

# Shared Ownership: A Philosophy & Practical Approach for Today's Classrooms

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Summary: This document is designed as a resource for teachers interested in knowing more about a shared ownership philosophy and practical approach for today's classrooms. To develop teachers' vision and proficiency with shared ownership, this resource addresses the following topics:

1. Shared ownership – Classroom perspective
2. Shared ownership – Teacher's role
3. Shared ownership – Day One
4. Shared ownership – Reflective processes

The goal of shared ownership is to empower teachers and students to authentically take charge of what goes into and what comes out of their classrooms. When teachers and students share ownership of their classrooms, they develop spaces that satisfy our deeply human desire to learn, to direct our own lives, and to create things that enrich ourselves and the world around us.

Student Levels: Grades K – 12

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## **Opening Thoughts from the Author**

It all started on January 12, 2016 – my first day of teaching in the B.Ed. program at the U of C – the day when I asked the most enlightening question of any class I teach, “What do you want to get out of this class?” It’s a question I’ve been asking for nearly 20 years, so I know what to expect. Most answers will line up with course outcomes. And in all likelihood, someone will bring up an immensely important topic that’s subconsciously on everyone else’s mind.

On that day, RS provided the spark when she replied, “Could we possibly talk about classroom management?” Nodding heads confirmed the interest of other participants. Throughout the following weeks, we took on the topic of classroom management. I brought in concepts and ideas. Participants shared their positive and negative experiences. Yet, as I continued to teach in the B.Ed. program, I couldn’t help noticing the exact same pattern in every single class I taught. Every time I asked, “What do you want to get out of this class?” Someone would inevitably bring up the topic of classroom management. I continued to dig deeper and shared the legacy of positive psychologist Carl Rogers. Although his influence on the education community is immense, I could see B.Ed. participants weren’t exactly enthusiastic about his person-centered approach to classroom management.

Everything changed in Fall 2018 after I received an email with the subject header “Managing Junior Classroom Mayhem”. I remember thinking, “Only 4 words and 50% feel negative. What does that say about teachers’ perceptions of classroom management?” I followed up by reading everything I could get my hands on and uncovered what I already knew was there: a vast litany of resources to bolster teachers in administering complete control of their classrooms. I could see it was time for me to do something more.

This document is my response to the topic of classroom management.

## **1. Shared Ownership – The Classroom**

The shared ownership classroom is exactly what it says it is – an educational environment in which both teachers and students take charge of what goes into and what comes out of their classrooms. When teachers and students share ownership of their classrooms, there's a noticeable feeling of belonging. Their collaborative relationships and trust in each other provide the foundation for meaningful instruction and learning to occur. With learning as their priority, they work together to establish and maintain the conditions for effective explorations. They develop spaces that satisfy students' deeply human desire to learn, to be successful in directing their own lives, and to create things that enrich themselves and the world around them.

Shared ownership doesn't mean that teachers and students have the same role, because they don't. Teachers are there to do the heavy lifting. They're responsible for getting learning underway and teaming up with students. They implement strategies that genuinely tap into students' autonomy and support students' growth and progress. They draw from students' own passion, creativity, accountability, empathy, and resiliency to deepen their capacity as increasingly competent, critical, resourceful, and reflective learners. They foster meaningful teacher-student and peer-to-peer relationships. All so that students can do their own kind of heavy lifting and exercise their own knowledge and skills.

Shared ownership differs in several ways from classroom management strategies in which teachers administer direct control of student behaviour without student input. The problem with traditional management approaches is that when teachers exclude students from decision-making processes that affect their entire classroom, they deny students the opportunity to build on their own life experiences and exercise their thought processes. Although teacher-controlled classroom management may produce quiet and orderly student behaviour, such behaviours aren't necessarily indicative of student engagement. Not to mention how such strategies seem oblivious to the life skills and knowledge students bring to their classrooms. Just consider how students of all ages master video games on their own, or their ability to solve problems, or how they learn about making friends and how to get along. By prioritizing compliant students and minimizing students' voice, teacher-controlled strategies signal to students that teachers' voices are the only ones that matter, and also what students bring to the classroom in terms of critical thinking, creativity and innovation, communication, and collaboration (Alberta Education 2016 competencies) is considered something separate from what students do in the classroom. While shared ownership and

traditional classroom management may propose common instructional and learning outcomes, fundamental differences remain.

<b>Classroom Management</b>	<b>Shared Ownership</b>
Based on a model of behaviour modification & factory efficiency	Based on a collaborative relationship approach to learning
Teachers require respect & cooperation from students	Teachers earn respect & cooperation from students
Teachers establish good control during the first week of school	Teachers establish collaborative relationships from day one
Teachers present pre-determined rules and expectations	Teachers and students collaborate on individual and class objectives
Classroom culture is teacher controlled	Classroom culture is shaped by ongoing teacher and student discussion
Classrooms are quiet & orderly	Classrooms fluctuate in terms of talking and interaction
Student disruption is not tolerated	Student disruption is anticipated
Student discipline is teacher-driven	Students' self-awareness and reflection are cultivated
Student autonomy is a reward for good behaviour	Student autonomy is fundamental throughout
Teachers employ routines to get things done	Teachers invite students to take ownership of routines

### **Shared Ownership Characteristics**

The following characteristics are integral to the shared ownership classroom environment.

