

# Building Authentic Relationships With Youth At Risk

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**Solutions**  
*to the Dropout Crisis*

“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

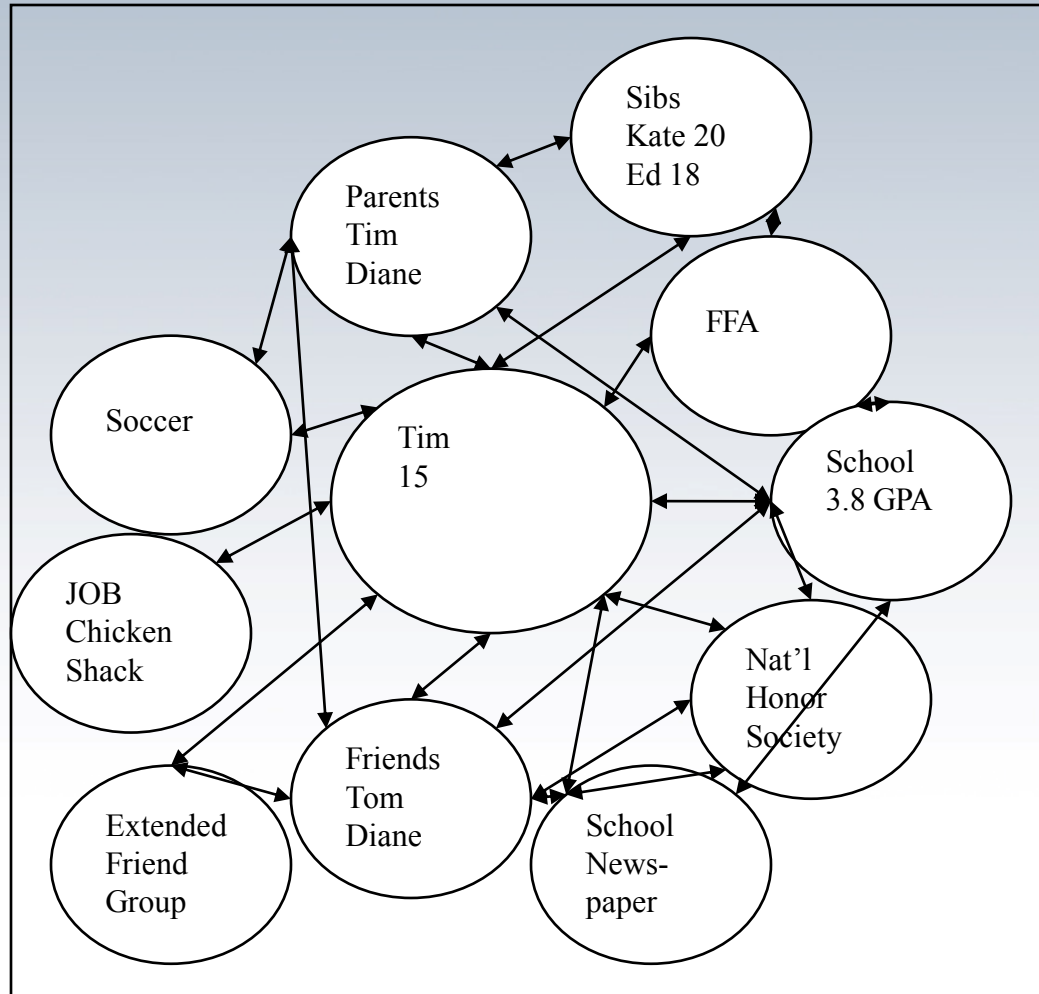


# Eco-Map

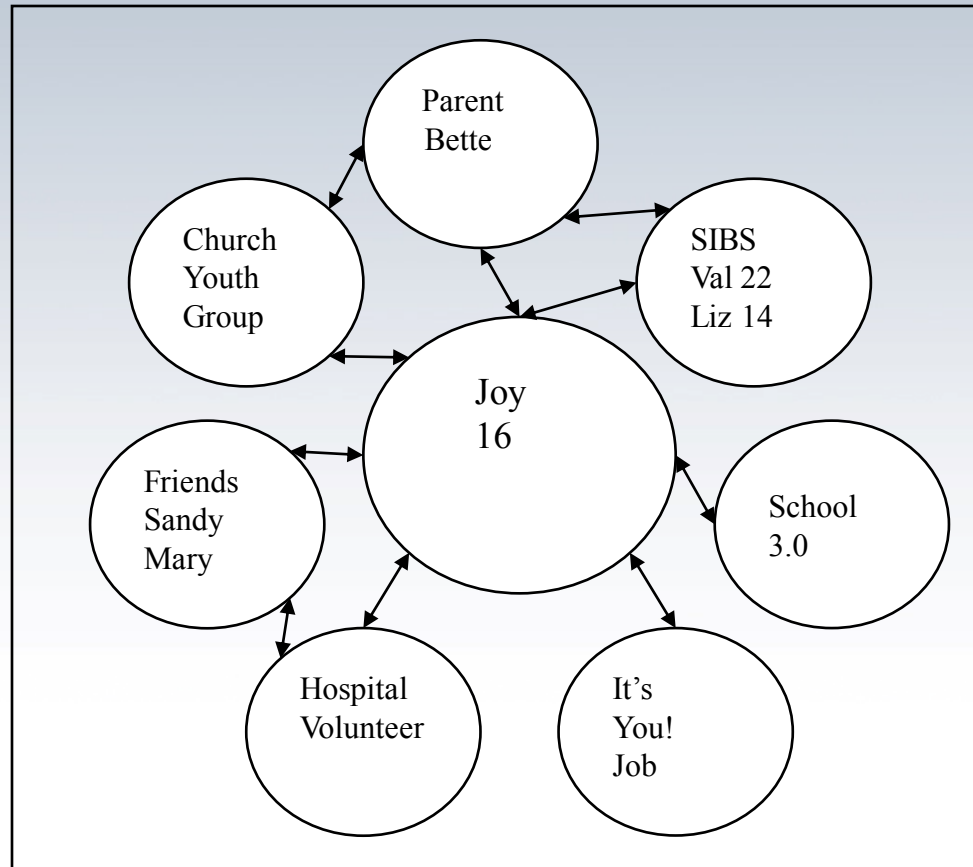
- For our purpose – a visual image of an individual environmental system.
- Circles represent systems or relationships within the individual's environment.
- Lines represent the level of connection between the systems.
- Social workers use this in professional practice; it is not an activity for classroom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



