



THE GARDENSHED

AN EDUCATOR'S TOOL BOX

MEETING YOUR CLASS

TO START US THINKING

Consider the culture you want to create in your classroom, and the approaches and routines that will help you to establish this. If you are aiming for a calm, hospitable and engaged classroom, plan initial learning activities that champion these pedagogies.

These are a few ideas that I have found useful:

- **Make welcoming students at the door your priority.** This demonstrates to students that they are what matters in your room, it creates instant connection and allows you to gauge students' mood as they enter. For students who crave attention, it allows you to have a positive interaction before there is any possibility of anything going wrong! (HOT TIP: Don't use this moment to check uniform – have a quiet word about that hoodie later.)
- In initial lessons I **have students in a seating plan** (Yes – even senior classes). I achieve this in a non-confrontational way by having laid out on the desks, before students arrive, something engaging and individualised that piques students' interest (for example part of a picture, a sealed envelope, or a curious word) - named for each student. Then as I greet students I say to them, *'Find the desk with your name on it and take a seat.'*
 - Most students will find their place and sit down.
 - Some will try to move or moan, *'Miss, why are you putting us in a seating plan?'* My response to that is always, *'Yip, to start off with, so I can learn your names and get to know you, and so we can do this activity I need you to sit in that spot. Once we're set up in our class routines, there will be lots of opportunities for you to move around and choose who you work with.'* (HOT TIP: If you say this, make sure it happens – I move my desks and regroup my students quite often so that they get used to working with a range of people, sometimes my choice, sometimes theirs.)

I have the plan of where I have laid out the papers in my planner and then I am able to refer to this for students' names. This is helpful with initial management as I can address students by name and helps me to quickly learn names. (HOT TIP: **Learn names** within the first lesson or two - it demonstrates respect and is your best initial management strategy. If you find it hard, find some strategies.) Keep students settled in this seating plan for a week or two and then consider your next move.

- The resource laid out on the desk should **kickstart learning** with an engaging, purposeful activity that demonstrates to students: In this class, we work productively.
- **Plan for a quick win.** Plan initial activities that ensure students experience success, regardless of their prior skills or knowledge. This tells students: In this class I can succeed. This message (which I try to communicate both explicitly and implicitly) makes students feel supported, safe and encourages them to engage and make an effort. Take the opportunity to give specific, positive feedback.
- Within the framework of purposeful teaching and learning activities, **take time to establish settled systems and routines** that will make the class run smoothly. This requires explicit teaching of your expectations and should focus on creating a learning-focused culture rather than compliance for the sake of it. For example, I will plan in time to set up folders (physical or digital), name them, show where they will be stored, how they will be shared and establish feedback routines.
- Plan activities that focus your relationship with students on teaching and learning, and within these create opportunities to genuinely get to know your students. Give students the opportunity to share about themselves with you. I like to pose these questions: *'What do teachers do that helps you learn? What do teachers do that makes it harder?'*

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

[New Zealand DP, Richard Wells, shares some further thinking on establishing a thinking-focused classroom here.](#) It is based on a longer talk by Rong Ritchhart, that you can find at the bottom of the post.

Here, Cult of Pedagogy offers [a systematic approach to establishing strong relationships](#) with students.