

WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . .

A must-read for classroom teachers, for teacher leaders/mentors, for teachers-in-training, and for teachers' instructors. All great teachers know that there are five essential things that they need to know and do to create a dynamic classroom. This book answers the five "big questions." In our current environment, teachers are asking for help creating a dynamic classroom. There isn't another book on the market like it. This book is the answer to how to create a dynamic classroom that is student-centered, engaging, relationship-building, goal-oriented, and lively.

—**Edward DeRoche**

Director, Character Education Resource Center
Department of Learning & Teaching, University of San Diego

Serena Pariser and Victoria Lentfer offer us exemplary classroom practices, teacher wisdom, and a healthy dose of optimism. They encourage us to "take a deep breath" and intentionally choose our next small step. The answers in this book can minimize stress, help teachers avoid burnout, and improve teacher retention.

—**Carol Pelletier Radford**

Author of *Teaching With Light*, *Mentoring in Action*, and *The First Years Matter*

Serena Pariser and Victoria Lentfer's *Answers to Your Biggest Questions About Creating a Dynamic Classroom* provides newer teachers with answers to common questions that linger in the brain of a newer teacher. As a newer teacher myself, I wish a book like this existed when I started out. This book is engaging, informative, and so much more. If you know a new teacher, work with a new teacher, or are a new teacher, this book is absolutely for you and will make the perfect gift for a new teacher in your life. Each section includes helpful tips and is easily organized and accessible. This book is truly an amazing guide for newer teachers, and I highly recommend it as it will form the perfect basis for that exciting and powerful start of a new journey. Teaching can be many things, but this book is truly a game changer for anyone starting out.

—**Susan Jachymiak**

Teacher, Leader, and Author

Answers to Your Biggest Questions About Creating a Dynamic Classroom embraces the need for engagement of both the student and the teacher. It's a book that not only helps a student to thrive as a learner but also helps a teacher to thrive as a coach, a guide, and a facilitator. Each chapter launches with an "Imagine This" scenario, and then breaks down and deconstructs what makes that moment in the classroom engaging and successful. The suggestions nod to what we all feel in the moment of classroom stress and give alternate solutions that are efficient and doable. This is a book that shares strategies for Monday, not someday.

—**Heather Wolpert-Gawron**

(aka "tweenteacher")

Author of *Just Ask Us: Kids Speak Out on Student Engagement*

ANSWERS *to Your*

BIGGEST QUESTIONS *About*

CREATING
A DYNAMIC
CLASSROOM

This book is dedicated to those who have chosen to enter this beautiful profession.
May your journey be one filled with immense gratitude.

FIVE to
THRIVE

ANSWERS *to Your*

BIGGEST QUESTIONS *About*

CREATING
A DYNAMIC
CLASSROOM

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	x
About the Authors	xii
Introduction	1

1 HOW DO I BUILD AN AFFIRMING CLASSROOM COMMUNITY? **6**

How Do I Create and Keep Positive Vibes in My Classroom?	8
How Do I Make My Classroom Visually Appealing as Well as Functional?	11
How Do I Make an Effective Seating Chart?	14
How Do I Build Routines in My Classroom?	18
How Do I Keep and Reflect a Growth Mindset?	21
How Do I Energize a Sleepy Class or Calm Down a Wound-Up Class?	25
How Can I Ensure Engagement and Get Ahead of Off-Task Behaviors?	28
When and How Do I Use a Behavior Contract?	31
Recap: Try This Tomorrow	35

2 HOW DO I KEEP STUDENTS AT THE CENTER? **36**

What Does <i>Student-Centered</i> Actually Mean?	38
How Can I Efficiently Build Relationships With Students (Even When I Might Have More Than 200)?	40
How Can I Connect With the Kid Who Challenges Me?	42
How Do I Support Students Who Are Falling Behind?	45
How Do I Stand Out to My Students?	47
How Can I Make Sure My English Learners Feel a Sense of Belonging in My Classroom?	51
How Can I Make Sure My Students Stay on Task When I Have a Planned Absence?	53
How Do I Get Students to Follow Classroom Behavior Expectations?	55
Recap: Try This Tomorrow	57

