



Element 4

Growing Positive Relationships; Mindset Shift

Learners thrive best in surroundings that encourage positive relationships. A learning community must commit itself primarily to establishing positive relationships before learning, to create an exceptional environment that supports everyone.



Growing Positive Relationships

Learning is most effective when positive relationships are prioritised before any learning begins. Placing positive relationships at the core of any learning community requires an intentional mindset shift. Understanding that strong relationships can be intentionally fostered by individuals in a community is the first step towards shifting mindsets from passive to active relational interactions.

When a positive relational learning community is established, it profoundly impacts learning and certain features are observable. These include; social, emotional, physical and academic safety; a support network; individuals consistently engaged in learning; equality, diversity, inclusion and respect; resilience and stress management and; a holistic sense of wellness and thriving.

Individuals thrive as a result of their experiences of strong, authentic relationships in collaboration with all members of a learning community - the network of relationships drives the learning, not the other way round.

Traditional teacher training programs often measure success by a teacher’s ability to manage and control individuals and groups to deliver effective learning. A relational community ought to exist where educators are not solely accountable for the growth of positive relationships and learning among just one class or group alone, but it is shared among the whole community. Shifting to this mindset creates a strong support network for all educators and develops positive relationships among them, strengthening overall culture in the process.

Positive values grow positive relationships, and a learning community must establish key core values and encourage them to be lived out. Relational exchanges in a learning community should be measured through an evaluation framework and effective feedback strategies understood and used to support learning and relational growth. This helps build accountability in the whole community.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is critical to developing positive relationships and can be understood as the variety of skills and competencies that enable individuals to succeed where collaborative human interaction occurs. All key actors in a learning community should be given opportunities to develop EQ.

Conflict is natural and necessary for growth in any learning community and should not be ignored. Learning how to deal with it can ensure continued stability and should be embedded into learning design frameworks in the whole community.

All deliberate actions taken by a learning community supports a shift from incidental to intentional relational interactions and can foster positive relationships and build a strong learning culture.

Then	Now
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships were incidental exchanges. • Learning was the first priority in the learning community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships can be intentionally grown using a variety of strategies. • Relationships are the priority and they can improve learning outcomes.

Starting Questions

1. Does your learning community place more emphasis on learning or relationships?
2. How much impact do you believe relationships can have on your learning community?
3. Do you believe relationships can be intentionally shaped?

4. Do you believe that students can learn and develop the skills and competencies to form positive relationships with others?
5. Does your learning community have any frameworks or procedures in place to help foster positive relationships?

Key Initial Actions

1. Use qualitative research methods to determine perceptions of positive relationships. The research outcomes will offer a framework for what changes could be made to grow positive relationships.
2. Facilitate a collective analysis to educate individuals on the mindsets, values, expectations and habits of the overall learning community.
3. Establish clear objectives and a vision for success when planning for change. The vision should encourage the design for frameworks that will support the development of positive relationships in the learning community.

On-going Actions

1. Design and deliver programmes that develop the key skills to grow positive relationships in individual and collaborative contexts.
2. Continue to evaluate relationships to foster individual and collective growth. The evaluation process should be inclusive of everyone and questions should reflect the role of each individual in the learning community.
3. Develop a strategy for dealing with conflict in the design process for growing positive relationships. Appropriate training is required for all key actors to learn how to deal with conflict situations effectively.

Further Reading

[Press Release: Social Support: Carnegie Mellon's Brooke Feeney Details How To Thrive Through Close Relationships](#)

[No Education Without Relation](#)

[The Relational Schools Foundation](#)

[Conflict Resolution Centre](#)

[Harvard study, almost 80 years old, has proved that embracing community helps us live longer, and be happier](#)

[Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ](#)

[Relational Analytics](#)

[Australia Conflict Resolution Centre](#)

Watch

[Dr Robert Loe Ted Talk: How positive relationships deliver more than academic outcomes](#)

[Relational Teacher Trailer](#)

Positive relationships for learning

In a new learning paradigm, building positive relationships must be the central priority before learning happens, to support the emergence of a strong learning culture. A positive relational community in a new learning paradigm diverges from the traditional held belief that educators are responsible for their own class or group of learners. A relational community ought to exist where educators are not considered solely accountable for the growth of positive relationships among just one class or group alone, but alternatively they work in a close network to support one another using effective collaboration.

