

1 Building Cooperation and a Community of Learners



The Heart of an Eagle Has Landed

8 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect**THE HEART OF AN EAGLE**

Once upon a time, while traveling from one place to another, a mother and her young son came upon a poultry farm. The boy was very curious and pressed his face into the wire fence to get a closer look at the hundreds of chickens pecking at the ground looking for food.

“Mama, there is a very odd chicken in this cage. He’s not like the other ones at all. Do you see the one I’m talking about?”

As the mother looked at the bird her son was pointing to, a dusty man in dirty clothing walked up to them.

“What are you up to? I don’t like people hanging around my chickens,” he grumbled.

“Just looking, sir. But would you mind telling me about that bird in the corner there? He is an odd bird and in fact, I was thinking he might be a young eagle.”

“Nonsense,” the man replied. “I’ve had him since he was barely a hatchling. Listen boy, when something acts like a chicken and eats like a chicken, he is a chicken.”

“Do you mind if we get a closer look for ourselves?” the boy asked.

“Do what you please,” he answered.

The mother and her son bent in half to fit through the half-built door. She went on her knees and scooped up the young bird. “We think you’re an eagle, not a chicken. You can fly free!”

She held the bird above her head and tossed him in the air. The bird flapped its wings once or twice but fell flat on its beak as it collapsed to the ground, and began to scratch in the dirt for its feed. The farmer, watching from afar, laughed out loud. “I told you that’s a chicken, just an ordinary chicken. You’re both wasting your time and mine!”

As the man turned his back on them to walk away, the boy shouted, “Excuse me, sir, but would you sell this bird to us? Since he’s just an ordinary chicken, I’m sure you wouldn’t miss him.”

“Fine with me. Ten dollars is my price. Take it or leave it.”

The mother knew the price was outrageous, but her son’s eyes were pleading so she gave the old man the money.

The boy scooped the eagle to his chest, ran out of the cage, and began walking and talking to the bird. His words were words of faith that the bird would eventually know its true nature.

After the boy and his mother spent a few days with the bird, the boy suddenly ran down a dusty road. His mother followed him to the top of a small hill.

Building Cooperation and a Community of Learners • 9

“What are you doing here, son?”

The boy did not answer. Instead he lifted the young bird as high as his arms would stretch and said as he had many times before, “You have the heart of an eagle. You are meant to fly and be free. Spread your wings and go, eagle, fly!”

A gentle current of air ruffled the feathers of the bird. The mother held her breath as her son tossed it high into the wind. The creature stretched out its wings and looked down on the mother and her son. He then began to glide smoothly in a wide circle high above the two of them, above the farm, above the valley.

The mother and her son never saw the eagle again. They never discovered where it decided to go. They only knew it would never return to live the life of a chicken ever again.

RAPPORT: THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

A common mistake we often make as teachers is thinking one person can't make a difference. Like the mother and son in this African folk tale, told to me by another teacher and mentor many years ago, we as teachers need reminders to find the “eagles” inside our students. Many of our students who are caught in negative behavior cycles require support from one healthy adult to grow beyond their limited belief that they can't fly.

In order for this to happen, the effective teacher needs to fulfill his or her first responsibility of establishing an *emotional foundation* for all the teaching that will occur in a year. If we want to have an influence on helping students change undesirable behaviors, the first and most important step is to establish a good rapport with our students. By *rapport* I mean a synergy, mutual liking and respect between the teacher and the students. It can be characterized by trust, respect, and understanding. This rapport or positive connection formed within a relationship between student and teacher becomes the foundation for all interaction in the classroom. Rapport building can also provide important insights into the students' needs and interests.

OUTCOMES OF ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

Increased Sense of Security

Once trust and respect have been established within the teacher-student relationship, students are freed from the obstacles of worrying about their emotional, physical, and academic safety in the classroom. They can take comfort in knowing that, even in a crisis, the relationship they have with

10 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect

the teacher will be constant and continue to provide a safe environment in which to work through the crisis.

A Transformative Experience

Teachers need to be models for caring relationships. The teacher-student relationship can provide a context for personal growth in which students learn to care for themselves as well as for others. Students watch to see how their teacher responds to other students and teachers. They learn from the teacher's comments and make judgments about the intention behind the teacher's response. Is it to retaliate? Support understanding? Gain control? The model established by the student-teacher relationship can be used to develop new understandings about desirable personal interactions.

A Change in Responsibility

Building positive relationships can increase the trust that exists between teacher and student. As the teacher gives up the burden of being responsible for "controlling students," the outcome will be a more "manageable" classroom in which learning can occur. For this to occur, however, students need to be given more responsibility for their own behavior and learning, therefore relieving the teacher of the pressure of playing police officer.

