Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Transcript:

This is a learning module designed to deepen your understanding of teacher-student relationships. You will explore why teacher-student relationships are important, and the different factors that affect them. You will also be introduced to a process of reflection and action that will help you build positive, supportive relationships with the students in your classroom.

What Are They?
Transcript:

First, let’s clarify what we mean by “relationships.” Take a moment to think about how you would define what teacher-student relationships are.

Within the context of this module, there are two main components that comprise teacher-student relationships. First, relationships consist of the feelings and beliefs that teachers and students have about one another. Feelings could include things such as trust or distrust, like or dislike, caring or hostility. Beliefs include things like the extent to which a student believes that a teacher cares about him, or a teacher’s belief about a student’s level of motivation.

Second, relationships are formed by a teacher and student’s interactions, as well as their perceptions of those interactions. For example, an interaction could take place where a teacher jokes or uses sarcasm with a student and intends for it to be fun and lighthearted. The student, however, might experience it as mean-spirited or insensitive, and the interaction could adversely affect their relationship.

The Importance of Relationships

Transcript:

Before we delve into the different aspects of teacher-student relationships, let’s take a moment to examine why they’re important.
Most teachers would probably acknowledge that relationships matter. A quick look at the research literature tells us that teacher-student relationships affect four important areas: motivation, behavior, academic achievement, and classroom culture (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Davis, 2012; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Murray & Malgren, 2005; Wentzel, 1997).

Chapter 2: Why Relationships Matter

Relationships and Motivation

Transcript:

Let’s talk about motivation first. A teacher’s actions and behaviors toward a student can directly affect how the student feels about being in the teacher’s class and working hard in it.

What kinds of actions and behaviors make an impact? Well, a series of studies have shown that students are motivated to work harder if they believe their teacher cares about them (Wentzel, 1997, 1998, 2002).

Authentic and Aesthetic Caring
Transcript:

When we talk about caring, it’s important to make a distinction between authentic caring and aesthetic caring. Authentic caring is deep concern for the academic, social, and emotional well-being of a student, as well as a personal commitment to ensure that the student’s needs are met. Authentic caring entails personal commitment (and sometimes sacrifice) on the part of the teacher (Bell et al., 2011).

By contrast, aesthetic caring is “hoping for the best” for students without taking the steps to learn what “the best” is or taking personal action to help make it happen. Teachers who demonstrate aesthetic caring generally only have superficial understandings of their students or their students’ lives.

It should go without saying that students are most motivated by relationships based on authentic caring. As a matter of fact, a recent survey study found that students described their most effective teachers as the ones who took the time and made the effort to build relationships with them (Gelbach et al., 2011; Newberry, 2010).

Relationships and Behavior

Transcript:

Let’s look at the connection between relationships and behavior. In his book Classroom Management That Works (2003), Robert Marzano and his team of researchers conducted a meta-analysis that examined the impact of different factors on students’ behavior in class. The analysis revealed that in situations where strong teacher-student relationships existed, the students were more willing to accept the teacher’s rules and procedures - and even their consequences.
This same study found that many teachers who experienced frequent behavioral problems also had problematic or disrespectful relationships with their students. Ironically, teachers often complain about the behavior of students who they have not attempted to build a relationship with.

**Relationships and Achievement**

“The teacher-student relationship has a tremendous effect on the achievement of the student.”

(Newberry, 2010, p. 1695)

“[Strong relationships with adults] are perhaps the single most important ingredient promoting positive youth development”

(Pianta & Allen, 2008, p. 24)

**Transcript:**

Not only are strong teacher-student relationships associated with higher student motivation and less misbehavior, but they are also correlated with academic success.

Take a moment to read these two quotes, and consider what they mean to you as a practicing teacher. These two statements highlight an important theme in this module, and it is this: Building relationships with students is not something that is peripheral to the role of a teacher. It is a major part of our jobs, and necessary in order to do our jobs effectively.
**Relationships and Classroom Culture**

By this point, we hope it is clear that your relationships with students affect the entire culture of your classroom. The degree to which each student feels safe, valued, and affirmed directly influences his or her willingness to productively engage as members of a classroom community. Research has found that students who have positive relationships with their teachers also generally have more positive attitudes toward school, which are associated with lower dropout rates, and lower rates of risky social behaviors (Gelbach et al., 2011).

**Chapter 3: What Goes Into Relationships?**

**What Goes Into Relationships?**

So right now you might be thinking, “Ok, I get it. Relationships are important.”

But you also might be wondering:

*What “goes in” to teacher-student relationships? What are the different “parts” or factors that affect them?*

Take a moment to think about it. Based on your experiences as both a teacher and a student, what are the most important aspects of teacher student relationships?
Aspects of Relationships

Transcript:

In this module, we will explore five important aspects of teacher-student relationships. They are:
- Teacher Knowledge of Self
- Teacher Knowledge of Students
- Students’ Knowledge of Teacher
- Teacher-Student Interactions
- Teacher Characteristics and Dispositions

Each of these aspects can profoundly affect a teacher’s relationship with students. These are also the aspects of teacher-student relationships that a teacher has the ability to affect through his or her own reflection and action. Let’s examine each one.

Teacher Knowledge of Self

Transcript:

To begin with, teachers who successfully build relationships with diverse populations of students take the time to learn about themselves. This might sound silly at first - every person knows who they are, right? It’s more complicated than that, though.

Effective relationship-builders work to understand themselves as “cultural beings.” What does this mean? It means they understand that their particular way of seeing and being in the world was influenced by growing up
in a particular time and place, with a certain set of experiences. Most importantly, they understand that their way of seeing the world is not the only way, and work to understand the perspectives of their students. Strong relationship-builders work to understand themselves in relation to others. They actively work to identify and affirm what they have in common with their students as well as the differences that exist between them. Teachers who are working to increase their knowledge of self, ask questions like, “What are the things that make me, me?” and “What major experiences shaped my decision to become a teacher?”

