CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF ENGAGEMENT

Clear & Consistent Expectations
This is one you surely heard in your teacher training classes and it really is true. You need to have a standard level of expectations for what you allow and don’t allow in class. Then you need to stick with it. If you have a rule that there’s no food in class, you can’t allow it one day when there’s extra time. It may seem ok, but that’s how problems slowly begin.

Student Norms:
Start the first day of school by setting “Student Norms”. These are created by the students and a bit different than a student contract. These are created specifically by the students with additional help in phrasing by the teacher.

Purpose:
Classroom governance, understanding what makes the students feel safe and secure.

Good Things- “Tell Me Something Good!”

Layout of Activity:
At the beginning of EVERY class, we simply ask the kiddos, “What good things would you like to share?”

Hints/Tips
Some like to share “bad things” and we do NOT allow this
Share YOUR good things with the class! (I.E. Your club’s event success or an excellent weekend at a family wedding)

Personally, we allow as many kids to share that want to.

Purpose:
Students that see us taking time out of our class to see how they are doing, will be more apt to participate in what we have planned for them that day

Create an Emotionally Safe Classroom

Students who have been shamed or belittled by the teacher or another student will not effectively engage in challenging tasks. Consider having a rule such as “We do not put others down, tell others to shut up, or laugh at people.” Apply it to yourself as well as your students. This is the foundation of a supportive, collaborative learning environment. To learn and grow, one must take risks, but most people will not take risks in an emotionally unsafe environment.
Use Questioning Strategies That Make All Students Think and Answer

Pay a visit to many classrooms and you'll see a familiar scene: The teacher asks questions and, always, the same reliable hands raise up. This pattern lends itself to student inattention. Every day, including some questions you require every student to answer. Find a question you know everyone can answer simply, and have the class respond all at once.

You can ask students to put a finger up when they’re ready to answer, and once they all do, ask them to whisper the answer at the count of three. They can answer yes, no, or maybe with a thumbs-up, thumbs-down, or thumbs-sideways gesture. That also works for “I agree,” “I disagree,” or “I’m not sure.”

Numerical answers under ten are easy to show with fingers but don’t limit yourself to math questions. For instance, if you’re teaching time management, have students let you know what their progress is halfway through the class by putting up one or more fingers to show whether they are one-, two-, or three-quarters complete with the assignment or finished. Do these exercises at least two or three times per class.

Phrasing

By asking questions that allow for multiple answers or explanations, you are differentiating instruction; everyone is expected to come up with at least one answer, but some may come up with more.

To convey the number of answers, students can use sign language, such as holding a hand to the chest (so their hands aren’t visible to their neighbors) and displaying one or more fingers to represent how many answers they have. This technique precludes students from bragging about how many ideas they thought of or how quickly they are ready. You can then call on volunteers who want to share their answers with the rest of the class.

Phrasing that Works for Us:
“We need (insert # of questions) before we move on to the next part…”
"Ask a question, even if you understand it. Maybe you can ask a question someone next to you has."

Purpose
Twisting the way we ask our "go to question" will ensure that the students MUST respond, helps ensure that there is questioning/insight happening from the kiddos.

Use a Fairness Cup to Keep Students Thinking

Here’s how: Write each student’s name on a Popsicle stick and put the sticks in a cup. To keep students on their toes, pull a random stick to choose someone to speak or answer a question. Important: When you begin using your fairness cup, prepare a range of questions, some of which all your students can successfully answer. This strategy allows the bottom third of your class to get involved and answer questions without being put on the spot.

Create Teamwork Tactics That Emphasize Accountability

By insisting that students “ask three before me,” you make it clear that they are expected to seek assistance from all members of their team before they turn to you.

Here’s how: To reinforce this rule, when a student on a team wants to ask you a question, you, the teacher, always ask another person on the team whether she knows what the question is. If she doesn’t, politely walk away, and the team will quickly understand what you expect.

Another way to emphasize accountability might be to say, “When you think your team is done with the task, find me within 30 seconds and tell me.” This strategy shifts accountability to the team for being on task.
Breaks for Students

Our block schedule classes are roughly 90 minutes. (high school)
We do not promise a break, rather, we judge on the glazed-over looks of our students if they need a quick (less than 5 minutes) rest period. Some students just want to put their heads down and "not think".

Suggestions:
Phone breaks (since students seem to view their phones as life support)
Brain breaks (Math War, Rock Paper Scissors contest, or a Riddle)

Stay Active...

(Math War or Rock-Paper-Scissors)
Math War!
- Stand up and face the person next to you.
- Raise your hand if you do NOT have a partner.
- Once I count to three, you will hold up both hands, with a random number of fingers up on both hands. (You pick each time)
- Your partner will have to add the digits up and shout that number.
- Whoever shouts the correct answer first wins.

Consistency, Accountability, + Transparency

CONSISTENCY IS KEY!!
Accountability
Class Points (HW turned in percentage, Quiz/Test averages, attendance)
The actual reward for winning class (I.E. Donuts or candy, it's never grade related)

Transparency
If you are having a rough day, let them know
If the class messed up, TELL them directly
Students act out as much as WE allow them to...
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For the student who does NOT follow class rules...

Some students want to get a reaction out of the adult.
Hold strong. Do NOT give in. It is not an ego contest.
If a student breaks a rule or constantly does not follow instructions, ask them to see you in the hall.
A hallway conversation takes away their peer audience and allows you to actually discuss why they are choosing to not follow the instructions.

Classroom Activities You Can Apply Tomorrow!!

- Popsicles Sticks/ Fairness Cup
- "Your Face Has a Question"
- Chunking Your Classroom (this half of the room, answer this for me)
- Row Call (Front row, answer #1. Back row tell us about problem #5)
- Hand Signs (thumbs up/down, numbers 1-5, etc.)
- Immediate Repeat of a word/phrase
- Choral till they all choral
- Sticky Note Progress Chart

Remember It's About Relationships:
Know Your Kids!
First and foremost, you need to learn your students’ names as soon as possible. This is a way to make an immediate connection and show right away that you care about them as people. There are teachers in October who are still learning names. Don't be like that!
There are several great ways to learn names quickly and I promise you they're worth the effort.
If you can greet each student by name at your door on Day 2 (or even as they leave on Day 1), it will have an immense impact toward limiting problems throughout the year.
Here's a few ways to make the name-learning process easier:
A seating chart - simple + still as effective as always
Introductions - have each student introduce themselves and say facts about them. You can make it fun by playing a memory/repetition game. When it gets all the way around, they have to give 1-2 facts for each student. You can also do M+Ms and each color goes with an ice-breaker question.

Attendance software - if your school has software with student pictures, use them to quiz yourself at night.

Procedures Prevent Problems... You probably heard this over and over in your education classes. That's because it's true! Routines allow students to know what's going on and get right to work. I start every class period with one of my daily warm up sets. These are projected up on the board as students walk in. I can stand at the door and greet students and they can get right to work before the bell even rings. This has been huge for getting class started off right.

Thanks for attending our session and best of luck this school year!