Voices of Experience

Practical Ideas to Start Up the Year

Grades K-3

Colleen Politano • Joy Paquin
Caren Cameron • Kathleen Gregory

Portage & Main Press
Introduction

Who is this series for?

Voices of Experience is a series of six books – three for grades K-3, three for grades 4-8. Each book is full of practical ideas designed for new teachers, teachers new to a grade level, and teachers who want new ideas to reenergize their practice.

What’s in the books?

We have compiled our best ideas and organized them into two sets of three books:

- Book 1: for the start of the year when teachers are just getting to know their students
- Book 2: for during the year when teachers need to get themselves and their students “fired up”
- Book 3: for the end of the year when teachers need to wrap things up

Each book is organized into four sections around the acronym ROAR.

R = ideas for building relationships
O = ideas for classroom organization
A = ideas for classroom assessment that support student learning
R = ideas that are reliable and ready to use tomorrow

“Create a new model of teacher-teacher support so that every teacher knows every other teacher’s best ideas.”

— Eric Jensen, Brain-Based Learning
For each idea we provide a brief discussion and easy-to-follow steps. Many also include student examples and unique adaptations. In addition, we have included current information about the brain and how students learn.

We have also included a variety of ways to use this series of books to support professional development activities in different settings; for example, educators’ book clubs; team and department meetings and staff meetings; in-service and pre-service workshops; and seminars with student teachers (see appendix A).

**Final Note:**

The single, most important message we want to leave you with is to listen to your own voice and the voices of your students. Adapt our ideas to fit for you, your students, and your school community.
Classroom Agreement: developing expectations with students

**Discussion**

Classrooms run smoothly when students know what is expected of them. Take time to create a class agreement together. When students’ ideas and words are used, students understand the expectations and feel committed to the agreement.

**Steps**

1. Ask students: “What kind of classroom do we want?” Make a list of students’ ideas (see figure 1). Leave the list posted for two or three days so that you and your students can talk about it, think about it, and add to it.

2. Discuss with students what they think it means to agree to something or to make a promise. When we ask students about their experiences with making a promise, we have had responses that range from “I promised my best friend I would…” to “At Brownies...”

Figure 1. This list was “brainstormed” and recorded. It was posted for two or three days so students could talk about it and add to it.
we promise to…” to
“When we say the Pledge
of Allegiance in our class-
room, we promise to…”

3. Read the posted list of
ideas to students, and work
with them to sort the ideas
into three to five key cate-
gories. Typically, we end
up with key words such as
safe, thoughtful, caring,
friendly, and helpful for
each category.

4. Ask students: “If we want
our classroom to be like
this, what will we need to
agree to or promise to do?”
Take a key word from the
list, and ask students: “If we want our classroom to be safe, what do
we have to agree to do?” Record students’ suggestions.

5. Make a chart to display the key words and the promises that
students suggested be included in the class agreement
(see figure 2).

6. Read the agreement as part of
the classroom routine. At the
beginning of the year, we read
the agreement aloud daily to
remind students of what they
have promised.

7. Help students become more
familiar with the agreement:
Ask them to work in groups to
illustrate a key word (for exam-
ple, safety) to show what it
could “look like, sound like, feel
like.” We ask students to use
three-fold sheets to show their
ideas (see figure 3).

“Be sure that students
understand the rules.
It is always good to
have the students
help you make them.
Post them, send
them home, and
follow them.”

— Marilee B. Sprenger,
Becoming a “Wiz”
at Brain-Based Learning

Figure 2. All members (including adults) are asked to read
and sign the “class promise” to signify all agree to it.

Figure 3. Doing “looks like, sounds like, feels like,” helps students develop a visual,
auditory, and kinesthetic connection to each point in the promise.