Creating conditions for learning

*Pedagogy and Practice:
Teaching and Learning in
Secondary Schools*

Unit 18: Improving the climate for learning

**department for
education and skills**
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

How to use this study guide

This study unit offers some practical strategies that teachers use to improve the climate for learning. The techniques suggested are tried and tested; they draw on both academic research and the experience of practising teachers.

By working through this guide you can build your teaching repertoire step by step, starting with strategies that are easy to implement and moving on to those that will help pupils develop their skills still further. The unit contains 'reflections', to help you reflect on an idea or on your own practice, as well as practical tips and tasks to help you consider advice or try out strategies in your classroom. There are case studies to exemplify particular points, a summary of the research and some suggestions for 'next steps' and further reading. The final page invites you to reflect on the material and to set your personal targets for the future.

You can work through this unit in a number of ways:

- Start small; choose one class to work with. Ask another teacher to help by talking through what you intend to do and to act as a mentor.

- Work with another teacher or group of teachers who teach the same class. Work together on developing your approach to improving the climate for learning. After three weeks compare notes. Discuss which strategies are the most effective and why.

- Find someone to pair up with and team-teach. Design the tasks together and divide the role of teacher in the lesson between you.

- Work with a small group of teacher-researchers within your school. Use the guide to help you focus your work as a professional learning community.

- Identify sections of the unit that are particularly relevant to you and focus on those.

There is space in this study guide for you to write notes and responses to some of the questions, but you may also find it helpful to keep a notebook handy. For some tasks, you might want to make an audio recording or video of yourself in action so you can review your work more easily. You could add this, along with any other notes and planning that you do as part of your work on this unit, to your CPD portfolio.

The evidence of work you gather in your portfolio could count as points towards accreditation of an MA, or could support your application for membership of a professional body, such as the General Teaching Council of England (GTCE). It could also be used to support an application to reach threshold or Advanced Skills Teacher status.

You will need access to video sequence 18, Improving the climate for learning, when working through this unit.

Improving the climate for learning

Contents

Introduction

Positive classroom climates

The climate in a classroom has an important effect on the quality of learning which takes place there. Measures of a positive classroom climate include:

- a recognition by pupils that the teacher treats them fairly, and is committed to teaching them;

- effective classroom routines, such as the way pupils enter and leave and the way lessons begin and end;

- strategies for making learning dynamic, interesting and challenging;

- a concern that pupils should feel secure, both in terms of the physical environment and emotionally;

- classroom displays which support learning and are up-to-date and attractive;

- table and seating arrangements which are varied to suit different teaching strategies and pupil groupings, and so enhance the learning process.

Every time pupils enter a classroom they respond according to their perceptions of how issues such as those above are being supported and implemented.

Common issues

Creating a positive classroom climate requires significant input from teachers. Often, it seems that it takes pupils a long time to focus at the start of a lesson and there never seems to be enough time to cover everything on the lesson plan. Pupils seem to have a very short attention span, spending considerable amounts of time off-task, and work remains unfinished. In addition, homework tends to be of a low standard or not done at all. As a result, teachers often feel that they spend much of the lesson trying to keep pupils on-task rather than addressing the learning objectives.

Resolving the issues

You can make a significant difference to your own classroom. Start with something which is well within your control and relatively easy to manage. Be determined to maintain the change deliberately and purposefully for the first few weeks as your pupils adjust. By then your change will have become established and you will often find pupils themselves taking more interest and supporting your efforts.

The classroom climate is more likely to be conducive to learning if teachers:

- make the most of lesson beginnings by being in the classroom before pupils arrive;

- share lesson objectives with pupils;

- move quickly into the lesson itself;

- make the most of lesson endings by leaving time to review what has been covered;

- set the scene for the next lesson;

- set up efficient homework routines, make homework appropriate and provide feedback;

- display all pupils' work regularly;

- use different arrangements of furniture for different activities;

- over time, speak to each pupil individually about things that interest them;

- use language in a way that builds relationships and raises pupils' self-esteem.

1 Classroom routines

Established classroom routines that pupils are familiar with are a common feature of effective lessons. However, some routines are more successful than others! The grid below, which is adapted from *Closing the Learning Gap*, by Mike Hughes, contrasts some effective and some ineffective routines.

Table opposite: Adapted from: Mike Hughes. *Closing the Learning Gap* (Network Educational Press) © 1999 Mike Hughes. Reproduced by permission of the publisher. www.networkpress.co.uk; PO Box 635, Stafford ST16 1BF; fax: 01785 228566.

