

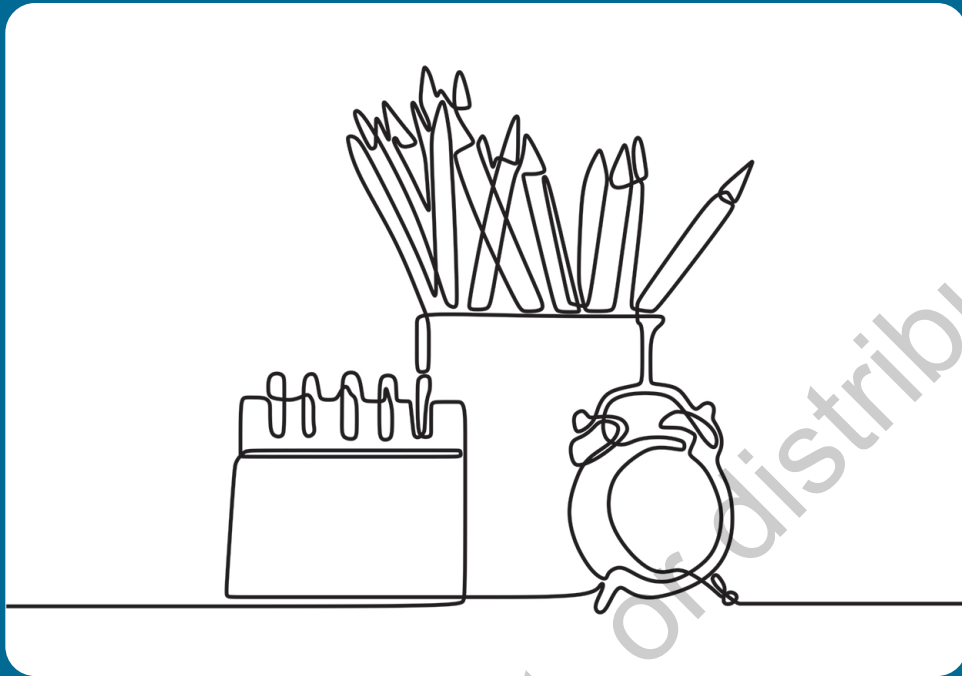
PART 1

FIRST WEEKS OF SCHOOL

A Memorable Day 1 . . .

On Day 1 of ninth-grade history, another teacher walked into the classroom and asked to borrow some paper and our teacher completely flipped out and made a scene. We all watched in disbelief. Then, after it was over, she asked us to write down what we saw, including every detail from the color of the shirt the other teacher was wearing, the length of time the confrontation went on, and exact quotes said in the interaction. She/we read all of them afterwards and there were so many variations of what everyone witnessed. Then she went on to say that much of history is like that as well. I'll never forget it.

—Amy, Age 38



Source: iStock.com/ngpakarti

What do the first weeks of school have to do with classroom management?

Everything. First of all, we want to be prepared and not only on time but early, so the above doesn't happen. The first weeks of school will establish routines in your classroom, set your expectations for behavior and participation, and teach healthy student collaboration skills. This will be the time your students form good habits in your classroom. This is also the time you will start to build a relationship based on mutual respect with students and set boundaries and structures. A strong first few weeks of the year almost always predicts a strong school year. Make these few weeks count.



Build Mutually Respectful Relationships With Students From Day 1

All of my years as a student I went through a countless number of teachers. I have had cool teachers, strict teachers, laid-back teachers. I have always thought, *I wish I could have a teacher that knows how to be all of those, when they need to.*

—Sammy, Grade 9

I chose to complete my four-month student teaching assignment at a boarding school in rural Pierre, South Dakota, with a student population that was 100 percent Natives from the surrounding reservations. We were told these students were mandated to be at this boarding school because they were unable to live in their homes for one reason or another. Needless to say, although it was a powerful student teaching experience, often classroom management was an issue because of my limited expertise. I remember the first time the classroom teacher allowed me to administer my own quiz. Finally I had my own class, if only for a few minutes. I handed out the papers and started walking around the room as I gave directions. One eighth-grade girl yelled in a snarky tone, “Hey, what’s your first name anyway?” I replied, trying to sound as authoritative as possible, “Serena, but *you* have to call me Ms. Pariser!” I shot her a look that I thought screamed, “Don’t mess

with me.” She must have interpreted it as, “I’m going to demand your respect and you’re going to give it to me.” That rarely works, I quickly learned, unless you’re looking for respect through intimidation. As a student teacher, I was anything but intimidating.

She thought for a second and then yelled, “Hey, Serena!” I fell into her trap and replied, “Ms. Pariser!” She laughed and yelled even louder, “Serena, Serena, Serena!” This went back and forth for a little while. My face was boiling red. I let loose with my final I’m-going-to-teach-you comeback: “*Ms. Pariser! You are a student!*”

BAM.

A spiral-bound 100-sheet notebook hit the side of my face. She had thrown it at me, with perfect aim, in a successful attempt to shut me up. My eyes started to water in fright. Had a student really just thrown a notebook at my face? Was I bleeding? What was the rest of the class thinking? I said in my calmest voice, “Call security,” but I was shaking. This is how I learned that you have to build mutually respectful relationships with students in order to be truly respected by them. The students don’t owe you anything.

Does Amazon sell respect? It seems like some teachers have it from their students and some do not. How do those successful teachers do it? Let me start by saying if the students respect and like you as a person, your job will be a lot easier. Unlike a boss who doesn’t like an employee, you can’t fire a student. You can spend your entire year trying to fix a fractured relationship that is broken due to lack of respect. Here are some guidelines to help earn the respect of your students (not an easy task):

First: You are part of the class. It’s not you versus the class.

Is your goal to get the kids to listen to you or to help each of them succeed? Think hard about this. Do you have the same goals in mind? Now, you may be thinking, *Yes, but how do I help them succeed if they don’t even listen when I am talking?* You’re not the only one who’s been on the verge of tears. I soon learned that when there is a battle in the classroom (you versus them), they can and will overpower you. They outnumber you. Scary thought, right? The secret is that you can’t let them know that. That’s the difference between an unsuccessful teacher and a successful one. Successful teachers know this and work with their students. Unsuccessful teachers seem to fall into the trap of testing their power, using a loud voice to try to overpower. Power struggles rarely work in the long run. It leads to intimidation, which isn’t an ideal learning environment. Yes, I’ve been overpowered. I’ve had students walk out of my classroom, curse in my face, and laugh when I discipline them. It’s not a pleasant situation when a student or whole class shows disrespect. It’s also hard to earn respect back once it’s lost. However, once the students trust—yes, trust—that you have their interests in mind, they will let their guard down and get ready for the educational journey. They will *want* you to lead them. They will *ask* you what they are going to learn today.

