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Principles of Pedagogy
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Principle of Pedagogy 6 – Positive educational environments empower learning

The classroom environment is an indication of what is valued when it comes to teaching and learning. The placement of the class library, the location of the teacher's desk, the arrangement of the learning space, a designated space for the class to gather, and the wall displays are all pedagogical statements. The environment is described as the 'third teacher'. Student choice and inquiring lead to engaging learning spaces.

Physical aspects of the classroom that need to be considered are:

- The location of resources, equipment and furniture
- Provision of contemporary teaching tools
- Lighting, sound, warmth, colour
- How the classroom reflects the culture and community of its learners

What is displayed in classrooms is a statement about what is valued. Wall displays, along with the physical arrangement and organization of classrooms can be a support for learners.

The Classroom Environment

A supportive, safe, respectful, caring and positive learning environment is fundamental for all students. The learning environment fosters a sense of belonging, enhances the joy of learning, honours diversity, allows for student choice and promotes respectful relationships. The physical classroom environment relays strong messages about what is valued and the pedagogy that takes place. The student is the centre of all learning, and the physical classroom environment reflects this.

The classroom is the meeting point for students and teachers. The physical environment shapes how students feel, think and behave. It has a powerful influence on how well students achieve academically, socially and emotionally. The physical classroom layout and aesthetic characteristics enhances student's attitude and motivation towards learning. Feeling comfortable in their surroundings allows students to relax, feel safe so that learning can occur.

The Classroom Environment guidelines

1. Is student – centered

The *Principles of Pedagogy* is the Catholic Education foundational document that connects teaching and learning to wellbeing. Students are at the centre of their learning. This includes collaborating in the decisions about the physical design, arrangement and organisation of their classrooms.

2. Is flexible and adaptable

Organization of the furniture in the room is important. The furniture layout allows enough space for all students to easily move throughout the classroom. Designated learning areas support inquiry and optimise learning.

Both students and teachers benefit from the flexibility and spatial variety that portable screens and dividers offer, instantly creating smaller spaces within larger ones for group or individual work.

3. Is comfortable

The physical space has significant influence on the overall wellbeing of students and teachers. Truly feeling at home in their surroundings will allow students to relax and retain more information.

- Add soft home furnishings such as bean bags, rugs and pillows
- Use warmer colours, skin tones and pastels
- Thoughtfully place works of art / displays
- Use plants and objects from the natural world

4. Has a carefully selected colour theme

Colour has the ability to impact students' attention, behaviour and achievement. Certain colours in the learning environment improves visual processing, relaxes students and enhances brain development. Colour is one way to positively enhance and change the learning space.

- Large amounts of bright colours such as reds, yellows and oranges, may cause overstimulation in a learning environment
- Cool colours produce feelings of calmness, relaxation, happiness and comfort

5. Has order and space

A clean and distinct environment helps the student focus their attention on learning instead of irrelevant stimuli. The classroom arrangement contributes to the student's grasp of order and space.

- Ensure the classroom is clutter free
- Eliminate non-essential visual materials
- Ensure teacher resources are packed away and covered

6. Is predictable

When a student can understand their environment, emotional security is enhanced and the student feels an increased sense of control. Consistency and predictability within the classroom environment creates a sense of safety, and learning can occur.

- Use visuals and labels so that classrooms are legible and students can operate the room independently

7. Has a calming space

Calming Space

The calming space is a designated area that students can access when wanting some quiet time. Students are given the choice and freedom to be able to use an *age-appropriate* calming space *in private* and *with dignity*.

Types of Calming Spaces

Primary Schools

- A designated area within the classroom
- Break out areas adjacent to the classroom, in line of sight of the teacher
- Designated sensory spaces that are supervised
- Teepees or tents

Secondary Schools

- Supervised designated Wellbeing Room
- Designated area in the library that is in line of sight of a teacher
- Supervised designated area in a staff member's office (e.g. Year Co-ordinator, Wellbeing Officer)

Calming Space guidelines

1. Available for all students
2. Age-appropriate
3. Caters for the students' needs
4. Is clearly differentiated from other learning areas
5. Clutter free
6. Has natural light
7. Is safe
8. Has a calming colour scheme
9. Contains a few calming / sensory items

Appropriate use of Calming Spaces

1. Established rules for the use

Students and teachers collaborate to establish rules on how to use the space regarding:

- How students access the space, ie. through the use of break cards
- Number of students allowed at one time
- Length of time spent in the space

2. Time spent in the area is voluntary and negotiated with the student

3. The student has the freedom of movement to return to the class group when they feel comfortable

4. The space has been discussed, planned and approved as being appropriate for that particular student

5. The use of the strategy is documented in the student's Personal Plan and reviewed regularly

6. The space respects the dignity and privacy of the student

It is essential that the design of these spaces within classrooms be carefully considered and that their use is monitored, even when used on a voluntary basis by the student, to ensure that practices are consistent with and respectful of students' human rights, dignity and privacy (Shaddock, 2015, p. 114).

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