HOW TO DEVELOP RAPPORT

I recently read that the three unwritten rules in real estate are "Location! Location! Location!" But how many teachers know the three equally important rules of classroom management? They are "Relationships! Relationships! Relationships!"

It's evident that some teachers bring out the best in students, and some bring out the worst.

How can a student-teacher relationship be developed? One of my favorite middle school principals once made a surprising comment to me. She said, "Mr. Khalsa, I'm beginning to believe that there are some teachers who actually don't like children!" Instead, I choose to believe that many teachers struggle with the question of how to develop a positive relationship with their students. New teachers often hear from their well-intentioned colleagues, "Don't get too emotionally close to the students; you may get hurt and your authority will be undermined" or "If the students see you as a friend, you will not have their respect." I do agree

Building Cooperation and a Community of Learners • 11

that “being friends” with your students is not a desirable or effective goal; There is a myth in the teaching profession that states, “It is not important for students to like their teachers. However, they should respect them.” However, in my many years of teaching in a variety of educational settings, I have always found that students work harder for some teachers than they do for others.

In effect, we teachers are salespersons, and common sense dictates that you can’t sell something to someone if they don’t like you or you anger them. Effective teachers have discovered along the way that a major part of their success is due to their ability to establish positive and meaningful relationships with their students. Teachers must therefore take the lead in developing such relationships. We need to demonstrate actively to students that we genuinely care about them, and to establish a healthy and *friendly* teacher-student relationship without trying to become a personal friend of each student.

It is also important to understand the psychology of students who are underachieving and/or who demonstrate negative behaviors in the classroom. These students have usually experienced years of a damaged self-concept. They see themselves as failures and as unlikable people. But my experience is that a student with such a poor self-concept is likely to make an effort to do school work for a teacher they really like.

Establishing a positive connection can be done in many ways; there is no one correct method. I’ve known teachers who come across as unfriendly and uncaring on the surface but whose names are always on the top of the list when students are asked which teachers they like most. Teachers have their own methods of establishing a caring rapport. Whatever method you use, the goal is to get across to your students that you genuinely like them, that you will enjoy teaching them, and that both of you will have a mutually rewarding time during the year you’ll spend together.

I understand that not all students are “likable” and that some seem to go out of their way to be disliked. But, as one saying goes, “You have to remove a lot of dirt in order to find the gold.” The gold is what we are looking for in our students, and with some it shines on the surface while with others it’s hidden deeply under the ground. Regardless of their approach, if teachers do not take the time to get to know their students and establish a rapport with them as individuals, they will not be able to get these students to meet the challenges of learning.

For example, when I begin the year with a class of new students, I always concentrate during the first week primarily on rapport-building activities. I encourage the students to tell me a little about themselves, what they enjoy doing outside of school, their likes and dislikes, what pets

12 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect

they might have, whether they have brothers or sisters, what sports they like to watch and play, what they like best about school, what they hate about school, what music they enjoy, what they hope to get out of the year, and so forth. I also share appropriate information about myself as a teacher, a husband, and a father. This gives the students the feeling that I am genuinely interested in connecting with them as people. I know that, without rapport, they will not want to learn what I need to teach. Often bringing in a small photo album can start this essential process with students of any age.

Meaningful Dialogue

Meaningful dialogue with students is the key to starting to build caring relationships. Entering into meaningful dialogue in an open and honest manner can be done in several ways. First, it's important that the teacher be aware of any residual negative feelings or biases that might color the way they perceive the student. For example, if a student is frustrating the teacher because of his or her aggressive verbal comments, the teacher has a choice in how to look at the student. He or she can choose to see the student as a symptom or a behavior problem, or view the student as a person who has many facets to their personality, one of which is difficulty in controlling anger. By taking the second perspective, the teacher chooses to see the student as a whole person; this opens up new ways of interacting with the student that are not limited by one negative viewpoint. Dialogue with the student then becomes more genuine rather than superficial.

Two Scenarios

Let's look at two scenarios and the dialogue that ensued between the teacher and student which had two possible outcomes.

Mr. Worthy, a sixth-grade teacher, was asking his students to line up for lunch. Steven, who was near the end of the line, began talking to Sara and Jesus, who were standing in front of him. The three students were engrossed in their conversation when Jason, who was walking quickly to get in line, bumped into a desk that then hit Steven's leg. Steven immediately turned around and pushed the desk into Jason's legs. Mr. Worthy looked up just in time to see Steven pushing the desk.

Scenario One

Mr. Worthy feels the need to take a controlling stance. He immediately tells Steven to take his seat and explains that, because he cannot interact

Building Cooperation and a Community of Learners • 13

appropriately with his classmates, he'll have to eat lunch alone. He further explains to Steven that he will not be able to participate in the afterschool basketball game to which he has been looking forward all week.

