

...teacher today

Building Community

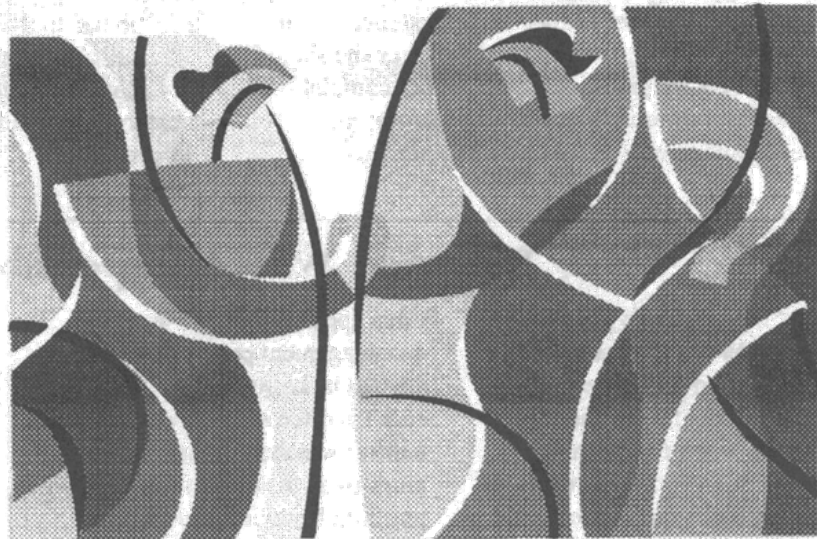
How can educators foster a sense of community in classrooms and schools? Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Connect with students. Try sending a late summer postcard welcoming students to your classroom and expressing how much you are looking forward to a year of learning and discovery.
- ◆ Greet students daily using their names. It is good practice to stand at your classroom door when the students enter. Although secondary educators may be faced with many students a day, it is important to learn as many students' names as possible. If remembering names isn't a strength, try commenting on the interests of individual students, or on something about the student that is unusual, outstanding, or significant.
- ◆ Share information about yourself and your interests. This will help to create meaningful conversation with students so you can both share significant aspects of your lives. Try attending some extracurricular activities and keeping abreast of school events.
- ◆ Network with students' families. Communicate through newsletters, emails, and/or Web pages. Welcome families' thoughts and participation.
- ◆ Engage in dialogue with students. Exchange ideas, ask students' opinions, and incorporate their suggestions into classroom routines and assignments.
- ◆ Work to develop a feeling of community within lessons and in the classroom. Invite community

Maximizing Learning through Classroom Management

In 1997 the American Medical Association conducted a comprehensive study, believed to be the largest of its kind in the nation, to determine which aspects of home and school life are protective of developing adolescents. The study sought to determine factors that provided adolescents with protection against negative influences from the media, peers, and society in general. Researchers discovered that the strongest protective influence was the establishment of emotionally strong relationships with parents and teachers. The study showed positive relationships with adults in school settings to be more important than class size, the amount of teacher education, or school policies. When students felt connected to their schools through healthy strong relationships with caring adults, when they felt their opinions and ideas were valued, and when they felt that fairness prevailed, they were less likely to participate in risky behaviors.

(Constantine et al., 1999; Resnick et al., 1997)



- members into the classroom; develop activities that encourage students to network with the local community and to consider other people's ideas and practices.
- ◆ Hold class meetings to create an atmosphere of respect between teacher and students, and among the students themselves. Even

(especially) when students are struggling either academically or behaviorally, provide input without sarcasm and with personal acknowledgement that the student has the skills and abilities to reach his or her goals.

(Cummings, 2000; Deiro, 2003; Zemelman et al., 1998)



The First Few Days...

There is only one opportunity to make a first impression, and the first impression students have of a teacher can set the tone for a class throughout the entire year. Here are a few tips:

- ◆ Dress for success: be proud of your chosen profession.
- ◆ Greet your classes as they arrive and be prepared with a warm-up activity.
- ◆ Provide information about the course content as appropriate to the grade level.
- ◆ Discuss expectations about academic excellence and appropriate behavior.
- ◆ Set aside time to hear from students: have the class work collaboratively to develop classroom *procedures* (as opposed to *rules*).

