

K-8 TEACHERS

VAI EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

BUILDING A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CULTURE:

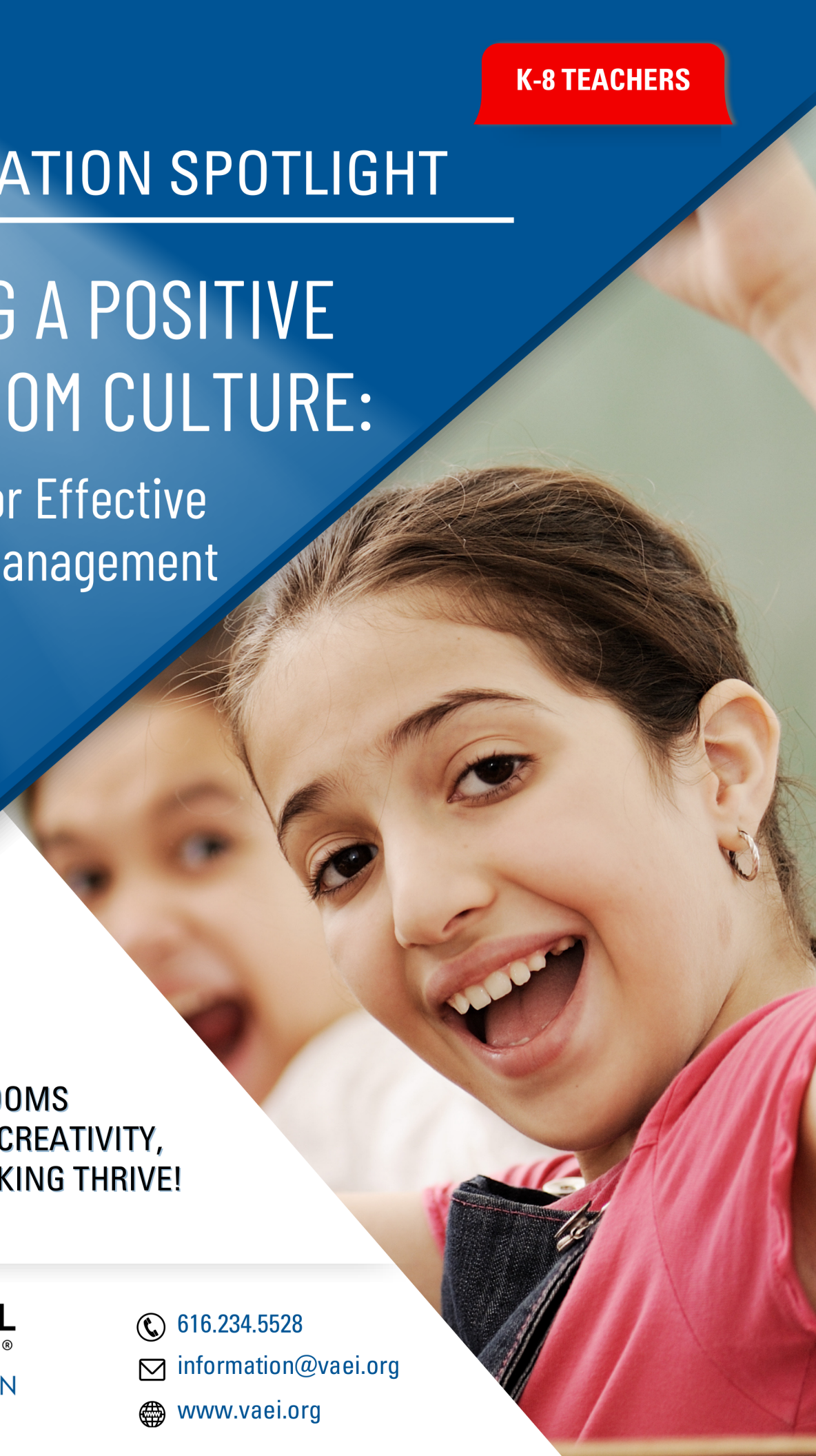
Strategies for Effective Classroom Management

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CREATING CLASSROOMS
WHERE CURIOSITY, CREATIVITY,
AND CRITICAL THINKING THRIVE!