More effective	Less effective
The teacher is waiting at the door to meet the pupils at the very start of the lesson.	The teacher arrives late and already the pupils are unsettled and ill prepared to learn.
The teacher ensures that the pupils enter the classroom in an orderly manner and asks them, in an encouraging way, to quickly get their books out and get ready to learn.	Pupils drift in, taking time to settle and get books out ready for the lesson.
The teacher gains eye contact with the latecomers who are directed by a nod of the head to enter quickly and quietly. They know that the teacher will eventually speak to them and expect a good explanation for their lateness.	Each latecomer is, in turn, chastised by the teacher in front of the others. Those pupils who arrived on time feel as if they are to blame.
The teacher begins the lesson promptly by making clear the context for the lesson and its objectives in a way pupils understand. This conveys the expectation that pupils will learn something of value during the lesson.	As a hush descends, the teacher reads out the register and then starts the lesson by collecting in last week's homework. Most pupils hand this in. A handful (whose identity is no great surprise) explain nervously, or sometimes aggressively, why they have failed to complete the task.
The teacher describes and explains the structure of the lesson and gives timings for various elements or tasks. The first activity is quickly under way, making explicit demands for pupils' full attention.	The teacher debates with frustration, although occasionally with amusement, each pupil's reason for not doing their homework. By the time this is over some 8 minutes of lesson time have already elapsed.
The teacher shows interest in the pupils and the work, and as a consequence the pupils engage positively with tasks, anticipating challenge and interest. Textbooks, if required, are efficiently distributed by a couple of pupils in a well-understood routine.	The teacher fails to notice that some pupils are beginning to get restless; any sense of anticipation is fading fast.
The teacher organises the time effectively so that there is an opportunity at the end of the lesson for a plenary, which includes a period of reflection on what was learned. Pupils understand the importance of this to their learning.	The teacher fails to plan the timing of the lesson effectively, and the end is characterised by pupils dashing around, collecting resources and packing away.
The teacher gives high status to the importance of the homework by giving the necessary amount of time to introduce it and to give the pupils a chance to ask questions and to check their understanding.	The pupils are not fully engaged in the task and their attention wanders on to other things, such as the next lesson or getting to the front of the lunch queue. Homework is hurriedly set, but the bell is imminent and not all pupils record the task effectively.
The teacher controls how pupils leave the lesson, so that departure is orderly. The opportunity is taken to say something of personal interest to one or two pupils as they leave. Over time every pupil is included.	The teacher allows the pupils to scramble out of the room, pushing and shoving. Not only are many unsure of the homework task, most are already forgetting the lesson completely.

Review your classroom routines   **15 minutes**

Read through the table of classroom routines above. Reflect on your own lessons. Where in a continuum between more and less effective do your classroom routines lie?

What the Key Stage 3 Strategy has to say about effective lessons

Throughout the Key Stage 3 Strategy there is a focus on good teaching within effective lessons, which have characteristically: a starter, a middle section, consisting of a number of episodes and mini-plenaries when appropriate, and a final plenary. Both research and the developing experience within the Strategy confirm that lessons that have well-planned and purposeful beginnings, with well-organised episodes of learning in the middle section and clearly defined and meaningful ends are more effective in enabling pupils to learn.

2   Beginnings and endings

The importance of lesson beginnings and ends cannot be overemphasised. In *Closing the Learning Gap*, Mike Hughes explains:

> *Students learn more at the beginning and the end of a learning experience than they do in the middle. This is sometimes called the BEM (beginning, end, middle) principle.*

> *The beginning, in particular, is the time when the potential for learning is at its greatest, when the relatively high concentration, but particularly anticipation, makes the learner more receptive.*

This principle has important implications that teachers should be aware of and actively exploit. In planning a lesson, consider how you will:

- make the most of the beginning;
- create lots of 'beginnings' throughout the lesson;
- make the most of the end.

Making the most of lesson beginnings

You can use a number of simple tactics to start your lessons more productively.

- Be at the door to greet pupils as they arrive. Be welcoming and positive. Smile at all of them, even ones you regard as difficult or uncooperative. Over time try to notice something positive about each of them. Remember names and use them.

- Engage the class in the first minute with something about today's lesson, or something positive and memorable from the last one. Alternatively, use a stimulating starter activity.

- With the potential for learning at its greatest, the lesson beginning is the crucial moment during which to emphasise what you want all pupils to learn and why. Have the lesson objectives written on the board and clearly and quickly identify

the expected learning outcomes using language with which the pupils can easily engage.

- Get straight into the lesson, leaving the register and collecting of homework until later.

For more on effective starter activities, see unit 5 Starters and plenaries.

Practical tip

If you need to take the register early in the lesson, then write a simple task on the board to engage the class while you do it. One possibility is to get pupils to write down three important words that they remember from the last lesson. You can follow this up by asking individuals to give you one word and the reason for choosing it. Alternatively you could quickly poll the five most common words.

Task 2

Improve the start to your lesson   15 minutes

- Choose one class you feel confident with.

- Plan an improved start to their lesson, keeping in mind the tactics suggested above. Include a challenging task, for example:

  – Write down one fact you know about …

  – What evidence is there that …?

  – Write down two key words from last lesson; be prepared to explain to the rest of the class (or to a small group) why they are key words for you.

- At the end of one lesson explain that you are going to change the way you begin the next lesson and why. Tell the pupils to be ready, or perhaps give them a question to think about for homework.

- Begin the next lesson as you have planned. During the lesson you can follow up the responses to your initial questions, if necessary modifying what you teach to more closely match what the pupils already know. This raises pupils' self-esteem by acknowledging that they do know something already.

- Towards the end of your lesson you could ask the pupils what they thought about the new routine.

- With your mentor or another teacher from the department, review the effectiveness of your lesson start.

It can take time to change the pupils' behaviour. Be gently persistent and consistent with what you ask, always ensuring that it is a reasonable request. Pupils need to understand the routine and its purpose before they will engage properly.

As you restructure your lesson beginnings, explain to the class the purpose of the change and your expectations of them. Emphasise how it will help them to learn better. Once introduced, you need to use the routine for every lesson until it becomes embedded.

In Year 9, the organisation of science teaching meant that the teachers saw each class only once a week. One teacher planned to maximise the time for learning by careful management of these lessons. This is how she described her strategy.

