

# **BASIC TIPS FOR TEACHERS TO STRUCTURE THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR TO PROMOTE SAFETY AND LEARNING FOR THEIR STUDENTS**

Part 1. Audience – teachers – Adriana Aivazis (2005)

Part 2. Audience – students – Licinia Stoian

## **Part 1. Adriana Aivazis**

### **Classroom set up**

### **Classroom expectations and consequences**

### **Nutrition**

### **Sharing time**

### **Movement simple physical activities**

### **Meeting the students' needs and learning styles**

The main purpose for classrooms and teachers is to learn subject matter. Classroom set up is essential to support teaching and learning. The physical environment of the classroom can improve the learning environment and prevent behavior problems before they occur. Structuring the learning environment to create a nurturing environment it is essential for both teacher and student. In her book *Resiliency What We Have Learned*, Bernard explains how each child has an innate developmental capacity, and “what this innate developmental capacity requires to produce good developmental outcomes is a nurturing environment in which young people can meet their inborn, psychological needs for belonging and affiliation, a sense of competence, feeling of autonomy, and safety – all of which contribute to a personal sense of hope.”

Research shows that the physical arrangement of the classroom can affect the behavior of both students and teachers (Savage, 1999), and that a well structured classroom tends to improve student academic and behavioral outcomes (MacAulay, 1990).

The classroom environment is the teachers' statement to the students and others regarding his or her values about behavior and learning.

The spatial structure of a classroom refers to

- how the students are seated
- where the students are in relation to one another
- how classroom members move across the room
- the classroom atmosphere and order

The classroom environment suggests that the classroom should be organized to accommodate a variety of activities throughout the day and to meet the teachers' instructional goals.

The classroom should be structured in such a way to allow the teacher to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of his or her students (MacAulay, 1990).

- the teacher needs to see and be seen by all the students
- minimize distraction to keep the students engaged.
- provide each student as well as the teacher with a personal space
- to ensure that each student can see the teachers' presentation and materials used in class.

The attributes of a structured learning environment are:

- Clearly defined spaces within the classroom that are to be used for different purposes, that students know how to behave in. Students with learning behavior problems may have separate quiet places to cool down or work independently.
- Areas to store different items.

- It is useful to limit the use of visual and auditory stimulation that may distract students with attention and behavior problem, as well as it is useful to increase the use of visual and auditory stimulation when working with ESL students.

The physical arrangement of the classroom should be reflective of the diverse cultural and linguistic characteristics of the student body and be consistent with specific learner needs.

### Routines

- Civil classroom rights- are introduced by the teacher to the students to teach them how to learn, belong, hear and be heard, be safe, be themselves, be happy, etc.  
A teacher must see that these rights are respected.
- Ground rules - are agreements about how participants will control their behavior in classroom activities. The teacher will post these rules in the room for all students to see them. These will allow learning to take place by ensuring safety for students. The teacher will design these rules, but later in the year students can be included in installation of new rules that are needed to solve problems which arise.
- Safe space - physical, intellectual, and emotional safety. Ground rules help in maintaining a safe space. The teacher has the main responsibility for classroom safety but students can also contribute by taking care of their own safety.
- Class meetings - enhance the quality of the academic engagement and learning in the classroom. (Discuss classroom life, getting along with each other, and learning). A teacher learns how to do class meetings with beginning guidelines, experience, reading, watching others, and talking with other teachers. At first, the teacher should control the time, topics, and procedures.
- Room arrangement - helps or hinder communication. The teacher can visit other classrooms to learn of new possibilities for room arrangement. The teacher can have a specific furniture arrangement as part of each instructional technique episode.
- Suggestion boxes-students must have many choices in expressing themselves.
- Nutrition - communicates care and concerns. Nutrition includes awareness of problems and opportunities, and then action by the class when appropriate. The teachers should be prepared to notice problems, consult with others, and interact.
- Wall charts - communicate the classroom routines, expectations, agreements, and procedures. The teacher will introduce the wall charts gradually during the first six weeks of class.
- Sharing time - the teacher should teach the students to take turns talking and listening to each other. Sharing is a good way to help the students get to know each other and it is also a good closure activity.