**Teacher Knowledge of Students**

Transcript:

Just as teachers must work to understand themselves better, they also must work to increase their knowledge of their students. This is the second major aspect of teacher-student relationships. Researcher and activist Julio Cammarota (2006) writes that when teachers and students interact on an emotional level and share their concerns and feelings, they begin to humanize one another. Now, this is not meant to imply that forging emotional connections with students should replace academic instruction. And obviously, depending on the number of students you teach, your relationships with some students will be stronger than with others. What this does remind us about, though, is the notion of authentic caring that we discussed earlier in the module. Specifically, students perceive teachers as caring when they attempt to learn about them and their lives (Bell et al., 2011).

Caring teachers operate with an “urgent need” to learn about their students: their interests, their passions, their strengths, and their needs (Elliot-Johns et al., 2012). They ask themselves questions like “What do I know about my students’ identities?” or “What are the different things that make each student uniquely him or her “self”?”
**Students' Knowledge of Teacher**

Transcript:

Caring teachers also allow their students to learn some things about them. This is the third aspect of relationship-building: Students' Knowledge of Teacher. Cammarota (2006) discusses the need for students to humanize their teachers by seeing them as “complete human beings” - that is, as people with families, interests, concerns, and challenges.

In another study, it was found that effective teacher relationship-builders were intentional about allowing students to learn things about them (Milner & Tenore, 2010). They shared their stories with students, and allowed their students to share their stories with them. Now, this does not necessarily mean sharing highly personal or intimate information about yourself with students, or “friending” them on social media. But it does mean letting students learn important information about the person you are, and you doing the same for them.

You might ask yourself “What are some important things to share with students about my own background, and my own reason(s) for teaching?”

**Teacher-Student Interactions**
Transcript:

Let’s examine the fourth aspect of teacher-student relationships: Interactions
As stated earlier, interactions and perceptions of interactions form the base of teacher-student relationships. But what characterizes these interactions when the relationships are strong? To begin with, all interactions reflect the teacher’s authentic caring for the student (Newberry, 2010). What makes an interaction “caring”? Well, a major factor is a teacher’s willingness to listen to, understand, and share the student’s concerns (Elliot-Johns et al., 2012).

Teachers who are strong relationship-builders engage in dialogue with their students, and allow their students to engage in dialogue with each other. And, the hallmark of true dialogue is a willingness to learn from another person’s experience and perspective. Teachers who are committed relationship-builders seek out additional time to interact with and learn about their students. They might do this in the classroom before or after school, in hallways during passing periods, at school events, or while coaching a sport. During these interactions, they ask students questions to learn more about them. They also create opportunities for students to give them feedback about the student’s experience in their class.

Teacher Characteristics and Dispositions

Transcript:

The last aspect of teacher-student relationships that we’re going to discuss are the characteristics and dispositions of the teacher him or herself. Take a moment to access your own background knowledge. Think about a positive relationship that you had with one of your teachers when you were a student. What made that relationship positive? Here is a set of characteristics. Choose the ones that you think are important for building strong teacher-student relationships.
Check for Understanding Feedback
Transcript:

Effective relationship-builders make a point of attuning to their students’ emotions and trying to see their classrooms through their students’ eyes. These teachers seek out and try to learn from the perspectives of their students. In doing so, they demonstrate authentic caring and compassion.

Strong relationship-builders seek relatedness with their students by identifying and naming the points of similarity that exist between them. But they also affirm difference, and see it as something to celebrate and learn from rather than erase or ignore. These teachers are open-minded, and seek to affirm their students as individuals.

Part of affirming difference means valuing students’ background knowledge and experiences. A key disposition of relationship-builders is the recognition that all students bring valuable background knowledge with them to school. These teachers are humble, and sincerely believe that they have things to learn from their students.

Chapter 4: How to Build Relationships

Building Relationships
Transcript:

So far, we’ve talked about why teacher-student relationships are important, and the different aspects that comprise them. Let’s now turn our attention to how teachers can proactively build stronger relationships with their students. Relationship-building is work and requires a continual cycle of reflection and action. This cycle consists of four main steps.

**Step 1**

Transcript:

The first is to identify an aspect of teacher-student relationships to focus on. While it is certainly possible to work on all five aspects simultaneously, it may be more beneficial to focus heavily on one or two elements at a time. For example, over a given period of time a teacher may prioritize increasing their knowledge of students.

**Step 2**

Transcript:

Examination of actions and interactions

- mindsets and beliefs
Transcript:

After identifying a focus for relationship work, the next step is to reflect. This involves examining one’s actions and interactions, but even more importantly, the mindsets and beliefs behind them.

Step 3

Transcript:

The outgrowth of this reflection is action, which is the third step of the cycle. This means taking concrete steps to improve that aspect of your relationships with students. The resource documents that accompany this module provide several different strategies that you can try with your own students.

Step 4

Transcript:

Finally, after taking action, strong relationship-builders step back and reflect again. They examine outcomes and changes that have resulted from taking action, as well as what they’ve learned. Then, the cycle repeats itself. Relationship-building never reaches a finite endpoint. There is always more to learn about our students.
Transcript:

As you begin the process of doing intentional relationship work, it’s important to operate with a mindset that could best be described as “confident vulnerability.” Put simply, this means believing that “I’m better than I used to be, but I’m not where I want to be” (Diaz, 2013). It’s a belief in your own value and worth, coupled with a willingness to be vulnerable as you undertake the work of getting better.
Building relationships with students requires open-mindedness, and a willingness to reconsider our own assumptions, ways of thinking, and perceptions. Confident vulnerability is instrumental in making this happen.