Steven begins to protest and blames Jason for the incident. Mr. Worthy quickly interrupts him and explains what he saw, saying that if Steven continues to protest, a phone call will be made to his parents and he will need to be alone for the remainder of the school day. Mr. Worthy feels justified in his actions and thinks, as he's going to lunch with the rest of the class, "I have the safety of the class to think about. I can't let his behavior go unpunished."

As the class walks out the room, some of the students hear Steven saying, "You better watch out, Jason. You won't get away with this."

Scenario Two

Mr. Worthy has a philosophy about teaching discipline which revolves around the importance of students taking responsibility for their own actions and learning self-control. After seeing Steven push the desk into Jason, Mr. Worthy understands that Steven has lost his self-control. He immediately makes sure that Jason is okay and asks Steven to sit down and "cool off." After hearing Jason's explanation of what initiated the incident, Mr. Worthy asks the class to go to lunch with another teacher and tells Jason that if he wants to talk more about the incident, they can discuss it after lunch.

When the class leaves, Mr. Worthy sits with Steven and asks whether he is ready to talk about what happened. Steven, who feels safe with Mr. Worthy and trusts that his side of the story will be heard, nods his head.

Mr. Worthy begins by saying he is having a hard time knowing why Steven would push a desk into Jason. He then asks Steven to help him understand the situation.

Steven quickly says, "He pushed the desk into me on purpose! I know he did!" Mr. Worthy responds by saying, "Steven, you sound like you're still really angry."

Steven replies, "Yeah, that kid pisses me off just like his older brother. He's always doing stuff on the bus, and Jason just sits back and laughs."

"You felt like Jason was purposefully trying to bother you just like his brother does on the bus?"

"Yeah. If I let him get away with shoving desks into me, he'll never stop bothering me like his brother does!"

Mr. Worthy replies with understanding, "It's hard when older brothers pick on you. Sometimes it can make you feel helpless and scared."

"I'm not scared of that jerk."

14 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect

“Do you think you get so mad sometimes that you act without thinking?”

“Yeah, I guess so. I’ve been told that before.”

“You’ve been told that before?”

“My mother always says that to me.”

“What usually happens when you act without thinking?”

“I usually get into trouble.”

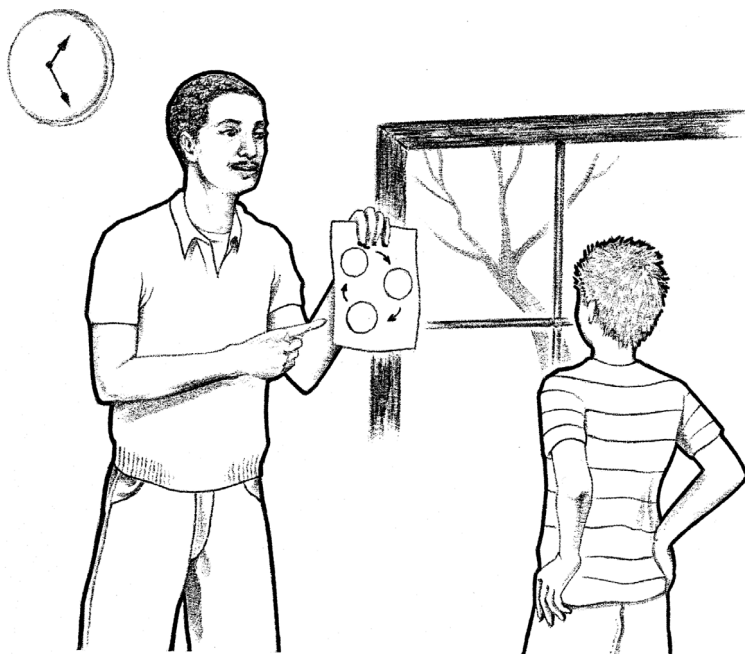
“Then how do you feel?”

“Not good. I know I shouldn’t have pushed the desk into Jason, but I get so mad!”

Mr. Worthy then says, “Steven, I’ve noticed that you seem to be in what I call a negative behavior cycle. Do you want me to show you what I mean?”

Steven nods in affirmation. Mr. Worthy then takes out a piece of paper and draws three circles. He simply explains how the negative cycle begins with a self-image statement, like “I can’t control my anger,” and then moves on to a behavior which reinforces the negative self-image statement.

Mr. Worthy wants Steven to know that he understands his angry feelings and would like him to come up with ways to deal with them. He says, “Anger is a really hard emotion to control not only for kids but also for adults. Sometimes when we get angry we don’t think clearly and do things we regret later. Would you like to work together on a plan to help you



Mr. Worthy's Negative Behavior Cycle

Building Cooperation and a Community of Learners • 15

change your cycle into a more positive one, and therefore control your anger?”

Steven says, “Yeah. But what about Jason?”

