NORMING: A PRACTICE THAT ENCOURAGES SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL COMPETENCY

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Center on
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OVERVIEW STATEMENT

Imagine that upon entering a fourth grade classroom, a student hurries up to you and says, "Welcome to our class, Ms. Jones. Please come in. We are working in groups on revising our stories. " As you begin to look around, you notice that students are sitting at desks in groups of three or four. They are talking quietly. You stop at one group to listen in. A boy reads his piece aloud while the others listen and take notes on a piece of paper. When he has finished reading, one member of the group says, "I like how you used the word 'spectacular' to describe the sunset. What about it was spectacular? Was it the colors?" The boy responds, "It was colorful—pinks and yellows and purples—but it was more than that. The sun was in the middle and looked like a really bright orange ball. It almost hurt my eyes to look at it."

The interactions you just read were respectful, enthusiastic, and helpful to me as a visitor and to the student sharing his story. Had they just happened naturally? Later in the day, you spoke with the teacher. He told you that in the beginning of the year, the class discusses how they will make visitors feel welcome. Together they decide on a procedure and create a set of norms for greeting visitors. They practice until everyone in the classroom feels comfortable greeting guests. Each week a designated student is the "greeter."

The teacher also works with the students to set norms for how they will work in small groups. The norms include behaviors such as eye contact, active listening, and taking turns. When students are sharing their work, they need these skills. They also need to know how to give and receive feedback. Before beginning group work, the teacher models these behaviors, and the students discuss what they see and hear. Then they model for one another and get into small groups to practice. Each time that students work in their groups, they meet afterward as a class to talk about how it went. They compare their group work with the norms they have set and consider what went well and what they need to improve on the next time.

When we think about developing a positive culture within classrooms and throughout a school, it is important that we examine norming. Norms are specific expectations that teachers and students establish to manage behavior toward one another and the school environment. They are part of what makes students feel safe, brings students together as a cohesive group, and helps students build connections to one another. When students participate in creating norms, they are more likely to participate in instruction and engage in cooperative relationships with one another. They also better understand the classroom expectations and begin to monitor and change their own behaviors. Norms are the foundation of school and classroom management and culture.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

In the 1980s, Emmer pointed to the importance of establishing rules and procedures for general classroom behavior, group work, seatwork, transitions and interruptions, use of materials and equipment, and beginning and ending the period or the day (Emmer, 1984; Emmer, Sanford, Evertson, Clements, & Martin, 1981). According to Glasser, ideally, the class should establish these rules and procedures through discussion and mutual consent by teacher and students (Glasser, 1969, 1990).

Durlak and colleagues (2011) conducted a meta-analysis on social/emotional learning, finding that "school's intentional implementation of evidence-based social and emotional learning programs not only improved social and emotional competency but also yielded an 11 percentile point gain in academic achievement." The study found that four conditions were necessary:

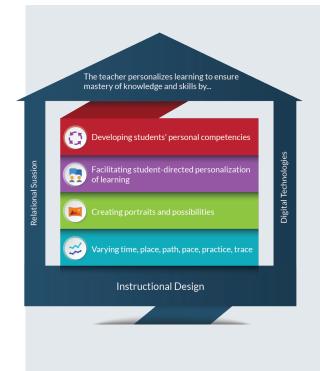| **1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Classroom norms for high expectations and academic success	Supportive and caring relationships	Teacher's classroom management that supports student engagement	Environments that support positive behaviors by actively teaching, encouraging, and reinforcing (Durlak et al., 2011).

Redding (2014a) writes, "The culture of a teacher's classroom reflects values and is seen in its rituals, routines, expected behaviors, and relationships among teachers and students. How the teacher organizes the classroom and establishes and reinforces its rules and procedures constitute classroom management, and classroom management operationalizes much of what is broadly called classroom culture" (p.13).

Chris Sturgis and Katherine Casey (2018) state that based on research in the learning sciences, students need physical and emotional safety to learn.