3 HOW CAN I DESIGN EFFECTIVE, FUN, AND ENGAGING LEARNING FOR STUDENTS? **58**

What Do Students Really Want in a Lesson?	60
What Are Some Often Overlooked Pieces of Lesson Planning?	63
How Do I Make My Lesson Plans Relevant, Rigorous, and Fun All at the Same Time?	67
How Do I Use Technology Effectively in My Lessons to Maximize Learning?	69
How Do I Get Ahead With Planning, With So Many Other Tasks to Do?	71
How Do I Keep Students on Task With Group Work?	73
What If a Student Finishes Their Work Early?	75
What Are Some Teaching Strategies That Are More Engaging, Fun, and Collaborative Than Direct Instruction?	77
Recap: Try This Tomorrow	81

4 HOW CAN I MAKE ASSESSMENTS WORK FOR ME AND MY STUDENTS? **82**

What Are Engaging Ways to Check for Understanding?	84
What Does Effective Feedback Look Like—and How Does It Fit With Other Assessments?	86
When and Why Should I Use Rubrics?	89
What Do I Do With Assessment Data?	93
Why Should I Use Assessments to Differentiate Instruction?	95
What Does Differentiation Look Like in a Classroom?	97
What Are Some Creative Ways to Assess in a Virtual Learning Environment?	99
How and Why Would I Do Peer Conferencing?	101
Recap: Try This Tomorrow	103

5 WHAT ARE THE THINGS I NEED TO KNOW . . . BUT ARE RARELY DISCUSSED IN A TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM? **104**

How Do I Keep a Work/Life Balance?	106
How Do I Make Time for Some Serious Self-Care?	108
What Can I Proactively Do to Avoid Feeling Overwhelmed or Burned Out?	110
What If I Have a Conflict With a Colleague?	113
How Can I Build a Supportive Relationship With Administrators?	116
How Do I Work With a Co-teacher Effectively?	118
How Can I Creatively Get Parent and Caregiver Support From Day One?	121

How Do I Build Healthy Parent and Caregiver Relationships?	124
How Do I Navigate a Difficult Meeting With a Parent or Caregiver?	126
How Do I Pick Myself Back Up After I Mess Up?	128
What Small Tweaks Make a Profound Difference in My Job Satisfaction and Overall Well-Being?	130
What Are Some Effective Time-Saving Hacks?	132
Recap: Try This Tomorrow	134
References	135
Index	137

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Serena Pariser is the best-selling author of *Real Talk About Classroom Management* and *Real Talk About Time Management*. She taught for many years as an English teacher, mostly in San Diego and one year in Philadelphia. She has experience working in some of the most challenging school settings from coast to coast. In addition to her extensive experience in urban school settings, she also has experience in affluent schools and has truly seen all sides of education. Serena was humbled to be recognized as Teacher of the Year at Gompers Preparatory Academy.

Her passions include progressive classroom management best practices, bringing curriculum to life, time management for teachers, and weaving character education into the curriculum. She presents on these topics at educational conferences around the country. She was a keynote speaker for the Arizona K12 Center Beginning Teacher Institute Conference, the Illinois New Teacher Collaborative Beginning Teacher Conference, and the Alabama-Mississippi Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Conference.

She worked as assistant director of Field Experience at the University of San Diego, where she has a broader influence on new teachers entering the profession. In addition, Serena was selected to be a National Evaluator for Schools of Character.

In addition to her educational work in the United States, Serena has expanded her educational knowledge around the globe. She coached teachers and modeled best practices and engagement strategies in Kathmandu, Nepal. Serena was selected as a U.S. ambassador with the Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Program, which gave her an opportunity to coach teachers in the village of Molepolole in Botswana.

Serena has an international audience of educators on social media, all found on her website at www.serenaparis.com, where she writes educational articles for teachers.



