Creating a Positive Learning Environment: Script

Introduction Slide 1

Hello and welcome to Creating a Positive Learning Environment.

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Webster Dictionary defines "environment" as the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival.

For a farmer, the environmental factor of climate is the number-one variable for a successful harvest during the growing season. While quality of seeds, richness of soil and fertilization all play important roles, it is the weather that primarily determines the success or failure of the harvest.

The climate plays an equally important part in the growth of people. While quality of the learning design, relevance of content, and time of the program all play an important role, it is the learning climate that makes the difference between quality growth and just showing up.

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As an instructor, **you are responsible for creating a positive learning environment for your students.** Creating a positive learning environment begins well in advance of students arriving to the classroom. It requires thoughtful planning and strategic thinking. Have you ever experienced sitting in a classroom listening to lectures and trying to stay awake? It's not a pleasant situation to endure. Our intention is to prevent this unpleasant situation from occurring in your classroom through proven strategies and techniques. Your success of creating a positive learning environment will be determined by the amount of quality time and preparation you devote towards the planning process.

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So, what is a positive learning environment? A positive learning environment should be one that is safe, positive, and promotes learning. It is one which encourages learners to achieve their potential, identifies and accommodates their individual needs and learning preferences, and deals with issues that arise within groups.

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According to Rena Palloff and Keith Pratt, authors of Building Learning Communities in Cyber Space: Effective Strategies for the online Classroom, A positive learning environment is made up of a "Community in which people are joined together by mutual interest to intensively examine a particular theme, are able to learn together and exchange existing knowledge and work on aspects of problem solving together."

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A positive learning environment is more than just having proper lighting, and appropriate seating. A positive learning environment is described as interactive, dynamic, objective-based, value-centered, promotes active learning, creative, respectful, and engaging. These characteristics should be an integral part of the learning environment you create for your students.

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Let's address why it is important to create a positive learning environment before, during and after a presentation. Creating a positive learning environment in your classroom will allow your students to feel comfortable, safe and engaged; something that all students deserve. Students need to feel that it's safe to learn because they make a personal investment in the learning process and they want to do it right. They don't like to appear either foolish or incompetent. By providing a comfortable setting and a welcoming environment that focuses on the positive aspects of learning, students will be more open to actively participate in class.

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In order to create a positive learning environment for your students, you need to recognize that there are many forces at work within the learning environment. The learning environment is a result of the interaction of many components including instructor behavior, student behavior, policies, community characteristics, and much more. By recognizing the impact each of these have, you can begin combating those negative influences that work their way into the classroom. Disruptive behavior, negative influences and distractions that you may encounter in the classroom will be covered later in this lesson.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Curtis Smith. I'm an Instructional Systems Specialist assigned to the National Training Center in Phoenix, Arizona. I have over 20- years of Training and Development experience. As an Air Force Instructor, teaching a variety of safety, health and training related courses, I've worked skillfully within the learning environment and dealt with negative influences and disruptive behavior. Now that you know who I am and why this lesson on creating a positive learning environment is so important, let's take a look at our lesson objective.

By the end of this lesson (which include the Webinar 4 Exercises), each student should be able to…

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Given a scenario involving specific student behavior(s) being displayed in a classroom situation, determine the appropriate course of action for the instructor to take that will result in him or her maintaining a positive and professional learning environment.

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Now that you know what are lesson objective is, let's take a look at what we will be covering. First, we will address how to create a positive learning climate. Next, we will define and identify elements of disruptive behavior. And finally, we will talk about managing diversity in the classroom. So, let's get right into our lesson by asking a question. How do you create a positive learning environment? There are many components that contribute to the creation of a positive learning environment.

Main Point 1 (Slide 11): Positive Learning Environment
Let us begin with the climate. According to Larry Nolan Davis, author of Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Workshops, "The first few minutes of the training are the most crucial. If they are interesting, relevant, and pleasant, problems which may arise later can be resolved with a minimum of loss to the learning. If the first minutes are boring, pointless, and unpleasant, the most valuable opportunities of learning are likely to be lost due to misunderstanding, incomprehension, or apathy. If you cannot always produce a positive attitude toward learning, you should at least attempt to ensure that you are not the cause of a negative one."

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Robert Mager, an expert on training and human performance improvement issues, believes "The learning climate should be arranged in such a way that the participant is in the presence of as many pleasant conditions as possible and as few as possible unpleasant ones."

This is a tall order, but if you have properly planned and organized a positive environment for your students, you have already taken a giant step in setting a fruitful learning climate. So, what are some things you can do as an instructor to create a positive learning environment? Here are specific steps you can take to create a positive learning environment.

