Chapter 9
Build a Community for Learning
Promoting Mutual Care, Support, and Celebration

CHAPTER GOAL

Visualize and understand how to create an inclusive community of learners in the school and classroom.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

1. Consider the relationships between meeting social and emotional needs and academic learning.
2. Learn strategies for strengthening community in the school as a whole.
3. Explore and utilize methods of building inclusive community in the classroom.
4. Understand how to explicitly and openly recognize and value differences among students in the classroom.

The Impact of Care and Community in Teaching

We're all sitting in the living room talking—a group of teachers who get together periodically. It's been a long day. Tonight we talk about our own experiences as students. What was good? What was bad? What influenced us? "I had one teacher who was absolutely cruel," says Linda. "He belittled students, called us stupid. Controlling the class was the most important thing to him, and he sent many to the office. I had fun causing trouble without getting caught!" She smiles, and everyone laughs, setting off a round of similar stories.

"But what was good?" Silence surrounds us as we are lost in thought. "I remember Miss Annie, my sixth-grade teacher," Rich says. "In many ways she was an old-style teacher. We diagrammed sentences, and more than once I got in trouble in her class. But one thing you knew about Miss Annie—she cared deeply for every one of us." After a pause Rich continues. "We had what we would today call a learning community. She taught us by example about caring and helped us create that with one another. Many of us

continue to go by Miss Annie's house," he said, "even though she's been retired many years." One by one, all of us recall stories about teachers who made a deep difference in our lives—by being who they were as much as by the academic skills they taught us.

Our evening discussion highlights the importance of emotions, care, and a sense of community in our classrooms. We first remember people for whom we cared and who cared about us in school. Parents ask first, "How does this teacher treat my child?" and "Does this teacher really care about my child?" Our students do the same.

Let's visit classrooms and think about this.

Kyoko Tanaka's sixth-grade social studies classes are always interesting. Kyoko has a dynamic personality and engages students in lessons of discovery. We particularly want to observe how she includes Duane, a student with a severe disability who uses an electric wheelchair, has limited control of his arms and legs, and doesn't speak. As the students read from their social studies book and engage in discussion, a cluster of two boys and one girl stand or sit around Duane. One holds the book for him and points to the passage; he is a member of the class. Every now and then Kyoko directs the conversation to Duane. His eyes glisten and he smiles. Later Kyoko directs the students to get into groups of two or three and read with one another, talking and answering questions. Two children wheel Duane to a table in the corner of the class under which his wheelchair can fit, and the three of them work together.

We then talk with Jennifer, a third-grade teacher, as we watch her learners in their reading workshop. "I am teaching third grade this year after having 'looped' last year from fourth grade," she explains. "So I have a new group of kids. One of these is Kevin, a student who has been labeled 'trainable mentally retarded.' He's a nice kid but he functions far below most students in my class. However, it's important to me that Kevin is welcomed and can work at his own level. I build community in my class, and the students help one another. Community has provided a basis for Kevin's learning and growth this year." As we walk around the class, Martha talks about the multiple ways she builds community in the classroom and how these interact with academic instruction. She uses cooperative learning groups, students helping one another as "experts," classroom meetings, and heterogeneous grouping of students with students who can help and learn from one another. "You should have seen Kevin showing his parents what he has been learning in his student-led conference," Jennifer says. "For Kevin, writing just a short sentence now is a lot, but he likes to write and read. It was terrific to watch him with his parents, who were a bit amazed."

We would hope that all teachers and all schools would seek to build community in classrooms and schools—to create safe havens for children, who are under increasing stress across the socioeconomic spectrum. Unfortunately, this is not the case. We've been in schools where we have seen teachers scream at children, where such teacher behavior has become an expected part of the school culture. We've seen some schools struggle

mightily to develop a sense of community and care in their buildings, trying particularly to help children whose lives are traumatic; and we've seen other schools where tension, pressure, and anger are the rule of the day, where children with high emotional needs are criticized bitterly by school staff. We have choices to make: Do we seek to build community for all children, or do we react with power and punishment when children don't do what is expected, building a culture of competition and isolation? That's the core issue that this chapter addresses.

You may remember that in Chapter 2 we posed the question: "What is the purpose of school?" That question is very fundamental to this chapter. If the purpose of school is to create competitive winners then teaching children to care for one another and take responsibility for the community makes no sense. If, on the other hand, we hope that children will be effective citizens contributing towards making the community a better place and caring for family, friends, and others, then helping children learn to care for one another, helping them learn how to build a caring community is very central.

We will find that creating a learning community where all students feel safe and accepted supports higher levels of academic and cognitive learning. We will also find that building community creates a positive environment and helps prevent conflict and behavior problems. Typically, some 80% of issues regarding social-emotional needs will be met if adults explicitly work towards building an inclusive community of learners, seeking to address social and emotional needs of children. However, there are always problems that occur. Another 15% of students may be involved in conflicts, hurt feelings, and other social and behavioral challenges. These students require a range of effective interventions and supports. A final 5% of students have very serious social and emotional problems for which intensive, interdisciplinary, individualized plans of service and support are needed (Noddings, 2007; Peterson, 2005). Note, also, however, what happens when we do not seek to build community. The less this happens, the more social, emotional, and behavioral problems occur. We have been in schools where, instead of 10-15% of students having challenging behaviors, the bar moved down so that as many as 50-60%of students did.

Creating an effective learning community, therefore, is critical. In this chapter we explore strategies for building an inclusive community of learners. In Chapter 10 we'll discuss pro-active strategies for students who provide mild to serious behavior challenges. Let's start by considering what we mean by the word 'community'.

What Is Community?
Individual Growth Thriving with Care and Support

Students come to us with many strengths and abilities. They may also come to us with pain and hurt in their lives. Our challenge is to create in our classrooms a culture that helps students build on their strengths and heals their hurts so that learning can occur. Rather than focusing on the deficits of students, we attempt to build a caring community of learners in which they have emotional support and a safe place to deal with their concerns and needs (Noddings, 2007; Sapon-Shevin, 1999, 2007; Sergiovanni, 1994, 2004).

What is community? Community occurs when diverse people develop relationships and work together so that each person is supported by the group in growing, learning, and coping with challenges; when the group works together to accomplish common goals in an atmosphere of mutual respect and care; and when a flexible balance of emotional support and productivity occurs (Shaffer and Anundsen, 1993). The qualities required of members of real communities are commitment to one another, trust, honesty, compassion, and respect.

Solving problems through community building is as old as humanity. Over the last century or so, however, many social trends have contributed to increased isolation of individuals from one another and the weakening of community (McKnight, 1995), with attendant consequences of increased loneliness, drug abuse, child abuse, crime, and other social pathologies. In recent decades a growing host of writers and social activists have been calling for efforts to build and strengthen community (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Schwartz, 1992, 1997), and community building is growing into an international movement. Scott Peck (1987), for example, developed a process for community building, gathering groups of people for three-day sessions of intense social interactions. In low-income neighborhoods, foundations have sponsored initiatives to help residents identify strengths and resources and work together to strengthen their community. Representatives from different cities formed the National Community Building Network (1995) to link individuals and organizations seeking to support comprehensive community building in low-income communities. Businesses talk about community building in the workplace, and educators discuss creating communities of learners. Let's look at key components of a good community and implications for teaching.

Belonging: A good community exists when people have a sense of belonging and feel valued as members of the group. The opposite of community is isolation and aloneness. As we seek to help all students belong, we become aware of the ways in which students

are sometimes rejected and seek to counter these patterns. We explicitly deal with differences and conflicts that hinder relationships, connections, and acceptance and use numerous strategies to ensure that all members are part of the class. We are particularly observant of students whose characteristics may make them more susceptible to both feeling and being isolated—students with disabilities, students from minority cultural and ethnic groups, even the more able students.

Inclusion: A good community is *inclusive* when membership is open and we make intentional efforts to accommodate and value diversity. Segregated communities have historically been the norm, with people clustering together according to ethnic and cultural backgrounds or socioeconomic status. Gradually, however, new models of building inclusive communities are coming into being, and we have the opportunity to pave the way in our classrooms (Beaumont, 1999; Cohen, E., 1994; Sapon-Shevin, 1999, 2007).

Support and care: In a community members receive the support, assistance, mentoring, and caring that they need if they are to cope with the problems of their lives. Those with "special needs" are not separated from the community and put into "special places". In the classroom we help students learn about one another's needs and help one another. For example, Nathan, a student with autism, has difficulty coping with the noise level as the high school drama class readies for the presentation of their play; he screams loudly. A classmate simply helps him refocus. No one is distracted—they know their friend Nathan, and they go on (Sapon-Shevin, 2007).

Contributions and responsibility of all members: All members have both the opportunity and the responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole. In inclusive classes, all students, whatever their ability, contribute. No one is considered helpless. By providing support good communities enable each person to operate as an individual while caring about others in the group and about the dynamics and health of the community as a whole. Consequently, individualism and community are not contradictory but are complementary (Kohn, 1996, 1999; Peck, 1987; Sapon-Shevin, 1999). A student who is beginning to learn English may love bugs and poems and share with the class a poem she has written about a bug. A middle school student with diabetes may be encouraged and assisted in monitoring his blood sugar and shares with fellow students his excitement about a new monitoring device he has received from his doctor.

