

## INTRODUCTION

### WHY SHOULD SCHOOLS TAKE THE PLUNGE AND SWIM WITH FISH!?

Imagine teaching in an environment in which learners of all ages are fully present for the task at hand. They're respectful and deeply in touch with each other's emotional needs. They take responsibility for their attitudes every day. These learners regularly seek opportunities to make the day of others by acknowledging their interests and achievements. They are free to play, imagine and experiment with new ideas. And they feel safe to make mistakes that lead to real, true learning.

Well, dream no more! With The FISH! Philosophy, this can be *your* classroom! By embracing the four principles of FISH! and releasing their potential among your students, you *can* achieve this positive environment. FISH! provides a common language and a framework to increase dialogue that encourages learning and understanding. Moreover, FISH! gives you the tools you need to help you build relationships, share responsibility, collaborate, and lead students to own and manage their behavior. The result? A joyful classroom atmosphere.

The FISH! Philosophy is helping educators across the country create unique and proactive learning environments. **That's because The FISH! Philosophy provides a "blueprint" for creating a common language, vision, and structure to foster awareness of choices and goals.** This structure can be adapted to fit any learning community. In this remarkable environment, all learners have a say in choosing the behavioral standards by which they live. In turn, these learners are committed to coaching each other to live their shared vision every day.

Educators today face many new demands to do more with less. They're challenged by rigorous academic expectations, standardized tests, teacher accountability, budget cuts, more at-risk students, and decreased prep time. Teachers take it upon themselves to somehow make it all work despite fewer resources and more paperwork. But what is the personal and emotional cost in doing so?

Student profiles are changing, too. Children today are exposed to many of life's complexities at such an early age. Working parents do the best they can to stay connected to their kids. Yet too many disadvantaged children come to school without their most basic needs being met at home. Students report feeling isolated and disconnected from school life. These students, in turn, can suffer emotionally, act out their frustrations, quit school, do drugs, join gangs, and otherwise look to escape their feelings of frustration and isolation. Educators are doing the best they can with what they have but schools need help. They cannot do it all alone.

With FISH!, they don't have to! FISH! helps educators encourage and motivate students to participate in their learning experiences. Everyone is invited to FISH!. It can't be imposed or mandated. It needs to be tried and talked about—a lot! When The FISH! Philosophy truly becomes their way of life, teachers and students begin a wonderful journey that will benefit them for countless years to come.

### CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Classroom management is central to this curriculum and learning experience. Strategies for managing classrooms should not be centered on misbehavior and discipline but instead help children take responsibility for, understand, and learn from the choices they make. People need to be free to share ideas and opinions as

well as address concerns in an emotionally safe environment. They need to have power over the culture they create and choices in what happens in the classroom.

That said, kids still need guidance in assessing their feelings, identifying their options, making choices, and taking action to correct mistakes or bad decisions. The FISH! Philosophy is about addressing feelings, taking ownership of our own actions, and taking a mistake and making it right.

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Current research consistently shows that sincere, positive relationships between teachers and their students are one of the key benefits of classroom management. These strong relationships encourage student participation. Taking a personal interest in your students fosters communication, higher levels of cooperation, and mutual respect.

The September 2003 issue of *Educational Leadership* is all about building these connections. **“Teachers who had high-quality relationships with their students had 31% fewer discipline problems, rule violations and related problems over a year’s time than did teachers who did not have high-quality relationships with their students.”** (Marzano & Marzano, p. 6-14) Your interest in your students’ ideas, opinions, and participation demonstrates your belief that they are valuable members of the classroom community.

Good teachers don’t treat all students equally. They get to know every child and respond to his or her needs based on personality and temperament. When teachers follow the four FISH! principles, they help students make powerful connections between what they are learning and how it will impact them personally.

Human beings will find a place to belong somewhere. The FISH! Philosophy is about making that place the classroom. A group of kids are put together every single day from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, religious, and emotional backgrounds. Any group of people working together toward a common goal establishes a culture, a way of being together, and a style of interacting with one another. However, positive school cultures don’t just happen—they must be created and manipulated to be what we want them to be. The FISH! Philosophy establishes a framework that helps students make better choices when interacting and thus improves the sense of belonging for all learners.

### PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INTERNAL MOTIVATION

Educators seek to motivate students to participate and to take personal responsibility for their contributions (positive or negative) to the learning community. FISH! does, too. FISH! is about taking personal ownership of our actions and being the people we want to be. In the classroom, FISH! satisfies our need to have power over our choices and goals by involving students through collaboration in creating the classroom culture. This involvement helps students understand the culture, identify its positive aspects, and address areas needing change. When students are involved in the creation of something amazing, they take pride in their work and assume ownership of the ongoing success of the class. Certainly this is a FISH!-ing expedition worth launching!

