

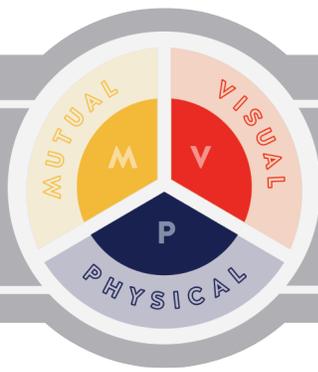
MVP SPACES

A Holistic Learning Environment ———

A guide for using Physical **STAPLES** in the classroom.

Simple **T**echniques to **A**chieve a **P**ositive **L**earning **E**nvironment

Anthony M. Chiles, Ed.S.



The Introduction

THE WHAT

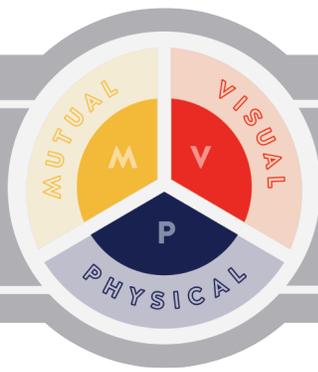
MVP Spaces is a guide to support an educator's practice in Mutual, Visual, and Physical learning spaces. Eight practices support each space called STAPLEs (Simple Techniques to Achieve a Positive Learning Environment) and are grounded in four principles: Relevance, Empathy, Action, and Lifelong Learning. Insight into these spaces provides an educator with a personalized framework to create a holistic learning environment for their students. MVP Spaces provides the blueprint for educators to engage in high-quality teaching and learning techniques, centralized in one location and simplified to implement with consistency and fidelity.

THE WHY

Creating holistic learning environments is essential for students to thrive socially, academically, and emotionally. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of such environments, particularly in disruptive and uncertain circumstances. However, many students and educators who rely on the consistency and structure of traditional face-to-face instruction need help to navigate the ever-changing landscape of blended and online learning. The research for creating positive learning environments includes many strategies to enhance an educator's toolkit. For example, one way to foster a positive learning environment is to establish clear and consistent expectations for behavior and learning, including structured and predictable routines and clear classroom participation guidelines. When students know these expectations, they are more likely to feel secure and confident executing them. Unfortunately, implementing effective strategies fails due to the need to implement them with consistency and fidelity. As a result, some educators have begun to review their core practices and are renewing their commitment and engagement in these techniques.

THE HOW

The Educator will first take the MVP Spaces Survey to analyze the perspective and use of the 24 STAPLEs in the Mutual, Visual, and Physical spaces. The survey questions are based on the REAL Education principles and help guide the implementation of each technique, focusing on consistency and fidelity. Each STAPLE includes (if applicable) a scripted activity and supporting documentation. Explore instructional videos, downloadable STAPLE handouts, and educator resources—plus connect with a growing teacher community—all at realeducators.org.



What is REAL Education?

Relevance in education focuses on a person's needs according to time and context. Relevant teaching engages students emotionally and connects prior knowledge to support the development of neural connections and long-term memory storage.^[7] Students must feel that the information they are learning is useful, valuable, and essential for their future. Relevance is most impactful when learning is connected to everyday life applications and as information moves from theory to practice.^[37] Background knowledge through scaffolding supports relevance by bridging the knowledge gap of new learning material. Relevant, real-world instruction can empower students to take ownership of their learning experiences.

Empathy in education is a teachable attribute innate in all people. We learn from a young age to “feel what others feel.” When explicitly taught and modeled, empathy teaches us to understand another person's point of view while using the information to inform our actions based on the situation.^[78] Compassionate action takes shape when empathy is enacted, whether a hug, a helping hand, or a shoulder to cry on.^[64] The golden rule “treat others as you want to be treated” is evident in nearly all cultures and ethnicities. Empathy teaches us how to interact with each other without judgment. Empathy interactions allow us to build social connections with others, regulate our own emotions, and promote helping behaviors.^[15] A culture of respect, trust, and teamwork is established when empathy is understood, modeled, and reinforced.

