



## Domain 2

### Teaching for effective learning: Create safe conditions for rigorous learning

All teachers create physical, social and emotional conditions for the learners in their classrooms. Teachers who consciously foster supportive yet challenging conditions provide students with increased opportunities for high quality learning. Establishing democratic relationships is a critical condition to sharing power and developing a safe, low-threat environment for learning.

Shared understanding of expected classroom and learning behaviour allows teachers to build responsibility and to foster student autonomy through negotiating both learning and the direction of the curriculum. Rigorous learning is promoted when students are responsible for their own learning and engage with higher order thinking and intellectually challenging tasks.

Safe classroom conditions enable teachers to explicitly challenge students in a low-threat environment. Rigorous learning also requires that teachers maintain high expectations of students by communicating their belief that everyone is a learner capable of success. Having time available for teachers and students to critically reflect upon their learning and to recognise success enables the celebration of achievements and the setting of future learning goals.

Creating a supportive, challenging and critically reflective classroom ensures students are provided with optimal conditions for sustained, relevant and rigorous learning.

***How does my classroom provide a supportive and challenging environment for student learning?***



## 2.1 Create safe conditions for rigorous learning: Develop democratic relationships



### Essence >

The teacher shares power with students recognising it as a fundamental condition for learning.

### Building democracy for more powerful learning networks

One of the challenges for a Year 7 teacher is finding ways to help students really get to know each other beyond their own friendship groups. If we don't address this, friction can spill into the classroom and we may lose the rigorous learning for another day.

I remember one particular group who, from day one, actively avoided any learning interactions with certain other class members. The inflexibility was getting in the way of team learning with and from each other.

I hatched a plan. I announced: 'Next week, everyone will change seats on Friday afternoon ready for the following Monday morning'.

There were lots of nods of approval, until I described the process. Names would be drawn randomly out of a hat in groups of four to form table seating for the following week. The initial groans and complaints were so enormous that it would have been easy at this point to give up, but I stuck with it. I explained that the concept and process were non-negotiable, but the ground rules and expectations needed to be developed collaboratively.

We put our heads together and the collaborative strategies flowed:

- **Suspend judgment**—there would be no responses, verbal or otherwise, as names were drawn.
- **Seek difference**—a redraw would be done if anyone was with more than one person from the previous week's table group.
- **Get to know your group**—we would begin the week with a ten minute table conversation, sharing personal interests, strengths and talents, or responding to a posed question.
- **Be in the moment**—all students would be actively involved in their table group.

To solve the teething problems, we explicitly revisited our ground rules and expectations. By the end of the term we'd established a

weekly routine that didn't just run smoothly but was actually embraced enthusiastically by everyone. With these new arrangements came new and powerful learning. Students mixed freely and got to know each other on a new level. By talking and working with every class member, they became more positive and respectful of others in the class. They actively sought out peers, including those they wouldn't have been 'caught dead' talking to before.

Students were discovering what they were all good at and, in the process, they developed a range of ways of thinking. They nominated peers as being skilled in certain areas when others needed help. From this we developed a 'Skills Register' which was posted on the classroom wall; we continually added to it as the year progressed. Rather than coming to me as their first port of call for help, encouragement and feedback, my students were constantly tapping into their own rich source of collective knowledge and skills.

In one of our class meetings we decided to explore new timelines for the seating arrangements. On the last Friday of term we had one mega-draw and organised table group seating for the entire next term. In this way, every student knew what to expect, and who they would be sitting next to and when.

The students weren't the only winners in our new seating arrangements—I learnt powerful lessons as well. I came to understand that when students choose their own classroom seating there's a chance for implied rejection of peers. Choosing not to sit with particular classmates is often deliberate, and a form of harassment.

Sometimes democracy needs a little help—separate the entrenched groups, scaffold their new interactions, and you can empower individuals to develop ways of working with, supporting and learning from *all* learners.

*Year 7 teacher*

## Justice alert

Who is heard and who finds it difficult to be heard?

