

Creating Conditions For a Sense of Community to Develop

SAFE AND TRUSTING ENVIRONMENT

Safe Environment

Physical and verbal violence has to be addressed. Ground rules and social commitments help in establishing boundaries. Instances of harassment, and violence though, must also get a response. Teach coping skills (e.g. dealing with frustration, making mistakes) directly. Establish processes for addressing conflict so that all know what to expect when the social commitment is breached. This can range from reminders, to class meetings, to accessing the larger school community systems.

Building & Maintaining Relational Trust

Trust is the foundation of all relationships. It is frequently difficult to build yet easy to break. Some come to the table ready to trust until it is broken, while others come with an attitude of distrust until it is proven. Either way, it takes consistent mutual respect, positive regard, integrity and demonstrated competence to create an environment for trust to flourish.

BALANCING “ME” AND “WE”

Empowerment (ME)

Individuals need the opportunity to make choices within the boundaries of the social commitment. It allows individuals to “be themselves.” This comfort gives people the safety net to take risks in order to learn and stretch themselves. It also guards against the pitfalls of groupthink.

Social commitment (WE)

Commitment from individuals is needed in order to keep a community healthy. Once norms are developed, this is what gets you through the rough spots.

OWNERSHIP

Focus (Goal Setting):

Goal setting provides focus for individuals and groups. The asking of questions is another way to help people focus. Community members can focus on individual and group behavior, tasks, desired outcomes, etc.

The 3 R’s: Routines, Rituals, Responsibilities

Routines provide consistency and continuity, while rituals (in this sense) offer continuity and connectedness. Authentic rituals are frequently spontaneous or arise from the personalities of the people in the community. Rites-of-passage are special rituals that help community members make the larger transitions. Responsibility entails having reasons to give to – or take care of – the community, each other, and oneself.

INTENTIONALITY

Invitational Education: Being Intentionally Inviting. Everything matters – what we say, how we say it, what we do, and how we do it. Creating an invitational climate fosters a culture of trust and is built on a stance that includes: Trust, Respect, Optimism, and Intentionality.

Time

It takes time to build relationships and create community. In a school setting, this means it has to have a high place in the priority list if it is truly valued and is, thus, given a chance to become a reality. It is also helpful to view community building as an essential part of the curriculum, rather than as a separate add-on to the day. Although you may begin the year with dedicated community-building time, it can become more and more integrated with the lessons as the year progresses.