Establishing a learning community with the initial intention of developing positive relationships requires an understanding of the perceived impact individuals have on one another. Acknowledging this impact is a fundamental step to shifting mind-sets from passive to active relational interactions.

“The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.”

Theodore Roosevelt

Key Ideas

1. Positive relationships should be placed at the centre of a new learning paradigm before any learning occurs.
2. When a positive relational learning community is established, it profoundly impacts learning and certain positive features are observable.
3. Developing emotional intelligence supports the growth of positive relationships in a learning community.
4. Conflict is natural and necessary for growth in any learning community.

Questions

- How much do you think traditional learning systems negate from a learning community’s ability to place positive relationships at its core?
- How much influence do you believe a positive learning community has on learner success?
- Do you think sufficient training is given to educators to support their learning community in fostering positive relationships?

- How do you think fostering positive relationships in a learning community will support students in the long term formal education?
- Do you think all the actors in a learning community are sufficiently trained and taught to deal with conflict?

1. Positive relationships should be placed at the centre of a new learning paradigm before any learning occurs.

Certain pre-conditions should be established in a learning community that can essentially *set the scene* and support students in their learning.

For individuals to thrive, they must feel safe. Positive relationships are best fostered in a safe learning community. Individuals should feel supported and cared for, and also that they can seek help when they need it. Support that fosters a safe learning community must include social, emotional, physical and academic care.

Positive values grow positive relationships. Core values such as kindness, trust, compassion, empathy, patience, loyalty and fun create a solid foundation from which positive relationships can grow. Active modelling of positive behaviours and conversations around behavioural values can encourage continued emotional and social growth in any learning community.

Individuals must develop their ability to evaluate their interactions with others. Evaluating relationships offers a deliberate shift from incidental to intentional communication. Intentional communication promotes self-reflection and offers individuals the opportunity to improve the quality of their interactions.

A learning community that sets high expectations provides its students with the opportunity to challenge themselves. Communicating high expectations develops the self-belief necessary to thrive socially, emotionally, physically and academically. High expectations also builds the self-confidence that individuals require to communicate with their peers positively.

“In many ways, effective communication begins with mutual respect, communication that inspires, and encourages others to do their best.”

Zig Ziglar

2. When a positive relational learning community is established, it profoundly impacts learning and certain positive features are observable.

Learning communities that deliberately place positive relationships at their core, exhibit several positive, observable habits;

- there is support for everyone. A social and emotional network emerges. Everyone engaging in positive relational interactions feels supported;
- individuals are engaged in their learning. Intentional focus on positive relationships creates a strong motivational platform;
- equality, diversity, inclusion and respect are prevalent. Conflict arises, but with clear emphasis on equality, solutions are available which offer continued personal and collective growth (see dealing with conflict section);
- resilience and stress management practices develop to support people during times of adversity. Individuals or groups cope positively with any negative experiences;
- there is a holistic sense of wellness and thriving. The learning community would be described as healthy;
- students develop positive relationships with their educators and peers. Evidence highlights that this helps them achieve stronger academic outcomes (see white paper 3 for further information);
- there is a positive sense of self, constructed by the perceptions of others and evident through inner confidence and improved learning experiences, and;
- strong links are formed with external individuals and community groups, which greatly benefits both the learning and wider community.

Feedback is essential for motivating learners and building a positive learning community. It impacts on an individual's sense of self, so effective communication and use of language must be intentional and skillful. A learning community should be well versed in the use of effective feedback language so everyone remains inspired to continue growing and developing.

