



Classroom Climate

Defining classroom climate:

How does the class “feel” – tense or relaxed, chaotic or organized, energetic or lethargic.

Is there a feeling of friendliness among the students, or one of thinly veiled hostility?

Do students show evidence of being comfortable enough to make mistakes, take a chance, ask dumb questions? Or do they sit silent for fear of ridicule?

Are the interpersonal dynamics [student-student, teacher-student] free flowing and open, or non-existent?

What is an ideal classroom climate?

Varies according to the discipline, but the common thread is procedure, rules and routine suitable to the situation.

Example: An Advanced Placement class climate might ideally be high energy, relatively free flowing, non-directional (students are allowed to flounder about trying to find answer via discovery processes) and often somewhat confrontational. Teacher functions as facilitator and challenger. An observer might say, “Lazy teacher, hostile to students. Too unstructured a climate.” The observer could be very wrong!

Example: A low level, basically remedial type academic class climate likely is highly structured and teacher dominated. Direct instruction and tight enforcement of rules prevails, with limited interpersonal dynamics due to student immaturity. A stable, predictable environment is created for the students. An observer might say, “Too teacher led, too little student freedom. Teacher needs to loosen up.” The observer could be very wrong!

Example: A hands-on, participation type class [drama, art, vocational] climate differs from the *students in desks* class. Activity is the norm, with student movement. Often-intense interaction among students, with teacher encouraging independent work as he or she offers guidance from the background. An observer might say, “Is anything actually being accomplished here? Is the teacher in charge? What are these kids doing up and about like this – we need some discipline, order and quiet here.” The observer could be very wrong!



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Focus on the Teacher

***What works for one teacher in establishing classroom climate will not work for another; each teacher must know his or her personality and work to develop his or her own style.**

Common basics: Establish your procedures and rules.

Make your classroom arrangement, as much as possible, work for you – i.e. rows maintain order better than chatty group seats

Think through discipline procedures and consequences ahead of time.

Know thyself: Introvert or extrovert? This matters! The introvert trying to be open, buddy-buddy and bubbling will come off phony. The extrovert trying to be distinguished, cool and “professional” will be miserable.

Tolerance for noise and confusion? This will influence climate. Using a lot of group work when you know the hubbub makes you snappy and tense will thwart the establishment of an accepting, warm climate. Likewise, quiet individual seatwork can drive the “lively” teacher up the wall with boredom. Match the preponderance of your lessons to your personal style.

How is classroom climate established?

1. Know yourself
2. Establish consistent, workable procedures
3. Teach the students the procedures
4. Establish a FEW good rules
5. Let the kids know consequences
6. Let the kids manage their own behavior – you can’t MAKE them behave BUT you CAN give out the consequences. Make it clear THEY are making the choices.
7. Know your purpose for the class & what climate best fosters that purpose



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8. Get to know your students – and then be smart enough to modify what needs changing.

9. Work with parents as needed

10. Accept responsibility – YOU are the ONLY PROTECTOR the kids have in your classroom. If you don't protect the rights and feelings of the students in your room, who will?

And lastly – **REFLECT REFLECT REFLECT**

What worked with period 1 might not with period 4 – why?

What worked in August is passé in March – can it be changed?

What worked before the “new kid” arrived sure ain't workin' now – what to do!

You'll never find a formula answer to creating a good classroom climate, because there isn't one. Follow the basics, trust yourself, and realize that here, indeed, is where the ART OF TEACHING displays itself.

Enjoy!

