CHAPTER 4

Positive Personal Relationships

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- Practice #2: Creating Group Cohesion
- Closing

Essential Question
How do I foster and sustain strong and supportive personal relationships?

Introduction

We have all experienced the power of personal relationships in our working lives as educators. Think of a student with whom you strongly connected: the sense of pride, fulfillment, and joy in knowing them and being part of their story. Think of how you experienced their successes, the attention, and care you provided them as individuals, and the ways in which they occupied your mind when they struggled. These types of relationships ground and sustain us. They renew our optimism as we see our students take critical steps to evolve into young adults. Many of us can easily recall memories of those classes and learning environments in which we felt connected with our students, and they felt connected to each other. What conditions were in place? What actions did we take as a teacher to develop such deep rapport with our students? What behaviors did we cultivate in them to support their social efficacy? Creating supportive, welcoming, and trusting environments takes time and an infinite number of small steps to ensure that there is a deep sense of belonging to each other and to the class community.

As teachers, we constantly seek to provide the best possible context for learning for each and every student. For adolescents, an emotional connection with adults is perhaps the single most important factor for fostering positive development, including higher levels of engagement, motivation, and academic performance.[1] There are many young people who enter our classrooms who struggle to make connections with adults and/or peers. They lack the interpersonal skill set enabling them to engage in social interactions that form healthy and sustaining relationships. For some of these students, end behaviors may show up as extremely shy, distant, or detached. For others, they may exhibit behaviors that are angry, aggressive, hostile, edgy, or sarcastic. Often, these students do not know how to assert themselves, advocate for what they need, or connect in ways that are skillful and socially appropriate. There are myriad reasons for students not yet able to form relationships.

Many teachers express difficulty in connecting with these students, as some are very practiced at keeping teachers and/or peers at a distance. It is a charge, of sorts, for us to remain steady, patient, and persistent with these young people in our care. Like those students who are ready to connect and get to know us and their peers, these students also need attention and guidance to develop critical competencies that ensure they are getting the most out of their schooling and relationships to be successful in school and life.

This chapter invites us to reflect on, discuss with colleagues, and consider two key practices that enable teachers to cultivate classroom cultures where quality relationships are a priority and cohesion between students is paramount:

> **Practice #1 – Knowing Students and Making Them Feel Known:** Teachers provide students with systematic experiences that help them feel acknowledged, cared for, and valued.

> **Practice #2 – Creating Group Cohesion:** Teachers intentionally embed rituals, routines, and experiences that support students feeling connected and empowered as a group.

These practices help us create a context in which students are primed for learning and develop a sense of shared accountability by demonstrating that they are part of a larger classroom community. The well-being of each student is at the heart of a healthy class culture, and in the interest of making our classroom communities stronger, we are called to study our students, their assets, the resources they bring to the class, and their talents. We have a rich opportunity as teachers to explore with our students what we can create together, and this evolves from knowing our students deeply. "The future is created one room at a time, one gathering at a time. To build community we seek conversations where people show up by invitation rather than mandate, and experience an intimate and authentic relatedness."[2]

The Big Ideas that Inform Positive Personal Relationships

- Effective instruction, discipline, and support for students is formed through positive relationships.
- When students experience a sense of belonging, trust, attachment, caring, and respect from teachers and fellow students, they are more likely to engage.
- Positive relationships with students heighten a teacher's sense of efficacy, professional sustainability, and commitment to the craft of teaching.

Effective instruction, discipline, and support for students is formed through positive relationships

Forming positive relationships with students automatically communicates that we believe each and every student has value just by virtue of being who they are; that we recognize and acknowledge their innate skills, strengths, and gifts; that we invite their voice, perspective, and expertise into the classroom; and that we make room for multiple ways of being in and knowing the world. Doing so is essential to teaching strategically, being able to manage a classroom effectively, and customizing targeted teacher facilitated interventions for individual students. "In classes with person-centered teachers, there is more engagement, and more respect of self and others. There are fewer resistant behaviors, greater non-directivity (student-initiated and student-regulated activities), and higher achievement outcomes."[3] Multiple researchers have concluded that students who form close and healthy relationships with teachers generally have stronger social skills, fewer externalizing behaviors, and overall higher academic performance.[4,5]

When students experience a sense of belonging, trust, attachment, caring, and respect from teachers and fellow students, they are more likely to engage.

We know that young people thrive and do better in school when they feel supported, cared for, and valued. There is a particular benefit for students who do not identify with the dominant culture as a result of race, class, language, gender/identity, sexual orientation or learning differences. Students who feel marginalized for these reasons might withdraw, engage in disciplinary incidents, or even drop out because school "isn't for them." Also, students with chronic or situational anxiety, or students who have lived in environments where traumatic stress and chronic traumatic stress is a reality may significantly struggle to perform in school.[6] These students require intense care and strategic support to grow their trust. How we respond to these students can support substantial resilience.[7]

Authentic curiosity about all of the students with whom we work, as whole, complex individuals, with multiple identities, is a culturally responsive practice that fosters the emotional safety necessary for academic success. Poplin and Weeres assert that the relationships students desire are "authentic" ones, wherein they are *trusted, given responsibility, spoken to honestly and warmly, and treated with dignity and respect*."[8] Children's perceptions of supportive relationships with adults can buffer them against the negative effects of excessive stress and even increase their attachment to school.

Positive relationships with students heighten a teacher's sense of efficacy, professional sustainability, and commitment to the craft of teaching.

Finally, we believe strongly in the importance of teacher sustainability, satisfaction, and joy in continuing to hone their teaching practice. In our current climate of schooling, teachers face multiple stressors that range from teaching students with complex learning profiles to managing challenging student behaviors, increased accountability measures, curricular mandates, and administrative demands with limited time and support to meet such expectations. Yet, despite all of these hurdles, research points to the main source of stress leading to teacher burnout being negative teacher-student relationships.[9,10] There is, however, a promising corollary: satisfying relationships with students serve as a buffer against teacher stress.[11,12] For so many of us, this is why we became teachers: to explore and discover our own connections with students; and to build trusting relationships in which students feel safe and secure to experiment, try on various roles, to lean in and observe and listen to the world of adults around them and begin to shape a vision of who they might be and how they might lead the life that they envision for themselves.

In this chapter, we will explore *Promotion* and *Prevention* practices and strategies that cultivate trusting relationships and enable students to thrive and flourish as they navigate the day-to-day complexities of school and life. See Figure 4.1 – Positive Personal Relationships.

FIGURE 4.1 Positive Personal Relationships

Promotion and Prevention	
Practice 1: Knowing Students and Making them Feel Known	Practice 2: Creating Group Cohesion
Strategies: • Student Names • Meet and Greet • Student Profile Data • Personal Check-ins • Value-added Feedback	**Strategies:** • Gatherings • Anchor Experiences • Circle • Student Feedback

The following adult mindsets support the implementation of these practices with integrity and fidelity:
• I believe that all students being known and valued strengthens their identity as a learner, validates a sense of belonging, and increases a students' motivation and effort to succeed in school. • I believe that students connecting with each other will create a culture and climate of trust and engagement, where students feel attached to one another, rely on each other, and persevere through tasks to achieve individually and collectively.