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Before the session:
Prepare and print your training materials
Before the session begins, prepare and print your training materials and handouts in advance. Preparing your training documents in advance and having them available to distribute to students will make a great first impression with the audience. It sends the signal to your audience that you're organized; you're serious about your profession and communicates you respect the participants and their learning experience. Here's a recommendation to consider. The training materials can be stored on individual jump drives and then given to each student. This action would reduce the amount of paper required to print course training materials. It's convenient, economical and promotes green initiatives. Please be aware, training materials should be gender neutral and avoid any traditional stereotypes.

Next, consider the room arrangement. It is essential to recognize the importance of the learning environment as it affects learner outcome. Adults typically benefit more from "hands-on" learning and working with peer groups. Some of your training will be structured as a lecture or in a classroom setting, so it is important to arrange the room in a way that enhances the learning environment. When arranging a classroom, be sure that the lighting is adequate for participants. Eliminate or reduce outside noises that may distract or interfere with hearing. There are those who prefer teaching in smaller rooms versus larger rooms because of the sound reflection.

Here are some of the frequently asked questions about arranging the classroom. What is the best way to arrange a classroom? Are all room set-ups equal? Which set-up is the best? Well, it depends upon the nature of your instruction. The physical layout can also be a reflection of your teaching style. The room arrangement involves the set-up of tables, chairs, posters, wall charts, and the storage of other materials within the classroom. To design the classroom appropriately, consider: lesson objectives, strategy, size of the room, equipment availability, number of participants, structure of the presentation and desired interaction with the group.

Take a look at the diagrams of different room set-ups located on page 7-16 in the student notebook. Closely observe the arrangement of each table and chair. In most cases, when you have a formal guest speaker or if you want no talking, no interaction, or no questions go with the more **formal classroom** set up. This can be accomplished by arranging the tables, desks or chairs in a series of rows. Keep in mind, the instruction seminar course is designed to teach you how to deliver a training presentation. Your training presentation should be highly interactive and utilize a student centered approach. The use of group activities is an effective way to generate student participation. The bottom line is you must have the involvement of your students to increase the opportunity for learning. The chevron arrangement is designed to create participant interaction. The chevron arrangement provides participants the ability to interact and see the faces of other participants and conveniently permits the instructor

to observe all learners. It reduces space between the instructor and learners and you can move up the aisle.

The **horseshoe or U-shaped** design is probably the most common seating arrangement. It allows the instructor to move closer to each student. This design works well when all learners must be able to see a demonstration. The horseshoe works wonderful when students will be involved in large group discussions and for meetings. If you want participants to collaborate in small groups to participate in group work or projects, organize them using **round tables**. This style is excellent for projects and teaching problem-solving. Each group can be working on the same topic or on different topics. By placing the seating arrangement in a circle, you can create the feeling of interaction among the participants. More members will participate when they sit at a round table rather than at a square table.

Greet Students
Also, make it a point to greet each student. You probably know that it makes a big difference in your attitude as a learner when you are welcomed warmly and made to feel comfortable. We have all had learning experiences where we were made to feel as if we were an important part of the instruction and others where our presence was irrelevant to the instructor. A handshake is more meaningful than telling a student to take a seat. Nametags or place cards may also be useful in keeping salutations personal.

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Getting Everyone Comfortable
Students respond better when provided a comfortable classroom environment. Be sure to set the appropriate room temperature. Having the room set at the correct temperature will eliminate one less distraction that could affect the concentration and focus of students. Provide an announcement of coming breaks and restroom locations to eliminate uncertainty and set the student's mind at ease. Inform students they are welcome to stand and stretch their legs during class.

Spelling out the Ground Rules
Adults (unlike most children) are also very interested in knowing the rules of the game. In this case, spell out the conduct and behavior to be exercised by participants before the learning experience in the introduction. Explain what resources will be provided and how they should be used. In the democratic approach, you might say something like this:
"These resources (people, materials) are here for you. Feel free to use them, call for more, whatever. Stop me (us) if you don't understand something; suggest that we move on if you already understand it."

Warming Up
Provide some type of attention step or warm up activity for your students. This action is important to getting students ready to learn. A warm up is great for breaking down barriers and reducing any tension students maybe experiencing. The warm up establishes a climate of readiness.

