



# Teacher Reflection and Action

## Relationship Skills

## Teacher Reflection

*"Since for teachers and leaders the conversation is the relationship, there is no trivial comment.*

*Patrick Bassett*

We may have heard before that in selling real estate, what matters most is "location, location, location." In teaching, the parallel would be "relationship, relationship, relationship."

Building and sustaining positive, warm relationships with our students is what constitutes the core of "classroom management." Rules or agreements about classroom behaviors are only effective to the degree that the people involved are willing to abide by them. And that comes down to relationship. How do our students know how we feel about them? They listen to our words, yes, but they also read our body language and sense our emotional connection to them.

### **Stephanie Jones et al cite substantial research showing that...**

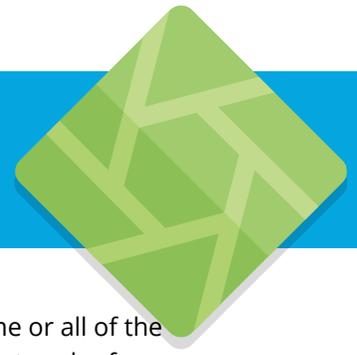
SEL influences the quality of teacher-student relationships... Teachers who are calm, positive, and content are likely to be better equipped to treat students warmly and sensitively, even when students behave in challenging ways. When students have high-quality relationships with teachers, they have better social adjustment and higher academic competence.

Conversely, when teachers and students have negative or conflict-filled relationships, students are less likely to be engaged in school and more likely to have low academic achievement. One study even found that the quality of teacher-student relationships was a better predictor of academic adjustment than other factors like teacher education and teacher-student ratio.

### **REFLECT**

Characteristics of an effective relationship include but are not limited to:

- Trust
- Mutual respect
- Being present
- Communication
- Caring
- Demonstrating appreciation



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On your own, writing in a journal, or in dialogue with a trusted colleague, reflect on some or all of the following questions. With the above categories in mind, take time to think carefully about each of your students. Who comes quickly to mind? Who did you forget until you looked at your roster? That happens for all of us; the point to ponder is why that might be.

- Which of my students are easiest for me to trust and why?
- Which of my students do I trust the least and why?
- How fully would each of my students say that they trust me, and why?
- Which of my students are easiest for me to show respect to, and why?
- Which of my students show me the most respect? The least? What may be contributing to that?
- How fully would each of my students say that I respect them, and why?
- Which of my students are easiest for me to stay truly present for when they are talking with me, and why?
- Which of my students are skilled at being truly present in class, and what may be contributing to that?
- How fully would each of my students say that I am truly present when they are talking with me, and why?
- Which of my students are easiest for me to communicate with, and why?
- Which of my students do I find it the hardest to communicate with, and why?
- How well would each of my students say that I communicate with them, and why?
- Which of my students are easiest for me to care about, and what contributes to those feelings on my part?
- Which of my students show caring to me and to others in our class, and how does that caring show itself?
- How fully would each of my students say that I care about them, and why would they say that?
- Which of my students are easiest for me to show authentic appreciation to, and why?
- Which of my students show appreciation of me the most, and how do they show their appreciation?
- How fully would each of my students say that I show them authentic appreciation, and how often? What contributes to that happening or not happening?
- Which of my students do I know the best? Which students know me well?



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### TRUST

- Which of my students are easiest for me to trust and why?
- Which of my students do I trust the least and why?
- How fully would each of my students say that they trust me, and why?

### MUTUAL RESPECT

- Which of my students are easiest for me to show respect to, and why?
- Which of my students show me the most respect? The least? What may be contributing to that?
- How fully would each of my students say that I respect them, and why?

### BEING PRESENT

- Which of my students are easiest for me to stay truly present for when they are talking with me, and why?
- Which of my students are skilled at being truly present in class, and what may be contributing to that?
- How fully would each of my students say that I am truly present when they are talking with me, and why?

### COMMUNICATION

- Which of my students are easiest for me to communicate with, and why?
- Which of my students do I find it the hardest to communicate with, and why?
- How well would each of my students say that I communicate with them, and why?



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### **CARING**

- Which of my students are easiest for me to care about, and what contributes to those feelings on my part?
- Which of my students show caring to me and to others in our class, and how does that caring show itself?
- How fully would each of my students say that I care about them, and why would they say that?

### **DEMONSTRATING APPRECIATION**

- Which of my students are easiest for me to show authentic appreciation to, and why?
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*Relationship Skills: The consistent performance of socially acceptable actions that promote and maintain positive connections with others.*

*“Listening is a revolutionary act.”*

*-Robert Dungey*

How often do we hear the phrase, “just listen”? As if listening was a simple or unimportant action. When in fact, deeply listening to one another is a powerful way to build heartfelt connections, new understandings, and deeper knowledge.

David Isay created StoryCorp ten years ago, and it has resulted in thousands of stories being preserved. Free recordings are made and archived by “regular people”: family members, friends, co-workers, teachers and students, interview one another. The power of listening helps us deeply understand one another, which builds connection and anchors relationships.