PRACTICE 1: Knowing Students and Making Them Feel Known

One of our greatest opportunities for increasing academic outcomes is to know the students with whom we work. *"Our relationships with students can drive and define the meaning of teachers' work and can be pivotal to student success."*[13] It is incumbent upon us to provide experiences that help students get to know us and us to know them. Research from the fields of prevention and resiliency cites the consistent presence and availability of adults who believe in them—who listen, empathize, encourage, push, and probe—as a primary factor in students making the most of their lives and maximizing their performance at school. Adults who serve as both advocates ("I'm on your side!") and coaches ("I'm on your case!") have the most positive influence on young people. Positive relationships with adults create conditions that increase motivation and effort. Put simply, students who feel respected and supported, who feel seen, heard, known, and understood do better in school.[14,15]

Benefits of Knowing Students and Making Them Feel Known
- Demonstrates care, compassion, and interest in students, resulting in positive personal relationships and relational trust.
- Fosters positive and welcoming ongoing interactions between the student and the teacher.
- Supports a continuous dialogue about the interests, needs, past experiences, and future aspirations of our students.

Learning and Life Competencies Aligned with the Practice
- Self-Awareness: I know myself, and I am aware of skills, behaviors, and attitudes that help me.
- Self-Management: I identify, express, and manage emotions, and I demonstrate perseverance and resiliency.
- Social Efficacy: I foster healthy relationships.

The following strategies invite us to consider the power of really knowing students.

Strategy: *Student Names*

"A person's name is, to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language."[16] Our names are central to our sense of identity. There is something incredibly powerful about being called by name—it immediately instills a sense of being known and recognized. Learning how to pronounce a *Student's Name* creates a culture of respect within the class community and can have a lasting impact on each student's success. For students, especially the children of immigrants or those who are English language learners, a teacher who knows their name and can pronounce it correctly signals respect, care, and appreciation and marks a critical step in helping them adjust to school.[17] When we make time to study *Students' Names* and get them right, we demonstrate care for the diversity of names and identities we encounter.

What It Looks Like: *Name Tent*
Have students make Name Tents and choose what name (full name, nickname, etc.) to write. Name Tents are placed on desks or tables. This visual approach assists the teacher, classmates, and any visitors with learning and remembering names. It also invites newcomers to get to know the group and the group to get to know the student right away. At the end of class have a student collect them and store them in your resource center. Keep blank tents and pens on hand for visitors and newcomers.

What It Looks Like: *Story of My Name*
Have students fill out a short questionnaire that includes their full name, nicknames, the origin of their name or nickname, what they prefer to be called, and feelings associated with any of their names. This enables young people the opportunity to select the name they want to identify with, which may differ from what they were assigned at birth. *See Appendix 4.1 – The Story of My Name.*

What It Looks Like: *My Name, Getting it Right*
To ensure correct pronunciation of students' names, it is important to identify strategies that will support this effort. Print the class roster and consider the following: read through it several times before the first day of class so that names sound familiar when you meet students; identify those names that might be challenging and conduct an Internet search as there are often pronunciation guidelines; as you meet students write in the student's preferred name and pronunciation tips; use a seating chart for the first couple of weeks and explain your interests to the students; ask students to say their name before asking or answering a question. This gives both their classmates and you a chance to learn names and correct inflections.

Considerations

1. Invite students to use their peers' names when responding to each other: "I agree with X, because..."

2. Set a goal at the start of the year to learn a few names of students per day. Greet your students by name when they enter the classroom or use their names as you pass back assignments.

3. Check in with students personally and ask them for tips: "it rhymes with…" "The middle sounds more like…" "Think about this when you say it…" Encourage them to correct you when you mispronounce their names.

Strategy: *Meet and Greet*

A *Meet and Greet* is a ritual in which teachers stand at the classroom door during transitions between class periods or move about the classroom as students enter the room to welcome and greet them by name. This gives teachers a dedicated time to connect with students through brief personalized comments and questions. Students tell us how much it means when teachers greet them by name and make a personal connection before class begins, and before redirecting a student to do the right thing or jumping into business. *Meet and Greets* have the power to set the tone for the class period. They communicate a sense of welcome and inclusion, support us in understanding students' emotional readiness to learn, inspire students to engage in the work ahead, and be accountable to the expectations of the class.

What It Looks Like: *Meet and Greet*

- Present a centered and relaxed posture; make eye contact with students; have an interested and pleasant facial expression; use an invitational and encouraging voice; consider whether you're hoping to get students energized or to calm down a rambunctious group—modulate your stance to match.
- Say hello or welcome students in different languages.
- Greet each student by name.
- Share a quick verbal appreciation, question, or personal connection with some students.
- Give a handshake, high five, fist bump, dap, or hugs (whatever is appropriate to you, individual students, and your school context).

Considerations

1. *Meet and Greets* implemented at least three times a week become a ritual that students remember and count on. If it is in your schedule, you are more likely to *Meet and Greet*. In some schools, all teachers *Meet and Greet* at the door to support students to transition to their next class in an organized and timely fashion.

2. Be at the door before students arrive. They will be looking for you.

3. You can *Meet and Greet* in the classroom. Move about the room as students are settling in and briefly connect with students. Go table-to-table or desk-to-desk and make a personal connection and set a positive tone with each individual.

Strategy: *Student Profile Data*

To teach students well, we need to know them well. To really know our students is to commit to embedding a systematic set of viable processes and structures for collecting critical kinds of student data. Gathering the right information about our students, over time, helps us develop a better sense of our students as whole individuals. When we have a deep understanding of how our students learn, it is easier to diagnose student needs and plan effective developmentally-informed interventions. In the opening days of school, or when new students enter our classrooms, a first priority is to signal to them that we want to get to know them—in all of their complex and intriguing individuality.

What It Looks Like: *Student Contact Card*

Collect basic information on all students that they can fill out independently: Full name, the name they prefer to be called, cell phone number, email address, best contact person, birthday, etc. Emphasize that your interest in collecting data is to be able to support students effectively. This signals to the student that you want to be able to reach them and support them throughout the year.

See Appendix 4.2 – Personal Contact Card.

What It Looks Like: *Learner Profile*

Collect critical data that will give you a more comprehensive picture of your students' learning preferences, strengths, and challenges. Think about the information you already have access to and what you still might need to support your students. Design your profile questionnaire to fit the needs of your classroom and school community, and be sure to include some version of these questions:

1. How do you learn best?
2. What has been your best school experience so far? Your hardest?
3. What motivates you?
4. What things make it most challenging for you to learn?
5. What are some things that get in the way of you getting your work done?
6. How do your family members view school? Your friends?
7. What kind of supports might you need to help you with your academic work?
8. What do you like/love to learn about?
9. What's an extracurricular activity you really enjoy?

What It Looks Like: *My Personal Story*

Have students write or visually represent their own story on an 11x17 paper that enables them to answers a series of questions that helps you get to know them personally and lift up the student similarities in the class. This can be filled out over time. Hand this out once a semester, so students can add to it and you can reconnect with students around their story.

See Appendix 4.3 – My Personal Story.