### Key actions: Teachers

- Accept my students as individuals, and work in partnership with them to develop class expectations and clarify rights and responsibilities
- Model respect by listening attentively to students and acknowledging alternative perspectives
- Seek students' feedback on my teaching, value their insights and act upon their advice
- Ensure that learners listen to each other and feel safe to voice opinions and challenge thinking
- Structure teamwork where students assume different roles and responsibilities within groups
- Think carefully before overriding class or group agreements
- Explicitly model fair voting processes and avoid bias
- Encourage all to act as leaders, teachers and learners
- Frame classroom conversations to focus on learning, and empower learners to contribute to future directions
- Teach explicit skills and create opportunities for students to chair meetings, negotiate agendas, make decisions and take action
- Help students to eliminate language and actions that make others feel uncomfortable
- Ensure that all individuals' strengths are valued equally
- Intervene strategically to ensure active inclusion (eg routinely adapt classroom seating arrangements to develop students' learning networks)

### Key actions: Students

- Strive to be an active class member
- Talk about problems with my teacher rather than being silent
- Think about when to work with others and when to work on my own
- Help others and still focus on my own learning
- Listen to others and give thoughtful feedback to teachers and classmates where I can
- Think about feedback I'm given from classmates and teachers and choose how to use it



*I began to grasp that teaching requires a plural pronoun. The best teaching is never so much about 'me' as about 'us'.*

Carol Ann Tomlinson

### Ways to develop democratic relationships

**Shared ownership of routines and systems:** It is important for students to feel a sense of control. They need to participate in decision making and know ahead of time what their session/day/week entails, who has responsibility for specific tasks, the work commitments and deadlines, upcoming events and planning schedules. With this 'transparency', everyone understands the context and everyone is accountable. Students share responsibility for notice boards, diaries, storyboards and timetables, and they keep information up to date.

**Class agreement:** As an introductory activity, use decision-making processes to involve students in listing the attitudes/actions they consider most important for maintaining a productive, democratic class. This agreement is displayed in the room, each student has a copy, and it is used as a reference for class issues as they arise.

▶ **Bone diagram:** This is a chart for monitoring the class agreements. Draw two circles linked by two parallel lines. In one circle, students note targets for what 'the ideal' will be. Then, in the other circle they describe the current state. Along one straight line, list the actions that will support progress towards achieving the 'ideal'. Along the other line, write the actions that might inhibit progress. Have the class regularly revisit the diagram to discuss and map progress.

**Parking lot:** This serves as an ongoing class feedback chart to post ideas, comments and concerns anonymously, ensuring that all voices are heard. It is a square with four quadrants labelled:  
+ – What's going well?  
△ – What needs improvement?  
? – questions  
! – ideas or issues.

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# 2.1

# 2.1

**Perception checks:** Regularly stop the class group and ask 'Has anyone found another way to do this?' or 'What would happen if we added ...?' or 'Has anyone identified an issue with this idea?'

This is useful for getting specific feedback. It can uncover a pressing issue or individual concern, and promote reflection, evaluation and the processing of ideas. This can be a circle or paired activity or the questions can be written.

**New angles:** This activity is based on the film *Dead Poets' Society* when Robin Williams' character stood on his desk to see a new perspective. Ask students to look at an object from a variety of angles: sitting, standing, lying on their sides. This activity may be extended by asking students to sketch an object from three or four different angles. Another extension of this activity is to set students the problem of photographing an object from three or four different angles, showing these photos to others and asking them to guess what it is.

The central concept of these activities is that where we stand can change what we see, thus encouraging students to see people from differing perspectives and to have a new appreciation of their peers.

### Student-initiated challenges:

Establish opportunities for students to work strategically together to achieve a common goal (eg online games, team technology tasks or physical games where students think, plan and act together).

**Hearing all voices:** This is a good strategy for starting learning conversations with a new group of students. Participants sit in a circle and can talk about themselves for two minutes or respond to a specific question. One person speaks uninterrupted for two minutes, with the next person in the circle following. The activity supports students in getting to know others while controlling how much they wish to share about themselves.

**Partner learning talks:** Give students time to share their learning on a task with a partner. They can share progress, seek feedback, ask for help, provide encouragement, ask challenging questions or give another perspective on the topic. Follow-up time is then given for students to refocus on what their next step will be.



## Language that teachers can use to develop democratic relationships

- What do you think? We value your opinion.
- What other perspectives might there be?
- What support would you like me to give?
- Could you teach this to someone else?
- How do you feel about your achievement?
- Making mistakes really helps us learn.
- If that didn't work, can you find another way to ...?
- Would someone like to volunteer to ...?
- When you say those things, how might other people feel?
- We're all in this together.
- In this class, we've agreed to ...

