



Your Classroom

SIMPLE WAYS TO CREATE A

POSITIVE LEARNING CLIMATE

*To all of my teachers—beginning with my parents,
Mrs. Fern Martinson, and Mrs. Shirley Kleve—
and the colleagues and learners who have so willingly
shared life’s lessons.*

*With gratitude to Search Institute and Anitra Budd
for patience and empowerment.*

Your Classroom: Simple Ways to Create a Positive Learning Climate

Marilyn Peplau

Copyright © 2005 by Search Institute

Search InstituteSM and Developmental AssetsTM are trademarks of Search Institute.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever, mechanical or electronic, without prior permission from the publisher except in brief quotations or summaries in articles or reviews, or as individual charts or graphs for educational use. For additional permission, write to Permissions at Search Institute.

Search Institute

615 First Avenue Northeast, Suite 125
Minneapolis, MN 55413
612-376-8955 • 800-888-7828
www.search-institute.org

Credits

Editors: Anitra Budd, Tenessa Gemelke
Design and typesetting: Percolator
Production: Mary Ellen Buscher

ISBN-13: 978-1-57482-867-2 (pack of 20)

ISBN-10: 1-57482-867-3 (pack of 20)

About the Author

Marilyn Peplau is an educator, speaker, consultant, and Search Institute trainer. In addition to her work with Search Institute, Peplau is a Teaching and Learning Facilitator at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota Master of Education program. She has won several awards for excellence in education over the course of her more than 26 years as a teacher and guidance counselor, including Wisconsin Secondary School Counselor of the Year. She holds a B.S. and M.S. in Home Economics Education from the University of Wisconsin–Stout, Menomonie campus.

About Search Institute

Search Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities. The institute collaborates with others to promote long-term organizational and cultural change that supports its mission.

Introduction

*A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell
where his influence stops.*

—Henry Brooks Adams, historian and writer (1838–1918)

Imagine you are a teacher standing in an empty classroom. This may be your first professional position, or you may have already spent many years in an educational setting. You are standing in the doorway watching students rush by when the bell rings. Young people of all shapes and sizes split from their groups and stream into your room for their first class of the day. Your mind spins as you realize that your influence on these young minds began the second they entered your classroom, and will continue until . . . who knows when? Eternity? Suddenly, you feel very responsible.

You've gone over your preparations for this class many times beforehand—the lesson plan is in place, the room is neat, and your materials are organized. But you may have overlooked the most important element: this multitude of students. As you pause to reflect on this group of young people, you're struck by the true meaning of "your classroom." You are not the only influence at work here; this classroom belongs to the students as well as you. But how do you harvest the collective energy and unique talents of every person in the room to create a positive, stimulating environment for all?

The Developmental Assets™ framework is a powerful tool for creating engaging classrooms, and it can offer opportunities for *all* teachers and students, no matter what their level of asset awareness, teaching experience, or academic achievement. Maybe you're curious because you've heard asset building is an effective way of interacting with young people—and that there's no prescribed program. Or perhaps you believe students and teachers can explore the world together and are looking for simple ways to build classroom solidarity. Whatever your reason for picking up this booklet, consider it your companion as you and your students explore the Developmental Assets and their potential applications in your classroom.

What Are Developmental Assets?

The Developmental Assets are a set of 40 positive qualities, skills, experiences, and opportunities that are critical in the lives of children and youth. Based on more than four decades of research on youth development, these assets paint a picture of the positive things young people need to grow into competent, capable, caring, and healthy people.

The 40 assets are spread across eight broad areas of human development, or *asset categories*. What follows here is a brief overview of the asset categories, which you'll have a chance to explore in greater depth throughout *Your Classroom*.



Support—Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate, and accept them.



Empowerment—Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when youth feel safe, when they believe they are liked and respected, and when they contribute to their families, schools, and communities.



Boundaries and Expectations—Young people need the positive influence of peers and adults who encourage them to be and do their best. Youth also need clear rules about appropriate behavior and consistent, reasonable consequences for breaking those rules.



Constructive Use of Time—Young people need opportunities to learn and develop new skills and interests.



Commitment to Learning—Young people need a variety of learning experiences, including the desire for academic success, a sense of the lasting importance of learning, and a belief in their own abilities.



Positive Values—Young people need to develop strong guiding values, including caring about others, high standards for personal character, and believing in protecting their own well-being.



Social Competencies—Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions and choices, and to cope with new situations.



Positive Identity—Young people need to believe in their own self-worth, to feel they have control over the things that happen to them, and to have a sense of purpose in life.

Research shows that assets are powerful influences on adolescent behavior; the more assets a young person has, the better. Assets help protect young people from many different problem behaviors and promote positive attitudes and actions. In fact, studies reveal that students with more assets are more likely to succeed in school, value diversity, and take on leadership roles. (*Insights & Evidence* v.2, no.4 [Minneapolis: Search InstituteSM, March 2004], 6)

When you intentionally help youth experience more assets in their lives, you're *building assets*. You'll find that you and your students are already doing many things that build assets—perhaps unconsciously and incidentally. By purposefully and repeatedly using asset language and actions, you'll make a significant difference for and with each other.

Support

It is the responsibility of every adult . . . to make sure that children hear what we have learned from the lessons of life and to hear over and over that we love them and that they are not alone.

—Marian Wright Edelman, children's advocate (b. 1939)

Youth do best in school, and in life, when they feel connected and have a sense of belonging. Even doing something as simple as smiling and shaking hands with students as they enter the classroom can make them feel reassured and engaged. It's not one big thing but a million little things like this that teachers and students do to support each other emotionally and intellectually.

