precious gift ... God’s children. As such, we must try to create an environment, “a room,” that is vital, so as to enable God’s children to grow in faith, knowledge and in service to the People of God. Can we, as Catholic educators, then, ever be satisfied with the “size” of our “room?” And how do we respond when those who share our “room” identify its limitations? In this brief article I hope to share with you some insights I have learned when challenged by a “small room.”

As a Catholic educators, we try to be an academic and spiritual mentor for our students. In creating a vital classroom environment we must fight off the temptation of seeing ourselves as the “owner of the room.” The “owner” mentality is one of the most destructive attitudes that we, as teachers, can have when attempting to build a vital Catholic educational community within our classroom or school. Rather, we should try to see ourselves as ones who steward the “room” and therefore, need to share the design of the “room” with all the families and parents who may see need for growth.

Unfortunately, when it comes to parents, there are some teachers who view themselves as “owning” the room. This perception makes the teacher/“owner” focus on the room as being all-important instead of those residing in the room. The “owner” mentality leads the teacher to believe that he or she must protect the “room” and its contents, at all costs, as though the room is complete as it is. The “owner” mentality then gives the teacher the justification of thinking that those who occupy the “room” must conform to its existing structure or, “if they don’t like it, they can leave.”

If parents are the primary educators, then we must also believe that they are the primary advocates for their child’s needs as well. As such, parents must feel free to speak about the “room” within which their child dwells and we must believe that parents are trying to speak in the best interests of their child.

Rather than be blindsided by “concerned” parents, we can invite parents to come to us, asking them to frame their concerns within the context of the whole community along with an emphasis on solutions. We can say to parents, “May you always feel free to say what needs to be said. May your words always be spoken in the spirit of what is in the best interest of the whole community. And may we listen to each other so that solutions and not the problems become our focal point.”



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By focusing on the needs of the whole community, parents are given the opportunity to let go of their own narrow “agenda.” By focusing on the solutions parents are encouraged to move beyond merely complaining. As parents move in this direction they are then empowered to see their role in expanding, not only the “room” they encounter at school, but also the “room” within which their family resides at home.

In this open dialog with parents, we then have an opportunity to inspire our parents to see their parental vocation as a ministry, to view their home as a holy “room,” to embrace their children as an awesome gift and to accept their parenting as a sacred responsibility! By doing this, I hope to assist parents in creating the best family environment or “room” for their child to grow in holiness.

Only by sharing the “room” with our families can I ever hope to hear their joys and concerns and understand the shortcomings that the “room”/class/school might possess. Only together, with parents as our primary educators and collaborators for change, will WE find the means to expand OUR “room.” And as our ‘Small Room’ expands so to does the vitality of our Mission of Catholic Education.

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