DEVELOPING AN EMPATHIC MINDSET IN THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY

SARAH KREMER, LPCC, ATR-BC
DIRECTOR, RESILIENCE CONSULTATION PROGRAM

NEW TEACHER CENTER CONFERENCE 02/13/17
• Originally founded in 1994 as Cleo Eulau Center
• Mental health agency focused on education and learning environments
• Support teachers, students and entire school community by
  • fostering healthy relationships
  • developing resilience in both youth and educators
• Educate on direct connection between emotions and learning
• Create more vital, healthy, and positive learning environments
Mission

Acknowledge Alliance is dedicated to promoting lifelong resilience in children and youth by strengthening the caring capacity of the adults who influence their lives.
Burnt out! Overwhelmed...

Test scores
Common core
* Need more support

Social Emotional Learning

Creative thinker
Leader
Great communicator
Problem solver

The power of classroom wellness
Acknowledge Alliance
Group Agreements

• Mutual Respect
• Share the Stage
• Commit to Cause
• Speak from your Own Experience
• Allow Facilitators to Guide the Process
• Technology Off/Silent
- Framework
  - School-based relationships
  - *Empathic Mindset*
  - Building relationships
- Group activities
  - Brainstorm
  - Role play
  - Discussions
- Individual reflection
  - Pair sharing
TEST POLL: Who was your first love?

- School sweetheart: 48%
- Pet: 23%
- Family member: 25%
- Other: 5%

Poll is full and no longer accepting responses.
How are you feeling right now? ONE WORD ANSWER

Poll is full and no longer accepting responses
How often do you use feelings in the classroom?

- Not at all: 48%
- Sometimes: 53%

Poll is full and no longer accepting responses.
Social-Emotional Well-Being & the Learning Process

50% cognitive

50% social-emotional
What is Empathy?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw
School Relationships

Human relationships are at the heart of schooling.

The interactions that take place between students, teachers, and among students are more central to student success than any method of teaching literacy, or science, or math.

When powerful relationships are established between teachers and students, these relationships frequently can transcend the economic and social disadvantages that afflict communities and schools alike in inner city and rural areas.

*Cummins, 1996*
“I have a mantra: Develop a relationship. Presume there’s a mind in there, ready to teach you something you don’t know.”

Rosenblum, 2016
Brainstorming

1. Think of a challenging situation with struggling students
2. Agree upon one situation for everyone
Role Play! (Small groups)
Research: Knowing Student Raises Achievement

• Intervention of finding similarities between teachers and students
• When teachers saw similarities between themselves and their students, they rated those relationships as better and students received higher grades
• *No change in student perceptions of teacher*
• Achievement gap was reduced by more than 60% (among Black and Latino students)
Strategy: Getting to Know You Survey

Get to know your students from day one
A quick online survey that helps you and your students learn about each other.

Sign up for free

https://backtoschool.panoramaed.com
My favorite hobbies can best be described as:

- Outdoorsy
- Athletic
- Social

If you have some free time, you'd prefer:

- To have some alone time
- To hang out with a few close friends
- To go somewhere that you could meet new people

Have you ever played an instrument?

- Yes
- No
Strategy: Empathic Mindset

Questions to promote empathy

• Answer questions on own
• Take time to consider replies and be honest with yourself
• Group discussion: how might this help promote empathic mindset in classroom?

Brooks, 2016
Empathic Activity

• On post-it notes, describe strategies used to maintain positive relationships when students misbehave

• Responses could help future school staff who encounter disciplinary problems
Research: Empathy in Classrooms

• Congratulations! You’ve experienced part of study on empathy in classrooms!

• 1st step: Teachers reviewed articles reporting how negative emotions could prompt student misbehavior and importance of being empathic by understanding students and maintaining positive relationships despite misbehavior
Research: Empathy in Classrooms

• 2nd step: Teachers described strategies used to maintain positive relationships during student misbehavior

• Results...
  – Teachers who completed empathic exercise were half as likely to suspend students over course of year as compared to control group of teachers
Strategy: Active Listening

• Involves listening to each word, imagining driving emotions behind what is being said, and regularly feeding back what is being heard to person speaking

• Encourages tuning in and connecting more deeply

• More practice with active listening = better reading emotions through words, tone, and micro expressions
Research: Active Listening

• Increases empathy levels and helps to create positive feelings in other person who's communicating with us

• People who previously reported feeling misunderstood or not heard found more fulfillment when speaking with someone practicing active listening

Myers, 2000
Strategy: Discovering Strengths

- Account for, appreciate, affirm, and act on the strengths of students and teachers in as many ways as you can
- To do this, you need to recognize the value of your own strengths
- 2/10 Activity
Student = Classroom

How can you build individual relationships with individual students in the classroom while still building relationships with the classroom itself?

How can you encourage students to build relationships with each other?
Strategy: Compliments Project

“...It created a safer classroom space; plain and simple.”

Positive and school appropriate words

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vzkqx0WdW_Q
Research: Stress in Classroom

• Study correlating levels of teacher burnout and cortisol levels of students
• Results: students’ cortisol levels were much higher in classrooms led by teacher who reported feeling overwhelmed or exhausted
• What came first? Hard to say definitively
  – Teacher feeling of burnout could impact classroom
  – Student misbehavior could impact teacher burnout

Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016
Strategy: Be Thermostat, Not Thermometer

- De-escalating students by rethinking behavioral escalation
- To defuse conflict, must disentangle self (as adult) from what is happening with youth
  - Thermometer: goes up/down depending on surrounding climate
  - Thermostat: registers temperature like thermometer but makes adjustment to keep climate in balance
- “Emotional First Aid”
Role Play! (Small groups)
Resilient students need resilient teachers. Good content teaching requires modeling of skills, and attitudes. If teachers themselves are barely coping, if teachers cannot bounce back from the challenges they face, how are they to sustain the strength needed to promote resiliency among their students?

Wolpow and Askov, 2008
When the going gets tough
By Katrina Kenison
http://www.onbeing.org/blog/when-the-going-gets-tough/7351
Thank you!

Sarah Kremer, LPCC, ATR-BC
Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, Board Certified Art Therapist
sarah@AcknowledgeAlliance.org