Dr. Victoria Lentfer is author of the best-selling book *Keep Calm and Teach: Empowering K–12 Students With Positive Classroom Management Routines*. Her book has been highly praised by Dr. Susan Swearer from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dr. Swearer is the chair of the Research Advisory Board for Lady Gaga’s Born This Way Foundation. Dr. Lentfer is a personal life coach, an educational consultant, and founder of the CALM Classroom Management Program, which is a comprehensive behavior management and teacher leader program that provides communication models to guide teachers and students to an inclusive and productive classroom. Dr. Lentfer offers professional learning for new teachers and veteran teachers in the area of classroom management. She has recently founded the Summer Seminar Courses in Classroom Management and Personal Growth for Teachers. She has more than 20 years of experience providing instructional support and teaching in urban, suburban, and rural districts, and has done extensive work with incarcerated youth. She is an education lecturer at the University of Nebraska Omaha, where she teaches classroom management and middle-level courses. Visit Dr. Lentfer’s website at <https://www.victorialentfer.com> for more resources and opportunities to connect.

Your students know you post their assignment on the left-hand side of the board. Your students can also turn in their work and put away their materials in an efficient and orderly fashion. Your students do not feel pressured not to make a mistake, because you have established a safe and inclusive classroom. They know they are welcome because they can see themselves represented on the walls. Your students know they can engage in conversations in a respectful manner.

All your students feel safe and supported. Your classroom is dynamic.

Imagine this as your reality.

What are the biggest questions teachers ask about creating a dynamic classroom? The five main questions that title the five chapters in this book will serve as a guiding framework for creating a dynamic classroom:

- 1 How Do I Build an Affirming Classroom Community?
- 2 How Do I Keep Students at the Center?
- 3 How Can I Design Effective, Fun, and Engaging Learning for Students?
- 4 How Can I Make Assessments Work for Me and My Students?
- 5 What Are the Things I Need to Know . . . But Are Rarely Discussed in a Teacher Training Program?

Often we overlook what actually makes the fabric of a dynamic classroom and spend our days “getting by and settling for a classroom that is just good enough.” The majority of teachers report loving their job. Let’s hold on to that—even on days when you’re not feeling your most dynamic self. (And if you are in the 4 percent who don’t love your job, let’s see if we can get you back to the other side.) Let this book be your coach, shoulder, and safety net. We’re here to dissect the five most critical things you can address to have this type of classroom and overall more happiness every day doing what you love to do. Let us get you on the right foot, or maybe get *back* on the right foot. The advice in this book is research based and tried and true in the experiences of teachers. You and your students deserve to be thriving instead of surviving.

Each chapter provides practical guidance on what you need to succeed, answering sub-questions about things like building routines, providing equitable classroom management, planning lessons that allow for differentiation, using technology effectively, minimizing off-task behaviors, and much more. And the final chapter covers important areas that are often overlooked in teacher prep programs but can make or break a teacher in their early career, such as communicating with parents, asking for administrator support, and maintaining a healthy work/life balance.

WHAT IS A DYNAMIC CLASSROOM?

By this, in the simplest form, we mean that your classroom is a place of positivity, and more importantly, it is full of energy. This energy could look like students almost jumping out of their seats to answer a question during a debate, or it could look like students focusing intensely on writing a personal narrative that creatively expresses an important moment in their life. It could also look like students in a group having a heated discussion on whether George made the right decision for Lenny at the end of Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*.

Regardless of how this energy looks, it is in a form that is the opposite of apathy or disengagement. Yes, your dynamic classroom might be a bit louder than your neighbor's classroom sometimes, but that's because your students are excited to learn! In your dynamic classroom, learning is a social activity. Students can work together without conflict, they feel emotionally supported to share ideas and challenge each other, and there's a constant buzz of excitement and energy in the air during the lessons. A dynamic classroom is affirming and puts students, instead of just the curriculum, in the center. This type of classroom brings student voice into the lessons, and brings effective, fun, and engaging learning to students. A dynamic classroom has well-planned curriculum that constantly assesses student learning in creative and effective ways. In a dynamic classroom, the teacher fosters relationships with the students and they know their teacher cares about them both as human beings and as students.