'I try hard to be in my lab before the pupils arrive, and they know that we have to make a sharp start to the lesson. Sometimes they complain that I hurry them too much, but with only one lesson a week we have a lot to do and I often remind them of this. I get one or two pupils to hand back homework and go straight into the lesson by explaining the objective and how today's learning fits in with last week. Dealing with homework can be such an interruption in the lesson, so I insist that pupils do it on the evening of the lesson and hand their books in the next day. I have a special bookshelf for the purpose. I check at lunchtime for any missing work and send notes to form tutors in time for the afternoon registration. I mark the work that evening and any which is less than acceptable is returned via the form tutor with a request for the pupil to find me and talk about the work. In this way I try to ensure that all pupils produce meaningful work which supports their learning and that we don't use lesson time doing wasteful administration or remonstrating with individuals. We can usefully talk about how the homework outcomes have prepared the pupils for today's lesson.'

Making lots of beginnings

To really make the most of pupils' potential for learning, you can increase the number of beginnings in a lesson. Effective lessons are often constructed from a number of episodes, each of which offers an opportunity for a new beginning. For more on planning episodes of teaching, see unit 1 Structuring learning and unit 5 Starters and plenaries.

Making the most of lesson endings

There are some simple tactics you can use for more organised and productive endings to the lesson.

- End early. Don't try to cover too much and leave up to 10 minutes to finish the lesson properly.

- Use the last part of the lesson for a plenary – group or individual reflection on what has been learned.

- Ask pupils to identify two or three key points they have learned from the lesson. They could share these in pairs and then record them in words or pictures, adding colour if it helps. Reviewing these key points could be part of the homework routine.

- If appropriate, summarise the learning. You could remind pupils of the context for the lesson in terms of what went before and what is to come.

- Set the scene for the following lesson.

- Have clear routines for an organised departure and have some way of saying goodbye and thanking the pupils for a good lesson.

Teachers who achieve an orderly departure from the lesson all insist that pupils retrieve belongings only when given permission and then leave according to an agreed plan. This could be:

- row by row, varying the order each lesson;

- one by one, after answering a simple question about the lesson;

- in groups, according to the quality of the groups' efforts during the lesson;

- one by one, after handing in homework.

Planning plenary activities

The plenary is an important part of the lesson ending. The Key Stage 3 Strategy leaflet *Making good use of the plenary* lists the purposes of plenaries.

> *To provide the necessary variety, plenaries can be used to:*

> - *draw together what has been learned in terms of the learning outcomes, to highlight the most important rather than the most recent points, to summarise key facts, ideas and vocabulary, and stress what needs to be remembered;*

> - *generalise from examples generated earlier in the lesson;*

> - *go through an exercise, question pupils and rectify any remaining misunderstandings;*

> - *make links to other work and what the class will go on to do next;*

> - *highlight the progress pupils have made and remind them about their personal targets;*

> - *highlight not only what progress pupils have made but how they have learned;*

> - *set homework to extend or consolidate classwork and prepare for future lessons.*

The leaflet itself offers suggestions for plenary-session activities and you will find further ideas in unit 5 Starters and plenaries.

Improve your lesson endings   15 minutes

As with task 2 choose a class you feel confident with.

Keeping in mind the tactics suggested above, plan a lesson ending. It should include a plenary activity – for example:

- Ask pupils to write down individually two or three things they have learned from the lesson. Don't specify what the things need to be; encourage the pupils to reflect.

- Ask pupils to explain one thing from their list to a partner, or to a group of four or to the whole class.

- Ask one or two 'volunteers' to remind the class of the lesson objective and to say whether it has been achieved. This is much more effective if you forewarn the 'volunteers' of this task during the lesson so they can think about it. Allow others to contribute their views.

At the beginning of the lesson explain to the class what you have planned for the plenary and why, to help them prepare.

With your mentor or another teacher review how the lesson ending went.

There may also be plenaries during the course of the lesson. These 'mini-plenaries' provide opportunities for teachers and pupils to reflect on and recognise what has been learned and how this learning took place. Additionally, such plenaries facilitate assessment, whereby the teacher can judge how successfully lesson objectives have been met, and what further steps are necessary. See unit 5 Starters and plenaries.

Homework routines

There is some controversy about the value of homework, but research generally confirms that pupils who do homework make more progress than pupils who don't. In both primary and secondary schools homework helps to develop good study habits and positive attitudes towards school and learning. The following list suggests general principles for effective homework.

- **Do value homework as a learning tool:** If the pupils see it as something that adds to their learning they will be more willing to complete it.

- **Integrate homework with the lesson or topic:** Make it plain how the homework consolidates or extends work done in class. Review homework during the following lesson to draw attention to its importance in learning the topic. Whilst practising skills during homework can be necessary, homework is most effective when it reinforces major curriculum ideas.

- **Make homework manageable:** Homework should be challenging but pupils should be able to complete it successfully. It should not be confusing or frustrating or used as a way of testing pupils.

- **Provide appropriate feedback:** For pupils to see that the teacher takes homework seriously it must be marked and returned as soon as possible. It must be properly corrected as uncorrected work gives the impression that simply doing something was enough. Feedback must be meaningful and supportive and if the pupil has to do some supplementary work then this too must be quickly followed up. Research also shows that feedback should be in the form of comments and not marks, which can be seen as an end in themselves and are demotivating for students who habitually fail to score highly.

- **Connect homework to everyday life:** This can make homework more relevant. For example, ask pupils to calculate the volume of paint needed to paint their own room, or to select leaves from garden plants as part of a science activity.