*Learning* – Classrooms are devoted to learning in all its variations: intellectual, emotional, intuitive, spiritual, physical, and more. Learning also has autonomous, interpersonal, and competency implications. Autonomy is an important stimulus for learning in terms of the need we have for understanding what we do and the world around us, directing our own lives and creating our own successes. From an interpersonal perspective, learning is socially influenced. We learn from the examples of learning around us. We also need to feel that our learning efforts are valued by and relevant to our own communities. The drive for competency impacts learning, particularly in the way our failures/mistakes/inadequacies may challenge us to enhance and broaden our learning efforts.

*Understanding* – The daily interactions of school classrooms provide a fertile environment for teachers to understand and get to know who students are. Through formal and informal questioning, spontaneous

revelations, and ongoing exchanges, teachers put together a picture of their students. They get a sense of students' interests, attitudes, beliefs, insecurities, frustrations, strengths, language, the way they learn, and the tools they use to study and grow.

*Acceptance* – Teachers with an acceptant attitude appreciate students for who they are rather than who teachers might want students to be. They understand that students' approach to learning may differ from their own. Most likely, students prefer freedom and experimentation in contrast to teachers' fondness for structure and quality. Teachers recognize the value in working with and building on what students bring to the classroom.

*Care* – A first aspect of care occurs when teachers set up safe, inclusive, and unconditional classrooms where students aren't judged by how much they care or don't care about learning. A protective second aspect means teachers shield students from excessive demands, guard students' vulnerability, and recognize how students develop through cycles of growth and rest. A final aspect of care involves teachers knowing when it's appropriate to push students out of their comfort zone and when students may be held hostage by self-imposed limitations.

*Authenticity* – At its most basic, authenticity refers to the complex dynamics associated with being true to one's self. When individuals are authentic, they acknowledge that living a meaningful life is more than a smooth trajectory of self-indulgence or narcissism. Meaningful living involves the messiness of alignments and tensions resulting from the interplay between thoughts/actions and values/frailties/vision. Authentic individuals aren't seduced by thinking that authenticity means let your ego lead the way or being true to myself guarantees that whatever I do is right. Rather, they find meaning both when situations align with their own values and when tensions challenge the integrity of their own thought processes. They can hold onto conflicting perspectives without losing sight of who they are. With authenticity, the stories teachers tell and the interpersonal connections they make have a genuineness that differs from an artificial teacher façade. Teachers who value their students know the importance of being true to themselves because of their own experience with understanding-acceptance-care. They possess the humility to foster student authenticity while taking care not to impose their own personal history.

*Reflection* – Once school is underway with its schedule of deadlines and expectations, it's easy to forget what reflection may offer. Reflection involves teachers and students looking back at where they started and how they got to their present location as the necessary

prerequisite for what they'll do in the future. Effective reflective mechanisms throughout the entire school year help teachers and students figure out what contributes to and what detracts from successful learning experiences. Through planning and making sense of or meaning from learning experiences, reflective activities may empower students in strengthening their preferred mode of learning and in modifying their learning approach to incorporate unfamiliar strategies. Ongoing cycles of reflection provide the support for critical thinking, continuous improvement and higher expectations, and set up students for successful lifelong learning.

What seems noteworthy is how the above characteristics aren't exclusive to the shared ownership classroom. All of these aspects are found in our experiences of everyday life. For example, we all know about learning from outside the classroom. We know what it feels like to explore something we enjoy and what it's like to learn from our mistakes. Of course, teachers have an added advantage because learning is their area of expertise. There's no question of teachers' readiness to implement learning. Next we have the relationship cluster of understanding-acceptance-care. Through interactions with family, friends, and community members, everybody learns about positive and negative relationships. Because successful relationships involve give and take, we learn to balance how much we talk about ourselves with being curious about the other person. Just think about a successful first date and the importance of attentively listening to what someone else has to say. Having respectful relationships means learning how to help others when they need it and step away when they don't, how to accept others for who they are. Authenticity may be something we rarely think about. However, asking a few questions like What's important to me? And how do I want to live? may reveal a lot about who we are. Finally, reflection has both spontaneous and deliberate variations in daily life. Spontaneous reflections capture the random and unexpected "aha" moments of making sense. Deliberate reflection is our way of weeding out what works in our lives from what doesn't work. Without reflection, we'd be chained to a lifetime of doing everything every day as if it was the first time.

Long before teachers think about building the shared ownership classroom, they have the fundamental life experiences for making it work. Most likely, various characteristics already show up in their teaching. Rather than thinking of shared ownership as something unfamiliar or extra, teaching in a shared ownership classroom is all about building on the everyday life experience that teachers already have.

