



RESPONDING TO SUCCESS

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The [Victorian Teaching and Learning Model](#) has a Vision for Learning which reflects student success in every aspect:

All students are empowered to learn and achieve, experiencing high quality teaching practice and the best conditions for learning which equip them with the knowledge, skills and dispositions for lifelong learning and shaping the world around them.

(Department of Education and Training [DET], 2019c).

Growth is expected of all students; the challenge for educators is to set those expectations within the classroom and to create the conditions to allow the growth to happen.

How to create a culture of success in your classroom

Establish classroom routines and behaviours

The first few weeks of every year are some of the most important weeks of the entire year. This is when I take the time to set the climate of my classroom. Classroom climate refers to the mood, attitudes, standards, routines and tone that you and your students feel when they are in your classroom. I include time to set high expectations for learning and ensure we as a class develop agreed processes; for example clear routines for lining-up, transitions between lessons, and the start and end of the day. This ensures that there are established structures in place to support effective learning behaviours. Teachers spend time co-constructing and developing classroom rules and norms that encourage and promote the positive behaviour that you wish to see throughout the year.

From the beginning of the year, it is essential to establish clear classroom boundaries to ensure a safe and productive classroom:

These boundaries will provide security to children and help them to develop internal limits to their behaviour. Boundaries also lay the groundwork for good teaching and learning to take place (Degeling, 2012).

For teachers, one of the most challenging aspects of teaching continues to be classroom management and discipline. I strongly encourage you to learn from experienced teachers and understand the ways in which they manage student behaviour while allowing the focus to be firmly on learning.

Positive relationships

Developing positive relationships with all students from the start of the year is essential. Help students to understand that you care about their learning and you care about them as individuals. Take the time to learn about the things that interest them and find opportunities to talk to them about these things. This is a great way to help them connect with you and also for you to learn about who they are. Help them to feel that they belong in your classroom by being welcoming and ensuring your body language is positive. Be pleased to see them when they arrive! When you see that a student seems to be having a hard time, consider how you can help better understand their struggles and how you can help them to access support outside of the classroom. Building positive relationships with your students will really support the work of reinforcing behaviour. Activities during the first few weeks could include defining the role of the student, the role of the teacher, creating a class promise or discussing what learning looks like, sounds like and feels like.

The [School wide positive behaviour support \(SWPBS\) framework](#) assists schools to establish a common philosophy and purpose, clearly defined expectations for behaviour, procedures for teaching expected behaviours, and procedures to encourage expected behaviours and discourage inappropriate behaviours. This may be something your school is already working on.

Planning the early weeks for next year will help you to set a positive climate for your classroom and ensure you and your students have a successful year!

Meaningful assessment practices

One of the ways that students can see success is through meaningful and purposeful assessments. Students need to be aware of the purpose for assessment as well as be able to clearly see how they have demonstrated growth in order to celebrate success.

The [Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning](#) (DET, 2019b) explore (in Principle 6 – see below), the effect that assessment and feedback have on student engagement and achievement. ‘Teachers provide regular feedback to students on their progress against individual learning goals and curriculum standards’ which supports students to self-evaluate. When students can monitor their own learning and see their own progress, this reinforces success.

Schools will have assessments in place and schedules to support the implementation of tasks. As a graduate teacher, it is important to ensure your assessment includes a balance of assessment elements. These should be both formative (e.g. effective use of feedback and questioning, exit slips) and summative (e.g. end of unit tests, final projects). Consider the evidence that will be collected to support the assessment. In my practice, I use a display folder for each student and file all the evidence for assessments. When it comes to writing student reports, I can use the student display folders which

includes the assessment evidence to help make my judgements. Organisation is important when collecting evidence as it will save you time when assessing and reporting.

Formative feedback that improves student learning and celebrates success

Professional Practice Note 6: Formative Assessment (DET, 2019) helps teachers to better understand both what formative assessment is and how to build it into regular classroom practice.

It is important to be mindful of the language used when giving students feedback, particularly positive feedback. Praising students for intelligence can reinforce a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2010). For example, “You did a brilliant job, you are very smart.”

