

Building a Classroom Community

By: Thom Stecher,
Newman-Stecher
International

Classroom Community Requirements


A community is a place where everyone works together for a common goal. In order to have a community, you need to have three things happening in your classroom.

- Respect of self and others
- Responsibility for yourself and that of your group
- Relationships; the ability to work collaboratively in a group and set aside all your differences.



Connecting the Community and Education

Every classroom, like every community, has its own distinct culture, values, and rules. By building a community in the classroom, teachers create a common feel connected to others. For children to participate in a classroom community- to relate positively to others and become successful learners- their basic needs for sustenance, safety, and belonging must be met. Only after basic needs are met can human beings crave more.

- *Physiological needs* are the most basic needs of living creatures. Children who are hungry think about their bellies instead of learning.
 - *Safety* is the feeling of security, comfort, and being out of danger. When teachers create a safe classroom community, children are able to positively relate to others, explore their environment, and engage in learning.
 - *Belongingness*- feeling accepted and loved. In an effort to seek acceptance and love from adults, these children often exhibit behavior that tests acceptance. These children need adults who can create a classroom environment where everyone feels accepted and valued.
 - *Self-esteem*- a sense of one's own worth. Children who feel competent as learners are more open to new experiences, better able to empathize with others, and more willing to persevere in learning tasks than are children who consistently feel inadequate.
- 

14 Ways to Build Self Esteem in Children

1. Respond to each student by their name.
2. Take time to talk with the student about what's important to him/her.
3. Use positive guidance and suggestions whenever possible. Reinforce the behavior you like.
4. Keep your expectations consistent with the student's stage of development and ability- be realistic.
5. Give the student an opportunity to make choices and take responsibilities that fit his stage of development.
6. Provide opportunities for the student to succeed- challenge him/her when the chances of success are good.
7. Give the student quality time- it's more important than quantity.

How to Get Your Classroom Started

Discuss with your students about the characteristics of a team. Have a team building vocabulary word of the day or week, such as respect, responsibility, cooperation, dependability, loyalty, etc. Build lessons and activities.

Divide your class into small groups or teams. Assign specific duties to each member. Have the group come up with a team name, symbol, logo, mascot, etc.

Integrate team building activities into your curriculum.

*Work on a Math problem as a team

*Write a story about their team.

*Design a poster with a team name and a self portrait of each member.

*Read a story as a team using buddy reading, and then present the story in play form to the rest of the class.

*Design and decorate a classroom bulletin board on an academic theme.

*Work as a group on a science or social studies project.

For the first week or so of school, have a "question of the day" which would be a daily question that students would answer about themselves.



Techniques for Better Classroom Discipline

Focusing- this technique means that you will demand their attention before you begin. Punctuate your waiting by extending it 3-5 seconds after the classroom is completely quiet. Be talking over them to try and catch their attention, they get the idea that you accept their inattention and that it is permissible to talk while you are presenting a lesson.

Direct Instruction- begin each class by telling your students exactly what will be happening. Provide time at the end of the period for students to do activities of their choice. They will realize that the longer the teacher has to wait for their attention, the less time they will have to do their own activities.

Monitor- the key is to circulate throughout the class even during independent work time.

Modeling- teachers who are courteous, prompt, enthusiastic, in control, patient and organized provide examples for their students through their own behaviors.

Non-Verbal Cueing- cues can be facial expressions, body posture, hand signals, along with flicking light switches and bells. Take the time to explain what you want the students to do when you use your cues.

Environmental Control- Students enjoy an environment that invites enthusiasm for your subject. Personalize your classroom. As they get to know you better, the fewer problems with discipline you will have. Keep an area specifically for that student that cannot handle all of the distractions and needs a quiet place to work. They need more "vanilla" and less "rocky road".

Low-Profile Intervention- the teacher makes sure that the student with the behavior issue is not rewarded for their misbehavior by becoming the focus of attention. Keep your interaction with this student inconspicuous. Draw the off task student back in by casually inserting his/her name into your lecture.

Assertive Discipline- this is traditional limit setting authoritarianism. When presented by Lee Canter it will include a good deal of praise. The teacher is the boss and no child has the right to interfere with the learning of any student. Clear and concise rules are laid out and consistently reinforced.

Assertive "I" Messages- use "I" messages when confronting a student who is misbehaving. They are intended to be clear descriptions of what the student is supposed to do. (continued on page 3)

14 Ways to Build Self Esteem in Children (cont)

8. Compare a student's skill against his previous accomplishments- avoid comparing him/her to other children.
9. Avoid shaming or labeling the student.
10. Be a good model for the student- children learn through watching adults.
11. React to the behavior instead of the personality.
12. Give a student your recognition for his accomplishments.
13. Accept the student's feelings- negative and positive- without judging him/her.
14. Be your student's mentor and cheerleader.

(continued from page 2)

Humanistic "I" Messages- these messages focus on feelings. This includes three parts. First, include a description of the child's behavior. "When you talk while I talk..." Second, relate the effect this behavior has on the teacher. "...I have to stop my teaching..." Third, let the student know that feeling that it generates in the teacher. "...which frustrates me."

Positive Discipline- use classroom rules that describe the behaviors you want instead of listing things the students cannot do. Make ample use of praise. When you see good behavior, acknowledge it. In addition to verbal praise, a nod, a smile or a "thumbs up" will reinforce the behavior.

Keeping Adult-Youth Communication Healthy

Stay Calm- a student will take his/her cues from, and react to, your emotional reactions. The fastest way to get a student to stop talking is to become visibly angry or upset at what they are saying.

Non-Verbal Communication- it is important that your body language clearly conveys that you are sincerely interested and really tuned into them.

Suggest Choices to Consider- assist the student with looking at all of their options and choices.

Open-Ended Questions- avoid questions beginning with "who, what, when, or where". Try to ask questions that elicit more in-depth conversation: "Why...", "In what way...?"

Reflective Listening- show the student that you really listened by paraphrasing what you heard.



Non-Committal Responses- interject occasionally to let them know you are still listening.

Support and Encouragement- in your own way, let the student know that you are there for them.

Invitations to Talk- use statements that offer encouragement to continue or even begin: "Would you like to say more?"

Focus on Feelings- help the student focus on the feelings behind his/her words. They often get caught up in word and lose sight of their feelings.

Satisfying the social and emotional needs of students does more than prepare them to learn. It actually increases their capacity for learning. Social and emotional learning has been shown to increase mastery of subject materiel, motivation to learn, commitment to school, and time devoted to schoolwork. It also improves attendance, graduation rates and prospects for constructive employment while at the same time reducing suspensions, and expulsions, and grade retention (Hawkins et al., 1999, Malecki & Elliot, 2002).