

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

The Work of Welcoming

Simple strategies to build community and make students feel welcome and safe in the classroom.

By *Rachael Button*

April 27, 2018

In her beautiful book *Radical Presence: Teaching as a Contemplative Practice*, Mary Rose O'Reilley writes, "Hospitality defines a space for a visitor—the student—to be herself, because she is received graciously.... Hospitality calls me to consider the singularity of each person... to try [to receive each student] with unconditional presence." O'Reilley describes a way of teaching that is both practical and personal, grounded in preparedness and presence.

I've taught in both traditional and nontraditional settings for nine years. However, only recently have I begun to understand hospitality as part of that work. When I started to reframe teaching as the work of welcoming, of stewarding a space, of receiving my students with unconditional presence, my classroom and my students' learning changed.

INCORPORATING THE PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

There's a sign on my classroom door that reads: "We value your class, color, gender, and orientation. This is a safe space." The sign indicates that I care about the story each student brings to the classroom; however, the building of class culture is what carries through on that promise of safety. My effort to cultivate an inclusive classroom culture has three components.

1. Assign seats—and switch them around: Like a host at a formal gathering, I make a place for each student. I assign seats daily. I consider the social dynamic of the classroom and prepare a space for my students to work with different people and to hear different stories.

2. Work with students to build a class conversation contract: Early in the semester, my students do an exercise called the *Perfect Conversation*

(https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/473b9b_55da642bab234320a6ae0e9d330deabd.pdf). Students rank a number of values-based statements from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” They then pair up, with each pair finding their point of greatest difference and sharing the stories that led them to their answers. While one partner talks, the other listens. When the listening partner is able to accurately summarize the talking partner’s points, the listening partner takes their turn to share.

After the exercise, partner groups discuss the experience of listening and being listened to and discuss how we can work as a class community to set guidelines that encourage productive and empathetic discussion.

This activity sets the groundwork for my class to create a **class conversation contract**

(<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/speaking-kindness-in-democratic-classrooms>).

3. Develop rhythms and routines that support the sharing of stories: Prior to working with high school students, I taught elementary and middle school students in schools where each day began with *morning meeting* ([/blog/morning-meeting-changing-classroom-culture-lisa-dabbs](http://blog/morning-meeting-changing-classroom-culture-lisa-dabbs)). In my current classroom, I’ve adapted this practice to the needs of high school sophomores and juniors.

We begin each class period with a question, usually related to the content of class that day. When students feel ready to answer aloud, they gather in a circle at the front of our classroom. I have a ball, and I toss it to the first person who’s ready to share; after that person has shared, they toss the ball to someone else. This routine of sharing ideas and stories, as well as gathering in a circle and sharing a physical connection with each other—through the tossing and catching of the ball—creates community, fostering a welcoming and supportive classroom culture.

BUILDING INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes, “Hospitality in the classroom requires that we not only treat our students with civility and compassion but that we also invite our students and their insights into the conversation. The good host is not merely polite to the guest, the good host assumes the guest has stories to tell.”

Part of hospitality is honoring what students bring to the classroom, while also inviting them into a new experience. This aspect of hospitality also has three parts.

1. Rethink participation: Limiting contributions in class discussions to those students confident enough to raise their hands would limit my capacity to welcome everyone's voice into the conversation. During a given class period, we might do a **chalk talk** (<http://teachersnetwork.org/ntny/nychelp/mentorship/chalktalk.htm>), journal, draw, hold a **Harkness discussion** ([https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-teacher/fall-2008/introducing-and-using-the-discussion-\(aka-harkness/\)](https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-teacher/fall-2008/introducing-and-using-the-discussion-(aka-harkness/))), or engage in **serial testimony** (<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/btwwda/workshop2/leader-resource2>), all in an effort to let every voice be heard.

2. Provide both mirrors and windows: The readings, art, and videos used in class should include both **mirrors and windows** (http://www.nationalseedproject.org/images/documents/Curriculum_As_Window_and_Mirror.pdf) for students: Mirrors allow them to see themselves in the class content, and windows give them the opportunity to understand the perspective of another. I incorporate a diversity of races, genders, sexual orientations, ages, and physical abilities in the authors, artists, and speakers whose work I assign.

3. Share space in class conversations: I work not to prioritize my voice over the voices of my students through established rhythms and routines—for example, I ring a chime rather than raise my voice above my students' voices when I need to interrupt conversations and bring us back together as a group. I also work on this through the way I structure lessons.

Because I'm the teacher, my voice is often privileged over the voices of students. By sharing space in the conversation, stepping back from my own place of power into a space of humility and hospitality, I not only demonstrate generosity and justice but also learn from my students and hear their stories, empowering them to do the same for each other both inside and outside the classroom.

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Classroom Management

Social and Emotional Learning

9-12 High School

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Why Students Cheat—and What to Do About It

A teacher seeks answers from researchers and psychologists.

By *Andrew Simmons*

April 27, 2018

“Why did you cheat in high school?” I posed the question to a dozen former students.

“I wanted good grades and I didn’t want to work,” said Sonya, who graduates from college in June. [The students’ names in this article have been changed to protect their privacy.]

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CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

60-Second Strategy: Equity Sticks

Looking for a simple way to ensure all voices are heard in your classroom? Try equity sticks.

March 18, 2018

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ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Accommodating Students with Dyslexia

These five easy-to-implement accommodations can make class less stressful and more manageable for students with dyslexia.