If you want them to take seriously their job as a student, do your job by being prepared to teach.

They will *give up* the fight because they realize you are both on the same side. How do you do this? You don't tell them, you show them that you have their interests in mind by using the following tips.

Tips for Building Mutually Respectful Relationships With Your Students

- **Focus on your goal.** Know that whatever you focus on is what will thrive in the classroom. If you focus on negative behaviors, that is what will thrive. If you focus on classroom rules, students will learn those rules, but when will they learn content? My advice is to always have your lesson prepared. Focus on the learning. Show students that learning is always the first priority. That is your job. If you want them to take seriously their job as a student, do your job by being prepared to teach. If you focus on your lesson plan, you will feel confident and the rest will follow suit.
- **Let students know you believe in their success.** Tell your students that you believe in their success. Do you think they will rise to the occasion if you challenge them? Here's a secret: If you believe in them and tell them so, they will believe in themselves. If you don't believe that your students will succeed, they won't believe either. For example, say "Nathan, I really want you to do well today. How can I help you with that?" instead of, "Nathan, you have an *F* in my class, don't you *want* to get a good grade? Why can't you behave?"

Both statements show Nathan that he is accountable for his behavior. The first statement, however, shows him you believe in his success and it is his choice how he behaves. You are rooting for him, yet he has agency. The second statement puts a student on the defensive, which rarely works. Be smart with your words and work on the relationship. The way you communicate makes a big difference in how your words are received by the students.

- **Be the teacher you are.** This seems like a simple statement, but I have always found it profound. Be your best self inside your classroom. What excites you that you can use in the classroom to accelerate learning? Use your personality strengths in your teaching. Do you love acting? Then use it in your teaching. Are you a great artist but feel insecure teaching math? Draw out some math problems! Do you love playing the piano? Why don't you play to the students as they are working? Your strengths are one of the biggest assets to your classroom. I love being silly and playful in life, but for many years I tried to run a very serious classroom because I was afraid of doing anything different as a new teacher. Once I brought my silly side to the learning, my students' test scores jumped, the

students were happier, and I was a happier teacher. We know there are still serious times in the classroom, but we also know when we can laugh together. Weave your personality into the lesson. If you are a golf-loving science teacher, why not bring in your nine irons on the day you teach force? If you do this, you are much more likely to be a better and “real”—as the students like to say—teacher.

- **Work on your weaknesses.** In addition to using your strengths to become a “real” person in the students’ eyes, you have to be willing to work on your weaknesses if that is what the students need. Let them know you learned how to do this specifically for them. You are a student as well. Think of yourself as a caretaker. This is the work you have to do outside of school hours (or during your prep if you’re super efficient). This is what your students need. Say two inexperienced teachers are discussing groupwork. One teacher says, “Groupwork is just not my thing. It’s easier to just have them work independently.” The second teacher says, “I know groupwork is better for the students but I also know this is my weak spot. I’m going to learn how to do it.” Which teacher do you think the students will respect more and will have more prepared, engaging lessons?
- **Use discipline sparingly.** If you discipline, do so for a specific purpose and tell students why. They will respect your authority and admire that you rarely have to use your power. Anger or disappointment can be effective only if used very rarely. Anger used often is completely ineffective. Discipline once, within the first two months of school, and only after you have taught the structures of your classroom. This establishes boundaries. Students need you to be stern when they cross your boundaries. For example, you could address your class with, “Do you remember the classroom agreements we discussed? Do we need something added to address side conversations? I want to make sure we’re on the same page. If there’s a misunderstanding, I can certainly address that. I know you’re not trying to be malicious, but you are in fact breaking an agreement.” Learn to pick and choose your battles. I always asked myself, *Is this affecting the learning of the whole class?* If the answer is yes, it is your job to correct the behavior. If the answer is no, do not stop the classroom for just one student. It’s not fair to the other students, unless you are using it as a teachable moment.
- According to one metastudy (Marzano et al., 2003), teachers who have strong relationships with their students have 31 percent fewer behavioral issues in their classrooms. This statistic has a huge impact on the amount of learning that goes on in the classroom and the amount of quality teaching that happens, as well as on your general well-being. Building a mutually respectful relationship with a student starts the minute they know you know their name and you use it often when speaking with them. Strong relationships with students don’t happen by chance. They happen through the way we decide, consciously or unconsciously, to interact with students from Day 1.

Your Turn

1. What are your teaching strengths? Are they the same or different from what other teachers have recognized as your strengths? How do you use this information to maximize student learning?

2. When was the last time you disciplined a full classroom? Can you remember a teacher who did this? Do you think it worked or not? If not, how could you or that teacher do it differently next time?

3. How can you show your students that you respect them, care for them as human beings, and believe in their success from Day 1?

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Nurture a Belonging Classroom

You rescued me from a lonely life.