Democratic problem solving: In any group of people, conflicts regarding priorities or personal relationships are inevitable. In a community we engage members in dialogue to make decisions and deal with conflict. Many teachers, for example, begin their day with a morning meeting in which the class helps decide what will be accomplished

during the day and in what order. When conflicts occur among students, a classroom meeting is held in which students help develop solutions. We communicate directly and respectfully. Each person "speaks their own truth" when they are "moved to speak," in Scott Peck's words (1987). Each person has the responsibility of listening and understanding as well as the right to articulate their own perspective.

Reaching out: Finally, a community *reaches out to and connects with* the larger world, making partnerships with other communities and groups (Gardner, 1989). In a school we seek to connect with parents, the community, other classes within our school, students in other schools. Parents are invited into class; students visit a local nursing home, developing relationships with the older people there; a high school English class comes to a third-grade elementary class once a week to read with them and work on joint projects.

When we walk into a school or class, we frequently sense almost immediately whether the culture fosters community or promotes exclusion and competition. The figure below describes what we might see in each type of culture; the tone and the impact on children of each type are unmistakable. When community is in place in a class, we are struck by the ongoing discussions and the way in which power is shared among students and the teacher. It's a class that feels like a place we would like to be.

Seeing Community in a Classroom

WHEN A CLASSROOM FUNCTIONS AS A COMMUNITY, WE SEE . . .

- Students constantly work with and help one another.
- Students of vastly different ability levels, cultures, ethnic groups work together. You hear them talking about their differences and what each person needs or likes.
- When conflicts occur, students have strategies to work through them (peer mediation, etc.).
- Circles of friends operate with some students who want and need them.
- Teachers and students frequently interact in classroom meetings to set rules and deal with problems.

WHEN A CLASSROOM IS *NOT AS* A COMMUNITY, WE SEE . . .

- Some students are ridiculed; others are isolated; cliques abound.
- Students with learning differences are sent to special programs.
- Students act out—either through direct aggressive verbal or physical acts or in

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passive–aggressive ways.

- Teachers yell at students, frustrated that students will not "behave."
- A lot of time and energy is put into controlling students.
- Conflicts erupt in fights and arguments.

Emotions, Relationships, and Learning

Community makes sense at one level. Yet in our society many powerful trends work to destroy community. People feel increasingly unsafe and limit relationships with others. Work demands reduce time available for community interactions, and financial pressures make the balance of home, family, and community life difficult. With increased mobility people frequently move away from family and friends and are constantly challenged to develop new relationships. Despite ongoing assaults, however, community survives as a basic human need. Community contributes powerfully to solving numerous human problems. Real community can (Shaffer, Anundesen, & Peck, 2005):

- Improve people's health. When people are in relationships and receive emotional support, they have reduced incidence of stress-related illnesses; cancer patients live longer, and birth problems are reduced.
- Help prevent addictions and assist people in recovering from addictions.
- Help people weather terrible crises in their lives.
- Promote learning and growth by providing a "safe place to grow."

Teachers make critical contributions to building a better society not only by teaching students academic skills in their classes, but also by giving students a chance to experience community. In this sense a very quiet revolution is occurring in which schools provide models for embracing, rather than destroying, diversity. Thus, inclusive teaching and community building are allied. Given the challenges to community, it's important that community be solidly grounded in our schools. Numerous educational

researchers and writers provide a theoretical and practical foundation for community building in schools.

Community and Five Needs of Human Beings

William Glasser (1992) developed a model of schooling that he calls the **quality school,** which is being used in more than 1,000 schools. The quality school is a school in which the "bosses" of the school—teachers—-interact with students in a non-coercive way. According to Glasser, "lead management is the basic reform we need" in schools (1992, p. 31). "Lead management" means talking with students and helping them think through better choices rather than dictating, directing, or controlling. According to Glasser, there are **five needs of human beings,** and as teachers, we provide students with opportunities to meet their five basic needs:

1. *Survival:* We help students survive, physically and emotionally, by creating safe places.
2. *Love and belonging:* Many of our students come to us having been rejected in one way or another in their lives. However, when we facilitate the connection of learners with one another, provide opportunities for collaboration, and ensure that each student is treated with respect, we provide the foundation out of which a sense of love and belonging may emerge.
3. *Power:* Helping students experience power is probably the most challenging. We are told in many ways that a key job of the teacher is to keep students under control. Yet creating community means giving students power along with responsibility. When we engage students in dialogue about the class—about how it will operate and how they will be evaluated—and when we listen to and act on what they say, we are sharing power with students. When we give students real opportunities to make decisions in small groups as they work on a project, we are giving power.
4. *Fun:* In a quality school, instruction is engaging and related to students' lives and, consequently, fun rather than boring.
5. *Freedom:* In such a school students have many opportunities for choices and can move around the classroom and school as they do their work, thus experiencing freedom.

Community and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow (1970) also identified five needs of individuals that occur in a hierarchy, beginning with lower-order and moving to higher-order needs:

1. Physiological needs: food, shelter, sexual gratification
2. Safety/security: physical and emotional survival and safety

3. Belonging/love/affiliation: being part of a community and experiencing caring relationships
4. Self-esteem: a positive sense of self, often attained through personal achievement
5. Self-actualization: the realization of the inner self's full potential in the world

According to Maslow (1970), we can't effectively move toward meeting higher-order needs such as self-actualization until lower-order needs are met. First, the basic *physiological needs* must be met; if they are not, it is very difficult to move to the following levels. This is why it's so hard for students who are homeless or hungry to function well at school. Given the necessities for survival, people seek to ensure their *safety and security*—both physical and emotional. Once safety is in place, needs for *belonging, love,* and *connection,* or affiliation, with others become paramount. Our experience of community, according to Maslow, is a prerequisite for achieving *self-esteem* and personal achievement. As people develop self-esteem, they often are restless to pursue their unique gifts and talents, seeking to express the essence of who they are, a final need that Maslow called *self-actualization.*

Kunc (1992) argued that schools often ensure that students with disabilities do *not* have their needs met by expecting students to achieve self-esteem (and academic mastery) as a *prerequisite* to being able to join the school community. For example, students who have been abused often have behavioral difficulties. We expect these students to "behave" before we allow them to be part of the community. We expect students who have significant learning problems to meet "seventh-grade standards" *before* they are allowed to be part of the general education classroom. Maslow's theory and decades of accompanying research demonstrate that this is exactly the wrong order. If students are to achieve and build a sense of self-esteem, these attainments must be built on the foundation of support and care in the community, not the other way around. We include students who have been abused to help them learn social skills. We include students with learning challenges with others in an engaging classroom environment so they can learn more effectively.

Bumps in the Road
Social Isolation Leads To Segregation

As we are seeking to include students with differences, we simply must attend to their social relationships within our classes. However, sometimes this doesn't happen. Two stories illustrate this:

Cheryl a 3rd grader with Down syndrome. Cheryl is considered by everyone to be just a cute girl. Her mother dresses her nicely and she is very well behaved. She likes being around other students and they seem to like her. Despite this, Cheryl has no friends. A paraprofessional has been assigned to Cheryl. Everyday she brings in a tub of activities that the special education teacher organized that contains materials for lessons for Cheryl. She works with Cheryl by themselves while the rest of the students in the

class work on other activities. Even when they go to lunch the paraprofessional takes Cheryl and they sit alone at the end of the table.

We talked with the teacher, paraprofessional, and principal one day about this. "She needs her own activities because she can't do what the other children are doing," explained the principal who was clearly irritated that we had questioned this arrangement. "Her academics are more important than socializing. That's not the purpose of school". We were more than amazed as this same principal had talked with us in glowing terms about their hard work to make their school a fully inclusive school.

Some months later we were in the school and went to Cheryl's 3rd grade classroom. We did not see Cheryl there. "Oh, the mother decided to take her out of this school and put her in Streetlawn School", the teacher explained. (This is a segregated school only for students with cognitive disabilities). When we asked why she said, "The mother said she didn't have any friends and was lonely". When we asked what the teacher and others had tried to do to deal with this she said, "Well, we can't make other children be her friend." Clearly no one in this school took responsibility for how the structure they had created in the classroom had literally put a wall around Cheryl, cutting her off from natural interactions with other students.

Nathan, a middle school student with cerebral palsy and a cognitive disability. A similar situation occurred with Nathan. Nathan had been fully included in general education classes beginning in the 5th grade. He was a 6th grader when we met him. Once again, Nathan was assigned a paraprofessional who went to all his classes with him. While all the other students worked at tables that seated five students each, Nathan was given an individual desk which was faced away from the rest of the class. "He is very disruptive and can really act out sometimes. He touches the other students. So we have to keep him apart from them," explained the general and special education teachers. We recommended several strategies that they could use to help Nathan learn good social interactions skills particularly suggesting that a circle of friends might be helpful.