## This element is not demonstrated if:

- The teacher places all the onus on students to solve their own learning issues or behaviour problems
- Students believe that they have the 'rights' and teachers have the 'responsibilities'
- The teacher is defensive or uses autocratic behaviour when challenged
- Class meetings are held but decisions are not acted upon or items discussed are low level and disconnected from learning
- Voting procedures reflect popularity rather than expertise
- Class discussion is dominated by the teacher or by particular students

## Practice check

- Is negotiation real in my classroom? Do students ask for help when they need it?
- Do I create an atmosphere for all students to be equitably engaged?
- Do I talk too much? Might I be the discipline problem?
- How are students supported to make their own decisions?
- Does my teaching style advantage some students over others?
- Is it safe for students to disagree with me or their classmates?



*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*

Nelson Mandela

share power

# 2.1

Notes:

- How do I ensure that all students experience:*
- *dignity and security*
  - *the right to participate*
  - *respect for their identities*
  - *access to information and privacy?*

Glenda MacNaughton &  
Gillian Williams

## 2.2 Create safe conditions for rigorous learning: Build a community of learners



### Essence >

The teacher creates a culture where everyone inspires and encourages each other's learning.

### Year 8 camp a buzz

The beginning of a new school year is always coloured by high levels of organisation, catch-ups with colleagues and great hopes for the learning year ahead.

With several newly appointed staff and a Year 8 camp in week 5, the pressure was on! What were our plans for creating a culture of positive engagement and valuing the strengths of our new Year 8 staff and students? Could the camp be the vehicle?

During the induction process for our new Middle School teachers, we discussed the purpose of the camp. We welcomed their input, and acknowledged their experiences and talents for coordinating it. In the week before students arrived, we met to make initial plans. We agreed to begin the school year by facilitating discussions with our students. We would focus on *responsibility, equity, organisation and effective communication*, and we'd use these as a foundation for planning our year and, in particular, the camp. The students would nominate peers for a core group to represent the six home groups.

The year got underway. At the Year 8 assembly on the second day back, we could feel the excitement building. The various organisational aspects of the camp were allocated to home groups. Class discussions evolved, and the core student group was established. They met daily with the Middle Years coordinator to convey home group thinking and to relay shared information back to classes for further input.

In classrooms, the engagement was tangible—the buzz was happening! One home group researched the best deals and availability, and cabin preference forms were designed. Another group booked buses and, in the process, they collated student 'travel sickness' data before allocating buses. The catering group was busy surveying students and teachers, checking dietary requirements and allergies, negotiating a menu democratically based on preferences. Kitchen duty rosters were developed to bring different groups and individuals together and encourage new networking.

Staff and students discussed explicit learning outcomes for the camp. They did collaborative research on the campsite to explore learning possibilities. One class consulted all home groups in an inclusive process to compile 'camp expectations'. They aptly chose to use the school values as their basis, showing insight that impressed staff!

One home group developed team building activities. They surveyed students' individual strengths and mixed them up for Trivia Quiz teams. A definite highlight was going to be the Red Faces Talent Night; everyone would be expected to participate, even the adults.

Everyone played their part in ironing out hiccups and problems as they arose.

After much anticipation and a lot of great teamwork, Week 5 was upon us and the Year 8 camp became a reality. With every learner in each home group actively involved in organising it, the attendance far outstripped previous years. Student engagement was high and our new Year 8s achieved all the intended learning outcomes.

Back at school, teachers built on the friendships and the shared experiences. Students continued to work in teams with common purposes. The cohesive culture that had grown at camp allowed them to take risks in their learning, even at this early stage of the year. They all knew something about each other as people; they willingly talked with others about their learning, built on the ideas of their peers and sought assistance from both peers and teachers.

Through planning the camp, and participating in such a successful way, students and staff had all shown immense collaboration and trust. Our year was now set with the safe conditions and connections for students' rigorous learning.

*Deputy principal of a metropolitan secondary school*

## Justice alert

Who struggles to feel a sense of belonging?

### Key actions: Teachers

- Remember that learning is social
- Value my students' experiences, cultures and personal stories which will help them to develop strong individual and group identity and a sense of belonging
- Embed collaborative activities that model and promote mutual support, respect and trust to facilitate learning
- Create opportunities for social interaction so that students can develop new relationships to transfer into their learning contexts
- Use my students' learning strengths and preferences to structure diverse groups where they can draw on each other's expertise
- Work with students to develop a learning environment where there is shared responsibility and equitable access to resourcing and support
- Teach explicit skills needed for teamwork
- Provide discussion time for students to share thinking, clarify ideas and inspire each other
- Pose challenges where individuals need to work independently and collaboratively to achieve success
- Use strategies that highlight the power of the learning community, such as a skills/interest register
- Model and reinforce processes for giving and receiving constructive, encouraging feedback
- Actively seek out opportunities for all students to make a contribution in teamwork across classes and year levels
- Celebrate individual achievements and shared successes as a community of learners
- Connect with students by reflecting on the meaning of 'community' for people through time and cultures

