

Recognizing Learning Environment for Students



Education

KEYWORDS :

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Introduction

Teaching and learning activities to be effective they need to engage students. Students who feel connected to their learning are more likely to achieve learning outcomes. Sexual health education can be a sensitive issue for some young people. It is important to enable students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting and to protect them from making harmful disclosures. Equally, it is important that teachers are prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a disclosure.

Teachers need to create a supportive learning environment so students feel safe to learn and ask questions. There are number of steps you can take to ensure your classroom environment is a safe place for all students when talking about sexual health.

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Making healthy choices isn't just about having personal self-discipline. In some neighbourhoods it is easy to get fresh and affordable produce, while in other neighbourhoods people are limited to fast food outlets, liquor outlets and convenience stores with less healthy choices. The most supportive environments make healthy choices the easiest choices.

Creating supportive environments is one of the five action areas identified by the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. Supportive environments offer people protection from factors that can threaten good health. They foster participation in health and let people expand their capabilities and self-reliance. This is critical for a person-centered approach to health.

How to create a supportive learning environment

Creating a supportive and understanding learning environment is particularly important when discussion activities deal with sensitive issues in relation to mental health and wellbeing. In order to provide a safe and engaging learning environment for students, it is important for teachers to:

- collaborate with students to develop a group agreement that sets the parameters for class discussions
- reflect on their own role in discussions - acting as a facilitator of the conversation to help to generate many viewpoints
- value all student contributions and make this known
- use a range of questioning techniques which open up discussion rather than trying to get to a quick right answer
- recognize that some students may not feel comfortable sharing; explore ways of dealing with this such as using think, pair, share activities
- Explore ways to ensure that all students get an opportunity to speak, such as using talk tickets.
- The environments in which young people live, learn, play, work, and worship profoundly affect their health. They shape young people's health practices as well as their resilience, health outcomes, and over-

all development. Inequities in these environments are also a root cause of health inequities among groups of youth.

- Supportive environments are ones that offer young people protection from threats to their resilience, health, and overall development. They facilitate their access to the services, supports, and other resources that foster resilience and enable health and well-being. Supportive environments can be fostered in young people's schools, neighbourhoods, and communities.

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF RESPECT AND RAPPORT

Respect and rapport begin with the teacher demonstrating respect for and rapport with students and teaching students how to show respect and build rapport with other students. Teachers can begin to establish this environment by learning to appreciate and understand their students' lives and cultural backgrounds and develop skills for cross-cultural communication. Interactions between students and teachers are warm and based on genuine caring, openness, and honesty.

ESTABLISHING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Culturally responsive classroom management builds on respect, personal and social responsibility, and a strong sense of community. Teachers' own beliefs and values influence their expectations of students and their behaviors toward students. Teachers in culturally responsive classrooms strive to create a strong sense of community in which each student understands and accepts his or her contribution to the success of the community. Teachers focus their efforts more on creating procedures and systems to support learning than on discipline and punishment, while maintaining their role as accountable adults.

20 TIPS FOR CREATING A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

I visit a lot of classrooms. And I'm always fascinated by the variety of ways teachers launch the new school year and also with how they "run their rooms" on a daily basis. From these visits and my own experiences as an instructor, I'd like to offer my top 20 suggestions for keeping your classroom a safe, open, and inviting place to learn.

1. Community Build All Year Long. Routinely include strategies and activities in your lessons, such as Save the Last Word for Me, that allow students to express their thoughts and ideas, build relationships, and practice collaboration. This will help grow and maintain a feeling of emotional safety in your classroom.

2. Post Student Work. When displays of essays, poems, projects, and exams dominate the walls, there is student ownership of the room. When they look around and see their own writing and thinking, they certainly experience a higher level of comfort than if they see store-bought posters. That said, if informational posters are needed, ask your students to create them.

