Learning Environment: Evidence and Resources

1. **Learning Environment:** The learning environment supports all students to take risks, ask questions, and make and learn from mistakes. The physical space, routines and procedures, and development of positive relationships create a physically, socially, and emotionally safe environment.

### Supporting Beliefs

- The learning environment is a shared domain between students, teachers, families, and other partners.
- Positive and meaningful relationships are the foundation of a productive learning culture.
- Safety and respect are vital to engagement and risk-taking.

### Key Traits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Space and Routines</th>
<th>Relationships and Culture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear, consistent, and respectful routines, procedures, and expectations are collaboratively established; students know what is expected, when, and why.</td>
<td>Teachers, students, and families establish and maintain positive relationships.</td>
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<td>Tools and materials are readily available to students.</td>
<td>Families are included and engaged in a variety of ways to promote student learning.</td>
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<td>The learning environment can be configured in different ways to best fit the task at hand.</td>
<td>All students feel safe to take risks and participate.</td>
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<td>Students are empowered to use and move around the learning environment in ways that support their learning.</td>
<td>Students are supported in building productive relationships with a variety of classmates across differences.</td>
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### Literature Supporting the Element

1. “The physical space of the classroom does not exist independently from the instruction and learning that live there. The wall space, seating, ‘learning zones,’ and materials in the classroom not only support instruction, but also support strong habits of scholarship, independence, and responsibility. Like other aspects of teacher presence—body language, voice, and managing your emotions—the classroom environment is a backdrop to how a student experiences school.”

2. “In short, when students feel a sense of belonging in a classroom community, believe that their efforts will increase their ability and competence, believe that success is possible and within their control, and see work as interesting or relevant to their lives, they are much more likely to persist at academic tasks despite setbacks and to demonstrate the kinds of academic behaviors that lead to learning and school success.”
3. “In summarizing the research on parent involvement, it becomes very clear that extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence suggests that parents play a crucial role in both the home and school environments with respect to facilitating the development of intelligence, achievement, and competence and their children.”

4. “Transformationist pedagogy means teaching and leading in such a way that more of our students, across more of their differences, achieve at a higher level, more of the time, without giving up who they are. In the transformationist classroom the price of success is not assimilation (‘acting White’), but rather a process of deep engagement with authentic identity and one’s own intellectual efficacy. The reward in such classrooms is that everyone gets smarter together, including the teacher, while at the same time maintaining, strengthening, and honoring our differences.”

5. “Students who are surrounded by disbelieving peers and discouraging adults, or who suffer from institutional labels that predict underperformance (such as “remedial,” “SpEd,” or anything other than “gifted and talented,” or “advanced placement”), may find it difficult to generate the motivation to attempt challenging tasks. Therefore it’s important that we manage those social expectations, too, through strong and responsive classroom management techniques and reflections on our own beliefs about what’s possible for our students and ourselves. We might even need to reconsider and reform the way we test, sort and rank students by ‘ability.’ After all, no learning environment will be successful if students don’t believe they will succeed.”

6. “You know, great classrooms are places where kids are not just listening to the teacher, but they are also learning from each other, learning with each other, and problem solving together. For that to happen, teachers actually have to teach kids how to work together, and teach them that working together does not mean copying someone else’s work, but it really means each person is taking responsibility for their contribution. If you are able to create an environment where kids are working together, it is easier for teachers to address the individual needs of children.”

7. “Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks.”

8. “Learning occurs in every social, intellectual, and procedural transaction between the teacher and students and among the students. Therefore, it is important to foster positive, caring relationships with other students and the teacher in the classroom. Because relationships matter, who you are and what you know and can do matters. While a teacher may have the ideas that being colorblind and ignoring differences shows equal acceptance of all, even young students are very aware of their differences. Instead, in identity safe environments, student differences are recognized and validated. Consideration is given to every aspect of the classroom, to all the subtle and overt messages that recognize that diverse ideas, perspectives, and materials can actually enhance learning.”

