



Empower One, Empower ALL:

Growing a Peer to Peer Culture in a General Education Classroom

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Give this transformational idea a try! Before your eyes, the transfer of ownership shifts from teacher to students! It is more powerful than you could ever imagine. Implementing Peer to Peer (P2P) opens the door for students to OWN their EDUCATION while being empowered through vulnerability, authenticity, and empathy.

The positive energy created within this student driven culture will empower teachers to create more P2P opportunities.

Requirements: Keep it SIMPLE, Keep it DO-able, and Keep it REAL! Start small.

Goal: Meet the needs and enhance the lives of **ALL** students within the classroom community.

Focus: Grow and build up **ALL** students (EVERY human has strengths and struggles).

Rationale: Within a classroom, social emotional skills are taught throughout the year. Such skills include tolerance, patience, problem solving, empathy, and resilience to name a few. Continuously working toward a genuine, loving, and nurturing community fosters interpersonal skills within students while growing confidence, perseverance, and communication skills.

Real Talk - Educator to Educator:

Let's be honest, this impactful work may take a lifetime, however providing time each day to learn about yourself and others provides a strong base for individual growth as well as strengthening your community. We know the importance of creating community; however, we don't always have dedicated time or resources. The good news is, as an educator, your heart is already in the right place and you already have a good start on building community, you just might not realize it.

Moving forward, it is important to "flex and flow" throughout this process, not "bend and break." It is essential to realize that this is the most important work and will need to be nurtured consistently throughout the year. Together, move at the pace of which your students and timeline allows. Demonstrate how to "take pause," evaluate where you are and where you want to go, revise the plan (Design Thinking), and take action. Perhaps you don't know where you want to go. It is in these powerful times the teacher learns to ask the students for ideas and *the magic happens!* The educator realizes the importance of student empowerment and the transfer of ownership begins to shift! Learn by doing! You are the role model, share your thinking, demonstrate your school's character traits while forging ahead. Show your students how to ask for help, bring those that have helped you into the classroom, and give yourself permission to be imperfect! Sharing in your learning provides a window of perspective. Learning that "sharing the power" IS the greatest game changing **GIFT** one could ever hope for!

Remember, the opportunities are endless, if you are open to seeing, uncovering, and trying them! Should you find yourself teaching virtually, many of these ideas can be tweaked to fit the virtual world. When in doubt, try, try, try anyway and see how it goes! The worse that will happen is that you will fail forward, learn, and model! No matter what you do, creating opportunities for student “voice and choice” is a **WIN-WIN!**

LET'S DO THIS!

Time to Prep: starting point

- Creatively name the culture. Consider connecting what your school is already doing for behavior, character building, etc.
- Clearly communicate your plan with administration.
- Communicate plan with parent(s).
- Find a common time to meet with the entire class weekly (10-15 minutes).
- Set up the first meeting with class.
- [Prepare a short PowerPoint presentation](#) (use general education presentation or ASD specific presentation provided if desired).
- [Prepare an informational pamphlet](#) for distribution.
- Prepare peer partnerships (pairs - see FIRST MEETING).

First Meeting (may need additional time or meeting): demonstrate trying something new

- Introduce PowerPoint
- Discuss and create a “[Responsibilities Page](#)” for Links and Peers together as a whole class.
- Introduce Peer Partnerships or Peer Groups (2-3 students grouped together). Relationships need time to form and grow. Set yourselves up for success, relax on the timelines.
 - Start with pairs, however based on your student needs, reserve the groups of 3 for special situations.
 - Partnerships can be based on the following:
 - personal strength/struggle where students can learn from and assist each other.
 - same personal strength/struggle and students work together to find strategies to help.
 - personal choice based on interest, likes, dislikes, etc.
- “Responsibilities Page” can be posted for students to reference. Perhaps students are provided individual copies and begin to build a [Peer to Peer portfolio](#) (see below).
- Discuss respect and confidentiality with students (“We are discussing real events that have happened and we need to remain respectful of everyone involved to gain the most out of this experience”).
- Demonstrate what good listeners do while listening. Teach eye contact, body position, Stephen Covey’s Seek First to Understand, Then Be Understood, etc.
- Listen to students and their ideas. The more it is their program, the stronger the program, more ownership on students, and more success will be reaped.
- Distribute the informational packet to be taken home. Possible suggestion on timing, introduce P2P the day of Curriculum Night (or whenever you welcome the parents into the classroom) and pass out the flyer/pamphlet to the parents directly. If this is not possible, send the pamphlet home with the students and send an email to the parents. If your preference is to hold onto the

pamphlet until it is needed, or inquiring minds want to know more, it is a good resource to use when you are comfortable.

