



# Handout 5: Developing a Supportive Context in the Classroom

## Learn About the Cultures and Experiences of Your Students

Promoting an atmosphere of respect and inclusion can make everyone feel like they belong in the classroom. So you're better prepared to engage with all of your students, you may need to educate yourself about the impacts of racism and discrimination against students of color, LGBTQ students, and students with special needs.

Seek to understand

- The culture in which you are working and find cultural references that will resonate with your students. Be aware of your connection to the communities you're discussing. Recognize that not everyone will have had the same experiences, emotions, or responses in life, so be careful not to generalize about groups of people.
- Yourself and your own beliefs, biases, privileges, and responses, because this is an essential foundation for facilitating discussions with students.
- How to identify the strengths that students bring from their diverse ethnic and cultural traditions and ways to empower students to use those strengths in the classroom.

## Find Ways to Practice Inclusion

Educators can design and implement classroom routines that engage student learning in a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment and teach students how to talk about differences in a respectful and informative way that does not sing Developing a Supportive Context in the Classroom le out individual students.

**Devise ground rules for inclusive behavior** that welcome all students. Developing a clear set of classroom rules for how students are expected to treat each other helps to establish a culture of inclusion and respect. These rules are most effective when they are

- Developed with input from students,
- Simple and understandable,
- Posted in the classroom, and
- Fairly and consistently enforced with positive and negative consequences.

**Expand students' knowledge of diversity** by exposing them to role models through literature, lessons, and classroom guests. Make sure students have opportunities to choose books that portray diverse families, as well as men and women outside of gender stereotypes. Integrate examples of people from various backgrounds into classroom curricula, discussions, and stories. Seek out diverse speakers, mentors, and role models for to participate in classroom activities.



**Use inclusive language** when referring to students, families, or others outside of the classroom. Doing so reinforces more respectful and inclusive vocabularies for students and models appropriate behavior.

**Celebrate each student** for who he or she is and provide opportunities for all students to be appreciated for their complexities (e.g., race/ethnicity, culture, social status, gender, and otherwise) in a sensitive context.

## Model, Teach, and Expect Respectful Behavior

Just like forming friendships, teachers can model behavior and attitudes that demonstrate to students how they should interact with each other. Teachers can create a social environment in which students are encouraged to get to know and learn how to respect each other.

- Set a tone of respect in the classroom, which includes managing student behavior so everyone feels safe.
- Present accurate information and positive representations of those who students may perceive as different from them.
- Make time for students to learn and practice a range of positive and respectful behaviors in their interactions and relationships.
- Connect students' own experiences with learning but avoid singling out individual students.
- Talk about differences respectfully, providing examples of people with varied backgrounds and orientations.
- Teach the differences between respectful debate and intolerant dialogue and name-calling.
- Provide a safe atmosphere in which to discuss issues.

As an educator, remember—you don't have to have all the answers. It's okay to say "I don't know" or "I didn't know that" and invite students to share their own experiences instead. Being authentic and respectful is often more important than worrying about how to say the "right thing."

Adapted from the following sources: GLSEN. (2016). *Ready, set, respect! GLSEN's elementary school toolkit*.

<https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/GLSEN%20Ready%20Set%20Respect.pdf>; Hurlington, K. (2010).

*Bolstering resilience in students: Teachers as protective factors*. (What Works? Research Into Practice, Research Monograph 25). Ministry of Education, Ontario, Canada.

[http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/ww\\_bolstering\\_students.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/ww_bolstering_students.pdf); McGarry, R. A. (2013, September). Respect, resilience, and LGBT students. *Educational Leadership* 71(1).

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept13/vol71/num01/Respect,-Resilience,-and-LGBT-Students.aspx>; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Justice Consortium, Schools Committee, and Culture Consortium. (2017). *Addressing race and trauma in the classroom: A resource for educators*. National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

[https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/addressing\\_race\\_and\\_trauma\\_in\\_the\\_classroom\\_educators.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/addressing_race_and_trauma_in_the_classroom_educators.pdf); and Welcoming Schools. (n.d.). [Home page]. <https://www.welcomingschools.org/resources/school-tips/>

[https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/addressing\\_race\\_and\\_trauma\\_in\\_the\\_classroom\\_educators.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/addressing_race_and_trauma_in_the_classroom_educators.pdf); and Welcoming Schools. (n.d.). [Home page]. <https://www.welcomingschools.org/resources/school-tips/>

For a full reference list, see the *Trainer's Guide* for Module 2.