### Key actions: Students

- Get to know my classmates so we understand each other better and can help each other in our learning
- Listen to my team mates and help solve problems together
- Play my part in teamwork and try out different roles
- Ask for help when I need it—from friends, classmates, teachers and family
- Tell my classmates and my teacher when I think they've done a good job
- Encourage my classmates when they're stuck



*I get along with everybody and I specially get along with myself.*

Year 1 student

### Ways to build a community of learners

**Community and service:** Begin a class/school program where all students take on roles/responsibilities, keep records of their ongoing involvement and are formally acknowledged for their contributions (eg credit towards SACE subjects). This strengthens school culture and enhances students' connection to school. Roles might include peer tutoring, mentorship, forums, action groups, sports coaching, and classroom duties.

**First two weeks program:** Many schools begin the year with a specific focus on the shared values, attitudes, skills and community goals that will prepare the class/school for success. All learning activities are designed to develop the theme. Home-school links are an integral part of this process which is continually reinforced and revisited.

#### Embed cooperative activities:

Use simple processes to extend students' connection within the learning community:

**Trust Walk**—Students pair up, one is blindfolded, and the partner walks beside, guiding the blindfolded person on an outside walk, while using a reassuring voice but no body contact.

**Tangles**—Eight students face into a circle with their right hands out in front. Each grasps the right hand of another person. Adding to this, the group now grasps left hands, making sure that no two particular people are joined by both hands. Now the challenge is to 'untangle' the group back to a simple circle without letting go of any hands.

#### Trust builders and trust busters—

Students consider what they value for their learning community and compile two lists: attitudes/actions that 'build' learning community capacity and those that 'bust' it. These are revisited frequently.

▶ **Think, Pair, Share**—Students gather information/make notes alone. Next, students pair off to share ideas/combine notes.

Then, each member of the pair joins with a member of another pair to think more deeply. Students continue this process, resulting in total class involvement.

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# 2.2



► **Experts/Jigsaw**—Students go from their home group to another class and learn about a topic. They return as ‘experts’ to their home group and teach their peers.

**Carousel brainstorm**—Identify a range of issues from the students’ current learning context. Assign an issue to each group. Arrange the groups in an order around the room. Each group records their issue as a heading on their sheet. For five minutes, each group brainstorms responses and ideas for their issue. After that, each group passes their sheet on to the next group, who read the comments and add their own ideas and opinions. The ‘Carousel’ process continues until all sheets return to their original author group. They then synthesise the results and report the summary back to the whole class.

## Collaborative aids for classroom display:

**Class values**—Brainstorm and decide on class values by a multi-voting process. These could become the class motto and be displayed.

► **X-charts**—A sheet of paper is divided into four by a large ‘X’. The areas are titled: ‘Looks like’, ‘Sounds like’, ‘Feels like’, ‘Thinks like’.

**Sentence starters**—These are useful for facilitating feedback.

**Thought bubbles**—These are a different form of sentence starters (eg ‘Learning partners are good at ...’).

**Informal photographs**—Photographs of students interacting/learning in groups other than their immediate friendship circles could be displayed. Please note that before photographs are taken, permission should be sought from the students’ parents/guardians.

► **Class metaphor:** This could be a statement such as ‘Our class is (like) a ... because ...’. This invites a humorous interpretation. Students work in groups to analyse their real class identity.

## Online learning communities:

These create wider connections and new opportunities for all students’ learning:

**Fan Fiction at <[www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)>:** Students upload their writing to the site for sharing and receiving feedback from a global audience.

**Class blog at <[www.edublogs.org](http://www.edublogs.org)>:** Create a class blog for students to collaborate on team challenges and pose critical questions of each other’s work.

## Language that teachers can use to build a community of learners

- We’ve agreed on what we want to achieve. What challenges will we set ourselves?
- How can we become better listeners in our learning community?
- I don’t know the answer to that one. How about finding out and then sharing with the group?
- How are we all feeling about the issue? Let’s brainstorm some possible ways forward.
- Would this be a good question for our online learning blog?
- This is what Ruby has achieved so far: ... Does anyone have suggestions for how she could go on from here?
- That’s an interesting opinion. Can you tell us more?
- Who can ‘piggyback’ off this idea? What if you work with Jack to combine your thinking?
- Have you found people who agree or disagree with your view? How shall we get together to hear their ideas?
- What does ‘community’ mean to you? What can we do to build a sense of community in our class?