"Would you like us to help you set up a circle?" we asked one day. When they expressed a willingness we explained how circles worked. We then asked Nathan if he would like to have a circle of classmates who would be with him and help him. He said, "Yes". He also knew who he would like to ask. We decided to get it started at lunch time. After he had eaten Nathan walked around and talked to several students. After a few minutes, ten kids were gathered at a table at the back of the room. We went over with the teachers. After welcoming the students, we explained what a circle was. "Are all of you willing to meet periodically and work to help Nathan in your class?" we asked. They all said "yes". One girl, Natalie added, "We like Nathan but we don't get to talk with him much because he sits all by himself. He looks lonely." We brainstormed about what could happen to help Nathan participate with the other students and begin sitting at a table. This began an amazing discussion where the kids came up with all sorts of great ideas.

So we left that day leaving the teachers with some simple guidelines for keeping the circle going. We were hopeful.

A month later we were back in the school. As with Cheryl, however, we found that Nathan was not there. "He's left this school," explained Jeremy, the special education teacher. "His mother came in very angry one day saying that Nathan is depressed every day. She said she had talked many times to the principal and other staff about not separating Nathan in the classroom and she can't take it anymore. I don't think the mother understands just how severe her son's disability is". "What happened to the circle of support?" we asked Jeremy. "Oh that", he said. "That was too much work and there was no way those

students were going to help Nathan. Those were some of the worst kids in this class". We were amazed at the lost opportunity. Nathan also is going to the Streetlawn School.

Relationships with other people matter. As human beings this is a basic need. If we're to be successful teachers to students we must pay attention to this need and take action when we see students marginalized. In this case, of course, educators, well meaning though they were, actually structured situations which isolated students and then took no responsibility for the impact of their actions. In Nathan's case some students showed they were willing and interested in including Nathan. For sure, calling something 'inclusion' does not make it so.

Connections between Academic Learning, the Emotions, and Community

In schools we often act as if we must choose between helping students with "academics" *or* with social–emotional needs. However, scientists are learning that the two are inextricably linked. In 1995 Daniel Goleman described the breakthrough research of Joseph LeDoux showing that emotional and academic learning are linked in the hard wiring of the brain, and emotional responses set the stage for academic and cognitive growth. According to Goleman (1995) **emotional intelligence,** or the ability to handle emotions well—interpersonal relationships, anger, feelings of sadness, and sense of self-worth—accounts for at least 50 percent of success in life. However, schools too often put little emphasis on emotional growth and development. This mismatch calls for a rethinking of the role of emotional learning in schools.

Building Resilience

Many researchers have become interested in **resilience**, the ability of some people to survive and become emotionally healthy when they are abused and mistreated or experience devastating circumstances, whereas others do not. We may have many children in our classes with whom we may feel helpless in light of their life circumstances. However, research has identified several characteristics of those who are able to weather traumatic circumstances to become healthy adults and has identified strategies that promote resiliency. These strategies give us hope. The strategies are twofold: (1) *Reduce* factors that increase the risk of harm, and (2) *increase* protective factors such as positive relationships, particularly with caring adults (see the figure below) (Elias et al., 1997; Geller & Hunt, 1995; Noddings, 2007; Rutter, 1977).

Behavior Management, Care, and Community: *Beyond Punishments and Rewards*

Perhaps no arena causes more concern for teachers than student behavior problems. Alfie Kohn (1996) tells of his frustration when he visited the classes of teachers who had reputations for dealing effectively with discipline. In Kohn's visits misbehavior seldom

happened, so he did not get the opportunity to see how the teachers handled it. After a while, he says, "it dawned on me that this pattern couldn't be explained just by my timing. These classrooms were characterized by a chronic absence of problems." After concluding that these teachers were not simply "getting the good kids," he looked more carefully. He discovered that these teachers did *not* concentrate on being good disciplinarians; nor did their teaching stress worksheets and students' working alone at desks. Rather, what he saw were engaged classes working on interesting projects and classrooms in which community and care were actively and intentionally promoted.

Characteristics of Resilient Children and Protective Factors

Characteristics Of Resilient Children	Protective Factors That Build Resilient Children
Social competence • Good communication skills • Sense of humor • Caring attitude • Ability to see different sides • Adaptability • Positive relations with others **Problem-solving skills** • Ability to think abstractly and flexibly • Abililty to try different solutions **Autonomy** • Self-control, self-discipline • Clear sense of separate identity • Independence • Self-esteem • Exertion of control over environment **Sense of future and purpose** • Goal orientation • Persistence • Achievement and education orientation • Hope for bright future • Sense of faith • Healthy expectations	• Warm and close adult relationships • Positive relationships with other children • High expectations for success • Variety of opportunities (music, art, etc.) • Youth participation and involvement • Ability to contribute meaningfully • Acceptance and fulfillment of responsibilities • Ability to make decisions that affect them • A safe and predictable environment • Clear norms regarding tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs *Source:* Adapted from Geller & Hunt (1995).

Kohn (1996) reviewed so-called **behavior management** programs and concluded that most are antithetical to good teaching. Relying on coercion through various forms of rewards and punishments, such programs reinforce an *external locus of control,* in which motivation is influenced primarily by others, rather than the more desired *internal locus of control,* in which drive and effort come from the internal interests and initiative of the person. Teachers often become frustrated at students' lack of inner motivation, their "not doing anything unless they are told," when that is what typical behavior management programs actually promote.

Kohn (1992, 1993, 1996, 1999) and others (Goleman, 1995; Noddings, 2007; Sapon-Shevin, 1999, 2007) recommend that we assist students in taking control of their own learning; work to build community, respect, and responsibility in our classrooms; and move beyond competition to building cooperative learning and interactions (Johnson & Johnson, 1989a; 1994). When we do this, our behavior problems decrease.

Students with Differing Abilities in a Community of Learners

In a traditional competitive class, the self-esteem of students who don't do as well as others is always on the line as the class sorts itself into groups of nerds, jocks, and dummies. In an inclusive school, a student with rudimentary verbal language skills works in classes with a budding novelist, a gifted artist creates alongside others whose artistic abilities are very limited, a talented athlete teams up with an individual who has cerebral palsy and gets around in a wheelchair. Our goal, however, is for students to see differences yet learn to appreciate and value one another, working against the social sorting that breaks community. Rather than pretending that everyone is the same, students in effective inclusive schools recognize these differences and make a place for all, as the school and classroom community goes about its individual and corporate work. For students with obvious ability differences, a caring community provides a context in which they can build on their strengths, learning at their own level and developing self-esteem in the process (Grigal, 1998; Haring, Breen, Pitts-Conway, Lee, & Gaylord-Ross, 1998; Hughes et al., 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 1989a).

Schools to Visit
Building Community to Support Student Learning
West Orient Middle School
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West Orient Middle School, with 430 students in grades 5 through 8, has a long history of being a school that builds community. Several years ago, as the school construction committee worked on plans to remodel the old building set amidst farmland and tree nurseries, they invited students to join the

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planning committee. The students' first thought was: if the library was to be at a lower level, how would their friend Shawn get there? They were used to bumping his wheelchair across the rough playground and around the old school, but it was time to consider everyone's needs. Their question was not disability focused but friend focused. These students were key in reminding the adults that with the library at a lower level, there would need to be an elevator.

Today West Orient is a school that includes both students and parents in the development of school goals and in decision making. With concern about school safety on the minds of all parents, West Orient was a leader in making it a priority that all students feel safe and respected. This explicit goal is being accomplished through a focus on building relationships between teachers and students and student to student.

At West Orient community means that every student, even those with significant disabilities, is a valued integral member of the school. It's not unusual to see the principal or the vice-principal sitting in the cafeteria with a group of students, helping a student with significant disabilities eat lunch. This isn't seen as a job and relegated to an assistant or a teacher, but is a time for administrators to connect with students and enjoy the lunchroom commotion.

The students themselves know what community is about—not because it's a rule or they are supposed to be nice, but because they live it each day and watch their teachers value every child. Students see one another's value beyond what adults often see. When students look at Nick or Sarah or another friend who has a disability and see the enthusiasm that these friends bring to the class or recall that they are allowed to protest when they are upset or that they keep the most private of secrets, they see the depth of their friends. The students say things like "I hate it when Nick is sick, because he's the one who pipes up when things are getting boring. Sarah reminds the teacher to call on all of us—even when we're the quiet ones." Students are also quick to remind adults that teenagers need both time alone and time with their friends—not always with adults.

At West Orient it's the students who often lead the way in demonstrating that when we reach out to one another and build relationships, we build communities that are strong and supportive. It doesn't matter whether you have a disability, or are a fifth grader among eighth graders, or can't talk or read or write, or are the most athletic or musical; what matters is that you belong to the community at West Orient because you came through the door.

By Patti McVay, Outreach Center for Inclusive Education

Building a Culture of Community in the School
Adults Collaborating and Caring

Nancy Creech (personal communication, June 21, 2000), a multiage teacher, says, "The key is that I teach *children*." Not English, not the sixth grade, not math, but children. We have choices. On the one hand, we can work to build community and support prosocial behavior. On the other hand, we can seek first and foremost to control children and punish them when we can't.

