Classroom Environment and Climate:

"Building a classroom culture of growth mindset changes how students approach learning and helps to develop strong work habits that lead to achievement and success."
~Cheska Robinson

The Environment:

Ask yourself and then take time to reflect on:

--"What can I do to make students want to enter my room and learn?" Unfortunately, students often associate the word *boredom with academics,* what can **you** do to change that within your classroom? [48]

---"What do I want my students to see, hear, think, feel, and be curious about when they walk into my classroom on the first day of school and every day thereafter?" Remember, the power of any environment is very strong! A welcoming classroom environment and an educator's visible enthusiasm are vital essentials to student success. You can ensure your classroom environment is welcoming and with music, lively décor, funny posters, live plants, pleasant fragrances, and seasonal decorations. [49]

--A growth mindset classroom should evoke excitement and curiosity when one walks in. [50] There should be motivational posters on the walls, reminding students that struggle is actually a good thing and leads to resiliency, that *FAIL is just the first attempt at learning,* that effort and mistakes are necessary parts in the process of learning. [51] There needs to be a poster of the brain somewhere, reminding students of the control they have in growing and making their brain stronger like a muscle, and thus getting smarter.

--The room should also prepare and excite students for what they are going to learn, for example, if you are reading a book about Knights decorate one wall like a castle. Walls should not remain blank and uninteresting. Have a

[48] Moyer, 2012
[49] Moyer, 2012
[50] Saphier, 2017
[51] Robinson, 2017

recognition wall for student growth, those who have struggled and overcome obstacles and those who have made mistakes that resulted in growth. Have a wall with famous people who have struggled and overcome their challenges, so students can see what is truly necessary to succeed by <u>all</u>.

--Create small group seating (6 desks = 1 table) so it is easy to transition between individual, partner, small group, and whole class work. Have a comfy work area--a carpet with big pillows--as alternative seating.

> "The environment must send the message that what is being done in the classroom is important, all students are capable of learning whatever the class is working on, and the teacher will not give up on any student."
> ~Jon Saphier

The Climate:

--**Students must feel safe and comfortable** discussing any topic, receiving feedback, and answering/discussing open-ended questions; they must feel like they and their ideas are valued.

--***A growth mindset classroom must be*** a risk-tolerant safe zone, where mistakes, errors, and failure are highly esteemed and seen as rich learning opportunities. Students are never made fun of or laughed at, but rather encouraged and respected for their effort and hard work. As students become older, their fear of failure increases; they become more self-aware. [52] You must seek to create a supportive, comfortable environment of learning, cooperation, collaboration, and encourage a willingness to learn from each other's successes as well as mistakes.

--You must make sure your actions in the classroom are truly student and learning-focused, a place where the students and learning drive your choices.

--Meet each student where they are. When discussing work samples, choices should reflect progress, emphasizing effort and development rather than outputs.

[52] Hanson, 2016

--You should be present and available at all times to help a student who needs help. If you see a student struggling, that is the perfect opportunity to teach him or her **how to** think about their thinking/learning process and try different strategies, to guide questioning about what one has done and can do as a next step. However, a balance must be achieved; a student should not always be saved from their struggles. As I have said, the struggles are what create resiliency in students. Struggle is a necessary part of learning. Students should be taught to treat their work like a mystery and think like they are detectives working to solve the mystery! [53]

> "Learning is a consequence of thinking—it's less the doing than the thinking, the reflecting on doing that counts."
> ~Janice Wiersema (et al)

Never take for granted…

YOU have the most influence on student achievement (in the school) and that should not be taken lightly!

A List of **Must-do's**: [54]

1) Get your students to come to class prepared:
   Use the study guide and questions in the book if you ask them to read; tell them to be prepared to answer questions (that you create) in the next class; design interesting and unusual homework assignments that allow them to stretch their thinking; start class with a quick quiz; and/or put a question on the board you would like to have answered at the end of the lesson. Coming to class prepared means: being mentally prepared, ready to discuss, challenge, interact, and contribute, it does not simply mean having the right book, paper, and a pencil.
2) Take advantage of the first 10 minutes of class when students are most alert. Students enjoy classes that start in unique and interesting ways. In this way, you can help students attain the proper mindset for class. Make clever use of the time before class by:
   playing music; showing intriguing clips from relevant videos, maybe videos of successful, well-known people who have fought their way to success; putting an engaging question on the board that will be answered during class; start with a surprise, mystery, or table full of props (*great for

[53] Dweck, 2010; Robinson, 2017
[54] Coffman, 2003

visual learners); set up a problem that you will solve later in class (* great for logical learners); have students do a short free-write about what comes to mind when looking at a picture or book cover. Be creative, **hook them** before you start the meat of the lesson!