> It is very difficult to learn if one doesn't feel safe and respected, have trust that educators fully believe in them, or feel that the system is stacked against them. The learning sciences also emphasize that learning is a social process rooted in interactions with people and environments. To facilitate social learning, it is imperative that schools cultivate supportive and consistent relationships between educators and students, and among students as peers. Relationships need to be based on respect and an attempt to understand different perspectives. (pp. 18–19)

One key characteristic of a supportive classroom and school culture that Sturgis and Casey cite is empowerment. "Students and educators are able to make decisions that support their personal learning paths and progress. Empowerment begins with building the metacognition and social and emotional skills that are the foundation of student agency. Empowerment is reflected in management and operational structures" (p.18).

How Norming Relates to Personalized Learning

The Center on Innovations in Learning (CIL) defines personalized learning as the "teacher's ability to influence a student's learning and personal competencies by virtue of their knowledge of, and interaction with the student and the student's family." Throughout their presentations on personalized learning, CIL educators liken personalized learning to a house where each floor is one element of a total design meant to ensure mastery of the students' knowledge and skills.

The teacher personalizes learning to ensure mastery of knowledge and skills by...

Developing students' personal competencies

Facilitating student-directed personalization of learning

Creating portraits and possibilities

Varying time, place, path, pace, practice, trace

Relational Suasion

Digital Technologies

Instructional Design

The first floor relates to the component of **varying the time, place, path, pace, practice, and trace of learning** for each student. Moving up, the second floor component, **creating portraits and possibilities**, calls for the student to gather and reflect upon information about him- or herself to make better decisions about the path to the future. The third floor focuses on facilitating **student self-direction personalization of learning** based on interests and aspirations and encouraging students' sense of responsibility for learning. The top floor of the house calls on the teacher to develop the **students' personal competencies**. There are two structural supports that run throughout the house—**relational suasion** and **digital technologies**. All of these elements rest on a foundation of **instructional design**. Because setting norms is foundational to establishing a positive culture for learning, this practice enhances all supports and floors of the personalized learning house.
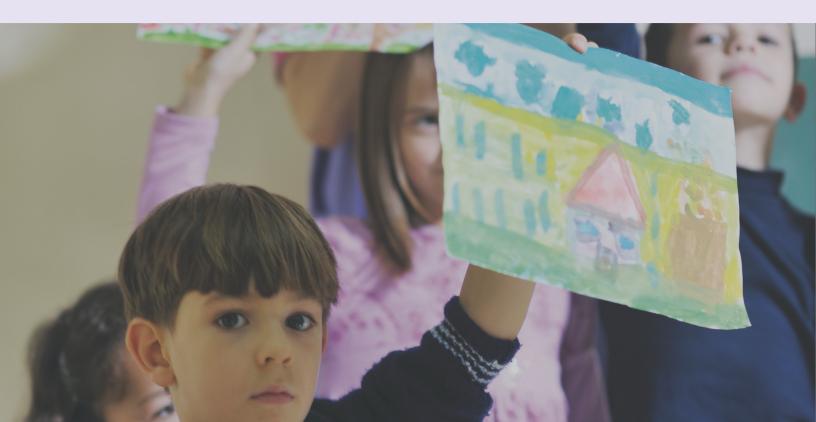
In his practice guide, "Personal competencies: A framework for building students' capacity to learn," Sam Redding proposes four elements that make up personal competencies: cognitive competency (what I know), metacognitive competency (how I learn), motivational competency (why I learn), and social/emotional competency (how I relate). Through coordination of all four components, when confronting a new learning task, students develop learning habits that lead to mastery of learning objectives.

Norming is closely related to the social/emotional competency in that it helps students relate to one another and their environment. Dr. Redding defines social/emotional competency as "sense of self-worth, regard for others, and emotional understanding and management to set positive goals and make responsible decisions" (p. 5). He states: "Social/emotional competency is built through both evidence-based programs and the culture of schools and classrooms" (p. 18). He also refers to the Durlak study cited earlier that lists four conditions that are the foundation of successful social and emotional approaches. The first of these conditions is implementation of norms for high expectations and academic success.

Why Should Norming Be Included in Planning?

