

Positive Learning Environments Instructor Manual

Chapter 3

Classroom culture

Chapter overview

In Chapter 3, we explore the idea of classroom culture. We have conceptualised classroom culture as the way in which a classroom ‘works’, and the values, beliefs, processes, procedures and behavioural norms that underpin and flow on from those workings. Classroom rules and procedures, routines and rituals, and the general classroom ethos are the manifestations of the prevailing classroom culture. Without classroom culture, it is difficult, if not impossible, to engage in successful learning and teaching.

At the centre of classroom culture is the set of expectations or behavioural standards established by the teacher, ideally in concert with his or her class as part of an agreement process. We describe three perspectives that may influence how classroom cultures are established and maintained: rules and consequences; rights, responsibilities and due process; and code of conduct. We demonstrate the importance of procedures, such as those relating to gaining teacher attention and lesson transitions, in maintaining a stable classroom culture.

Additional learning activities

- 1 The theoretic level of classroom culture refers to the early stages of the establishment of a class, before rules and procedures are worked out. List and share some of the values and beliefs you hold about student behaviour in an ‘ideal’ classroom. How are these similar and different compared with those of another person?
- 2 Make a list of expectations of student behaviour that you would bring to a classroom on the first day of the school year.
 - a What values underpin these expectations?
 - b How do these values compare with the values you listed in the previous activity?
- 3 Following on from Activities 1 and 2, write a short description of your classroom ethos.

- 4 Devise and write up a procedure poster that reminds students about a particular procedure – for example, ‘What to do when you finish work early’ or ‘How to retrieve and return classroom resources’.
- 5 Give three examples of rituals that classrooms (and schools) engage in.
 - a Why do these rituals occur?
 - b What values do you think they reflect?
- 6 The behaviour of young people is often talked about in the media. With a partner or in a group, discuss issues relating to student behaviour that you could address in your classroom.
- 7 What is your idea of a negative consequence for inappropriate behaviour? What kinds of negative consequences would you be likely to implement in your classroom, and why?
- 8 From your own experience as a school student, identify the sources of classroom order and disorder that relate directly to classroom ecology.
- 9 Refer to the explanation of codes of conduct in the chapter. Discuss how a code of conduct differs from rules, and, in a group, formulate your own code of conduct for a primary and a secondary classroom. How and why should these codes of conduct be different or not be different?
- 10 Discuss and debate the following proposition: ‘All students should be treated the same.’

Suggestions for using ‘More stories from the field’

- 1 Compare and contrast two ‘More stories from the field’ from the online content. List and discuss the similarities and differences evident in those teachers’ approaches to *developing classroom culture*. What are the variables that might account for these?
- 2 Choose and read a story from the field that relates to the age group you are focused on (i.e. primary or secondary) and your context (i.e. relief teacher or full-time employed, pre-service, early career or experienced, etc.). Reflect on that teacher’s *understanding of behaviour standards*. Then repeat the exercise with another story involving the same age group and context, and compare approaches.