

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR GMGY

SUPPORT MATERIALS - GMGY



WHY SHOULD I CREATE A RESPECTFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

'In a respectful classroom, pupils feel physically and emotionally safe and valued for who they are.'
(Wessler, 2003)

Creating a respectful classroom environment is central to the effective delivery of Goodness Me, Goodness You! The following guidance aims to assist teachers in creating a 'safe' space for the exploration and discussion of beliefs, religions, ethics, morals and values.

HOW DO I CREATE A RESPECTFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

Pupils can learn how to appropriately interact with each other during a GMGY lesson. Respectful engagements are more likely to occur when teachers explicitly teach the pupils the skills required to interact respectfully at school. The following strategies proposed by Cohen, et al., (2011) aim to assist teachers in making their classrooms just, equitable and inclusive; all traits which will enhance the learning environment during GMGY.

1. Create opportunities for group decision-making. Open dialogue engages pupils in a democratic process in which compromise rather than competition is crucial to making decisions.
2. Democratisise the space. When group decision-making or pupil interaction is key to an effort, rearrange the room. Change which way is the front, move all the desks to the side, or have pupils sit on the floor in a circle. Let pupils have a say; give them a chance to learn from their decisions.
3. Use multidimensional group projects, and vary the composition of the groups. A good group project should highlight different learning styles and skills. Successful completion of the project will require interdependency among group members and foster respect.
4. Vary protocols for classroom sharing. Pupil sharing in classrooms typically comes through talking or writing; often the fastest or loudest wins the stage. Instead, use reflection and writing time to help pupils organise their thoughts, have pupils share through visual art without using language, or have pupils share in pairs or small groups.
5. Create conflict around issues. When discussing issues in class, provide a more realistic experience of what a complex issue is. Taking different sides of an issue—not to compete and win, but to come to a collective decision—creates a democratic experience that demonstrates the messiness and complexity of the process.
6. Many children benefit from being taught how to respectfully disagree when they hear something that they do not agree with. This skill can be taught explicitly and children can be given opportunity in informal settings and scenarios to try out these skills before engaging in dialogue.

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HOW DO I TEACH CHILDREN TO DIALOGUE RESPECTFULLY WITH EACH OTHER?

GMGY lessons allow for differing and sometimes contradictory opinions and beliefs to be expressed. The following steps may assist teachers in preparing children for these types of dialogues. These suggested guidelines for dialogue can be taught explicitly to the pupils prior to the GMGY lesson.

1. Listen respectfully to other people's beliefs and opinions: Being a good listener is a way of showing that you respect and understand the other person's perspective.
2. Speak from your own experiences, without making it personal: If you get upset, it can help to remember you're mad at the idea or concept your friend is raising, not the person.
3. Step up, step away and stay calm: If you are a person who speaks a lot remember to try and give others a chance to speak. If you are shy at talking, make an effort to participate – your point of view is important and needs to be heard. Use a calm voice when speaking.
4. Avoid putting down others' ideas and beliefs and be open to something new: Use respectful language and behaviours. Use the sentence, 'I don't agree, and this is why.'
5. Use 'I' statements to express how you feel: Speak only from your own experience.
6. Share at a level that makes you feel safe: Join in as much as possible but let the teacher know if you are uncomfortable with any part of the lesson.

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7. Be confidential: The group can define confidentiality, making sure that everyone will feel safe sharing. It could be that nothing shared in the group goes outside of the group, or it could be that the stories and learnings can be shared but not the names of the people.

Teachers can strengthen a pupil's intrinsic motivation by recognising and positively reinforcing positive engagement skills when they see them. When pupils make the connection between their respectful engagement and feeling good about themselves, intrinsic motivation is enhanced and respectful engagements will continue to occur.

HOW CAN GMGY CONTRIBUTE TO THE CREATION OF A RESPECTFUL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT?

GMGY can be used by schools to enhance the following aspects of school environment:

- The involvement of pupils in leadership positions or action teams within the school gives pupils an authentic voice and responsibility. During GMGY action projects, teachers could offer pupils leadership roles within the projects.
- Making parents, carers, guardians and extended family members feel a welcome part of the school community is an important aspect of developing a respectful school environment. Opportunities for families to work in partnership with the school in relation to GMGY could be a valuable opportunity for schools to make families feel

welcome.

- Teachers who know pupils well and form positive relationships with their pupils foster a strong sense of belonging. GMGY teaching pedagogies offer teachers an opportunity to engage with the class as a co-participant which can encourage positive relationship development.
- Mutually beneficial relationship with organisations and individuals within the community enables the sharing of specialist expertise. Collaboration brings schools and services together to provide programs and initiatives to achieve outcomes for pupils and their families that extend beyond what can be achieved in isolation. GMGY offers opportunities for schools to make connections to their local community.

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