- **Use homework planners:** These can help pupils develop independent learning and organisational skills. Pupils have to be taught how to use a planner effectively. It is common for form tutors to check such planners weekly but this is often cursory, not seen as very important and focuses on completion. It is better to spend the time each week checking fewer planners and discussing with pupils how their planners can best be used. Ensure that all homework is written down.

- **Pursue non-completion of homework:** The consequences of non-completion need to be made clear in terms of failed learning opportunities. There should be routines for dealing with this such as completion of homework during breaks or by the following day. It may be necessary to spend time with individual pupils to support completion. This is often time well spent. Failure to pursue non-completion indicates that the homework was not important in the first place.

3 The physical environment

The physical environment has a significant impact on how pupils feel about their learning. In effective classrooms, teachers work at creating a room where it is evident that learning is its purpose. When pupils enter the room they are given clear messages about the importance of learning and about what is expected of them. Within the room there is information and other support they might need. The furniture need not always be in the same place but it is organised to help them learn.

If you teach in several classrooms, then it may be possible to work with another teacher who shares one of the rooms. The advantage of this approach is that you can share ideas and tasks. Ensure that you talk to and involve any other teachers who share the room, explaining what you are doing and why. They may not be able to help, but at least they will be able to encourage the pupils to support and sustain your efforts.

Display

Research has shown that an important component of the classroom climate is the quality of the display.

Display is intended mainly to support learning but it can also reflect the teacher's enthusiasm for their subject and make a dull classroom attractive and exciting. Bright, colourful displays simply make a room more pleasant to be in. Furthermore, some research suggests that a significant amount of learning may happen subconsciously. If this is the case, then it is possible that pupils learn subconsciously from display.

Teachers are not expected to put up and maintain displays: this can usefully be completed by teaching assistants, or even pupils. However, planning displays is a professional activity because it provides a learning experience. Displays do need to be presentable, and by implication be important, and have taken care to produce. Teaching assistants can share the responsibility, and pupils should contribute when appropriate.

Displays can:

- provide information such as key words, key facts or the 'big picture' of a topic;

- reinforce good habits through the use of key questions: what, when, why, how, who and where;

- stimulate curiosity, by offering new information, a puzzle or a challenge;

- affirm and inspire, for instance through examples of effective work or suitable quotations.

To be most effective, displays should be positioned just above eye level. Research shows that when the brain is in visual mode the eyes tend to look up (in auditory mode the eyes tend to remain level and in kinaesthetic mode they tend to look down). Because the brain is stimulated by novelty, display needs to be changed regularly.

Task 4

Review the displays in your room   15 minutes

Ask yourself the following questions about the displays in your room:

- How much display is in the room and how much space is available?

- Do displays support and demonstrate quality work by pupils?

- What condition are the displays in, when were they last changed and who put them up?

- How do the displays support your current teaching?

- How much pupils' work is included?

- What do the pupils think of the displays?

- What do the displays say about your approach to teaching?

Then, in the light of your observations, think about what improvements could be made and consider:

- What improvement could be made to the room as it is?

- Does the room need additional resources to improve display? These could be:

    – display board(s);

    – shelves or other surfaces for artefacts, resources or possibly plants;

    – coat pegs or bag stores to release existing surfaces.

- Who would supply these resources?

- What do you have to do to try to obtain them?

Make notes on your thoughts and ideas. You may find it useful to talk to your head of department or mentor about your ideas before taking any action.

Having thought about what improvements you would like to make, you will need to identify how you might obtain any resources you need. Your colleagues are more likely to be supportive if you are clear in your reasoning for the need for certain resources – in particular, the ways in which you intend to use them to support more effective learning.

Planning your displays

Use the displays in your room to reflect your ideas and interests as well as those of the pupils. Also include information such as fire escape routes and the weekly bulletin. This too needs to be organised.

What you put in a display should be determined by the purpose you want it to serve. This will include the objectives for topics and even lessons. It can also serve longer-term objectives such as raising pupils' self-esteem. The purposes of a display may include the following.

Modelling good practice: This can be done with pupils' work or even some of your own which shows the qualities you are looking for. It is often useful to display work along with comments or a commentary that shows how the work meets any assessment criteria. In this way pupils gain a better understanding of how they can improve their own work. It should go without saying that you should not display heavily corrected work. Displaying work of older pupils can raise pupils' expectations by providing useful insights into what they will cover in the subject and the standards that are expected. A display of pupils' work with a commentary is sometimes called a 'quality board'. The word 'quality' can refer to the fact that it focuses on the qualities of the work and helps to show what 'good quality' looks like.

Raising pupils' self-esteem: To make your display effective, try to ensure that over time the work of all pupils is displayed. Avoid displaying only the very best or neatest work because this usually means that some pupils' work may never be displayed.

Providing information: Good-quality, commercially produced, subject-specific material can provide information to kindle interest or could be used by pupils for tasks that you set. General-interest material may remain in a display for a term or so. Topic-specific information should be displayed only for as long as the topic is being covered in lessons.

Providing instructions or guidance: Displayed teacher-produced (and some commercially produced) materials such as word lists, writing frames and other guidance can easily be accessed by pupils at any point in a lesson. Such material usually changes with each topic.

Providing short-term school and form notices: Notices generally have a short life and can often look scrappy. You could appoint one or two pupils to be responsible for this section, removing and replacing items as necessary. Particularly important items can be highlighted by backing or headings or perhaps the use of large arrows which could say 'read this now' or something similar.