—9th Grade Student

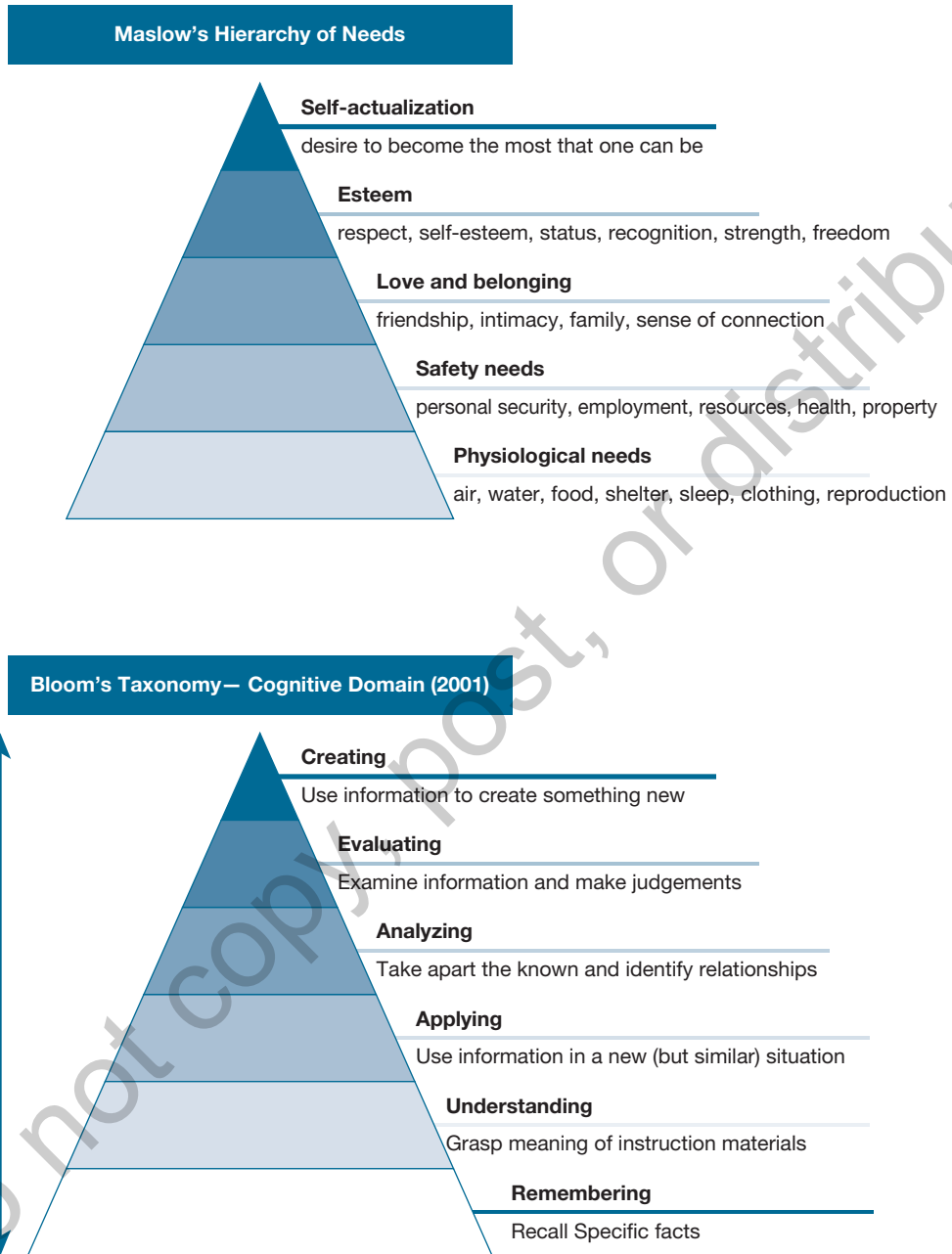
There's a phrase that has grown quite popular in the educational field the past few years: Maslow's before Bloom's. Basically, it's saying that we have to tend to Maslow's hierarchy of needs before students can get very far up on Bloom's taxonomy. So, if a student doesn't feel like they completely belong or doesn't have a sense of connection with the other students in the classroom, any sort of deeper learning may not happen throughout the school year as they will continue to struggle with Maslow's hierarchy and most likely eventually check out or shut down. (If you're not familiar with the concepts of Maslow and Bloom, look to Figure 2.1.)

As teachers it's our job to make Maslow's hierarchy happen very early in the school year, starting even on Day 1. You see, on Day 1 we are already working to create bonds between students. We want students to feel a sense of connection to each other, to feel accepted, and to start creating friendships with their classmates.

How can we create belonging classrooms from Day 1? Here are a few strategies that work.

- ▶ **Teach students not to shame, laugh, or ridicule each other for giving incorrect answers.** I used to do table points in a class-wide token reward system. When a student would accidentally laugh at another student for giving a way-off-track answer, I would reward the student who was ridiculed with table

Figure 2.1 Maslow's Before Bloom's



Source: Adapted from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Bloom's Taxonomy.

points. If the perpetrator apologized, I would give a few points to him or her, but not as many as the ridiculed student. This gave the power back to the student who was ridiculed. Pretty soon the laughter stopped because students knew that inside our classroom this was not okay.

- Create a “family board” or area of the classroom dedicated to student pictures so students can feel seen in the classroom. It’s okay if not every student is up there right away (especially if you are a middle or high school teacher and have multiple classes) because they will be at some point. Students who might not feel initially connected to the class, their peers, or the teacher might need to be on the family board in the first round to gain a sense of belonging in the class early on. Another benefit of family boards is that if you post group photos or photos with more than one student in it, many students feel seen in the classroom at once, which builds a sense of belonging. For an example of a family board, see Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Family Board



Source: Pariser and DeRoche, (2020).

- Hold morning meetings daily (with the same format to provide structure and comfort to students) or weekly.** Morning meetings are a powerful way for students to come together on a regular basis and “gather around the dinner table,” as you would with any functional family.

Your Turn

1. Did you ever have a class in K–12 or even university or graduate school where you really felt like you belonged? What contributed to that?

2. On the other hand, think of a time when you felt like you didn't belong to a class or a group somewhere. What contributed to that?

3. How does creating a belonging classroom help increase learning in the classroom and lead to fewer behavioral issues and higher engagement?

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Make It About the Students and the Importance of Student Collaboration on Day 1

The first day of school should be all about the students. We need to learn their names as fast as possible. The faster we know their names, the more we care about them. At least that's what they're thinking, I promise. Referring to your seating chart will help you learn the names the quickest. My seating chart is virtually attached to my hands the first few weeks of school until I learn all of the students' names. Make sure the seating chart is always on a clipboard that you walk around the classroom with. The students don't know what is on your clipboard, so the fact that you are addressing them by name will be impressive to them. Every other adult in your room should have a copy of the seating chart so they know names as well.

In the first couple of days, you may not have a seating chart yet and students may still be enrolling in the school or your class. However, you can still start learning student names in a few creative ways.

Tips for Learning Students' Names

- **Learning students' names Method #1 (basic).** If you're a little hesitant and would rather take a conservative approach to learning names, that's fine. My mentor taught me an effortless trick. Have the students take an index card and write their first name on it, preferably with marker and as large as possible so you can see it easily. They then fold the cards in half and place them on their desks with the names facing you. This will work for the first few days. Then make a seating chart as soon as possible to get a handle on the names fast. You could also use name tags, but index cards are reusable and easier on your wallet. Most schools provide index cards to teachers at the beginning of the school year.
- **Learning students' names Method #2.** Use student pictures. Most attendance programs now can make seating charts with student pictures on them. If you don't want to take the time to construct one, you can either cut and paste the student pictures onto your seating chart or keep a reference of student pictures on your clipboard behind your seating chart.
- **Learning students' names Method #3 (advanced).** I read this strategy in Kelley's (2003) *Rookie Teaching for Dummies* and still use it every year. The students get a kick out of it, and it's really effective for learning names. It also shows the students that you are creative and they may never know what to expect.
 1. Start at one edge of your classroom and ask the student her or his first name.
 2. Move on to the student behind her or him.
 3. Go back and forth a few times between the two of them, repeating their names as you look into their faces.
 4. Move on to student number three, repeat the name, and review all the names you've learned so far.
 5. Repeat this process until you learn the entire class, and then spend some time picking out students at random and trying to remember their names.
 6. When you feel comfortable with the names, turn your back and ask the students to change desks.