As we work to create community in our school and class, we can expect this process to occur in stages. Community doesn't just happen. It is created through hard work and perseverance. Peck (1987) described a series of stages through which a group of people go as they build community:

1. The process starts with *pseudo-community*, a state in which people act as if they are community and are "nice" but do not connect.
2. Next, when people begin to speak the truth to communicate authentically, *chaos* ensues. Conflict occurs, and some people try to convince others that their position is correct. It is at this stage that people often give up. For example, staff may be angry at one another; students may get upset and withdraw sullenly.
3. If the group continues without falling apart, they next settle into *emptiness:* a time of waiting, listening, confusion. We literally do not know what to do, but we are there listening.
4. Eventually, people begin to communicate and listen to one another, reach out, and build an actual *community*—a state that is both felt and objectively real. This often starts with some genuine sharing on the part of one or two people. Gradually, their risk taking gives others courage, and others share too.
5. *Maintaining* community, of course, is an ongoing process as well. Oftentimes a group will recycle through earlier stages.

How does all this look with children and staff in a school? Sandy is a first-grade teacher and Michael a ninth-grade English teacher. Both seek to build community in their classes, and both describe some experiences that are similar each year. Both begin their year helping students get to know one another. They set up times to discuss how the classroom community is operating—each day for Sandy, once a week for Michael. Every year, they see Peck's cycle operate. At first, everyone is very friendly, chattering away. "I think they are actually hiding how nervous they are," explains Michael; Sandy nods her head in agreement. Then the conflicts begin. Each teacher facilitates discussions, but they allow students to air feelings. "They really get angry!" says Sandy. She often has to resist jumping in too quickly. Watching such conflicts, the group will settle into silence. Then a student will say, "You hurt my feelings." Another might say, "My mom got her feelings hurt last night." Suddenly the real sharing begins, the basis of community.
If we understand these stages, we can more clearly appreciate the difficulties and the richness of the project as we work toward community in our teaching. We will know that "niceness" and "pleasantness" are not real community. We'll also know that conflict and chaos are inevitable as we and our students actually open up to one another and build authentic relationships. We'll know that community is born out of a struggle to listen, share, and communicate honestly and authentically with respect—and that this struggle is an ongoing process that is never complete.

The Foundations of School Community

Let's now explore specific strategies for building community. First, three basic foundation stones are important.

Democratic and Collaborative Decision Making The first building block is democratic and collaborative decision making. For example: In a traditional school, the principal makes major decisions and tells teachers what to do; teachers in turn tell students. In an effective inclusive school, the principal allows teachers and other staff to work together to consider issues related to the whole school. At best, all school staff participate, including the secretary, the janitor, the teachers, the speech therapist, the lunch aides. Thus, teachers in the classrooms also utilize collaborative decision making on a regular basis, teaching children to make responsible decisions.

Democracy, of course, means that we can use our own influence, in collaboration with others, to make decisions and set directions—that is, to exercise power. In democracy we decide that our voice will be heard even, or perhaps especially, when those above us do not want to hear it. In standing for what we believe, we can model empowerment for students. We can create new energy and engage the support of others who are emboldened by our courage. This prevents the energy-draining disempowerment when we feel helpless (Apple, 1995; Banks, 1990; Skrtic, 1994).

Support for Teachers and Students The second school-wide foundation stone is the development of support for teachers, students, and others. In Chapter 5 we explored many support strategies and structures. As we collaborate, we form relationships and develop trust that mirrors the support and caring we give students in classrooms. It is very difficult to build community with our students if we do not have a supportive community among school staff. For example, as Fran, the art teacher, Cathy, the social studies teacher, and Randall, a special education teacher, work together to develop a multicultural unit on freedom, linking the experience of the Underground Railroad and the fight for freedom in South Africa, they develop a personal bond and enjoy one another. The students sense this, and it transforms the whole experience; and through the students' final assembly performance, the effects of the teachers' mutual support have an impact on the whole school.

Parent and Community Connections The third foundation stone is involvement and connection with parents and the larger community. In Chapter 6 we explored ways to build these relationships and connections. Here we point out that these connections are a critical part of building community in the school as we bring many people into the lives of our students.

Key School-wide Practices That Promote Community

We can walk into any school and within a very few minutes get a feel for its culture. We may be treated rudely or ignored by a secretary, hear teachers yelling at students, see the principal acting tense. Or we may see friendly people who ask if they can help us in an open way. Students and parents feel the climate of a school as well, and respond.

Creating a Child- and Family-Centered Vision First and foremost, we create a common vision of our school that is centered on children and families. If we see the school as driven by the goal of achieving higher test scores, we act differently than if our purpose is to create a supportive community where all grow and learn together. If we have a courageous and creative principal who supports child- and family-centered learning, we are fortunate. If we do not, we still can work toward this end and seek partners among other like-minded teachers and parents (Kohn, 1999; Schwartz & Pollishuke, 1990).

Building a Culture of Respect A clear indicator of school culture is the way teachers talk to and about children and parents, particularly those with whom they are having difficulty. I walk into Sharon Watson's class and I see her talking with her first graders in highly respectful tones. "Class, let me introduce you to our visitor," she says. She asks students questions, gets their opinions, listens to them. She is concerned about one child with whom she has not yet been able to develop a good relationship.

Where respect flourishes, staff and students interact openly and spontaneously. Laughter and smiles are frequent. In other schools, however, tension fills the air; people talk hesitantly, with restraint, with forced smiles and with laughter that does not feel genuine. It is essential that we work to respect others, communicate in caring ways, and model honesty and directness.

Collaborative Learning Circles How do we constantly renew ourselves, learn new teaching strategies, and build community with our coworkers? Increasingly, teachers gather, often supported by university faculty or staff development specialists, to share, talk, and explore innovative teaching. For example, at Barnard Elementary School, teachers meet every month after school as part of a "literacy circle." Teachers have taken the leadership in this group—deciding on scheduling, letting people know of meetings, setting the agenda. Learning circles are powerful, engaging, fun ways for teachers to grow that parallel best practices in our classrooms.

School-wide or Multi-class Themes for Learning Several teachers, or the whole school, adopt a common theme to organize learning. A high school, for example, might

focus on "working for justice" to link subjects throughout the building. Or teachers in first, third, and fifth grades might decide to involve their students in the theme of animals in captivity. They link subjects around this theme and develop collaborative activities across grade levels (Manning, Manning, & Long, 1994; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998).

School Celebrations for All We can promote community through schoolwide celebrations and assemblies, where we set a tone and demonstrate what we value. With the increased emphasis on raising standardized test scores, for example, many schools have assemblies honoring students who passed the test. Such awards ceremonies divide students who passed from those who did not.

In a whole school, celebrations recognize multiple talents and the gifts of all. We have awards for the most improved or the funniest; for hard workers; for caring and compassion; for creativity. Our assemblies are fun, involving students, parents, community members, and teachers. We sing songs; share stories; and break into small groups to act out a simple story involving teachers, students, and parents together. We look for ways to strengthen and celebrate our bonds with one another (Developmental Studies Center, 1994; Noddings, 2007).

Building a Community of Learners in Our Class
Valuing Our Differences and Helping One Another

When we use best teaching practices, we find multiple opportunities to build community. At the same time, as we have seen, community building supports academic learning. Let's now turn our attention to yearlong strategies and structures that help create community in our classroom.

Routines and Structures for Building Community: *Getting Started and Building throughout the Year*

Community starts and ends with daily classroom routines, building through small, ever present interactions and procedures. At the beginning of the year, we remember that first impressions, for adults as well as children, can endure; we seek from the beginning to set a tone and build a culture of mutual support. "What about the subjects—biology or spelling or math?" we are often asked. "Shouldn't we get into those right away?" Effective inclusive teachers take time for community-building activities. Teachers who intentionally work to build a community consistently believe this time to be well spent, establishing a foundation on which they build throughout the year (Denton & Kriete, 2000; Gibbs, 1998).

Responsive Classrooms A site with many resources related to building community and addressing social and emotional needs of children. Very practical resources and materials. www.responsiveclassroom.org/

Tribes is a process of building community, respect, and responsibility in a community of learners in a school. This site provides an introduction and resources related to this approach. www.tribes.com/

The **Center for Social and Emotional Learning** works to "promote positive and sustained school climate. . . that nurtures social, emotional, ethical, and intellectual skills and dispositions to enhance student performance, prevent drop outs, reduce physical violence, bullying, and develop healthy and positively engaged adults" by integrating "social and emotional learning with academic instruction". csee.net/climate/

What Do We Want to Learn? We involve our students early on in talking about what they want to learn. Linda, an eleventh-grade English teacher, for example, has students brainstorm ideas about the course, recording the suggestions on sheets of paper so all can see. The class then groups these ideas into workable themes. Linda has discovered that students often choose many ideas that she herself had and that are in the school curriculum. However, by helping to shape the class, students gain the feeling that it belongs to them and they are not just visiting (Manning, Manning, & Long, 1994).