3. Have Non-Negotiable. Along with classroom rules and procedures, students must know non-negotiable right out of the gate. My biggest non-negotiable? Name calling. This resulted in an immediate consequence (a call to the dean and removal from the classroom that day). Tackle name calling head on or else kids won't feel safe to be themselves, let alone learn.

4. Admit When You Don't Know. Students appreciate when we show our humanity. Saying "I'm not really sure. Does anyone else know or might they like to look that up for us?" is powerful stuff.

5. Read with Your Students. The message this sends: *I like to read. I don't just tell you this and grade you on how much you read, I read side-by-side with you. You see my facial expressions as I struggle to understand something difficult and you see when I feel emotion at a sad or funny part. I am a reader, too.*

6. Remain Calm at All Times. Once a teacher loses it with a class or student, it takes a long time to rebuild that feeling of safety and trust within those four walls. Step right outside the door and take a few breaths. It's worth it.

7. Take Every Opportunity to Model Kindness. They will follow.

8. Circulate. Mingling lets you monitor their work, yes, but it also gives you a close view of any tensions or negative energy brewing with groups or between students. Also, circulating gives you great opportunities to overhear a student sharing an idea or question that you can use with the whole class.

9. Address Grudges Early On. If tension is building between a couple of students, create time and space for them to talk it out while you mediate.

10. Write with Your Students. The message this sends: *I like to write. I don't just tell you this and grade you on your writing, I write side-by-side with you. You see me struggle as I am drafting a poem or letter, and you see me contemplate new words, cross-out old ones, and take chances as I revise. I am a writer, too.*

11. Model Vulnerability. They will appreciate this. If we are asking kids to write and talk about times they have felt scared, alone, confused, etc., we need to be willing to do the same.

12. Follow Through with Consequences. A consequence must proceed a non-negotiable. Students need to know there's a consequence for those serious infractions. They need evidence to believe they are safe in each classroom.

13. Smile Often. The antiquated saying in the teaching profession is *wait until Christmas to smile. This is just plain silly. Let the children see those pearly whites often and genuinely. The more smiles we offer to students, the more we will receive.*

14. Use Every Opportunity to Model Patience. They will notice.

15. Give Kids a Chance to Problem Solve on Their Own. It's so much better when ideas and solutions come from the student. This is a chance for us to ask rather than tell: "What might be some things you can start doing so you complete your homework on time? How about I write them down as you tell them to me?"

16. Laugh with your Students. The message this sends: *Learning doesn't have to always be so serious, nor do we. Sometimes, when tensions are high, like during testing or when crazy things are happening out in the world or on campus, we need to laugh together. It's okay.*

17. Offer Options. If we start an assignment with, "You will have three choices," kids may even get excited and are often much more willing than when we say, "The assignment is..." By giving kids choices, we send a message that we respect their decisions.

18. Keep the Vibes Good. Students, no matter how young, know when a teacher is not happy. Joy can be contagious, but so too can misery. Maybe a vacation, a massage, watching a TED Talk, or even changing the level of grade you teach will help re-ignite the flame between you and teaching when you are in a slump.

19. Sit with Your Students. Sitting in a chair made for a child is not the most comfortable thing for an adult. But joining a group of children at their table takes us off stage and let's us, even just for a few moments, become a member of the group. We might ask a strategic question, inquire about the group's project, or simply listen.

20. Art and Music Feed the Soul. (And they starve the beast.) Incorporate both of these routinely in your lessons.

WAYS TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUR STUDENTS

Build a strong classroom community

The adult education classroom can play an important role in helping students build stronger and larger networks. Classrooms provide students and staff with friendship, skills, and contacts beyond their immediate communities. Intentionally building networks in the classroom can create meaningful, supportive relationships among students and teachers.

- Use pair work, as well as small-group and whole-class activities, beginning the first day of class to help students get acquainted, and provide ongoing opportunities for students to form connections with students they don't interact with as frequently in the classroom.
- Provide students with opportunities to share about their backgrounds and cultures.
- Seek to connect students with the greater community, through field trips, current events discussions, bringing guest speakers, etc.

