



Building a Community in the Classroom: Helpful Resources

(Summer 2006)

By: Jennifer Behrman, Lori Soltys, and Meghan Delwisch



Here are some great resources for teachers and counselors to use in order to create community in classrooms and small groups.

Activities

Community Circle (aka Class Meeting)

Have the class sit in a large circle. Review classroom agreements and discussion guidelines. Start out with a question of the day. In the beginning of the year, these questions can be "getting to know you" type questions: What is your favorite color, I feel happy when..., Rain makes me... but later in the year, community circles can be used for dealing with tough situations, making decisions and planning events (Tribes, p. 219).

Peace Path

The purpose of the Peace Path is to support independent problem solving in the classroom community.

Materials: 8 sets of foot prints

"I" statement cards

Situation cards

Method: In the beginning of the school year you would introduce the concept of using "I" statements with your class as a whole group.

"I feel _____ when you _____."

"I understand (or I hear) that you feel _____ when I _____."

"I would like for you to _____."

"I agree to _____."



You would then write up a series of possible situations where students would need to use I statements. You can generate these yourself or have the class write or brainstorm their own ideas and write on small sheets of paper.

The next step would be to read situations and call up two or more students at a time to role-play a situation and practice as a group to solve the problem using the peace path. Younger students will require more practice and support from the teacher. As the school year begins and conflicts arise in the community, students are sent to the peace path to work out their differences. Initially the teacher would help support the students and eventually the students would become independent in solving conflicts (source unknown).

Outlines

This activity helps build inclusion as well as help students to develop communication and listening skills. In this activity, students are given an outline of a T-shirt. Depending on the directions the teacher gives, students complete their T-shirt and then take turns sharing their design with others. There are several different ways to have students share their designs with others. T-shirt possibilities include: acrostic poem, what the student did over summer break, an alliterative adjective that goes with their first name, a place the person would like to visit, an important person... (Tribes, p. 264).



People Hunt (Scavenger Hunt)

Students are given a sheet with various questions on it. They then circulate around the classroom introducing themselves to other children and asking one of the questions on their sheet. This activity helps students learn the names of their classmates and get to know one another. For younger children pictures often work well. The Tribes activity has student working with three different sheets and every sheet has different questions (Tribes, p. 280).



People to People

All of the students stand in a large circle next to a partner. One student (the teacher to start with) stands in the middle and is "it". The game starts with everyone snapping his or her fingers in unison. The person in the middle says, "Neighbor to neighbor" and that officially starts the game. The person in the middle then calls out actions such as "toes to toes", "hands to hands"... for the others to do. When given a command, such as "toes to toes" the people in the circle touch toes with their partner and then go back to snapping their fingers until the next command is given.



When the person in the center says, "People to people" again, everyone must find a new person to be partners with. The person without a partner is now in the center and the game continues (Tribes Energizer Box).

I Like My Neighbors

Have all members sit in chairs in a circle with one person standing in the middle to be it. The person in the middle gives a statement such as, "I like my neighbors, especially those who are wearing black shoes." Everyone with black shoes on, jumps up and scrambles to find a new chair. The person left standing is now it and the game continues (Tribes, p. 392).

Spider Web

The class gathers in a large circle. The activity begins by having one student share his/her name and something about him/herself. The student is given a ball of yarn to hold. Once the student share, (s)he holds onto the end of the yarn and passes the yarn ball across the circle to another student who then shares. The activity continues until everyone has had a chance to share. When finished, they have created something resembling a spider's web. To build collaboration skills, try to do the same activity in reverse order and unravel the spider's web (Tribes, p. 246).

Self-Portraits

Have the students create self-portraits. These self-portraits can be cartoon drawings or true image self-portraits. Not only do self-portraits give insight into how a child may see him/herself, creates ownership for the classroom and they are so adorable hanging in the classroom.



One Special Thing About Me

Sitting in a community circle, have students introduce themselves and state one thing that makes each of them special. If it is later in the year, students can share what makes one another special. This is also great for a poster. Write the student's name in the center and then fill in adjectives that describe that person (Tribes, p. 365).

Five Tribles

Tribles are little fuzzy characters that show different emotions. Each student is given a Triple card then in a community circle or with a partner, students share which Triple matches how he or she is feeling.

Students also share why they are feeling that way. This is a great way to start off the day. (You can also make up your own cards.) Students can repeat this activity at the end of the day to see how their emotions have changed. Instead of using cards, students can also check-in in the morning by putting their name under the Tribble that resembles their emotion (Tribes, p. 249).

Books

Seven Blind Mice

By: Ed Young

Theme: Individually we may only see part of the picture or have one perspective yet as a group we can see the whole or understand different people's ideas.



