Classroom Management Approaches to Support School Connectedness

Student Autonomy and Empowerment

School connectedness is the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. Students who feel connected and engaged at school are less likely to report risky behaviors (such as early sexual initiation, substance use, violence, and suicide) and have more positive academic outcomes.[1-6]

Classroom management is the process that teachers and schools use to create positive classroom environments in face-to-face or virtual learning modes. Classroom management includes teacher- and student-led actions to support academic and social-emotional learning among all students.[7] Well-managed classrooms that incorporate positive behavior management strategies are one way that teachers and other school staff can build school connectedness.[8]

Which classroom management approaches and skills increase connectedness?

CDC researchers reviewed scientific papers on classroom management and identified six classroom management approaches that promote student connectedness and engagement. Strategies to support these approaches were identified through a structured review of web-based practice resources. Student Autonomy and Empowerment is one of these approaches.

Student Autonomy & Empowerment

Peer Connection & Support

Management of Classroom Social Dynamics

Teacher Caring & Support

Behavior Management

Teacher Expectations

Student Autonomy and Empowerment. When students feel their teachers are open to their ideas and allow them to make choices regarding their learning and schoolwork, they are more engaged in school,[9,10] less disruptive in class,[11] and report feeling a stronger sense of belonging and connectedness to their school.[11,12] Students reported feeling more connected to their school and peers when they felt that students in their school:

1 Were given the chance to help make decisions.

2 Had a say in how things work.

3 Got to help decide some of the rules.

4 Were asked by their teachers what they want to learn about.

5 Got to help decide how class time was spent.

Student Autonomy and Empowerment

These skills can help provide students with opportunities for autonomy and empowerment in the classroom.

Skill	Example Strategies
Providing students with opportunities to help make decisions about class rules	Include students in the process of creating class rules, expectations, and norms. Revisit these regularly with the class to discuss what is working and what may need modification. When transitioning from in-person to remote learning models (and vice versa), revisit class rules and solicit students' input on any changes they think should be made to best suit the new learning environment.[13] For example, discuss options for students to opt-in or opt-out of using cameras and establishing other ways of maintaining accountability and engagement (e.g., chat box, verbal participation, polling questions).
Asking students what they want to learn about	Ask students for their input on how class time is spent[12] using a brief survey or poll (in person or virtually) or group brainstorming session. For example, consider asking for students' input on content (e.g., key questions, topics they would like to learn about); mode (e.g., project-based assignments, group vs. individual assignments, assessment format); and classroom structure (e.g., small groups or "break out rooms" for virtual learning, discussion boards, didactic instruction).[14] Make changes or adaptations to lessons, activities, and assignments, as possible, to reflect what students have indicated interests them.[10] For example, provide supplemental readings and videos, or invite guest speakers to talk about topics that students are most interested in.

Skill	Example Strategies
Providing students with opportunities to lead in class	Consider inviting students to lead classroom discussions or group-based activities. For example, ask students to choose a topic or concept that has been covered in class to reteach to classmates.[13]
Allowing students to choose how to complete projects and assignments	Offer choices rather than mandating a single option whenever possible. For example, consider having students choose assignments or assessment formats from a menu of different options.[13] Ask students to keep a journal (for virtual settings, this could be housed in an online platform or shared file) and reflect each week on what has been going well, what challenges they've had, and what they might try differently the following week.[15]

Tools and Templates

- Edutopia. How to Make the Most of Student Feedback During Distance Learning.

- Search Institute. Checklist: Building Developmental Relationships During the COVID-19 Crisis.

- The Art of Education. Create Your Classroom Rules WITH Your Students for a Powerful Start to the Year.

Reflection Notes

How do I currently do this?
What could I do to improve?

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