Providing long-term information: Long-term notices such as fire routines often become 'wallpaper', unnoticed and gradually getting dirty and scruffy. Have a separate section for this kind of information; ensure that it is mounted carefully and changed at least annually, even if you just replace one sheet with an identical copy.

Practical tip

Some teachers have a separate section of display for news items. These are usually short pieces cut from newspapers, magazines etc. Of necessity, these have a short 'shelf life', and teachers who have this sort of display tend to clear it out every month, building it up again over the next month. Pupils very quickly become interested in this kind of information and can be encouraged to contribute their own cuttings.

Case study 2

A mathematics teacher was keen to improve the quality of her Year 7 pupils' work by building more effectively on their primary experience. Having visited one of the feeder primary schools, she decided that she would tackle a topic on shape, space and measures. She obtained Year 6 work done by some of her pupils and displayed it at the start of the topic to remind the class of what they had already learned. Over the next few lessons she added Year 7 work to the display. Following the primary-school practice, she mounted the new work on backing sheets and used computer-generated arrows and words to highlight the development of ideas from Year 6 to Year 7. She found that pupils remembered more easily what they had done before and were keen to talk about their new learning. Conveniently, the display was up for the school's open evening and it generated much interest from parents as well as prospective pupils.

Creating a quality board

The essential elements of a quality board are:

- a good piece of pupil's work;

- a good-quality picture frame, large enough to contain the work and a surrounding commentary;

- teacher annotations, either handwritten or produced on computer, explaining why the work is good.

To be most beneficial a quality board should be:

- related specifically to your planned teaching – for example, how to use standard column procedures for multiplication and division, how to write a conclusion and evaluation for a science investigation, how to set out an argument;

- referred to during a lesson as part of the teaching process before pupils tackle a related activity;

- left on display so pupils can check their work against it;

- changed when you move on to another topic.

Task 5	Creating a quality board	30 minutes

Consider a topic you are going to teach over the coming two or three weeks. Find and photocopy a good piece of pupil's work, then plan your annotations. Obtain a picture frame and assemble the quality board. When you come to use it with a class, make sure you explain what you have done and that you will be looking for work from them for quality boards in the future.

After pupils have completed their work on the topic, ask them how useful they found the quality board.

After you have checked the pupils' work, evaluate the effectiveness of the quality board.

Task 6

Making the best use of the environment | 15 minutes

Watch video sequence 18a. In this video extract, a music teacher describes the way he uses display to support learning in his classroom.

- How does he organise and present his wall displays to make the most effective use of the available resources and space?

- Identify two ways in which the teacher uses the display to support pupil learning in his classroom.

- Identify two ways in which you might improve the displays and their use in your classroom.

Task 7

Planning your display | 20 minutes

It's a good idea to have discrete areas for different sorts of display. Work through the following questions to help plan a display that meets your own needs. You may find it useful to discuss your answers with your mentor or another teacher.

- What separate areas will you need? You might include:
    - school or form notices which change regularly;
    - more permanent notices, such as information on fire drill and first aid;
    - other news and information which changes regularly;
    - pupils' work which changes regularly;
    - published materials which change with your topic;
    - topic-specific materials such as word banks, writing frames etc.;
    - other subject-specific materials which do not change so often.
- How will you organise these areas? You could:
    - use separate notice boards for all or some of them;
    - divide notice boards or wall space with ribbon or coloured paper strips;
    - give each area a title.
- Where will you begin? You might choose one or two categories of display and start with these to see what you and the pupils think of them.

Remember, you have embarked on a continuous process which involves developing and changing the display regularly. Start thinking now about other classes, other topics and other sources of material and about what you want the display to do.

Arranging the furniture

The arrangements of chairs and tables should reflect and support the way you want pupils to learn. The type of activity will not be the same for every class, every lesson, so neither should the chairs and tables. Even if your classroom has fixed tables, you may still be able to rearrange chairs to make your teaching more effective.

Task 8

| **Using a double-horseshoe arrangement** | **10 minutes** |

Watch video sequence 18b. The teacher is using a double-horseshoe arrangement, which enables all pupils to focus on the front of the room but also offers options for changing pairings in group work. While you are watching this sequence, make notes of the advantages for the teacher and pupils of this furniture arrangement. Can you see any disadvantages?

Some schools have arranged their classroom like this in every subject, including science and D&T, where design permits.

| **Reflection** | **Barriers to change** |

Consider your classroom. What is the dominant furniture arrangement? How does this influence the teaching and learning approaches you can use? Do any of the following present barriers to change?

- The furniture is fixed and offers very limited scope for flexibility.

- Some classes would not respond well either to having the furniture in different positions or to moving it.

- You have no experience of teaching with different furniture arrangements.

- The classroom may have too much stored in it and be untidy.

Points to consider:

- Can you move your table or do away with it altogether? If you only use it to store books etc., a shelf may do just as well.

- Having tables and chairs in rows is fine for pupils working individually. However, if you want pupils to move about, this arrangement is possibly the worst of all, particularly if coats, large bags and other items of pupils' kit are strewn about the gangways. If you have fixed furniture arranged in rows, think about what you can do to store these things elsewhere.

- For group work, pupils need to be able to face each other to talk without having to shout or move about.

- Circles of chairs allow large groups of pupils to see, talk and listen to each other. You can be part of the circle or not, depending on your purpose.