And to Think We Thought That We'd Never Be Friends

By: Mary Anne Hoberman

Brings up everyday conflicts and how these conflicts result in a community parade filled with unlikely friends. It celebrates friendship and collaboration.

The Rainbow Fish

By: Marcus Pfister

Themes of friendship and isolation. Offers positive solutions to solving problems of jealousy, sharing and being part of an accepting community.

How Are you Peeling?

By: Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers

A great book to introduce the topic of feelings and to do community building activities for identifying, expressing and solving problems around feelings.

Excellent pictures. You can also do an art extension making faces out of fruit/ veggies.



I Like Myself

By: Karen Beaumont Illustrated By: David Catrow

An ADORABLE BOOK! GREAT illustrations with rhyming, playful language. The main character tells the reader all the things she likes about herself. A nice book to use in talking about positive self-concept and how to talk about others and ourselves positively.



The Red Tree

By: Shaun Tan

(A little dark) beautiful illustrations of a young girl struggling with feelings of hopelessness and despair wanders through an imaginary world of her pain. The story ends with a hopeful note though as a red colorful tree blossoms in her dark bedroom bringing with it the possibilities of new found hope. This could be used with an individual student or with the whole class in a discussion of feelings and how we can help others or ourselves in the community with difficulties in our lives.

Chrysanthemum

By: Kevin Henkes

This book is great for investigating names, learning to be proud of a name and treating others with respect. This book is also a great way to introduce projects centered on names.

I Like Me

By: Nancy Carlson

This is an adorable book about a pig that likes herself. The book is easy to read and has a great rhythm, which students quickly pick up on making this a new favorite. Students can create an individual or class book about themselves using the format from this book.



First Day Jitters

By: Julie Danneberg

This is a great book to share on the first day of school when everyone is nervous and excited at the same time. There is even a surprise ending. Julie Danneberg has also written another book called, First Year Letters, which is a great follow up for the end of the year.

Stone Soup

Retold by: Heather Forest Illustrated by: Susan Gaber

There are many different versions of this story but this one is a favorite because of the wonderful illustrations. This book is a great way to introduce the importance of working together, being contributing members of a community and that each person brings something special. Students enjoy making "stone soup" using pictures of themselves and words that describe some of the ways they are special.

Pickin' Peas

By: Margaret Read MacDonald Illustrated by: Pat Cummings

This is just a fun book. Students love this book. They enjoy the fantastic illustrations, hearing how the rabbit tricked the little girl and singing along with the adorable little song. All of the lyrics and hand motions are in the back of the book.



Smile A Lot!

By: Nancy Carlson

This is a cheesy little story with an important message. The story reminds us that when things get tough, we should smile a lot. This book is a great way to start a discussion with students about how to handle difficult situations. The pictures are really cute too!

The Other Side

By: Jacqueline Woodson Illustrated by: E.B. Lewis

This is a beautifully written and illustrated book about the power of friendship. Students love to share stories about their friends and how they became friends.

Hooway For Wodney Wat

By: Helen Lester Illustrated by: Lynn Munsinger

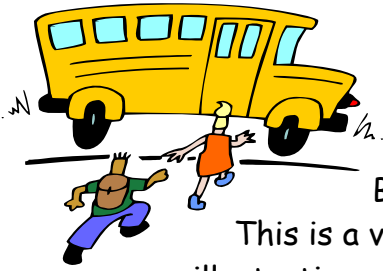
This is a wonderful book to use when talking about accepting and appreciating all people. In this story, Rodney is a rat that cannot say his w's. He quickly becomes the class hero though and everyone learns to appreciate him.

Amazing Grace

By: Mary Hoffman Illustrated by: Caroline Binch

This is a wonderful story about being who you want to be, not giving up when others say you can't do something and learning from each other.





If You're Happy and You Know It!

By: Jan Ormerod Illustrated by: Lindsey Gardiner

This is a very cute book centered on the song. This book has darling illustrations and students love singing the song. Nothing builds community like singing together.

The Way I Feel

By: Janin Cain

This is a great book to help students look at and discuss feelings.

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse

By Kevin Henkes

This is a great book to use when setting up classroom agreements or after a tough day to discuss why rules and following rules is important.

Tacky the Penguin

By: Helen Lester Illustrated by: Lynn Munsinger

There are several Tacky the Penguin books and all of them are great for teaching children that it is okay to be different and to march to the beat of a different drum. Tacky is an odd bird but he has great contributions to his community.

Timothy Goes To School

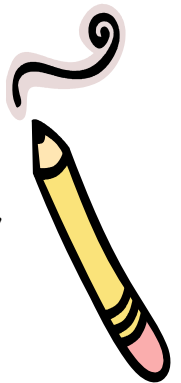
By: Rosemary Wells

This is a cute book about a boy who is so excited to start school unfortunately; that excitement is short lived as he learns all of the things one should not do at school. This is a good book to look at the impact of friendship, saying things that hurt one another feelings and dealing with disappointment.