Promoting Student Ownership through Democratic Exercise of Power Students need to understand that the classroom belongs to everyone, not just the teacher. This understanding must be fostered through careful thought and consideration. Students need opportunities to help create the rules that will govern their lives in the classroom. This does not mean sitting down in one setting and creating a list of rules. Creating classroom rules should start with asking students this question: "How do you want you year to be in this class? What would make it a great year?" We lead students in discussing everyone's ideas and how these hopes can become real. We then get students to work in small groups to categorize and group the ideas and then develop a few rules that cover all the ideas contributed. We insure that the voice of all students are heard and that some students do not dominate the conversation. This process is essential. We must be willing to give up the feeling of total control and to replace it with a feeling of pride in teaching students how to control themselves. Once the group agrees to the rules, we sign them, post them and refer to them often. We might say, "Lorinzo, that breaks the agreement you made to abide by rule number four." This system puts the

responsibility for actions on the students and reminds students of agreements made together (Manning, Manning, & Long, 1994; Peterson, 1992; Petrson, in-press; Sapon-Shevin, 1999, 2007).

"You Can't Say You Can't Play": *Classroom Rules That Promote Community* Any group of people can develop rules of conduct that encourage care and support or that create conflict, exclusion, and isolation. Students often reject one another, create cliques, or are cruel, reflecting the society around them. However, we will challenge students to promote rather than destroy community. When we see students creating divisive rules or acting out assumptions and prejudice, we ask them to think through these issues. Vivian Paley (1992) tells of her experience with a new rule she suggested to her kindergartners: "You can't say you can't play." She describes how her children sought to make this rule real and the dialogues that occurred as they presented their experience to older students. The rule helped children become more aware of ways in which they rejected one another and helped some isolated students join the classroom community.

Who Are We? *Getting to Know our Classroom Community* Early on we help students know each other, discovering commonalties and differences. During the first two weeks of the school year we intentionally engage in fun community activities, playing games that encourage interactions. This helps begin to build the culture of playing together. We ask students to bring pictures from home, make art projects together, organize classroom materials, read fun books, and share ideas. This begins to build the idea that the classroom belongs to everyone and everyone is important, while also giving the teacher some baseline data from which to begin instruction.

Daily Routines We either make or break community in daily routines. In elementary schools, going to the bathroom is one of the most important. For example: We enter Lowe Elementary School and see a class lined up. The teacher admonishes the children to stay quiet while trying to rush them to the bathroom. The noise of laughter and scuffling is heard through the bathroom door. In about twenty minutes, the teacher gets

the class back to work. In another class Bob explains that children go as they need, waving a bathroom pass to ask permission without interrupting; he nods yes and checks the clock to make sure they are not gone too long. The children sign in and out, providing data for a conversation on responsibility should that become necessary. This process teaches children responsibility while not wasting learning time.

We must help students take on responsibilities and provide supportive structures to enable them to do so. Each basic daily routine can be fun while teaching dependability. Lets take a look at some ways to build responsibility throughout the day of a 4th grade classroom.

8:20 Children enter the room and get materials out of their backpack and cubby for the day. They move a magnet with their name on it to hot or cold lunch. One student signs the lunch slip and will later hand out the cards to students with hot lunch. He asks Sara, a blind student, if she is having hot lunch, and signs her up. He then leaves, after waving at the teacher and returns quickly for morning meeting.

8:30 The children meet on the carpet for morning meeting. They bring daily planners that the school provides, in which they write down what homework is due and upcoming events. Children have homework buddies that check to see if each person has turned in their homework and written down the appropriate items.

8:50 Children line up for specials. One child is the line leader, stopping at certain points that she has learned so the teacher can wait. There is no conversation from the students or teacher.

9:30 During writing time, the children are working at their tables with partners, while the teacher meets with a small group. One child uses the sign language signal for bathroom to ask for permission. The teacher nods her head without interrupting the conversation with the group.

10:15 When writing time is over, the teacher signals that by turning on a lively CD. The children dance to the theme as they transition to the carpet area for math. They bring math journals, dry erase boards and markers to work on the teacher directed math portion.

10:45 The teacher begins singing songs from the class musical they are preparing for as the children move to play a math game to strengthen skills. As the children get to loud, the teacher moves to a designated spot in the room. As she moves to that spot, children begin to quiet automatically. She moves a rainstick around to get their attention and then waits. They quiet down and listen.

11:15 The children get ready to leave for lunch. The teacher asks trivia questions related to their study as they move quickly around the room doing designated jobs. They stay quiet to hear the questions and move quickly to be allowed to leave for lunch.

Class Meetings Classroom meetings are important tools for engaging students in decision-making regarding needs and problems. Many effective teachers meet frequently, whether about teasing, staying on task, turning in homework, or celebrating an accomplishment. Meetings vary in length; some may be only ten minutes, others longer. Both students and the teacher chose topics for classroom meetings by anonymously writing issue topics and putting them in a box, allowing those not comfortable with sharing aloud to have their needs addressed.

Classroom meetings are run by children, not by the teacher—a difficult shift for some teachers. Students take turns in the roles of note taker and moderator. The class establishes basic rules that allow students to speak one at a time, often using a designated object (a "talking stick," for example) to pass to the person who has the floor to speak. Students are not required to speak and may pass if they want. Most importantly, when the class makes a decision, action occurs (Gibbs, 1998; Noddings, 2007; Sapon-Shevin, 1999).

Sharing: Celebration, Joys, Challenges, Grief, and Pain If our class is a community, it must be first and foremost a place of sharing—sharing of hopes, dreams, joys, fears, challenges, and sometimes hurt, grief, and pain. As teachers we model by taking risks, sharing our own lives with students. This will encourage students similarly to share with one another. In an elementary classroom students write daily in journals about events in their lives and share them in "morning news," which we can record on chart paper and edit. This information could go into our weekly class newsletter. We can use a similar time in a high school class. The more trust we create, the more students will share during this time (Gibbs, 1998; Peterson, 1992; Sapon-Shevin, 1999). Teachers read journals when they are placed in a certain basket, responding quickly with highlighters and sticky notes, thus increasing the relationship between student and teacher.

Along with daily sharing, we also need routines for special times. Celebrating special events creates a feeling of community. We are alert for events in our students' lives—achievements, family events (weddings, graduations, etc.). We make sure that every birthday is celebrated, whether the parents do or not. We look for opportunities to tell students that we appreciate their work, help in class, or caring acts.

Sometimes, when a student is having a hard time, the total class helps the student. Perhaps a student's father has died and she is crying. We might ask if she would like share what happened and tell the class about her father. Students could offer sympathy and practical ways to help. One year in Tanya's second grade class a child had all of their Christmas gifts stolen and the family had no money for more. The children secretly called his mother and asked what he would like best. They then pitched in and bought him some Christmas gifts.

Communicating Respectfully "When you are done writing, please match eyes with me so I'll know we can go on. Renae ready?" said Shawna. This is an example of a respectful strategy for interacting with students to move from topic to topic. Through respectful communication we promote acceptance in the class and do not embarrass students or put them on the spot. For example, anytime students don't want to talk, they just say "pass." They will be more likely to respond later. If they pass all the time, we talk with them individually. We invite students to participate but do not demand participation. As we make transitions, we say: "Would you bring your writing/conversation to a close, please?" Waiting respectfully, we say "Thank you" to those who do stop (Schiller, 1998). However, we do *not* compare students to one another: "I really like the way Renae stopped when I asked her to." Students recognize this as a manipulative ploy rather than true appreciation.

We communicate respect (or lack of it) as we respond to our most difficult students. In a fourth-grade class, Jennifer was arguing insistently with the teacher. Although the teacher tried to stay calm, she finally began yelling at Jennifer. Another student muttered, "Great! Now she'll be mad at all of us." When the teacher treats all students with respect, despite their behavior, they are more comfortable taking risks and sharing. When they feel intimidated or worried, however, the community bond is broken.

Making Choices Children need both help from adults in the form of structure and freedom to make choices. We can establish many ways to give students reasonable choices. Often we can present options to the entire group and allow students to make selections through discussion. *Daily choices* students make include:

1. *Order of work*: We let students choose the order of work activities within the routine they have created. For example, math and theme studies are in the morning, but should they learn the new math lesson or go over homework first? The language arts block is in the afternoon. Should they do reading or writing workshop first?
2. *Day-to-day goals:* Students identify daily goals related to academics or behaviors. Teachers suggest, but do not demand, goals, chosen reflectively, that need improvement. This is done as a class at the beginning of the day, and the daily goal is posted in the room and is referenced often. The goal is revisited prior to choosing the goal for the following day.
3. *What to read/write:* During reading or writing workshop, students select books to read and stories to write. The teachers pick the genre, but students select the content.