Considerations

1. If you are part of a teaching team and share the same students, have the students fill out various *Student Profile Data* formats over time in one class and copy them for your colleagues, or keep the profile data in one central location. If there are not grade level teams, dedicate a couple of teachers in the grade to take on this process, and store the information in the guidance office, so all teachers have access to the information. Let students know you will be sharing this with your team or grade level teachers and the interests for doing this. Once a term, return these to students to have them updated. This data is critical when teachers come together to discuss students who need additional support. It provides the teachers with a window into the student and can enhance the conversation.

2.   Make sure newcomers have an opportunity to fill out *Student Profile Data* formats over time. Appoint a student ambassador to connect with new students to orient them to the process and materials and explain the interests for collecting this information.

3.   Depending on the types of information collected, provide opportunities for students to share some of this information with each other to make personal connections and create group cohesion.

Type in "learning preference inventory" to your web browser search bar, and you'll find myriad resources and downloadable templates for students to assess and reflect on their personal learning styles. Check out https://www.edelements.com/blog/the-first-step-to-personalize-learning-is-knowing-your-students for links to example profiles and tips on how to design (and keep track of the results from) your own learner profiles.

Strategy: *Personal Check-ins*

Personal Check-ins combine the power of conferencing as a tool for learning about students with the power of building connections through brief interactions that demonstrate an interest in who the student is and how they are doing in that moment. Systematic implementation of *Personal Check-ins* with students builds rapport and creates a positive and cohesive class culture. As one student put it eloquently, *"I think one thing that really allows me to work hard is knowing that my teacher knows where I am in life at that moment. If they don't know me, I will tend not to work as hard for them."*[18]

What It Looks Like: *Personal Check-ins*

Personal Check-ins can be done during independent work time, at the end of class when students are packing up, as students are exiting class, or during transitions when students are in the hallways or lunchroom.

Example 1: Ask a Personalized Question: *"Hi Mike. Good to see you. How are you feeling today?"*

Example 2: Make an Individualized Comment or Acknowledgment: *"Hey Maria, I hear from Mr. Tobin that you are quite the athlete. Tell me how soccer tryouts are going."*

Considerations

1.   Consider each of your sections. Which students might truly benefit from *Personal Check-ins?* Make a goal for yourself, and consider connecting with at least two to three of these students.

2.   Engage in a Whole Group *Personal Check-in* when the energy or vibe seems particularly high or low. "Good Afternoon. So how has everybody's day been so far? Show me on your hand—a five indicates fantastic and a one—really challenging." "Hello, fabulous fifth period. How's everyone feeling as we head into this 3-day weekend?"

3.   For students who are really struggling to connect with you and their peers, we offer the following strategy: Appendix 4.4 – 1 Student / 5 Actions / 5 Days.

Strategy: *Value-Added Feedback*

Value-added Feedback is when a teacher shares a specific, concrete observation of what the student did and names the asset or personal quality that enabled the student to do it. *Value-added Feedback*, when genuine and specific to a student's interaction with a peer or the student's contribution to a lesson, has the power to build rapport and relational trust with the teacher. It reinforces students' positive mindsets about learning, which increases their investment to do well. *Value-added Feedback* also increases academic engagement and the likelihood of the student replicating the behavior and taking additional academic risks. Teachers have multiple opportunities to offer students *Value-added Feedback* throughout a class period. Authentic *Value-added Feedback* promotes goodwill in students; it also increases participation, effort, and focus.

What it Looks Like: *Value-Added Feedback*

Providing *Value-added Feedback* on the Learning and Life Competencies reinforces key target behaviors that support students day to day in their classes.

1. Social Efficacy: "I noticed you wanted to hear everyone's opinion in your group before making a decision. You really demonstrated your capacity to work cooperatively in your small group."

2. Self-Management: "I noticed how you completed your last three labs. You tackled every part of each lab. That showed real perseverance."

3. Academic Efficacy: "Before you started on your project today, I noticed that you took the time to check the machinery and get all of your tools out before jumping in. That shows me you are organized and responsible. Thank you."

4. Self-awareness and Social Efficacy: "I saw that you were frustrated today when we were graphing linear equations, and you took a break and asked for help. This showed how in touch you are with your emotions and your ability to be your own advocate in order to learn something you find challenging."

Considerations

Providing *Value-added Feedback* when you are teaching multiple sections in classes of 25 or more may feel overwhelming. As a starting point:

- You might begin by giving *Value-added Feedback* to the entire class, which will support a climate and culture of safety, care, and encouragement.

- Identify three to four students you think would really benefit from *Value-added Feedback*.

- Consider providing *Value-added Feedback* to home groups, project teams, or cooperative learning groups.

PRACTICE #2: Creating Group Cohesion

We live and work primarily in community. The soul of a classroom is the psychological sense of community created among and between the students and the teacher. Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor describe community this way: "People can be together without feeling connected or feeling they belong or feeling responsible for a collective vision or mission. In a school and in a class, a psychological sense of community exists when a critical mass of stakeholders are committed to each other and to the setting's goals and values, and exert effort toward the goals and maintaining relationships with each other."[19] As leaders in the classroom, we have the opportunity to build a high-functioning, cohesive classroom community of learners. Being on a team or a member of a group gives us a sense of belonging and investment. It requires its own set of individual and collective skills. Consider for a moment all of the elements of teamwork that need to be present when a drama production is underway, a basketball team is in the middle of its season, a musical group is performing, or a newspaper is printing its daily publication. With the guidance of a director, coach, leader, or supervisor, teammates inspire, motivate, connect, and care for one another.

Benefits of Creating Group Cohesion

- Provides structured skill-building around problem-solving, cooperation, collaboration, and communication.
- Creates opportunities to discover commonalities and shared experiences among students.
- Develops trust and rapport within the group.
- Emphasizes student voice and leadership.

Learning and Life Competencies Aligned with the Practice

- Self-awareness: I know myself, and I am aware of the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that help me.
- Self-management: I demonstrate perseverance and resiliency, and I identify, express, and manage emotions.
- Social Efficacy: I communicate and problem-solve effectively, demonstrate empathy and respect, and foster healthy relationships. I am assertive and self-advocate, I cooperate and participate, and I demonstrate civic responsibility.

Strategy: *Gatherings*

Gatherings set the stage for learning by bringing everyone together in a joint exercise, which serves to build community and focus attention. *Gatherings* can be a ritualized way of opening your week or can occur within the context of a *Circle* (see p. 55). *Gatherings* help students transition from public space to the class period and take anywhere from 3-8 minutes to facilitate. They provide critical practice in listening and speaking in ways that demonstrate respect, understanding, empathy, and self-management. In particular, *Gatherings* give quiet students frequent, low-threat practice at speaking, while providing talkative students with an opportunity to practice listening, often resulting in equal participation. *Gatherings* enable teachers to slowly and deliberately build the group's emotional and psychological safety and sense of reciprocal trust—going from simple, low-stakes topics to more complex, personal, higher-stakes experiences and conversations. In *Gatherings*, each person's voice enters the room and provides opportunities for everyone to be acknowledged and heard, modeling that each and every student is important and has something valuable to say. And when each student speaks within the first few minutes of class, they are more likely to engage fully and positively throughout the class period.

What It Looks Like: *Table Topics for Teens*

Adolescents have opinions… capitalize on that fact! Table Topics for Teens is an opportunity for students to think about their future, hear multiple perspectives, practice articulating their thoughts, develop their relationships, and connect with their peers.