# TIM

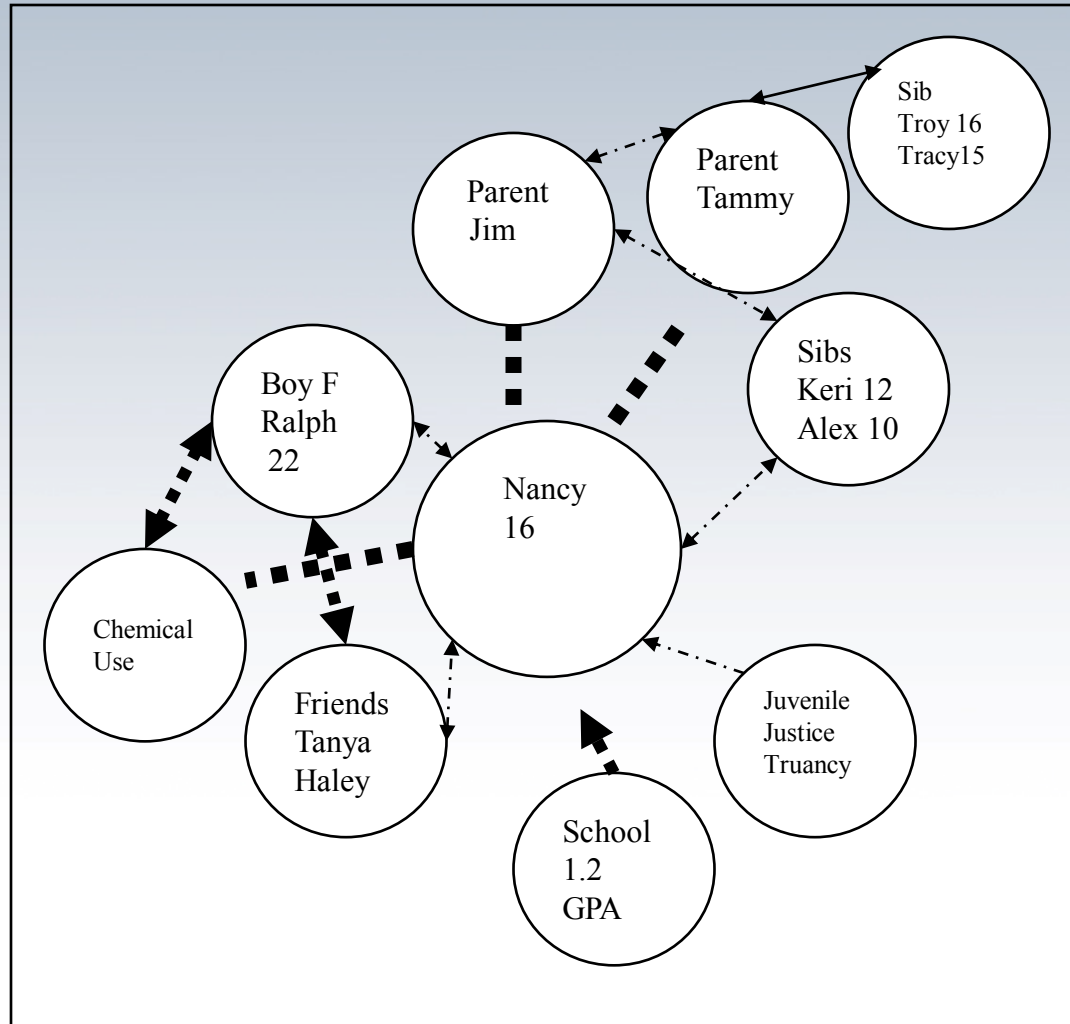


# JOY





# NANCY



# Discussion

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



# Discussion

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



# Discussion

- NANCY (Closed Student)
  - Tenuous, stressful, dysfunctional connections
  - Negative experiences and relationships with adults
  - 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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