FISH! is unique. No two classrooms will be the same. FISH! classrooms will even look different from year to year simply because of the unique blend of students in each class and how they each will contribute and live FISH!. Students involved in the creation of behavioral standards will take your classroom to amazing levels of interaction! They will learn to choose attitudes conducive to a positive learning

culture and be there for peers and teachers. They will become more aware of doing kind things for others and have more kind things done for them. They will feel connected to the classroom community and see themselves as an integral part of it.

Students need to realize they are the only ones who can take ownership of and actively participate in their learning. Neither teachers nor parents can do it for them. From cradle to grave, we own our contributions to our surroundings. Educators who undertake the FISH! journey will be able to teach life skills and strategies that will help kids make good choices as they learn and grow.

### COLLABORATION

Remember, FISH! is an invitation! The decision to live FISH! cannot be forced upon students or teachers; it must come from within. FISH! For Schools invites student participation through collaboration. Students should be included in every aspect of the creation of a FISH! classroom. As students learn about the four principles and become a part of the creation of something world famous, they realize that every person contributes to the classroom culture. Frequent dialogue and conversations encourage student participation and help them see how teachers and students can work together to create what they need to succeed in life.

### SAFE AND PLAYFUL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Imagine life without joy, laughter, and pleasure! Play inspires creativity and releases stress. It is essential for learning new things and to our physical and emotional growth. Play is great for building relationships, too. Think of friends with whom you laugh the most and how humor strengthens your bond. Human

beings must play, have fun, and giggle! The FISH! Philosophy focuses on creating this lighthearted and emotionally safe place for students to learn and be every day—a place where they are excited to come in the morning and enthusiastic about staying through the day.

William Glasser's *Choice Theory* (1998) supports the need to encourage internal, rather than external, motivation. The Choice Theory is based on five basic needs: **survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun**. These needs comprise the source of internal motivation and guide human behavior. The FISH! Philosophy supports these basic needs and provides activities that foster students' desire to create a better place to learn.

### DIVERSITY

In FISH! Philosophy classrooms, relationship building is a priority between teachers and students and between students themselves. It's all about *connections*. Diversity is accepted, and the strengths and experiences of all are respected and celebrated. The classroom community is enriched by each and every member, every day.

### CONFLICT RESOLUTION

FISH! is about building communities and improving one's way of life. That's why FISH! believes that students who make poor choices should be given opportunities to correct their mistakes. Using the F.I.S.H. Resolution Plan (see Appendix), these students are encouraged to reflect on their feelings and create a plan to make amends with the person(s) involved. Here's an example of what FISH! directs them to do when a problem results from poor behavior choices.

<b>F: Feelings</b>	Identify your <b>feelings</b> at the time of the choice and now.
<b>I: Issue</b>	Describe the <b>issue</b> and the choices you could have made.
<b>S: Solution</b>	Devise a <b>solution</b> to correct the mistake.
<b>H: Heart Work</b>	Make it happen from the <b>heart</b> . Put your solution plan into action with sincerity and effort.

Students can then be asked to describe other choices they could have made at the time to create a better outcome for themselves and others. Compassion and resolution should be the focus of student discipline.

FISH! also focuses on rights and responsibilities. All students have rights in school. One student cannot infringe upon the rights of others and each one must act responsibly to maintain the rights of both themselves and others.

The F.I.S.H. Resolution Plan provides conflict resolution and communication activities appropriate to four different developmental levels. For example, young children begin by drawing pictures to complete it. Next, students move to writing to complete the plan. And gradually, students partake in conversations to become more aware of the consequences of their actions and how to choose responsibly from the heart.

Now that you've read all this information, it's time to let FISH! release the potential hidden in *your* classroom. Dive into the fun of it! Be There! Make Their Day! Choose Your Attitude! Play! It's the simplest, hardest, most fun, and genuinely exciting journey you'll ever undertake to a better life and love of learning for you and your students.

## THE FISH! PHILOSOPHY IN SCHOOLS

### BE THERE

Being there for others is a skill children need to learn, have modeled, and be given the opportunity to practice frequently. The ability to tune into the moment demonstrates respect for themselves and others in their lives. Perhaps more importantly, it helps children develop a better understanding of, and appropriate responses to, the needs and feelings of others. In the classroom, Be There teaches children to focus on educational lessons so they can better understand the content.