(Kellough, 1999)

Setting the Tone - Effectively

Harry and Rosemary Wong have written perhaps the quintessential book on the start of the school year: *The First Days of School* provides helpful tips to launch any teacher, new or experienced, off to a good start. It is the Wongs' belief that the first days of school determine the tenor of the year. They stress that getting off to a good start is one of the most important precepts for *effectiveness* as a teacher. Students learn best from teachers who are positive, supportive and optimistic. It is always a good idea to model the behaviors expected from students. For example, if a teacher expects punctuality, he or she should be on time as well. To encourage timely work completion, return assignments promptly. Open communication, friendliness, and honesty are likely to be returned.

Effective educators...

1 ...*have positive expectations* for student success. Having high standards and expectations for *all* students drives learners to success. This belief is based on research that shows that students will perform up to the expectations the teacher holds.

2 ...*are good classroom managers*. A well-ordered environment will lead to an effective classroom climate. How the classroom is organized and structured contributes to the ease with which students learn.

3 ...*design lessons for student mastery*. Teachers who know their subject matter *and* their students well are able to design and deliver engaging and appropriate lessons.

(Wong 1998; Kellough, 1999)

Behavior: Whose Responsibility?

Faced with a student's undesirable classroom behavior it's easy to blame the student and entertain the thought, "If only this student wasn't in this class, there wouldn't be behavior problems!" However, researchers tell us that every behavior is *functional*; *misbehavior* in some way serves a purpose for the student.

Brain researcher Robert Sylwester maintains that for learning to happen *emotion* needs to be present. Lacking an emotional connection to learning, possibly combined with the feeling that the learning task is either too easy or too difficult, students may shut down their learning processes. The first indications of shut-down are

often apparent in body language. If disengagement persists, and the student lacks internal control, the result is often *misbehavior*. A good teacher watches for anticipatory clues so as to adjust his or her own teaching behavior to reengage students, thus preventing *misbehavior* before it occurs.

Educational author and lecturer Alfie Kohn presents the "Why should I care?" principle. Lacking a reason to care—"Why do I need to know this?" or "What good will learning it do for me?"—causes students to disengage and often turn to off-task behavior. The remedies, he says, are good planning and content that interests,

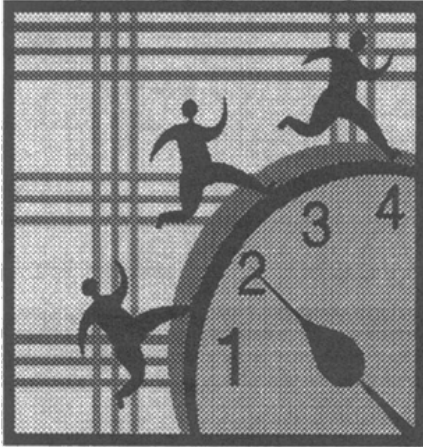
engages, and addresses the *social* needs of the student as well as the *academic* curriculum. When the classroom is viewed as a community, everyone becomes responsible for developing and maintaining a positive learning environment.

In the first days of the term discuss with students the *community* of the classroom. Welcome input from students on classroom policies and procedures as well as on curriculum and assignments. Working together to create a community of interactive, engaging learning will help to minimize behavior problems.

(Sylwester, 2000; Kohn, 1993, 1996)

Managing Time

With so many activities in the day, and accountability requirements, effective time management is vitally important for staff and students. Researchers say the extent of time spent engaging in learning activities has a direct



correlation to student learning. Teachers can increase the amount of time students spend learning by managing the time allotted to instruction, as well as attending to the rate of student engagement.

Reflect upon how instructional time is spent. Calculate how many minutes per day are spent in routine tasks such as attendance, lunch counts, etc. Are there more efficient ways to accomplish these tasks? Could students be engaged in an interactive, collaborative warm up activity while the business of recording daily data takes place?

Stay mindful of the amount of time spent on any one learning task. A good rule of thumb is that when only one or two learning modalities (such as auditory and visual) are involved, the activity should be limited to about 15 minutes. When adding additional modalities (such as kinesthetic or tactile) students' ability to stay on task will increase.

Try these suggestions to maximize student time on task:

- ◆ Prepare and **present lessons in an interactive manner**. Ask questions, allow for discussion time, and provide continual feedback.
- ◆ **Check for student understanding** of learning *tasks* as well as content. Be certain that they have the skills, materials, and tools they need to feel a sense of accomplishment. When applicable, use the principles of guided practice to lead learning.
- ◆ **Provide oral and written directions** for seatwork or independent activities with choice and variety built in. Communicate the purpose of the lesson to students.
- ◆ **Keep aware of student behavior** and communicate that awareness to the class.


