Building Authentic Relationships With Youth At Risk

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“SIGNIFICANT LEARNING DOES NOT OCCUR WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP”

Dr. James P. Comer
Significant Learning

• Globalization

• Industrial Age Learning to 21st Century Learning
Significant Relationship

- Relationship
  - Rigor
  - Relevance

- Participation Gap

- Authentic Relationships begin with trust
Ecological Systems Theory

The individual is a complex system of relationships and influences.

- Influences and relationships from the past and present
- Continual engagement and interaction
- Ever-changing eco-system/environment
- To consider the individual is to consider the eco-system
Eco-Map

• For our purpose – a visual image of an individual environmental system.
• Circles represent systems or relationships within the individual’s environment.
• Lines represent the level of connection between the systems.
• Social workers use this in professional practice; it is not an activity for classroom use.
JOY

Parent Bette

Church Youth Group

SIBS Val 22 Liz 14

Friends Sandy Mary

Joy 16

School 3.0

Hospital Volunteer

It’s You! Job

It’s You!
NANCY

Parent Jim

Parent Tammy

Boy F Ralph 22

Sibs Keri 12 Alex 10

Chemical Use

Friends Tanya Haley

Sibs Troy 16 Tracy 15

School 1.2 GPA

Juvenile Justice Truancy

Nancy 16
Discussion

- TIM (High Achiever)
  - Many positive connections
  - Positive experiences with adults
  - New relationships entered with positive expectations
Discussion

• JOY (Average Student)
  o Few systems
  o Positive connections and relationships
  o New relationships entered with positive expectations
Discussion

• NANCY (Closed Student)
  o Tenuous, stressful, dysfunctional connections
  o Negative experiences and relationships with adults
  o New relationships entered guardedly with mistrust
What this tells us

• All students come to us with unique personal environments or eco-systems.

• Traditional methods of building relationships work with some students because of existing and past positive relationships with adults in their environment.
What this tells us

• Traditional methods of building relationships do not work with closed students like Nancy, because of past and current experiences.
  
  – Educator inquiry leads to retreat
  – Positive words are not trusted

• These are the students that need relationships the most.
Relationships Grow When Students Trust the Educator

• It is not the educator knowing the student.

• It is the student knowing and trusting the educator.
THE BEST YOU CAN DO IS BE YOURSELF.

THE VERY BEST YOU CAN DO IS BE YOURSELF.
Ask Yourself

WHO AM I?
Identity and Integrity

- **Identity** refers to the personal environment of the educator.
- **Integrity** refers to becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of the self.

Take time and reflect.
Authenticity and Congruence

• Students are watching to see if you are who you say you are
• Students have radar for authenticity

• **Authenticity** is sharing oneself by relating in a sincere, honest, natural, genuine, open and at times quite spontaneous manner. The educator's words and actions are in tune with his/her feelings and identity.

• **Congruence** is bringing a consistent realness and honest openness of self to the classroom. Congruence is the matching of behavior and content of communication.
5 STRATEGIES TO PRESENT AN AUTHENTIC AND CONGRUENT SELF

5 STRATEGIES TO BUILD TRUST
Trust-Building Strategies

- Passion - Sharing energy
- Creativity – Sharing ideas, passion and humanness
- Listen into Voice - Sharing belief in students
- Vulnerability – Sharing humanness
- Story – Weaving all of the above into a relevant context of content and emotion
PASSION

• “This is important to me and I am sharing it with you, therefore you are important to me”
• An invitation to know you
• Source of understanding of educator relevance for student
• Passions both inside & outside of education
CREATIVITY

- Shift in Thought: creativity in sharing of self – not only sharing curriculum
- Share excitement for learning
- Risk-taking for the sake of student learning (vulnerability)
- Builds bridges/connections
LISTEN INTO VOICE

• Match words of caring & belief, with action

• Share your belief in student & knowledge

• Nurture the student to find voice

• Allow time and space, and listening to what is said when the voice is found

• Demonstrate respect for student experience
LISTEN INTO VOICE

• Honor student story as they choose to share it

• Honor student concerns and priorities

• Respect the quagmire of the adolescent experience

• Show belief in student contribution

• The importance is believing there are answers and communicating that, not actually getting the answers
VULNERABILITY

• Shares your humanness
• Invites students to accept their own humanness
• Demonstrates your willingness to be open to students
• Invites students to risk being open with you
• Extremely important
STORY

• Shares humanity, passion & creativity
• Invites students into your world
• Allows students to see you in a different way
• Shares your beliefs, hopes and “fears”
• Connects emotionally with students
CELEBRATE!

• The very best you can do is be yourself, authentically yourself
• An authentic and congruent educator invites student trust
• Significant relationships begin with trust
• Students need to trust the educator before relationships can grow
• “Significant learning does not occur without significant relationship.”
For More Information

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