Mr. Worthy asks whether he would like to try to work out his differences with Jason. He points out that they used to be friends at the beginning of the year and seemed to have a lot in common, like sports and comic books.

Steven replies, “Yeah, he has some cool comic books and we both are football fans. But it seems like he doesn’t like me anymore.”

“How about we all sit down together after lunch and try to work through this? It might not be easy but I think it’s worth trying. What do you think?”

Steven agrees, “Okay, after lunch.”

Mr. Worthy says, “Great, but until then I want you to stay away from each other. Let’s go eat.”

“Yeah, I’m getting hungry. Thanks, Mr. Worthy.”

What’s the Difference?

In the first scenario, Mr. Worthy did not enter into a dialogue with Steven, and therefore didn’t understand his perceptions. Without dialogue, Steven had little chance of understanding *his* emotions or learning about the effects of his anger on his behavior. Learning how to control himself was not going to happen. Instead, Steven had strong feelings of vindication toward Jason. Children lose sight of their own responsibility when they are controlled by someone else—in this case, Mr. Worthy.

In the second scenario, Mr. Worthy entered into genuine dialogue with Steven. He did so without judgment, but with a desire to understand the situation and help Steven work through it in a positive manner. He could have controlled the dialogue and explained to Steven that it was an accident and that Jason deserved an apology. But he knew that Steven would probably become defensive and “turn off,” and consequently would gain little understanding of his emotions continuing his negative cycle of reinforcing behaviors and attitude.

Mr. Worthy conveyed his understanding of Steven’s perception and helped him to focus on his emotions without condoning his behavior. He also gained more information about what might be causing the animosity that had built up between these two students. He established a safe place for Steven to express his viewpoints. Then he drew on his knowledge about Steven, which was that Steven and Jason shared many interests and that their past relationship could be used to resolve this crisis. The incident was transformed through dialogue from a “punishable moment” to a

16 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect

“teachable moment” in which Steven was allowed to take responsibility for his own actions.

TECHNIQUES FOR CREATING DIALOGUE

Unexpected Questions

When I need to communicate with a student who has been misbehaving, I often dig into my “bag of tricks” for a technique that may open the student up to discussion and problem solving. One of my favorites when talking to a student out of class is asking a question such as, “I’m surprised you said what you did. Did I do something that bothered you?” There is always a good chance that, with a tough student, I may be able to avoid a power struggle by pursuing this line of action. If I’m treating the student with dignity and respect, the student is obligated to respond in a respectful manner by possibly saying, “No, Mr. Khalsa, you didn’t say anything wrong.” At that point, I may say, “OK, that’s good to know. So what’s bothering you?” Most of the time the student’s response is genuine and mature, and they are willing to take responsibility for their misbehavior.

Active Listening and “I” Messages

A very wise teacher I once knew said, “If you want to support someone or ‘stand-under’ them, you must first understand them.” The focus of active listening and the use of “I” messages is *understanding*. These techniques of communication were made popular by Thomas Gordon (1974).

Active listening is a way to communicate an attitude of empathetic understanding that does not necessarily require agreement with what’s being said. There are several ways of using this technique when the student has a problem. You can use silent gestures such as nodding your head and sounds such as “Mm-hmm” to let the student know you’re listening. You can also feed back or paraphrase what the student says at certain points in the dialogue. For example, Mr. Worthy used this technique when he said, “You felt like Jason was purposefully trying to bother you just like his brother does on the bus.” Once students see that the teacher understands their perceptions without being accusatory or judgmental, they begin to feel safe in exploring their emotions and actions in relation to the situation at hand. Problem solving can be addressed more easily when a student feels understood. Modeling the active listening technique gives students a wider range of effective communication choices when they are listening to their peers.

“*I*” messages are used when you want to express to a student the effects their behavior is having on you. For example, “When *I* get interrupted,

Building Cooperation and a Community of Learners • 17

I get really annoyed, so please listen.” “I” messages can raise the expectations that a student will listen to your concerns and do what you ask. There are three parts of an “I” message that should be included for maximum effectiveness:

1. Can you describe the behavior? “When I get interrupted . . .”
2. How does it make you feel? “I get really annoyed . . .”
3. What do you want changed? “So please listen when I’m speaking.”

Gear shifting is when you switch into active listening after sending an “I” message. This strategy takes a certain amount of personal awareness and self-control to be effective. This aspect of Gordon’s (1974) system is often overlooked and can be the most demanding part. For example, the teacher says, “Joey, I get annoyed when you make those faces during class. They are distracting to me as well as others. Can you control your urge to make those silly faces?” Joey says, “Yeah, I’ll stop but Susan is a pain. She’s always staring at me.” The teacher responds with active listening, “You feel upset when Susan looks at you during class?”