Sample Questions:

1. What are some ways you take care of yourself to support your efforts in school?
2. Where do you like to be alone to study, do your homework, or prepare for "doing school"?
3. Where in this course do you feel most confident? Where might you want support?
4. What is an academic habit you have learned to help you in this class?
5. When you think about this course, what is a change you have made in yourself in the last semester?
6. What strategies do you have to re-enter a learning task or class, when you are feeling down, when you have had a difficult moment in class or received a lower grade than you wanted?

Check out Larry Eckert's book, *If Anybody Asks Me…: 1,001 Focused Questions for Educators, Counselors, And Therapists* (Pocket Prompters Series), for more ideas.

What It Looks Like: *How are you feeling? Or, How is your day going?*

Checking in with students about how they are feeling or how their day is going results in the entire class understanding that students are in different places at the start of the class. It increases students' sensitivity and understanding for their peers. The students also appreciate that we care enough to check in with them. This Gathering can be done in a number of ways:

1. **One to Five:** On your hand let us know how you are feeling or how your day is going: 1 (I am struggling a bit.) to 5 (I am good and ready to go.)
2. *How are You Peeling?: Foods with Moods* by Elffers and Freymann has an array of foods with facial expressions. It is a Scholastic picture book that you can cut up, and students can select the food that represents how they are doing.
3. *Weather Cards:* Create a series of cards depicting all kinds of weather, and have students select the one that captures how they are doing or how their day is going. Type "weather card images" into your browser and copy and paste into a word document, print, and cut.

The beauty of all of these samples is they can be used throughout the year as students do not tire of them.

What It Looks Like: *Metaphor Object Bag*

Collect a bag of small objects. You are sure to find objects by looking in junk drawers and kitchen drawers, on shelves, and in random places in your home. Set the items out and invite students to pick an object that represents any of the following:

1. The best thing I bring to a group…
2. A personal skill that I bring to working out problems…
3. A part of my personality that helps me...
4. An object that represents my work style in a cooperative group…

This is a *Gathering* that can be repeated throughout the year. Students love it! Ask them to bring in objects to contribute to the bag and have them work in pairs to make up additional metaphor starters/prompts. If you have a large class, create a PowerPoint slide with images. Project the slide, and have students select an image.

What It Looks Like: *Appreciations*

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1. Create randomized groups of four students.

2. Hand each student a piece of recycled paper.

3. Have students write their name on the top of the paper. Let students know that they will write something they appreciate or admire about each student as they pass the papers around their group. Example: I appreciate the way Gonzalo always helps people with word problems.

4. Once this is completed, have students silently read through the appreciations written about themselves.

Considerations

1. Use topics and questions that all students can address without feeling vulnerable, embarrassed, or defensive. Establishing a culture in your class that is emotionally and intellectually safe will enable you as the teacher to select from a wide variety of questions or prompts. Topics can be personal, or connect to the curriculum, the school, a community issue, or a current event. This is also a great way to harness student voice and thinking by having them come up with questions of their own.

2. When you have a class of 20 or more, it can be impractical to have every student share. Consider using either a whole group or small group format. With whole group *Gatherings*, students share with a partner first, and then four to six partner volunteers are asked to share publically. Keep track of who shares and be sure to ask for new voices the next time around.

3. Use a talking piece or a soft, tossable object to ensure that everyone focuses on the speaker and that there is only one voice at a time. Students should have the option to pass. They are still thinking, and this builds trust with the teacher. If you notice a pattern of passing, engage in a *Personal Check-in* with the student. You can also use a talking piece for groups of four to six if this feels more realistic for implementation.

Strategy: *Anchor Experiences*

Anchor Experiences create enduring learning moments for students that live beyond one single interaction. They provide an "anchor" to come back to again and again as students venture out into new learning waters, grounding all subsequent knowledge and skill in the context of that initial experience. *Anchor Experiences* promote problem-solving and strategic thinking, offer interaction and fun, and build self-management, self-awareness and social and academic efficacy. Because *Anchor Experiences* involve deliberate reflection, they require that students not only actively engage in an interactive experience but also process the knowledge and skills used in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values.[20,21] When chosen strategically and implemented at opportune times of the year, *Anchor Experiences* can serve as touchstones for identifying and reflecting on *Expectations* (see p. 113) and Learning and Life Competencies (see p. 12–13). They also support classroom cultures in which students feel integral to their own learning and understand how their learning and their classmates' learning is mutual and reciprocal.

What It Looks Like: *Lava River*
This is an *Anchor Experience* that requires collaboration, communication, listening, commitment, and a willingness to succeed. These are the same elements that are needed to support collaborative groups in our classes. *See Appendix 4.5 – Lava River Anchor Experience.*

What It Looks Like: *Building The Tallest Tower*
This is a problem-solving activity for groups of four that requires the group to use the information and constraints provided to design a Tall Tower. There is no one right approach, and the problem requires that team members collaborate, cooperate and communicate to meet the outcome successfully. This *Anchor Experience* supports future cooperative learning groups. *See Appendix 4.6 – Tallest Tower Anchor Experience.*

Considerations

However fun and engaging these *Anchor Experiences* are to do; it is the reflection questions afterward that make these activities important learning experiences. Intentional reflection results in students increasing their self-awareness about the skills and behaviors they used to accomplish the task. Students begin to make connections about how they learn and work in groups, which can lead to improvements in group processes and transfer of skills to new learning tasks.

Strategy: *Circle*

Circles have a deep history in indigenous practices and have been adapted and used successfully in education and in juvenile justice to build a sense of solidarity and support, to foster empowerment and accountability, and reduce instances of harm.[22,23] *Circles* create the space for students to learn about themselves and each other, build trust, and bring the reality of who and where they are in life into the classroom; they also create the space for groups to respond proactively to challenges or harms, building skills in solving community problems and creating the type of learning environment that works for the group. *Circles* build trust, psychological safety, and class cohesiveness by engaging students in a real dialogue about real issues, encouraging honesty, deep listening, and the sharing and holding of each person's perspective. *Circles* have a very different feel from the typical classroom set-up of desks in rows, or even of small groups of desks or tables. It is very important to have an arrangement where everyone can see each other (e.g., circle, u-shape, square-up, stand around the perimeter of the room). These types of physical arrangements increase accountability because all body language is obvious to everyone."[24] Because the space is structured to be egalitarian, students are given the message that we are equals in this space and that our individual and collective voices are heard and valued.

What It Looks Like: *Community-Building Circles*
The purpose of community-building *Circles* is to support young people to communicate, connect, and care for one another. In this type of *Circle*, students come to know each other more intimately, find similarities, appreciate differences, treat each other with dignity, and find joy in what they have to offer one another. The beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets we create in a community-building *Circle* are what we hope to replicate in the larger school community when students step outside of our classroom. *See Appendix 4.7 – Community Circle Protocol*

What It Looks Like: *Problem-solving Circles*

The purpose of the problem-solving *Circle* is to build the students' sense of agency to solve problems and issues that surface in their class community. Students in this *Circle* understand that they have the capacity to share perspectives on how to lean on each other to work through problems or conflicts that arise in the classroom.

