

# Teacher to Teacher

A DoDEA Teachers of the Year Publication



Fall 2004



## Building Strong Teacher-Student Relationships

By Joyce S. Loyd  
2004 DoDEA  
Teacher of the Year

I was a student teacher at Slippery Rock Elementary School in Slippery Rock, PA in 1977. I was teaching a lesson to my fifth grade students in March and being observed by my university supervisor. A young man was disrupting class, so I did what I thought was expected and asked him to step out into the hallway. That afternoon my university supervisor looked me straight in the eye and said, "You need to find the root of that child's behavior by getting to know him. Make him want to learn what you have to teach. And don't ever put a child out of your classroom again." I cried. And then I decided to take some action. This young man loved to play kickball. We had been playing it every day at recess, even in the snow. I gathered a bunch of my friends from college, and we started playing kickball with him after school several days a week. What a difference it made getting to know this young man! He was being raised by a single mom who didn't get home until 6:00 or 7:00 in the evening. He had no siblings. Needless to say, the time I spent with him after school was worth every second. He was no longer a discipline problem in my class. This was the moment I began to understand the positive and negative impact teachers could have on the lives of students. I decided to put greater effort into getting to know my kids and in return, letting them get to know me.

In my 27 years of teaching, I have never looked back. Building strong teacher- student relationships is the key to academic achievement, fewer discipline problems, and developing good relationships with parents. Current research supports these claims. Building these relationships is a year-long process. Some will happen very quickly, and others will take more time. I never give-up on getting to know any child, and I take the time to let the child get to know me. This newsletter will focus on strategies teachers use in their classrooms to build strong teacher-student relationships. Keep in mind these strategies can be used at any time during the school year. Give them a try. Modify them to fit your personality and the needs of your students.



## Building Strong Relationships with Students via the RES Character Train

By Denise Webster  
2004 Kaiserslautern District  
Teacher of the Year

In response to the Kaiserslautern District Superintendent's desire for a character education component in each school's Continual School Progress plan, Ramstein Elementary School began to explore its options a couple of years ago. As a faculty, we took some time during a CSP day to research and discuss various programs on the market. We highlighted what we liked and what we didn't like. We analyzed costs and benefits, materials and texts of various programs we as educators had invested in, as a part of the entire research process. What did we find?

The faculty of Ramstein Elementary found there wasn't a comprehensive program that we could "buy" in order to reinforce the morals and values we wished to encourage with our students. We even came to consensus and agreed that what we were really looking for COULDN'T come in a packaged deal. What we were looking for had to come from within a person. It wasn't going to be found in a textbook or on a worksheet. *(continued on page 2)*

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It was going to have to come from living it and experiencing it throughout the entire educational experience. So...we ultimately went back to the drawing board.

The School Improvement Leadership Team took the lead on the project and formed the Character Education Committee, using feedback and data collected from faculty members to develop a focus. As a result, Ramstein Elementary School focuses on ten character traits; citizenship, cooperation, friendship, honesty, kindness, respect, responsibility, self-control, self-discipline, and trustworthiness. Each month the entire school, including the cafeteria monitors and recess monitors, focuses on one trait, while reinforcing the traits highlighted and taught in the previous months.

Every teacher and specialist received a set of the ten words printed, mounted and laminated as "word wall" words so that students would see them as high frequency, important words that could be used on a regular basis to reinforce their importance. This also gave a perfect opportunity for students to use and display these traits in their writing during Writer's Workshop.

Next, a "Character Tree" was cultivated (out of laminated butcher paper) and planted in the cafeteria for all students to view. Teachers were given Kelly Koala (our mascot) Coupons so we could



recognize them for displaying any of the ten traits. Once a student's name was submitted at a central collection point, a committee member hung the names on the tree recognizing them for making good choices and being a good thinker. At the end of the month, coupons would be returned to the teacher with an award to present to the student so that his/her achievements could be highlighted, recognized, and taken home as a moment to cherish.

A third component presented for the program is our "Character Train." It is also located in the cafeteria and is another visual display. Each car displays the word of the month and on the car itself, we post photographs of children interacting and displaying the correlating traits.

Finally, our music teacher, Terri Gillespie, and our enrichment teacher, Toni Tinti, put their creative minds together and composed catch tunes with movements and reminders to help encourage good thinking and choices. What did this all do, you may ask?

First and foremost, this character education program, designed and developed based on the needs assessment of Ramstein Elementary, has become a program that teachers believe in, support, and address within their normal instructional components. Children hear the same terminology in support of character building traits no matter where they go. Whether they are in the library, the cafeteria, on the playground, or in the classroom, children hear the same positive reinforcements throughout their experience, resulting in more positive outcomes all around.