My goal was always to find out about my students on the first day (make it about them). Show them you care who they are as learners. I like to do an activity to get them talking to each other, problem-solving, or working as a team to try to create something. Remember, they are as nervous as you are. They want to know about you, but they also want to know each other. You will need your students to be friendly with each

other to have a productive year, so it pays off if they can learn to communicate with a bit of structure and enjoy speaking with and learning from each other. This is why structured team-building or icebreaker activities are priceless on this day.

On the first day you want your students to smile, be able to communicate with each other, start raising hands, and start learning each others' names. Save the rest for later. The introductory activities I enjoyed the most required students to be up and out of their seats, moving around the room, and trying to solve a puzzle in a group or team. Tons of these activities can be found online, in books, or in the minds of your colleagues. A book I recommend for icebreakers and team-building activities that can carry you throughout the year is Thiagarajan's *100 Favorite Games* (2006). This book is filled with activities for grade school up to adult learners to help build a community of leaders and critical thinkers in your classroom. My copy lives on the bookshelf beside my desk.

Table 3.1 shows the traditional way of conducting Day 1 contrasted with a more effective way that will engage your students.

In Best Practice #6, you'll see why having students speak to one another on Day 1 will help you build a seating chart the first week. You have to get a glimpse of their personalities. Day 2 is when students can begin to take notes, learn the classroom rules, understand your expectations and consequences, and get ready to learn. Day 1 shows them you are curious about *them*, hear *their* voices, and and learning *their* names.

Table 3.1 Engaging Your Students on Day 1

OLD WAY OF DAY 1	FRESH AND ENGAGING IDEAS FOR DAY 1
Teacher goes over class rules and expectations.	Students do a collaborative icebreaker or structured collaborative activity. Teacher saves rules and expectations for Day 2.
Students leave with an idea of the teacher's personality.	Teacher is more interested in seeing the personalities of the students.
Students do not know their classmates and may be resistant to collaborating the next day.	Students start to know their classmates and collaboration is easier the next day.
Student voice is not heard.	Student voice is heard.
Students leave the room understanding rules and expectations.	Students leave the room smiling and excited for the next day of class. Teacher goes over rules and expectations to class on Day 2.
Students do not talk to each other on Day 1. The teacher talks to them most of the time.	Most of the period is a collaborative team-building activity where teacher can start to see the personalities of the students to help build a seating chart.

Your Turn

1. What is one of your favorite Day 1 activities? Why do you like it so much?

2. What message does doing a fun and collaborative activity on Day 1 relay to your students?

3. Why is it important to have students talking to each other on Day 1 in a structured activity? How will this facilitate student collaboration in your classroom?

4. Think about a successful Day 1 you've had in the past. What were some of the long-term positive results that came out of what you did?

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BEST PRACTICE #4

Set Your Routine and Structures Early . . . and Keep Them!

If you've ever substitute taught or covered a colleague's classroom, you know that you can tell a good teacher the moment you walk into their class. Even when their usual teacher isn't there, the students know what to do. They enter a certain way, they go to their seats, they do a specific procedure first, they ask to do certain things and know not to ask to do others. This classroom routine shows the teacher set structures early. These types of classrooms run like a well-oiled machine, especially in the first five to ten minutes of class. Routines should be taught in the beginning of the school year, just as content is taught.

Setting structures early almost guarantees a successful year. Let students own the routine. Humans tend to keep habits. Without habit, classroom and life may be exciting, but we start to feel out of place. Give students a habitual way to start and end your class.

Tips for Establishing Classroom Structures

- **Make it easy.** Make sure your structures are not too tedious. If a student needs to get a pencil, do they have to sign ten release forms? Or is there a basket always in the same place that holds

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pencils? If the structures make sense and show you value the students, then they will work.

- **Consistency is key.** Don't change your structures too often. I'm not saying don't *ever* change structures, but having an established routine makes students feel comfortable. Students learn to remember and do daily things automatically. If you keep changing things—even if the new structures are better—they'll forget what the newest structure is and just follow none. Decide on structures that work early on.
- **Structure the beginning of class.** Give structure to the beginning of your class period by asking the students to do the same type of thing at the beginning of class every day. Think about how your own personal morning routine before you get to school sets you up for the rest of the day. This way, if kids come in groggy they will know what to do automatically. An example of a great daily structure is outlined in the following steps:
 1. Go directly to your seat and sit.
 2. Place your backpack on the back of your chair or on the floor.
 3. Take out your homework log and record your homework.
 4. Start the warm-up exercise on the board.

Once you do the same routine for about seven days, the students will get in the habit of doing it, and the routine will become comforting to them. They will feel successful since they are following the rules. Remember to praise students each and every time they follow your routine, no matter how easy. Post the opening routine somewhere in the room for your visual learners or any students who need a gentle reminder. It will save you a lot of frustration if you can just say the student's name and point to the routine instead of repeating yourself. I have found a PowerPoint slide helps with this. Split your computer screen and project that slide (so you can take attendance as students do the morning routine). Pro tip: Place a smiley face on the slide somewhere and "Good morning/afternoon Period _____." All you have to do is change the period number or class name, project the slide, and boom—you're free for the first several minutes of class to take attendance and get ready for the lesson. Posting the routine on a screen also creates student agency, builds confidence, and projects positive vibes from the start of your class.

Remember to praise students each and every time they follow your routine, no matter how easy.

Routines that need to be set as early as possible in Week 1:

- ▶ Technology sign-out
- ▶ Tardy student policy
- ▶ Students assigned technology numbers; this is most effective if technology numbers are on student names on seating chart
- ▶ Classroom books sign-out
- ▶ Bathroom pass/log (if necessary)
- ▶ Where are assignments turned in?
- ▶ Where can missing work be found for absent students?
- ▶ Where is homework written on the board for students to record?
- ▶ Cell phone/electronic device policy for your classroom

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Your Turn

1. Look at the above list of routines. What is a structure or routine that you've seen work well in a classroom for one of the items?