## Teacher Reflection

With collaborative relationships and meaningful learning at its core, the shared ownership classroom differs remarkably from traditional classroom management strategies.

1. What characteristics of shared ownership do you see are already present in your teaching?

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2. What characteristics of shared ownership do you think you could incorporate immediately in your teaching without too much effort?

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3. What part of shared ownership would you say you don't incorporate in your teaching? Why?

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4. What obstacles do you think might be keeping you from using shared ownership in your teaching?

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## **2. Shared Ownership – The Teacher**

All teachers teach as a reflection of the broad base of knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences they bring to their classrooms. They naturally draw from various overlapping sources. They're influenced by personal experiences related to life philosophy, family, spirituality, and interests. On a professional level, teachers' training in education theories, best practices, pedagogy, ethics, and reflection come into play. Their participation in school ethos may include issues related to mission, values, collegial support, and leadership. From their own history of having been taught, teachers derive a sense of what they liked and didn't like from the student's perspective. Furthermore, teachers have their own vision of goals and expectations related to the ideal classroom environment.

In his book *The Skillful Teacher* (2006), educator Stephen Brookfield points out how students consistently look for two qualities in their teachers that have a lot to do with their effectiveness in the classroom. Brookfield describes how students want teachers who are knowledgeable about their subject domain and teachers who are personally authentic in their instructional approach. They want to spend time with teachers who know what they're teaching and why they're teaching the way they do. And they want teachers who genuinely know how to be true to themselves. In other words, students are looking for credible and dependable teachers who bring their knowledge and personality into the classroom. So, it makes sense that teachers figure out not only what aspects influence their teaching, but also how their own personality and knowledge will impact their readiness for developing shared ownership classrooms.

- What comes to mind when you consider the various influences on your teaching approach? What do you think has been most influential?
- How has your teaching style been influenced by your former teachers? What is your primary takeaway from your experience of being a student?
- How do you think your personality impacts the way you set up the classroom environment?



## Teacher's Role

The teacher's role in a shared ownership classroom takes on a blending of key attributes in order to support a collaborative learning environment.

<b>Teacher</b>	Teachers foster students' educational growth by providing leadership, by generating tools so students can manage on their own, and by expanding students' awareness to fill in gaps when they don't know what they don't know.
<b>Facilitator</b>	Teachers help their students bring about an outcome by providing indirect assistance. Facilitators excel in watching, listening, asking or answering questions, challenging, offering suggestions, or lending a hand.
<b>Collaborator</b>	Teachers help their students overcome an obstacle by directly assisting students with the task. Collaborators repeatedly contribute their knowledge and skills until students can complete the task on their own.
<b>Provoker</b>	Teachers may challenge their students to take on explorations that step out of their comfort zone and move past their current knowledge and skills. Provokers understand the uncertainty and risk involved in exploring the unknown.
<b>Relationship builder</b>	Teachers build unconditional relationships with their students. They know the importance of understanding, accepting, and caring for students where they are.
<b>Advocate</b>	Teachers trust that students have what it takes to make meaningful explorations. Advocates stand up for students' strengths when others can only see what they lack.
<b>Releaser</b>	Teachers understand when it's advantageous to get out of students' way. Releasers aren't threatened by students' capacity for independent success. They empower students to keep going on their own.
<b>Guide</b>	Teachers assist students by providing scaffolding as necessary. Guides help students with a task being careful not to take over students' working space.
<b>Resource</b>	Teachers undoubtedly have vast knowledge and experience to share with students. They offer students resources in terms of shortcuts to vital information that is beyond students' ability to reasonably explore.

Shared ownership teaching moves beyond the traditional 'stand and deliver' model or the teacher as 'unquestionable authority', opening the opportunity for teachers to tap into their broad base of knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences. It's not about teachers abandoning their pedagogical skillset and replacing it with some kind of artificial academic model. Rather, shared ownership invites teachers to evaluate what influences their teaching approach, to determine how to apply what's already in place, and consider where it's possible to add to their current knowledge and experience.

### **Teacher Reflection**

The preceding chapter focuses specifically on the teacher's role in a shared ownership classroom.

1. How do you feel about the blended role of teacher, facilitator, collaborator, provoker, advocate, releaser, relationship builder, guide, and resource?

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2. Which of the above roles do you currently incorporate in your teaching?

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3. Where are your strengths?

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4. What about your weaknesses?

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### **3. Shared Ownership – Day One**

Day One is a particularly important day in shared ownership classrooms. It's the highly scripted day when teachers set the tone for the type of interactions and expectations that will follow.

*Part One: The Room* – Teachers make sure the classroom is ready before students arrive. Desks are arranged, seats have been assigned, and Assignment #1 is ready for the students on each desk.

*Greeting* – Shaking hands with and greeting students at the door is a simple way to welcome students and ensure that they are in the right place.

Teacher voice: Good morning. What's your name? Yes, you're in the right place. Great to have you here. Use the seating chart to find your desk. Your first assignment is waiting for you there. You'll want to get started right away. If you need help, be sure to ask a fellow classmate.