No technique can be effective if it is not delivered with genuine passion and empathy. This technique is not used to teach the student the important lessons of life; it is intended to reestablish a relationship of understanding which will promote a change in future behavior. Effective teachers use the most effective techniques over and over again while still being aware of the other techniques available to them in their “bag of tricks.”

Like all techniques in teaching, with practice “I” messages become more natural. Some of us may find using this technique of communication difficult because it doesn’t fit our personality or because it means we have to make ourselves vulnerable. For example, a student might not really care how we feel, and may therefore reject the very premise of our caring intentions. I once overheard a very angry eighth grader respond to a teacher’s “I” message with, “I don’t give a sh** what you feel like. I’m leaving!”

One of the myths of “I” messages is that these statements are the only way to communicate your feelings to someone else. In fact, there are a lot of ways in which we can choose to communicate with others. I have found the key to successful communication is matching how and what you say to the person with whom you are communicating. Knowing the student’s personality and the type of relationship you have developed will also determine how you choose to communicate.

I was once asked to help a twenty-year veteran teacher who was having difficulty with a new position in which he was placed. He was trained as a shop teacher, and because of district cuts in positions, he had

18 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect

been asked to be an inclusion teacher. This position involved coteaching. An opportunity for me to demonstrate how to coteach in a math class arose unexpectedly. However, while I was leading a dynamic activity with the math teacher, my veteran teacher was sitting at the back of the room reading a book. After the class, we sat together to discuss our observations. If I had used “I” messages with him, he would have thought I was indirect and maybe even wimpy. I knew that because I tried an “I” message with him once, and he laughed it off. During this conference, I used another technique I seldom use: I looked directly at him, and said, “Dammit, George, if you were my coteacher, and you were sitting in the back of the room reading a book while I was teaching, I’d ask you to find another teacher to work with! You get a paycheck like everyone else here, don’t you?” The feedback I got from his coteacher after that conversation was encouraging. He said George had adopted a new attitude in the classroom and was more actively involved with all the students.

I have never spoke that way to anybody else I’ve worked with, but I needed that technique for George. The same attitude applies to students. Different students may need different forms of assertive communication in order to respond to your needs.

Another myth about using this form of communication is that if you use “I” messages, they will always work. While I have found that they often do work, this isn’t the case with everyone at all times. As I explained, not all people will care about your feelings. However, “I” messages remain the best way I know to make a direct statement in a nonthreatening way.

The opposite of an “I” message is a “You” message. “I” messages often lead to understanding while “You” messages suggest blame and result in arguments, resentment, and retaliation. An example of a “You” message is, “You keep interrupting me! You are so rude and don’t care about anyone but yourself. Stop interrupting me.” Both students and teachers are individuals with needs to be respected and met. It is advisable to avoid the use of “You” messages because they create more tension and disrespect, therefore failing to educate and facilitate change within the student (see Lesson Box 1.1).

Creating a Higher Standard of Communication

After observing a colleague using “I” messages and active listening techniques while talking to a student about his inappropriate behavior, I asked whether she had always communicated with her students about their discipline problems in this way. “Not really,” she laughed. “I’ve been trying to be more aware of how I talk by not putting the student on the defensive. So I guess this is a new way of talking to students. My teaching life used to be filled with angry students and very frustrating situations.

(Text continues on page 22)

Lesson Box 1.1 A Lesson for Teaching “I” and “You” Messages**Materials**

“What Are ‘I’ and ‘You’ Messages?” (Activity Sheet 1.1)

Setting the Stage

Ask students to think of a time when someone really annoyed them. How did they communicate their feelings? How did the other person respond?

Objective

Students will

- Practice identifying “I” and “You” messages
- Role-play giving “I” messages

Purpose

- To increase effective communication/dialogue
- To manage and resolve conflicts

Background Information

- Students need an understanding of role-play
- It is important to understand the meaning of assertive and aggressive communication (assertive is being direct without blaming or hurting the other person’s feelings).

Instructions

Explain to the students that in this lesson they will learn the difference between an aggressive and an assertive way of speaking. The two alternatives are called “You” messages and “I” messages.

(Continued)

20 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect**Lesson Box 1.1 (Continued)**

“You” messages tend to be aggressive. They attack and blame another person. The receiver of the “You” message usually feels judged and blamed, and wants to defend himself. The result of a “You” message is usually anger, defensiveness, and perhaps long-term damage to the relationship.

An “I” message communicates your concern without blaming or judging the other person. The receiver of an “I” message learns that he has done something the speaker doesn’t like. With “I” messages, there is less likelihood that the relationship will be damaged.

The teacher writes the following on the chalkboard:

- I feel . . . (Say how you feel.)
- When you . . . (What did the person do?)
- Because . . . (What problem is it causing you?)

