

Positively Positive

*Every thought is a seed. If you plant crab apples,
don't count on harvesting Golden Delicious. ~Bill Meyer*

As you work to lay the foundation of and build upon a classroom community, infusing positivity into the classroom atmosphere can increase each student's sense of belonging, as well as motivate them to follow community expectations and work to excel at the academic tasks at hand. Here are a few ways to easily ensure your classroom is a place where students enjoy learning:

Any Time You Are Feeling Blue...

Give your students a list of everyone in their class. Encourage them to write several positive things about each of their classmates. Collect the lists and compile all of the positive comments about each student on a single piece of paper with his/her name at the top. Teachers should add their own positive feedback to the final compiled sheet as well. (The compilation sheet should be completely anonymous.) Title the paper "Every time you are feeling blue, look at what your classmates said about YOU!" You'll be surprised at the smiles you see when you hand out the papers and how long students will keep those lists. (Teacher note: If any student's list of compiled comments is lacking, teachers should try and inflate the list with their own comments about the student. It's important everyone get genuine, positive feedback.) This activity works well towards the end of the first semester, or prior to a holiday break.

Class Meetings

Providing students the time and structure for addressing issues not directly related to the curriculum (but are related to school) can help promote a sense of community in the classroom. Holding structured class meetings allows students to come together to discuss topics and address issues in a civil way. While it might take minutes away from formal instruction to host a class meeting, the benefits still greatly augment learning. According to Dr. Marvin Marshall, "Classroom meetings facilitate positive relationships because they provide opportunities for building trust and respect – which in turn leads to a caring environment. Such an environment of mutual respect is necessary in order for each class member to develop the confidence to make a statement or voice an opinion and feel safe doing so." To read more about classroom meetings and ways to structure them, go to:

[http://www.disciplinewithoutstress.com/pdfs/Classroom Meetings Chapter.pdf](http://www.disciplinewithoutstress.com/pdfs/Classroom_Meetings_Chapter.pdf)

Just a Note to Say...

Keep a pad of stationary or Post-Its nearby while teaching. When students say or do something profound, exemplify positive behavior, improve in some way, etc., write a simple note to them. For example, "Dear Jamaica, Your comment regarding the Revolutionary War today was incredible. When you talked about the way slaves were fighting for the same thing as the Patriots (freedom!), it really made us all stop and think. Wonderful job! It's great having you in this class!" Just a few sentences of such written positive feedback, which can be done in seconds, can mean a lot to a young person.

Likewise, as students return from a semester or holiday break, having a class letter from you copied and waiting on their desk can be a wonderful way to welcome them back. Such a letter might note how you spent your break, what you missed about them, specific topics and lessons you are looking forward to sharing with them in the upcoming weeks, etc.

Know their Names, Use their Names

It is important to learn each of your students' names and the correct pronunciation. We often forget how important it is to students that their teachers know their names – it makes students feel valued, important, and respected. It is equally important to address each student by name, both in and outside of class. Always say a student's name respectfully, and even when disciplining, never say a student's name in an angry or condescending manner. Simple actions like addressing students in the halls and outside of class by their name helps you build positive relationships and better ensure student investment in your class.

Letters from Former Students

A great way to give your students a positive impression of you and your class is to ask former students to write letters to future students about your class, the types of lessons and activities they can look forward to, the manner in which they will be treated and expected to treat one another, etc.

Motivational Tidbits

Always open and close class on a positive note. As an opening journal entry, or as you dismiss students, providing a little "motivational tidbit" can get your students think about particular issues of character. Project an inspirational quote, read a quick motivational story, remind students of something upcoming that they can look forward to, play a bit of a song, etc. – the point is to take a few seconds to inspire and motivate.

- Example quotes:
 - No one can make you feel inferior without your consent. - Eleanor Roosevelt
 - You can't expect people to look eye to eye with you if you are looking down on them. - Anonymous
 - How a man plays a game shows something of his character; how he loses shows all of it. - Anonymous
 - Smile: if you can't lift the corners, let the middle sag. - Anonymous
 - How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these. - George Washington Carver
 - Be the change you want to see in the world - Ghandi
 - Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?' - Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - Additional quotes can be found in the Consortium's lesson "In Their Shoes-Understanding and Standing Up Against Bullying & Intolerance" or by doing an Internet search for "inspirational quotes", which will provide numerous options (for example, the Quote Garden: <http://www.quotegarden.com/attitude.html>)
- Example short motivational story ("A Cherokee Teaching"):

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves.

