

Lesson #1

What do We Want for Our Students? Class Meetings ¹

Objectives:

Participants will

- Explore their personal and group hopes for their students
- Consider the many uses of class meetings

Materials:

- Chalkboard or chart paper and markers
- Copies of Handouts on following pages:
“Class Meetings Check-off List”
“How to Use Class Meetings”

Procedure:

- 1.** Arrange the room or ask participants to arrange the room so that everybody can see everybody else. If possible, arrange chairs in a circle.
- 2.** Opening comments: Ask the group how many minutes they spend each day on student behavior issues? What does this total in a week? A school year?

The Class Meeting is one of the most powerful tools a teacher has to ensure that a positive learning environment develops and is maintained throughout the academic year. Ask if anyone currently uses Class Meetings. If so, ask for a brief explanation of how it works. Ask if anyone is familiar with the work of Jane Nelson on Positive Discipline or Linda Albert on Cooperative Discipline. Both have accumulated a wealth of data that indicates that class meetings can indeed create a positive learning environment and help teachers find additional instructional time.

- 3.** Introduce the topic by telling the group that we are going to have a conversation/ dialogue about what we want for the children we teach. There is no problem to solve here; this is only a conversation to help us think about ourselves, our students, and what we do in the classroom. Establish Ground Rules, such as
 - * We will talk one at a time—no side conversations.
 - * Nobody may speak twice until everybody who wants to speak has had a chance to speak once.
 - * Other Ground Rules or norms as appropriate.

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4. Ask for someone to serve as timekeeper and another as recorder. Pose the topic as a question: **What characteristics do you wish for your students right now or that they need to be happy, contributing members of the community (classroom/ school/ world)?**

Have the recorder put the ideas on a flip chart or chalkboard. Once all ideas are recorded, ask the group for their reactions. (The list almost always reflect intrinsic qualities, as opposed to skills. . .confidence, good self-image, integrity, perseverance, happiness, fairness, patience, courage, optimism, hope. . .as opposed to “can do long division,” “has perfect pitch” or “punctuation” . . .!)

5. When the group has had a chance to respond to the list, ask how many minutes a day we spend teaching these qualities to students. Ask if there is a way that we teach these qualities to students even though not part of the established curriculum (by modeling, encouraging, for example). Ask what they think is the relationship between these qualities and conflict management education and classroom management.

6. Distribute copies of the handouts. Give participants time to look them over. Ask for further responses, particularly on using Class Meetings for Academic Achievement.

7. Ask for one or two volunteers to indicate a way they might like to try a Class Meeting in their own classroom or other setting.

8. Conclude by asking participants

- How can we use this information in our classrooms?
- How can we use this information in our school?
- How does this information apply to our School Conflict Management Action Plan?

Handout: Class Meetings Check-off List ²

1. **Have students arrange themselves in a circle so everyone can see and hear.**
2. **State the topic, goals and length of time the meeting will run.**
(20 minutes is the average)
3. **Set discussion ground rules.**
(Examples: take turns to talk; one person talks at a time; listen while someone else is talking)

OPTIONAL: Determine a discussion leader, timekeeper and recorder.
4. **Pose the topic, in question form, to the group.**
(Example: Several people have said there is a lot of name calling lately. What can we do about that?)
5. **Pause to give students time to think about their individual responses.**
6. **Ask that the class take turns sharing their thoughts.**

OPTIONAL: If there is an appointed discussion leader, he/she calls on individuals to speak.
OPTIONAL: Sometimes, with younger students, children pass a ball or toy around and the student holding the item is the one who speaks.
OPTIONAL: You can also have the class work with partners to share among themselves. Then have these small groups share with the entire class.
7. **Put all ideas on a flip chart or chalkboard for all to see.**
OPTIONAL: If there is a recorder, have that student do this (only older students).
OPTIONAL: For very young children, skip this step or draw simple pictures.
8. **Once all ideas are recorded, ask the group for their responses. Ask follow-up questions to clarify. Try to help them come to consensus on which ideas work best.**
9. **See if they can agree to try the promising ideas.**
10. **Review their agreement. Close the meeting.**

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HANDOUT: How to Use Class Meetings **Classroom Management - The Peaceable Classroom**³

The class meeting is one of the most powerful tools a teacher has to ensure that a positive learning environment is created and maintained throughout the academic year.

Many teachers mistakenly think that Class Meetings are only a tool for problem-solving after something has happened. While this is the perfect time to hold a Class Meeting, there are many, many other times a Class Meeting can be useful. It might make sense to view these other times as opportunities or as prevention strategies to use before something happens. Examples of prevention-oriented class meetings include:

Community-building

This type of class meeting helps students get to know each other – and it helps teachers get to know their students. These class meetings can be especially valuable during the first weeks of the new school year. This time helps children feel more at ease in the classroom, with each other and with their teacher.

An easy way to start these **get acquainted** class meetings is through use of a sentence starter such as: “Something I did during summer vacation. . .,” or “Something I look forward to doing this year at school. . .” Class meetings can be used to discuss school and **classroom behavior expectations**. Some teachers allow students to help determine consequences.

As children know each other, have **compliment time** where children express what they like or admire about each other. (Teachers need to assure that all children are included in giving AND receiving compliments.)

As the year progresses, meetings can be used to discuss how to make the classroom better, how to work better as a **team**, things that will continue to **improve the classroom atmosphere** and allow students a significant role in both creating and maintaining a positive climate. Class meetings can be used to monitor or assess progress on agreements from earlier class meetings. Example: have a class meeting to get student feedback on classroom behavior.

Class meetings can be conducted at the end of the school day or week to evaluate **how things went** during that time and what the class can do to make things even better.

Planning or Goal-setting

Class meetings can be a time to discuss **plans and goals – for a day, a project, a curriculum unit**. Cooperative learning or team projects can be created, monitored and evaluated during a series of class meetings. Meetings can focus on questions like “**What do we need to do in order for this project or activity to go well for us?**” or “**How well are we working together? How do we make it better?**”

Class meetings can be used to discuss and determine classroom activities for achieving group goals or student recognition, such as field trips or class parties.

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Improving Skills Needed for Academic Achievement

Class meetings are a time for students to hone communication skills as students need to speak clearly and listen well during a class meeting. Some students might be given leadership roles in actually conducting class meetings. Students may need to analyze information, consider perspectives, create and evaluate options, consider consequences, negotiate, make decisions or come to consensus during class meetings.

Class meetings can also allow for discussions about homework or test preparation. They also can be used to gather feedback or reflect on and discuss what has been taught/learned.

Problem-solving Meetings

Students and the teacher may request a class meeting about a problem. Students may want ideas on handling conflicts with friends. Elementary students often have class meetings about things that happen at recess. Class meetings can help individuals or the whole class determine what to do about issues like gossip, bullying, teasing, name-calling, excluding others, tolerance for differences. Teachers may want a class meeting to discuss interruptions during instruction, problems with homework assignments, or other classroom behavior.

As teachers and students get more comfortable with class meetings, they can be conducted in 10-15 minutes. Class meetings can be conducted any day of the week, any time of the day that makes sense. Few tools have the flexibility and potential that Class Meetings have for creating Peaceable Classrooms.