By Jessica Hamman

April 12, 2018

For many of us, reading is as automatic as breathing. But for the millions of students with dyslexia, reading is a difficult task that poses constant academic and emotional challenges. To simulate the experience of reading with dyslexia, try using this key to decipher the coded statement below.

a=/z/ b=/y/ c=/x/ d=/w/ e=/v/ f=/u/ g=/t/ h=/s/ i=/r/ j=/q/ k=/p/ l=/o/ m=/n/ n=/m/ o=/l/ p=/k/ q=/j/ r=/i/
s=/h/ t=/g/ u=/f/ v=/e/ w=/d/ x=/c/ y=/b/ z=/a/

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TEACHER WELLNESS

With Student Trauma, It's OK to Set Boundaries

Student trauma impacts teachers, too. Taking care of yourself isn't a luxury—it's a necessity.

By Emelina Minero

May 1, 2018

It's probably not news to most teachers that nearly six out of 10 children have experienced trauma, according to a **foundational study** (https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/ace_graphics.html) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser. As educators on the frontlines, teachers regularly encounter students who have experienced significant hardships in their homes and communities. But psychologists and mental health practitioners say that the impact of trauma goes beyond the kids and reaches into the lives of educators who work closely with them day to day.

This secondary form of trauma, known as vicarious trauma, **can develop**

(<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/research-briefing-vicarious-trauma-consequences-working-with-abuse.pdf>)

from a single event or over a period of time. To protect yourself from vicarious trauma, it's important to understand its impact, recognize its symptoms, and develop preventive strategies to take care of yourself. We recently spoke with Micere Keels, an associate professor at the University of Chicago and founder of the **TREP Project** (<http://www.trepeducator.org/>), a trauma-informed curriculum for urban teachers, on how to identify and navigate vicarious trauma.

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MENTAL HEALTH

Setting Students With ADHD Up for Success

Students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder benefit from these easy-to-implement strategies—and so do their peers.

edutopia



April 27, 2018

Teachers often come to the classroom with an **unclear understanding**

(<https://www.additudemag.com/symptoms-of-add-hyperarousal-rejection-sensitivity/>) of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and they are rarely provided with strategies that detail how to work with students who have been diagnosed with ADHD, even though such students make up an increasingly large number of their students—11 percent and growing as of 2011, according to data gathered by the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/data.html>).

As a special education teacher and tutor who coaches struggling students (many with ADHD), I have found several classroom strategies to be effective.

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COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Improving Student-Led Discussions

A look at some common problems teachers find when implementing student-led discussions—and potential solutions.

By *Mark Wise*

April 24, 2018

In a Socratic seminar, Socratic circle, fishbowl, or Harkness discussion, the primary goal is for students to engage in and sustain an academic discussion independent of the teacher. The benefits of student-led discussions are well documented—students learn to purposefully reference the text as evidence as they develop opinions, and they learn to be more receptive to and respectful of the ideas of others.

Ultimately, student-led discussions require students to actively engage in collaborative and respectful dialogue while utilizing feedback from their peers to gain additional insight.

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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Putting Students in Charge of Their Learning

Giving students choices and the means to assess their progress fosters metacognition and independence.

By *Beth Pandolpho*

May 4, 2018

For many teachers writing lesson plans, including me, two main questions guide the decision-making: “What do I want my students to be able to know and do as a result of this lesson?” and “How can I design an activity in which students can search for the answers for themselves?”

Designing activities that foster learner independence is essential because they invite students to engage more thoughtfully with the content—and that engagement should include students talking about their work.

Educators ***Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey***

(<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov14/vol72/num03/Speaking-Volumes.aspx>) write, “Gone are the days when a quiet classroom was equated with a good one.... It matters who’s talking in class because the amount of talk that students do is correlated with their achievement.”

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Launching an Engaging Newsletter

Tips for putting together an effective classroom newsletter, a simple step that can enhance teacher-parent relationships.

By *Todd Finley*

May 4, 2018

Here’s the family conversation happening in thousands of homes tonight over pot roast:

Mom: “Melissa, how was school?”

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TEACHER COLLABORATION

Getting Comfortable With Saying No

Turning down a new responsibility at work can be tough, but an instructional coach has some advice for how to do it.

By *Peg Grafwallner*

May 3, 2018

Learning to say no is tough. It can mean you'll be seen as not a team player, as not wanting to do "what's right for kids" (my favorite education guilt trip), or as not being "one of the guys" (always an odd one for the many women in education).

Several years ago, my principal asked me to be the school assessment coordinator, in addition to my other duties as instructional coach and reading specialist. Instead of thinking it through and learning more about the position, I said yes. In truth, I was flattered that he saw leadership qualities in me that I perhaps didn't see.

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TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

How Teachers Benefit From Writing

Writing in private or for an audience can deepen reflection and empathy for students. Plus: websites that accept submissions.

By *Andrea Marshbank*

May 2, 2018

When I started writing a blog, I felt like an imposter. It was as if I was pretending to be a "writer." When I hit the publish button on my first post, I was sure that some sort of writing police were going to burst through my webpage with red pens clutched in their hands. "You're not a writer!" they'd bellow. And I would have agreed—I did not feel like a writer.

But as a teacher, I was a writer. In fact, I was writing every day. All teachers are writers—we write emails, lesson plans, newsletters, assignments, and so much more.

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