

**Breakout session: creating an emotionally responsive classroom**  
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*“Every act of creation is first an act of destruction.”*

**Goal of the session:** to help educators create a process for reflective practice resulting in emotionally responsive teaching and learning. The goal here is not to provide the “how-to” of modifying a classroom environment but, rather, to give educators a collaborative process they can use, continuously, to reflect, refine, and experiment within their own community.

**Group activity #1 “Today is Opposite Day”** also known as the Triz exercise (don’t ask me why), from *Liberating Structures*

1. Divide participants into groups. This exercise involves generating a list of all the things we can do to make sure that we achieve the worst possible result imaginable with respect to our top strategy or objective. Ask group to quickly brainstorm what that “worst result” might be for early childhood programming: e.g. “How can we double or triple the number of referrals we make for behavioral problems in the classroom this year?”

[Here is a real-life example of a group of doctors who had a high rate of errors and unintentional injuries in their practice. They picked as their “desired” result for this exercise: “How can we ensure that we always operate on the wrong side of a patient’s body?”]

Spend 5 minutes choosing the “worst possible result” for the purposes of this exercise.

2. Groups generate list of specific items to achieve that worst outcome. Be specific and comprehensive. Consider all aspects of the educational habitat – physical environment, use of language, curriculum, routines etc.. Don’t just say, “don’t listen to children” but give concrete examples such as “cut off children immediately when they connect an idea to their personal lives during circle time.”

[Example: When hospital employees were asked to generate their list of “how to make patients feel unwelcome,” they came up with, “require all new patients to receive a rectal exam, regardless of reason for visit.”]

10 minutes

3. Go down this list item by item and ask yourselves, ‘Is there anything that we are currently doing that in any way, shape, or form resembles this item?’ Be brutally honest to make a second list of all your counterproductive activities/programs/procedures.

10 minutes

4. Go through the items on your second list and decide, concretely, what first steps will help you stop what you know creates undesirable results?
  - Important to focus on what needs to STOP, not what new things that need to be done. There is a subtle difference. Focusing on what needs to stop promotes more accountability because it recognizes that there are sins of commission, and not just omission, that need attention.
  - Include *who* needs to be involved in stopping the decision.  
10 minutes

Use the 1-2-4-all procedure for each part of the exercise:

1. Silent reflection: 1 minute
2. Pairs: 2 minutes
3. Group of four: share and develop ideas as you notice similarities and differences: 3 minutes
4. Whole group: Key idea(s) 4 minutes

What works about this exercise:

- Allows people to acknowledge the things we don't want to admit and "get the skeletons out."
- Allows participants to be self-reflective in a fun and low-stress atmosphere, using humor and exaggeration to look critically at behaviors that need to be examined
- Allows for creative, expansive thinking
- Builds trust and shared purpose

## **Group activity #2 The Six Thinking Hats** (from Edward de Bono)

Here is a process for trying this in your own professional community

1. Pick a challenge, such as designing a developmentally appropriate outdoor play space
2. Divide participants into six groups, each wearing one thinking "hat" as described below. Each group will bring a specific perspective or lens to the of creating an outdoor play area – with its own set of assumptions/orientations/ biases. Make a list of insights/considerations generated by wearing the assigned thinking hat.
3. Share feedback from the six hat groups. Together, consideration of these six frameworks, or 'hats,' can yield the fullest and most productive response.

**Managing (Blue hat) group:** Thinking that asks identifies underlying goal(s)? What are we trying to achieve by doing X? What is the big picture? The 30,000 foot view.

**Creative (Green hat) group:** Thinking that stimulates curiosity, provocation, thinking out of the box, "if money were no object...", "if we could run the world for a day..."

**Optimistic (Yellow hat) group:** Thinking that focuses on harmony, benefits, sunny perspective, positive results, looking on the bright side.

**Emotional (Red hat) group:** Thinking based in instinctual, emotional, and gut reactions not necessarily based in evidence or justification

**Discernment (Black hat) group:** Thinking that identifies reasons to be cautious, practical, realistic, or conservative. (This is not 'negative thinking' per se, but can often be interpreted as such.

**Information (White hat) group:** Thinking using *only* available information. Fact-based. What does the evidence base tell us?