See Appendix 4.8 – Problem-solving Circle Protocol

Considerations

1. Keep a clear and consistent structure so that students can take on increasing responsibility within the safety of a known format.

2. Build *Circles* into your schedule. Consider the skills and needs of your group. Do you have a weekly *Circle*? Bi-weekly? Monthly? What is going to be most supportive of your students' growth and development? Think flexibly about the amount of time dedicated to the *Circle*. Depending on the context, they could be 20 to 30 minutes or an entire class period.

3. Skillful facilitators of *Circles* create multiple ways for students to take ownership of the space, from coming up with *Gatherings* and prompts, and taking on facilitation themselves. In high-functioning *Circles*, students take primary responsibility for generating the agenda, raising issues, and solving problems. Teachers can begin by facilitating several *Circles* as a model for what we expect of students, and then transfer facilitation responsibilities to students and serve as a coach as they take on ownership. *See Appendix 4.9 – Circle Facilitation.*

Strategy: *Student Feedback*

"Students are what we do. They are the center of our classroom… Honest feedback from our students will help us level up."[25] When teachers invite students to give feedback on the course, the learning process, the teacher's performance, or the group's participation, the classroom becomes a more collaborative culture where students partner with the teacher to enhance the learning environment. Students feel valued because the teacher wants to hear from them—their voice, opinions, and interests. The process of sharing *Student Feedback* validates the range of perspectives students bring into the room and can prompt small and large improvements that can make the class a more cohesive, engaging, and personalized place to learn.

What It Looks Like: *Group Process Feedback*

How students assess small groups or the whole group.

- Rate how the class is meeting *Expectations*. Print out the *Expectations* and have students work with a partner or trios to discuss the *Expectation* they feel is 90 percent of the class culture. Have them also discuss an *Expectation* they feel needs more intentional effort from the group. Have the students report out and chart their responses. Discuss the patterns and specific next steps.

- Rate your *Cooperative Learning* group's effectiveness according to the four criteria we use: (1) We sustained our focus and met the *Expectations* for the group task; (2) We worked effectively and cooperatively and finished the task; (3) We were respectful, friendly, and supportive to one another; (4) We accepted help, feedback, and others' perspective with goodwill.

  4 = We did it consistently without prompting.
  3 = We did it sometimes without prompting.
  2 = We did it sometimes with prompting.
  1 = We did not do it.

- Rate the group's active collaboration, attentiveness, and helpfulness during a specific learning task. If the rating is low, explore possible reasons and solicit suggestions for how to be more on-point next time.

What It Looks Like: *Lesson, Unit, or Course Feedback*

Have students assess their own learning. Consider using a few questions and be sure to revise to meet your context.

- What is something important you learned?
- What activity did you like the most? What are some reasons?
- What activity did you like the least? What are some reasons?
- Name an activity that helped you learn something that was new or challenging for you. How did this activity help you learn?
- Name an activity or task that did not help you to stay engaged and learn. What are some reasons it did not work?
- Identify something the teacher might have done during this unit that would have helped you learn.

What It Looks Like: *Appreciative Feedback*

How students support and recognize the efforts, accomplishments, and contributions of individuals, the group, and the teacher.

- What did you appreciate about the group's participation today?
- What is one way you felt supported to make your best effort this week?
- What is something the teacher said or did that helped you learn this week?
- What is something a student did that made the class a good place to be this week?
- What is something the whole group has accomplished that you feel especially proud of?

What It Looks Like: *Recognitions, Appreciations/Kudos*

1. Provide feedback to individuals and the class as a whole and create opportunities for the students to acknowledge/appreciate each other's effort and achievement that day. By opening this up to students, we eliminate the power dynamic in which only the teacher can give *Feedback*. It communicates that we are all part of a community that celebrates achievements (both big and small) and we all pay attention to each other's successes.
2. Make this a regular weekly practice, as it will support positive behavior change as students begin to see and get public recognition for incremental progress.
3. Model *Feedback* for particular actions, outcomes, or effort—avoid generalizations.
4. Encourage students to speak from their own observations.

What It Looks Like: *Pluses and Wishes*

1. Ask students to share at least one "plus" (what worked particularly well about the lesson, unit, or activity) and at least one "wish" (what they would like to see changed for next time or any suggestions for improvements to support their learning). This demonstrates respect for students as 'consumers' of the lesson, whose *Feedback* is valued in making the class the best it can be.

2. Students can do this orally, or provide them with two different color sticky notes—"plus" on one color, "wish" on another and have them post on a chart as they leave the room. Look for patterns or have some students volunteer to come at lunch and do this for you. They can type up or write the patterns on a chart for the next class, and you can let students know a change you are considering based on their "wishes."

Considerations

1. It is always important when collecting *Student Feedback* that you identify the patterns that are surfacing and share the data with the students. It is most powerful to share this data visually via a chart, or PowerPoint presentation. Publicly displaying data validates *Student Feedback* and builds a cohesive and collaborative classroom culture to support instructional next steps.

2. Have students identify the patterns in the data collected and recommend next steps to support your instruction and their learning.

Closing

"The need to create a structure of belonging grows out of the isolated nature of our lives, our institutions, and our communities."[26] Positive personal relationships between teachers and students and amongst classmates result in classroom learning environments where students feel empowered to show up and explore who they are in relationship to themselves, their peer group, and their school community. Cultivating healthy and trusting relationships is inextricably linked to student success. When students feel safe, supported, cared for, and respected, it results in a communal structure where relatedness, accountability, and commitment are at the heart of each and every interaction.

What strategies from this chapter align with your classroom context?

What are the ways these support the 6 Conditions for Engagement?

Attention, Goodwill, Effort, Interest, Participation, Commitment

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The Story of My Name

The Story of My Name

Welcome to this class. I am glad you are here and look forward to getting to know you. Names are important to me, and I want to make sure that your classmates and I call you by the name you prefer. I also want to make sure we pronounce your name correctly.

Thank you for taking the time to help your classmates and me learn your name!

My full name is: _____

Please call me: _____

What are some things you know about how you received your name? Or, what are some things you like about the name you prefer to be called?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

The Story of My Name

Welcome to this class. I am glad you are here and look forward to getting to know you. Names are important to me, and I want to make sure that your classmates and I call you by the name you prefer. I also want to make sure we pronounce your name correctly.

Thank you for taking the time to help your classmates and me learn your name!

My full name is: _____

Please call me: _____

What are some things you know about how you received your name? Or, what are some things you like about the name you prefer to be called?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX 4.2

Personal Contact Card

Welcome. My role as your teacher is to support you as a learner and member of this classroom and school community. I am asking for the information below because there will be times this year when I want to acknowledge some things you have done well and share them with someone who cares about you. Also, I want to be sure to care for you when you might need help over the course of this year. Thank you for taking the time to fill this out. I am glad you are here and look forward to getting to know you.

My full name is: _____

Please call me by this name: _____

My birthday is: _____

My cell phone number is: _____

My home phone number is:_____

My email is: _____

My address is: _____

My parent or legal guardian's name: _____

You can reach them at this number: _____

Their relationship to me is: _____

- -

Welcome. My role as your teacher is to support you as a learner and member of this classroom and school community. I am asking for the information below because there will be times this year when I want to acknowledge some things you have done well and share them with someone who cares about you. Also, I want to be sure to care for you when you might need help over the course of this year. Thank you for taking the time to fill this out. I am glad you are here and look forward to getting to know you.