Action in education is a driving force for active engagement. Daily activity that includes mental and physical experiences is needed to support creative and critical thinking skills in learning.^[47,73] Active learning allows students to be fully engaged in their education through hands-on learning, collaborative group work, and memorable experiences.^[74] Experiences that are mentally and physically demanding to develop deeper learning connections.^[7] We remember what we touch. Taking active brain breaks during instruction allows the brain to retain information and focus attention. While the instructional approach sets the stage for an active classroom, the way a learning space is physically set up is equally important to the overall success of the active system.^[41,70] Being mentally and physically active benefits the body and mind by reducing stress and improving mood and overall mental health.^[12]

Lifelong Learning is a process where one can learn, unlearn and relearn continuously. [20] History's greatest pioneers, inventors, and leaders have utilized continuous learning to create and improve significant human advancements in transportation, agriculture, and technology. Through trial and error, creating and destroying, defining and redefining, lifelong learning provides us with a wealth of knowledge on developing continually. Lifelong learning builds innovation and creativity in finding solutions for age-old problems still waiting to be solved. [39] Lifelong Learning does not occur in a single location, at a particular time, or in one attempt but is flexible, timeless, and omnipresent. Students in the 21st century can now learn from anyone, anywhere, and anytime. [39] Continuous improvement encourages an endless pursuit of understanding the world around us and how to make it better, including ourselves.

Combining Mutual, Visual, and Physical Spaces with the foundational principles of relevance, empathy, action, and lifelong learning creates a holistic learning environment. To truly educate students, we must return to the simple, integrated format that has produced some of the greatest minds in history. This means providing learning experiences that are experiential, meaningful, and connected to all aspects of life. The focus should be on providing a well-rounded education that extends beyond economic or political considerations and encompasses a Real, Experiential, Authentic, and Lifelong approach. This approach is vital for preparing students for the demands of the 21st century.

*A note from the Author of **MVP SPACES**:*

Thank you for being so committed to creating and sustaining holistic learning environments. By utilizing these techniques, MVP Spaces will help new and veteran teachers become REAL Educators. Our students depend on us to come alongside them and facilitate their learning in meaningful and engaging ways. We can do it. Let us work together and make it happen!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony M. Chiles', written in a cursive style.

Anthony M. Chiles
MVP Spaces, Creator



PHYSICAL SPACE

STAPLE & Definitions

Physical Space | Property or body of a safe, clean, and nurturing space to support a positive learning environment.

P1

Play Low, Soft Music

P5

Make Learning Mobile

P2

Provide Flexible Seating Options

P6

Use a Student Reflection Area

P3

Use Hands-on Activities

P7

Take Active Brain Breaks

P4

Keep All Areas Clean & Organized

P8

Give Students Classroom Jobs

R.E.A.L. Education Connection

R

Relevance | having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand.

E

Empathy | the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

A

Action | the manner or method of performing.

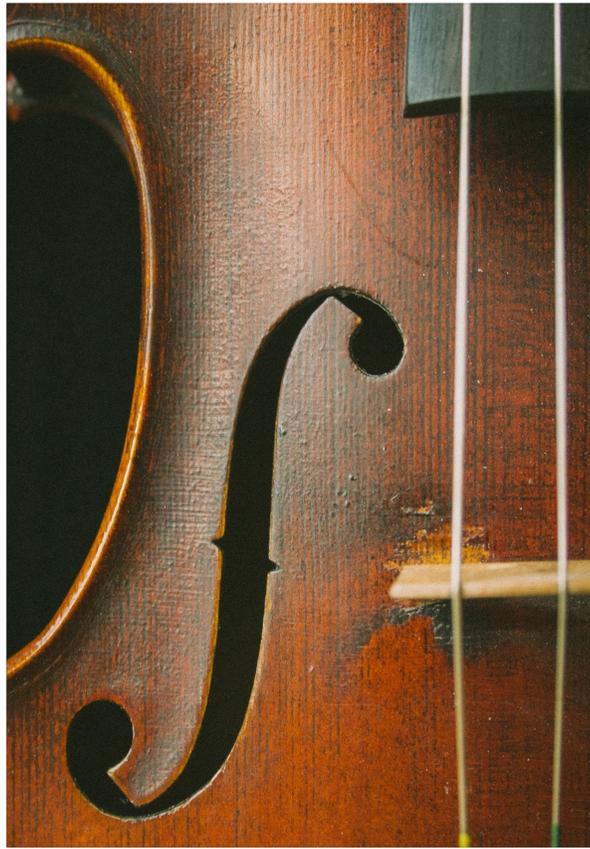
L

Lifelong-Learning | knowledge acquired by systematic study in any field or scholarly application.