2. In your opinion, are there any of the above items that do not need a structure and/or routine? Why?

3. Do you think it's more important to have a routine to begin the class, a routine to end the class, or both? Why?

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Use Empowering Language Instead of Controlling Language

Your class is a place I look forward to coming to every day.

—Carmen, Grade 9

Even though students are mandated to attend school daily, don't take advantage of that. Strive to make your classroom a place they look forward to being in. Strive to make it a place where they feel good and comfortable. After my third year teaching, a close teacher friend gave me one of the most meaningful presents I have ever received. She handed me *Positive Words, Powerful Results* (2004), a book by Hal Urban.

Inside the front cover was a handwritten note regarding how teaching is all about what we say and how we say it. This message stayed with me. It took me a few months before I started reading the book. I mean, who had time to read books for fun with all those papers to grade, right? Urban's book was the beginning of my journey of realizing that teaching is all about making the students feel empowered, challenged, successful, and supported. There's a quote by an unknown author I stumbled upon recently that sums it up perfectly: "If speaking kindly to plants helps them grow, imagine what speaking kindly to humans can do." Our job as teachers is to help our students grow academically, socially, and emotionally. That's a big responsibility. The climate in the classroom begins with your words: what you say, *how* you say it, and the tone you use while saying it. It is an art and a science. Some of us are born with the ability to *give*

not *take* from others with our subconscious choice of words. This wasn't the case for me; I had to learn. The book was one of the most meaningful presents to me because it cracked the door to show me that our words and tone can be either our biggest ally or our biggest hurdle in becoming a great teacher.

I can use my words and tone more effectively now, but I remember a time during my third year of teaching where I failed. I was walking my ninth graders down the hallway and they were supposed to be silent. One notoriously defiant student—I'll call him Adam—continued to talk. I first threatened to make the whole class turn around (secretly hoping I didn't need to go there because I wasn't even sure if they would listen to me enough to turn around). Adam continued to talk away, however, unafraid of my threats. I stopped the class, stuck out my first finger—otherwise known as the teacher finger of shame—and waved it with every word I said.

"Stop talking!"

Adam laughed.

"I. Said. Stop. Talking!" I spoke a bit louder this time and with a face more red, my head leaned downwards and eyes of fire (or so I thought) staring at Adam.

He turned around to not only laugh but also show his classmates he didn't care with a snarky glance. This was probably not the first time a teacher had tried to overpower him and was probably not the first time it hadn't worked. Adam had zero fear of me, and fear was the emotion I was trying to trigger in him to get obedience. Needless to say, the story ended with my head almost flying off because of all of the blood that had rushed

to it. Adam eventually stopped talking but just to get out of the school gates. I lost. He left laughing and I took an aspirin. This story is just one of many where I was not using empowering language but instead using controlling language.

Just writing about this story today triggers a painful feeling. As teachers, we have to be careful not to beat ourselves up for the times we mess up and resort to controlling language because we're

at our wit's end. These are the times when we are learning, and these times will be your biggest teachers.

We have to be careful not to beat ourselves up for the times we mess up. These are the times when we are learning, and these times will be your biggest teachers.

Tips for Improving How We Can Use Empowering Language

- **Use "I" statements.** If you want a student to do something, especially when correcting behavior, never say, *"You need to . . ."* Always start with, *"I need you to . . ."* Students can't really argue

with an “I” statement. It’s very easy for a student to argue with a “you” statement.

- When speaking to a seated student one-on-one, try to kneel down to their level or below them. This is less intimidating for students and they will be more likely to open up to you.
- **Say the student’s name when speaking to them, but not in a threatening way.** People love hearing their own name. In fact, according to Carnegie’s (1981) *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, “A person’s name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language” (p. 83). Dale Carnegie knew how to win people over. This is why this tactic will work for your class. Saying a student’s name in a respectful and even loving way will connect them with you as you are talking to them or asking them to do something.
- **Put yourself in your students’ shoes.** Think of the last time you spoke to your class. Would you appreciate being spoken to like that? If the answer is yes, well done! Great job! You are ahead of where most are, including myself, in the first year or two of teaching. I equate the first years of teaching as fighting with a significant other in an unhealthy relationship. You say things you don’t mean; you apologize; you lose control at times; you wonder why they don’t care about all the preparation or work you are putting in. However, the great news is that as you become more experienced, you realize that you are on the same team as the students and not fighting against them. You will have more control and stronger connections with your students this way. Yes, you will still lose your cool, but it will happen rarely and for a specific reason. Yes, you will disagree, but you will keep your composure as you see the issue for what it is. How can you start growing? Speak with respect to the students with the goal to empower them. They will do what you want them to do more often and because they want to, not because they are afraid of you or sick of hearing you nag.

The student sees the first comment as him doing the teacher a favor, but he sees the second comment as a threat or challenge, and he thinks you are using your power to hold it over his head that you can give him detention. Ironically, you could give detention in both cases; you are just making Jorge feel like he is doing you a favor with the first comment.

Empowering comment:
“Jorge, I need you to sit down, please. Thank you.”

Instead of a controlling comment (in the mind of a student): “Sit down or you will have detention.”

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EMPOWERING LANGUAGE	CONTROLLING LANGUAGE
"I need you to . . ."	"You need to . . ."
"Do me a favor and sit down."	"Sit down <i>now!</i> "
"Can you do me a favor and listen up please?"	"Why aren't you listening?"
"Could you please stop talking to your neighbor and listen a bit more closely?"	"Why can't you stop talking?"
"I" statements	"You" statements

I will admit that sometimes you can get faster results with controlling language, but when we do that we are breaking the students down and they may resent you in the long run. Empowering language helps build students up.

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Your Turn

1. Can you remember a teacher who made you feel not good because of their words? What did they say and how did they say it?

2. Now think of an instructor who made you feel great every time you heard them speak to the class or to you. Do you remember specific words they said or just the way the words made you feel?

3. Practice using “I” statements and statements using a student’s name in a respectful and loving way aloud. The more you hear yourself say it, the more likely you are to do this naturally.

BEST PRACTICE #6

Create Purposeful Seating Charts



Watch for more about creating purposeful seating charts.