Periodic choices include:

1. *What to learn:* At the beginning of the year or of each unit, we find out what students would like to learn and incorporate their ideas.
2. *Seating arrangement:* Although students have assigned seats for collaborative group work, a student rarely needs to sit in an assigned seat at other times. Students may sit in a preferred location as long as they are working. Teachers help students understand that the total room belongs to them all, no matter whose things are at a given seat. This provides many student options and facilitates more effective use of available space.
3. *Choice time:* Our curriculum is most often determined by our school district. Therefore, students do not often have the ability to choose topics of interest to them. However, we can provide time, whether at a certain time every day, an hour once a week, or the beginning twenty minutes of the hour every Friday, for students to direct their own learning. This is important in developing lifelong learners. We can let them select their own topics or offer suggestions such as researching favorite basketball players on-line, a physics experiments they conduct on their own, creating a rich textural plan on paper and then building it with blocks, or reading books that are too easy but are fun and relaxing.

Games and Learning Activities That Build Community Whether in the first five minutes of an hour class or during recess time, we can take time to play games that encourage community. Most games can be used, with adaptations, at all ages. Community-building games involve everyone in the class and are cooperative, as opposed to competitive: Students learn that for them to win, others do not have to lose. Rather, they learn that for one to win, all must cooperate and win together. Community games also teach conflict resolution and demonstrate commonalities and understanding of one another. The figure on page 357 summarizes some fun community building games based on the work of Mara Sapon-Shevin (1999), many of which can be played in ten or fifteen minutes.

Games That Promote Community Building

GAME AND DESCRIPTION

1. *Cooperative musical chairs:* Children try to make sure that every person is on a chair, whether there are two people on a chair or six. This involves helping instead of pushing the slower and weaker ones out.
2. *Children write facts and fictions about themselves,* and class has to decide which is which. Or students write clues about themselves and class guesses who they are.
3. *Stand up/sit down* in categories or move to different walls. This shows students how they are alike and different.
4. *"Make a group":* Call out something, like a kind of breakfast food, and students who fit that category

make groups of three or more. Change categories constantly so students are moving around a lot.

5. *Mimic others' actions:* For example, pretend to toss different objects while the other person catches them, or pass faces or sounds around a circle.

6. *Riddle concentration:* Each student has a card with either question or answer. Play like child's game Memory to find matches. Students can get help from classmates sitting on either side. Put matches in middle and cheer when all win.

7. *Get in groups by birthday month:* Each group makes rhyming chant about its month, then presents it.

8. *Hug tag:* Put in groups of two or three. One or more children are given a red flag or sock, which they try to give to other children. Children are "safe" if they are in a group that is hugging one another. When the teacher says "switch" the groups disband and regroup while the "huggit" tries to give the flag away.

9. *Tug of peace:* Stand in circle with rope, hold out with two hands; all pull together, leaning back, to pull everyone up at same time; Cheer; try to sit down without falling.

10. *Hula hoop pass:* In circle children hold hands and try to pass hula hoop from one person to next without letting go of the others' hands. Do with one then two together.

11. *Cooperative stories:* Retell aloud a story about a certain subject or chain of events. Each person adds line to story so it makes sense.

12. *Nonverbal lineups* on different topics. Students line up in order based on chosen topic. They must communicate without talking.

13. *Cooperative word sentences:* Put words on cards. One student has verbs, another adjectives, another with nouns, and so on. In groups of four to six, make different kinds of sentences—longest, funniest, and so on. Must use word from each person's set, and each person must be able to say the word to get credit, thus the peer tutoring aspect.

14. *Cooperative 20,000 pyramid:* In groups students generate clues to get people to guess items in a certain category—for example, among citrus fruits, to guess orange, lemon, and so on. Make sure clues are not misleading. Then play. Students need to use lots of skills to generate good clues. Can change skill level by selection of categories or by timing the game. Each team discusses as they hear each clue and decides whether to answer or ask for another clue.

Source: Adapted from Sapon-Shevin (1999).

Multilevel Cooperative Learning Working together helps students accomplish tasks they could not do alone. Students can work together on any subject, whether reading a chapter book together or teaming up as editing partners or math homework partners. We create projects that require that students work together, but at different jobs requiring types and levels of expertise. For a science experiment, for example, differing students have the following job roles: obtain materials, set up the experiment, read directions, record results, share with the class, and draw a picture of what happened. Every student has a job at their own level on which others depend. Students learn that each person has different strengths to contribute (Cohen, E., 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1989a, 1994).

Cross-Grade-Level Interactions Interactions across grade levels also strengthen community. Older students might pair with younger partners to read once a week. Classes might do research or art projects together, take field trips, write a story together, or share completed work (Nesbitt, 1991; Sapon-Shevin, 1999).

Clock Partners From kindergarten through high school, a good way to pair students for activities is the *clock partners* technique. Each student has a large clock drawn on a sheet of paper with a line at each hour. Students sign each other's clocks at the same time. For instance, Jeremy and Amy both decide to be two-o'clock partners together. Students go around the room till they have a partner for each hour. They cannot have the same partner twice. Also, if someone asks, the student cannot say no. For an activity, we ask students to get their clocks and join up with, for example, their ten-o'clock partner. This simple strategy removes the aggravations often associated with pairing students—no more hurt feelings or efforts to separate students who always work together.

Sharing Work. Sharing completed work gives students a sense of pride in their own accomplishments and appreciation for others, building self-esteem and community simultaneously. When a writing project is completed, we share together as a class, have a book signing to which adults are invited, or read stories to other classes. At the end of a unit, we can have a celebration for which children prepare activities and set up projects, skits, and written work showing their learning; we invite other classes or parents to attend. This raises the level of expectation, knowing there will be a real audience to prepare for and adds others into our community(Schiller, 1998).

Student Roles in the Learning Community

We develop opportunities and structures within which students can help and support one another. In addition, we explicitly teach students *how* to do this.

Student Classroom Leadership When students exercise leadership, they increase their understanding, sense of responsibility, and self-esteem. In the class community every student has a job and takes responsibility for it without constant reminders. We recently observed a classroom in which all twenty-five students had meaningful and needed jobs—watering the plants, straightening books, passing out materials, helping on computers.

As students make choices, leadership roles often evolve naturally. We rely on some students to serve as peer mediators, to be members of circles of support, to give comfort, or to lead and facilitate discussions. Students may help design the way we approach the curriculum or give input as to how to help students who are having difficulty learning.

Helping Others as Experts Students need experience teaching others. To teach someone about something, a child must have a deeper understanding of that subject. By having children explain their thought processes to others, we teach a much needed skill and

demonstrate that everyone can be an expert. Our class becomes transformed into a place where there are many people to ask for help, not merely one teacher who cannot be everywhere at once (Fuchs, Fuchs, Kazdan, & Allen, 1999). We also help students understand the difference between helping and doing the work for a peer.

Sights to See
Emotional and Academic Learning Together

Emotional Intelligence: An Overview Many innovative school programs integrate social and emotional learning with more traditional academic areas, providing students with skills they'll need throughout their adult lives. 7 min Includes showing putting on a student newscast and show daily www.edutopia.org/emotional-intelligence-overview

Educating Hearts: "A Districtwide Commitment to Teaching How to Care The Anchorage, Alaska, school system's investment in social and emotional learning is paying off both socially and academically". www.edutopia.org/anchorage-social-emotional-learning-video

Students often enjoy leading lessons they have seen taught several times. Maybe the physics class always starts out with an example problem that is discussed. We rotate students who choose the homework problem and lead the discussion. This strategy gives students a learning opportunity that is both powerful and fun; it also provides an excellent window into their thinking.

We can ask students to help others after finishing their work. Alternatively, we may ask one student to teach a few other students a new skill that the whole class needs to learn and then send others to this expert group for help. This is an excellent way for students who normally finish last to have experience being a leader.

Students can be experts on any subject—spelling, adding, dividing, proving theorems, capital letters, the Internet, quotation marks, making a cursive m, even quantum physics. The key is to teach the students to share knowledge—and to accept information from others (Au, Mason, & Scheu, 1995; Girard & Willing, 1996).

We are also careful to assure that all students have the opportunity to share expertise as well as be helped by others. We will be particularly attentive to abilities that a student with a severe disability has to share with others and facilitate their being able to do so. When a student who is learning our language, we look for ways she can share about her language and culture.

Buddies, Tutors, and Peer Mentors Sometimes we formalize ways for learners to help one another. We might, for example, pair students on an ongoing basis as *study buddies.* (For older students, we'd call it something else, obviously—class partners.) Or we could shift such pairings more frequently; across subject pairing certain students in reading and others in math, or changing pairings from week to week (Girard & Willing, 1996; Sapon-Shevin, 1999).

More and more schools are utilizing ***cross-age buddies and tutors:*** older students who serve as tutors, reading buddies, and mentors for younger children. It is not unusual to walk into an elementary school and see a high school student reading with an eight-year-old or helping a fifth grader with his/her math assignment (Nesbitt, 1991). Students with special challenges themselves can also very effectively serve as tutors, mentors, and helpers for other students. For example, a sixth-grade student struggling to read sixth-grade material can fluently read a story to a first-grade student.

Some schools operate formal peer tutoring programs in which students receive training, provide tutoring, and receive credit. In one high school, students considered at risk because of academic and behavioral problems mentored students with mental retardation. The students with mental retardation developed friends and were able to negotiate the school environment. The self-esteem and academic performance of the at-risk students increased dramatically as they were successful in a highly responsible role (Fitzgerald, Henning, & Feltz, 1997; Murray-Seegert, 1989).