Check in: get the real pulse on things

- Daily time devoted (5 minutes) for peers to “check in” with each other to provide further support.

Real Talk - Educator to Educator:

If every day doesn’t work, consider utilizing these same pairings within a subject area such as reading or writing. Work smarter, not harder. Oftentimes, it just takes looking at what you want to do with what you are already doing, to see how they fit together. You’ve got this!

- Weekly Debrief - whole class meeting - **T.E.A.M.** Time: **T**ogether **E**veryone **A**chieves **M**ore, is a time for the entire class to get together and share whole class celebrations, struggles, and solutions, as well as create class goals for the following week (see attached). [T.E.A.M. Time Blackline Master/Case Conference Form](#)

Real Talk - Educator to Educator:

Providing time to sort out the issues from recess, transition times, lunch time, or anything that comes up allows the students to be heard. Additionally, problems are “flushed out” together, in a safe place, and positive modeling can be provided in a timely fashion. Teaching students to be “problem solvers” rather than “problem keepers” goes a long way in building community.

How to get started:

- Set discussion “norms” such as confidentiality, no names are discussed. Stick to general issues that may include lunchroom behavior, recess choices, etc.
- The role of the teacher is to encourage **FACT FINDING** while taking notes. Simply lead with each prompt, jot, ask clarifying questions, and move on (Note taking can be passed onto a student, as well, and promoting and elevating the level of class discussion among the students is critical).
- Encourage students to talk calmly about the general situation to take the emotion out (Note: There will be times when students are escalated. If so, pause and deal with it individually. Then, perhaps it will be shared at a future **T.E.A.M.** Time - always use your judgment. When I am not sure, I ask the students if they want to talk about it generally. Empowering!).
- It is important to begin the class meeting with the goals/reflections/notes section of previous week (after week 1).
- Post debrief for students and class to reference.
- Provide time for groups to check in and discuss following the meeting as needed.
- Click here for [T.E.A.M. Time Photo](#) example.

Additional Ways to Grow Peer to Peer Culture: Ideas that have grown over the years that we tried and had success with! You can do it too!

- Read books to demonstrate and model desired behaviors. Let the class discussions resonate and see where they lead over time. Transferring student ownership is powerful and planting this seed early in the year is pivotal to growing the community with the students at the helm.
 - [The Hard Hat](#) by Jon Gordon
 - [The 7 Habits of Happy Kids](#) by Sean Covey
 - [The Energy Bus](#) by Jon Gordon

- [The Dot](#) by Peter H. Reynolds
 - [The Word Collector](#) by Peter H. Reynolds
 - [By You!](#) by Peter H. Reynolds
 - [Happy Dreamer](#) by Peter H. Reynolds
 - [The Invisible Boy](#) by Trudy Ludwig
 - [The Bravest Fish](#) by Matt Buckingham
 - [The Magical Yet](#) by Angela DiTerlizzi
 - [I Am Enough](#) by Grace Byers
- And a literal million other books that are great for this time together - choose something that will speak to your class - think mirror or window.
- Consider checking out silent short films too! Great resources.
 - The Present
 - The Box
 - Ian

TEACHER TALK:

It is essential to find texts that provide a “mirror **AND** window”, meaning that students **MUST** see themselves in these books (mirror) as a way to connect to the message **AS WELL AS** looking into other perspectives people may have (window). The beauty in this is the exchange, when one student is looking through a window, another member in the class is looking at a mirror...learning and growing together. Be purposeful in **ALL** that you do. Show grace to everyone including yourself!

BUILD GROWTH PORTFOLIOS with students:

Each time students engage in an opportunity to grow, bring it to their attention! Ask them to **TAKE ACTION** and record their thinking and then stash it in a safe space, which becomes their portfolio. Reflection is a **HUGE** part of personal growth and this is an opportunity to **PROVE** it to these young minds! Let's show them just how easy it is to document their learning and growing...before their very eyes! This type of portfolio is worth your time! Read more about [portfolios](#) here!

