**Teacher Agency in the Classroom**

**Classroom Practice and Student Supports**

*Teacher agency is the voluntary exercise of power in thought, choices, and actions. Exercising this power of choice can enable teachers to create more equitable spaces for students and communities.*

### Routines

Teachers have agency over many of their classroom routines, such as discussion structures, seating arrangements, bathroom procedures, and more.

- Are the routines in place because it’s better for the teacher or better for the students?
- Routines can be changed without obstructing the objective.
- Example: Transitioning from the loud, crowded hallway to a silent, independent “do-now” can be difficult for many students. Teachers can change the structure to ease the transition.

### Grades

- Teachers have agency over their grading: involve and work with students, be clear about what is being assessed, allow for multiple attempts, and do not grade as a reward or punishment.
- Allow for multiple ways of knowing and showing based on the content objective. Example: Students can ask and answer questions of a text by drawing, talking, TikTok-ing, or they can use post-its, highlighters, etc.

### Curriculum

- While there are some constraints to the curricular materials teachers use in the classroom, it is imperative that teachers utilize agency to ensure that the curriculum is inclusive and speaks positively of all students.
- Find materials that provide students the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the text, as well as the opportunity to learn about others who may be different.
- Challenge content districts to eliminate curricular materials that may be harmful to certain student groups or do not depict all groups in a positive light.

### Expectations and Rules

- Classroom rules and expectations when created solely by educators create power imbalances in classrooms. Teachers have agency in regard to classroom rules and can utilize that agency to empower students rather than subordinate them.
- Creating community agreements with students rather than for students gives students a sense of ownership over their own classrooms.
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**Points of Reflection**

- What is your motivation for the practice and what do you hope to accomplish with this practice?
- Is it truly a school policy, or is it something that has just always been done, and therefore often goes unquestioned?
- Who does the practice help? Who does the practice harm?
- How have I empowered students to take ownership in this space?
- What message does this unit send to students about themselves or others?

**Common Missteps or Misconceptions**

“If I am too nice to my students and not strict in the classroom, students will take advantage of me.”

Our primary goal is to create classroom norms based on mutual respect and not obedience. Therefore our goal is not to be “mean” to students but to develop communities of care.

Here is an example: Many classrooms only allow 3 bathroom passes per semester. Changing this routine is not “letting students take advantage.” It is addressing a basic human need. What is the goal of only allowing 3 bathroom passes? If students are not trusted, and therefore only allowed to miss class 3 times to use the restroom, is the bathroom the problem? What about addressing the reasoning behind the lack of trust instead, or addressing why some students may want to leave the classroom? Over the course of a semester, many students will need to use the restroom more than 3 times. We do not need to police their natural functioning and basic needs.

**Glossary**

**Agency**: the voluntary exercise of power in thought, choices, and actions.

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