

# The First Six Weeks of School

## A Responsive Classroom Approach

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### An Overview

- The first six weeks of school are critical to the success of the entire school year.
- In the Responsive Classroom approach, social and academic curriculum is woven together to accommodate the developmentally appropriate needs of the children.
- This approach to teaching & learning has grown out of the work of Northeast Foundation for Children, Greenfield, MA

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### The Seven Beliefs of the Responsive Classroom

1. The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
2. How children learn is as important as what they learn.
3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
4. There is a set of social skills that children need in order to be successful academically and socially: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (CARES).

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5. Knowing the children we teach is as important as knowing the content we teach.
6. Knowing the parents of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children.
7. Teachers and administrators must model the social and academic skills which they wish to teach their students.

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### Intentions During the First Six Weeks of School

1. Create a climate and tone of warmth and safety.
2. Teach the schedule and routines of the school day and our expectations for behavior in each of them.
3. Introduce students to the physical environment and materials of the classroom and the school, and teach students how to use and care for them.
4. Establish expectations about ways we will learn together in the year ahead.

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### Teaching Practices

#### Morning Meeting

The Morning Meeting serves as a transition from home to school, helps children to feel welcome and known, sets the tone for the day, creates a climate of trust, increases students' confidence and investment in learning, provides a meaningful context for teaching and practicing academic skills, encourages cooperation and inclusion, and improves children's communication skills.

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#### The Four Components of the Morning Meeting:

1. **Greeting:** Children greet each other by name, often including handshaking, clapping, singing, and other activities.
2. **Sharing:** Students share some news of interest to the class and respond to each other, practicing communication skills and learning about one another.
3. **Group Activity:** The whole class does a short activity together, building class cohesion through active participation.

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4. News and Announcements: Students develop language skills and learn about the events in the day ahead by reading and discussing a daily message posted on a chart by their teacher.

Meetings vary from teacher to teacher and class to class, each meeting reflecting the style and flavor of the students & teachers.

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## Teaching Practices

### Guided Discovery

Guided discovery is a focused, purposeful, yet playful technique teachers use to introduce materials, areas, or activities to students. The Guided Discovery consists of five stages:

1. Introduction
2. Generating ideas and modeling exploratory work
3. Children explore
4. Children share their explorations and observations
5. Cleanup and care of materials

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### Academic Choice

One way to give children more choice in their learning and to allow them to work at their own pace and level of ability is through a structure called academic choice, in which children choose their learning activity within a range of choice structured by the teacher.

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### Hopes and Goals:

The Starting Point for Establishing Rules with Students

Enlisting children in the process of generating rules is an essential part of the work of the first six weeks of school. Children are more apt to understand and respect rules they help make, and it's important that everyone has a voice and say in the construction of what it means to be a safe, caring, and respectful community.

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### Logical Consequences:

Logical consequences is a discipline technique. Unlike punishment, which relies on the use of external control, the primary goal of logical consequences is to help children develop inner control by looking closely at their own behavior and learning from their mistakes.

Three criteria, referred to as the three R's (Jane Nelsen), are used to ensure that a response is truly a logical consequence. They are:

1. **Related**-The consequence is directly related to the child's behavior.
2. **Respectful**- The consequences are not intended to humiliate or hurt.
3. **Reasonable**- The consequence should help children fix their mistakes and know what to do next time, not make them feel bad.

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### Time-Out:

Time away from the group is used when a child is not able to cooperate and is being disruptive to the group. In younger elementary grades, there is often a designated area in the classroom where children go for a brief time to regain their controls. In older elementary classrooms, students often have input into deciding where their time-out place will be. To be a logical consequence and not a punishment, time-out must be used in a matter-of-fact and respectful manner. The teacher's tone and intent is a critical factor in this distinction.

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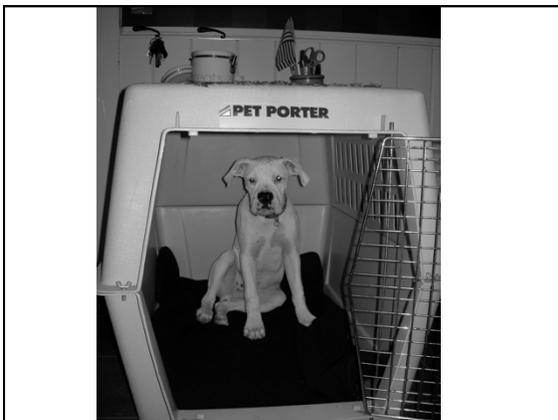
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## Quiet Time

Responsive Classroom advocates for a mid-day schedule that includes recess, lunch, and quiet time, in that order. The children need a break from the rigors of academics and the demands of social interaction, a break which will help them to be more productive and engaged in the afternoon.

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