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Emotional Links

In her book *Mapping the Mind*, Rita Carter (1998) states that the teaching and learning process is all about relationships. In fact, unless this emotional engagement is made, learning will not “stick” positively in the memory (Goleman, 1996; Jensen, 2005; LeDoux, 1996).

In order to form a relationship, clear ground rules need to be established (Prentice, 2007). Because the teacher is the adult, this is the teacher’s responsibility. However, with the emphasis on coverage of content, it can happen that these social expectations are never clearly shared with students.

Part of the development of these expectations is sharing appropriate information about yourself. You may share about your family, your interests, and your ambitions, but this is not enough.

More important is to share with them what you believe in.

This then provides a knowledge base as to the “life rules” that you live by and expect in the classroom setting (Borba, 2001). Sharing your own thoughts and dreams develops a model of trust (DePorter, Reardon, & Singer-Nourie, 1999), which in turn gives students the opportunity to do the same. Use these exercises to open the lines of communication between you and your students.

WHAT I’LL DO FOR YOU AND WHAT I’LL NEVER DO FOR YOU

Share clear statements so that learners will form an understanding of what drives you, your passions, and your purpose as a teacher. These are some examples:

- “I will help you with your learning by providing interesting experiences and opportunities for you to explore. I will never do your thinking for you.”
- “I will support you through any problems that you encounter to the best of my ability; however, I cannot support you completely if you lie or fail to reveal the whole truth to me.”

- “I will offer you options and choices; however, if the situation involves risk or danger, I will make the final choice as to what happens.”

“YOU DON’T KNOW THIS ABOUT ME BUT . . .”

This is an opportunity for both you and the students to share things about yourselves: Where you were born, how many brothers and sisters you have, your ambitions, mistakes that you have made, and what you have learned from them. Some discretion may be required in this area. This process could involve one person per day or could be completed in groups using a talking circle process.

VIP CENTER

A display area is set up and the person selected to be VIP brings a “treasure” from home every day for a week. These may include photos, certificates, awards, or mementos. The VIP then makes a presentation to the class.

In my experience, five- to seven-year-olds will need to talk about their center every day. Eight- to ten-year-olds can present at the end of the week, whereas I found that it worked best for eleven- to thirteen-year-olds if they began their display on a Tuesday and presented the following Monday. Remember that for most of these senior students, there was a clear understanding of the process through years of experience. Now was the time to expand it. This inclusion of a weekend gave them time to practice presentation techniques and involve IT/PowerPoint/video processes or other props so that it was not only about themselves, it also developed life skills.

This process could involve self/peer/teacher evaluation, but this is not necessary. I have also seen it involve a child-portrait artist who presented the portrait and a summary of the presentation to the VIP. There may also be a requirement to discuss and involve family members. In fact, parents regularly turned up for these presentations, and one parent wrote a fabulous reference for her child and read it to him as part of the presentation day.

Choosing the VIP is best done on a weekly basis with the name drawn out of a hat by the previous presenter. This helps to maintain anticipation and ensures that all students have a turn. The activity can be completed with the award of a certificate with attributes contributed by classmates written on it.

Humans are the only living creatures that try to live independently.

Nature operates through interdependence.



It was near the end of the school year when I was privileged to be part of an emotional unburdening. A very shy senior student who would rarely speak in front of the class had her week as the VIP. It was day five of her special week, the day to present to her peers. She stood nervously in front of the class, head down, feet scuffing the floor. We waited in silence for what seemed minutes willing her to have the courage to begin. Two or three false starts intensified the mood. Finally, after a deep and quivering breath and with her head down she began to speak.

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"You may not know that I live with my Auntie and Uncle." Long pause. "That is because my parents didn't treat me very well so I was taken away from them." She then began to tell us some of the tragic moments of her short life and how wonderful it was to be part of a new family. A family, short on money, but large on love. During the entire story her head remained down and her voice shaky and quiet. That was until she reached the end when for the first time she looked up and with a tiny smile said, "Thank you."

I looked at the class teacher who had very wet eyes which mirrored my own. The class was silent as many of the students, aged twelve and thirteen, wiped away their tears as the girl quietly returned to her seat. It was a privilege to be part of the process.

I was also present at a VIP presentation when a very different story occurred. Again it concerned a senior student's presentation, a thirteen-year-old boy who began to speak to the class. Just as his presentation began, his mother entered the room. She quietly listened as he proudly told the class about his family and some of his life's achievements sharing photos and certificates. At the conclusion of his presentation, his mother then moved to the front of the room with a piece of paper. She introduced herself explaining that what she was about to read was a reference that she had written for her son. "To whom it may concern. You may not know my son as well as I do, so I wish to share some of his attributes." She then proceeded to read about what a fine young man he was and how he made his family proud. Two VIPs. Two special emotional links for all concerned.

SOURCE: Michael A. Scaddan