### CHOOSE YOUR ATTITUDE

This concept helps students develop an awareness of choice within the realms of attitude and behavior. When children learn how to view attitude as a conscious choice they can make every day, it can truly transform the way they choose to behave in all aspects of their lives. With FISH!, students learn strategies to choose and assume attitudes that are conducive to learning and building friendships.

### MAKE THEIR DAY

Doing simple things for others offers many benefits both intrinsically and extrinsically. Make Their Day lessons focus on children making their own days by taking care of themselves physically and emotionally. They help students be kind and respectful to others in the learning environment. And lastly, these lessons focus on community service learning projects to teach children about the importance and value of making the day of many people at one time. Make Their Day makes a real difference in each unique classroom and the community.

### PLAY

Play is not about throwing fish; it's about throwing oneself into life! Learning can be fun and The FISH! Philosophy encourages students to play with ideas and tap into their creative selves. Play shows children how to live in the moment and see the humor in everyday life without being offensive to others. This concept helps students see Play as a natural part of the learning process. Playfulness can relieve tension and stress in the classroom. In addition, Play can bond friends and strengthen relationships between students and educators. Curiosity comes alive and children want to be there!

### HOW KIDS EMBRACE FISH!

#### Lessons

Lessons are organized so there is a clear, constant flow into deeper levels of student ownership and the creation of classroom standards. The units begin with an overview of the FISH! principles and students focus on the current classroom situation. Together behavioral standards are established and mission statements are developed.

#### Discussions

Discussions are a large part of the units, as students must interact and participate in order to fully realize the benefits of taking ownership and creating the classroom they want to live and learn in each day.

#### Visual Charts

Visual charts are prescribed and included so established classroom standards can be posted and added to throughout the year. In the primary grades, music and puppets are used to meet the developmental needs of all students.

### Engaging Activities

Engaging activities invite students to participate and guide them in very specific ways to “try” the FISH! principles to see how they impact their lives. Students discover the power of these principles through experimentation, discussion, and reflection.

### A Common Language

A common language is established using the four simple and powerful FISH! Principles. This language is easily understood by students. As the principles are defined in more depth, these simple phrases take on a much larger and heartfelt meaning for students.

### Friendships

Friendships are established as students participate in practicing the principles. Students learn the power of choices. Deeper relationships are formed as students learn to Be There for others, Make Their Day, and enjoy the process of learning through fun and Play-ful exercises and activities. Supportive and respectful peers and educators allow students to realize their personal value as important and positive contributors to the classroom and life.

### Gone FISHin'! (a teacher's personal story)

“After teaching for seven years, I was very confident in my approach to building a strong classroom community. This year, however, the students in my classroom struggled significantly with treating each other with respect and kindness, manners, listening, and following directions. After trying numerous strategies that had worked for me in the past to no avail, I started to get frustrated. Behavior problems consistently interrupted learning

*and disrespect towards peers and property were spinning out of control. I was tired and irritable and it was negatively affecting my teaching, love for learning, and children, as well as my home life. The thought of getting through each day became overwhelming. The thought of getting through the school year seemed incomprehensible. Then I came across The FISH! Philosophy. As the staff development facilitator at our building, I was working with the staff development committee on introducing the staff to The FISH! Philosophy. As I brainstormed ways to share the FISH! principles with the staff, my mind kept going back to my students. Ideas of how I could help students embrace a new way of being together continuously crept into my thoughts. Should I, could I, do this with kids? Nothing I was trying was working, so what could it hurt? And so our ‘swimming’ began . . .*

*We began with a discussion on the need for change in the classroom. Collaboratively, we decided what kind of learning community we wanted to create together. We talked about barriers to creating a safe, welcoming, supportive, and exciting learning community. As I introduced the FISH! principles to the students and we openly discussed issues and concerns and celebrated successes, I watched our chaotic classroom transform into a wondrous place for learning and being together. The FISH! Philosophy provided a framework and common language to practice respect and kindness. It helped us to have fun while we learned a better way to be together. I was so proud of how well the students transferred the learning when interacting with one another and [how they] took ownership of their own learning. They focused on the positive aspects of the classroom and were provided with a forum for dealing with issues. Academic successes were celebrated and disruptions became limited. Not only did we have more time for learning, our learning time became more exciting and interesting as student participation, interest, and enthusiasm increased. The FISH! Philosophy is an incredible way to build community and so much more learning can take place when students are working together to promote and support one another in their learning!”*