Some family homes do not create an environment of positive relationships, so a learning community must provide the crucial supporting network to ensure no learner slips through the net. Transformational relationships is a process whereby individuals who experience negative relationships, begin to recognise the safety of a positive relational environment over time. Once affected individuals experience nurturing support in their learning community, it creates the conditions for transformational relationships and better learning development to occur, strengthening them sufficiently emotionally, socially, physically and academically.

3. Developing emotional intelligence should support the growing of positive relationships in a learning community.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is critical to developing positive relationships. It can be understood as the variety of skills and competencies which enable individuals to succeed where collaborative human interaction occurs. People with strong EQ demonstrate the following behavioural traits;

- they understand their emotions and express feelings accurately;
- they empathise with people's emotions and can relate and cooperate;
- they manage and control negative emotions healthily;
- they manage change, make careful decisions and solve problems effectively;
- they are able to listen attentively to others;
- they can receive feedback in a positive manner, and;
- they generate a positive mood and are self-motivated.

The key skills and competencies displayed by individuals with strong emotional intelligence might include:

1. Self-awareness. Knowing one's emotions, strengths and weaknesses drives values and goals and helps students recognise their impact on others while using gut feelings to guide decisions.
2. Self-regulation. Managing or redirecting one's disruptive emotions and impulses and adapting to changing circumstances.
3. Social skills. Managing the emotions of others to steer them in the desired direction.
4. Empathy. Recognising, understanding, and considering other people's feelings, especially when making decisions.
5. Motivation. Motivating oneself to learn for the sake of learning.

Developing EQ in a learning community has several social and emotional, preventative and restorative benefits for individuals and society. It can help prevent violence, bullying, drug use and promote self-discipline. In a learning community, having EQ encourages positive relational interactions and supports increased learner performance.

Emerging evidence indicates that individuals have the capacity to develop their emotional intelligence, implying one can intentionally affect interpersonal and

intrapersonal relationships. Organisations who rely on a positive relationships for success must make the development of emotional intelligence a high priority. In learning communities, the teaching and learning EQ must be embedded in learner design experiences and become as important as the learning of any other subject.

4. Conflict is natural and necessary for growth in any learning community

The health of any relationship lies in one's ability to foster continued growth, and this includes managing conflict in a way that doesn't cause lasting damage. Conflict is a natural occurrence in all human interactions, and effectively dealing with it can support the equitable health of any learning community. The following points are guiding actions required to help resolve conflicts:

- Evaluate emotions before entering into a discussion.
- Be willing to fix the problem.
- Broaden outlook to see other points of view.
- Write down perceived needs and anxieties.
- Negotiate and be open to compromise and fairness.
- Think of as many possible solutions and decide on the one that is most beneficial to everyone.
- Treat each other equally.
- Be clear in discussing the conflict by communicating the problem, not the person.
- Work on the positives, not the negatives that have arisen from the conflict.

Shifting from incidental to intentional interactions places positive relationships at the core of any learning community, and building a positive relational environment requires continued effort. Educators must acknowledge their role as the key actors who must drive this process. This begins by committing to working collaboratively with one another. Removing pressure on educators to deliver content in traditional, siloed fashion, further enables the correct relational circumstances to emerge, and enables communities to focus on modelling the key relational skills together, which is conducive to an exceptional learning community.

"I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he is the garbage man or the president of the university."

Albert Einstein

Act now

It is a commonly held notion that people are not in control of their relational exchanges. This might be because relationships are so naturally embedded into all daily interactions that they are perceived as habitual. Existing research, however, demonstrates that positive relationships can be intentionally grown. Growing positive relationships must become intentional if a strong learning culture is to emerge.

A framework for growing positive relationships should be designed as a shared, actionable process. Below is a list of implementation points for consideration:

1. Educate and research

Gather and share information to encourage dialogue and communication in the early stages of action planning. Create opportunities for individuals and groups to express views, allowing them to align their thinking on the topic. Discussion time must be set aside.