STAPLE #1

Play Low, Soft Music



Music is a universal language that connects across cultures and backgrounds. Playing soft music in the classroom can support brain development by gently engaging areas related to language, focus, and organization. It also helps create a calm, welcoming atmosphere that promotes mindfulness and improves attention, assisting students to stay present and engaged in their learning.

1. Use classical music to support focus - Classical pieces are proven to enhance concentration and reduce anxiety.
2. Incorporate diverse music selections for cultural relevance - Introduce music from various genres and backgrounds to reflect student identities and promote cultural awareness.

[Research Resource \[32,48\]](#)

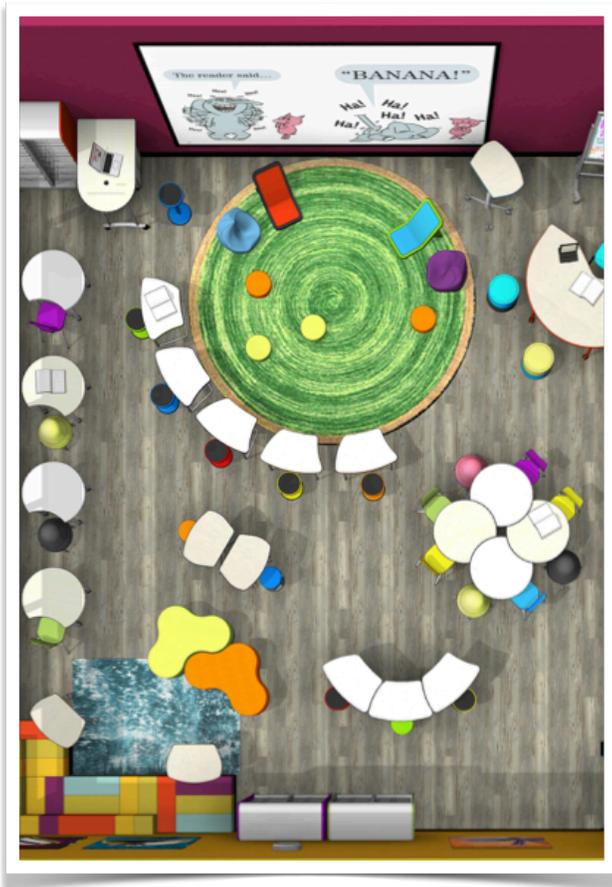
R.E.A.L. Education Connection

- **Relevance:** Playing soft music creates a learning atmosphere that feels familiar, focused, and student-centered, making classroom tasks more connected to students' daily experiences.
- **Empathy:** Music can support emotional awareness and help students recognize and respond to the feelings of others, fostering a more collaborative and caring classroom culture.
- **Action:** Low, calming music helps students manage stress and stay regulated, giving them the focus and control they need to remain engaged in learning tasks.
- **Lifelong Learning:** By using music to support focus and creativity, students develop habits that promote emotional balance and a positive approach to learning throughout life.



STAPLE #2

Provide Flexible Seating Options



Flexible seating empowers students by offering choice, comfort, and autonomy in how and where they learn. A variety of seating options allows students to become more engaged and collaborative. Movement is naturally encouraged, supporting focus, brain activity, and physical health. A flexible space helps shift the classroom from teacher-centered to student-centered, boosting participation and motivation.

1. Replace traditional desks with tables and chairs.
2. Create zones in the classroom that reflect your teaching style.
3. Limit physical barriers for group work.

[Research Resource \[10.75\]](#)

R.E.A.L. Education Connection

- **Relevance:** Flexible seating options cater to students' needs and preferences, making the learning environment more relevant.
- **Empathy:** Flexible seating encourages collaboration and empathy among students by allowing them to move around and respect each other's learning styles and needs.
- **Action:** Flexible seating motivates students to participate more actively in class discussions and group projects.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Flexible seating fosters lifelong learning by allowing students to explore different options and take responsibility for their education.



STAPLE #3

Use Hands-on Activities



When students are actively involved in learning—touching, building, experimenting, or solving problems—they retain information better and develop critical thinking, collaboration, and resilience. Hands-on, experiential learning strengthens neural pathways and makes instruction more memorable, relevant, and enjoyable. By doing rather than watching, students connect learning to real life and build skills they can use.