## This element is not demonstrated if:

- Individual achievement is prized over collaborative endeavours
- Students always work alone
- Students identify only with their immediate friendship group
- Minimal noise and student movement are seen as indicators of competent teaching
- The teacher lets behaviour management concerns override learning opportunities when planning for teamwork
- Student assessment is always individual, at the end of the learning, and marked by the teacher

## Practice check

- Do I know each of my students well enough to recognise their different needs for feeling a sense of belonging?
- How do I deliberately develop a learning community with students? Do they all feel a part of the group?
- Do I undermine students’ self-esteem in front of their peers/teachers?
- Do I teach collaboration skills?
- Do my students share responsibility for progress?
- How am I modelling being a community member with other teachers?
- In what ways do I bring the resources of the wider community into the classroom?



*Great discoveries and improvements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds.*

Alexander Graham Bell

# inspire and



# 2.2

Notes:

*We need to construct our own meaning, in our own context, of a collaborative learning community ... It is not a checklist of factors, it is a mindset as much as a map. It is a philosophy as much as a place ... It is taking responsibility for our craft, our own development and that of our students; it is ensuring our future.*

Carole Cooper & Julie Boyd

encourage learning

## 2.3 Create safe conditions for rigorous learning: Negotiate learning



**Essence >**  
The teacher responds to students' changing needs and involves them in deciding the direction of the curriculum.

### Never too old to learn

I was working harder than my Year 9 SOSE class! If working harder means learning more, then I was learning more than they were. Things needed to change. I wanted my students to be motivated and take the lead in their learning.

A colleague suggested, 'Why not try negotiating it with the students? You could use individual or team learning plans with scaffolds to build their knowledge and skills to work more independently? My students are so much more motivated when we work this way.'

What did I have to lose? I'd give it a try.

I talked with the class about my ideas, emphasising that I had high expectations explicitly linked to the curriculum standards. It was important to me that they were motivated but also that they engaged in quality learning as well as produce quality work. I shared the standards with my students and had them highlight key words about the actions and the degree of skill and understanding needed. From this we developed a brief that outlined expectations and a planning proforma that could be used to develop inquiry questions from the unit of work.

The students chose their own learning focus within the SOSE unit. I then provided a range of proformas like the Bloom's Taxonomy with examples and question matrices to scaffold their learning.

The learning plans supported the development of rich inquiry questions—an essential element for success. We collectively brainstormed ways to publish and format the learning. As compiling a bibliography was part of the brief, I explicitly taught this skill. As opportunities arose for clarifying key concepts through the group work, I used them to demonstrate other skills such as using the Capacity matrix for the whole class. I found this explicit teaching at the point of need was much more effective.

As the students developed their personal learning, we stopped regularly to see what everyone was doing and what progress was being made. What help did they need? What was working well? Who was stuck? Where were the common dips and troughs? Along the way, the students shared their learning with each other and asked for feedback. They were becoming increasingly adept at providing explicit feedback and posing constructive questions.

After each of these monitoring sessions, I scaffolded their progress with targeted learning workshops for small focus groups and individuals. All students completed their inquiry with significantly more motivation and energy from them and less pushing from me.

*Year 9 teacher of Studies of Society and Environment*

## Justice alert

Are all students supported to engage in learning they are passionate about and achieve a meaningful outcome?

## Ways to negotiate learning

**Ordered sharing:** Begin a term/teaching block by outlining the general learning focus and hearing all students' responses. Then discuss and collate ideas to inform your planning. At strategic points during the term, identify sections of the curriculum and discuss what students are expected to know, understand and do.

### Flexible learning environment:

Ensure that students have easy access to resources, non-restrictive systems for movement outside the classroom (library passes etc), a balanced timetable with some extended blocks, and space for the 'teachable moments'.

**Agree on protocols:** Agree on ways for students to negotiate seating arrangements, grouping strategies, equitable use of ICTs/media, appropriate noise levels, and time management/organisation issues.

**Classroom display:** Displays can include flow charts for independent learning procedures, a peer skills register, agreed deadlines, clocks/timers, and sentence starters for students' critical reflection on their learning.

**'Students' Tip' board:** This could be a whiteboard where students can write tips about what worked for them/what didn't work, and strategies they used successfully.

