



Observatoire
de la formation
professionnelle
du Québec

ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF BELONGING



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Hi!
I'M JOLY, A VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION TEACHER. IN ADDITION TO THIS WORKBOOK, YOU CAN FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM AT OBSERVATOIREFP.ORG/EN/RELATIONSHIP-MANAGEMENT HAPPY READING!

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INTRODUCTION

Feeling that you belong to a group is not only an added value but a need to be fulfilled, as suggested by Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs. This workbook offers a variety of ideas you can use to foster a sense of belonging in your students.

THE SENSE OF BELONGING

DEFINITION

The sense of belonging is the feeling of being part of a group and of feeling good, important, and respected. In a way, it refers to the degree to which students identify with their class group or to their profession. To what extent do they identify with their future profession, their class, their teacher, or their colleagues? Feeling involved and invested in one's group is a good indicator of the level of belonging one feels. This is an individual feeling, related to one's place in a group.

RELEVANCE

The stronger the sense of belonging, the more students want to be part of the group, hang out, and make meaningful connections with each other. A sense of belonging bolsters the quality of relationships, the willingness to share, the ability and comfort to take risks, to make mistakes without feeling judged, and to move forward with confidence and determination. It is also said that students will be happier and more inclined to learn if their sense of belonging to the group is fairly strong. In addition, identifying with their profession is very stimulating for students' professional development. In turn, future employers will benefit from graduates who already embody the culture of the profession.

IMPLEMENTATION

Here are some ideas to help you foster a sense of belonging in your students.

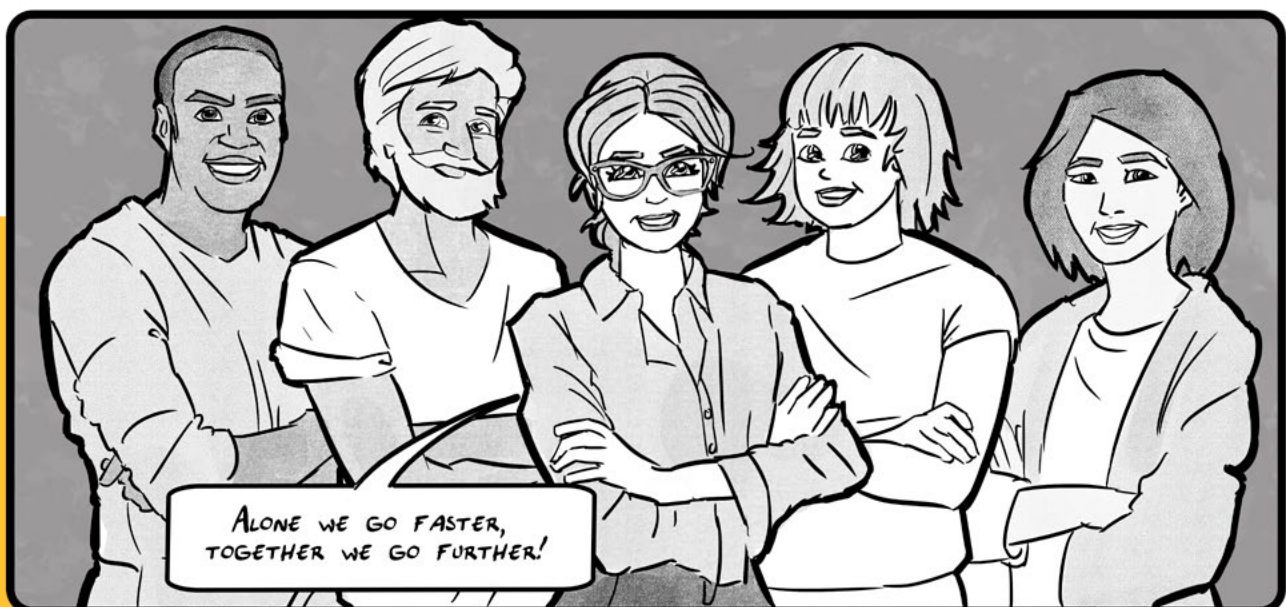
Coat of arms icebreaker

A full description of this activity can be found in the “Icebreaker” workbook. In a nutshell, the idea is to design a coat of arms that represents the group. The students create it together by inserting characteristics and visual elements to which they relate and with which they identify as a group. This coat of arms becomes the logo, image, or symbol of the group.