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During the Session:
- Before each break, briefly review major points and your plans for the work immediately following the break. This helps to maintain momentum and provides a sense of predictability and security.
- Occasionally, poll the group to determine the relevance of the materials you are presenting.
- Model climate-setting instructions. For example, as you encourage participants to get comfortable, do so yourself.
- Occasionally, move between groups during class discussions to encourage openness and a relaxed atmosphere.
- Early in the lesson, describe your role and as guide and facilitator.
- Tell participants that, while you have ideas to present, you are interested in their ideas as well.
- Describe the objectives for the lesson and provide an idea of how time will be managed.
- Let participants know whether you prefer them to hold questions until the end of the lesson or ask questions as they come to mind and
- Stay on track and on time with the lesson plan.

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After the Session:
Here are things you can do after the session to maintain a positive learning environment:

- Answer student questions.
- Follow up on student requests.
- Be available for the students.
- Objectively review student feedback and
- Look for improvement areas.
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So far, we have covered things that an instructor can do to create a positive and open atmosphere before, during and after the lesson. Now, let's move on to learning how to deal with disruptive behaviors.

Main Point 2 (Slide 17): Disruptive Behavior

In order to maintain a positive learning environment, you'll have to manage disruptive behavior. Have you ever observed or dealt with disruptive behavior in other training courses? How were they handled? How did these situations make you feel? Were you uncomfortable? Are you worried about encountering disruptive behavior when you teach?

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We will discuss some of these possible behaviors, so that if, and when you encounter them in your own class, you will be better prepared to handle them. According to Gerald Amada, author of Coping with Misconduct in the Classroom, "The classroom is a special environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and growth. It is essential to this learning environment that respect for the rights of others seeking to learn, respect for the professionalism of the instructor, and the general goals of academic freedom are maintained."

Why is it important to deal with disruptive behavior? Occasionally, instructors find that they cannot provide effective classroom instruction because of disruptions. Negative or unproductive students have the potential to seriously interfere with the instructor's ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to benefit from the instruction and should not be tolerated. Dealing effectively with disruptive behavior is the responsibility of the instructor and course coordinator. Participants expect you as the instructor to maintain a non-threatening learning environment. The other participants are there to learn and want their time spent productively. It is up to you to take the lead in dealing with disruptions.

Before you can deal with disruptions in the classroom, you must understand the different types of disruptive behavior. Our goal for you is to be able to manage potential problems that could occur and cause a disturbance in the learning environment.

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According to Alexis Aiger, author of What is Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom, "What one instructor considers disruptive, another instructor may not. No set criteria or definition exists to determine which behavior qualifies as disruptive. However, some behaviors generally qualify as unacceptable no matter which instructor manages the classroom."

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Disruptive classroom behaviors include aggressive behaviors, defiant behaviors and social disruptions. Aggressive behaviors include intimidating peers, engaging in physical altercations or damaging property. Defiant behaviors include blatant and sometimes vocal disregard of rules, as well as devaluing the teacher's expertise and judgment. Examples of social disruptions include interrupting discussions with off-topic information or engaging in private conversations.

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Here is a list of the most common problems you may encounter in the classroom:

- Everyone looks bored.
- Everyone will not participate.
- One or two people dominate the class.
- Ramblers monopolize the discussion.
- Cell phones or beepers interrupt the class.

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- Someone gets angry in class.
- Two students begin arguing.
- Interruptions may occur.
- Students have different knowledge levels.
- Students return late from break or lunch.
- Students have legs/feet up on desk/tables
- Students having sidebar conversations.
- Students questioning your credibility.

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So, what do you do when you are confronted with these types of behaviors? Relax; we've got you covered. We will provide concrete solutions for managing problems in the classroom during our live Webinar session that you will be able to apply during your training presentations. Now that you are aware of the disruptive behaviors that exist in the classroom, let's talk a little about how to manage diversity in the classroom.

<u>Main Point 3 (Slide 24): Managing Diversity in the Classroom</u>
The responsibilities of an instructor are many. One of the hardest and most important aspects of our job as instructors is teaching to a diverse group of students. Diversity comes in many forms such as: Different knowledge levels, different thinking patterns and learning styles, desires for varying amounts of detail, personality, gender, class, religion, culture and ethnic backgrounds are among them. When attempting to balance the needs of a diverse group of students, it's important to keep in mind that the instructor sets the tone in the classroom.

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Instructors have a lot of influence in creating a positive learning environment for all students. You need to understand that the factors of diversity impact how students interact and respond to others in the classroom environment. For example, a former co-worker of mine shared a story of an Asian student who would not look directly at the teacher. The parents later revealed that their children are taught to look at the floor when talking to an adult, particularly with who should be respected. The instructor may have been led to believe the student was shy and timid based on the nonverbal cues exhibited. Here's another fact for you, did you know there are over 550 Native American tribes in the US, each with different customs? These facts are intended to provide you awareness and inform you how diversity can impact the classroom.