**Planning frames:** Establish a convention of shapes and colours linked to elements needed for a good plan (eg green arrow for your target, blue hexagon for resources, yellow star for the people to help you, brown footprint for steps to take, grey clock for deadlines or time frames). For group or whole class work, use coloured card shapes to put together project plans. Set up symbols on the school computer network so that students can cut and paste these into their own personal learning plans.

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# 2.3

## Key actions: Teachers

- Remember the power of student interest—what they bring with them as they walk in the door and what I generate with them; both are key to engagement and persistence in learning
- Empower my students by working with them to use the relevant curriculum guidelines as reference when setting their learning goals
- Progressively move from more prescriptive learning activities to student-led activities
- Support students to attain learning outcomes in personalised ways
- Listen to students to find out their learning needs and interests and use this to inform learning plans
- Design open-ended tasks with clearly defined criteria that challenge students to show initiative
- Scaffold students' efforts in developing targets for their own learning
- Work together with students to rigorously monitor their progress
- Teach students explicit skills in questioning to develop their own inquiry processes
- Clarify the steps needed to identify and access relevant resources for self-directed learning; model and practise this process with students
- Acknowledge diversity, involving families and community in supporting students' personal learning
- Establish ongoing procedures to engage students in goal setting, planning, self-monitoring, critical reflection and evaluation
- Actively involve students in the assessment process as an integral part of all negotiated learning

## Key actions: Students

- Listen when the teacher is explaining the curriculum
- Ask myself, 'How will I make this learning task really suit me so that I can do my best?'
- Set my own learning goals, with the support of my teachers or peers
- Challenge myself to manage my time and work hard towards my goals
- Ask for help when I need it, so I can keep going



*When children have a stake in their learning ... powerful things happen. They become more committed to their learning, and so are motivated to learn ... As they become autonomous learners, they grow in self-confidence and in belief in themselves.*

Mark Collis & Joan Dalton

# 2.3

Create worksheets using the symbols. Set criteria for what you expect in particular plans, and encourage students to use at least one frame of each colour/shape when developing every plan. (This activity is based on work by Gornal, Chambers & Claxton 2008, p 33.)

**Assessment rubrics:** In the planning stage, work together to establish an assessment rubric. Vertically, list 'Criteria to be assessed', and cross-reference these horizontally with scaled achievement indicators, clearly worded. Students can then use the rubric to guide their learning.

**Learning coaches:** Teach students to coach each other. Coaching is basically a structured conversation where one person, the coach, helps another person to find out his/her own answers. The coach asks the questions and listens but does not offer suggestions. The GROW structure is widely used: set the Goal, find out the Reality, think of Options, commit to the Way forward (eg 'What is it that you want to do?', 'What's it like at the moment?', 'What might you do to improve?', 'So what are you going to do and when are you going to do it?'). 'Speed coaching' lasting ten minutes for each student can be really effective. (This activity is based on work by Gornal, Chambers & Claxton 2008, p 35.)



## Language that teachers can use to negotiate learning

- What are you really interested in?
- These are the outcomes we need to achieve. How might you work towards these in your own way?
- Have you thought about ...?
- How are you going? Do we need to go back over it?
- You've set your goals. How will you measure your success and what's your next step?
- Let's discuss your PLP [Personal Learning Plan]. What resources have you found? How are you deciding which ones are most useful?
- With online resources, how are you judging their reliability?
- Who else is in on your learning? Are you sharing your ideas at home? Do you need any extra support?

## This element is not demonstrated if:

- There is one predetermined learning pathway (eg oral lesson, worksheet, ICT) for all students
- The teacher approaches each new task by dictating how students will work—as individuals, groups or as a class
- The teaching and learning program makes little reference to students' needs, interests or prior knowledge
- The classroom learning environment lacks clear boundaries, explicit norms or limits
- Students see 'negotiating learning' as doing whatever they like
- Teachers place more accountability on students than on themselves

## Practice check

- Do I listen critically when students are making choices for learning and do I provide adequate guidance when they need it?
- How am I involving students during the planning process?
- Do I focus on both the learning and the learner?
- Do I maintain a balance in explicitly teaching the skills and then reinforcing them in negotiated, student-directed tasks?
- Are our record-keeping processes targeted to individuals' needs?
- How am I ensuring that students and I share accountability for their negotiated learning outcomes?



*Interest matters ... the depth of engagement established in the presence of interest is essential to the development of deep rather than surface learning.*

Chris Goldspink

plan for ...