*Part Two: Teacher Introduction* – Teachers who take time on Day One to introduce themselves can demonstrate they're knowledgeable and personally approachable by being immediately upfront about who they are, what they know, and where they're coming from. It's a simple way to establish students' trust and to spotlight teachers' credibility, dependability, and ability to put together manageable and worthwhile educational explorations.

The following questions may guide teachers in preparing their introduction:

1. What's important for students to know about how I teach?
2. What do I want students to know about who I am outside the classroom?
3. What can I share about my own learning experiences when I was their age?

Teacher voice: Hey – Good morning everybody and welcome to OUR classroom. My name is Dr. Thompson and, yes, I want to emphasize that I just said OUR classroom because this isn't MY classroom. It's OUR classroom. It's a place of learning that belongs to all of us, where learning and working together are hugely important. Let me tell a few things about who I am and how I like to teach...

#### **Advice**

- Please be aware that any introduction has its limits in terms of too much and too little information.
- Allow time for students to ask questions.

*Part Three: Students' Learning Experience* - Similar to the way teachers' experience and knowledge are relevant to instructional environments, students also bring their own attitudes, experience, skills, beliefs, prior knowledge, and interests related to learning. They have their own history of learning experiences filled with successes, celebrations, mistakes, and failures. Students' prior learning experiences and interests have a powerful influence on how they'll individually take on further explorations and investigations, and also how they'll interact with classmates and teacher.

Teachers who take time on Day One to find out what students' have to say about their own learning experiences let students know that their relations with learning aren't random or insignificant. They get a sense of what students are interested in, what they know, what they're able to do, and how they like to learn as integral to setting up an effective learning environment. They confirm the value of students' learning both inside and outside the classroom.

Gathering information on Day One about students' learning experiences differs from the sporadic information gained informally throughout the school year. It means teachers have a head start in terms of understanding where students are coming from. They may adjust the language and activities of teaching to incorporate the particularities of students' learning experiences.

Finally, sharing teachers' and students' learning experiences with the entire classroom may have a remarkable socializing impact. Most likely, students will discover their learning experiences of success and failure have a lot in common with their classmates and their teachers. In this way, a purposeful exploration of learning experiences may provide a powerful bonding for the entire class.

Assignment #1 is designed so that teachers may assist students with putting together a snapshot of their learning experiences.

Teacher voice: So, now that you know a little bit about me, let's take a look at the assignment you've all been working on for the last few minutes. Don't worry if you didn't get to the end. You can finish the assignment as we go along.

**Assignment #1 – Dr. Thompson’s Class  
Room XYZ**

1. Name three things you like to learn about.

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2. Name one thing you struggle to learn.

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3. Circle the words that describe how you feel about learning.

Learning is –

Easy

Fun

A chore

Necessary

Time-consuming

Homework

Not for me

Creativity

Following rules

Imagination

Good marks

Pass or Fail

4. Circle the positive influences on learning. Put a square around the negative influences on learning.

Computers

Friends

Good diet

Getting sleep

Teachers

Parents

Texting

Classmates

Video games

Exercise

Weather

Time of day

Brothers/Sisters

Tests

Grandparents

5. What’s going on when learning is easy for you?

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6. What’s going on when learning is challenging for you?

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## Advice

- The preceding Assignment #1 is intended as a template that teachers may modify to meet the age- and level-appropriate requirements of their classrooms.
  - K-3 students may prefer to answer questions orally.
  - Students with limited writing skills may choose their own media to respond.
- Teachers may want to soften the formality of Assignment #1 by including more informal questions like:
  - Who's your favourite superhero, rap artist, movie star?
  - What's your favourite food, sport, video game?
- For K-3 students, teachers may prepare a brief questionnaire to send home via email for parents to complete with their child.
- This written document may serve as a valuable resource for Parent Teacher Interviews and for tracking students' progress as learners throughout the year.
  - For teachers who include student input during Parent Teacher Interviews, students may set the stage by starting with "Hi Mom, Dad. So here's where my learning was at the beginning of the year, and here's where I am now."

## Teacher Reflection

Assignment #1 focuses on how knowing about students' prior learning experiences and interests may serve as a powerful launching pad for future educational explorations.

1. How do you currently find out about students' learning experience?

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2. What benefits does Assignment #1 have for your classroom?

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3. What obstacles might keep you from finding out more about students' learning experience?

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*Part Four: Teacher/Student Collaborative Relationships* – In a traditional teacher-controlled setting, teachers are solely responsible for determining classroom rules and expectations, whereas shared ownership classrooms are based on the idea that teachers and students work together to come up with individual and class outcomes. Because shared ownership teachers understand, accept, and care for their students, they're deliberate in incorporating strategies that support students' autonomy and nurture students' developmental self-awareness. They value the give and take of meaningful collaborative relationships where it's not about students bowing down to teachers' commands or teachers catering to students' whims. Rather, classroom culture is shaped by ongoing discussion and reflection. The following three questions provide a framework so that teachers and students may define the various aspects of their collaborative relationship.

