

Section 1: **Creating a Positive** **Learning Environment**



Secondary: Grades 7-12

Section 1: Creating a Positive Learning Environment

1. What is this?

A collection of learning experiences for Grades 7 - 12 that illustrates ways to establish a positive classroom environment that nurtures learning by:

Manage Own Behaviour

- helping students manage their own behaviour in the classroom

Relate Positively to Others

- helping students communicate effectively and interact positively with each other

Take Responsibility

- involving students in creating classroom expectations that help them feel welcomed, valued and supported in the classroom

2. Why do this?

■ **Maximizes potential for learning & achievement**

- Creating a non-threatening environment in which students are emotionally and physically safe has a significant impact on student learning and achievement. *Marzano, 2003, p. 53-59, 71-77ⁱ; Jensen, 1998, p.52ⁱⁱ; Howard, Dryden and Johnson, 1999, p.316ⁱⁱⁱ*

■ **Fosters Resilience**

- A student's "functioning in school is inextricably linked with his or her sense of belonging and connection to the school environment and his or her relationships with peers and teachers within it." (*K.A. Schonert-Reichl for Pan Canadian Education Research Symposium, Children and Youth At Risk, 2000*)^{iv}
- Social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy – self-efficacy and self-control and a sense of purpose are the attributes that foster resilience. *Benard, 2004.*^v

■ **Facilitates Classroom Management**

- A common language and a shared understanding of expectations for behaviour in the classroom and a sense of ownership of these expectations by the students reduce classroom management issues and positively influences student achievement. *Marzano, 2003 (pp71-77) Howard, Dryden and Johnson, 1999, p.316*

■ **Helps students 'fit in'.**

- In any new group, people are pre-occupied about 'fitting in'.^{vi} *Students are too!*

3. What is here?

ALL LEARNING EXPERIENCES CAN BE REPLICATED IN ANY SUBJECT AREA.
Some examples have been provided.

* Learning Skills + Essential Skills L Literacy Strategies

Grades 7-8						
Learning Experience					Examples	
Theme	Title	*	+	L	Subject Area	page
Self-Management	Look Before You Leap	√	√		Mathematics, Science and Technology	21
Relating Positively To Others – Communicating	Listen Up!		√	√	Mathematics	25
Relating Positively To Others – Interacting	Participating Positively	√	√		History	30
	Strengths in Numbers	√	√		Health and Physical Education	35
Taking Responsibility	Setting Mutual Expectations	√				39

Grades 9-12						
Learning Experience					Examples	
Theme	Title	*	+	L	Subject Area	page
Self-Management	Rules of Engagement When the Going Gets Tough	√	√			44
Relating Positively To Others – Communicating	Listening for Understanding	√	√	√	Canadian and World Issues	48
Relating Positively To Others – Interacting	Giving and Receiving Feedback	√	√		Music	54
	Looking Out for One Another	√	√			59
Taking Responsibility	Establishing Mutual Expectations	√				64
	Looking in from the Outside	√	√		Canadian History	70

4. What do I need to know?

- A. Learning experiences like those in ‘Creating A Positive Learning Environment’ are important at the beginning of the year, term, semester and on return from holidays. At these times, students are in an early stage of group development (e.g., forming or inclusion).

The Stages of Group Development apply to every group, team or class.

Stages of Group Development	
Peck ^{vi}	Gibbs ^{vii}
1. Forming 2. Storming 3. Norming 4. Performing 5. Transforming	1. Inclusion 2. Influence 3. Community

- ▶ The primary concern of students in the beginning stages of coming together as a class or group is a preoccupation of how to fit into the group and *whether* they fit into the group.
- ▶ Experiences that address these concerns are those that help students get to know each other and establish and practice agreed-upon ways of working and learning together.

- B. The teacher’s role is critical. It is important that they:
- are role models for the expectations that all have set.
 - remind students about the ways they are to work together, provide feedback on the ways students work together
 - provide on-going opportunities for students to assess the way they work together and when appropriate, determine ways they can improve.

Endnotes

-
- ⁱ Marzano, R.J. (2003). What works in schools. Virginia: ASCD.
- ⁱⁱ Jensen, E. (1998). Teaching with the brain in mind. Virginia: ASCD.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Howard S., Dryden, J. & Johnson, B. (1999). Childhood Resilience: review and critique of literature. Oxford Review of Education, 25 (3). In Levin, B. Students At Risk: A Review of Research, 2004.
- ^{iv} Schonert-Reich, K.A. *Children and Youth At Risk: Some Conceptual Consideration*. Prepared for Pan Canadian Education Research Symposium, Children and Youth At Risk, 2000
- ^v Benard, B. (2004). Resiliency: what we have learned, San Francisco: WestEd Pub. [ISBN: 10-914409-18-2]
- ^{vi} Peck, M.S. (1988). The different drum: community making and peace. New York: Simon and Schuster in Conzemius, A & O’Neill, J. (2002). The handbook for smart school teams. Indiana: National Education Service.
- ^{vii} Gibbs, Jeanne. (2001), 7th Ed . Tribes: A new way of learning and being together, California: Centre Source Systems