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My cell phone number is: _____

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My email is: _____

My address is: _____

My parent or legal guardian's name: _____

You can reach them at this number: _____

Their relationship to me is: _____

APPENDIX 4.3

My Personal Story

Personal story for _____

I want to know who you are. I believe that if I know you as a person, I can help you more as a learner. I want to learn about where you come from and people who are important to you. I also want to understand some experiences you have had in your life that have made you who you are. When we share parts of our story, it can raise our awareness, stretch our hearts and minds, and help us connect. Sharing facts and experiences from your life can take emotional and mental energy. For some of you it may take courage too, so share what feels comfortable to you right now, and you will have other opportunities to add to your personal story throughout the year. I look forward to learning about you over time, and I thank you for giving it a try.

Where I started – family, neighborhood, state, country:

_____

A person or a couple of people in my life who have cared for me, supported me, influenced me:

_____

An important event(s) in my life that has mattered to me:

_____

An important life lesson that I learned:

_____

A couple of things I love to do that are healthy for me:

_____

A turning point in my life; I used to…, and now I…

_____

A proud moment in my life:

_____

A time when I really struggled:

_____

Something I did once to help another person:

_____

Something I'm really good at:

_____

Something that makes me unique/different:

_____

A hope or dream I have for the future:

_____

APPENDIX 4.4

1 Student / 5 Actions / 5 Days

Think about **<u>one student</u>** who could really benefit from a saturated dose of encouragement and support. Consider the strategies and place a ✔ next to five actions you will take. Write in the day you plan to implement the action.

☐ _____ Take special notice of something about the student during *Meet and Greet*, independent work time, or *Ending Class*.

☐ _____ Engage in a *Personal Check-in* at the start of class or independent work time and let the student know how glad you are to see him/her today.

☐ _____ Ask a question that invites students to rate their day or share a high and low of the day so far during *Meet and Greet,* independent work time, or *Ending Class*.

☐ _____ Give the student a *Value-added Feedback* card or Post-it that offers a specific, concrete observation of what the student did and names the asset or personal quality that enabled the student to do it. Examples:

> ☐ **Social Efficacy:** "I noticed you wanted to hear everyone's opinion in your group before making a decision. You really demonstrated your capacity to work cooperatively in your small group."

> ☐ **Self-Management:** "I noticed how you completed your last three labs. You tackled every part of each lab. That showed real perseverance."

> ☐ **Academic Efficacy:** "Before you started on your project today, I noticed that you took the time to check the machinery and get all of your tools out before jumping in. That shows me you are organized and responsible. Thank you."

> ☐ **Self-awareness and Social Efficacy:** "I saw that you were frustrated today when we were graphing linear equations and you took a break and asked for help. This demonstrated real self-awareness and your ability to be your own advocate in order to learn something you find challenging."

☐ _____ Make a *Good News Call* to the student's parent/adult ally about something they have done well in class, a skill they have improved, or something they have done to contribute positively to the classroom community.

☐ _____ **Seek a student out at lunch** or before or after school with the aim of getting to know the student better, finding out about: their likes, dislikes, and interests, or their perceptions of the class.

☐ _____ Engage in an *Academic Check-in* with the aim of closing anticipated learning gaps or supporting the student to complete work one step at a time.

☐ _____ Arrange to meet the student before, during, or after school to engage in an *Academic Problem-solving and Planning Conference* to begin to close learning gaps and engage in behaviors that support academic improvement.

☐ _____ **Ask questions or comment about activities that the student is doing outside of your class:** sports, extra-curricular activities/specials, and other events and projects inside and outside of school.

☐ _____ Invite the student to **help you do something in the classroom**.

☐ _____ Use **specific affirmative statements** to acknowledge the student's contributions to class. ("I appreciate you asking that.")

☐ _____ Another idea: _____

APPENDIX 4.5

Lava River Anchor Experience

Overview:

This *Anchor Experience* is a group challenge to support cooperation, communication, and perseverance. This dynamic activity, followed by the structured reflection protocol, can help: (1) establish your *Expectations* related to how we work together; (2) make connections to already existing *Expectations*; and (3) identify target behaviors for working together cooperatively. You can refer back to this *Anchor Experience* when students are expected to work in pairs, trios, or quads to reinforce *Expectations* and practice Learning and Life Competencies.

Note: If you have any students with physical disabilities or who might be uncomfortable with this activity, let them know the day before what the activity is, the different roles that people will play, and ask them what they would be comfortable doing (e.g., group leader, observer, timer, resource manager, direction giver).

Materials and Prep:

- You will need: painter's tape or two ropes 12 feet in length each to establish the Lava River boundary in your space, and 12-20 pieces of large construction paper or 8½ by 11-inch copy paper for the charcoal rocks.

- Clear a large space in your room or use a hallway, cafeteria, gym, or outside area.

- Place the painter's tape or ropes on opposite sides of the space about 25 feet apart to establish the "banks" of the Lava River ensuring there is enough space for your students to stand on each side of the river bank.

Grouping Format:

- Divide the class into two equal groups that will stand on opposite sides of the Lava River.

Directions:

1. Explain to students that they are going to participate in a group challenge. Some students may feel uncomfortable not knowing the bigger purpose for this, so your frame is important. *"Lean into this experience with me, and I will support you to make connections to our work together in class at the end of the activity."*

2. Instruct the two groups to stand on opposite sides of the ropes/tape leaving the space between empty.

3. Distribute the large pieces of paper ("magic charcoal") to each side in this ratio: 40 students = 10 pieces of "charcoal" per side, 35 students = 9 pieces of charcoal rocks per side, 30 students = 8 pieces of charcoal per side, 25 students = 6 pieces of charcoal per side, 20 students = 5 pieces of charcoal per side.

4. Describe the challenge:

- *The space between the ropes is the Lava River. The problem is that it's boiling hot, so that falling in it would be a disaster. Your goal here is to get everyone across the river, from one side to the other. The squares you have are big pieces of charcoal that will float on top of the Lava River, so if you use them to step on, you can get across safely. If you fall off the charcoal or touch the Lava River at any point, you have to go back and start over.*

- *One more thing. I'm the Lava Lizard in the river and charcoal is my favorite snack. If I see charcoal in the river that no one is standing on, I will snatch it up.*

- *You will have about five minutes to strategize with your group and play around with the charcoal pieces. Then you will have about 15 minutes for each side to cross to the other side of the Lava River.*

- *There are four guidelines for this kind of physically active experience: (1) Work Hard; (2) Play Safe, (3) Be Kind; and (4) Play Fair. Ask the group for some suggestions for what this would look like and sound like and how they apply to this particular team challenge.*

5. Let students know that you'll answer three questions before they begin.

6. If anyone asks whether they can talk to the other group, you can say that each group can identify one person to negotiate with the other side.

7. Give the group about five to eight minutes to strategize and practice and then give them about 15 minutes to complete the challenge.

Whole Group Reflection:

1. Select a few reflection questions from below and begin by having students silently journal their responses for 2-3 minutes.

2. Have students Turn and Talk with one of their group partners to discuss their responses.

3. Facilitate a whole group discussion of the initial reflection questions. Chart student responses on poster paper or project them digitally so you have an artifact/document to refer to later when you want to reinforce collaboration expectations.

