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Seven Keys to a Positive Learning Environment in Your Classroom

By Tom Hierck

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Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Seven Keys to a Positive Learning Environment in Your Classroom* by Tom Hierck. *Seven Keys to a Positive Learning Environment in Your Classroom* details what educators can do to create classroom atmospheres that maximize students' learning.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

Chapter 1

Classroom Culture and Positive Relationships:

Precursors to a Positive Learning Environment

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1. Briefly describe what *classroom culture* encompasses.

2. Why may educators lose belief in the efficacy of cultural change? For what reasons have you or one of your colleagues felt skeptical of a change in school culture?

3. According to Douglas Reeves, what five characteristics do leaders and teachers of 90/90/90 School cultures exhibit?

4. In his career, what conclusions has author Tom Hierck reached about the behaviors of students who feel connected? How have you seen students who feel connected flourish in the classroom?

5. What are the new three Rs of education, and which of these three Rs do school and academic standards sometimes neglect? What does your school currently do toward fulfilling the expectation of this R?

Chapter 2

Classroom Expectations

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1. At the end of the first day of school, what message do you hope that students take home with them about their learning environment?

2. Ask educators at your school to each define the word *summarize*. How do their interpretations compare, and what does this tell you about how well your school has developed a common language?

3. Take a few moments to answer the questions that teachers should ask themselves to do an inventory of their belief system (page 22). What do your responses teach you about your personal beliefs?

4. In your own words, define *chase time*. Describe a classroom situation in which you experienced chase time. Which of the strategies for minimizing chase time that this chapter presents do you think would have worked best in your situation, and why?

5. Consider the strategies that can help teachers establish classroom routines. Which of these strategies do you think best fits the context of your community, school, and students, and why?

Chapter 3

Targeted Instruction

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1. What is the premise of targeted instruction?

2. Describe the "Bag of Me" strategy. Why does this strategy help students develop a sense of belonging in the classroom?

3. Why should teachers approach behavioral struggles in the same way they approach academic struggles? Consider a behavioral struggle that arose in your classroom and what handling it like an academic struggle would have entailed.

4. What questions should teachers ask themselves when a student does not execute a desired behavior as expected?

5. What trust do positive teacher-student relationships help build? Why is it important that teachers build relationships with older students?

Chapter 4

Positive Reinforcement

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1. What did Graham Nuthall's research discover about the feedback students receive every day? For what two reasons do students like to receive this kind of feedback?

2. Why should teachers include celebration, recognition, and reward systems in class? In what ways do you use these types of feedback in your classroom?

3. Describe what teachers do in the direct approach, the correct approach, and the connect approach to reinforcement? Give your own example of what language sounds like for each of these approaches.

4. According to Greg Wolcott, what are the components of every student's STORY? What can teachers do when they know each student's STORY?

5. What ratio of praise to reprimands should classrooms meet? What should teachers consider to determine if they have verged toward giving too much praise?

Chapter 5

Data-Driven Decisions

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1. What does it mean for teachers to use data as a hammer, and what does it mean for teachers to use data as a flashlight?

2. Why does Douglas Reeves say a physical exam metaphorically represents formative use and an autopsy represents summative use?

3. Use the ABC direct-observation tool to consider a behavior in which one of your students does not demonstrate proficiency. What are the antecedent, behavior, and consequence for this situation?

4. Briefly describe what event recording, interval recording, momentary time sampling, and duration recording each involve. For your class's purposes, what data could you best record using each of these strategies?

5. How are *instructional agility* and *instructional freedom* different?

Chapter 6

Differentiation and Enrichment

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1. In your own words, define what *differentiation* is and is not and what *enrichment* is and is not.

2. Consider the list of strategies for differentiating a classroom environment. Provide examples of how you could bring each of these strategies to fruition for your classroom purposes.

3. List the six steps that Barbara Coloroso says teachers can use to deal with behavioral challenges. What is a challenge you've faced in your classroom that you think this six-step process could help you tackle?

4. Describe the steps involved in the Check-In Check-Out monitoring and mentoring tool.

5. What should classroom teachers consider as they try to address behavioral gap that arise in gifted students?

Chapter 7

Collaborative Teams

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1. Why are collegial support and mentorship important? Describe a case in which you discovered the benefits of working in collaboration outweighed the ease of working in isolation.

2. How are collaboration and universal agreement different?

3. What can teachers do to effectively react to unresponsive parents of their students? Describe a situation in which you faced an unresponsive parent, how you dealt with it, and what you could have done differently to improve your reaction.

4. Define *social and emotional learning* (SEL). What five competencies should teachers teach and reinforce through SEL instructional design?

5. What six teaching strategies do Jennifer Ng'andu, Olga Acosta Price, and Wendy Baron purport can help students learn social skills while gaining academic knowledge? Which of these strategies do you already incorporate into your classroom, and which ones could you better use in class?

Chapter 8

Connection to the Schoolwide System

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1. What is the best way to provide dependable behavioral interventions for students? What are the down sides of classroom-based approaches to behavioral interventions?

2. Based on the example for implementing a three-step process to manage classroom behaviors (page 108), describe a case in which you could use the three-step process to address a behavior that does not meet classroom expectations. What does the impact of the three-step process depend on?

3. According to Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, what four factors do students require in order for them to learn, and what does meeting these four conditions ensure?

4. What are some reasons why it is more beneficial to focus on the causes of behaviors than to rush to consequences for the same behaviors?

5. How did you feel when expressing your opinions among teachers when you first started teaching? Based on this experience, how do you think new teachers could best find the courage to respectfully disagree and support their ideas with their coworkers?