



We Are All Change Makers

The research is strong and consistent; students who feel connected to school do better academically and are healthier. (Healthy Schools BC, 2014).

Next to family nurturing, school connectedness is the most important protective factor in a young person's life. Students with strong connections to school are less likely to exhibit emotional distress, display disruptive behaviour, or engage in violence. They are less likely to use alcohol or other drugs in unhealthy ways or become sexually active early. But how can we build connectedness?

No magic solution exists. Building a sense of connectedness within a school is a complex process. According to John Dewey part of the answer is to make our schools places of *education*. That may sound strange, but Dewey is suggesting that to educate we need to foster communication among students, engage them in open inquiry rather than providing authoritative instruction and expand their excitement by building upon their interests. He believed schools need to be democratic communities in which students feel valued, included and respected.

Creating such school communities takes time and plenty of intention and effort – and young people's engagement in the process is critical. This inquiry lesson encourages students to reflect on Margaret Wheatley's poem, *Turning to One Another*, and to engage in behaviour that builds the skills of connectedness, of democracy.

Meaningful youth engagement involves recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people through the provision of real opportunities to become involved in decisions that affect them at individual and systemic levels. ~McCreary Centre Society

Instructional strategies

Begin by providing students with a copy of the [handout](#) and having them read Margaret Wheatley's poem, *Turning to One Another*.

1. Draw attention to the first four lines of the poem.

*There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.
Ask: "What's possible?" not "What's wrong?" Keep asking.
Notice what you care about.
Assume that many others share your dreams.*

Ask the students to close their eyes and envision an ideal school community. Then engage them in dialogue about community. Some of the questions below may be useful.

- a. What is a community? What does it look and sound like? How does it feel?
- b. What do you think the power of a community is?
- c. Is it important to be part of a community? Why or why not?
- d. How can we build an ideal school community? Explain.
- e. Throughout history, people have used alcohol and other substances for a variety of reasons (e.g., as medicine, in rituals, to have fun). Do drugs build community or destroy it? Explain your views.

2. Draw attention to the following section of the poem.

*Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.
Talk to people you know.
Talk to people you don't know.
Talk to people you never talk to.*

Again, engage students in dialogue using questions such as:

- Do you have to be brave to start some conversations? What conversations take courage? Do conversations about drugs take courage? Explain.
- Do you have to be brave to talk to certain people? Who is it hard to talk to? Who is it easy to talk to?
- How do drugs change the ability to talk to people? Discuss your answer.
- Do you think talking and connecting with people that we don't know or have never talked to before can help build community? Explain.
- Have you ever felt that you were not a part of a community? That you did not belong? How does it feel?
- How do drugs effect the sense of belonging? Explain your answer.
- What can you do to feel like you belong? What can you do to make others feel like they belong?

Invite students, working in small groups, to come up with questions about what makes a good community. These should be questions they could ask someone they do not usually talk to. Collect the questions on flipchart paper and post in the classroom.

3. Invite the class to reflect on these lines:

*Be intrigued by the differences you bear. Expect to be surprised. Treasure curiosity more than certainty.
. . . .
Remember, you don't fear people whose story you know.
Real listening always brings people closer together.*

Then facilitate more discussion using questions like:

- Why are we afraid to talk to some people? How could we become less afraid? (e.g., taking a friend with us)
- What might we lose if we don't talk to someone?
- If we talk to someone, does that mean we agree with that person? Can we be part of a community even if we disagree about some things? What if we behave differently or like different things?
- Are there some people who are too different to be part of the community? What would happen to such people? How could we make them part of the community?

Invite each students to identify a person they know, someone they don't know and someone else that they've never talked to. Then identify a window of time for them to talk to each of these three people using some of the questions generated above and included on the posted sheet. Debrief the experience with the class and identify some of the things students learned in the process. You might also have students identify actions they are now going to take to improve their school community.

Sources and resources

Healthy Schools BC. (2014). [School connectedness – What does the evidence say?](#)
Joint Consortium for School Health [Youth engagement toolkit](#).
McCreary Centre Society. (2012). [Youth engagement resources](#).

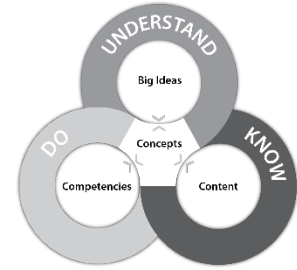
Drug literacy

Big ideas

- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control drugs by examining human thinking through time, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other

Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities and societies
- Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs



For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf>

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

English Language Arts 5

Big idea

- Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others to the world

Competencies

- Access information and ideas from a variety of sources and from prior knowledge to build understanding
- Use a variety of comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading, listening, or viewing to guide inquiry and deepen understanding of text
- Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and develop understanding of self, community, and world
- Exchange ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding

English Language Arts 6/7

Big ideas

- Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others to the world
- Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking

Competencies

- Access information and ideas for diverse purposes and from a variety of sources and evaluate their relevance, accuracy and reliability



- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking

Physical and Health Education 5/6

Big idea

- Personal choices and social and environmental factors influence our health and well-being

Competencies

- Describe and apply strategies for developing and maintaining positive relationships
- Explore strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use

Physical and Health Education 7

Big idea

- Personal choices and social and environmental factors influence our health and well-being

Competencies

- Explore strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use