A big part of classroom management is giving every student opportunities to succeed. Have you ever seen a class that is doing a word search? Do you ever wonder why it drops down to almost silent immediately? *It's because they all can do the task.* The problem is that the task is too easy. Often misbehaviors occur because students are underchallenged and become bored, or they are overchallenged without academic support. This is where the tool of a purposeful seating chart can and will help both your classroom management and the academic abilities of the class. With a purposeful seating chart, even with a challenging curriculum students will always be in close proximity to those that can help them. A purposeful seating chart will foster a community of learners.

My mentor taught me a strategy for making seating charts that changed my teaching career. Before this strategy, I used to break up students who “shouldn’t sit together” and then sprinkled the rest around and hoped for the best. This isn’t the way to go. Making a purposeful seating chart means you look at students’ academic abilities, learning disabilities, and language barriers and then make a chart from there. *I suggest having a seating chart done by Day 3 of the first week of school.* The earlier the better or students will start finding who they want to sit next to and then you’ll have an extra battle on your hands. On the first day, if you do a student-centered activity where students are given ample opportunity to talk and work with each other, you’ll have the opportunity to observe how the students interact with each other and what personalities stand out (and some will). Take notes as you observe student interactions on Day 1. You’ll need these observations to make a purposeful seating chart.

Tips for Preparing a Purposeful Seating Chart

Step #1: Acquire a list of students with individualized education programs (IEPs) in your class. You can usually find this on your attendance roster. It's helpful to have a description of the disability if available. Sometimes IEPs trickle in later in the school year, but work with what you have at the beginning of the school year.

Step #2: Find the list with the students who are multilingual. Usually you can acquire this list from the speech pathologist at your school or from the school counselor. It's easiest to get this information on your attendance roster, so check there first.

Step #3: Acquire a list of students identified as GATE (gifted and talented). This information is often found on your attendance roster.

The rest of your students should be general education students.

Draw how you want to arrange the desks in your room. I recommend groups of four to six, which research also suggests is best for larger projects (Teaching & Learning Transformation Center, n.d.) and will leave more space in your classroom for movement. Situate the groups so students' backs are not toward the front of the room. You will be talking to the whole class many times and do not want students to constantly have to flip their chairs around.

Step #4: Place your students with IEPs first. *Spread them out from each other.* Some students may have preferential seating in their IEP, meaning they are legally mandated to sit in the front, back, or side of the room depending on their needs and what is most beneficial to their learning.

Step #5: Also *spread your multilingual students out from each other.* I usually put these students next to vocal general education students who speak often in class. If the general education student speaks the multilingual student's native language, even better. Vocal students will usually be eager to help a struggling multilingual student when needed. This makes a difference. Spread out the advancement via individual determination (AVID) students you may have from each other, if you have that data.

Step #6: *Spread out* your students identified as GATE and AVID from each other.

You may be thinking, *Why would I spread out all of my students with IEPs, multilingual students, or students who need extra support when I work with them all together?* The answer is that you spread them out to create the most heterogeneous seating chart possible so that instead of students forming cliques with like students that sit near them, the class as a whole has a strong chance of becoming a community that

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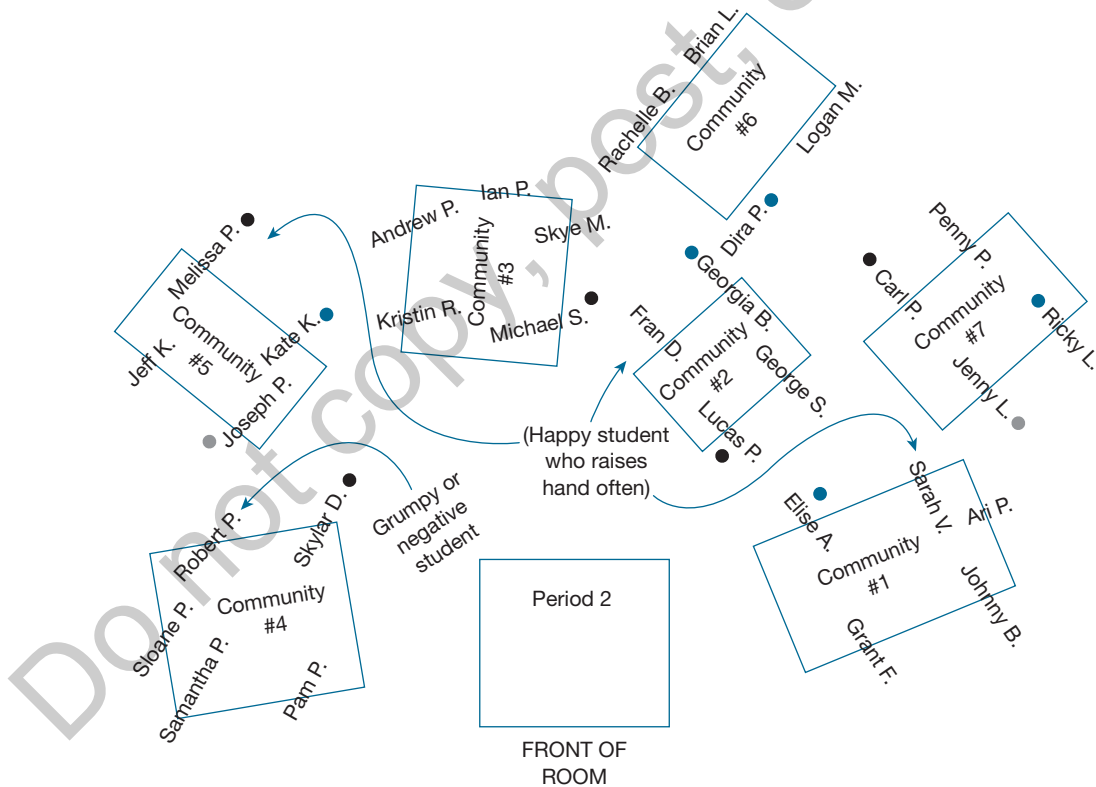
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collaborates and learns from each other as well as from you. Also, every student has somebody near them who can help them access the content and build on social-emotional skills. Let's face it, in tomorrow's world students will need to be able to empathetically work with people different than they are and still reach a common goal.

You don't want to have a seating chart with *IEP* and other indicators written all over it, but you want to be able to identify these students when you are teaching. Perhaps use a different color highlighter to color their names or put a dot next to them. This way you can remember what types of learners you have in the class as you are teaching.