Teacher voice: Thanks everybody for all your thoughts on learning. It's amazing to see how much experience we all have with learning – both in terms of mistakes and failures. I'm really confident that we're going to be able to make learning a real success in OUR classroom this year. And speaking of OUR classroom, I want to take some time today to figure out how we're going to make sure this classroom belongs to each and every one of us. To do that, I need your input on some very important questions. So, let's get started.

Question 1. What do you want OUR classroom to look like?

When teachers ask for their students' input on questions like number one, they're basically opening the door to consider what students have to say about going to school. Many students will respond with answers like 'having fun' or 'being with friends'. Students may also remember their discussion from Assignment #1 and say something about 'learning'. While students and teachers will come up with a range of answers well beyond what's mentioned here, it's interesting to note how the accumulated answers provide confirmation that desirable educational environments are necessarily multilayered. Such classrooms generate enjoyment associated with students being successful and autonomous in their learning efforts. Students want to learn with friends because of the social and emotional worth we all place on being with others. Desirable classrooms provide safe environments for students to fail, make mistakes, and take on challenges to enhance and broaden their learning efforts. Answers to question one may also indicate how students and teachers differ in their interpretations of what learning is. For example, teachers may think of learning in terms of planning and outcomes, whereas students may view learning as something that spontaneously unfolds. Teachers may emphasize understanding, consistency, and quality learning in

comparison to students' willingness to accept a broad range of involvement and standards from satisfactory to perfection. By bringing forward their ideas in this collaborative manner, students and teachers not only affirm the relevant multiple layers in a desirable classroom, but also recognize the importance of everyone's voice in setting up a shared ownership classroom.

Question 2. What do think students can do to make OUR classroom a great place to be?

Asking questions like number two is a great way for teachers to find out how students see themselves in the classroom. Do they want to wait and be told what to do? Are they active participants who want to know their responsibilities upfront? Teachers may provide clarity by setting up routines that give students ownership of such things as organizing their workspace, signals for asking a question or going to the washroom, transitioning to carpet story time, setting for group activity, video, or lecture. Furthermore, students may refer to what they do in terms of 'sit quietly' and 'pay attention'. Most likely, the biggest challenge facing students comes from distractions that get in the way of staying on task or listening to the teacher. Here's an opportunity for teachers and students to use proactive discussion to come up with reasonable solutions or counter measures to implement when distractions show up. The point of answering this question is so that when flare-ups occur, both teachers and students have various solutions in place and no one is caught off guard.

Question 3. What do you think the teacher should do to make OUR classroom a great place to be?

Students' responses to question three may include remarks like 'be nice', 'no yelling', 'be creative', and 'teach us' – comments that indicate how much students value their relationships with teachers and the opportunity for learning. And they're also interested in avoiding yet another class with yet another teacher who day-in day-out does the same old thing. For their part, teachers may be concerned with doing whatever it takes to ensure students achieve excellence in learning. It's interesting to note how students and teachers both circle around the aspect of successful student achievements, yet they separate when it comes to how students want teachers to assist them with achieving success. Teachers can help students understand where teachers are coming from by reminding them that having a 'nice' teacher may not always be in students' best interest. Sometimes students need a teacher who's willing to ask for more, similar to the way students already know that sometimes they need to push themselves. Moreover, teachers need to remember that students



aren't looking for superficial entertainment or relentless taskmasters. They want reasonable teachers who know how to engage students by making authentic personal connections and stimulate students to reach beyond their usual limits without compromising their emotional health and wellbeing.

Teacher voice: Thanks everybody. It looks like we've put together a great document that we might even call OUR Classroom Charter. But I want to be clear that OUR Charter is a work in progress not something written in stone that can never be altered. In fact, we'll be returning to this information throughout the term to see where we're at – to put in things that we think need to be there and take out things that have run their course. I hope you can appreciate that we took the time to explore these questions. And we've still got time for one final question. Take your sheet for Assignment #1 and write your answer to this final question on the back.

*Part Five: Student Vision of Learning* – Creating the opportunity for students to envision their own personal learning goals.

Question 4. What do you yourself as a person want to get out of OUR classroom?

On many occasions, students' responses to this final question will match with the teacher's goals so there's a sense of mutual purpose between what the teacher has planned out and what students are anticipating. Some students may bring a kind of neutral attitude that's neither positive nor negative; they simply want to get credit for the course and move on. Other students may be looking for more than the class has to offer in terms of opportunities to explore beyond the boundaries of the curriculum. They may even have their own suggestions for how to stretch their knowledge and skills. When students respond to question four with "I don't know" or "I don't care", teachers may tend to take such remarks personally, not exactly sure where students are coming from. Welcoming all students into an inclusive classroom no matter their commitment to learning is at the core of shared ownership classrooms. Assuring students they're in the right place can be pivotal in helping them figure out where, how, and with whom they fit in. This means that teachers care for students and protect students' vulnerability as necessary for authentic learning and meaningful collaborative relationships.

