

SHAPING A CAN-DO CLASSROOM

The graphic features the words 'SHAPING A CAN-DO' in a white, bold, sans-serif font at the top. Below this, the word 'CLASSROOM' is written in large, green, bold, sans-serif letters. Overlaid on the 'CLASSROOM' text are four yellow hands, each with fingers spread, appearing to reach up or be raised in a gesture of participation or agreement.

Every classroom has a culture that gives positive or negative meaning to the learning occurring within its perimeters. This culture comprises the traditions, understandings, and expectations that teachers, students, and parents share about learning.

When the culture is strong, positive, and healthy, it produces a *can-do* community in which students toil daily to grow intellectually, personally, and socially. It is an environment initiated by the teacher and nurtured by all participants.

Nurturing a can-do environment starts with a teacher's sense of optimism in building relationships with students and parents. With that beginning, teachers can then employ other can-do fundamentals.

Classroom Heroes

Heroes are important to the classroom culture. They personify a learning community, providing role models who inspire others through their extraordinary deeds and successes. Developing a can-do attitude in

students begins with stories about heroic students from their school. Former students from the same

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class as the current students serve as reachable heroes.

After learning about these heroes, students write to them, engage in two-way e-mail correspondence, and invite them to visit. Once sufficient information is collected, students work in collaborative groups to develop written profiles about the heroes. Photographs and other obtainable artifacts also should be collected.

Using these materials, students create classroom displays about the heroes. The teacher and students should regularly discuss the heroic attributes of these former students.

Jennifer and Travis are two such heroes. Jennifer, a senior at a California coastal high school, often visits her former elementary classroom to assist the teacher and inspire students. She achieved heroic status in her old classroom for winning her state's top academic awards for visual arts, creative writing, and mathematics. She went on to achieve an A-plus average in high school, lead her varsity volleyball team to the California Interscholastic Federation Championship, and have one of her paintings selected to hang in the Congress of the United States.

Travis, an A-average student throughout his school years, was offered full-ride basketball scholarships to three major large colleges in the southeast. Following graduation, he also was asked to

join the world of professional basketball. In making the difficult decision, Travis consulted his family. His parents approved the pro-ball choice, provided that he began college classes on a part-time basis. Now, Travis is fast becoming a leading player. When not playing basketball, however, he routinely visits students at his former schools to help them develop self-esteem.

Jennifer and Travis represent only two of many student success stories. Teachers need only a bit of imagination and investigative effort to identify local heroes.

Classroom Traditions

Tradition—passing customs from one generation of students to another—is an important feature of a can-do classroom culture. Traditions influence and shape student behaviors.

For decades, a now-retired Colorado elementary school teacher was recognized for the spelling prowess of her students. Her class put on an annual school-wide invitational spelling bee, and it was an accepted fact that her students were proficient spellers. If they weren't in the fall, they were proficient by spring. It was tradition!

Students deficient in spelling skills worked with the help of peers and their parents to improve deficiencies. Becoming a good speller and earning a certificate of merit in the spelling bee was a matter of personal pride.

It's never too late to create classroom customs. Traditions that influence student behavior and academic achievement often start humbly. Identify a tradition that will shape a strong, positive, and healthy classroom culture, and then roll up your sleeves and put it into action.

Recognizing, Celebrating Success

Do the walls of your classroom silently shout out recognition and celebration of students' accomplishments? Students need daily reminders of their achievements. Success begets success!

Make your classroom a wall-to-wall success story. Fill the room with students' accomplishments—A-emblazoned composition papers, 100-percent spelling tests and math assignments, carefully done line drawings or colorful canvases. Classroom shelves might display three-dimensional products, such as sculpture, science experiments, social studies projects, and fashion creations.

Slowly but steadily, students subconsciously absorb the positive feedback and realize how much they are learning and accomplishing. The teacher never stops congratulating students for their good work. Mirroring the teacher's behavior, students in turn develop the habit of congratulating one another for a job well done.

Can-Do Action Plan

What does it take to have a strong, positive, and healthy classroom culture? It requires identifying heroes and building tradition, recognizing and celebrating accomplishment, and instilling the pride of ownership in students. It's never too soon or late to start shaping a can-do culture! 🍏



Can-Do Classroom on Tap

Determine whether your classroom is a strong, positive, and healthy classroom culture by answering the following questions.

1. Are my students enthusiastic about learning?
2. Is a can-do attitude obvious among students?
3. Do lessons respect and accommodate learning styles?
4. Are students' academic achievements and positive behaviors recognized and celebrated?
5. Are students' accomplishments regularly displayed?
6. Do students take responsibility for developing bulletin boards and displays?
7. Do students keep the classroom environment attractive and clean?