Explain that these are the elements of an “I” message. Once you feel comfortable using “I” messages, you don’t necessarily need to follow this format.

Ask students to pair up with a partner. They will select five or six statements from the “What are ‘I’ and ‘You’ Messages?” activity sheet to work with, deciding which of them are “I” messages and which are “You” messages. Then they will try to change the “You” messages to “I” messages.

Volunteer pairs can role-play changing the “You” message to an “I” message.

Summary

After the activity, discuss the difficulties students might have experienced in using “I” messages rather than “You” messages. Which would be more effective? Why do they think “I” messages are a better way to communicate? List reasons on the chalkboard and review.

Copyright © 2007 by Corwin Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted from *Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect: Effective Strategies, Anecdotes, and Lessons for Successful Classroom Management*, by SiriNam S. Khalsa. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com. Reproduction authorized only for the local school site or nonprofit organization that has purchased this book.

Activity Sheet I.1 What Are “I” and “You” Messages?

“I” messages express what you feel, what made you feel that way, and what you’d like to happen. Here are some examples of “I” messages:

- I really get embarrassed when you call out my name. I’d appreciate it if you would not do that in the future.
- I need some time to think about this. I feel pressured to say something I might regret later. Let’s talk later.
- I really don’t like you going into my desk without asking. Will you not go in without asking me?

False “I” messages are statements that have “I” in them but contain blame, demands, or accusations. These are false “I” messages:

- I think you’re a liar.
- I feel like taking your CDs and losing them.

“You” messages use blame and threats to express feelings. Here are some “You” messages:

- You are really lazy.
- Why can’t you do your own work and stop asking me?

Directions

Read the statements below. Write an “I” next to the “I” messages and a “You” next to the “You” messages. Then change the “You” messages to “I” messages.

1. Why don’t you stop being such a loudmouth? _____
2. I really don’t like it when you say things like that about me. _____
3. I’m busy, so just go away. _____
4. I hate it when my mother goes into my room when I’m not home. _____
5. I wish you would share. You’re so selfish sometimes. _____
6. When you called so late I was really mad because I need my sleep. _____
7. I think she’s really a liar and that’s why I’m not talking to her anymore. _____
8. You used my CD player and never returned it. It bothers me that I can’t trust you.

9. Can you stop tapping your pen? I’m trying to work and I can’t concentrate. _____
10. You keep interrupting me! You have no respect for what I say. Will you stop it?

Copyright © 2007 by Corwin Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted from *Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect: Effective Strategies, Anecdotes, and Lessons for Successful Classroom Management*, by SiriNam S. Khalsa. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com. Reproduction authorized only for the local school site or nonprofit organization that has purchased this book.

22 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect

(Text continued from page 18)

I used to escalate mole hills into mountains by using so-called 'straight talk.' Honesty is crucial, but what good is it if the student doesn't listen and turns their anger on to you? By holding myself to a higher standard of communicating, I've enjoyed my job much more and like the results I'm having in changing unacceptable behaviors."

"I used to get so emotionally involved," she continued, "while feeling in my gut that I wasn't getting my message through to the student. I like using 'I' messages when a kid needs to understand how his behavior is affecting me. They seem to pause and see me as a person with feelings instead of an angry authority figure lecturing them on what not to do. I also used to do most of the talking when they had a problem. Now I try to listen and ask a lot of questions."

I asked, "Why ask so many questions?" "Questions help students to do the thinking and come up with their own solutions. Isn't that what we're trying to teach them—to think and solve problems?" she said.

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING COOPERATION

Photo Share

This is a strategy that should start at the beginning of the school year, but could also be done at different times throughout the year. I ask students who want to share photos about their life outside of school to bring them in for this activity. I always keep a small photo album of pictures of my family, pets, house, and so forth, on my desk for them to look

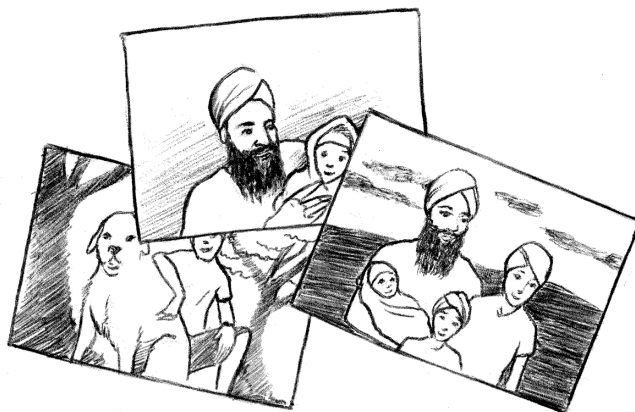


Photo Share

Building Cooperation and a Community of Learners • 23

through when they have free time (students love to see pictures of your children or other people you spend your life with). I'll never forget a comment one of my students made while looking through my photo album. She said, "Mr. Khalsa, I never knew you had children and a wife, too!" Helping your students see you as a person first will only enhance your ability to create positive relationships with them.