### LISTEN

Listen to one or more of these examples of StoryCorp interviews. Think about someone with whom you wish you could have a meaningful conversation.

- [Chance encounter between a father who lost a soldier son and a trauma nurse](#)
- [A daughter interviews her parents about her sister who died](#)
- [A high school freshman tells his story of homelessness with his teacher](#)
- [A man talks with his literacy tutor about his concerns for his children and joys of reading](#)
- [A young man expresses appreciation to the grandma who raised him](#)
- [Co-workers from a wildlife rescue center remember the Exxon Valdez oil spill](#)
- [A woman makes homecooked meals for men from a homeless shelter](#)
- [A man talks with his adopted triplet boys, all of whom are blind](#)
- [A daughter interviews her single dad who raised her while he went to college](#)
- [Childhood friends interview one another about their lifelong friendship](#)
- [A man reflects on the gratifying power of helping others in need](#)
- [An 18-year-old from Harlem talks about raising his brothers – and ‘stop and frisk’](#)
- [A judge and her mother talk about her early years as the class cut-up](#)



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### ACTION: MICROLAB

The Microlab strategy is an elegant structure for supporting deep sharing and for practicing attentive listening. Both of these skills are essential for authentic, caring relationships. For this activity, find two or three trusted colleagues to experience this strategy with you.

1. Read the Microlab directions from [Morningside Center for Social Responsibility](#)
2. Follow the instructions for timing and structured sharing, using the following questions:
  - Describe a relationship that's been very beneficial to you, at some point in your life.
  - What do you value most in relationships, and why?
  - How do you help your students build positive relationships with one another?

### FACILITATION TIPS

- It can be very powerful to reveal each question in turn, rather than all at once.
- Be sure to provide the group with private think time before the first speaker begins responding to the prompt, so that everyone has their own answer in mind. This will help participants give each speaker their full attention.
- Before beginning, remind participants to share their own responses to each question, without commenting on or building on anyone else's response.
- Remember that each participant is to listen to the speaker without talking or verbally reinforcing, and that the full time for each round belongs to the speaker, even if she or he uses it for silent thinking.
- Start with one-minute rounds as you learn the protocol. One minute can actually seem like quite a long time for some participants!



### EXTENSIONS

Use the Microlab strategy with your students, both for sharing feelings and thoughts on various topics, and for academic content discussion and review. Thoughtfully framing your questions to provide space for a variety of ideas and viewpoints will result in rich dialogue, once students are confident with the process. While students are beginning to learn the Microlab strategy itself, keep your questions simple and conversational so that every participant will likely feel confident that she or he has something to contribute.



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## Teachable Moment Classroom Lessons

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility  
Microlab for Exploring Tough Issues

<http://www.morningsidecenter.org>

*One way to support young people (4th grade and older) in dealing with emotionally laden and controversial issues is to start with a small group experience called a “microlab.” In a microlab, people gain understanding through speaking and listening. It is not a time for discussion or dialogue; rather each person has a short time (one to three minutes depending on students’ age) to speak in response to a question. When a person is speaking, the others in the group - usually only two or three others - should listen only and not interrupt.*

### **HERE’S HOW TO DO A MICROLAB IN THE CLASSROOM.**

1. Divide the class into groups of three or four using puzzle pieces, number cards, or by counting off. Ask participants to arrange themselves in their small groups so that each person can easily see and hear everyone else in the group.
2. Before you begin, explain the guidelines for a microlab:
  - It’s okay to pass if you need more time to think or would rather not respond. This is a timed activity. I will let you know when it is time to move on to the next speaker.
  - You will each have one [or two or three] minutes to speak.
  - Speak from your own point of view.
  - Be your own barometer - share as much as you feel comfortable sharing.
  - Confidentiality is important, especially when we come back together as a large group. We need to agree that what we share among ourselves in the small group will stay private.
3. Introduce your first microlab question.

(Use the questions below or create your own.) In introducing each question, it’s usually helpful to say the question,

Then give some specifics about the question or model answering the question yourself, and then repeat the Question again. This gives participants some time to think about what they would like to say. In between microlab Questions, you may want to remind people to try not to interrupt or engage in dialogue.



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Possible microlab questions:

- What do you want to say about [the issue]? What's on your mind?
- How are you feeling?
- What would you like to do for our community or the world to address [the issue or problem]?

(Note that the initial questions allow for expression of feelings and concerns, but that the last question focuses on the positive.)

4. Reconvene the full group.

Ask students how the microlab was for them. Then ask for volunteers to share something they said or felt in their Microlab. Remind participants of the need for confidentiality - each person should only speak from his or her experience.

This sharing may lead to a wider classroom discussion. If the issue is a volatile one, discussions can sometimes get heated. If you decide to open up the topic, it would be a good idea to establish some guidelines for discussion or "Community practices" ahead of time.

You may want to end the session by having the students brainstorm about questions they have on the issue that would lead to gathering information and further study.