Building Relationships in an Online or In-person Learning Environment

Whether in-person or virtual, building relationships with students is critical, especially during this time of constant change. While being away from the school building and having limited access to in-person supports, students and teachers are struggling in a myriad of ways. Find opportunities to check in with students, learn more about them and their experiences, and find strengths they can use through this time of uncertainty. Below are resources for building relationships while teaching online, as well as when we return back into the school building.

Building Remote Learning Relationships: Educator Reflections

School Climate

School climate, simply put, "the feeling we get when we enter the school building or classroom," may look different online, but is still vitally important to address. Disruption to the learning environment can be linked to many factors: changes in routine and structure, trauma, stress, anxiety associated with the uncertainties a pandemic brings, etc. The change from in-person to online classes forces us all to shift our brains to view areas of our home, once seen as a place of relax and retreat, to now a structured workplace. This isn't an easy adjustment. Taking opportunities to share our experiences, whether they are struggles or strengths, is important to embed into our conversations amongst colleagues, and with our students. This is a needed step to create a positive in-person or online climate, to remind students and staff they are not alone, and to maintain and build relationships within our classroom community.

Building Relationships with the 3 Signature Practices of SEL

These signature practices include tools for fostering a positive classroom learning environment within the structure of daily lessons. Included with each practice - *welcoming inclusion activities, engaging strategies, and an optimistic closure*, are examples of how to embed into an online or in-person learning environment. Consider how to merge these practices into your warm-ups and closures, and eventually they will become part of your everyday classroom routine. Being intentional about including every student within these practices helps to promote SEL skill development, inclusion and belonging, and equitable experiences for all.

Welcoming Inclusion Activities

Routine opening activities establish safety and predictability, support contribution by all voices, set norms for respectful listening, and encourage students to connect with one another. Welcoming activities should offer a natural flow into the learning for the day. Keep in mind that all students may not be comfortable sharing out loud, and that it may take some more time than others to fully participate in the chosen activities.

In-person and online examples
▪ Greet students warmly by their preferred name, if they are on time or late ▪ Express joy in seeing students and offer a fresh start ▪ Start with positive expectations, feedback and/or celebrations ▪ Play name games to develop relationships ▪ Class circles or morning meetings ▪ Partner discussions ▪ Embed student voice into morning announcements ▪ Check in with mood meter ▪ Make breakfast/snacks easily accessible

- Using an open-ended question, each student shares their response with a partner. After sharing, ask for 2-3 comments from the whole group
- If familiar with the circle process, invite students to bring a talking piece to show (on camera if online). When they hold up their talking piece, they begin speaking. Lowering their talking piece signals when they are finished speaking. This will take practice for students to master.
- Interactive "do-nows," such as peer-to-peer homework help

Engaging Strategies

Engaging strategies include opportunities for brain breaks, time for students to collaborate, and intentionally chosen strategies to help commit newly learned information into long-term memory. Providing this time gives students a chance to practice what they have learned, and to apply learning in a variety of contexts. Engaging strategies can also serve as a great attention getting signal and seamless transition to the next activity.

In-person and online examples
- Use empowering teacher language - Plan and reflect based on student work - Encourage problem-solving among students - Stand and Stretch: Helps refresh and reset the brain - Include movement and making connections - Cultivate practices that involve interactions in partnerships, triads, small groups and as a whole group - Minute Brain Break (a calming activity, promotes focus and readiness to learn) - **Think Time (30-90 seconds of silent think time before speaking or sharing)** - Think, Ink, Pair, Share (silent time to reflect; time to write; partner discussions; close with a group share out) - Clock Partners (prearrange partners for quick reflection and discussion) - Socratic Seminar - Jigsaw - Turn and talk

Optimistic Closure

Close each day with some kind of reflection, helping students end on an optimistic note. An optimistic closure highlights the importance of the work, provides a sense of accomplishment, supports forward-thinking, and encourages students to want to return the next day

In-person and online examples

- Provide lesson overview
- Use prompts such as:
  - What worked today? This week?
  - What is right with our students...our class...our school... our community?
  - What problems did I help fix or repair today?
  - What did I learn about my identity that makes me proud?
- Reflect and Share:
  - What is something I learned today?
  - Who is someone I was able to help?
  - Who helped or was kind to me?
  - What is something I want to share with my family?
  - What is something I'm looking forward to doing tomorrow?
  - What is something I enjoyed about the day?
- Offer an appreciation for someone in the room
- Edutopia closure examples
- *Note: Establish a shared agreement with students that it's accepted to "pass" when asked to share*