- Consider swapping rooms on occasions when your furniture arrangement constrains what you want to do in a particular lesson.

Furniture arrangements and pupil groupings   20 minutes

Now that you have considered your current room, discuss with your mentor or a colleague any of the furniture and pupil arrangements that are possible in your class. Remember, pupils who have been accustomed to deciding for themselves where to sit will need clear, non-confrontational explanations as to why you are making particular decisions and how it will improve their learning.

As always, begin with a plan that is manageable and not too ambitious. The following advice is adapted from Alistair Smith's book *Accelerated learning in the classroom*.

- On paper, plan some arrangements of tables and chairs. Give each table a letter or number and map out two or three arrangements which will support your teaching and help pupils learn more effectively. Make sure each plan shows exactly where the tables and chairs should be. These room plans are very important and it will be helpful to display them in your room so that pupils can refer to them.

- Select a class you think will respond well to these changes in furniture, then choose a lesson where a different arrangement will help. Think about what sorts of grouping you will need. Will these stay the same for the whole lesson? What will the best furniture arrangement be?

- Plan your lesson. Be clear about how working in groups with different furniture arrangements will help pupils learn, and rehearse your explanation to them.

- Plan how pupils will be grouped, even if this is not essential. If you start out by putting pupils into the groups that you want, it helps to establish this as a deliberate way of working. Then it is easier to vary the type of grouping and the combinations of pupils in the future. It also prevents pupils from getting into combinations that do not work as well.

- Discuss your plans and potential pitfalls with your mentor or a colleague.

Adapted from A. Smith. *Accelerated Learning in the Classroom*. Network Educational Press. Reproduced by permission of the publisher. www.networkpress.co.uk; PO Box 635, Stafford ST16 1BF; fax 01785 228566.

Put the plan into practice   90 minutes

- Securely label each table with the number or letter from the map and give each group of tables a name.

- Before the selected lesson, enlist some help to move the furniture to your planned rearrangement.

- As the class arrives, welcome pupils and point out that you have rearranged the furniture. Say that you will explain why at the start of the lesson.

- Once the class is in and settled quickly, explain what you have done by referring to your room plan on the wall. Explain how this will help pupils to learn better.

- Before the end of the lesson, take a few minutes to ask pupils what they thought of the new arrangement. Then explain that you want them to return the furniture to its original arrangement before they leave. Refer to the appropriate room plan and give any specific instructions which will help. Tell them to work quickly and quietly.

- Before pupils leave, praise them for their positive response and say that in future lessons they may have to move furniture before they start work or even during the lesson. They will have to learn to follow the plans and do this quickly.

- Continue moving the furniture regularly over the following three weeks until your pupils have made the adjustment and can move themselves and furniture efficiently.

- You are now ready to try this with another class whose interest may have been aroused by the display of room plans on the wall.

Once you have established the habit, rotate furniture regularly with a minimum of fuss. In your lesson plans, identify the arrangements which are most appropriate and routinely explain to pupils why you have chosen a particular arrangement. By keeping them informed, you will involve pupils more in their learning – and all the research suggests that the more pupils are involved, the better they learn. Giving pupils choice offers further benefits to their self-esteem, so you might on some occasions explain the lesson and let them decide which arrangement they would prefer.

Practical tip

Where you stand in the classroom will influence which pupils you address directly in question-and-answer sessions. Teachers tend to focus on pupils within a fairly narrow arc. Simply by moving to different points in the room you can ensure a wider range of pupils is included.
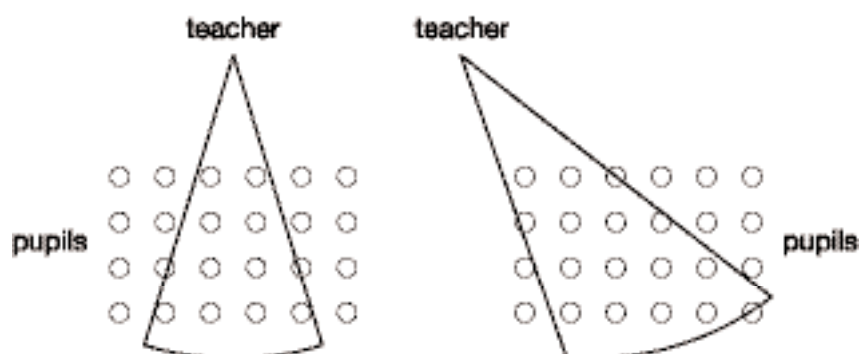
4   Language for learning

Beyond the explanations, the instructions and the other 'stuff' of lessons, what teachers say and how it is said have a significant impact on pupils. This influences how pupils perceive the relationship between themselves and the teacher, which in turn affects their commitment to learning. It is the way that teachers show their commitment to the principles of respect, fairness, challenge, support and security described in the introduction.

Some ways to convey this commitment were suggested in section 1. These included being welcoming and positive to pupils as they arrive, using their names, saying something positive to every pupil individually over a period of time and thanking pupils at the end of a good lesson.

In *Strategies for closing the learning gap*, Mike Hughes describes the types of language that teachers can use to influence pupils' motivation and learning.

- **The language of success:** This means giving pupils the message that you have confidence in them and in their abilities. For example, saying to a pupil 'I *know* you can …' is far more encouraging than saying 'I *think* you can …'.