4. Share some of the data you collected during your observation of the groups and follow-up with additional reflection questions to unpack the nuances of what gets in the way of and what supports effective collaboration.

- What are some things you observed about how your group worked together? What did your teammates do or say that helped your team be successful?

- What skills and attitudes helped the group to come up with a successful strategy to meet the goal?

- What were some of our challenges/obstacles? How did we respond to challenges and frustrations?

- What are some things that supported you in persevering and completing the task successfully?

- What are some skills and understandings we take from this experience that will help us work together every day as a class community? (If there are connections to the *Expectations* you plan to introduce, make them transparent for the student.)

- What are some ways the group lived up to our *Expectations* in this *Anchor Experience*? (This is a great question if you have already shared your *Expectations* with your students.)

Closing Talking Point:

Cooperation, communication, and perseverance are all important Learning and Life Competencies. We're not born knowing how to work together effectively in a group. We learn by watching other people and practicing these competencies ourselves.

Considerations and Tips:

- Students often assume this is a competition. It is not, and it requires both sides to work together to accomplish the goal and share the charcoal rocks.

- During the activity, if the groups are having a lot of difficulty listening to each other, or working cooperatively, stop, and ask everyone to freeze. Take three comments from the group, saying: "I'm open to hearing three observations from the group that help describe what's not working." Then say, "I'll take three suggestions from the group about strategies that you think will help you achieve the goal of getting everyone across the Lava River."

- After trial and error by the group, typically they accomplish the goal by each side moving single file in a line and meeting in the middle, so they can share the other sides' rocks. This usually requires them to work together and coordinate each person's steps so that they are sharing the rocks and ensuring someone's foot is always on each of the charcoal rocks.

APPENDIX 4.6

Tallest Tower Anchor Experience

Overview

This small group challenge is an opportunity for students to practice cooperation, communication, and perseverance. This dynamic activity followed by the structured reflection protocol can help: (1) establish your *Expectations* to support how we work together; (2) make connections to already existing *Expectations*; and (3) identify target behaviors for working together cooperatively. Tallest Tower can serve as an *Anchor Experience* that can be referred to when students are expected to work in pairs, trios, or quads to reinforce *Expectations* and practice Learning and Life Competencies.

Materials and Prep:

- You will need 3x5 cards (50 per group), rolls of tape (1 per group), and a measuring tape.
- Set room up in desk/table groups of 4.

Grouping Format:

- Groups of 4.

Directions:

1. Explain to students that they are going to participate in a group challenge. Some students may feel uncomfortable not knowing the bigger purpose for this, so your frame is important. *"Lean into this experience with me, and I will support you to make connections to our work together in class at the end of the activity."*

1. Describe the challenge: Each group will have 12 minutes to build the Tallest Tower using only the 3x5 cards and the tape. The tower needs to be 30 inches or higher and must be freestanding.

2. Give students 2 minutes to strategize and then distribute the 3x5 cards and tape, instruct the groups to begin, and start your timer.

3. Have students complete the task with no help from you. Closely observe the skills and behaviors they used during their collaboration and take notes so you have specific observations to share with the students.

4. Announce when time is up and have each group bring their tower up to the front of the room.

5. Measure each tower and test for sturdiness by seeing if it tips over when gently pushed.

Whole Group Reflection:

1. Share that the reason you invested class time in this activity is because it provides an opportunity for everyone to reflect on what it takes to work together in small groups.

2. Select a few reflection questions from below and begin by having students silently journal their responses for 2-3 minutes.

3. Have students *Turn and Talk* with one of their group partners to discuss their responses.

4. Facilitate a whole group discussion of the initial reflection questions. Chart student responses on poster paper or project them digitally so you have an artifact/document to refer to later when you want to reinforce collaboration expectations.

5. Share some of the data you collected during your observation of the groups and follow-up with additional reflection questions to unpack the nuances of what gets in the way of and what supports effective collaboration.

Reflection Questions

- In order to successfully meet the goal of this activity what skills and behaviors did you need to use?

- What are some ways you communicated with each other? In what ways might that communication style support your success or make it more challenging?

- What are some things that supported you in persevering and completing the task successfully?

- What roles did group members take on while working on the challenge?

- What helped everyone participate or kept some from participating?

- If you were to do this activity again, name two ways you might improve how you work together.

- What are some ways the other groups might have impacted your effort?

- What are some ways the group lived up to our Expectations in this Anchor Experience? (This is a great question if you have already shared your classroom expectations with your students.)

Closing Talking Point:

Cooperation, communication, and perseverance are all important Learning and Life Competencies. We will be working on growing these skills over the course of the class and you will have time to practice them and get better at them every time you work in small groups. Remember, we are not born with the skills to work together effectively in a group. We learn these skills by watching other people and practicing them ourselves.

Considerations and Tips:

- Sometimes students will want to focus solely on the tower itself during the whole group reflection. This can lead to interesting analogies about strong foundations, strong support structures and connections, need for flexibility, planning before acting, etc. However, the first priority is to make sure they reflect on their communication, collaboration, and listening skills.

- Also, this *Anchor Experience* offers an opportunity to explore effort, and how our effort combined with effective strategies enables us to get better at meeting and accomplishing tasks.

- If there was a wide variance between more success and less successful "builders," you might invite the group to do this a second time to see if they can best their prior effort. This generates big talking points related to effort, practice, and perseverance.

Community Circle Protocol

Community *Circles* are meant to support group cohesion and a strong sense of connection among students, over time, by sharing feelings, news, and good moments in their lives, highs and lows, interests, celebrations, and more. This *Circle* reinforces that we all have value here, and dignifies each and every individual, their voice, and what they bring to the class community.

Step One: *Circle* Is About to Begin:

- Using an auditory cue (bell, chimes, rain stick) signal that *Circle* is about to begin. Students will follow the procedure for arranging themselves and/or the physical space for *Circle*.

Step Two: *Gathering*

- Welcome your students with a two-minute *Gathering* to support the transition to *Circle*. The Gathering ensures all voices are engaged from the start.

- Example: Using your hand, from 1-5, where is your energy right now (1 low – 5 high)?

- Example: On a scale of 1-10, 1 being low and 10 being high, rate your day so far.

Step Three: Agenda Check, *Expectations*/Guidelines, and *Circle* Topic

- Review the agenda.

- Review the topic

- Example: *What's something that you love to do that we might not know about you?* This question enables students to learn about one another, discover possible connections, and spark conversations because students have an interest in getting to know each other more.

- Review relevant *Expectations* and the guidelines for *Circle*

  Example

  - One person speaks at a time.

  - Use the "talking piece" when speaking.

  - Use encouraging language.

  - Keep comments on point.

Step Four: Reflect with a Partner

- Share the prompt: *What's something that you love to do that we might not know about you?*

- Students reflect silently for a minute of think time.

- *Turn and Talk* with a partner.

Step Five: Whole Group Share and Reflection

- Whole Group: Students share experiences in a Go-Round format: ask for a volunteer to begin and the speaking order moves to the left or right. This works for smaller groups of 15 to 20. In very large groups, have four-to-six *Turn and Talk* partners share highlights from their conversations or put the timer on for a certain number of minutes and let students share. In all contexts, make sure the speaker has the talking piece.