Circles of Support A *circle of support* (sometimes called circle of friends) is a powerful way to help when students need more intentional, intensive support. The idea is simple: We ask peers, friends, and family of a student to come together to provide support. Although circles were born to help students with disabilities, they are powerful tools for anyone. A student coming into our class having just immigrated to the United States may not speak our language well. A student with autism may have difficulty relating to others. A student with an abusive father may be doing poorly in school.

To get started we ask students if they would like to have a circle of support. An adult acts as a facilitator for the group. A social worker or psychologist meets with students during the day after school or on the weekend to facilitate a circle meeting. Some teachers have met with circles on their lunch hour or during their planning period (Peterson, Tamor, Feen, & Silagy, 2002). In other situations, teachers have taught students about circles and students conducted circles during the school day. Most school circles meet at the school building. Circles, however, may choose to meet at home or in a community setting.

Students themselves decide whom to invite to their circle. A student, with our help, can issue an open invitation to all students within a class. In other situations, when a student is new to our room and does not know anyone, we ask for class volunteers.

Once the group is selected and a meeting time and place established, the group meets. Most circles have found it helpful to use some form of person-centered planning, like the MAPS process described in Chapter 4, to focus. In a MAP, the "focus person" and the group explore the dreams and fears of the student and develop an action plan, including assistance from circle members. One teacher used a very simple version of this process, asking a student what help he wanted. The circle then identified ways they could help (Peterson, Tamor, Feen, & Silagy, 2002).

Circles have been very powerful. In Chapter 1 we described Judith Snow's experience with the first formalized circle of support. In schools circles have helped students with challenges by helping with many issues—homework, problems with relationships, the blues. In Kitchener, Ontario, we visited with the circle of friends of May, an eighth grader with Down syndrome. This group of young people had greatly helped May to be part of their class. They decried the "life skills class," where, they said, May "was not learning anything." What was particularly interesting, however, was the critical thinking and problem solving going on among these students (Falvey, Forest, Pearpoint, & Rosenberg, 1998; O'Brien & O'Brien, 1992).

When we spoke with Linda, early in this chapter, about Kevin, she also spoke of a circle of support. She talked with Kevin and his mother, asked him to suggest five children he wanted to be involved, and then she asked the children one-on-one. Even though these third graders gave up one recess a week and knew it was a working commitment, not one of them said no. "It says something about the community we have built," said Linda. "Children can meet very high expectations." The children began by deciding who would help Kevin with reading and other needs he expressed. We were struck by the fact that the children wanted to help Kevin with subjects in which they needed improvement also.

We can get more information through Inclusion Press (see www.inclusion.com). The developers of MAPS and circle of support concepts strongly urge that we invite friends and family to our own circle and MAPS session before facilitating a circle for someone else. You'll be surprised how valuable and fun this is (Falvey, Forest, Pearpoint, & Rosenberg, 1998; O'Brien & O'Brien, 1992).

Journey into the Classroom
A Circle of Friends Makes a Difference

The story of Brandon and his circle of support demonstrates the power of friendship and how children can help one another given the resources and opportunity. Brandon entered Trina's class in the 3rd grade. He had a cognitive disability impaired student and was reading and writing at a pre-kindergarten level. He was sweet, emotionally young, and very likeable. Through the strong community that Trina built in her class he quickly found a group of friends that loved being with him. Two of these friends had also been in his first and second grade class where Brandon had been fully included.

At the end of the second grade, the school psychologist had recommended that Brandon go to a separate special education class in another school. This surprised the teachers and principal. They decided to visit the special education class. Trina, the teacher in whose class Brandon would be in if he went to 3rd grade at their school went along as well. All were shocked at how much more Brandon was able to do than other students in the class and how limited the curriculum was. It was obvious that Brandon would regress in this situation. "Our Brandon simply can't go there," said Terry, the second grade teacher. Marshall, the principal, and Trina heartily agreed.

Trina said, "I want Brandon to be in my class". They made plans for her to be supported by the special education teacher and occupational therapist who was part-time in the school. However, Brandon really needed help and support from his peers as well.

One day Trinia asked Brandon if he would like to have a circle of friends help him. As she explained he liked the idea. She asked him for permission to invite friends to join them including the two friends he had been with for two years.

The first meeting was held at lunchtime and was fascinating. After discussing dreams and fears with Brandon, they began to come up with a plan. They decided that each of the 5 students in the circle would help him in a different subject. One student chose math because that was his favorite subject and math with Brandon sounded fun.

One little girl said she wanted to be in charge of helping with spelling. Trina was a bit taken aback, as this student was not very strong herself at spelling. "Why would you like to do that Lisa?" she asked. Lisa said, "If I help Brandon with spelling that will help me spell better also because it will give me more practice." "Out of the mouths of babes", thought Trina as she smiled.

After writing their plan they chose something fun to do together. This continued every week for the next two years (the teacher looped with her class). The weekly meeting always included plans to improve subjects, celebrations of what Brandon had done well that week, and discussion of how the other children were doing as well.

Over time the focus shifted from solely being on Brandon to how the whole group was doing in their lives. They always did something fun together, and as time went on they began to hang out together outside of school. When these children went on to 5th grade, Trina made sure they were in the same class and asked the teacher to provide them time to run their meetings each week. By the time they all reached middle school the group was functioning on its own, without an adult running it or even always being present. They were no longer doing something an adult had asked them to do. They were not "helping" another student. They had become part of each other's lives. They had become a 'kids club' and were helping one another. Due to Tina taking the time and effort to help create and support this group, lifelong friendships were created and Brandon was provided support that helped him be successful. That is what good circles are all about.

Reflection: A major need in our society is the nurturing of people helping one another in communities. Circles of support provide students with special needs important supports in schools. As important, however, they give all students a concrete learning experience, leadership education you might say, in understanding how people can help one another. This is a life changing experience with long-term positive impact.

Celebrating Differences

We help students learn to understand and value one another. Simultaneously, we work to (1) understand common needs of all as human beings across our differences; and (2) explore ways in which human beings are different and ways in which these differences contribute to the total community. We seek to build an inclusive community in which students notice, value, and celebrate differences that include race, culture, language, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, age, and more. These differences provide a rich tapestry for learning and exploration that can cross subject areas. We help our students experience and understand different perspectives, the influences of life experiences, and the contribution that each person can make to the whole, enhancing learning and community building simultaneously.

Intentionally Promoting Inclusion and Relationships Daily we work to support students in developing positive, caring relationships. If Jorge seems isolated, we look for opportunities to pair him with supportive classmates. If Anthony has a difficult time handling his emotions, we may ask some students if they could help Anthony out or group him with socially skilled, emotionally stable peers. If students seem afraid of Mary, a girl with severe cerebral palsy who must struggle to speak and is sometimes loud in the process, we ponder ways we can help classmates understand and support her. For it is certain that if some students do not have friendships and supportive relationships, these students are feeling isolated, fearful, sometimes angry, and our classroom community is weakened.

Frames of Relationship

FRAME	SAMPLE WORDS	SAMPLE ACTIONS
Ghost/guest	"Nothing to do with us!"	Being invisible, ignored, excluded
Inclusion kid/different friend	"He is weird."	Differential treatment by everyone
	"She is cute."	Affection
	"It's not nice to tease special students!"	Politeness
Kid who needs help	"Can I push him to science?"	Helping
	"It's my turn to help her."	
Just another kid	"It's no big deal."	Typical reciprocal interactions
	"Like everyone else."	
One of my friends	"He's just my friend."	Hanging
	"He's got my back."	Affection
		Invitations to parties
		Having fun together
Best friends forever	"Part of my life."	Hanging
	"Best friend."	Having fun together
	"Trust with anything."	

Source: Adapted from Fisher (2001).

Fisher (2001) developed a helpful framework for understanding the social place of any child within the class. If a child is at risk for being marginalized, this framework helps us consider our options. In ways, it is a more detailed breakdown of the journey from benevolence to community that we described in Chapter 1. As we think about children, how do they interact? Is there one child who has no "regular friends" or "friends forever" but has many "helpers?" Is one child actually ignored by almost everyone (a "ghost/guest")? What might we do to change that? One teacher brought a situation like this to the attention of students, who subsequently invited the child to their house on

the weekend. Do all children get to be helped? Perhaps Lisa, who is labeled gifted, is always helping other students but not receiving help herself. Might we suggest that a student with cerebral palsy help Lisa in an area in which he is strong?

Ability Differences Up Front It is important to help students understand and accept that we all have different abilities and that these differences do not make us better or worse. Teaching students about multiple intelligences is one constructive way to do this. Personal knowledge of multiple intelligences helps students who function lower in some areas look at their strengths in other areas. We also help students understand that different students will be working at different levels.

As we do this, we are providing enormous learning that will benefit students in later life. Students learn to value and look for one another's abilities. They learn how to work effectively with people having very different abilities.