- **The language of hope:** Ban phrases such as 'I can't do this'. Instead, encourage pupils to adopt the attitude 'I can do it and I'll need some help'. Display phrases such as 'You can do it. What help do you need?'

- **The language of possibility:** Pupils often put limits on what they think is possible, believing that in some way a task or even a subject is beyond their capability. They may describe their supposed inabilities with phrases such as 'I'll never be any good at maths' or 'I always mess up science experiments'. Unsurprisingly, their belief affects their motivation and their commitment to learning. By careful choice of language, teachers can create a climate of greater possibility which will influence pupils' views of themselves. An example of this is given below.

Task 11	Reviewing your use of language	15 minutes
	The grid on the next page is adapted from *Strategies for Closing the Learning Gap*. It shows how a slight shift in language can make a significant difference to the outcome of a typical classroom situation. Reflect on a recent situation in which you responded in a way similar to the teacher in the first example. How could you have changed what you said in order to encourage the pupil? How will you remember to adopt the language of possibility more often?	
Student: I can't do this. It's boring.	The student is actually saying, 'I don't believe I can be successful with this and therefore I don't want to take the risk.' Note: It may or may not be 'boring'.	

Teacher: Of course you can. Just keep trying and put a bit more effort in and you'll get it.	Inadvertently, we have denied the validity of the student's feelings. Exhorting her to 'keep trying' is not motivating if she believes the task is beyond her. Asking her to put in a bit more effort presupposes she isn't trying hard enough and it's her fault. Again – not motivating.
A simple shift in language may have the desired effect	
Student: I can't do this. It's boring.	
Teacher: OK, it's a little tricky at the moment. Which bit can't you do yet?	By initially agreeing with the student, we are validating how she is actually feeling, which will always (*sic*) be correct. This is a start to gaining rapport and therefore effective communication. However, by reframing the problem as a 'little tricky at the moment', we have also diluted the severity of the problem and made it a temporary stage. 'Which bit can't you do yet?' repeats the student's words (*can't*), which she will accept, and also lessens the difficulty by presupposing it's only 'a bit'. The inclusion of the word 'yet' serves to emphasise the temporary nature of the difficulty and retains a connection to the possibility of things improving.

Mike Hughes with Andy Vass. *Strategies for Closing the Learning Gap* (Network Educational Press) © 2001 Mike Hughes. Reproduced by permission of the publisher. www.networkpress.co.uk; PO Box 635, Stafford ST16 1BF; fax: 01785 228566.

We all fall into the trap of using negative language at times, even when it does not accurately describe what we think. You may find, for example, colleagues exclaiming that '9C are unteachable', when they really mean that the lesson did not go to plan for some reason. We need to recognise and sympathise with these kinds of feelings in pupils as well as colleagues. Remember, however, to use language to support learning.

As well as adopting positive language you can also:

- **Remove the language of failure:** Try to avoid telling pupils they are wrong. As well as being demotivating it does not encourage pupils to see mistakes as a vital part of learning. 'You're a step nearer to the right answer' is a very different message from 'You're wrong again!' Words like 'rehearsal' or 'trial' can also be useful.

- **Use no-blame language:** Avoid appearing to blame pupils for their lack of learning. Phrases such as 'Which bit haven't I explained well enough?' will stop pupils feeling it's all their fault.

Other useful positive words and phrases for the classroom include:

- When you finish …

- I know you can …

- Which part didn't I explain well enough?

- I'm sorry, I should have made it clearer.

- What do we need to remember here?

- OK, so you haven't quite mastered it yet.

- Up to now, this bit has proved a little tricky.

- Today you have a fantastic opportunity to show yourself how much you've remembered from the last module.

- You will remember …

- Your choice / it's up to you / you decide.

- That's right, isn't it?

Support your words

The following strategies can also help create a better climate for learning.

- Smile often. It promotes confidence.

- Use open and welcoming body language.

- Although you cannot speak to every pupil individually every lesson, over time try to notice and say something positive about each of them.

- Make eye contact with pupils, especially as they are answering questions.

- Use polite language to model the tone of responses you expect.

- Use names frequently in affirmative ways, for example 'Tom gave two of the really important points in that answer and backed each one up with an example'. Avoid pointing.

- Try to keep your voice pitched low and avoid shouting.

- Try to use praise, frequently but not indiscriminately. Reward progress towards and achievement of targets. Pupils will value the praise if it is clear that it is deserved because of their efforts or achievements. Pupils in challenging classes tend to respond more positively to praise given directly to them even if work is also acknowledged more publicly.

- Encourage pupils to be supportive of each other, to listen and respond with respect, for example by using structures such as 'I agree with Tom that …; however, I think that …'.

- Avoid putting pupils on the spot. Use strategies to ensure pupils feel 'safe' to answer – for example, extending wait time (try to count to eight before expecting an answer); using 'think, pair, share'; prefacing challenging questions with 'This is a really difficult question so I'm going to ask several people and then we'll try to construct a best answer together'.

- At this point you might like to review video sequence 20a.

Task 12	**Use support strategies**	**15 minutes**

Reflect on the list of support strategies and choose three that you don't use currently or would like to use better.

When you plan your next lesson, identify some opportunities to use the strategies and write them into the notes for the lesson.

Summary of research

Effort

It is important that students believe that effort influences achievement. Other common pupil explanations about how achievement is gained include ability, other people and luck, and none of these is likely to be productive. In one study (Van Overwalle and De Metsenaere 1990), students who were taught about the link between effort and achievement increased their achievement more than the students who were taught techniques for time management and comprehension of new material. Effort is very significant because to grapple with complex problems pupils need to take risks and apply themselves. Students' attitude to effort is determined considerably by praise.

