



Indicator: All teachers establish classroom norms for personal responsibility, cooperation, and concern for others. (F9)

Explanation: This process of establishing classroom norms for student social behavior is one of the most important influences on academic achievement (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). Building classroom norms, known as “norming,” is one step in group development that allows individuals to learn to work together, trust one another and solve problems as a unit.

Questions: What are classroom norms? How should teachers go about establishing classroom norms? How have teachers been trained in developing social/emotional skills in their students (i.e., professional development, mentoring, establishing classroom management skills)? Why are norms important?

A meta-analysis on social and emotional learning done by Durlak and colleagues (2011) found that “school’s intentional implementation of evidence-based social and emotional learning programs not only improved social and emotional competency but also yielded an 11 percentile point gain in academic achievement” (Redding, 2014b). The study found four conditions necessary:

1. Classroom norms for high expectations and academic success
2. Supportive and caring relationships
3. Teacher’s classroom management that supports student engagement
4. Environments that support positive behaviors by actively teaching, encouraging, and reinforcing (Durlak et al., 2011 in Redding, 2014b).

Classroom norms are specific expectations that teachers establish for students’ behavior. They are ways of behaving that are established by the teacher and that define the culture of the classroom. Establishing norms in the classroom is part of what brings students together as a single group, developing the interconnections between individuals. This process is one of the most important influences on academic achievement (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). Redding (2014a) writes of establishing this culture:

Personal competencies are enhanced through the teacher’s instruction (especially when personalized) and the classroom culture. The teacher’s relational suasion with students facilitates their learning and their building of personal competencies. Like the school culture, the culture of a teacher’s classroom reflects values and is seen in its rituals, routines, expected behaviors, and relationships among teachers and students. How the teacher organizes the classroom and establishes and reinforces its rules and procedures constitute classroom management, and classroom management operationalizes much of what is more broadly called classroom culture. (p.13)

According to Tuckman (2001) there are four stages of group development that occur regardless of the culture, language, or purpose of the group: forming, storming, norming and performing. In working on group development in the classroom, teachers need to allow the first two stages to occur naturally before facilitating the classroom norming process in the third stage. The first two stages may take up to three weeks at the beginning of the school year. The stages are:

1. **Forming**—Members are anxious about being accepted by other members of the group, so they behave cautiously.
2. **Storming**—Dominant members emerge in the midst of conflict and confrontations. Clarification about roles and the group purpose are sought by the members of the group. (Note that conflict should be addressed by the teacher immediately, not left to fester.)
3. **Norming**—Members grow more cohesive and interdependent; New standards and roles are adopted and communication and trust among members improves. Resistance is overcome at this stage and members feel comfortable expressing personal opinions.
4. **Performing**—Productivity and autonomy are strong as members problem solve to complete group objectives. The interpersonal bonds between group members serves to facilitate task completion and problem solving; any interpersonal “problems” are considered to be in the past.

When arriving at stage 3, norming, teachers will need to facilitate the cohesion of the students into a single group. Finley (2014) recommends that when introducing a class to the norming process, teachers should state the goals for the class culture to be developed. Is the class culture intended to establish personal responsibility, caring for each other, treating each other with respect, achieving better learning outcomes? It is important to establish these goals up front.

Once the goals of classroom norms are established, the process of defining them can begin. Finley (2014) recommends the following steps:

1. Ask students to write down events or occurrences that have impeded their learning in the past (e.g., Students talking out and interrupting each other).

2. Once those events have been identified, ask the students to identify classroom norms that could prevent that problem (e.g., Each student should raise a hand if he or she wishes to speak).
3. Have a group discussion about numbers 1 & 2.
4. Repeat.

Depending on the classroom norms that come out of ideas generated by the students themselves, teachers may want to distribute lists of other potential problems that interfere with classroom learning. Upon completion of discussion, the teacher and students should decide on the final classroom norms collaboratively. The agreed upon norms should be posted in a visible place in the classroom and revisited at regular intervals to make sure the norms are still meeting everyone’s needs.

These norms now define the expected behavior of everyone in the classroom. The existence of these norms allows stage 4 of the group formation process, performing, to occur. The structure that classroom norms provide facilitate both classroom success and the success of individual learners.

Need some ideas for topics to include in norming? Finley (2014) includes the following list of ideas:

1. Student-to-student interactions
2. The physical space and/or personal property
3. Sensitive topics
4. Transitions
5. When the instructor leaves/is absent from the room
6. Communication
7. Using the pencil sharpener, drinking fountain, and/or restroom
8. When tasks are finished early
9. Smart phones
10. Confusion or frustration
11. Intolerance
12. When needed materials are missing

As a Leadership Team, plan what the school can make available for the staff to assist them in developing and establishing a set of norms that will enhance students' social and emotional personal competency. The school may plan professional development for all the teachers on how to establish a set of norms as well as on good principles and practices of classroom management. Teachers who are more skilled in these areas can mentor newer teachers or teachers who are less skilled. The school may provide resources and tool that support classroom management and the establishment and reinforcement of norms (Redding, 2014a).

References and resources

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