

PART II

Culture and Climate: Fostering a Positive Classroom Community

Being a positive role model is essential to teaching today's generation of learners, who are influenced by more individuals, entities, ideologies, and groups than any other generation in history. Fostering a positive, inclusive, and disciplined classroom is only half the battle. Becoming the leading role model is a great challenge every teacher today must face in establishing and maintaining to expect the same high level of discipline from students. Today's instructors must be authentic, sincere, fair, consistent, and honest to earn respect. Today's students are not easily fooled as the students from yesteryear. The ubiquity of the internet, social media, and mobile devices have disrupted virtually every classroom. Teachers must bring common core values to the school to ensure all students feel welcome and respected. My seven-step strategy for fostering a positive, inclusive climate in my classroom and earning my students' trust and respect is to:

- Be a role model and walk the walk. Don't just say it. Show it.
- Never lose cool or composure. Always show calmness and professionalism.
- Check your ego at the door every morning, with no exceptions.
- Show consistency
- Be firm but gentle and nurturing, too.
- Try hard not to become offended, uptight, or nervous.

Goals for establishing a positive classroom community

Goal 1: To make learners accountable for their behavior and responsibilities as primary users of the classroom space.

Goal 2: To teach all students lessons along the way that reinforce the values stipulated in the original student-teacher agreement.

Goal 3: To orient students to a new way of thinking that makes them aware that the path to success is through personal responsibility and empowerment.

Integration of Core Values in the CCTL Plan

My CCTL plan is founded on fundamental core values. Therefore, establishing the core values and integrating them into the daily activities, lessons, and interactions between the teacher and students, are essential to creating a positive culture and climate in the classroom. Before starting the academic year, the instructor will hang relevant and meaningful classroom décor in strategic classroom areas to teach students the above-listed values.

The terms "trust," "agreement," "core values," and "shared values" will be used interchangeably to avoid sounding mantric. The ubiquitous presence of the values in the environment will make it easier to refer to the trust agreement. During the first three days of school, we will have an in-class discussion activity to

explore the values in base groups to establish context and philosophy. Each student will have a chance to express their needs and views. The objective is to start the academic year with an activity that helps cultivate and forge a shared understanding of the trust agreement. It will be delivered in three components.

The Building Blocks of Trust and Respect

1. **Shared values are visible and ever-present:** The values represent help the students and teacher to achieve their goals every day in the classroom. Therefore, the values will be visibly displayed throughout the classroom and they will remain visible to all throughout the year in the form of classroom art, posters, famous “quotes” that support students and the shared core values. Whenever one of the values becomes an issue, it will be visibly present and easy to point to.
Goal: Create a ubiquitous presence of the shared values

2. **Open discussion on Day One:** The instructor will moderate a class discussion and review each shared value to establish context and understanding. Students will be expected to contribute to the discussion. The instructor will use techniques to reveal the truth to students that the shared values are vital to the well-being and success of the entire learning community. Learners will develop an understanding of the ways values can enhance their learning experience. They will realize that the lack of values in the classroom will adversely impact every community member: the students, the instructor, the parents, and the school administration.

Hopefully, this will set the tone of positivity for the entire academic year and unite the students in the common goal and pursuit of fostering an inclusive, respectful climate where students practice these values because they benefit from them.

Goal: To lead students to the understanding that adopting these values is for the greater good of the community and the well-being of each student.

3. **Create base groups for collaborative group work:** Assign two or three values per group and allow students to explore the values through discussion and inquiry more profoundly. Each base group will collaboratively present their understanding of the values to the rest of the class. They will create poster art products and other visible artifacts to exemplify the values their group explores and list examples of specific behaviors they would deem to be inappropriate and unacceptable for the classroom.

Goal: To reveal to students through peer-to-peer learning that the values exist to protect them and make their educational experience enjoyable, enriching, meaningful, and safe.

Strategy 1: Create a Trust Agreement with the students on Day One.