The example we set as we interact with students with obvious ability differences is most important. If we are frustrated with and belittle a student for lack of understanding, if we ignore or isolate such a student, we will promote these responses in other students as well. In contrast, we model respect and teach students practical strategies for supporting one another (Sapon-Shevin, 1999; Tomlinson, 1999).

Children's Literature Literature is a powerful tool for engaging students in understanding differences and experiencing the human condition from different perspectives. Many children's books deal explicitly with issues that confront children. We've listed just a few excellent resources in the chart below. We can read and discuss such books aloud; or students may read and discuss them in literacy circles, write their own stories and compare their experiences with characters in the story, and/or act out parts, playing different roles and reflecting on the life of the person portrayed (Sapon-Shevin, 1999). See the figure below for some examples.

Don't Feel Sorry for Paul. Wolf, 1974. Lippincott. I	Paul was born with incompletely formed hands and feet but is first and foremost a child—riding his bike, going to school, at a birthday
Rachel. Fanshawe, 1977. Bradbury. P	Picture book for young children that illustrates how Rachel navigates her life in a wheelchair—swimming, being part of a Brownie troop, going on vacations.
I Have a Sister—My Sister Is Deaf. Peterson, 1977. Harper. P	A sensitive book in which a girl tells about her sister and how she handles being deaf.
My Friend Jacob. Clifton, 1980. Dutton. P	Fiction; two high school students, one of whom has abilities far below typical for his age, are friends.
The Balancing Girl. Rabe, 1981. Dutton. P	Story of two students—one, in a wheelchair, can line up dominoes and then make them all fall down together; the other feels the need to knock down the dominoes. They work through this conflict.
Jamaica Tag-Along. Havill, 1989. Houghton Mifflin. P	An African American girl is rejected by her brother and does the same to a younger child. After she realizes that she's doing the same thing, they build a sand castle together, and finally her brother joins her as well.
Living in Two Worlds. Rosenberg, 1986. Lee & Shepard. I	Photo essay about biracial children that describes segregation and prejudice in housing, culture, and religion and conveys the pain of being teased.
Come Sit by Me. Merrifield, 1990. Women's Press. P	A young boy in a day care center has AIDS, and some children won't play with him—but Karen does.
The Big Orange Splot. Pinkwater, 1977. Scholastic. P	Mr Plumbean lives on a "neat street." He decides to paint his house to illustrate his dreams. At first the neighbors are upset, but by the end the street has all sorts of new designs!
Fly Away Home. Bunting, 1991. Clarion. P	A homeless boy scrounges for food and shelter at the airport where he lives with his father. He is given hope when a bird escapes from the terminal.
White Socks Only. Coleman, 1996. Albert Whitman. I	A young African American girl takes off her shoes and steps to the "Whites Only" water fountain in her white socks. A controversy ensues, ending with the removal of the sign on the fountain forever.

The Number on My Grandfather's Arm. Adler, 1987. UAHC Press. P	A little girl's grandfather tells her the story of the concentration camp in Hitler's Germany after she notices a number on his arm.
Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt. Hopkinson, 1993. Knopf. P	Twelve-year-old Clara, a seamstress slave, escapes on the Underground Railroad, leaving behind a quilt that shows the directions to the North for others.

P = Primary; I = Intermediate; A = Advanced   *Source:* Adapted from Sapon-Shevin (1999).

Thematic Units We can study human differences as a thematic unit. We might even use the categories of difference listed previously. For example, one thematic unit could be: How do people differ in intellectual abilities? This question could lead into an exploration using multiple intelligences as a framework and include a study of IQ tests. Or we could explore the history of people who are deaf or differing ethnic groups. One teacher did an extended study project, for example, on "Coming to America." Students read books, researched ways groups came to America, interviewed family members, and wrote the stories of their families, which were then read in class by parents. Another group of students investigated civil rights of persons with disabilities. They interviewed local people, invited presenters, and enacted a drama of the takeover of the president's office at Berkeley in California in 1972 (Manning, Manning, & Long, 1994; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998).

In the End
The Growing Circles of Community

At first building a community of third graders, eighth graders, or high school seniors may seem a bit far-fetched. After all, most of us have experienced schools where feelings were not considered important. Many of us probably long for deeper community—yet many of us have been hurt so often by interactions with others that the idea of a caring community seems questionable.

We would do well to look at ourselves and explore how our own needs for belonging, love, power, freedom, and fun are being met. What is our experience of community? What do we understand? Have we had positive experiences that lead us to understand community, or will we need to feel our way carefully from scratch?

The fact is that the hunger for an unmet need for community is strong for many people, underlining the potentially powerful impact of community in our class. This fact also makes the challenge greater as we learn. Yet it seems reasonable to hope that we can be

community-building leaders in our schools. Teachers all over the world are building a literature of practices that far extend the beginnings we've sketched in this chapter. The community-building movement in neighborhoods, churches, businesses, and whole municipalities is similarly growing, and there is much from which to learn. We have to be wise in the process, of course. What Peck (1987) calls pseudo-community—everyone smiling and being nice—is not real. Community building is a journey that's full of both excitement and many false paths, but we'll find that it's key to teaching.

We may also find that the community we build with students contributes to a richness in our own lives that we wouldn't have thought possible. When we are greeted enthusiastically by students in the grocery store, when a college student we had in the fourth grade drops by to introduce us to his fiancee, when the whole student body throws us a farewell party as we move to another school, we'll reflect on community and the circling impacts of genuine care and support.

For students to learn, they must feel safe and emotionally secure. Otherwise they become tense and it is very difficult for them to take in new information. For this reason building a caring community in which students feel that they are welcome and that they belong is critical for learning. Caring classroom communities go far to help *prevent* many social and behavioral challenges and provide a setting in which *problem solving* among the community can occur when difficulties do occur. Creating a caring community throughout the school, through a warm atmosphere, friendly staff, and connections to the community is vital for encouraging learning and growth.

We intentionally build community in our class on a daily basis. Responding to the social and emotional needs are part of what we teach. We have many strategies to build community —such as giving students involvement in the decoration of the room, providing jobs that make students actually responsible for much of the functioning of the class, holding class meetings, promoting peer learning, and establishing circles of support.We provide safe classrooms, where a lot of high order thinking and learning is going on because children are emotionally secure and feel free to take risks, regardless of the hurtful things going on in the children's lives. We are attentive to helping potentially marginalized students be connected in class, creating interactive opportunities, problem solving with students, creating structures through which students can develop real friendships as well as be helped. We explicitly help children learn about and appreciate differences among themselves, teaching them strategies to tap into classmates' strengths and to help one another.

Traveling Notes

For students to learn, they must feel safe and emotionally secure. Otherwise they become tense and it is very difficult for them to take in new information. For this reason building a caring community in which students feel that they are welcome and that they belong is critical for learning. Here are a few notes from this chapter of key ideas you can take with you.

1. Caring classroom communities go far to help *prevent* many social and behavioral challenges and provide a setting in which *problem solving* among the community can occur when difficulties do occur.
2. Creating a caring community throughout the school, through a warm atmosphere, friendly staff, and connections to the community is vital for encouraging learning and growth.
3. We intentionally build an inclusive, caring community in our class moment by moment each day in our class. Responding to the social and emotional needs of our students is simply part of what we teach.
4. We have many strategies to build community —such as giving students involvement in the decoration of the room, providing jobs that make students actually responsible for much of the functioning of the class, holding class meetings, promoting peer learning, and establishing circles of support.
5. When we foster emotionally safe classrooms, we find that more learning and high order thinking occurs because children are emotionally secure and are willing to take risks, regardless of the hurtful things going on in their lives.
6. We attend carefully to helping potentially marginalized students be connected in class, creating interactive opportunities, facilitating problem solving, and developing structures through which students can develop friendships as well as support one another.
7. We explicitly help children learn about and appreciate differences among themselves, teaching them strategies to tap into classmates' strengths and to help one another.

**Stepping Stones
To Whole Schooling**

Following are some learning activities that may extend your understanding of ideas and actions you may take towards building community in your school and classroom.

1. Make a checklist of the community-building practices we have described in this book. Check community-building practices you do and do not see being used. What

is the impact on the behaviors and learning of students? How could you strengthen the community in your own classroom? Locate a teacher who uses circles of friends. Observe a meeting and interview the students involved. How do they feel about this responsibility? How has it enriched their own lives? How has it changed the life of the student they are helping?

2. Interview a parent of a child who has been having "behavioral problems" in school. What has been occurring in the classroom? How is community built in the classroom and how has the teacher responded to the problems? What conclusions might you draw?

3. Find out what children are included in a local school district. Where do the children go who do not attend regular classrooms? Visit one of these rooms. Interview the students to find out how they feel about their school setting. What does this say about community?

4. Identify teachers in your school who are using different community-building strategies. Approach these teachers and talk with them about what they do. Ask to visit their class; write down notes of what you see, take pictures of what they do, and organize these into a booklet that you can pass out to all staff.

5. Locate a school that uses peer buddies and mentors. Observe and interview students involved in this process. What do they think? How does the system help them learn? How do they feel about the process?

6. Have a party and ask each teacher to talk about one positive happening with a child who is having difficulty in the class. Celebrate these achievements!