The place and importance given to relationships

Making room for relationships and emphasizing them in learning activities fosters a sense of belonging. When we identify with others, and exchange and share moments together, in the end, we feel that we belong to the group. The emergence and enhancement of interpersonal relationships in the classroom are therefore essential if we wish to develop a sense of belonging. Note that for every student to feel included and that they belong, it is important to establish clear boundaries to determine what is and is not acceptable within the group.

Trust, recognition, respect, and sharing are also very important. Every human being needs these to feel comfortable within a group. In the context of training, teachers will need to respect and promote these values from the beginning in order to create a sense of belonging within the class.



Conferences, conventions, and symposiums

Whether they are organized in the classroom or as field trips, these events contribute greatly to the development of students' professional identity and, by extension, their sense of belonging to their future profession.



Social activities (potluck lunches, games, etc.)

Gatherings and sharing conversations about subjects unrelated to course content are particularly valuable for developing relationships and feeling part of a group. Even if they are not frequent, these moments are precious. You will also notice that the more positive your relationship is with your students, the higher their level of engagement and participation in these activities will be, and the more their sense of belonging will develop.



Inside jokes

Using humour to connect usually works very well. Inside jokes are specific to a group and their classroom experience. Using funny moments in class to create inside jokes that only the students in the group will understand pays off in terms of relationships.



Time

Although it may seem obvious, time is a key factor in creating a sense of belonging. Students must be given time to bond and to get to know each other. It is also through spending time together that inside jokes will emerge, anecdotes will be created, and the group will have fun while learning.

Common vision and values of the profession

Beyond the feeling of belonging to a class group, it is interesting, from the start of the program, to feel part of the big family of the profession we have chosen. As teachers, it is therefore relevant to speak on behalf of the profession, and to convey its values, habits, and particularities so that students feel and become attached to them. Feel free to tell anecdotes, share experiences, and discuss the challenges and vision of the professional field. Making room for questions, opinions, and debates will be very interesting!

Teamwork and collaboration on long-term projects

Teamwork leads to relationships, creating bonds, helping each other out, and feeling like we are part of a group. Beware, however, that if the teams are always the same, and teamwork is very frequent, developing a sense of belonging to the entire class group will be more difficult. There is a risk that subgroups will be formed instead.

Group challenges

Challenging students can be quite effective in developing a sense of belonging. Indeed, by being in the same situation, all together, to tackle a common challenge, students are more likely to strengthen their relationships and identification with each other. Challenges can be intellectual (related to course content). They can also take the form of games and focus more on relationships, humour, mutual support, etc. (e.g., riddles, escape games, choreographies, outdoing oneself in a task related to the trade, etc.). The fact that students have to excel and step out of their comfort zone, all together, will benefit their sense of belonging.

Communal decision-making

Including students in the decision-making, when possible, will make them feel included and valued within the group. Students who feel that their opinions matter will be more likely to get involved and to want to be associated with the group. Do not hesitate to help students take their place or take a stand during group decision-making. It will then be much easier to implement the decisions and ensure that they are followed.



Valuing each student

To feel part of a group, it is essential to feel accepted and appreciated. In order to achieve this, recognition plays an important role, whether it comes from the other students or the teacher. This can take many forms: recognition of a task well done, praise, encouragement, etc.

Sense of initiative

Autonomy is the ultimate goal that every teacher wants their students to achieve. If a student takes initiatives, it shows that they can think and act like future professionals. Therefore, as a teacher, it is advantageous to create situations that allow your students to think for themselves and make choices. In this way, they will feel that they are getting closer to their final goal and that they can already identify with the trade they have chosen to practice..

Welcome and integration activities

The first exchanges within a group are crucial. A good integration activity will help strengthen the bonds between students. This is an opportunity to start off on the right foot. Your role will be to create an atmosphere conducive to exchanges so that everyone wants to be part of the group.



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