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Creating a strong classroom community is an integral part of teaching the whole child. This foundational aspect of the learning environment not only fosters a sense of belonging and connectedness but also significantly contributes to academic success and social development. A supportive and inclusive classroom community encourages students to collaborate, share ideas, and engage in active learning, ultimately enhancing their overall educational experience.

When building a positive classroom culture, consider these three pillars: community, content, and conduct. Comparable to a 3-legged stool, each pillar plays a necessary role in building a sturdy and supportive foundation. Following these three pillars of classroom culture, we can ensure that our students feel like they belong, are engaged in their learning, and are respectful of the rules and everyone in the room.

Pillar 1: Community

Daily engagement with each student significantly enhances their sense of belonging. Additionally, fostering a culture of connectivity between students and the teacher is crucial. Employing techniques to establish personal connections within the classroom promotes the formation of relationships that contribute to a safe and inclusive environment. Building these relationships need not be an extensive process. Consider the following strategies to help build community in your classroom:

- Greet Every Student, Everyday:** If you want students to be curious, they first have to feel that their ideas and their wonderings matter. Make an effort to greet every student every day. Look each student in the eye and welcome them to your classroom. It's a small gesture that makes a big impact.
- Hallway Conversations:** Instead of having "check-in" conversations with students in the physical confines of the classroom, surrounded by the listening ears of their peers, take time on a weekly basis to pull each student out into the hall and chat about anything that is on their mind.
- Handshakes, Hugs, and High-Fives:** Connecting with students as soon as they enter the classroom can make their whole day. Greet students at the door every morning with a hug, handshake, or high five; it can change the outlook of that students' day. As teachers get to know their students better, they can get creative with it: developing handshakes or "hellos" that are unique to each student!
- Post-It Check-Ins:** Students value individualized feedback. By giving students a Post-It note prior to a scheduled follow-up, it lets them know you value their input and are eager to hear about their progress. And by "sticking" to an adhesive note, you limit yourself to just an important idea or two.
- Curiosity Networks:** A classroom is only as strong as its connections. Help strengthen the collaboration in your classroom with these powerful grouping strategies. Check out [these strategies](#) for forming curiosity networks, including Think, Pair, Share, Jigsaw, Truth Contagion, Diverse Groups, and many more!
- The Cheerful Baboon:** Every time you say the word "baboon," you can't help but smile. So, bring some extra smiles to your classroom by incorporating a little baboonery! Instead of saying, "Good morning," say "Merry baboon to you, my friend." Find other ways to create routines that use the word baboon — you'll be amazed at the results. Check it out in action [here!](#)

- **Perspective Taking:** Students come into the classroom with all different kinds of perspectives. Celebrate those perspectives, rather than shying away from them. Show a picture that could be interpreted in two or more ways. Students can share their perspective and then allow for the class to respectfully debate their points of view. As students learn about others and their perspectives around an interpretation of a picture, they will start to become more open to listening to others as they progress through the year.

Pillar 2: Content

Engaging students in the process of learning is key to their growth. If students are not interested in learning the content, it can be difficult to instill that positive classroom culture. Help students engage in the content by using these powerful strategies. As students' thirst for knowledge grows, the classroom culture flourishes as well.

