

## **The Tale of Two Classes**

*Please accept a sincere apology for the blatant rip-off of Charles Dickens.*

It was the best of classes, and it was the worst of classes. There was a class of light and a class of dark. Some had everything before them, and some had nothing before them—in short, the classes were so far apart.

There was a teacher with a plain face, kind eyes on the throne of Level Three, and another teacher with a stern jaw and tired eyes on the throne of Level One. In both classes, it was clearer than crystal that things were two worlds apart.

In the class with the teacher on the throne of Level One, learning was passive, not confused with engaged and active involvement. From his throne, the teacher spoke down to his subjects - sage on the stage, all-wise, but disconnected. This teacher learned from a teacher who ruled his kingdom from afar; any discussion was unheard of, collaboration and interaction were frowned upon. The teacher read from the book, students followed along, sitting very still, waiting for time to pass.

On this date, the teacher informed his students that the class would view two DVDs from a series. Students were fed three hours of images and verbalization on Fetzer valves, ball-bearings, and gauze pads.

“If you pay close attention to the videos, you will not need to take notes,” expounded the teacher.

“Will we have time to ask questions?”

“The videos will take you right to the end of class. I strongly doubt there will be time. Pay close attention to the material. You will move on to a new topic during the next session.”

The teacher descended from his throne, dimmed the lights, and pressed play on the DVD player. An overly-enthusiastic face materialized on the screen, espousing the virtues of the video series and the success rate of students who benefited from the knowledge contained on the thirteen DVDs. As the images on the screen transformed to a scene of students working in a shop, the teacher faded into the dark and slipped out the classroom door, only to reappear as the last image went dark.

"Wasn't that fantastic? You know, you really learned a lot from these videos. Not a wasted second of class. Make sure to sign out as you leave." The students slowly shuffled out into the night.

Time travels back three hours.

In the class with the teacher on the throne for level three, not one student was sitting. Each was huddled into four small groups, vigorously pawing through textbooks to search for the all-desired answers to questions tacked up on the board behind the throne. The teacher never returned to his throne. Instead, he circled each group; cheerful banter and trash talk resonated between groups, each trying to best the others.

Within minutes and in unison, hands extended into the air, followed by cries of "Got it" and "Over here" rained down on the teacher.

"Who thinks they know the answers?"

Words were barely out of his mouth when the students drowned out anything further. Answers offered, praise awarded, inaccuracies corrected, the class tallied their points and settled into their seats. Each set of eyes focused, anticipating the prompt.

"Ok, people, the next task is a crumple and toss. I'm assigning each pair a series of seven or eight pages in the module for you to read with your teammate. Some groups will have duplicate pages as other groups."

Each group was handed five index cards and a sharpie marker. The activity was part of the teacher's toolbox and was a favorite. Students did not wait to hear anything else, each anxious to start.

For twenty minutes, the classroom was quiet but for tiny muffled sounds. Slowly, wads of crumpled index cards started to arc across the room in the direction of the empty trash can, positioned in the center of the classroom. Several never came close to the target, more rattled off the rim, a select few managed to find the bottom of the basket.

The teacher extracted a crumpled ball from the bin, unfolded it, and read, "45-degrees with a right twist. Is this correct?"

"Yes!"

"No!"

A brief pause holds the class still.

“The No’s have it. Thank you for playing. Try again.”

For the remainder of the session, the teacher and students collaborated, engaged, discussed the content with a free give-and-take of information. No one person became the main focus. Everyone participated. By the end of the class, it was not clear who taught who. This veteran teacher marveled that even he still had room to grow. He shut the lights and closed the door, a happier and wiser man.