People for Education

Measuring What Matters

Quality learning environments

The domain

In a quality learning environment classrooms support a dynamic interrelationship between students, teachers and content; the whole school mirrors ideals of citizenship in democratic societies, and supports social relationships, characterized by trust, interdependence and empathy amongst all members; and school–community relationships focus on students' well-being, promote cross-cultural perspectives, and provide broader learning opportunities for students.

Why it matters

The organization of the school, the relationships within it, and the learning "environments" within classrooms influence students' academic, social, and behavioural learning. The quality of practices and the opportunities to learn, both inside the classroom and throughout the school, play a critical role in developing environments where students can flourish.

Conditions in Classrooms

Classroom environment

- The classroom is welcoming, inclusive, and psychologically safe.

- Student voice and experiences are integrated within learning and curriculum in classrooms.

- Students characterize their work in class as both interesting and engaging; students are intrinsically motivated.

- Expectations for students are high, but realistic.

- Student expectations are not fixed. They are open, dynamic, and collaboratively shared.

- Diversity in the classroom is respected and individual differences are celebrated.

- All students are provided with opportunities to participate.

- Risk-taking is rewarded and failures are embraced as learning opportunities.

- The teacher takes risks – mistakes are made visible to students.

- The teacher's classroom management style focuses on maintaining high standards, while projecting genuine warmth.

- Positive student-teacher and student-student relationships are supported.

Learning experiences

- Tasks are balanced between direct instruction and student-led inquiry.

- Students have opportunities to work collaboratively in small and large groups, as well as individually.

- Tasks are balanced between pre-planned structure and responsive, student-initiated learning.

- Classroom activities are culturally relevant and responsive.

- Learning experiences are connected to real-life examples and problems.

- Students have opportunities to learn and express learning in multiple ways (visual, verbal, physical, social, etc.).

- Activities prompt students to draw connections between different disciplines.

- There is a balance between open problems (which have no single answer) and closed problems (which generally do).

- Students have time to be inquisitive and explore new areas.

- Experiences are integrated with other initiatives around the school and community.

Assessment

- Objectives of learning are clear and shared with students.

- Informative feedback is shared in an ongoing way with students to support their learning.

- Assessment is mostly used in support of learning, rather than to evaluate learning.

- Assessments make use of a wide array of student data (e.g. work products, observations and conversations).

- Students have opportunities to assess their peers' and their own work.

- Students set goals and assess their own progress towards those goals.

Conditions within the School

School Environment

- Student success in school includes development of citizenship, creativity, social emotional learning and health.

- The school ethos promotes mutual respect and equality of opportunity.

- Interactions across the school are characterized by respect and appreciation for individual differences.

- Active participation of students in all aspects of school life is integral to the operating social environment of the school.

- All aspects of the school (e.g. the schoolyard, sports teams, peer interactions, hallways) are recognized as learning environments.

- Teachers are trusted to ensure successful outcomes using professional knowledge and judgment.

- Teachers feel responsible for student learning, both individually and as a group.

- Student voice and input on school decisions is valued, sought, and used.

- The school is an open learning space in which community members outside of the school with diverse interests and resources/expertise work with students and staff.
- School-based structures are in place to identify and provide support for students dealing with social, emotional, learning, or mental health problems/disorders.

School leadership

- Authority is shared across the school's staff; it is not limited to formal leadership roles.
- School leadership values student voice and consults student government in school decision-making.
- Principals provide, and support the development of, instructional leadership among educators.

Professional learning for educators

- Professional learning is modeled and promoted by school leadership.
- There is space and time provided by school leadership for professional learning and collaboration in the daily workflow of teachers.
- Professional learning is self-directed and collaborative.
- Teacher professional learning is used to inform school direction, vision, and strategy.
- Professional learning is ongoing and embedded in work in ways that involve both:
  o the use of data drawn from selected experiences within the classroom.
  o risk taking and experimentation in educators' practice.

Conditions beyond the School

Partnerships between school and community

- Parents feel included and respected in the school community.
- Clear and mutually beneficial agreements exist between schools and their community partners.
- Educators and community members (including parents) are actively involved in partnerships.
- Teachers enrich curriculum learning and contribute to work within the community through school-community partnerships.
- Partnerships provide experiential learning opportunities for students.
- Partnerships involve the mentorship of students during and beyond the scope of classroom projects.
- Students are aware of and can access programs and services for support with issues related to mental illness, bullying, and substance abuse.
- School-community partnerships support the appreciation of diversity and respect for people from different cultures and contexts.