In this respect blanket praise is usually counterproductive. Morine-Dershimer's (1982) research review shows that praise for 'easy' work can undermine achievement because students see it as undeserved, and this lowers their perception of their ability. However, rewards do not have a consistently negative effect (Wiersma 1992; Cameron and Pierce 1994). Reward works fairly well when it is based on the attainment of some specified performance standard. For students to respond to reward or praise they must perceive that the reward is justified. There is evidence, too, that concrete rewards, such as sweets, are less effective than words. Earned praise seems to be an effective way of developing a better learning climate. It is extrinsic but the evidence is that when it is removed, positive attitudes and behaviour continue as intrinsic motivation takes over (Kohn 1993). This outline would fit broadly with the main principles of assessment for learning – pupils working towards clear criteria and developing a sense of achievement and motivation as a consequence.

Relationships

Brekelmans et al. (1993) have researched interpersonal behaviour by teachers with pupils. This model has two dimensions, which are plotted on axes at right angles. The first is 'proximity' which describes the degree of cooperation or closeness between those who are communicating, and the two extremes of the scale are Opposition and Cooperation. The second is the 'influence' dimension and on this scale the extremes are Dominance and Submission. Using standardised data from science tests and questionnaires, completed by Dutch pupils, the researchers were able to correlate achievement with student outcomes. Interestingly, 'Repressive' teachers, who were high on opposition and dominance scores, had the highest attainment. 'Directive', 'Authoritarian' and 'Tolerant' teachers also had high outcomes whilst teachers who were generally submissive had low attainment scores.

However, teachers who were high on the cooperation scale induced more positive attitudes from students. 'Repressive' teachers were high on attainment and low on attitudes. Teachers with disorderly classrooms have low outcomes on student achievement and attitudes. There are a number of texts that summarise research and give advice on relationships and interactions between teachers and pupils (see for example Neil and Caswell 1993).

Another radical approach to improving the climate for learning is using pupils as researchers. In their very accessible, research-based publication, Fielding and Bragg (2003) outline a number of examples where pupils have performed this role. These include:

- good lessons, good teaching, effective grouping practices (Y8);

- developing new teaching approaches (Y9);

- PSHE provision (Y10).

Not only can classroom conditions change as a result, but so can the essential relationship between teachers and pupils.

Creating orderly lessons

Establishing rules

Experienced and successful teachers are clear in their minds at the start of the year how they will conduct their lessons. Most aim for some kind of dominant presence to give a sense of being in charge. They use their eyes, movement, speech and gesture to create the desired atmosphere. They have also established a set of clear rules or expectations (see Wragg 1984 for a fuller account). This investment of time is productive as it pays off through the year, as less time is wasted. These general rules are built upon by having clear procedures for lesson starts and there is much advice within KS3 Strategy materials on lesson starters.

Maintaining momentum during the lesson

Muijs and Reynolds (2001) have summarised some key features of momentum in lessons. It seems that one of the most fruitful ways of preventing pupil misbehaviour during lessons is to ensure the smooth flow of a lesson. Sometimes teachers can themselves slow momentum by, for example, stopping an activity in order to do something else (sometimes referred to as a dangle). Where the teacher returns to the original activity afterwards, this is sometimes called a flip-flop. Both can leave pupils confused about their task and priorities. Overdwelling occurs when teachers go on explaining instructions well after the pupils have grasped what they have to do. Fragmentation is where a task is broken down into too many very small steps. All these can easily be avoided by careful planning.

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Next steps

This unit has explored an aspect of teaching and learning. You may wish to develop your ideas further, to consolidate, apply ideas in different contexts or explore an aspect in more depth and innovate.

Reflect

What have been the key learning points for you?

What has been the impact on pupils?

Here are some suggestions as to how you may develop practice further:

- Investigate what your pupils think about the physical environment of the classroom they are taught in. You might plan a questionnaire and ask questions such as what do they like most and least about particular aspects of their classroom. You might ask them to suggest improvements that will enhance their learning. What did you find out? Were there any common issues raised by different year groups?

- Work with a colleague and investigate how changes to the language you use impact on pupil motivation. Can you generate a larger range of positive words and phrases to add to those on pages 19 and 20?

- Work with your entire department to develop a systematic approach within the department in your subject, which pupils will recognise as a focus for improving their learning. Use section 1 Classroom routines to begin to identify the areas of current practice that you wish to develop. How will you evaluate whether any change has resulted in improved learning? What success criteria will you use?

For further reading, the following publications are recommended:

- Hughes, M. (1999) *Closing the Learning Gap*. Network Educational Press. ISBN: 1855390515.

- Hughes, M. and Vass, A. (2001) *Strategies for Closing the Learning Gap*. Network Educational Press. ISBN: 1855390752.

Setting future targets

Having considered your next steps, you may wish to set yourself some personal targets to support your own continuing professional development. You could use these ideas to inform your performance management discussion.

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Setting your targets   **40 minutes**

When setting targets for the future you may want to discuss the possibilities with a colleague or your line manager.

Whatever you decide to do, you will need to consider the following.

- What are your objectives for the next year?

- What are the expected outcomes in terms of pupils' achievements?

- What strategies will you employ to achieve these outcomes?

- How will you track progress over the year?

- How will you know whether you have been successful or not?

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