All these routines must be established in a classroom from the first day of school, to ensure a safe learning classroom atmosphere and to facilitate good classroom communication routines. Good communication routines are established over a 6-8 weeks period. Subject matter is the major focus of the classroom but academic activities need their time right at the beginning. Positive youth development depends on the quality of the environment- the available supports, messages, and opportunities young people find in the people, places, and experiences in their lives (Bernard, 2004, p. 40).

Teachers can make a difference! A teacher should be more than an instructor for academic skills, he/she should be a confidant and positive model for personal identification, the person

who would help each student develop the attitudes and competencies needed to succeed in life and develop a lasting positive sense of self and sense of the future.

Works Cited:

Bernard, Bonnie (2004) *Resiliency. what we have learned*. WestEd

MacAulay, D.J. (1990) Classroom environment. A literature review. *Educational psychology*. 10(3), 239-253

Rolla E. Lewis, Ed.D., N.C.C. (2005) Lecture. Portland State University, Portland Oregon.

Savage.T.V. (1999) *Teaching self-control through management and discipline*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

## **Part 2. Licinia Stoian**

### **Structuring the Learning Environment - A welcome to students**

#### 1. Classroom set up

\* "Welcome" - we want that every student feel comfortable and safe in this classroom. That is why we offer you:

- a clean, freshly painted and well lightened classroom;
- books on the shelves, and an inventory of these books;
- access to dictionaries and technology
- access to the library and the recommendation to use it.

#### 2. Expectations

I have high expectations for you, as learners, because I want the best for you. How could you meet my expectations?

- Respect the school's policies, and the rules we'll establish for this class.
- Come to class and be here on time.
- Participate in class discussions and activities.
- Do not disrupt the class.
- Be polite (show respect for others).
- Turn in assignments on time.

You have to know that if the teaching process is interrupted there are consequences, and these are:

- verbal reminder to meet classroom's expectations
- teacher-student conferences and/or discipline referral to office
- discipline referral and removal from the classroom to main office.

#### 3. Sharing time

Maybe you are curious to know more about your classmates and about your teacher. We, also, would like to know you better. This is why we have dedicated a special time to share: thoughts, new ideas, opinions, or feelings.

This will help all of us to understand our small community, to perceive its diversity, and to build friendly relationships with others.

#### 4. Learning Styles

Activities in this class will address different senses, because students learn in different ways, and I want you to have the best opportunities to actively participate in this class.

We'll use not only reading and writing, but also auditions, videos, charts, we'll have hands-on

projects and you will be invited to be authors as well as actors in our in class activities.

#### 5. Physical activities

These activities are complementing learning, not replacing it. They are health-related fitness movements, and there is a special time dedicated to them. Every day we'll have the possibility to walk, jump, bend, or stretch in order to develop our muscular strength and to help our hearts to beat in a healthy rhythm.

#### 6. Healthy snacks

You have to be healthy in order to learn well, so we'll try to find out which healthy snacks work for you. Would it be fresh or dried fruit, nuts, baby carrots or celery sticks? Do you like banana mousse or carrot muffins? Also, I encourage you to share your best recipes and you are free to be inventive in finding new formulas for "brain-food".

My healthy foods recommendations are not rules; do not feel stressed by them. They are not imposed to you, though you will have the possibility to discover their benefits. There is no good health as long as a person does not feel safe, content and confident, and that is what I wish you feel in this class.

Resources:

<http://www.healthychoices.org/ch2/ch2-pg2.html>

<http://www.northwestcollege.edu/campusserv/advice/college/classroom.htm>

<http://members.kaiserpermanente.org>

[http://educationworld.com/a\\_curr/columnists/jones/jones001.shtml](http://educationworld.com/a_curr/columnists/jones/jones001.shtml).