Students come to the classroom with many perspectives; tapping into these can enrich everyone's understanding of the subject at hand and expose the class to different approaches and ideas on a particular topic of study. Making learning possible for everyone is the goal, and is often a challenge. At the very least, it is our professional responsibility to make learning equally possible for all students.

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Here are tips on how to manage classroom diversity:
- ✓ Prepare yourself and your materials.
- ✓ Display the objectives and agenda and stay in control of the course objectives.
- ✓ Know your audience and maintain contact with students.
- ✓ Show the participants what you want them to do.
- ✓ Employ a variety of teaching strategies to address different learning styles
- ✓ Consider diversity in learning styles and educational histories
- ✓ Use simple language and concrete examples.
- ✓ Learn names and correct pronunciation of students
- ✓ Encourage students to share their backgrounds, experiences, and how things may be different in their culture.
- ✓ Maintain respect for every person in the classroom and
- ✓ Demonstrate consideration or acceptance of various perspectives.

Slide 27: Consequences of not managing diversity and disruptive behaviors

Students provide a wealth of knowledge and information through their backgrounds, customs and history that contribute to the overall classroom learning experience. You should draw upon this useful data by being sensitive to student diversity, listening to students, asking for the opinions of students and observing and reading the behaviors of students. Proper planning and the use of proven techniques are essential to creating a positive learning environment.

Without them, you weaken the opportunity of cultivating a climate that is conducive to learning. The consequences ultimately lead to a less than desirable learning

environment that negatively impact the comfort, safety and the willingness of students to participate and engage others in the classroom. Subsequently, you, your students and Bureau of Land Management suffer due to poor preparation that opens the door to obstacles within the classroom. The consequences are students unable to maximize the learning experience due to a deficient learning climate.

Slide 28: Conclusion

In conclusion, the objective for this lesson was for you to be able to…

Slide 29: Objective

Given a scenario involving specific student behavior(s) being displayed in a classroom situation, determine the appropriate course of action for the instructor to take that will result in him or her maintaining a positive and professional learning environment. You will reach this objective when you attend the facilitated webinar linked to this lesson. Specifically, you will participate in an exercise aimed at this objective.

Slide 30: Summary

However, to participate in that upcoming webinar you were provided a lot of knowledge in this lesson. The route we have traveled began with how to create a positive learning climate. It's important to seize the opportunity in the early stages of training to establish a positive climate. Describe your role as facilitator and communicate the course objectives. Take advantage of the classroom arrangement to maximize the level of comfort and readiness of students. Be sure to set room temperature to provide for comfort, arrange chairs and tables according to the type of presentation to be delivered. Prepare your training materials in advance, greet your students and spell out the ground rules. This will eliminate uncertainty and set the students mind at ease.

Provide some type of attention step or warm up activity for your students. This will ease any tensions of your students and provides a climate of readiness. Also, provide an overview of what will be presented and its relevance. Next, we defined and identified elements of disruptive behavior. It's essential you understand the different types of disruptive behaviors and manage the potential problems that could arise. Finally, we talked about managing diversity in the classroom. One of the hardest and most important aspects of our job as instructors is teaching to a diverse group of students. You need to understand that the factors of diversity impact how students interact and respond to others in the classroom environment. Diversity comes in many different forms. Remember, you set the tone for learning in the classroom. Draw upon the diverse perspective of students to expose the class to different approaches and ideas. Making learning possible for everyone is the goal.

Slide 31: Transfer and Close

Now that you've been exposed to what a positive learning environment is and how to develop the ideal environment, begin implementing the preparation steps to provide a comfortable setting and a welcoming environment for your students. Check to see if the lighting and room temperature is satisfactory. Gather and prepare all training materials in advance. Make sure the room arrangement coincides with the type of presentation to be delivered for maximum effectiveness. Utilize the tools provided for managing classroom diversity to enhance the learning experience.

Ask yourself if you're doing everything possible to create a positive learning environment so students will be more open to actively participate in class. These measures will increase the opportunity for growth and development of your students. Remember, creating a positive learning environment in your classroom will allow your students to feel comfortable, safe and engaged; something that all students deserve. Don't forget, we will be introducing effective solutions for managing disruptive behavior during one of the live webinar sessions. Also, be sure to complete the lesson review questions located on the KRC for this video lesson. See you at the webinar!