- **Wonder Wall:** When you start a new topic, have students share their questions or wonderings about it. Display these wonderings on a "wall". As you work through the unit, revisit the wall periodically and challenge the class to discuss it. Having questions visible in the classroom promotes curiosity and student engagement.
- **Idea Snowball:** Utilize a variety of collaborative structures to develop and refine ideas. Use individual think time to reflect on a reading, video, or topic. Use small group time for students to share their thoughts with others and develop their ideas and use whole group time for discussion that allows for refinement of learning. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, each structure adds layers of insight to the original idea.
- **Peer Teaching:** Allow students who understand a concept first to teach it to others. Not only do you get the advantage of having multiple miniature assistants, but you can also help the "teachers" solidify their understanding by articulating it for others!
- **Start with the End:** Instead of showing students the pathway to answer a question, teachers can allow students to construct their own understanding. Teachers start by presenting students with a question you hope they will be able to solve at the end of a lesson. Then, students to work individually and in groups to solve it. This strategy helps students put their thinking to the test, without encouraging one particular type of solution. Students explain their thinking and discuss as a class, helping students to see where their solutions went wrong, and where they were right.
- **Work Logs:** Let's get organized! To help support group work and time management, have students track their group and individual progress by using work logs to keep them organized and on track. Teachers can check in periodically to support effective use of the logs!
- **Four Essentials of Inquiry:** Leading with inquiry-based lessons will help increase your students "buy-in" to the content being taught. Consider the four essentials for inquiry and reflect on how you are approaching the different categories. Teachers should think about the questions they are posing to their students and how the four essentials for inquiry might change those. Challenge your teachers to get their students to ask the same questions!
- **Project-Based Learning:** Using units that are authentic with real-world connections allows students to acquire deeper knowledge about content and gives them a sense of purpose while they are learning. Project-based learning helps to incorporate cross-curricular ideas and even lets the students help to make the world a better place.

Pillar 3: Conduct

Displaying empathy can be profoundly impactful when dealing with students who are not performing at their best. Offering compassion coupled with setting clear objectives, can guide students towards the behaviors and outcomes expected in the classroom. Every student (and teacher) can have an off day. Keeping students focused on the task at hand can be challenging, but it is important for classroom culture. These strategies will help teachers to focus students and create a space that is safe for everyone.

- Brain-gauging Transitions:** Teachers spend lots of time transitioning from one activity to another. It can help to keep minds engaged by adding academic content to these times. For instance, while walking down the hall, younger students silently count their steps by twos or fives. For older students, they can estimate the amount of time it takes them to clean up after an activity.
- Flexify Your Rules:** Teachers should limit the list of rules to no more than five, and make them more flexible. Instead of saying, "Turn your work in on time. Be on time for class, and bring the necessary materials," say, "Do your best." Instead of saying, "No hitting, kicking, biting, insults, or name-calling," they can simplify it by saying, "Be kind." These broader rules are applicable to a wider range of issues.
- "But What Did I Say?":** Teachers should never argue. When students attempt to engage, it can be useful for teachers to simply listen, nod empathetically, and say, "But what did I say?" If they continue to argue, teachers can kindly repeat, "But what did I say?" When we are caring and consistent, this approach will work wonders!
- Shake Your Sillies Out:** Do you have an activity coming up that might cause their kids to get silly? We can create space for them to be energetic and silly by taking a designated "Shake Your Sillies Out" time! Keeping your sillies in check can help them focus when it's time to be serious.
- Marble Jar:** Keep a jar in the front of the room. Place a marble in the jar when the class is on task and is showing self-direction. Determine how many marbles it takes for the class to "earn" some extra minutes of recess, free reading time, or another sought-after reward. As students fill up the jar, encourage them to work together to support good behavior and a rich learning environment — and celebrate a little every time you put a marble in the jar — to build a sense that you're all on the same team.
- The Horn of Silence:** Need a creative, engaging way to get your students' attention when they're engaged in conversation? Create a horn out of a tube for wrapping paper. Blow into it like a horn to make a fun noise and establish the expectation that students will wind down their conversations by the time you get to the end of the note. For an added wrinkle, slide one tube over top of the other and play different notes, and use it as an excuse to learn about sound and pitch.
- Classroom Cash:** Incentivize your students to go above and beyond by creating classroom cash that can be given out or taken away based on how well they control their controllable behaviors. To be more creative, teachers can replace Washington and Lincoln's faces with your own – or with your school mascot – and give it a fun name, like "Cougar Cash."
- Classroom Contract:** Teachers can brainstorm a contract for their students to abide by throughout the year. Teachers can have them come up with pieces of it, as they determine what they want their classroom environment to look like. This will help you strengthen your students' positive behaviors and create a safe environment for everyone.

In Conclusion...

Everything becomes secondary when a student feels as if they don't belong or feels disconnected from their peers and teacher. Following the three pillars of classroom culture (Community, Content, and Conduct), we can start to form that positive classroom environment, and support our students in becoming the best version of themselves.



3 Pillars of a Positive Classroom Culture

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