Sometimes we equate norms with rules. Rules, however, are usually teacher generated and introduced on the first day of school for the purpose of creating a safe and efficient classroom environment. Norms, on the other hand, are an agreement among members of a classroom or school about how they will treat one another. They are often developed when there is a perceived need. Because teachers and students together develop norms, students are more likely to take ownership for following them. Norms **foster a sense of belonging** and help students begin to feel that they are all a part of the same community of learners. Norms help to teach **cooperation and communication** skills. They give students the language to interact with one another about how things are done in their school and classroom. When someone in their group is not cooperating, having norms assists students in holding them accountable. Norms **encourage empathy and caring** for one another. In classrooms where norms are in place, students often help one another follow the rules. They understand that when someone breaks the rules, it hurts the whole community.

Norms are not just documents that hang on the walls; rather, they are directly taught, practiced, and returned to again and again. They cross all subjects in a classroom and are integrated into all academic areas. In classrooms and schools where norms are in place, students understand the behavior expected of them in a variety of situations, classrooms are well managed, and the school culture is welcoming and positive.

HOW DO I CREATE NORMS IN MY CLASSROOM OR SCHOOL?

There are various ways to create norms in a classroom, but most of them begin with a **discussion** with students about how they want their class to be; then they work backward to think about how they need to act to get there. The ideas students **generate** usually reflect something about respecting and caring for themselves, one another, and their learning environment. After a list of possible rules is produced, the class needs to work together to **consolidate** them into three to five global rules. Students often state their ideas using negative language such as "Do not hit." Through the discussion, the teacher helps students state their norms in positive terms. The final list of norms is published and displayed in a prominent place in the classroom.
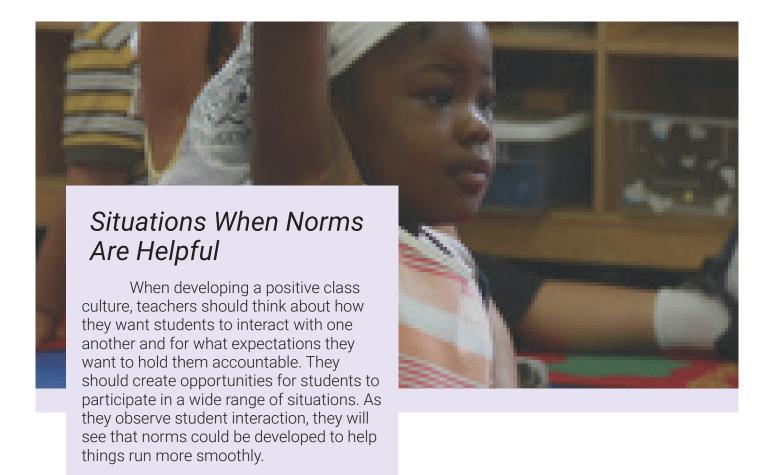
After the norms are in place, they must be **explicitly taught.** Often the lesson focuses on how the norm's action will look and how it will sound. For example, if the norm is "Take care of our belongings," students might come up with ideas such as "Put books back on the shelf after you are done with them" (looks) and "Walk quietly to the shelves when the teacher says to put your things away" (sounds).

The next step in creating norms is **modeling and practice.** The teacher might ask a student to show the rest of the class what the behavior will look and sound like when they are following the norm. After a student models, the class discusses what they notice. This might be repeated with several more examples until the teacher is confident that students understand the norm. Then the class practices following the norms within the course of their normal routines. The teacher stops periodically to have a discussion about how well they are doing. At first, discussions are frequent. Over time, they occur less and less often as the norms become second nature to students. Of course, whenever there is fallback in following the norms, the teacher initiates a discussion, remodels the behavior, and provides ongoing practice.

In most groups there are one or two members who disregard the established norms. As part of any discussion of norms there should also be agreement on how members of the group will hold one another accountable. It is important to make sure that there are logical consequences attached to breaking norms. For example, if the norm is "take turns talking" and a student is constantly calling out, the teacher might first give a non-verbal or verbal reminder. If the behavior persists, the teacher might direct the student to take a "time out" away from the group. The time out allows the student to regain control over his or her behavior. Of course, the procedures for "time out" must be thought through carefully and taught, modeled, and practiced so that students understand the purpose and so that they don't cause further disruption.

Situations When Norms Are Helpful

When developing a positive class culture, teachers should think about how they want students to interact with one another and for what expectations they want to hold them accountable. They should create opportunities for students to participate in a wide range of situations. As they observe student interaction, they will see that norms could be developed to help things run more smoothly.