# 2.3

Notes:

*Student interest is key to ongoing student motivation to pursue tasks at increasing levels of complexity ... and, satisfaction with earlier tasks is often important in keeping students engaged with work that is temporarily not interesting to them.*

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

respond to ...

## 2.4 Create safe conditions for rigorous learning: Support and challenge students to achieve high standards



### Essence >

The teacher has high expectations and guides each student to achieve his/her personal best.

### Interrupting the failure cycle— Never give up

Rebecca was a Year 3 student who just wasn't making progress. She'd had one-on-one support for several hours a day since she started school, but her learning was still laboured. For Rebecca, writing her own name was an ongoing challenge. I kept thinking of the famous quote by Albert Einstein: 'Insanity is continuing to do the same thing over and over and expecting different results'. I had to do something different.

At the time, I was involved in further study on digital literacies, so I decided to try a new way of working with Rebecca. I negotiated with her and her family to send daily e-mails between school and home. Initially, Rebecca's mother would type the outgoing e-mails and read incoming e-mails to Rebecca.

Gradually, with encouragement, Rebecca took the reins. Her growing confidence was tangible. In time, she was writing and reading all her own e-mails. She was developing a taste for it—e-mailing classmates and then even teaching other students how to do things on the computer.

Rebecca was turning a corner. Things started to change at school. She was transferring her learning to other situations. For the first time, she was experiencing success.

*Primary school teacher*

### Using transfer to challenge learners

Many students claim, 'I can't do maths!', but Sean was the classic. When he entered my maths lessons, his entire body language drooped into failure. One recess time I caught sight of him in the quadrangle practising his soccer skills. He was a different person! The confidence, persistence and precision shone through.

I had an idea. The next time I saw him I praised the skills and dedication he showed in learning his soccer techniques, and then I posed the challenge: 'If you bring one tenth of that doggedness to the next ten maths lessons, I'll work with you to get a passing grade.' He looked at me for a full five seconds and then replied, 'OK, just watch me!'

He was up for the challenge.

*Adapted from Professor Guy Claxton's presentation at the Building Learning Power conference, Port Pirie, 19 March 2009*

*When we expect  
that we have an impact  
on student achievement,  
we are right. When we  
expect that we are impotent,  
we are also right.*

Douglas Reeves

# challenge students to achieve

## Justice alert

Is every student challenged to reach her/his personal best or just those who 'do school' well?

### Key actions: Teachers

- Share my excitement and my own learning examples with my students
- Create a learning environment where every student feels driven by challenge rather than threat
- Listen to each student and identify and value his/her learning strengths and passions in developing personal learning goals
- Encourage students' resilience in using their strengths to tackle new learning, solve problems and 'raise the bar' with their expectations
- Set tasks with multiple entry and exit points to maximise each student's learning time and progress
- Establish and monitor classroom procedures to maximise learning time
- Continually nudge students—ask them 'What else could you do?'
- Ensure my teaching and learning program is referenced against criteria for high standards
- Engineer learning conversations that extend students' thinking
- Scaffold each student's progress with guidance, modelling, demonstrations and targeted feedback
- Challenge students with tasks that demand transference of skills/understandings
- Structure milestones for students to share their learning and get guidance along the way to enrich their final performance or demonstration of understanding
- Teach students how to seek feedback and offer timely feedback to move their learning forward
- Celebrate students' successes throughout the learning process as they challenge themselves to achieve their personal best

### Key actions: Students

- Believe in myself, use my learning strengths and have a go—I can do it
- Aim high and challenge myself with goals that will take a lot of persistence
- Reflect on my learning, and explain how I got past being 'stuck'
- Show initiative—talk with people, read lots of books and explore new ways of using technologies
- Challenge myself: 'Is this my best? What risks will I take to prove to myself that I can do even better?'
- Look forward to getting feedback from others to help me take the next step



*Do not worry about your difficulties in Mathematics. I can assure you that mine are still greater.*

Albert Einstein

### Ways to support and challenge students to achieve high standards

#### Supporting students to reach their potential:

- Most importantly, tell yourself 'This student **can** learn and **I** can help them do it'.
- Keep looking for new approaches.
- Look at both sides of the situation. Identify the challenges that the student, and you, must embrace to achieve success.
- Provide time for students to see a learning task through to completion. If at first they don't achieve the required standard, provide specific feedback and give them the opportunity to try again. If they are finding it hard to complete a task, help them tackle their difficulties, set new time-limits and support them to meet deadlines.
- Remember that your expectations matter.