Strategy 7 of the High Impact Teaching Strategies (DET, 2019a) defines some signature characteristics of positive feedback:

- provides detail, such as ‘You achieved a good outcome because you...,’ rather than just ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’
- compares what a student is doing now with previous work, such as, ‘I can see you focused on improving X –the result is much better than when you did Y last time’
- providing specific guidance on how to improve, and not just tell students when they are wrong
- is framed to encourage and support further effort
- is given sparingly so that it is meaningful
- is supported by effective professional development for teachers.

Providing regular feedback to all students is essential for student success. Remember that feedback is founded on the belief that all students can achieve success in learning. It places the emphasis on students feeling safe in taking risks and making mistakes as they progress. I have tried to model the importance of making mistakes in learning. It is important to demonstrate that making mistakes is how everyone learns; remember, aim for progress, not perfection! I use James Nottingham’s (2019) ‘Learning Pit’ in my classroom, <https://vimeo.com/117364809>. This enables my students to see that learning will be a challenge and there will be times when they are feeling uncomfortable. For them to experience success in their learning they need to jump into the ‘learning pit’ and use the tools and resources around them to get out and celebrate the new learning. This can be used when giving feedback on student learning as it encourages them to step out of their comfort zone and embrace new learning. It is important to acknowledge students for doing something they find challenging.

Encouraging student success through student voice and agency

Giving students opportunities to have a voice and agency assists their learning. This empowers them to be part of the learning and teaching process. I collaborate with students to establish the success criteria, negotiate assessment tasks and give feedback on my teaching. I usually ask students for feedback at the end of my lessons using exit slips. Those slips might include questions such as ‘How did you feel during the lesson?’ or ‘What could the teacher do differently next time to further support your learning?’ This helps them to reflect that achievement is a progression and something in which we all play a role. To better understand the role of student voice and agency in the classroom, see [Amplify](#) (DET, 2018).

Some further tips on positively reinforcing success:

- Actively engage with the students even when they are working independently. Rather than remaining at the front of the room, walk around your classroom and work with different children. This will ensure you are aware of the learning to assist with your assessment and will give constant opportunities for teacher to student feedback.
- Work hard at keeping students engaged. There are many reasons why students might become unmotivated or disinterested during a lesson. Speak to some of your colleagues about how they maintain engagement and make a time to view their classes in action. Teachers love to share their practice so ask lots of questions.
- Be a role model of learning. Demonstrate that you as a teacher are always learning, that you also make mistakes and then learn from those in order to succeed.
- Give careful thought to the way you set up the classroom environment. Think about physical aspects such as desks being close together in groups of two, four or six. How will that support successful collaborative learning? What impact will it have on student behaviour and engagement?
- It is powerful and effective to respond to students in a positive way. It is important to give specific praise that focuses on the positive behaviour. You might say 'thank you for putting your hand and waiting your turn' rather than focusing on the negative behaviour 'don't call your answer out, remember you need to put your hand up'.

Key takeaways for graduate teachers

Developing a positive, inclusive and familiar classroom will help students will to succeed in their learning, and is one of the ways we can strive to ensure all students are 'empowered to learn and achieve' ([Vision for Learning, DET](#)). Plan to build positive relationships with all students and allow them to get to know you! Share things with your students such as what school was like for you, why you became a teacher and what things you enjoy doing outside of school. I created a book all about me many years ago that I always share with my new class at the start of the year. Making those connections with your students will help build those relationships. Then those relationships will allow you to respond to all student success in a positive and developmental way.

Discussion with your mentor

After reading the article, discuss with your mentor:

- What have you done this year to establish a positive climate for learning?
- What might you do differently next year?
- How do you currently recognise and reinforce successful learning behaviours?
- What might you try in the future?

References

Degeling J 2012, Positive reinforcement in the classroom, viewed 4 November 2019, <https://www.josephdegeling.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Positive-Reinforcement-in-the-classroom.pdf>

Department of Education and Training 2018, Amplify: Empowering students through voice, agency and leadership, viewed 4 November 2019,
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Amplify.pdf>

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Nottingham, J 2019, The Learning Pit, viewed 4 November 2019,
<https://www.thelearningchallenge.co.uk/>

Further Reading

Literacy Portal:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/Pages/literacyportal.aspx>

Numeracy Portal:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/maths/Pages/numeracyportal.aspx>