Use qualitative research methods to determine perceptions of positive relationships. Data gathered through surveys, structured or unstructured interviews or discussion, will offer a framework for what changes could be made to grow positive relationships. The following questions could be used to inspire action:

- How is the information and research gathered useful?
- How can the information be used to plan a process for change?
- Has the research changed individual or collective perceptions?
- Are there other research methods that might further increase knowledge?
- Are there any perceived obstacles that might hinder a process of change?

Gathering and sharing information immediately builds a relational platform, empowering individuals to initiate the conditions necessary for working collaboratively. In an educational context, learners must be empowered to assist and voice their opinion.

2. Analyse, collaborate and plan together

Facilitate a collective analysis to educate individuals on the mindsets, values, expectations and habits of adults working together. Discuss and clarify what their assumptions and expectations are on a range of topics that impact a learning community.

The following points should be considered in this process:

1. Discussion and consensus on the mindsets, values, expectations and habits of the adults in the learning community and how these relate to the students.

2. Analysis on collectively held values, assumptions and expectations in the overall learning community.
3. Analysis of individual, hidden control mindsets in relation to students and discussion on the implications if these mindsets don't align universally.
4. Using an external agency to analyse collective beliefs or use of a survey tool as part of the analysis process.

Without collective analysis, a learning community could be potentially derailed if an aggregated consensus on the values, assumptions or expectations that everyone can relate to is missing.

Shared collaboration is a formula for success. Positive relationships emerge where transparency, trust and open communication exist and where individuals feel that they are respected and valued.

Related information:

[The VIA Character Strengths Survey](#)

15 minute scientific survey of character strengths.

[Relational Schools Relational Proximity Framework](#)

Framework document on how to measure relational closeness.

3. Design objectives

Clear objectives and a vision for success must be included when planning for change. A vision should begin to emerge from the 'educate and research' process. The following questions can assist to formulate objectives and a vision for success:

- What do positive relationships look like?
- How do we grow positive relationships?
- How do we want our individuals and our organisation to act and behave in the positive relational community?
- How will we manage conflict when it arises?

4. Execute and Evaluate

All key actors must be aware of their role by this stage of the process.

The learning community must design and deliver programmes that develop the key skills to grow positive relationships in individual and collaborative contexts. Students must be empowered through continued exposure to positive relationships from other adults in the community, and they must act as role models.

Continued evaluation is a crucial aspect in this process and must be ongoing to foster individual and collective growth. The evaluation process should be inclusive of everyone and questions should reflect the role of each individual in the learning community.

The questions below might inspire a framework of design for individual and collective evaluations:

Learners

- Do I know what my core values are?
- Am I living out my values?
- Do I feel safe in the learning ecosystem?
- How have I dealt with difficult situations?
- How can I improve my relationships with others?
- How is my learning going?
- Is there a caring atmosphere in the learning ecosystem?
- Do I feel like I can support my peers to make them feel good about themselves and their learning?
- Do I know how to use language to support my peers?
- Is the learning happening motivating me?
- Can I think of any recent positive conversations I have had with my peers?
- Are my learning and relational experiences having any positive impact outside of the learning ecosystem?
- Am I getting on well with my peers?
- Are there any difficult relationships I feel I could improve? Why are they difficult? How can I improve them?
- Can I think of a peer who supports my learning in the learning community?
- Can I think of someone who I can turn to for support in my social, emotional, physical and academic growth?
- Do I feel that I have a positive impact on my peers in group and social learning contexts?
- Does our learning community promote the growth of positive relationships?
- Do I feel like an effective member of a positive relational community?
- Does my home life impact on my relationships in the learning community?

Educators and other key actors

- Do I know what our community core values are?
- Do I know what my core values are?
- Am I living out the shared values set by my community?
- Are the values clear to individuals in the learning community?
- Am I modelling positive relationships according to the values of the community?
- Is the learning design and delivery around positive relationships effective?
- Do I know how to use language to support my peers and learners?
- Are there any difficult relationships with my peers that I could improve?
- Is our learning community a good example of positive relationships?
- Do I feel I am an effective member of a positive relational community?
- Does my personal life impact my relationships in the learning community?
- How does the learning community make me 'feel' emotionally and physically?
- Do I manage stressful situations ok?
- Do I feel supported in the learning community?