**Learning wall:** Arrange wall space where students can share their learning processes, their individual strategies for risk taking, and celebrate their persistence. They can post photographs, stories, artworks, tokens, diagrams and questions.

#### Make the most of mistakes:

As a learner, model that it is all right to make mistakes. Share the emotions that you feel, and demonstrate how you learn through these experiences. Students could create cartoon strips to share their own experiences where 'mistakes' were the key to eventual success.

**'Stuck' posters:** Work with students to display useful questions to ask themselves when they are 'stuck'. Encourage them to talk about how they got through being 'stuck'. Help them to draw on memories/feelings of earlier successes to cope with new challenges. (This activity is based on work by Gornal, Chambers & Claxton 2008, p 17.)

**Pastoral care:** Devote time for students to share tips for resolving problems and moving forward with challenging learning. Encourage them to use the strategies they see others use when having difficulties.

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# 2.4

**Mentor links:** Students can offer to share their strengths by acting as mentors for other learners. They can give specific tuition, supportive ideas/feedback or targeted advice on work skills and self-motivation.

**Comfort zones:** Explore the idea that people experience different degrees of comfort at different times when they are learning. In the classroom, identify three areas, each representing a degree, or zone, of comfort: 'Comfort', 'Stretch' and 'Panic'. Suggest different activities and ask students to move into the space that best represents how that activity makes them feel. For example, watching a video might move most students to the comfort zone while stroking a snake might move some of them to panic. Always end the activity with everyone in the comfort zone. Discuss what students felt and what they were able to learn in each of these zones. Good learning happens best in the stretch zone, not in a panic or when too comfortable. When students are stuck, ask for ideas of what could move them into the stretch zone. Code the zones with colours like traffic lights: red for panic, amber for stretch, green for coasting through with no effort and not picking up much learning. (This activity is based on work by Gornal, Chambers & Claxton 2008, p 17.)

**Expert interviews:** Set up interviews with skilful people. Students develop a series of questions to uncover exactly what the expert does (eg What preparation is there?, How do you keep your eye on the ball?, What sort of thinking or beliefs are helpful?). Students create a checklist of key aspects to imitate. (This activity is based on work by Gornal, Chambers & Claxton 2008, p 49.)

**Scheduled learning conversations:** These conversations can be a valuable opportunity for students to share their learning journey with you and other significant adult/s. Support students with a framework for their presentation. They extend an invitation and negotiate a 15 minute meeting time. During the meeting, the student shares growth points, concerns and achievements, shows evidence of his/her successful learning, and leads a three-way conversation where the adults ask questions and acknowledge the student's efforts.



## Language that teachers can use to support and challenge students to achieve high standards

- I'm a teacher and a learner too. You probably know more about this new topic than I do. I aim to be an expert by the end of it! What tips can you give me?
- What's really important to you as a learner? What do you want to get better at?
- What do you hope to achieve this time? How will you do it?
- I'm going to model how to ... for the class. You may move off on your own as soon as you've got the idea.
- You have a real talent for ... How does it feel to ...? Remember to have that same confidence when you ...
- Let's say nothing's 'wrong' but, rather, there are just 'degrees of rightness'. How might this change your thinking?
- It's great to move outside your comfort zone—that's when the real learning happens.
- Do you understand it well enough to teach it to someone else?
- What did you use to work it out last time? Find out three ways others have done it.
- It's when you 'get stuck' that you really start to learn. What's your next step? You can do it!

## This element is not demonstrated if:

- Teachers'/students' words and actions reflect an attitude of 'near enough is good enough'
- The learning intention is unclear
- Learning lacks a clear sequence and evidence of mastery is difficult to find
- Engagement in the learning process wanes before reaching the outcome
- Teachers reference students' achievements only against external norms (eg class norms) without acknowledging individual progress
- All tasks are geared towards final summative tests, without formative assessment to guide student progress

## Practice check

- How do I encourage students to persist when learning gets tough?
- Do I provide opportunities for all students to learn and achieve to a high level?
- How do I make the learning intention/s of each lesson clear to students?
- How do I challenge individuals and acknowledge initiative and progress?
- What procedures are in place to help students move forward when they encounter problems?



*If you do things well, do them better. Be daring, be first, be different, be just.*

Anita Roddick

believe all



# 2.4

Notes:

*I began to challenge myself and I started to mature, because the teacher made me realise I can't go through school waiting for someone to push me all the way. Now that I am heading to high school I am glad I changed into the person I am now, because I reckon I work pretty hard and I follow everything through to the end.*

Year 7 student