9. “When considering an environment where students are constructing their own understanding, educators may conclude that a teacher has nothing to do. On the contrary, a teacher’s role in a constructivist class is no less critical than the teacher’s role in a traditional class. It is different. Teaching no longer focuses solely on making presentations (although those are still sometimes appropriate) or assigning questions and exercises. Instead, teaching focuses on designing activities and assignments—many of them framed as problem-solving—that engage students in constructing important knowledge.”

10. “To find the core of a school, don’t look at its rulebook or even its mission statement. Look at the way the people in it spend their time—how they relate to each other, how they tangle with ideas. Look for the contradictions between words and practice, with the fewer the better.”
Resources and Readings

Brief Articles

   This article outlines the common practices of pedagogy performed in urban schools and details the problems with these common approaches. In addition, it explains the ways in which teachers can shift their pedagogy to better serve poor students including crafting learning environments that engage and challenge students.

   This series of essays by classroom teachers explores the ways in which the relationships they build with students, families, and communities impact what and how they teach.

   This article offers ideas for creating good endings to the school day. Several educators reflect on the “closing meeting” process and ways it can be used to bring the school day to a peaceful end.

Books and Reports

   This book presents resources in two parts–Foundational Structures and Practices that support active learning in the classroom and Protocols and Strategies that build collaborative environments where students take responsibility for their learning. The tools and resources are widely applicable across grade level and content area.

   This book is organized around best practices in teaching and learning related to areas including school climate, community experiences, and relationships.

   Fisher, Frey, and Pumpian believe that no school improvement effort will be effective unless school culture is addressed. They identify five pillars that are critical to building a culture of achievement.

   This report examines how classroom contexts affect noncognitive factors, especially student agency. The report is based on data collected from schools ends by exploring the implications of the research on classroom and instructional practices.

   This report reviews the research in 66 studies that consider the impact of family on student educational achievement and summarizes key findings.

   This book explores the link between the school environment and how children learn, and offers practical design ideas to improve schools. The book is intended for educators, education decision-makers and community members.

   This book a model for teaching that unleashes the potential of students who may have failed or struggled throughout their school careers. Rajagopal’s CREATE model for closing achievement gaps helps educators improve their instructional approach for all students, especially those who are underserved in urban classrooms. Using examples
from math, language arts, and other subjects, he explains how to achieve success with even the most disruptive and
disengaged students.

   This book focuses on translating research into practice, outlining the domains of child-centered teaching, cultivating
diversity as a resource, classroom relationships and caring environments as critical to creating learning environments
that promote success for all students. The authors describe practices that support each domain and common
challenges related to that domain, ending each section with questions to help teachers implement the practices.

   and Classrooms That Work for High Potential Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds. National Association for
   This book presents guiding principles for culturally diverse environments and curricular choices to support
   multicultural inclusiveness.

    for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
    This book presents ideas for how to address student differences in thoughtful ways. The book is broken into parts--
    the first half of the book focuses on what it means for a teacher to effectively lead a differentiated classroom and the
    second half of the book focuses on managing a differentiated classroom.

    Education Press.
    This book explores student resistance through a variety of perspectives, arguing that oppositional behaviors can
    be not only instructive but productive. According to Toshalis, the focus of teachers’ efforts should not be about
    “managing” adolescents but about learning how to read their behavior and respond to it in developmentally
    productive, culturally responsive, and democratically enriching ways.

    Series.
    In this report the authors review research on achievement, motivation, school engagement, and student voice. The
    report explores what works and highlights the importance of fostering student voice and empowerment.

Videos

1. Teaching Channel. My Favorite No: Learning from my Mistakes.
   Retrieved from https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/class-warm-up-routine

2. Teaching Channel. Group Contracts for Collaborative Work.
   Retrieved from https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/group-contracts-ntn

3. Edutopia. 5-Minute Film Festival: Classroom Makeovers to Engage Learners.

   Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICqBxV2hYs0

5. TED. John Hunter: Teaching with the World Peace Game. (2011, March)
   Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/john_hunter_on_the_world_peace_game


7. EL Education. Setting Up Your Classroom Environment.
   Retrieved from https://eleducation.org/resources/setting-up-your-classroom-environment

8. EL Education. Connecting Class Norms to Schoolwide Norms.
   Retrieved from https://eleducation.org/resources/connecting-class-norms-to-schoolwide-norms