



The Classroom Element

The Classroom Element encompasses the environment and the people who create a classroom community.

The Reggio Emilia approach from Italy recognises the environment as the 'third teacher'; the first being the parent and the second being the class teacher. Therefore, it's worth spending time considering the best way to use the environment to promote meaningful participation and engagement.

Consider the **Universal Design for Learning principle**. By providing multiple means of engagement, representation, expression and action, we reduce barriers to learning and nurture the agency of learners who can flexibly use their environment.

Proactive measures in the classroom environment such as:

ROUTINE	PREDICTABILITY	CONSISTENCY	CLEAR EXPECTATIONS
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can create a regulated classroom and support students to feel calm, safe and ready for learning.

If a student can anticipate a transition, perhaps through an embedded routine or schedule, this predictability supports their ability to begin to regulate based on the upcoming activity.

Students feel less anxious and apprehensive in a predictable and structured space. With embedded routines, students can build independence and confidence.

Practical Strategies

- 'Meet and Greet' every student by name in the morning
- Have students collaborate and contribute to decisions about their classroom and their learning
- Create a predictable, structured environment to support transitions between and during lessons
- Offer a soft start to the day and after breaks
- Have an area within the classroom that offers students a quiet space, e.g. a beanbag, calm corner or library space. See the [Relate Mindful Colouring Page](#) for a relaxing activity
- Use the top of a bookcase or cabinet as a standing station where students can opt to stand while they engage in writing tasks
- Be conscious of the visual clutter in the classroom space. Be reflective of whether it is necessary and relevant to the learning

Students say...

Listening looks different from person to person. Being allowed to listen in a different way can make all the difference, e.g using hands to fidget or even knit/crochet, sitting in a different way, standing up or stretching legs.

School staff modelling taking breaks would help make it the norm.

In exam years, some students push themselves not to take necessary breaks as they are stressed about missing something. Check in with them to make sure they are not 'pushing' themselves too much.

Where possible, stagger corridor times as these can be overwhelming for some students.

Not all breaks are for movement, some are for fatigue or quiet or to stop and take a moment to re-engage.

Flexible movement being usual practice makes it easier to get up and move about or stim without feeling self-conscious.



The Outdoor Classroom

Conducting teaching and learning outside in natural environments can positively impact student regulation, social-emotional development, motivation and engagement in learning (Becker, Lauterbach, Spengler and Dettweiler, 2017; Mann *et al.*, 2021). The outdoor classroom can be explored and provide benefits in all contexts.

Outdoor learning brings everyday subjects such as reading, maths or science alive by adopting a kinaesthetic, sensory and experiential approach to learning (Lieberman and Hoody, 1998).

The sensory rich environment of nature creates unique opportunities for students

- To connect with their surroundings
- To attend to the unique tactile, visual and scented experiences of the natural world
- To be curious and imaginative
- To create and build using natural materials

Finding opportunities to incorporate nature into teaching and learning activities is something that will benefit students of all ages.

For ideas for all age ranges check out [Outdoor Learning – Education Scotland](#) and [Learning Through Landscapes](#)

Visuals in the Classroom

- Use them to label
- Use them to direct
- Use them to schedule
- Use them to show when there's a change
- Use them to list instructions
- Use them to create zones in the environment
- Use them to show expectations
- Use them to show time
- Use them to offer choices

Toolkit



[NCSE The Physical Classroom Environment](#)



[NCSE Classroom Sensory Screening Tool](#)



[NCSE Visual Supports within an Inclusive Learning Environment](#)



[NCSE Movement Breaks in the Post Primary Classroom](#)



[NCSE Sensory Spaces](#)



[Clever Classrooms Report](#)



[NCSE Get Ready, Do, Done Template](#)



Calm, Alert and Learning by Stuart Shanker



Self-Reg Schools: A Handbook for Educators by Stuart Shanker and Susan Hopkins



The Kid's Guide to Staying Awesome and In Control by Lauren Brukner

NCSE TPL



Fundamentals of Structured TEACCHing

Visual Structured Teaching Methodologies

Understanding Behaviour (Primary)

Pathways to Prevention

Promoting Positive Behaviour for Learning (Post Primary)

Reflective Questions

- Are there opportunities for multi-sensory or movement-based learning activities that link in with what you are teaching?
- Is there flexibility in what position students are in throughout the day? Can they stand, sit or move around at different times?
- Can you zone the classroom space for different activities? For example, a rug for sitting as a group, a beanbag for relaxing, a standing station for standing up while writing.
- Observe the physical environment through the student's perspective.
 - Is the environment welcoming and warm?
 - Are the resources needed available and easy to access?
 - Is the furniture the correct size for everyone who will be there?
 - Is everything visible from all positions the students are in?