5. Protecting positive relationships

Conflict is a common area where organisations fail; they embed the appropriate strategies but overlook a plan to maintain positive relationships when conflict arises. A strategy for dealing with conflict must be included in the design process for growing positive relationships. Appropriate training is required for all key actors to learn how to deal with conflict situations effectively. Training should include everyone who is part of the community.

Related information:

[Conflict Resolution Centre](#)

Organisation that researches, develops and disseminates the theory and practice of Conflict Resolution (CR) throughout a national and international network.

Examples in action

Below are examples of educational institutions, consultancies, government organisations and case studies committed to delivering the best possible methods for developing and maintaining positive relationships in individual and collaborative contexts.

Educational Institutions

[Samuel Ward Academy](#)

Reputable academy whose responsibility is to take care of people, keep promises

and support family, school, community and country.

[Linton Village College](#)

Award winning college with a strong sense of community in which relationships, pastoral care and enrichment opportunities are of paramount importance.

Government and NGOs

[Ashoka Foundation](#)

A community of change leaders who collaborate to transform institutions and cultures worldwide to support changemaking for the good of society.

[Ministry of Education, Singapore](#)

The teaching and facilitation of SEL in Singapore schools is guided by four principles which promote the growth of relationships through social and emotional learning.

[Scottish Government](#)

Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour Report

[Japan 2022 goals on emotional intelligence](#)

[New Zealand Curriculum](#)

The New Zealand Curriculum recognises that students learn best when they enjoy positive relationships with their fellow students and teachers and that effective teachers foster positive relationships within environments that are caring, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and cohesive.

Business and Consultancy

[Relational Analytics Case Study 1](#)

Case study of project by Relational Analytics on resolving difficult relationships in a European manufacturing industry.

[Relational Analytics Case Study 2](#)

Case study of project by Relational Analytics on resolving a level of disharmony in a team that was experiencing changes which was impacting on relationships.

[Relational Analytics Case Study 3](#)

Case study of project by Relational Analytics on Relational Schools project in England which worked to put relationships at the core of school life.

[The Office of Social Emotional Learning](#)

Committed to educating and developing the skills and competencies of the whole child, which includes the fostering of academic, social/emotional, and physical wellness.

Free course on teaching conflict resolution to teens:

<https://thegandhiexperiment.teachable.com/p/10-ways-to-stop-violence-through-non-violence>

Further reading

[Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development.](#)

[7 Reasons Why Emotional Intelligence Is One Of The Fastest-Growing Job Skills](#)

[Press Release: Social Support: Carnegie Mellon's Brooke Feeney Details How To Thrive Through Close Relationships](#)

[No Education Without Relation](#)

[The Relational Schools Foundation](#)

[The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review. London: Department for Education and Skills.](#)

[Conflict Resolution Centre](#)

[Harvard study, almost 80 years old, has proved that embracing community helps us live longer, and be happier](#)

[Robert Waldinger - Lead researcher for 75 year old Harvard study](#)

[Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ](#)

[How Positive Relationships Help You Grow And Thrive](#)

[We Don't Need The Best People, We Need The Best Teams](#)

[Relational Analytics](#)

[Reuven Bar On - Researcher into EQ](#)

[15 factors that exemplify EQ](#)

[8 Traits of Healthy Relationships](#)

[50 Characteristics of Healthy Relationships](#)

[Building Blocks for Learning](#)

[The impact of youth-adult relationships on resilience](#)

[Australia Conflict Resolution Centre](#)

Watch

[Dr Robert Loe Ted Talk: How positive relationships deliver more than academic outcomes](#)

[Relational Teacher Trailer](#)

[Robert Waldinger TED Talk on the Harvard study for secrets to longevity.](#)

[The 3 Pillars of Positive Relationships](#)

[Dan Buettner Ted Talk on lifestyle behaviours that promote longevity](#)