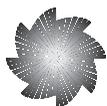


VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

Practical Ideas to
Start Up the Year

Grades K-3

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PORTAGE &
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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

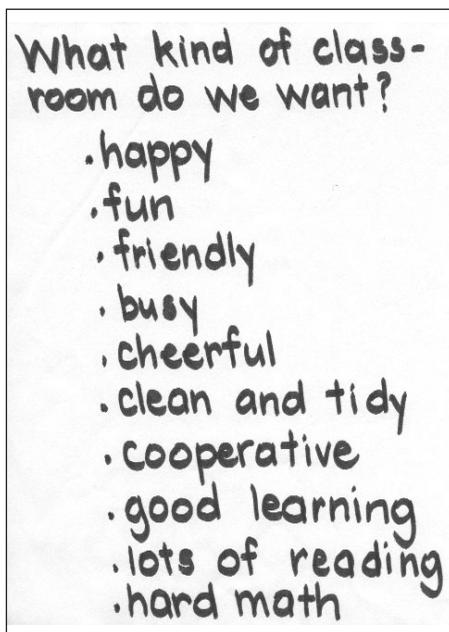


Figure 1. This list was "brainstormed" and recorded. It was posted for two or three days so students could talk about it and add to it.

we promise to..." to "When we say the Pledge of Allegiance in our classroom, 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 categories. 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 example, *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).



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

"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

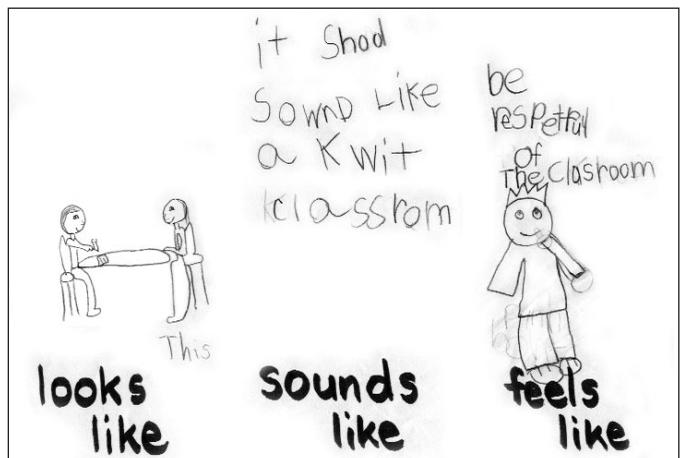


Figure 3. Doing "looks like, sounds like, feels like," helps students develop a visual, auditory, and kinesthetic connection to each point in the promise.