1. Allowing students to create products of their learning.
2. Connect learning activities to real-world problems.
3. Plan hands-on experiences into lessons.

Research Resource [7,28,91]

R.E.A.L. Education Connection

- **Relevance:** Hands-on activities can make learning more relevant by providing concrete experiences that connect with students' real-life experiences.
- **Empathy:** Hands-on activities encourage students to work together and understand each other's perspectives, ideas, and contributions.
- **Action:** Hands-on activities encourage students to be more active and engaged in learning, increasing the opportunity to retain what they learn.
- **Lifelong Learning:** When hands-on activities engage students in a fun and interactive way, they are more likely to develop a curiosity and passion for learning that extends beyond the classroom.



STAPLE #4

Keep All Areas Clean & Organized



A clean and organized classroom sets the tone for safety, structure, and a focused learning environment. When students see cleanliness modeled and participate in maintaining order, they learn responsibility and life skills that extend beyond school. Simple routines and thoughtful setup create a space where students can focus on learning without distraction.

1. Set up a routine for daily cleaning and organizing.
2. Maximize Classroom Structure to Promote Safety
3. Examine the Classroom Daily for Areas Needing Attention.

[Research Resource \[21,79\]](#)

R.E.A.L. Education Connection

- o **Relevance:** A clean and organized classroom enhances relevance by providing a comfortable, distraction-free environment.
- o **Empathy:** Keeping the classroom clean and organized promotes empathy by creating a shared space everyone can respect and appreciate.
- o **Action:** A clean and organized classroom encourages students to take action and model responsibility and respect.
- o **Lifeong Learning:** A clean and organized classroom fosters a love of learning and a sense of ownership and responsibility that can translate to other areas of life.



STAPLE #5

Make Learning Mobile



Learning doesn't have to be confined to desks or classroom walls. Students gain real-world context, relevance, and excitement for learning when they engage with content in new locations—whether it's another classroom, the outdoors, or a virtual space. Mobility fosters collaboration, curiosity, and connection to the broader world.

1. Collaborate with another teacher outside the classroom.
2. Plan place-based learning aligned to a lesson.
3. Use mobile technology to support on-the-go learning.

[Research Resource \[29,31,58\]](#)

R.E.A.L. Education Connection

- **Relevance:** Mobile learning reinforces that learning isn't limited to a desk or a specific spot—it can happen anytime, anywhere students are thinking, exploring, or engaging with the task.
- **Empathy:** Mobile learning promotes empathy by providing opportunities for students to connect and collaborate with peers, regardless of location or time zone.
- **Action:** Mobile learning encourages action by making it easy to access and engage with learning materials.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Mobile learning fosters lifelong learning by allowing students to access learning materials and continue their education beyond the classroom.



STAPLE #6

Use A Student Reflection Area



Students benefit from having space to process thoughts, emotions, and academic learning. A designated reflection area supports self-regulation, emotional growth, and deeper thinking. It also normalizes the need for pause, showing students that learning includes moments of calm and reflection. A reflection space helps students reset and return with greater clarity, focus, and learning readiness.

1. Set up a separate area, away from the main gathering space.
2. Include flexible seating options.
3. Provide reflection tools or prompts.

[Research Resource \[19,25\]](#)