The Art Lesson

By: Tomie dePaola

This is a darling story about a boy who was so excited to study art in school unfortunately, things did not go the way he had planned. This book has many possibilities for discussion and students always have lots of things to say about the messages in the story.



Teacher Resources

Tribes: A New Way of Learning and Being Together

By Jeanne Gibbs

This is an excellent resource for all teachers. There is a ton of useful information on cooperative learning and how to create and sustain those conditions for our students. Additionally, there are a ton of games, activities and resources for teachers to use to build inclusion and teach social skills.

Tribes Energizer Box

This is a box full of additional games, activities and resources to use with students in order to build inclusion and teach social skills. All of the games, activities and resources are listed on individual cards and are very user friendly.

Tools for Citizenship and Life: Using the ITI Lifelong Guidelines and Lifeskills in Your Classroom

By: Sue Pearson

This book is the teacher's guide to using the Lifeskills' curriculum in a classroom. It is full of wonderful ideas, activities, games, book lists and staff activities to introduce and practice the lifeskills in our schools. This resource is incredibly teacher friendly.

Social Skills Lesson & Activities

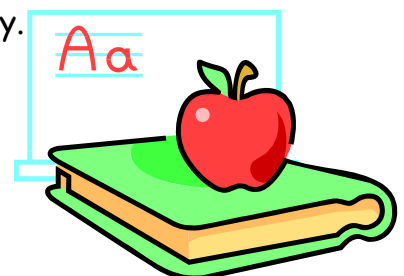
Edited by: Ruth Weltmann Begun

This book contains tons of ready to use activities to teach children various social skills. This series is available for many different age groups and has ideas for practicing just about any social skill imaginable.

No-Bullying Program

Johnson Institute

This is a wonderful curriculum spanning across several grade levels. This curriculum teaches students how to recognize bullying behavior and how to use specific language to stand up to a bully.



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Summer 2006



“The community circle is like our healing circle. It allows everyone a chance to be seen, to speak, and to be heard. Each of us has a different way of looking at things. We can learn from each other. It is good to listen and watch, when you watch you see everything. You learn to give to other people and you see different ways to deal with problems.”

-Anne Wilson, Ojibwa Elder
Maniton Rapids, First Nation-Ontario, Canada

Why is Community in the classroom important?

Building a community in the classroom is so important because students need to feel safe and respected in their learning environment. This allows students to be themselves and feel empowered in their education. Students that feel that their school is their community will be more successful in school and in their relationships with others. Students are learning how to interact with others in a peaceful and respectful way. A classroom community gives students the tools they need to be successful and valuable parts in society. Students feel like their feelings are being validated because they are given their own time to speak and be heard.

A classroom community allows student to communicate in a positive way and be heard. “The current body of scholarly literature indicates that a perception exists that children perform better both socially and academically when they attend a school environment that is a safe, caring, structured community.” (Weidner, p. 4)



The Teachers Role in Building a Community

In order for a classroom to have an effective community the teacher has to play a very important role.

- Teachers have to let go of any hidden agenda that they might have and they need to give up behaviors that can affect communication (Weidner, 2006).
- Teachers need to focus on the power of relationships.
- Teachers need to even the playing field by become an equal member in the community (Set a good example of what it means to be a member and part of a community).
- Create an environment in the classroom for listening, acceptance, and empathy towards all members of the community.
- Support every child strengths in the community.
- Encourage collaborative learning within the community

In the book *Tribes* it gives information

For relating to middle school students-

- Establishing classroom agreements supports a sense of what is fairness and security in the classroom.
- Middle school student’s “use put-downs” as a form of “joking”.
- Acknowledge their sense of humor while increasing awareness that put downs are hurtful.
Discuss put-downs students receive and talk about feelings.



For relating to high school students-

- Tribes can be used with teenagers as they also seek to be included.
- It is important to consider their interests and lives.
- Working in cooperative groups (5 or 6) can motivate teenagers.
- Establish agreements,
- Use Tribes strategies to incorporate academic content with cooperative learning.

Key Points For Building a Community

Create Community Agreements

Attentive listening
Appreciations/No put-down
The right to pass
Mutual respect

-Tribes

Students need their basic needs met to help find self- fulfillment and to realize their potential. If their basic needs are not met they will have difficulty learning and relating to others.

A child's basic needs (in order):

- Physiological-hunger and thirst
- Safety-to feel secure and safe and out of danger
- Belongingness and love-to affiliate with others, to be accepted and belong
- Esteem-to achieve, be competent and gain approval
- Cognitive-to know, to understand, to explore
- Aesthetic- symmetry, order, and beauty
- Self-actualization

-Maslow

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