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Understanding Each Other - Developing Positive Relationships with Challenging Students

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Understanding Each Other - Developing Positive Relationships with Challenging Students

Ann M. Van Buskirk, Ph.D.
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A Relational Framework

- Related to the early humanistic work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, this approach focuses on the person as “person” first, and person as “student” second
- The concerns and interests of the student are intertwined with the intellect, and the emotions of the student and educator can facilitate or hinder the learning process
- The teacher seeks to create a non-threatening, supportive environment, and to engage in a positive relationship with each student

- “No one has yet realized the wealth of sympathy, the kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child. The effort of every true education should be to unlock that treasure.”

Emma Goldman

Why does Relationship Matter so Much?

- The one thing most likely to affect academic achievement is LOVE – the feeling that a child has that her/his teacher loves her or him.
- "Love is the bond between men, the way to teach and the center of the world."
Jose Marti
- Positive attachments between adults and youth are the foundation of effective (and affective☺) education (Brendtro and Brokenleg, 2002)

Why does Relationship Matter so Much?

- A teacher who cares about his or her students creates feelings of belonging in their classroom
- A recent study found that best predictor of academic achievement in the area of mathematics was whether students believed that their teacher liked them, and whether they had positive attachments to their teacher

Why does Relationship Matter so Much?

- Rapport and positive interactions with students make more difference in what students learn than how expressive or animated the teacher is as a presenter
- Good teaching and behavioral intervention begin with kindness

What else matters?

- **Passion** for what we teach is critical. Research has found that when teachers are excited about what they are teaching, students are as well.
- **Fun** – making lessons engaging and interesting is the other critical piece in developing positive relationships

The Challenging Student

- There are different types of students – which type is often challenging for you?
- **Withdrawn**, often appearing depressed, sad or apathetic
- **Passive Aggressive**, appearing to be in no distress, often smiling but refusing to say or do
- **Oppositional Rule Breaker**, argues, disrupts, does not follow teacher directions or engage positively
- **Dependent**, often needy, developmentally delayed, whines or cries, acts more helpless and looks for extensive support and attention

What happens if challenging students don't feel as if they belong?

- **Destructive relationships** as experienced by rejected students, who are hungry for love but unable to trust, expecting to be hurt again
- **Climates of futility** in which an insecure student is crippled by feelings of inadequacy and fear of failure
- **Learned irresponsibility** when a sense of powerlessness may be masked by indifference, defiance or rebellious behavior
- **Loss of purpose** leading to a generation of self centered youth desperately searching for meaning in a world of confusing values

Signs that a student is personally challenging

- Losing patience more easily with that student
- Not physically moving toward them
- Staying away from their entire area of the classroom
- Allowing “escape” behavior – happily handing over a pass for frequent bathroom, water and other breaks
- Not checking in with them or offer help with work as frequently

Signs that a student is personally challenging

- Having judgmental thoughts “OMG, his hand is up, what stupid question is he going to ask?”
- Noticing a visceral response when the student is present (gut clenches, shoulders tighten, temples throb) and feeling relief when the student is absent
- Personally requesting that the student sit as far from you as possible

What to do?

- Acknowledge that there is a problem
- “All personal achievement starts in the mind of the individual. Your personal achievement starts in your mind. The first step is to know exactly what your problem, goal or desire is.”
W. Clement Stone

- Watch out for negative judgements without understanding
- "Assumptions are the termites of relationships."
Henry Winkler
- "Never look down on anybody, unless you're helping him up." *Jesse Jackson*

- ### What to do?
- Resolve to do everything you can to make things better. In the words of *Winston Churchill* "If you are going through hell, keep going" and refuse to give up on establishing a positive relationship.
 - At the same time remember that " "I can't do it," never accomplished anything; "I will try" has performed wonders." – *George Burnham*

- ### Strategies
- Consult with a colleague and if you have a partner or co-teacher, work out a plan
 - Find the missing pieces (look for the why, examine what part of the iceberg lies beneath the waterline)
 - Acknowledge your own humanity

Letters to my teacher



Activity

Strategies

- Be very conscious of increasing positive interactions > negative interactions
- Acknowledge the student daily upon seeing them so as to start on a good note
- Sit down with the student and ask, "what are things like from your point of view" or "what can I do to make our relationship better?"
- Ask the student to tell you about what is going on that may impact their work, and really listen
- Invite the student to eat lunch with you

Strategies

- Get to know all students (Survey) and seek to build community (Boer et al 2011)
- Make things fun – invite a mystery reader, help students throw a “party” to thank auxiliary staff, have a thought or story for the day that students can draw from a box, create an auction and allow students to use behavior bucks to bid on donated items, create classroom rituals

A great teacher...

- Respects students
- Creates community and belongingness in the classroom
- Is warm, accessible, caring and kind
- Sets high expectations
- Has her own love of learning
- Is a skilled leader
- Can shift gears and keeps things moving
- Collaborates with colleagues
- Maintains professionalism in all areas

A great teacher...

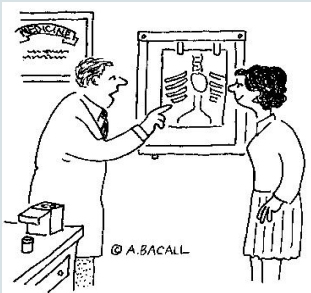
Love, Fun and Passion

- What if I'm not feeling the love, it's no longer fun and I can't rekindle the original passion I had in my work?

William Baker has said that the mark of a true leader is not charisma, or boldness or brilliance- it is kindness. Compassion, integrity, faithfulness...

But what if you are out of kindness?

Activity



How do we face up to the challenges of this critical work?

- Engage in ongoing development of pragmatic skills and theoretical understanding
- But recognize that if the instrument is broken, out of tune or missing some parts, the music will not flow from us, or if it comes out, the melody may be off a bit.
- Let us first tune into ourselves, and find ways to care, heal and repair the broken pieces.

How do we face up to the challenges of this critical work?

- "Ring the bells that still can ring. Forge your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything-that's how the light shines through."
- "Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all." Dale Carnegie

Do I Make You Proud



Video Links

- Do I Make You Proud
– <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt9NM6I8mr0>
- Letters To My Teacher
– <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQkGeeD7V50>