One is evil- He is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, and ego. The other is good- He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, empathy, kindness, humility, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on within you- And inside every other person too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee replied simply, "The one you feed."

Please and Thank You- *"Without good manners human society becomes intolerable and impossible."*
~Bernard Shaw

At some point in your life, it is likely someone has taught you about the importance of manners. Using the words please and thank you on a common basis, and thus encouraging your students to do so, helps create a positive, inviting, and warm classroom environment. Consider including these words in all class directions, even worksheets and tests. ("Please review your notes from yesterday and write a 5 sentence summary.") Extend this into your open house nights by having students write thank you notes to their parent/guardians, or record students delivering thank you messages to meaningful adults that can played before a community event.

Praise, Praise, Praise!

Whenever you can (but only when deserved) praise your class as a whole. A few seconds of positive feedback can go a long, long way. For example, after a class discussion you might say, "You guys, that was a really amazing conversation. Thank you all for sharing those amazing thoughts. I learned a lot from you today!" Or, make comments to other adults that your students "overhear." For example, if students are all diligently working on their warm-up, say to a teacher passing by in the hall, "Do you see how great these kids are? I LOVE teaching this class. They are like college students!" Buzz the office and rather than calling for an administrator to come and remove a disruptive student, say to the secretary (again, so that the students can overhear), "Can you send Principal Jackson up please? She has GOT to see the amazing projects my students just turned in!"

Shout-Outs

Young and old alike, we love to know that we are appreciated, respected, well-liked, and valued. Encourage students to offer meaningful, positive comments to one another based on their performance in class. The best way to do this is to model this behavior yourself. Offer positive feedback to the class daily, by completing the statement "Let me tell you all what I liked..." after the class has finished a discussion, assignment, group or partner activity, etc. Also, try to privately compliment individual students on specific actions or accomplishments (i.e. when they make an interesting comment, do well on a test, improve in some way, etc.) Let students know when you've seen them being respectful or kind and express your pride in them whenever possible. The more positive energy you create, the more likely your students will be to join in when you say, "Today was a great day in class. I saw so many of you doing a wonderful job. Would anyone like to say something positive about a classmate?" Teachers should try and keep track of which students have been complimented to ensure all students are receiving positive feedback throughout the days of class.

Teachers may also want to create a “shout-out” bulletin board, where the accomplishments and good news of students can be noted and celebrated. Whether it’s a student making the winning score in a ball game, earning a 100 on a test, celebrating a birthday that week, or learning they’ve been accepted into arts camp, having this visual reminder of positive news can make a big difference.

Smile!

It’s a fact – teachers typically have too much to do in too little time. Thus, as students enter our classroom, they might misinterpret a face full of concentration as a frown. If you want to create a positive classroom, reminding yourself to smile is important. A smile communicates that you are positive about yourself and your classroom and that you are exactly where you want to be, which can rub off on students. A smile is also necessary to make students feel welcome and safe in your classroom. Don’t forget to smile – it takes fewer muscles than frowning!

Student Conferences

How often do you give specific positive feedback and constructive suggestions on an individual basis with your students? Scheduling student conferences can be a great way to ensure structured time for chatting with each student one-on-one. Once your students have been trained to effectively work independently or in groups, use this working time to call students up one by one and conference with them. Start by letting them know what they have been doing well with in class. (For example, go over an assignment that they turned in that you were particularly pleased with; comment on a behavior that you find exemplary; note positive contributions they have made to the classroom community; etc. If there are areas of improvement, note these after you have offer positive feedback. This can also be a good time to let students know where their current grade stands and how they can improve it. These few minutes of one-on-one time can be very important to students in letting them know they are visible and important to you.

“Tell Me Something Good...”

At the beginning of class (after the opening assignment has been completed) encourage students to share something positive out loud, such as something good that has happened to them recently, something they are proud of, something they are looking forward to, etc. Tell the students their news might be something very simple; the only stipulation is that it has to be something positive. After a student shares, the remainder of class should clap in congratulations or shared excitement. Reserving just a few minutes of beginning class time for this can set the day off on a very positive note.

Model the expected behavior first. For example, “I’ve got to share some great news with you guys today. I’m so excited! My brother is having a baby, so I’m going to be a new Aunt!” Then, encourage students to share: “Alright class, tell me something good!” Ask that they raise their hands to volunteer something positive and that they share only a sentence or two of explanation. (If your students need a little creative nudge to get them going, play a few seconds of the song, “Tell Me Something Good.” Train your students to know that when they hear this lyric or hear you say “Tell me something good,” they should be ready for positivity.