

Cultivating and Maintaining a Safe and Productive Learning Environment

Overview of cultivating and maintaining a safe and productive learning environment

Teachers set and maintain collective expectations and establish classroom environments that ensure a safe and productive classroom community. They distinguish between the helpful use of boundaries to provide structure and the use of power to control. They develop specific approaches and routines to establish, maintain, and respond to these expectations and behaviors in ways that build a classroom community that supports students' learning and flourishing. Choosing and using expectations and agreements requires explicit care to avoid reinforcing values and patterns of control and behavior that privilege dominant ways of being related to race, class, and gender.

Advancing justice through cultivating and maintaining a safe and productive learning environment

Teachers' perceptions of students' behavior, understanding, effort, and engagement are shaped by assumptions related to students' social identities. Because of the close relationship between dominant norms and the culture of schooling, teachers' interactions with children, as well as the classroom environment itself, can limit opportunities for students who do not share these norms. In contrast, this practice calls on teachers to manage the classroom environment in ways that do not exclude students, that make positive, significant differences for children, and that disrupt inequitable patterns that reflect broader sociocultural patterns. Central to this practice is a teacher's high level of regard for students as full humans and an unwavering respect for their rights. It is interwoven with the work of building strong relationships with students as individuals and as a community. It differs from traditional notions of "classroom management," which have been associated with ideas and systems related to compliance, control, and exclusion.



Decomposition of cultivating and maintaining a safe and productive learning environment

Table 1: Areas of Work and Techniques for Cultivating and Maintaining a Safe and Productive Learning Environment

Areas of work for cultivating and maintaining a safe and productive learning environment	Techniques for cultivating and maintaining a safe and productive learning environment
Examining discipline practices and existing agreements	• Consider whether the school and classroom environment and discipline practices privilege some cultures, identities, or experiences over others. • Consider how individual children might be affected by different expectations, rules, and agreements. • Examine critically the relationship between the broader school environment and classroom-level discipline and community practices. • Interrogate, revise, and broaden one's own preferences and biases about student behavior.
Establishing agreements and expectations	• Work with students to establish and try out agreements and expectations for a safe and positive learning environment. • Center the input of children who might be marginalized. • Be explicit about and ensure shared understanding around what expectations and agreements look and sound like in practice. • Communicate about agreements with caregivers. • Create public artifacts about the uses and purposes of the agreements and expectations. • As needed, create individual supports to promote students' community involvement.



Areas of work for cultivating and maintaining a safe and productive learning environment	Techniques for cultivating and maintaining a safe and productive learning environment
Highlighting, reinforcing, and maintaining agreements	• Enact agreements and norms consistently and equitably. • Be consistent, explicit, and brief with requests and redirections. • Name student words and actions that support the classroom community. • Establish proactive structures to maintain and reinforce agreements and grow community (e.g., regular class meetings). • Regularly use non-judgmental language that reminds students of and reinforces expectations. • Reach out to and collaborate with caregivers to better support and gain insight about students. • Refrain from exclusionary practices such as removing students from the classroom, publicly shaming children, or evaluating their behavior with respect to their peers.
Repairing harm and engaging in conflict resolution	• Use language that preserves the student's dignity. • Engage in conflict resolution processes as needed (whole group, small group, or individually): ○ Acknowledge and take responsibility for one's own mistakes as a teacher. ○ Demonstrate care and compassion. ○ Create room for choice and agency. ○ Establish logical next steps that strive to repair harm.



Areas of work for cultivating and maintaining a safe and productive learning environment	Techniques for cultivating and maintaining a safe and productive learning environment
Revising agreements and conflict resolution structures as needed	• Create consistent space for recognizing when community agreements are and are not working. • Solve and refine agreements together. • Ensure that agreements protect children’s individual rights as well as the rights of the collective, and revise as needed. • Legitimate, value, and model learning from conflicts and revising agreements.

