

PERSONAL SYSTEM OF DISCIPLINE

Grade Levels: High School, 9th through 12th Grades

Subjects: Geography (U.S. & World), History (U.S. & World), Social Studies

Assumptions:

- Students exhibit a wide variety of emotional, physical, and social needs.
- Students relate to their school environment in remarkably different ways.
- Students bring their assumptions about school, about teachers, and about academic subjects from a variety of cultural, economic, religious, and social backgrounds.

- Each class represents a unique cross mix of individuals.
- This unique community assembles for a limited duration of time.
- An important opportunity, for sharing and interacting, i.e., to promote individual and group learning and growth, exists.

- Traditionally, formal state-controlled academic settings emphasize extrinsic over intrinsic motivators.
- Traditionally, pedagogical methods and processes emphasize the flow of knowledge from teacher to student rather than person to person.
- Traditionally, bureaucratic involvement in the educational enterprise stifles the creative learning environment.

- The healthy, holistic learning environment addresses emotional, physical, social, and spiritual needs.
- The healthy learning environment involves all class members creatively as individuals and as members of an important social entity, i.e., the class.
- The healthy learning environment seeks to break down traditional barriers to creative learning, i.e., the model of one teacher and many students, when in reality all class members (especially the “teacher”) are learners, engaging in both learning and teaching on a functional level.

- Unfortunately, limitations to maximizing the learning environment exist because of certain “necessary” evils, i.e., failure of human nature, lack of resources, and institutional restrictions.
- However, the potential to creatively overcome these pitfalls also exists.
- The triad of preventive, supportive, and corrective discipline rests on the most important triad of the intrinsic worth of every person (i.e., in religious terms, bearing the *imago dei*, the image of God, or in psychological terms, the human conscience), the ability of human nature to

adapt and change for the better, and the insatiable desire of the human spirit toward greater experiential growth and understanding of both self and the world.

Mechanisms:

—By nature, the classroom, or physical environment, is quite restrictive. Class members are often severely limited and have little or no freedom of movement. While the physical environment is a certain geographical and historical environment, it is not the geographical and historical milieu of the lessons to be learned. It is *an artificial environment*. Hence, it must be “reconstructed” in order to provide the greatest potential for learning. Preferences for reconstruction might be limited, but could possibly include abandonment of traditional furniture, rearrangement of furniture into recognizable geographic patterns, drawing of charts, maps, time lines, etc. on floors, walls, windows, and ceilings, and use of moveable artifacts such as globes, archaeological finds, photos, historical documents, etc.

—Uncomfortable seating or standing positions must be minimized.

—Learning must be directed toward the experiential and even the experimental as much as possible.

—Such a dynamic physical environment will be resisted by some and will be welcomed by others. For a few, it will be an open invitation to “chaos” and “disorder.” Logical, rational underpinnings will provide the cohesion for any “new” physical arrangement. In this way, the physical environment itself becomes part of the learning process and the thing learned.

—Out of necessity, daily attendance checks will be made.

—Class members will be expected to bring common materials, such as textbook(s), assignments, homework, writing materials.

—The class leader, “teacher” or otherwise, will be expected to bring special materials for any particular lesson.

—Apart from specific instructions and explanatory material, the class will be conducted in an “open” manner, i.e., free and spontaneous discussion about the daily lesson. The class is a group learning environment, and all members are expected to participate as fully as possible.

—Since communication of facts and feelings is imperative, rules restricting free and open communication will be minimized.

—Those who choose to deviate from the material in the daily lesson(s) in their communication will be encouraged by redirection to contribute to the sum knowledge of the group by appropriate participation.

—The class leader, or “teacher,” will plan appropriate blocks or sections of material for adequate coverage of the entire curriculum.

—Daily, weekly, or monthly checks for comprehension / understanding will be utilized, to include pretests, post tests, individual tests, group tests, projects, reports, presentations, role play, historic re-enactment, drama, etc.

—Class member input into curriculum development and evaluation tools and processes will be maximized as much as possible by use of formal and informal feedback.

*Parameters or
Expectations:*

—Local district and school guidelines will be communicated and applied.

—Positive behavior(s) will be recognized and applauded.

—Disruptive behavior(s) to the healthy learning environment will be treated as part of the group learning process and will become, necessarily, part of the “curriculum” for which class members are responsible.

[Note: The class leader, or “teacher,” must not assume that he or she is excused from disruptive behavior to the healthy learning environment. Sometimes, by the desire to be in charge or in control, the class leader is most likely to be guilty of disruptive behavior.]

—Class members are expected to be courteous to all other class members.

—Class members are expected to care for personal and public property.

—Class members will recognize and respect genuine differences of opinion.

—Activities to encourage and develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills will be an active part of the curriculum.

—Individual and group study skills will also be a part of the curriculum.

—Social processes, as they relate to the curriculum, will be utilized.

—Hyper-competitiveness will be de-emphasized.

—A flexible grading scale will be implemented with equal weight on content and process.

—Individual and group goals, as well as measurable objectives, will be established by class members, albeit within the framework of state legal guidelines set for curriculum.

Pragmatics:

—All class members must choose to participate in order to fully maximize a healthy learning environment.

—Any class member who decides not to participate, i.e., via inattention or disruption, unduly minimizes the total learning environment and penalizes both self and the class.

—Any class member who deliberately and repeatedly minimizes the total learning environment will be expected to provide a rational justification (either orally or possibly in writing) for such action to the class leader or

“teacher.” Failure to do so will result in removal from the class. Local policies on such situations will apply.

—Ideally, the group would act as arbiter and judge for deviations in such a dynamic class setting. Realistically, with the current state of educational affairs in our society along with heightened politicized bureaucratic and media intrusion, the group leader or “teacher” must take complete responsibility for discipline.

Support:

—Collaboration of the class leader or “teacher” with peers, administrators, and helping agencies is a must.

—Concerted effort to enlist the support of parents and guardians is an absolute necessity.

—Communication of goals, ideals, and objectives in the creation of a new model conducive to healthy learning cannot be neglected.

—Mild and severe conflicts over methodology, philosophy, and minutiae are to be expected.

Tools:

—A variety of pedagogical methods, curriculum enhancements, conflict resolution principles, basic group dynamics, negotiation tactics, body language strategies, Rogerian and more direct counseling techniques will be applied.

—The class leader or “teacher” will develop a different master plan for effective management of each class which is unique, and a specific plan for each “problem” individual as needed.

—Documentation will be maintained on in-house or standard forms. Class members may be utilized for creative keeping of records, as long as issues of confidentiality and privacy are not compromised.

Propaganda:

—An initial and periodic newsletter, with contributions from students, concerning curriculum, discipline, interests, performance, scheduling, etc. may be sent to administrators, faculty, parents, and students.

—For technologically up-to-date institutions, a class web-page or email messages may be possible.

—Traditional conferences remain necessary for face to face discussion of key issues.

—With administrative support, a special Parents’ Day, Week, or even Month can be stressed to enlist involvement of the most important resource for students.