

4th-8th GRADE
HOW TO NURTURE HEALTHY CLASS DYNAMICS
By Patti Connolly

With the class as a whole

- **Healthy Authority**-First and foremost, the overarching idea is that you are the healthy, lovingly firm authority. Through your consistent commitment to self-development, you strive to model the appropriate behavior you expect of your students. Here are a few examples of your work in this area:

Admit and apologize when you have behaved in a manner you are not proud of. They see you as someone they look up to now and need to see you as worthy of their respect.

Self reflect on what is not working well. An example is questioning of oneself “Is there something in the way I set up the lesson (the “breathing”) or my class management style that caused the children to talk so much?”

- **Soul breathing**-Plan your lessons so that they have appropriate amounts of incarnating (sitting, listening, drawing, writing, reading) and excarnating (out of desk, talking, moving, modeling, cutting with scissors) activities (this is called).
- **Hold the Picture**-Visualize what you want your class to be academically, socially and emotionally. Just like there is school spirit, there is also a class spirit that you can foster by seeking understanding on a deeper level.
- **Creative Discipline**-Create a discipline system that engages the students in the process of moving towards more self-regulation out of their own desire to improve instead of a punishment/reward model. By guiding the students to become more responsible for their own behavior you move them up the ladder of moral development (see Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development below). This would entail:

Civics or Class Meeting-Use weekly class meetings to work with social issues or behaviors that are not working for you and/or the students. During the civics class:

Create class behavior guidelines together, deciding on a few key rules that cover most situations such as “We are kind to all” and “We are here to learn”.Devise a system with the class of bringing up issues and use healthy communication and problem solving models with them.

When you realize that there are recurring behaviors that all or most of the class is doing and you are consistently disciplining them for, use the class meeting to solve the problem. Engage the students in determining consequences for themselves (that you will follow through with), which are strong enough for them to stop the misbehavior. When we use unsuccessful consequences we are actually reinforcing (habituating) misbehavior by consistently giving it attention without extinguishing it.

- ***Working with their natural tendencies (I call it “the flow”)*** - Study the temperaments and use them to support your students’ healthy development, for examples how you seat the children in class, how you tell stories, and how you give consequences for behavior.

With individual children

- Discover and nurture each child’s true nature or “higher self”. Of course some children make it harder for us to see their true nature and we must work doubly hard to see it.

Here are a variety of exercises to help you get there: objective observation, non-judgment, active listening, visualization, meditation, creating an individual verse for the child to say each week, and positioning him in the class based on temperament. (Specific instructions are available for each of these.)

Form a unique and loving relationship with each child through home visits, one-on-one after school outings, learning more about the child from his/her parents, child study.

- Remember that we are helping to remove what we perceive as hindrances for each child without using judgment. This usually takes years, not months or weeks. We must be patient with the child and ourselves.
- Especially look for opportunities to understand and work positively with those children who “push your buttons”. They are your greatest colleagues.
- Appeal to each student’s developing sense of individuality by involving him/her in solving a problem, for example ask him/her what the consequence should be for a misbehavior. This as-short-as-possible discussion and determination of consequence is at recess time and is just between you and the student.

- Be creative and congruent in matching the consequence with the misbehavior, for example if a student throws something at another, have him/her practice throwing a paper ball into a trash can.
- Sometimes we pigeon-hole a student into playing a certain role in our class. Strive to see every student afresh. Help free your students as well from doing the same to themselves or their peers. Look for opportunities to show the student a new picture of herself, putting her in a situation where she can see herself differently, remind her of positive accomplishments, let everyone know how you feel about her striving.
- Find biographies (that take the place of pedagogical stories) of people who have had a similar challenge as a student or students.

Lawrence Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development in relation to developmental stages of Steiner and Piaget

Level 1: Pre-Conventional

0-7 years, Imitation, Piaget's Sensorimotor to Concrete Operations stage

1. Obedience and punishment orientation – Deference to a superior power. I decide on what is morally wrong based on whether I get punished or not. I will do what is expected to avoid punishment.

2. Self-interest orientation – What's in it for me? Action as a means to hedonistic satisfaction. I need to be paid to conform.

Level 2: Conventional

7-14 years, Imagination, Formal Operations Stage

3. Interpersonal accord and conformity – Good boy/girl orientation. I want to be liked. I behave to fit in with what my teacher/parent expects. I choose to follow their social norms or stereotyped cultural images to receive their approval.

4. Authority and social-order maintaining orientation – I behave within the "law" (fixed rules) that an outside moral force has created to maintain a functioning society. I am beyond the need for individual approval but am still dictated by an outside force.

Level 3: Post-Conventional

14-21 years, Inspiration, True Formal Thought Stage (possible ~16 years but most individuals stay at Stage 4)

5. Social contract orientation- I behave based on the view that the world holds different opinions, rights and values. Laws are social contracts and may need to be changed if necessary. I choose what is the best behavior in this situation based on these social contracts. Democratic governments are based on this stage.

6. Universal ethical principles – Conscience based on universal ethical principles. I act because it is right, not because it is expected, legal, or previously agreed upon. I use abstract reasoning and only follow laws that are grounded in justice. Few individuals consistently operate at this level.