A carefully planned seating chart in a class might look something like that in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 A Seating Chart



- student with IEP
- student identified as ELL (Keep in mind that advanced or early advanced ELLs may function quite similarly to general education students.)
- GATE student

A coded seating chart is most effective if it is always visible to the teacher. Dedicate a special place on your desk or on your clipboard where it is always in plain sight as you are teaching. You might want to put the code somewhere near your desk, but be careful about labeling student abilities right on the seating chart as students will figure out who is who and feelings could be hurt. Also, of course, that information is legally confidential.

As you create your seating chart, you may also want to keep in mind these possible participants in your classroom:

- ▶ **One-on-one adults in your room.** if you have an adult who is a one-on-one with a child, great! This student will be put in a group and the adult will be in the group as another member. It can be beneficial to put a “negative” student in this group because the constant attention and proximity of another adult could turn a negative personality around because they won’t have to fight for attention. It’s worth a shot; I’ve seen it work. Just make sure the one-on-one adult and negative student aren’t a personal clash and that the negative student isn’t an explosive student. This isn’t fair to anyone. It’s a good idea to have a talk first with the adult to let them know about the other students in the group so they feel empowered to work with all of them.
- ▶ **Happy students.** I usually wait two days before making the seating chart so I can pick out the happy students who raise their hands often in the classroom. Happy and consistently engaged students will reveal themselves fast, so usually I can spot them by Day 2. I try not to change seats after I make the seating chart on Day 3. I’ll stick one happy student dead center in the front and one dead center in the back. This keeps the class joyful and gives every table in the room a change to have engagement. Have you ever noticed a table of four students with all of their heads down sleeping? Humans tend to mimic behaviors near them that they see. If they see the person next to them raising their hand, they will be more likely to follow suit. (See Best Practice #8 for more details on how spreading positivity in the classroom can help maximize learning for students.)
- ▶ **Chronically grumpy or angry students.** As much as I’d like to wave a magic wand and have a smile appear on all students’ faces, it’s just not always possible. The fact is, the learning must go on. And we know that a grumpy or angry student doesn’t learn as much as a happy student. Chronically grumpy and angry students may need the most help, but their negative attitude shouldn’t get most of your attention. If placed incorrectly, they may try to bring the entire class down with their negativity. Once you make sure the learning of the class isn’t being hindered by a chronically grumpy or negative student, then you can go deeper into looking at the root causes of these emotions and help the student one-on-one.

I'll usually seat them on the side of the room in front so they don't get lost in the back of the room or create a peanut gallery, and so their negative energy doesn't bleed into the class. We want happy and engaged students to become role models for these students, not the other way around. When identifying these students you are looking for one trait: negativity. Most of the time these students can be identified as quickly as the happy students.

- ▶ **Vocal students.** Make sure there's one vocal student at each community table. *Vocal* means a student who loves to share out or even perhaps just talk to others around them. Using vocally gifted students as an asset can greatly increase engagement and increase participation for shy students. *I mark these students on my class roster Days 1 and 2 so I know to spread them out.* These are usually also the students who like to talk to their friends, too, and that's okay. Sometimes the vocal students are the lowest-level multilingual students, and I love when this happens. You want the student to be vocal (regardless of language or academic ability) because you want a focus of your class to be on raising hands to answer and having a voice. It's fascinating how these students can encourage others to raise their hands as well. Use vocal students as resources to get strong participation from your classes. If each community group has someone raising their hand in the beginning, that will lead to others in the group following suit.

If you need to do a few seat swaps later, you can (the sooner the better), but make sure you still have the IEP, multilingual, GATE, and gen ed ratios evenly spread out. Most years I do one or two seat swaps in the first week and then leave the seating as is. The bottom line is that as teachers we have to figure out a way to ensure that the whole class learns together.

With all these things considered, I then check the seating chart to make sure of the following:

- ▶ Every low-level multilingual student is placed next to a gen ed student for academic support. It's even better if that gen ed student can speak the local language of the multilingual student.
- ▶ Two students with IEPs are not seated in the same group if possible.

I also ask myself the following:

- ▶ Do I have any students who might need a bit of extra room for body size or wheelchairs? Are they going to be comfortable where they are seated? You'll be able to see this on Day 1 and make sure to jot it down discreetly.
- ▶ Do I have space for other adults in the room to sit so they feel part of your classroom?

This will give you a happy, mixed-ability class that has the most potential for success. Each student has a fighting chance to succeed. And if you make a seating chart in the first week of class, you will learn student names much faster. It's a win-win.

In Figure 6.1, you'll notice I placed the two hand-raising, happiest students in the center front and toward the center back because *I want their energy to spread out to the class*. I then placed grumpy and/or angry students in Community #4. I now have a classroom where all students are given a chance to academically succeed. It's useful to keep your seating chart with you when you are teaching to check in on these students. If one table isn't grasping a concept, look at what learners you have at each table. Were three lower-level multilingual students accidentally placed together?

There's a small chance that if you explain to someone how you decided on the seating for your class, they may be offended because you're looking at cognitive abilities rather than other factors. But what you are actually doing is making the focus of your class academic success, collaboration, and engagement, and you're giving each student a chance to succeed based on the skills and knowledge they have. If you want to teach challenging curriculum and help students be able to perform academically, this way works.

Tips for Making a Seating Chart

1. Print out a class roster before Day 1 of the school year.
2. During class, mark:
 - a. happy, engaged students
 - b. grumpy, angry students
 - c. vocal students (please use just one letter or codes so students can't interpret)
3. Keep an eye on the same students for Day 2. Are they marked accurately?
4. Before the suggested day to have a seating chart ready (Day 3), print out your list of IEP, multilingual, GATE, and AVID students (this information usually can be found on your attendance roster if you look closely).
5. Arrange the desks the way you'd like first, before Day 3.
6. Draw a seating chart for each class. First, place your IEP and multilingual students based on where they will learn best. Next, place GATE and AVID students. Then, place your happy students definitely first toward the center and then spread out evenly. Finally,

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place your negative students on the side where they have room and aren't physically bumped often by accident. These students usually like space.

7. Spread out the gen ed students in the remaining seats.
8. Color code your chart based on type of student so you have a reference during class to check for understanding. Be as discreet as possible when making the color code legend on the seating chart. Assume a student will see it at some point during the year so be sure they aren't able to understand the legend.

Step #8 is especially important if you have to switch somebody's seat (this usually happens). You can make sure the switch still supports the class as a whole being balanced out academically.