Norms can be nonverbal. For example, the teacher can implement signals for when the class should "stop, look, and listen"—maybe a hand signal, a chime, a bell. Nonverbal signals can also be used as checks for understanding. Some teachers teach students the sign for "I agree" or institute a "thumbs up/thumbs down" protocol. As a check on time during group work, a teacher might ask students to show with their fingers how much more time they need to complete an assignment using a "fist-to-five" protocol.

Teachers might institute norms for classroom routines:

- How do we line up for lunch?
- How should we come to meeting circle?
- How do we take out and put away materials?
- What is our routine for moving around the crowded classroom?
- How do we organize our materials?

All of these actions might be part of developing a culture of respect within a classroom.

There should also be norms developed for group discussions. One common mode of discussion is "turn and talk." Norms for this routine might include:

- Face your partner.
- Sit knee to knee.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Take turns.
- Ask questions or add on.

A set of norms for larger group discussions might look like this:

- Listen actively.
- Ask for clarification when confused.
- Ask questions.
- Take turns.

Whenever a norm is developed, the key is to discuss, model, and practice it. Then reinforce it with positive praise and return to it regularly.

Creating Norms Throughout the School

In one school, the principal modeled the creation of classroom norms at a staff meeting. She then asked teachers to create classroom norms within their own classes. On a designated day, each class brought its class norms and hung them on walls around the gym. Teachers then led their students on a poster walk. As they looked at norms developed by other classes, they talked about how the rules were alike and different. The principal then brought a representative group of student leaders together and led them in a discussion of norms for student behavior across the school. She followed a similar norms development process as classroom teachers had done. After the norms were developed, they were presented at the next assembly. The student leaders modeled for the student body. Afterward they created posters of the school wide norms and posted them around the school.

Later in the year when the principal and teachers noticed that cafeteria behavior was becoming a problem, the principal asked each teacher to send a class representative to the cafeteria for a meeting. This group, with the principal's assistance, created a set of norms for cafeteria behavior. The media specialist filmed the students presenting the norms they had developed and modeling the agreed upon behavior for the cafeteria. The film was played on the school's daily TV show. Teachers were asked to review the norms with their classes and assist students in practicing them.

Norms Throughout the Workplace

At the beginning of the school year when collaborative teams of teachers begin to work together as a professional learning community, one of the first things they do is establish norms for their work together. These norms might include how they will discuss ideas with one another and how they will show respect for their colleagues' ideas. They might also include coming to the meetings on time and being prepared. The team members then discuss how they will hold one another accountable for meeting their norms.

The examples provided show how norms might be created across the school. Just as they do in classrooms, the development of norms and conversations around how we as a school community treat ourselves, others, and the school help to build a culture that is cohesive and respectful. When students and adults live together in a positive environment, they are likely to build strong social and emotional competence that impacts learning across the school.

SUMMARY

Norming is an important factor in developing positive classroom and school culture. Norms are created when teachers and students collaboratively agree on a set of behaviors for working together and managing their environment. Because students are part of the development process, in classrooms and schools where norms are in place, students often show more respect for one another and take greater ownership for their learning.

Although the practice of norming strengthens all components of personalized learning, it is most closely aligned with developing the students' personal competencies, especially the social/emotional competency. When students learn how to communicate and relate with one another (social/emotional competency), they become more motivated learners (motivational competency) who are more willing to use learning strategies (metacognitive competency) and gain mastery of new concepts (cognitive competency).

There are specific techniques for developing norms. These can be generated for a variety of situations and used with students of all ages from preschool through adult learners. After norms have been agreed upon in any setting, it is important that they be explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced.

GLOSSARY

1 Norming:

The process of developing norms

2 Norms:

Specific expectations that teachers and students establish to manage behavior toward one another and the school environment

3 Personal competencies:

The individual's interrelated cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and social/emotional competencies

4 Personalized learning:

A teacher's relationships with students and their families and the use of multiple instructional modes to scaffold each student's learning and enhance the student's personal competencies

5 Social/emotional competency:

Sense of self-worth, regard for others, and emotional understanding and management to set positive goals and make responsible decisions

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