Personally, I decided to take the program a step further and tie it directly into my classroom management system. We cultivated our very own character tree (also out of butcher paper and laminate). Each child has an apple growing on this tree. The apple is red on one side and green on the other. Every week, the children begin with their apple on the red side. Throughout the week, children are

encouraged to collect 20 points on a point card. They collect these points by displaying the ten various character traits. The goal is for them to be "caught" doing the right behavior. Once a child has ten points collected they may turn their apple to green, showing others their progress. This acts as both a positive reinforcement to the child for their hard work and as a reminder to those who may need to strive a bit harder. Once a child collects the 20 points, they get to hang their point card on their apple hook. At the end of the week, this recognition and the fact that assignments are complete earns



them Friday Free Time, which consisted of various computer based activities, art activities, and reading activities to name a few.

Students LOVE this program because they realize they are ultimately accountable for the outcomes and they truly strive for the goals that are established. The first few weeks are at times a challenge for some, but I have had success with every student attaining the goal. Once they do, they feel the thrill of self-satisfaction.

For the times where there does need to be an emphasis on behaviors needing corrective measures, I have a second "apple system" in place. It is strategically located completely opposite from the positive system mentioned before. The reason for this is so children do not automatically compare the positive with the negative. Students have another apple with their name on it hung on a magnetic surface. There are three baskets labeled with a 1, 2, and 3 placed by these apples. Students exhibiting behaviors that need to be corrected differently receive a warning first, then two levels of time out (if necessary). The students rarely need to go to time out.

Why is this important? Why the success? I firmly believe that because the students and teachers have ownership in the language, which is common throughout the school, the students take the program more to heart. Teachers are not spending additional instructional time focusing on character education elements. Rather, they are highlighting the character traits through their already planned lessons and daily routines. All educators are using the same terms when working with children, so no matter who asks the question "Are you making good choices?" the child will be able to answer based on the traits that all of us know, use, and reinforce.





## Family Relationship Building

By Maryann Williams  
2004 North Carolina District  
Teacher of the Year

Family Fun Night is an activity we enjoy at Holbrook Elementary School as we build relationships. It is a time to celebrate being a family! We offer a spaghetti dinner for \$1 a family, and then activities for families to do together afterwards. Some of the activities include: Beach Volleyball, Square Dancing, Computer Fun, BINGO, Recycling, Family Crest Making, Singing and Signing, Spanish for Beginners, Germ Busters and Calculator Fun. Families choose classes to attend together. The classes are staffed by teachers and other outreach agencies from the Ft. Bragg community. PTA volunteers help with food preparation and clean-up. Our goal is to promote family fun in a friendly, non-threatening environment. This, in turn, builds better relationships with our school families.

We have also hosted monthly "Lunch and Learn" classes this



year. Parents are invited to eat lunch at the school. They participate in learning activities. Some of our sessions this year have included: Coping through the Holidays, Helping Your Child Express His/Her Feelings, Teaching Personal Safety, and Activities to Enrich Your Child's Summer Vacation. These sessions provide a relaxed atmosphere in which parents gain

valuable information and are encouraged to communicate their concerns about their children and/or the school. The principal, school psychologist and school counselor are present to help answer any questions that may arise. This program is funded through a PTA grant.

Building relationships with our school families is a high priority at Holbrook. We recognize that the family is the first teacher of the child, so we provide many opportunities to enrich that relationship. We also strive to build on the relationships we have with our students and their families.



## Interviews and Introductions or Seven Questions for Getting to Know Your Students

By Edward Gravlin  
2004 Korea District  
Teacher of the Year

Welcome to class! Today we will take a little time to learn more about each other. Turn to the person next to you and introduce yourself. This is the person you will interview. Ask them the questions listed below and then have them ask the same questions of you. Later, you will use the answers to introduce each other to the class. Have fun!

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) Where were you born?
- 3) How long have you lived here?
- 4) What is your favorite food?
- 5) What is your favorite movie?
- 6) Do you have a favorite hobby or interest?
- 7) Can you tell me something nobody knows about you?

**Editor's Note:** The positive effects of building community and personal relationships within the school environment are well documented in educational research. This, and other similar activities, set the stage for a more personalized learning experience for students and enhances a collaborative mindset. The ability to collaborate, on both a large and small scale, is one of the core requisites of modern society (Fullan 1993).



## Developing Strong Positive Relationships through Multi-Media

By Lorri Blanchard  
2004 Georgia/Alabama District  
Teacher of the Year

One way I encourage strong positive relationships with my students through multi-media is to have them develop and create a family website. This is an excellent way to incorporate technology into the curriculum, to get to know my students better, and to provide an opportunity for my students to keep in touch with their family members. With many of our parents being deployed, my students appreciate the fact that I care enough to help them develop a way to communicate with their *(continued on page 4)*



deployed parent. My students tell me what they miss the most is being able to share the day to day events with their parent who is deployed.

I use Microsoft Publisher to create our website. It is not my first choice for website authoring, but because most of my students have this program at home we can easily transfer their work in class to their home computer for publishing. I have the students construct a design layout of the items they want to include in their website; however, this layout must include the following:

1. Home page
2. Page about mom or dad
3. Page about school
4. Page about their siblings
5. Page about what is going on in their daily life
6. E-mail response line

Once they have the design layout created, they begin constructing their website. They can preview their site using the web site preview under the file menu to see how their site will look on the web. Most of your internet service providers will give you “free” server space to upload your site when you subscribe to their service as long as it remains under a certain file size.