- Reflection: What questions or comments might you have about the thoughts shared in *Circle* today? Individuals interested in sharing can bring their voices in one at a time, using the talking piece.

Step Six: Optimistic Closure

- Always close the *Circle* in a hopeful, thoughtful and intentional way, leaving students continuing to think and feel like they belong. The closing can occur in a Go-Round, Popcorn or *Turn and Talk* format, depending upon time and the number of students.

  Examples:
  - In what ways might our *Circle* today support our class community?
  - What might be something you heard about today that you want to learn more about, or try yourself?
  - What's one thing you appreciated about *Circle* today?

Examples of other Community *Circle* prompts:

- Share a quote with the students and have them reflect and think about it: *"The quieter you become the more you can hear"* (Ram Dass). What does this quote mean to you? How might it be important for our class?

- Something about this class community you appreciate and one idea to make us a stronger group.

- Who is someone you trust? What are some of the things they do that make you trust them? What are the reasons trust is important in a class?

- What are the ways we can show respect to one another in our class?

- What are some things that help you work with another student or small group?

Consideration: If you are offering students more than one *Circle* prompt, repeat Steps 4 and 5.

Problem-solving Circle Protocol

Problem-solving *Circles* are meant to help the group reflect on some of the challenges that surface in the class community or an incident within the class. Students use each other as resources to solve problems together. This *Circle* reinforces that students have the capacity and agency, with guided support, to work out problems that show up in the classroom. Students feel respected and empowered to work with fellow peers and the teacher to find resolution in community.

Step One: Circle Is About to Begin

- Using an auditory cue (bell, chimes, rain stick) signal that *Circle* is about to begin. Students will follow the procedure for arranging themselves and/or the physical space for *Circle*.

Step Two: *Gathering*

- Welcome your students with a two-minute *Gathering* to support the transition to *Circle*. The *Gathering* ensures all voices are engaged from the start.

- Example: Name a single word that captures the feeling you are bringing to *Circle* today.

Step Three: Agenda Check, *Expectations*/Guidelines, and *Circle* Topic

- Review the agenda.
- Review the topic.

   Example: Words and Actions That Help
   - I have noticed in the last couple of days, while you have been working in groups, that some hurtful words are being used between many of you. For example: You never help out here. Don't you know how to do that? You have the attention span of a flea…Words hurt and can have a lasting impression on the one that is being hurt, and also says something about the person using the words. *Circle* today is to explore how we can support each other when we work together.

   - Review relevant *Expectations* and the guidelines for *Circle*

   Example:
   - One person speaks at a time.
   - Use the "talking piece" when speaking.
   - Use encouraging language.
   - Keep comments on point.

Step Four: Reflect

- Share the prompt: *Think about a situation in the classroom where you helped someone in need. What did you do or say that helped them?* This question enables students to tap into an act of kindness, and hear strategies and examples of what students can do when they see a fellow student who needs help.

- Students reflect silently for a minute of think time.

- *Turn and Talk* with a partner.

Step Five: Whole Group Share and Reflection

- Whole Group: Students share experiences in a Go-Round format: ask for a volunteer to begin and the speaking order moves to the left or right. This works for smaller groups of 15 to 20. In very large groups, have four to six *Turn and Talk* partners share highlights from their conversations or put the timer on for a certain number of minutes and let students share. In all contexts, make sure the speaker has the talking piece.

- Reflection: What questions or comments might you have about the thoughts shared in *Circle* today? Individuals interested in sharing can bring their voices in one at a time, using the talking piece.

Step Six: Optimistic Closure

Always close the *Circle* in a hopeful, thoughtful, and intentional way, leaving students continuing to think and feel like they belong. The closing can occur in a Go-Round, Popcorn or *Turn and Talk* format, depending upon time and the number of students.

Examples:
- What's something you heard today that you want to try the next time someone needs help?

- In what ways might our *Circle* today support our class community?

- What's one thing you appreciated about *Circle* today?

Examples of other Problem-Solving *Circle* topics:

1. If students are struggling with meeting classroom *Expectations*, review the classroom expectations. What's one we are doing well on? What helps us to do this well? What's one we need to work on? What are some things we can do to support us in meeting this expectation?

2. If students are struggling with a classroom procedure review some of the reasons for doing it. What might be getting in the way of us doing this procedure? What are some things we can try?

3. If students are not taking care of the classroom materials, furniture, etc. What are you noticing about the condition of our classroom? What are the reasons it's important to make sure the classroom is clean and organized? What can we do to make sure we are taking care of our learning environment?

Note: In all of the examples above, make sure you bring specific observations to the group. Also, let the students know that you, with them, will be observing how things are going for a week. Make sure to share value-added feedback when you notice things are improving, and formally set a time in your lesson to share overall impressions.

Consideration: If you are offering students more than one *Circle* prompt, repeat Steps 4 and 5.

Circle Facilitation

Circles require intentional preparation and facilitation. Planning for *Circle* will ensure student engagement, focus, and investment. The following checklist is offered to support your success setting the stage and facilitating *Circle* fluidly and seamlessly. Consider your context and use whatever on the checklist below feels supportive to you.

Room Arrangement:

- Identify a space in the room that could accommodate a *Circle,* square, U-shape where everyone can see everyone else. If possible, try not to have furniture in the center, so everyone can see each other fully and be accountable to one another.

- Talking Piece: Find a talking piece such as a Koosh Ball, Glitter Wand, Pine Cone, or have some students create one, to regulate the dialogue of the students. It is passed from one student to the next around the circle/square. The person holding the talking piece has the floor, supporting others to focus on the speaker and listen.

- Agenda: Post an agenda for *Circle* in the same place that reviews the sequence of *Circle* and the topic for the *Circle*. This supports everyone to be on point and helps newcomers to the class.

- *Expectations* (See Chapter 7, p. 113) most likely will apply in *Circle*. You may want to add some additional guidelines for participating in *Circle*. Once the students get the feel of *Circle*, these could be co-constructed with the students. Post these in a place where students can see them and they can be easily reviewed.

- An auditory cue such as a bell, Tibetan singing bowl, or rain stick, signals that *Circle* is about to start, signaling students to set up. The cue can also be used to indicate that the *Circle* has ended, signaling again for furniture to be moved.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Students can help set-up and break-down the furniture arrangement. You will need a procedure for this so students can do this efficiently and in an organized fashion. Make sure to Model, Teach, Practice, and Assess how the procedure is going.

- Over time students can take on various roles as they become more comfortable with the structure of *Circle*. Sample roles: facilitate the *Circle Gathering*, review the agenda and *Expectations*/guidelines, the Reflection portion of the agenda, facilitate the Closing, or even facilitate the entire *Circle*.

Facilitation Tips:

- Honor the right to pass and practice positive presupposition. If a student does not want to share, communicate that you want to hear his/her thinking and that you look forward to the student sharing when s/he is ready: "How about we give you some more time to think and hear from others, then come back to you in a few minutes." If the student demonstrates a pattern of passing, schedule a private time to check in with them to understand how you might support them in participating.

- Be mindful of commenting on students' responses during the Go-Round, so that some responses are not privileged over others.