

Book Excerpt: “Creating Your Climate in 15 minutes a Week”
Quick Tips for Creating a Positive Learning Climate with Youth

Set the tone and expectations early “How we treat each other is just as important as what we are going to be doing together.” Create a climate of safety where ALL students feel welcome and safe – physically and emotionally. Tell them that name calling, even as a joke, is not acceptable.

Strategy: Involve students (have them brainstorm in groups and agree together on them) in establishing these “Working Agreements” that govern their behavior, speech and attitudes in class. Put students in small groups. Introduce the concept of brainstorming (i.e. “no bad ideas”). Ask students to select one notetaker in their group. Ask them to brainstorm as many “agreements” as they can. We want to know what agreements they would create so that everyone in class felt safe, comfortable and could participate fully in a positive learning environment.

A set of “Agreements” that “we” made and “own” and agree to support can quickly become someone else’s set of “rules” that we have to follow. You might consider including prescribed consequences for violation of parts of the agreement. Send it home for parents to sign too.

Sample Process if “Showing Respect” is one of the Agreements:

“When it comes down to it, what we are talking about is treating everyone like a person of value....we might call it treating people with respect and considerate treatment.”

“One thing that I hear from people of all ages, in every culture, over and over again, is “I want to be treated with respect.” You’ve heard that too, haven’t you? One of the most frequent causes of trouble between people of all ages occurs when someone feels disrespected. The feeling of being disrespected makes everyone, grown-ups and kids, feel angry. So if we are talking about improving how it feels around here, maybe we should talk a little bit about the ways respect and disrespect show up. How do you know when you are being respected or disrespected?”

(You could create a T-chart on the board, with one side labeled “Respected” and the other labeled “Disrespected.” As students suggest answers, you could ask them, “And what would the opposite of that be?”)

"Respected"	"Disrespected"
Hearing compliments	Hearing insults
Being allowed to finish	Being interrupted
Being spoken to in a normal voice	Being yelled at
Being taken seriously	Being mocked
Hearing "sorry" when someone bumps into you by accident	Being bumped into without an "excuse me"
Hearing about the things you do right, as well as your mistakes	Hearing only about your mistakes
Being listened to and responded to	Being ignored when you ask a question or make a comment

"I guess that we all have a pretty good idea of what respect and disrespect looks and sounds like....the hard part might be to figure out what we can do when *we* feel less than respected, or how we can express disagreement with someone without making *him or her* feel disrespected. Over the next few days, we will consider some ideas that will help us deal with these hard situations where we feel intentionally or accidentally disrespected. But for now, can we agree that one of our climate goals that will guide our practices at our school will be: **"We treat everyone with respect."**

Notice your own internal biases to which students are you more "naturally" drawn? Who's it easier to talk with? If you are a coach, is it easier for you to relate to the athletes in your classes? Then go out of your way (though not in a showy way) to reach out to the "other" students and help them engage and feel welcome in your class. Look for their strengths not just their deficits, be an "asset builder." Each and every student needs to feel a sense of purpose, a sense power, and a sense of place (belonging). Check in with them regularly and over time. Be at least one student's silent mentor and talk to them regularly, go to activities, etc.

Create trust and connectedness. Remember, "students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Remember you have a relationship power, not just a title power (teacher, custodian, coach,

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principal, etc.). When students know our stories, they are more likely to trust us and connect with us. Be careful not to become preachy and avoid the temptation to appear perfect. It's important to connect with their hearts, not just their heads. When we know their stories we can be better teachers. We can learn what is going on in their life, the barriers that get in the way of their learning, and are better at applying the content we teach to the content of their lives.

Strategies: Opening Day: share your "story." This week consider sharing:

- a) About your family now or your parents.
 - a. Where did you grow up?
 - b. What did you like most about that place you grew up?
- b) Why did you choose to go into teaching?
 - a. What is best the best thing about being a teacher?
 - b. Have you seen any of your former students and what do they tell you about their experience with you as a teacher?
- c) What adult did you connect most to (trust, relate to, etc) and why?
- d) What did your parents struggle with while you were growing up?
- e) What did you struggle with as a student?
- f) What do you struggle with today?
- g) What you hope to achieve this year with your students

B. Students share their "stories." Have them to share answers to some quick connectors. Ask them something about their family, their interests, what would make them happy, what do they struggle with, what do they value the most, etc.

Seek and value student input. Ask students questions about what and how they'd like to learn, and find ways to incorporate their needs, ideas, and preferences. Consider asking them to write down or share what they want to learn in your class or what they want to improve. Have students evaluate *you* and how you are doing in your role as teacher, coach, etc.

Focus on style while delivering content. Consider the aspects of teaching represented by the "scales" or "spectra" below. Where do you "naturally" fall (i.e. what do you find yourself doing most of the time)? How can you strike a better balance (which really means moving across the full spectrum, e.g. exhaling AND inhaling)? Practice balancing these aspects in your instruction and style.

Teacher Directed	↔	Student Centered
Content	↔	Process
Intellectual	↔	Emotional
Directive	↔	Facilitative

Teach	↔	Connect
To	↔	With
Exhale (talk, present, give information)	↔	Inhale (listen, watch, receive information)
Rippling out (moving, driving the learning process)	↔	Gathering in (pausing, encouraging the class to notice)

Remind bystanders to bullying and mistreatment that they are involved when they see it happen, like it or not; their silence is consent. So, if they have social influence with the aggressor, they might be able to speak up and help her/him make a better choice. If they know the target, they could support them on the spot or later on. Consider a discussion about they could say and/or do. Remind them that laughing at meanness only encourages it. Let them know that you will not allow put downs in your classroom, even if they say they are just joking. **If you hear or see behaviors that are hurtful, speak up.** Create a class norm where you emphasize that name calling/mistreatment is NEVER, EVER allowed.

Other Quick Tips for Adults to Build a Positive Climate

- Set the tone on the first day: “How we treat each other matters just as much as what we will do together.”
- Involve students when making rules and group agreements.
- Let parents, children, and staff know that you take bullying seriously. Write conduct agreement & send home to be signed.
- Survey students and map out the “hot spots.” Establish protocol for staff and provide information needed to intervene in mistreatment. Teach skills to intervene.
- Provide, three “yeah’s” [positive comments] for every “boo” [negative or correcting comment]
- Look for their strengths not just their deficits, be an “asset builder.”
- Garner relationships/partnerships/resources to provide opportunities to help students, teachers, and parents address the problem ONGOINGLY.
- Have students evaluate you and how you are doing in your position.
- Remember you have a relationship power, not just a title power (teacher, custodian, coach, principal, etc.).
- Each and every student needs to feel a sense of purpose, a sense power, and a sense of place (belonging). Try to address the hidden needs they have that result the behaviors they show.
- Do something outside your routine with a youth like go see their games, concerts, or activities.
- Listen actively to a young person, REALLY listen. Survey them to evaluate bullying, the foods you serve them, the faculty/staff, facilities, programming and other climate issues. Involve them in interviewing new teachers/staff, and providing tours to new staff, students, and others. Advocate for their place “at the table.”