Teacher voice: Thanks everybody for contributing your thoughts. It's been great to hear from all of you and I'm excited about what we might accomplish next. Does anybody have questions? What do you think about OUR exploration today? Any comments?

## **Day One – Further Thoughts**

At first glance, it's easy to see how teachers might be nervous about facilitating discussions related to Assignment #1, Teacher/Student Collaborative Relationships, and Student Vision of Learning. For teachers accustomed to telling students what to do through pre-determined rules and expectations, these activities may seem loaded with the potential for getting all kinds of information teachers haven't anticipated. Yet, it's also easy to understand how teachers who solicit answers to these questions have an advantage because their knowledge of who students are and what they bring to the classroom goes well beyond test scores and random bits of isolated information. They base their instructional strategies on an immensely informed and authentic picture of their students.

With their focus on learning and collaborative relationships, shared ownership teachers generate a kind of fluidity that differs from 'stand and deliver' classrooms. Setting up a shared ownership classroom isn't about deciding whether teachers' or students' attitudes and insights should lead the way. Rather, teachers in shared ownership classrooms have the flexibility to accommodate an entire spectrum of classroom characteristics from orderly to messy, autonomous to interconnected, expected to unpredictable, and inside to outside the comfort zone.

## **Advice**

- While there is a distinct advantage to Day One implementation of a shared ownership classroom, teachers should feel comfortable with introducing these activities at appropriate times throughout the school year.
- Please assure students that there are no 'right' and 'wrong' answers to the above questions. Students who are unfamiliar with the process may worry that teachers have a fixed agenda in asking such questions.
  - Often teachers and students may be uncomfortable with the silence of no one wanting to be the first to respond.
  - It may be practical to give students several minutes to write their answers to the questions before sharing responses with the entire class.
- Time is a precious commodity in all classrooms. One of the best ways teachers can increase the amount of available time is to share responsibility of certain daily and often recurring tasks with students. Teachers may use the cumulative information from all Day One activities to inform the way they organize OUR classroom.

- Teachers share routines with students and provide opportunity for practice
- Teachers identify students ready to take on leadership roles and students who may gain from peer assistance.
- Teachers incorporate more student-led activities.
- All students regardless of age, level, or dependency can benefit from taking on various responsibilities.
- Teachers will want to keep the class Charter in mind during future classes. It's important for teachers to point out moments in class that demonstrate the characteristics included in the Charter.
  - Teachers will also want to give students opportunities to voice their observations of in-class characteristics from the Charter.

### **Teacher Reflection**

Parts Four and Five provide a framework for identifying what's involved in a collaborative teacher/student relationship as the precursor for students to envision their own personal learning outcomes.

1. In shared ownership classrooms, teachers use inclusive expressions like 'OUR classroom'. How does this expression compare to the language you currently use?  
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2. What expectations do you have for students in the classroom? How do you communicate or develop classroom expectations with your students?  
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3. Which of the above questions do you already incorporate in setting up an effective classroom?  
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4. Which additional question could you implement immediately?  
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5. How do you feel about asking for students' vision of their own learning goals? How is this question different or similar from what your current process?

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#### **4. Shared Ownership – Reflection**

In shared ownership classrooms, teachers invite students into reflective processes and make meaning from their experiences. Teachers who promote reflection organize their instruction so that students are the producers, not just the consumers, of knowledge. To best guide students in the habits of reflection, shared ownership teachers deliberately involve students' participation to develop their own learning goals (for example Day One activities), monitor individual progress, construct meaning from the content learned as well as the process of learning, and apply what they've learned to other contexts and settings.

Most people view their life experiences simply as the experiences they are, not as opportunities for learning. So it might be expected that students frequently aren't sure what to do when it comes to reflection. Students inexperienced with reflection may offer superficial responses such as "I really enjoyed this assignment" or "It was fun!" They may think reflection is a request for testimonials about how good or bad their experience was. In order for students to get in the habit of reflecting deeply on their work, teachers need to incorporate strategies that involve students as active participants who derive rich meaning from their learning experiences. When teachers engage students in reflection, they encourage students to go beyond merely reporting on what they've done. They help students become aware of what they learned in the process, what was noteworthy, and what they can do to build on or transfer the experience. Students learn to describe their reflections so that another person might also understand the meaning. When K-12 students consistently and purposefully plan, carry out, and review their own learning activities, their responses become more purposeful and they perform better on measures of language, literacy, social skills, and overall development. Over time, students develop their creativity, their ability to think critically about information and ideas, and their metacognitive ability. Students' ability to reflect develops gradually and with practice.

The process of reflection involves a cyclical pattern of actions. A four-stage model is useful – planning, ongoing awareness, meaning making, and follow up. This cyclical model encourages students to think systematically about the different phases involved in reflective practice.

*Planning* – The Day One activities described in the previous chapter are good examples of what's involved in planning. However, planning isn't limited to what happens on Day One. Planning should be a regular classroom activity so that students get in the habit of thinking about what they want to do and how to carry it out. Regular planning may

take place at the same time each day, at the beginning of a unit plan, on a weekly or biweekly basis. Teachers may scaffold students' planning by encouraging them to consider details about where they will work, the materials they will need to use, the sequence of their activities, and the outcomes they expect to achieve.