Guess Who?

I've used this activity successfully at all grade levels. Students are asked to write on an index card one thing that really bothers them or a pet peeve, together with the name of a close friend and a favorite food. These questions can change depending on the grade and maturity level of the class. Questions such as your favorite musical group, TV show, or hobby are also very popular. The teacher participates in this activity as well. The index cards are collected and the students are asked to raise their hands and try to identify the person who wrote the card based on the information read out loud by the teacher. After all the students who want to guess have done so, the author of the card stands up. The purpose



Guess Who?

24 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect

of this activity is to help students see connections between them by identifying shared likes and dislikes; it also helps to increase group cooperation and cohesion. Use these types of “getting-to-know-you” activities regularly to help all students learn about each other.

Private Appointments

I have found this technique to be essential in creating dialogue with the many students I teach. All students are asked to set up an appointment with me for a private discussion about whatever each of us decides to talk about. It could be school related—which it is the majority of the time—or related to other concerns the teacher or student might have. I’ve also spent this time talking about a basketball game we both watched on TV, or the reason girls of Puerto Rican heritage have a very large party celebrating their fifteenth birthday (*quinceañera*). It might take a week or two to get around to all your appointments, but the time spent is well worth it. Why appointments? To make certain you connect with every student.

Relaxed Time

William Glasser (1998) suggests that getting along with your students takes a lot of effort, and the best way to begin to do so is to have fun learning together. Laughing and learning are the foundation of all successful long-term relationships. I fully agree with Glasser’s insight into fun and laughter and their effects on relationship building, as well as their role in inspiring creativity and reducing stress in the classroom. But in saying this, I also think we can do a disservice to our students if the message they receive is that school and learning should *always* be fun. I believe there is a time for relaxed interactions and feeling the enjoyment that comes from playing games and joking in class. But for most students learning is work, and they should understand that work is not always fun. Learning should always be challenging, stimulating, and expansive, but because of the nature of growth, it will not always be fun.

Rapport building doesn’t stop after the first day or week of school. There are many times during the year when I must find the time to sit or walk with students and discuss what might be happening behind their surface behaviors. We also talk about frustrations they may be having in other classes. I take opportunities to call home to let their parents know I’m interested in how they are doing after school as well. This information always gets back to the student with the implied message, “My teacher must really care about me.” When you’re spending time with your students—especially doing things other than academic work—you are still teaching desirable skills for personal relationships. You are building the

Building Cooperation and a Community of Learners • 25

rapport that makes you a likable person. Teachers have a lot of competition for students' attention: video games, peers, MTV, the Internet, just to name a few. But we can provide something that these stimuli cannot: warm, caring, strong, and reliable human relationships. Our relationships will always have a profound effect on our students' achievement and lives. The importance of building an emotional foundation through rapport with your students might be summed up in the words of the poet John Masfield: "The days that make us happy, make us wise."

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

It's been my experience that fewer discipline problems erupt when students see themselves as part of a cooperative classroom community which supports sharing and caring behaviors. Learning is an active process in thinking, analyzing, and evaluating information. Building a community of learners can be a challenging goal, but it is essential for students to feel a sense of belonging. A thinking sign that reinforces this goal can read:

*We work best when we are
All for One and One for All*

Consider pointing out the basketball teams that succeed because of individual athletes deciding to be less of a ball hog and more of a team player (e.g., Michael Jordan or Tim Duncan). Discussing a thinking sign which supports cooperation is one way to begin to create an environment that is safe and caring for all students. In a safe classroom, all students participate and feel that they belong. They know that their individual and cultural differences will be accepted and valued as much as the things they share in common. Teachers ideally find the balance of showing students that every individual counts and can learn with a commitment to the well-being of the whole classroom community.

Building Group Self-Esteem

How does building a sense of classroom community help students to feel better about working and learning? For this question to be fully understood and answered, we must first understand the impact a person's self-esteem has on their ability to learn. Self-esteem is our sense of self-worth.

26 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect

It comes from all our thoughts, and from the experiences we have collected about ourselves through life: smart or slow; awkward or graceful; popular or unpopular. These impressions, evaluations, and experiences we have about ourselves add up to a positive feeling about our self-worth, or a negative feeling of inadequacy. The connection between self-esteem and one's ability to learn has been made with students of all ages; high self-esteem promotes learning. Self-esteem affects virtually every facet of a student's life. Students who feel good about themselves usually feel good about school and life. They are able to gain the self-discipline necessary to meet and solve the challenges and responsibilities of life with confidence.