WHO IS THIS BOOK INTENDED FOR?

If you are a new teacher, this book will set you up for success in the first few years, when habits are formed. It's really tough to unlearn bad teaching habits, and most of us are guilty of forming at least one or two bad habits the first few years. Serena recalls, for example, in her second year of teaching, a parent was so upset about her daughter's low grade in English class that the student's mother, aunt, and friend all came directly to her door while she was in the middle of teaching a class. Serena's entire class had to watch her get "told off" by these three adults. Serena feels that if she'd had the answers that are in this book then, she would have known how to diffuse an angry parent *and* how to collaborate with them to support the student together. She also would have known to reach out earlier and what to say to the parent before the situation escalated to such heated emotion. This is just one example of how this book can help new teachers.

If you are an experienced teacher who wants support to create and sustain a more dynamic classroom, the strategies in this book can get you there. Serena was lucky enough to work with a mentor, who also happened to be her co-teacher, who helped shape her from that teacher who was pretty good to a teacher who had a dynamic classroom full of students excited and eager to learn. Just one example of this is in Chapter 3, where highly engaging, fun, and collaborative learning strategies other than direct instruction are explained. Including these types of strategies in Serena's lessons often was just one factor that had her students asking, "How do you make teaching so fun, Ms. Pariser? We feel so happy while we are learning."

If you are a mentor teacher, teacher leader, or teacher coach, this book can help support you in leading newer teachers or teachers who need a little extra support to create classrooms that are dynamic and where learning is brought to life. Serena used to coach teachers and worked with a high school biology teacher who had a strong mastery of science content but lacked the ability to form relationships with his students because so many off-task behaviors were happening during the lesson. In turn, the students didn't appreciate his content mastery. It was a lose-lose situation. The information in this book can help support teachers like this, who have student-centered goals but aren't sure how to achieve them. Perhaps, as a teacher leader, you can use this book to support those teachers you are coaching, leading, and mentoring. For example, in Chapter 2 you'll find creative and effective ways teachers can efficiently build relationships with their students with very little time or effort.

The teachers whom you work with also can learn that teachers who report having strong relationships with their students report having 31 percent fewer behavioral issues (Marzano et al., 2003).

If you are a teacher educator, this book is a visually appealing and engaging text that can support preservice teachers in starting on the right foot. It can set them up for success in being the teacher and having the classroom that so many visualize when they enter education programs. For example, in Chapter 5, readers will learn myriad solutions to issues that may arise that we don't learn about in teacher prep programs. For example, teacher prep programs rarely guide us on how to navigate a difficult parent meeting; this is often an in-the-moment lesson learned through trial and error, which can take an emotional toll on a teacher. Chapter 5, in just a few pages, offers guidance and resources to help with parent communication and so much more. How much better will our teachers of tomorrow be set up for success if we can proactively prepare them for situations like this?

If you are changing professions into teaching, welcome! You have entered one of the most noble professions. This book can help support you to create a dynamic classroom right from the start to bring the content you know to a classroom of students who are excited to learn. That takes a whole new set of skills. This could range from knowing what students actually want in a lesson (which we cover in Chapter 3) to knowing how to energize a sleepy class or calm down a wound-up class (which we cover in Chapter 1).

"I know the best way to teach" . . . said no teacher ever. But there are aspects of teaching that work over and over again to get that dynamic classroom. That's what is shared with you in this book.

We, along with all great teachers, know that there are five essential things you do need to know about teaching to thrive and create a dynamic classroom. These are things that might be missed in a teacher prep program, or even things we may have overlooked as our workload piled up after year three or so and now we need a gentle reminder, or just things we gloss over that are ever so important to our effectiveness, well-being, and overall happiness as teachers.