ASSETS in ACTION in the CLASSROOM

Imagine finding the following note on your desk from a student. "Every day when I come to school, I just need to see the twinkle in your eye, and then I know it is going to be a good day of learning. P.S. You're the best teacher ever!" That's ample proof that Emily Ann Simonson, a second-grade student, identifies Greg Lenn as a supportive teacher at Malone Elementary in Prescott, Wisconsin.

How Can You

Reinforce Relationships That Build Support?

Making connections with young people is the first level of relationship building, whether students are just beginning school or about to graduate. It begins with using each others' names, or nicknames as requested and appropriate. The sound of one's own name activates the brain's attention in a positive way. Students become connected when they are known and feel accepted.

Check any action you or your students use to strengthen relationships and offer support.

	YOU...	STUDENTS...
Smile and say hello	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage others with sincere compliments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Let others know you believe in their abilities and won't give up on them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How Can You

Encourage Environments That Build Support?

Consider the many ways you can create a classroom where students feel a physical sense of belonging and acceptance. For instance, if you're going to reinforce relationships by making sure you and your students use each others' names, that means you will all need to *know* each others' names first. This might take the form of colorful visual

cues like placards, creative nametags, or bulletin-board displays you and the students create at the beginning of the school year.

How Can You *Uphold Positive Practices That Build Support?*

Parents and guardians often provide the first and most influential support system for young people. Enhance this foundational support by maintaining an open-door policy that allows parents to be classroom or school volunteers and assume additional responsibilities.

Give yourself credit for using positive practices with students and parents. How often do you:

	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	RARELY
Make yourself available to listen one-on-one or in small groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Give an encouraging comment to every student each day?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ask for parents and guardians to be partners in the education of their children by volunteering at school or in the classroom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Empowerment

Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.

—William Butler Yeats, writer (1865–1939)

Finding out what lights students' fire allows educators to add more meaning and relevance to their daily lessons. For instance, many teachers still encourage children in kindergarten to bring an item for "show and tell," recognizing that even very young learners have some

prior knowledge to build on and bring to the classroom. When you listen to their stories and help young people investigate the questions they have, you light the fire of inquiry within them.

As a teacher, you can have an enormous impact on students when it comes to the Empowerment category. For example, you can work to build a classroom that eliminates physical and emotional threats and increases the likelihood of student success. You also have countless opportunities to encourage critical-thinking skills, which can give students the motivation and confidence to voice their opinions.

How Can You

Reinforce Relationships That Build Empowerment?

Taking relationships to the next level means getting beyond names and continually learning something new about each student. While you may have prior information about your students from other teachers or administrators, make sure you allow them the chance to start over with you. Some students will need a second chance in the course of their education, and you may be just the person to offer it.

Check any action you or students use to reinforce relationships while empowering youth.

	YOU...	STUDENTS...
Ask others what they think	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take everyone's comments seriously	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide ways for everyone to contribute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How Can You

Encourage Environments That Build Empowerment?

Discovering students' interests and gifts is one of the challenges in education. Consider composing a questionnaire that asks students to complete the following sentence stems:

- Three words that describe me . . .
- I learn best . . .
- I like a classroom that . . .

- A skill I have is . . .
- One thing that makes me unique is . . .

This information can help you intentionally plan for students to use their skills and display their best qualities. Classroom participation becomes more meaningful when students feel free to contribute their interests and gifts to the class, and the relevance of learning escalates as well.

How Can You

Uphold Positive Practices That Build Empowerment?

Give yourself credit for using empowering practices. How often do you:

	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	RARELY
Find out students' opinions through surveys, focus groups, interviews, or polls?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ask students for their help in solving classroom disputes or problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Celebrate students' accomplishments both in and out of the classroom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ASSETS in ACTION in the CLASSROOM

Fern Martinson was a one-room country school teacher who found a meaningful role for every one of the students in grades one through eight at Ulysses School. My role as a student was handing out iodine tablets to my schoolmates every Friday—a necessity in those days for health. While the task is antiquated, my gratitude is fresh almost fifty years later for this teacher who valued every student's contribution, no matter how small!

40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS KIDS NEED TO SUCCEED

EXTERNAL ASSETS



SUPPORT

1. Family support
2. Positive family communication
- 3. Other adult relationships**
4. Caring neighborhood
- 5. Caring school climate**
6. Parent involvement in schooling



EMPOWERMENT

- 7. Community values youth**
- 8. Youth as resources**
- 9. Service to others**
- 10. Safety**



BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS

11. Family boundaries
- 12. School boundaries**
13. Neighborhood boundaries
- 14. Adult role models**
- 15. Positive peer influence**
- 16. High expectations**



CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME

- 17. Creative activities**
- 18. Youth programs**
19. Religious community
20. Time at home

INTERNAL ASSETS



COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

- 21. Achievement motivation**
- 22. School engagement**
- 23. Homework**
- 24. Bonding to school**
- 25. Reading for pleasure**



POSITIVE VALUES

26. Caring
27. Equality and social justice
28. Integrity
29. Honesty
30. Responsibility
31. Restraint



SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

- 32. Planning and decision making**
- 33. Interpersonal competence**
34. Cultural competence
- 35. Resistance skills**
- 36. Peaceful conflict resolution**



POSITIVE IDENTITY

37. Personal power
38. Self-esteem
39. Sense of purpose
40. Positive view of personal future

BOLD: the assets schools can most directly affect

The 40 Developmental Assets™ may be reproduced for educational, noncommercial uses only. From *Your Classroom—Simple Ways to Create a Positive Learning Climate*. Copyright © 2005 by Search Institute.