*Ongoing Awareness* – As students engage in an activity, they use their ongoing awareness to assemble various threads of information. Paying attention to and evaluating their experiences as they occur makes it easier for students to later recall what went on. The more specific the observation, the more likely students will remember and add their own details. Teachers may scaffold students' ongoing awareness by asking students for explanations and commentary on what they're doing. Teachers may also share their observations on what they see students doing during the activity.

*Meaning Making* – Following a specific activity, students take time to revisit their original planning, assemble the various threads of ongoing awareness, and consider what was learned from the experience. Having students compare their original intentions with their actual experience helps them think critically about how and why their actions did, or did not, follow their intentions. Meaning making involves descriptions of what students saw in their work, what changed, and what needed to change. As students reflect on their experiences, they may recall problems they encountered or directions they had not anticipated. Teachers may scaffold students' meaning making and critical thinking by asking open-ended questions that help students connect their plans and explorations with their analysis and evaluation. Teachers may need to interpret and expand what students have to say, providing vocabulary that deepens students' explanations and understanding.

*Follow Up* – This final stage brings the reflective cycle to another level of planning/implementation. When students reflect on their own actions and construct meaning from their experiences, these observations provide the understanding for students to follow up with proven solutions or incorporate newly discovered interests. Students use the knowledge and skills gained as the prerequisite for taking further action. They extend their meaning making with formalized plans and implement what they've learned in future explorations. Teachers may scaffold follow up by encouraging students to apply what they've learned to contexts beyond the original situations and timelines in which the learning was accomplished.

Engaging students in the four stages of reflection makes them more than mere puppets following prescribed roles. They're active participants who incorporate aspects of creativity, analysis, and

imagination in order to make things happen and make meaning for themselves and others.

The following additional considerations may also have an impact on reflective processes in shared ownership classrooms.

*Documentation* – Documentation gives students the message that their ideas are valuable and encourages students to be actively involved with multiple stages in the reflective process. Logs and journals are effective tools for student reflection that may include drawing, writing, mind maps, photography, and audio recording. When students document their process, they're more likely to think through and elaborate on their ideas as they formally record them. Periodically, teachers may ask students to reexamine their documentation, comparing what they recorded at the beginning of a learning sequence with their current understanding. Teachers may also document their own observations and interactions with students as a way of monitoring student progress. Reading student journals is another way teachers may keep track of how student reflections are developing.

*Group Dynamics* – Students benefit from working in groups at all four stages of reflective processes because the thoughts and insights of other students often spark or confirm their own ideas. Sharing allows students to tap into others' comments, suggestions, assessments, evaluations, and feedback. The opportunity for an individual to share in pairs or larger groups often validates the student's own internal conversation. Discussions and interviews provide teachers and students with openings to model and practice empathic listening skills, thinking and communicating with clarity and accuracy, and flexibility with posing questions and problem solving.

*Reading & Writing* - Teachers may notice how students' reflections evolve as students develop their reading and writing skills. When students are asked to reflect orally, they may give rich descriptions of their work. However, as students develop their writing ability and are encouraged to write their reflections, the resulting reflections may become less descriptive as students focus on spelling, punctuation, and other grammatical aspects. Students with limited fluency in reading and writing are more likely to be limited in what they describe on paper. Teachers may assist by writing down students' thoughts or taking dictation. When teachers meet with students, they may ask students to orally elaborate on their work.

*Time* – With time as the most common constraint to effective teaching and learning, reflective processes offer teachers and students the opportunity to maximize time available by paying close attention to what's working, what's not working, and what to do next. Making time for reflection isn't about taking time away from something else.

Shared ownership teachers schedule in reflective processes from the get-go because they value its contribution to students' learning.

*Emotional Impact* – Students' reflective processes are most definitely influenced by the feelings, beliefs, and values they bring to and encounter during their explorations. Both negative and positive feelings can interfere with reflective processes as students' preoccupation with emotional reactions may effectively cut short the potential of reflective engagement. Teachers and students may benefit from being upfront about identifying internal reactions to reflective processes and consider how personal factors may influence their work. The point of meaningful reflective processes isn't to omit emotional involvement. It's all about understanding how feelings, beliefs, and values may have consequences for reflective work.

*Reflective Teacher Practice* – When teachers are reflective about the teaching and learning process, they assimilate new insights, adapt what they already know, and translate critical thinking about knowledge and skills into action. Similar to the reflective process they use with their students, teachers' reflective practice may involve planning, ongoing awareness, meaning making, and follow up. Teachers who are effective reflective practitioners deliberately prepare and analyze classroom activities. They're astute observers who make meaning of students' actions and inactions toward an activity and students interactions with each other. Their reflections at the end of a teaching sequence provide vital information for student assessment and what teachers will do in the next teaching sequence. While the four stages of reflective process may provide an organized structure, teachers' reflections most likely combine formal aspects of planning and follow up with informal moments of spontaneous awareness and meaning making that populate teachers' ongoing interactions with students.