(Kellough, 1999; Levin & Nolan, 2000; Wong & Wong, 1998)

Lesson Planning

Schools serve a wide variety of students with diverse educational needs and challenges. In some communities, students who are at risk, who are identified as needing special education, or who do not speak English as their first language are in the majority. The principles of inclusion mean that *all* students are included, regardless of their needs or exceptionalities. This principle necessitates lesson plans that are flexible and diversified.

Begin by helping students to understand their own learning styles and preferences. Allow students who really want to delve into a topic to do so, either independently or with a learning partner. Some may choose independent projects. Allow the students to present their ideas to the class for suggestions; useful ideas may emerge as a result of classroom brainstorming. Other learners may benefit from tiered assignments that are appropriate to their present levels of accomplishment, yet challenge them to "step up." Learning centers for exploration and discovery may really appeal to social, hands-on learners. Teachers need not do all the planning—students will naturally have ideas and will likely choose to contribute them if invited to do so. Individual contracts can be a useful tool to keep track of ideas, activities and progress. When students feel ownership of their learning they are apt to set their own high expectations with a comfortable level of challenge.

(Tomlinson, 2001; Sprenger, 2003; Kochhar et al., 2000)


"If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend."

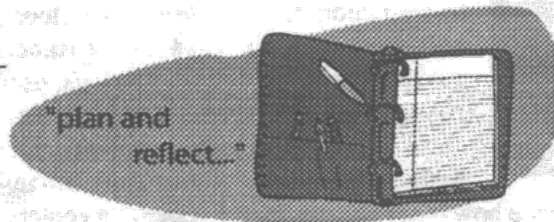
Abraham Lincoln

Don't Forget Professional Development

Being well-prepared reaps great rewards. One overall goal of professional development is to learn new instructional strategies in order to increase student achievement and success. The best professional development is ongoing, interactive, and reflective. And, just as all students have individual learning strengths and strategies, so do teachers. Construct a personal professional development plan throughout the year using these strategies:

- ◆ Seek team teaching and peer consultation opportunities. Take some time to watch another teacher teach. Plan and reflect together in follow-up discussions.
- ◆ Create an ongoing professional discussion group with colleagues. Consider an early morning breakfast meeting or an after school get-together with educators from another site. This creates a great opportunity to share ideas and strategies.
- ◆ Keep current. After attending a professional development workshop, schedule an ongoing review of the material presented and plan to implement at least one new strategy that was learned.

(Rock, 2002)



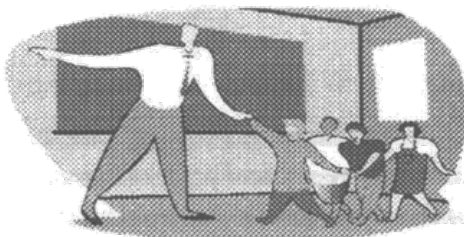
Classroom Management

It may be surprising to discover how many things contribute to the overall success of a class. From the moment students approach the door of the classroom on the first day, they are developing attitudes about the class. Teachers don't have to be graphic artists to design a warm and welcoming entry to the classroom space. Consider wall displays—are they pleasing to the eye without being over-stimulating?

The physical set-up of a classroom and management of materials also contribute to an effective learning environment. Evaluate the arrangement of furniture, supplies, and materials in the room. Are high traffic areas free of clutter and congestion? Can the students see the teacher and presentations easily? Are students easily seen? Are frequently used materials readily and conveniently available? Can work areas be reached without difficulty? Is there space for students to store their belongings? Try to set up some alternative workspaces for students that help the active learner, and other workspaces that facilitate small group work.

Designing a classroom where the arts, movement, and problem-solving opportunities abound is as important at the high school level as it is at the elementary level. Doing so provides a nurturing environment in which brain dendrites may flourish and grow. Author and educator Eric Jensen cautions teachers to be mindful of the social/emotional aspects of the environment. Students need to feel safe, respected, and appreciated in order for optimum learning to occur. It is important to provide appropriate challenges, and continual, meaningful feedback.

(Evertson et al., 2000; Burmark, 2002; Jensen, 1998)



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