Here are some examples to grow the culture while building portfolios:

- **Weekly Intentions and Reflections** are used to bring student driven purpose to growing a sense of self, ownership of education, and learning how hard work pays off. Parent signatures are a nice addition so that the parents are aware of their child's intentions from week to week over the course of the year. Amazing growth comes from this weekly exercise. Teachers must take time to “bump up” student writing as the year progresses and this is a great way to do it. [Weekly Intention and Reflection Blackline Master](#) and [Photo Gallery](#).
- **Build Interactive Bulletin Boards** based on student ideas that will help students grow.
 - **YAY ME!** - see [Yay Me! Blackline Master](#) student page attached that allows students to **BE THE GAME CHANGER!** Students brainstorm strengths and struggles in a writer's notebook. Students add evidence or reasoning to support their thinking. Next, students choose **THE SINGLE THING** that would influence their school life positively and they record it in the “arrow” – **ACTION ITEM** section of the student page. Also, students will choose the **SINGLE THING** that he/she feels confident in teaching someone else and record it in the circle on the student page. From there, students have owned their behaviors and a peer will help to encourage and hold them accountable. This can be done several times throughout the year. [Check out these photos!](#)

- **GLOWS and GROWS** – As time passes and relationships grow, students can add sticky notes to their partner's work that are thankful in nature, offer advice, and/or are complimentary.
- **I AM A...(writer, mathematician, scientist, reader, etc.) Board** is an empowering display that allows students to see how they have grown and share their excitement of achievement with their peers. This is typically an area from the **ACTION ITEM** (Yay Me!) section that students have collaborated to enhance their skills. Take a picture of the student posing with confidence in their newly uncovered skill! Next, have students record their thinking with evidence to support their claim/statement. Celebrate by posting the picture and the reflection on a bulletin board filled with students striving to be their very best! These are AMAZING MOMENTS for the student, their family, and their school community! [Take a look at how easy this is!](#)
- **WE GROW BETTER TOGETHER! Board** is based on personal growth which positively impacts our community. We “planted a seed” based on the teacher’s recent learning around social emotional learning. Over time, we learned about growth mindset, social awareness, self management, and self efficacy. At first, we made basic definitions and individually chose **ONE** area of focus that most strongly spoke to each of us (listen to your inner voice - **GUT!**). From there, four groups were created and broken down into smaller groups of 2-3. These small groups became our **NEW** peer groups because we are working toward a common interest. As we learned about each of the four domains, we decided to dig into a “Literature Scavenger Hunt” where the student read a variety of books while looking for examples the characters demonstrated a specific domain (For example, Growth Mindset). Peers would flag the page with a note to the reader! Think about this powerful activity for a minute. Can you name the many skills in this activity alone? This board grew one week at a time and our class planned it as we learned! Check it out here...[seeing is believing!](#)
- **Literary Deep Diving Board** is when a text grabs a hold of the class. It is a text that becomes special and you keep coming back to it in conversation. This happened when we read the student version of The Hard Hat by Jon Gordon. This book took us a week to get through and it kept popping up in literally everything we did! So, we made some visual reminders and nurtured the idea of “We Before Me” the whole year through. We even bought a hard hat to hang around the classroom to celebrate our personal growth which directly impacted our community for the better! Take a risk and ask the kids if they have any ideas! Not feeling so artistic? No worries! Your kids will be happy to assist in making their ideas come alive! [Photo Gallery!](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES and NOTES:

- [Our Story](#) - documented journey of building a peer to peer culture in a general education classroom (each year takes on a slightly different look, based on the students in front of you, their needs, and classroom dynamics).
- [My Promise/Your Promise Page](#) - teacher’s promise to his/her students and their promise to themselves AND their peers.
- [End of year celebration certificate](#)
- Social Emotional Learning at its BEST! [Photo Gallery!](#)
- School wide ASD celebration in April - [Photo Gallery](#)
- [WHY?](#) - Why not I say! Check out the district correlations!
- [Peer to Peer Videos](#) - 2 different videos that help paint a picture of **WHY** this work is **ESSENTIAL!**

Remember to “**GO SLOW to GO FAST!**” and “**FLEX AND FLOW or bend and break!**” This time of student and community development is well worth your time. Be flexible, remain positive, think outside the box, get out of your comfort zone, and center everything around the needs of the “people!” Know your efforts today will make tomorrow and days to come **MUCH** better! You will get more accomplished with your children by taking that first step than if you don’t take it at all! They need you to try, try, try! You won’t even believe what’s to come, if you’re able to be vulnerable, authentic & therefore **EMPOWERED!**

BECOME A PEER TO PEER WARRIOR!
YOU CAN DO IT!
BELIEVE!

***Note:** The information provided considers the learning that I have done as an educator, lifelong student, and human over the past 21 years of my career. It is important to recognize that as I learn, I try to implement some of the takeaways within 24 hours, while taking the time to chew on other nuggets a bit longer. There are many authors, leaders, researchers, and peers that have inspired and influenced my thinking which include and are not limited to START, Stephen Covey, Ron Richhart, Galileo Teacher Leadership Consortium, Troy School District, Lucy Calkins and many more. I am thankful to those that have positively impacted my work with students and their families! Thank you!*

- Lisa Carruthers