Reflective processes in shared ownership classrooms offer teachers and students a framework for monitoring and fine-tuning the two major components of shared ownership classrooms – learning and collaborative relationships. When teachers and students engage in reflection, they use their experiences with learning and relationships to consider what they've learned in the process, what caught their attention, how they feel about it, and what they can do next. Shared ownership teachers rely on reflective processes to strengthen students' skills and knowledge such that they're able to transfer what they've learned to new and different situations. They're attentive to all four stages of reflective processes because they value the individual growth and classroom development that comes from discussion and interaction. This doesn't mean that reflective processes occur without the tension of conflicting perspectives or heated debates. Cycles of



ongoing reflection provide a continuum for teachers and students to develop the personal confidence or consciousness to respond with equal enthusiasm to what's easily known and what's immensely challenging. What's important is that shared ownership teachers and students aren't trapped in some kind of static classroom where learning is defined only by knowing which choice is correct. Rather, because teachers and students acknowledge the messiness of authentic work, their reflective processes display a willingness to tolerate uncertainty and unpredictability, maintain a healthy optimism and realistic expectations, and hold onto challenging perspectives until they trigger new knowledge. Teachers and students flourish in highly critical and personal learning explorations.

### **Advice**

- Teachers should keep in mind there's not really a 'right' or 'wrong' way to incorporate reflective processes.
  - Various timelines are appropriate to reflective processes from a single class to an entire term.
  - Age and level of students are important considerations.
  - Reflective practices may be modified to meet the needs of individual subject matters.
- Students may have their own ideas about reflection.
  - Getting to know students through the Day One activities may help teachers to set up and give students ownership of effective reflective processes.
  - Individual work allows students to take charge of their own reflection.
  - Group work requires students to participate in active listening and explore the implications of each other's metacognitive strategies.
- Students need encounters with reflective role models (parents, teachers, administrators). Teachers may offer examples from their own reflective experience.
- Students may think that making mistakes is a bad thing. Teachers may assist such negative thinking patterns by encouraging students to get the most out of every mistake they make.
- Not all reflection takes place during the allotted class time period. Deep reflection frequently occurs at home, during recess, and at times completely separate from teaching and learning.

## Teacher Reflection

Engaging students in reflective processes plays an integral role in shared ownership classrooms. A framework to facilitate ongoing student reflection may include planning, ongoing awareness, meaning making, and follow up.

1. Which aspects of ongoing reflection – planning, ongoing awareness, meaning making, follow up – do you consistently use with your students?

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2. Which aspects of ongoing reflection – planning, ongoing awareness, meaning making, follow up – are missing from your teaching? Why?

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3. How does the factor of time influence whether or not you include reflective processes with your students?

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4. What type of documentation works with your students?

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Reflective teacher practice is integral to evolving shared ownership classrooms. Teachers may incorporate four stages of reflective practice – planning, ongoing awareness, meaning making, and follow up.

1. Which aspects – planning, ongoing awareness, meaning making, follow up – do you consider as strengths in your reflective practice?

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2. What could you do to be more deliberate in addressing all aspects of planning, ongoing awareness, meaning making, and follow up in your reflective practice?

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3. What kind of formal and informal documentation mechanisms do you have in place to keep track of themes related to student and teacher reflection?

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4. What could you do to be more deliberate in addressing all aspects of planning, ongoing awareness, meaning making, and follow up in your reflective practice?

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### **Final Thoughts from the Author**

My purpose in putting this resource together has been to provide teachers with insight and practical guidance into shared ownership classrooms. While teachers may be unfamiliar with the term 'shared ownership', I anticipate that teachers will be familiar with many ideas fundamental to shared ownership classrooms. As teachers read through this resource, there will be numerous occasions when they respond with, "Yes, that's what I already do!" "So that's why it works." "I get what's going on." Such statements confirm feelings of reassurance and alignment with a shared ownership approach. On other occasions, teachers may wonder, "Why didn't I think of that before?" or "How can I possibly incorporate that aspect?" They acknowledge the challenges of integrating minimally acquainted and previously unknown ideas.

I appreciate how the philosophy and practical approach of shared ownership may present teachers with any number of routes for exploration and implementation. Some teachers will get going immediately by strengthening elements of shared ownership already in place. Some will make noticeable adjustments to their classrooms that confirm their commitment to shared ownership. Other teachers will wait for opportunities like the beginning of a term or a new learning sequence to allow for adequate thought and preparation.

My impression is that making the most of shared ownership involves teachers living and teaching with awareness, gratitude, and hope. It isn't about the search for perfectionism or the eradication of self-perceived flaws. Most likely, it all starts with teachers letting go of what they see getting in the way. It continues by teachers taking the time to consider how shared ownership might influence what we have yet to imagine about ourselves, our students, teaching and learning, our communities and country, and what it means to live the good life.