One primary condition affecting how individuals feel about themselves is a sense of connection, or the feeling a student has when he or she can gain satisfaction from group associations that are personally significant. The child in elementary school will experience shifts in his or her connections from parents to teachers; adolescents experience dramatic changes in connections to family, friends, and the world around them—from from parent-oriented ties to the rehearsal of adult relationships.

If you can “step back” and view your students objectively, you will be able to evaluate whether they have a firm sense of connection to the classroom community, or whether they are experiencing problems in that area and need assistance. Observable conditions that make up a community of learners include

- Students who communicate easily and are able to listen to each other and understand others' viewpoints
- Students who talk positively about family, race, or ethnic group
- Students who have a certain ease around their teacher(s)
- Students who don't always need to be noticed or in the center of activities
- Students who are able to state their ideas or feelings directly and ask for help when necessary
- Students who are comfortable expressing appropriate affection, such as handshakes
- Students who are actively helping each other to reach the learning standards set by the teacher

Models for Behavior

In cooperative classrooms, all students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. An effective way to start building a safe learning environment is for the teacher to model how to share

Building Cooperation and a Community of Learners • 27

feelings and concerns with the class. This could be done in a group setting or on a one-to-one basis. Students seem more likely to risk stretching themselves intellectually and socially when they know the teacher is understanding and supportive of an open and respectful process of communication—for example, “I’d like to share my concern about how much time I’ve been spending on reminding Kara and Crystal to stop talking during silent reading time . . .” Here the teacher is demonstrating a willingness to discuss something openly that might be interrupting the learning process without putting down or attacking students. This discussion could be brief but to the point. The importance of being a role model for effective communication cannot be underestimated when building a classroom community of learners. Some students come to school without having sufficient role models. If this is the case, the teacher will need to make them available at school. In doing so, he or she will help the students to feel secure about order in their classroom lives. They will be able to determine right behavior from wrong. With effective models, students’ values and beliefs will serve to consistently guide their behavior and goals. They will have a sense of purpose and direction, they will understand how to work in a group, and they will know how to meet standards of excellence.

When the teacher is assertive about expectations of how to become a “genuine community of learners,” the probability of it occurring increases. For example, one of my coteachers, Ms. Manfredi, and myself decided to take a different approach toward setting classroom rules at the beginning of the year. We asked the students what they thought about having a classroom that had no rules. One student remarked, “Well, last year, by the end of the year Mr. J had over fourteen rules we had to follow! No rules would be great.” After some discussion, we decided not to have rules, but instead a guiding principle for classroom behaviors (see box).

Our Principle:

You can do whatever you want in this cooperative classroom as long as it doesn’t bother someone else.

We also made a point of saying that the teachers are part of the cooperative classroom, and discussed some behaviors that might “bother someone else.” This approach might not be right for all teachers, but it was effective in creating a foundation for cooperative planning by placing the responsibility on the students for thinking about what behaviors might be bothersome to their peers and teachers. It helped to develop emotional maturity as well as independent thinking skills.

28 • Teaching Discipline & Self-Respect

Students want to feel that their teacher is concerned both with their academic achievement and social/emotional progress. It has been my experience that when students expect the class to work together in ways that are good for everyone, they will actively help to bring that about. But I've also learned that we cannot assume that students, regardless of their grade level, will know how to actively support a cooperative classroom community without direct instruction and feedback.

For example, during the third week of school, Mr. Cauldron made the following announcement (which could have easily been made on the first day of school) to change a negative pattern: "I'm not happy with how students are treating each other in this class. From now on I want students to work toward becoming a class that practices mutual respect and caring. I want us to speak up if anything is bothering us, and work together to help each other solve our problems in an appropriate manner so we can continue to work and learn together. If we work together as a cooperative community of learners, I'm sure all of you, as well as myself, will really enjoy coming to school everyday and being a student in this classroom. Is this something we all want to achieve?" The purpose of his talk was to establish a clear expectation of cooperative classroom behavior, as well as to inspire students to think about their behaviors, and how they might work against or toward creating a genuine community of learners.

I don't believe any teacher wants to consciously disconnect from students. Although there are everyday events in the classroom that can leave students thinking they are dumb, disliked, and troublemakers, getting to know individual students and taking time to have a meaningful dialogue with each of them builds a strong teacher-student connection. Helping students to get to know one another through activities like those suggested in this chapter builds classroom community. Taking the time to reach students so they not only respect you but look forward to seeing you every day establishes bonds that stretch beyond the school year. A teacher can affect a student's destiny. You can never tell where your influence stops.

Whatever you cast a light on will grow. Celebrate your students' unique talents and strengths by consciously selecting something you can celebrate publicly for each student. This communication is best when delivered in a natural manner that is not forced or contrived. For example, "Amanda, I just want to mention to the class how much I appreciate how helpful you are. For example, . . ."