3) Make participation and interaction essential parts of your class, give a *weekly* participation grade to illustrate its importance. Help students learn to defend their views, hear alternative perspectives, and redefine their belief system. Use discussion and questions as often as possible; this allows you to hear what students are thinking and how they are processing information. It also allows you to teach students how to think critically.
4) Help students get to know each other; have them sit in different seats periodically. Place stronger students next to weaker students so they can help each other learn. Call on <u>all</u> students, not just the ones with their hands up first. Give a wait time after asking a question until most hands are up. Sometimes students who think deeply do not process the material as quickly. This approach puts the focus on the process of learning not on the correct answer.
5) Make students responsible for each other. Those who master the material more quickly can help those who don't. Assign buddies to make sure students can quickly access missed material when they are absent. I would suggest a file bin where you put extra handouts in dated folders so absent students can quickly access them upon their return. Assign study groups and give them class time to prepare for tests and projects.

**Make it clear in the beginning:

> "Everyone in the class is in the same boat and that no one is going to get left behind. But make sure your students know it's their responsibility for getting on the boat.
> ~Sara Jane Coffman

6) Teach your students to behave responsibly in groups, a life skill that must be taught! Brainstorm a list of rules: respect other's opinions, don't interrupt each other, stay on track, etc. Spend time with each group and monitor their progress and behavior. Everyone is responsible for the group working well and should have an individual job.
7) Model higher cognitive skills, model being curious and asking questions. Ask students, "Do you want to skim the surface of new information like a jet skier or examine things more deeply like a scuba diver and really

process and learn that new information, so it is accessible to you in the future and aids in you having a stronger brain?" No one word answers allowed! Daily critical thinking is a must!

8) Have students analyze their learning experiences. Give them a learning style inventory page (See helpful sites under "*Variety*"). Help them understand how they process information. One's teaching style may differ from a percentage of his or her students, discuss how you can bridge the gap to benefit each student. Get feedback from the students—how can you teach them better? Don't be afraid of a suggestion box or a survey; I highly recommend both as a means to staying in touch with how students feel and what they need/want from you. Student to student feedback is important too, like editing each other's papers. Giving feedback is another life skill worth learning!
9) End class in a meaningful way. The last 10 minutes are as important as the first 10 minutes. Give students a chance to write a short summary of everything they learned in class or give a quick quiz to gage understanding, or ask "Why did we do/study this? Why is this important?" and have an open discussion; make sure *all* students have a chance to participate.
10) Again, don't try to *save* your students from their choices. Be compassionate when it makes sense but hold them responsible for lack of effort. Teaching responsibility helps students become responsible citizens and productive members of society, which is after all our ultimate goal.

*****Remember:**

It is the classroom **climate** that you create that prepares students for thought-provoking and meaningful work! A **positive** classroom **climate** is key to learning! [55]

[55] Dweck, 2007

Challenge and Empower <u>All</u> Students:

"Important achievements require a clear focus, all-out effort,
and a bottomless trunk full of strategies. Plus allies in learning."
~Dweck

"Learning is a gradual process that requires time and effort."
~Donna Miller

--An educator's challenge in the 21st century is to provide a learning environment that is rigorous and empowering for <u>all</u> students. Again, it is the classroom culture that you choose to create that prepares students for thought-provoking and meaningful work. [56] Building a classroom culture with a focus on growth mindset changes how students approach learning and helps to develop strong work habits that lead to academic achievement and life success; one's mindset influences learning behaviors and academic success.

--Continually ask yourself, "What can I do to make students want to enter my room and learn?" Take time and reflect on that. Quality is never an accident. It is the result of sincere intention, diligent effort, and skillful execution. You need to be deliberate about the learning environment that you create each and every day. [57]

--Don't be afraid to establish and hold high expectations that challenge all students (no one struggles or coasts!), but also teach them how to be successful and meet those expectations. Always provide appropriate scaffolding to support an emerging growth mindset and student independence. Your support is one of the critical elements of a growth mindset. [58]

Struggles, Mistakes, and Failure:

"Failure is success if we learn from it."
~Malcolm Forbes

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[56] Dweck, 2007
[57] Moyer, 2012
[58] Dweck, 2007

"Learning happens in stages that require time,
Growth will not occur without error."
~Donna Miller

--Challenges, errors, and failure must be seen as *normal* and as opportunities to learn, and thus something to celebrate. If individuals avoid problems, they will miss the very richest opportunities for learning. In fact, mindset becomes most significant when students are faced with challenging situations and setbacks. It is at that point when they can either choose to quit or realize that learning comes when they fight through their confusion and struggle. [59]

--Struggle is an opportunity to teach students how to try different strategies. If at first you don't succeed, step back and think about what to try next, again, like a detective evaluating a crime scene and solving a mystery. [60] Try, try again…with different strategies. Learners should reflect on what they have done and ask, "Why didn't it work" and "what clues does it give me as to what to try next?" Struggle must be viewed as a natural part of learning! Welcome the "wobble" or discomfort in the learning process as a step in one's growth. [61]

--You need to ask students, "Where did you struggle and *how* are you working to solve those problems? What strategies did you use so far and what can you try next?" Ask them to refer to the content for evidence. Students need to be able to support their answers and views.