See our website for information on monthly workshops and field trips that teach about community involvement and service while improving language skills.

Build self-esteem and self-efficacy

Students' determination and belief that they can achieve their goals are important factors in their persistence in ongoing learning. Adult learners may have negative feelings about themselves due to failure experienced in their lives, due to dropping out of school, losing a job, or not being able to read or write well enough to complete a job application or read to their children.

- Ensure that students experience success at their first meeting so the first experience is a positive one. It may be appropriate to start with material that is slightly below the student's level.
- Be patient! Patience is an extremely important characteristic for any teacher or tutor of adults. Adults can

often take a longer time in the learning process because of various learning barriers, but this does not mean they aren't motivated to learn.

- Accept your student as he/she is and respect his/her values even if they differ from yours.
- Believe in your student and he/she will begin to believe in him/herself.
- Memorize the names of all your students within the first week of instruction. Use students' names frequently.
- If your students are English learners, learn a few key phrases in their native languages to model that it is acceptable to struggle with pronunciation and language learning.

Use positive nonverbal communication

Nonverbal messages are an essential component of communication in the teaching process. It is not only what you say to your students that is important but also how you say it. An awareness of nonverbal behavior will allow you to become a better receiver of students' messages and a better sender of signals that reinforce learning.

Some areas of nonverbal behaviors to explore include:

- **Eye contact:** Teachers who make eye contact open the flow of communication and convey interest, concern, warmth and credibility.
- **Facial expressions:** Smiling is a great way to communicate friendliness and warmth to students.
- **Gestures:** A lively and animated teaching style captures students' attention, makes the material more interesting, and facilitates learning. Head nods also communicate positive reinforcement to students and indicate that you are listening.
- **Posture and body orientation:** Standing erect, but not rigid, and leaning slightly forward communicates to students that you are approachable, receptive and friendly. Speaking with your back turned or looking at the floor or ceiling should be avoided, as it communicates disinterest.
- **Proximity:** Cultural norms dictate a comfortable distance for interaction with students. Look for signals of discomfort caused by invading students' space, which include rocking, leg swinging, crossed arms, tapping and gaze aversion.
- **Paralinguistics:** Tone, pitch, rhythm, timbre, loudness and inflection in the way you speak should be varied for maximum effectiveness. Students report that they learn less and lose interest more quickly when listening to teachers who have not learned to modulate their voices.
- **Humor:** Develop the ability to laugh at yourself and encourage students to do the same. Humor is often overlooked as a teaching tool. It can release stress and tension for both instructor and student and foster a friendly classroom environment that facilitates learning.

Motivate students

Motivation is a key factor in student success, and whatever level of motivation your student brings to the learning environment will be transformed, for better or worse, by what happens in the learning process.

- Involve students as active participants in learning. Students learn by doing, making, writing, designing, creating, and solving. Pose questions. Don't tell students something when you can ask them.
- Be enthusiastic about what you are teaching. An instructor's enthusiasm is a crucial factor in student mo-

tivation. If you become bored or apathetic, students will too.

- Work from students' strengths and interests.
- When possible, let students have some say in choosing what will be studied. Let students decide between two locations for a field trip, or have them select which topics to explore in greater depth.
- Vary your teaching methods. Variety reawakens students' involvement in the course and their motivation. Incorporate role playing, debates, brainstorming, discussion, demonstrations, case studies, audiovisual presentations, guest speakers or small group work.
- Relate new tasks to those students already know.

CONCLUSION

Supporting of student in different activities, they will make their stuffs in different angles. If you're a teacher, you spend a good part of your life in places that should feel more like a warm home than a cold, impersonal office building or warehouse. So consider increasing your own sense of well-being and motivation as much as increasing these qualities for your students.

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