Changing It Up in Middle and High School

In middle or upper grade levels, the students are able to move their desks into different formations depending on the learning plan that class period. Doing this once a week is usually enough to make this type of arrangement “special” and can really spice up a lesson. High school students can move desks around fast for you, so you can have a bit more flexibility with desk arrangement to best fit the discussion needs of the lesson without having to do all of the work yourself. The seating chart you created using the tips above can be your “home base” arrangement.

In middle or upper grade levels, depending on your subject, you may want to rearrange seats in a way that fosters the *type of conversations* you have in the classroom. For example:

- ▶ In an ELA classroom, if the space allows, a circle or horseshoe makes sense for having discussions about text in a seminar-type lesson.
- ▶ In a history class, a class divided down the center makes sense to debate two different sides of a story or historical event.
- ▶ In a math class, groups make sense to foster working collaboratively in teams to solve math problems.
- ▶ In a science class, groups make the most sense to complete labs.

In each of these seating arrangements, the students' cognitive levels should be spread out.

You could also use this type of dynamic seating style the second half of the year in an upper grade middle school classroom. They may just need more help arranging the desks (maybe project a visual of what each shape should look like when you ask them to move the desks), and you might leave a few more minutes to get the desks back in their original spots.

I'd change seating arrangements sparingly in the middle school grades—maybe once per unit during a debate, Socratic Seminar, or other special activity.

Flexible Seating

Flexible seating means that students choose their own seats based on where they feel most comfortable and/or learn best. In flexible seating students often have unique seating options, such as bean bags, the carpeted floor, or swivel stools. Although flex seating has certain benefits and is often preferred by students, it can take strong classroom management for students to be able to sit where they want one day then go back to their home base seats the next. You might consider using it very sparingly in your first few years of teaching. Here are a few reasons why:

- ▶ Something to keep in mind with this is that students are unaware of others' data, meaning students do not know each other's English language (EL) levels, who has an IEP, or which of their classmates are GATE, so they're not likely to keep the mix that you'd be able to create with a seating chart. Flexible seating should still provide students with opportunities for collaboration.
- ▶ If your class is on a full-class behavior modification program based on groups or communities, flexible seating can disrupt this because students may be constantly changing their seats. Also, with flexible seating, self-chosen student groups will likely be academically uneven in skill level. In my experience with flexible seating, usually the students with low EL levels are grouped together, the students with high academic ability are grouped together, and so on. Human beings tend to naturally gravitate to people like them.
- ▶ Students may be so excited to be able to have flexible seating that they agree to be more focused. However, we know that a quiet classroom does not always mean that students are learning the most or grappling with the material. Remember the word search example from the beginning of this section? It's a fine balance.

Tips for Flexible Seating

If you are curious about trying flexible seating, I suggest you do the following:

- Use the seating arrangement proposed in the tips for creating a seating chart as the students' home base or normal seating. The home base seats usually work best for instruction time and should be where the students are the most often. It's amazing how fast students can forget where they sit.
- Try flexible seating out in small ways first. For example, if students are working in table groups, you could let the groups choose where they want to sit in the room during work time. The groups should stay together. In another example, during groupwork time, one group may go to the carpet together and sit in a circle if that works for them and they are more comfortable.
- Use flexible seating at first with classes that need less academic or language scaffolding, such as a class with mostly gen ed students. The seating arrangement created from the tips above provides solid academic support. So, students who need less academic support might do better with flexible seating.
- Have a mini-lesson teaching students how to pick the seat best for them.
- Try flexible seating out with just one class first.

Teachers often ask me how often to change a seating chart. The answer is that it really depends on you, the teacher. I personally like to keep the same home base seats all year or at least half the year. Why?

- Building a community of learners means they have to trust each other academically, socially, and emotionally, and that takes time. Keeping the same seats builds deeper relationships between students.
- Because the seating chart is done so thoughtfully, all student needs should be met. For example, students who need preferential seating or students who need to be closer to the board to see should be taken care of.

It's important to point out that if students are grouped together with people not at their table for a group project, they would sit with the project groups while working. The seating chart is always their home base seating.

Your Turn

1. What are your thoughts on the heterogeneous seating chart and spreading out students with IEPs, general education students, multilingual students, etc.?

2. How would you do small group instruction in your room? Would you have a designated area?

3. What are your thoughts on spreading out happy, engaged students and negative students? Do you think this has benefit to a classroom?

4. Do you have another way you would like to do a seating chart? Talk to your coteacher or another colleague about this and gather some ideas. (Remember, if you want the focus of the class to be on academics and engagement, then you have to look at this criterion—i.e. the data—first when arranging students.)



Create Room Environments That Foster Student Belonging

We treat this classroom as if we were home.

—Michelle, Grade 8

We want our classrooms to feel like a second home to our students. Heck, sometimes our classrooms are the most consistent environment for students who are highly mobile or live in overpopulated or disorganized households. Some of our students might have even experienced living with different relatives at different times. Students should feel comfortable, calm, and at peace in our classrooms. This is when true learning can begin. Here are some tips for creating this environment.

Ways to Create Room Environments Where Students Feel Comfortable, Calm, and at Peace

- Have a few plants around the room. Give students leadership in taking care of them.
- Add some lamps, string lights, or some sort of dimmer lighting around the room.

- Have students wipe down their own desks at the end of class so they take responsibility in keeping the classroom clean.
- Have student pictures posted somewhere in the room.
- Use the power of soft music in the classroom as students are working or reading. Music is a powerful way to help students feel at home and focused in a classroom.
- In elementary school, ask parents and caregivers to send a picture of their student doing something they love to tape next to their name in their cubby.
- Words and messages posted in the room should be in a positive tone. For example, instead of a sign saying, “Do not go in this back room,” it could instead read, “Please respect this back room is only for adults.”

During my first two years of teaching, my classroom didn't feel like a second home to either myself or my students. I didn't have any pictures of students posted, little student work was displayed, and the desks were in rows. Graffiti from students was drawn all over the desks and bulletin boards, and I honestly couldn't keep up with cleaning it off every day. I also had bright fluorescent lighting, no plants, torn books, and gum stuck in more desk corners than I could even count. It was clear that the students didn't treat our classroom like a home, and neither did I.

Real Conversation With an Eighth-Grade Student

Student: Ms. Pariser, what do you call pasta that is not real?

Me: I don't know.

Student: An impasta!

Me: [laughs loudly]

Student [to another student]: See, that's how you know they are getting old, when they laugh at that.

Student [to me]: It was just a social experiment.