--Encourage students to practice and learn from, not run from, their mistakes (A life skill worth mastering!). "Learning assumes we don't have all the answers," so a know-it all attitude is detrimental to learning and to a growth mindset. [62] Make sure your students know they have permission to do what is necessary to learn and to make mistakes along the way.

--Build ways for students to learn from and correct mistakes into class time and recognize students' perseverance and improvement. [63]

--Let it be known that no one gives up or coasts; commit to differentiate learning that accommodates each student. Giving up should never be an option since anything can be learned with effort and practice. Students should know that you will never give up on them. Coasting can cause a fixed mindset: if suddenly a task takes effort, some students will develop the belief that they

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[59] Blazer, 2011; Dweck, 2006; Miller, 2013; Ricci, 2015; Wiersema et al, 2015
[60] Dweck, 2010; Robinson, 2017
[61] Miller, 2013
[62] Moussavi-Bock, 2013, p. 63
[63] The National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools, 2012

are not smart after all, if they were, why would this task not come easily as others have. Teach students that coasting is much less useful for brain growth and so a waste of their time.

Questioning Teaches Critical Thinking:

--Empowering questions, or those that promote ones' ability to act, allow students to think outside the box; they encourage self-reflection, innovative thinking, and self-efficacy. Students with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks and are more self-motivated.

--Empowering questions allow students to tap into their highest-level thinking, which leads to meaningful conversations. But again, you must create a climate of comfort and safety to allow for this willingness to be vulnerable.

Empowering questions give the student confidence and encourage them to continue.

They ask:

What are you most proud of in your project?

What is the outcome you are seeking for your project?

What difficulties are you encountering?

What are your ideas for solving these problems?

When a partner edited your project what feedback where you given?

What will you do next? [64]

Disempowering questions create a negative reaction and drain energy.

They ask:

What is the problem with your project?

Why are you late finishing that part?

[64] Nash, 2017

Why are you sharing your work with others, you need to work alone? [65]

--When you ask the right questions in a deliberate manner, students feel empowered and are given the opportunity to think critically, without being fed the information.

--Make use of the art of asking questions, where students can gain their own understanding and be empowered, with the **teacher as their guide**. If the teacher asks the right questions--students arrive at their own conclusions.

--**Encourage students' questions and inquiries:** provide daily opportunities for talk about what they are learning, confirm what they know, and ask questions that are important to them. Emphasize the value of each person's comments as they model and explain their own thinking and ask questions, while elaborating on connections.

--Provide opportunities for students to be experts and teach others what they know, which also reinforces their own knowledge. [66]

"Teaching is a wonderful way to learn."
~Carol Dweck

>>>Both students and teachers need to be engaged in daily active and purposeful learning.

5 hallmarks to create a question culture:

1) Willingness to admit, *I don't know;* after all, learning assumes one does not have all the answers.
2) Go beyond just allowing questions to fostering questions in a positive way.
3) Focus on asking empowering questions whenever possible within the lesson.
4) Emphasize the process of asking questions and searching for answers rather than finding the "right answer" as quickly as possible as that does not encourage learning to take place.
5) Accept and reward risk-taking. [67]

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[65] Nash, 2017
[66] Moyer, 2012
[67] Nash, 2017

--You face the challenge of helping students learn to ask and answer questions about their learning/work consistently for themselves, such as: "How did I do this…how was/am I thinking…why was/am I thinking that…how is this similar to or different than…why did I do that…what do I conclude about…what is my evidence…why does it matter…how does this connect/relate to?" [68]
This type of ongoing questioning that causes them to think about their thinking is called intentional mental processing, or metacognition. [69] It allows students to be more successful **t**he **n**ext **t**ime **(T.N.T).** [70] Questioning helps to promote curiosity in students, which is essential to the learning process and one's aspiration to learn.

--Empowering questions, deliberately asked by the teacher, not only cause students to feel confident about what they are doing but also encourages them to continue.

> "The result: globally competitive students who are able to think critically and solve difficult problems."
> ~Kathy Nash

The Value of Wait Time:

1) Allow time for students to work on their own with no answer given, give a brief silence for *most* to come to their own conclusion, deeper thinkers often take more time.
2) Fit in reflective work time. This allows students to get more engaged, accommodates a greater range of students, and pushes them toward deeper thinking. Acknowledge the involvedness of any given task; don't say something is easy, as that could make a confused student feel badly.
3) Have students present their work/answers on the board when possible. This forces them to be better, more strategic thinkers about their thinking process; in this way their thinking or argument is not split up the way it is in an open discussion, where they may contribute just a bit of information to the discussion.

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[68] Wiersema et al, 2015
[69] Wiersema et al, 2015
[70] Wilson and Conyers, 2016

4) A question with an open-ended answer, trains students to recognize better and worse examples of convincing answers. Let students debate using evidence; allow for a give and take discussion. [71]

[71] Sussman, 2017