The “trust agreement” is a behavior contract between the students and the teacher that outlines the expectations for both and addresses acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in the classroom. The purpose of the trust agreement is to acknowledge our shared values as a group and all of the benefits they bring to each student, the classroom, and the learning community as a whole. More values can be added throughout the year. For now, the base list of ten shared core values for the community is listed below.

Table 1. Integration of Core Values in CCTL Plan

	Core Value	Students will understand that...
1	Safe place	The students and teacher must commit to maintaining the safest environment possible. In addition, all must commit to cultivating a classroom environment devoid of aggressive behavior that could potentially injure another student. In any such instance, the correct response always reflects peace, civility, de-escalation, and conflict resolution.
2	Respect	The teacher and students must respect one another. The philosophy will be “show respect and earn respect.”
3	Responsibility	Convey to the students that the learning community needs them and counts on them. We all have a job to do and we will all succeed together.
4	Honesty	Without honesty from the students or instructor, we will be burdened with lack of confidence, which will adversely impact our ability to thrive as a community.
5	Integrity	Learn to value strong moral principles and uprightness.
6	Teamwork	Cooperate and collaborate as one united learning community.
7	Help others	Support peers, be there for others, give back to the community.
8	Show gratitude	All of us are blessed to have the opportunity to be members of this community and to learn together. Show gratitude and humility
9	Kindness	What is your definition of kindness? Why should others be kind to you? And, why should you be kind to others?
10	Tolerance	Teach acceptance. Communicate the importance of bringing no judgments, biases, or microaggressions to the environment, equality for all. The philosophy will be to embrace diversity because we are all deeply enriched by it.
<p>I have read these core values and understand what they mean to my peers, teacher, and me, and acknowledge the importance of modeling my behavior in a way that aligns with these core values.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Student _____ Date</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Instructor _____ Date</p>		

This approach aims to establish a structure that enables the instructor to protect every student in their social, emotional, and academic development by creating a positive, inclusive, and nurturing environment for the class with a comprehensive behavior plan. Once the structure is established through the discussion and the base group collaborative work, the instructor will have access to the truth agreement, and all of the values it represents within view as the posters and classroom decór reflect the values and will continue to do so for the entire academic year.

Strategy 2: Create a n Open Line of Communication that virtually connects students with the instructor.

As a language instructor, I find voice boards such as *VoiceThread* beneficial as a communication tool for teachers and students. Voiceboards allow for a conversation to develop over time. Voice recordings are a more natural way to communicate complex thoughts and ideas to students. It is an excellent tool for language assessment and allows teachers to provide rich feedback. Voice boards are asynchronous, convenient, and flexible. The posts can be public or private, and students can discuss various topics with the instructor, from academics and grading to concerns about classroom issues. Therefore, as the course instructor, I plan to use *VoiceThread* or a similar tool to create a 24-hour open line of communication with my students. Another long-term goal would be to create a public forum to voice class needs, concerns, and essential communications. To enhance the essence of community, I would encourage parents to be members of this virtual community. I will call the board *the Hotline* or some other catchy or cheesy name that enhances the perception that the voice board is the optimal way to communicate within the learning community. I would even resort to catchphrases to emphasize the point:

Need to talk? Call the hotline!

Got a question? Call the hotline!

Problems in school? Call the hotline!

Problems with homework or a project? Call the hotline!

Need to let out some steam? Call the hotline!

You have a big idea! Call the hotline!

The point is to redundantly deliver the message, "*The instructor is here for you 24 hours a day, seven days a week if you need help or have a concern.*" Also, the voice board archives all voice recordings expressing; concerns or reports of problems. The recording(s) would be invaluable if a problem were to escalate.

Messages on the hotline can be public or private. Students can leave a recorded message anytime. The instructor will moderate the general discussion forum and check in every day. Some discussions will involve the entire class. Some will include homework and projects. Other conversations will be private between the student and instructor. Most voice boards come bundled with the school's primary learning management system (LMS). With the voice board, the instructor will receive the message and respond before the next meeting with the student.