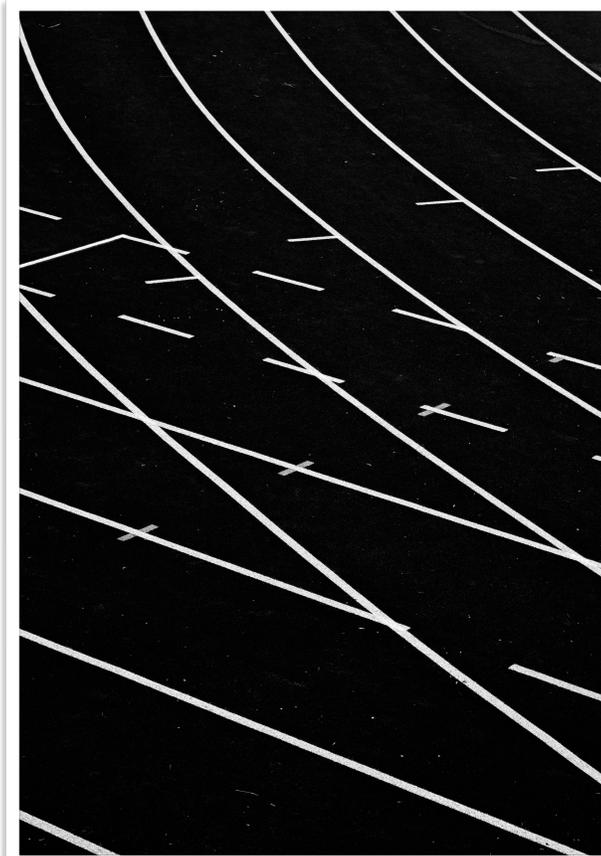
R.E.A.L. Education Connection

- **Relevance:** A reflection area helps students pause and make sense of what they're learning, allowing them to connect classroom experiences to their personal goals, emotions, and growth.
- **Empathy:** A reflection area promotes empathy by providing opportunities for students to reflect on their feelings and experiences and those of others.
- **Action:** A reflection area encourages action by empowering students to identify areas for improvement and take action to achieve their goals.
- **Lifelong Learning:** A reflection area fosters lifelong learning by promoting self-awareness, critical thinking, and continuous improvement.



STAPLE #7

Take Active Brain Breaks



Long periods of sitting can lead to restlessness, reduced focus, and mental fatigue. Active brain breaks provide a reset for the mind and body, boosting energy, improving mood, and helping students regain attention during extended instructional blocks. Movement also stimulates neural activity, increases oxygen flow to the brain, and supports better learning outcomes. Regular, intentional breaks improve overall classroom engagement and behavior.

1. Play a Movement Game (Online or In-Person).
2. Take a walk outside.
3. Do stationary exercises.

Research Resource [[14,24,53,80](#)]

R.E.A.L. Education Connection

- **Relevance:** When students are given a choice of brain break activities, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated to learn.
- **Empathy:** Students who engage in group activities better understand and appreciate their peers.
- **Action:** When students are given regular breaks to be active, they are more likely to be focused and productive in the classroom.
- **Lifelong Learning:** When students are encouraged to take breaks and prioritize their well-being, they develop habits supporting their ongoing learning and personal growth.



STAPLE #8

Give Students Classroom Jobs



Classroom jobs are more than just tasks; they're opportunities for students to build responsibility, leadership, and a sense of belonging. When students contribute to the functioning of the classroom, they feel trusted and valued, which enhances engagement and ownership of the learning space. Jobs also promote interdependence, teaching students the importance of teamwork and shared responsibility.

1. Ensure jobs are meaningful and modeled.
2. Rotate jobs regularly.
3. Offer a variety of roles.

[Research Resource \[62,66\]](#)

R.E.A.L. Education Connection

- **Relevance:** Giving students responsibilities contributing to the classroom community makes them feel more connected to their learning environment.
- **Empathy:** When students can help their peers, they develop a greater sense of compassion and understanding.
- **Action:** When students are responsible for classroom jobs, they learn the importance of taking action and contributing to a larger community.
- **Lifelong Learning:** When students are given jobs, they learn to take ownership of their actions and develop skills to support their ongoing personal and professional growth.

ANTHONY CHILES

Inspiring REAL Connections, in the Digital Age

Anthony M. Chiles is an engaging communicator and an expert in helping people build REAL connections with others and create positive learning environments in schools. With over 20 years of experience as an educator and administrator in Georgia, Anthony is deeply committed to servant leadership and applies a head, heart, and hands approach to teaching others.



Anthony holds a Bachelor of Music Education from Berry College, where he developed a strong foundation in music and the arts. He then pursued further academic achievements, obtaining a Master's and Specialist in Educational Leadership from Georgia College and State University. Additionally, Anthony has earned a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) Endorsement from Augusta University, equipping him with a multidisciplinary perspective that enhances his ability to address complex challenges in today's educational landscape.

Anthony cherishes his role as a husband to Sherrie and a father to their six beautiful children. Growing up as a military dependent, he has had the privilege of experiencing diverse cultures and backgrounds, instilling in him a deep appreciation for inclusivity and a genuine desire to support individuals from all walks of life. He is dedicated to creating transformative experiences and empowering others to thrive personally and professionally.

Stay Connected:



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