### **Building Positive Relationships with Students through Classroom Environment**

By Lisa Eckhoff  
2004 Mediterranean District  
Teacher of the Year

A smile and a personal comment to each student as they walk into the classroom begins to set the mood. As each child hears his/her name, he/she looks up to make eye contact and has the feeling that he has been welcomed to school. The classroom environment should be attractive to all senses. Environment is created through the teacher's attitude, classroom furnishings, colors, sounds, and general student comfort.

Teachers should make a point to welcome each student individually to make a comment that means something to each child. Students know you are glad they have come to school if you extend an attitude of interest and caring. At the beginning and end of each day, I try to follow consistent procedures so the students know what to expect and their anxiety level is kept to a minimum. As the children leave for the busses, I ask them for a verbal response. Some examples of questions are: “What was the most fun for you today? Can you solve this particular addition or subtraction problem?” Another technique is to use a weekly vocabulary or

spelling word in conversation. Sometimes it's as simple as, “Today, I need a Monday word,” meaning say a word that starts with an “M” and we share a high-five hand slap. This individual contact is important to each child.

While students are in the classroom, the furnishings should be size-appropriate and comfortable. Students need opportunities to sit on surfaces other than their chair. It's comforting for children to sit on carpets, rugs, pillows, beanbag chairs, etc. Sometimes, just providing other locations in the room to read or work, and allowing students to lie down on their backs or bellies, sit cross-legged, or even stand meets a child's particular needs, and, in turn, helps me get to know my students better.

Although teachers cannot always choose the most modern, clean, freshly painted facilities with abundant resources, we can use what we do have to make our rooms positive, warm, and inviting. I like to have lots of student work hanging from the walls and ceiling. Throughout the room, the current season is celebrated. Bright colors and bulletin boards that are changed regularly keep students engaged. I try to create a comfortable feeling like being at home. I have potted plants placed in the room to add life. The room is divided into smaller sections to help create a cozy feeling. I keep clutter to a minimum and the students know where things belong. Students are given their own storage space and responsibilities throughout the room, which encourages their feelings of ownership. My students get to know me through these arrangements and settings, as well.

To calm, organize, and sometimes stimulate children, I usually have music playing. I have absolutely no musical talent, except to press play on the CD player. It's magical. Students enter the room with soothing music to help them enter, put things away, and settle in to start the morning. Very soon after that, I play classical music that is a little more upbeat. I have some children's sing-a-longs and other musical varieties to engage the students. They especially enjoy nature sounds as they work. The children adjust their mood, noise, and activity levels to the music. The background music helps to minimize chatting as well. I can learn a lot about my students as they make comments on the music, as I observe their reactions to the music, and as they participate in the musical activities.

We know that children cannot learn if their basic human needs have not been met. Children need to have physical comfort with space, furnishings, appropriate temperature, etc. They also need to have opportunities throughout the day to move around from place to place. If I have a lesson that has gone too long (more than ten minutes with 2<sup>nd</sup> graders) or I can just see that the children are not focused, we stand up and play Simon Says or do jumping jacks. Sometimes, just playing a stretching or wiggle game is just what we all need. Additionally, the daily schedule has to include consistent break times, including opportunities to snack. Sometimes, I just toss together some cereal, nuts, and goldfish crackers and pass a small cup to each child. They are instantly revitalized!

To reach and teach the “whole child,” teachers must create an atmosphere where each child feels welcome, important, and encouraged. One element of our responsibility is to use available resources to transform our classrooms into the very best environment. When we make this effort, our students know that we care about them and that we value every *(continued on page 5)*

single child. By teaching the “whole child” I am able to build relationships with my students.



### Ideas for Building Strong Student-Teacher Relationships

By Karin Mordt  
2004 Okinawa District  
Teacher of the Year

**This idea comes from our teacher of the Moderate/Severe Learning Impaired classroom:** Each day we take time in the morning to talk. If students want to tell me something that is going on in their lives I listen, mainly because I want to encourage them to speak. We also do a daily journal with the parents. The students often make sure that their parents or I read the journal because they know something about them was written in it. As often as possible we write or draw about our families, homes, or anything else that is on our minds. My students and I have a relationship where trust is established and expectations are set, which creates a very welcoming classroom for all of us to enjoy.

**This idea comes from a first grade teacher:** I have Family Book Breaks in my classroom. This is a fun alternative to traditional parties. Families sign up for a holiday theme or other special topic. Then throughout the year families come to read a story, do a craft or other activity, and/or share a snack. This is a great way for kids not only to learn about a topic through literature, but also to interact with each student’s family. It is also a special way for families to share information about a topic of interest. For example, Jewish families have hosted Hanukkah book breaks; Japanese families have come for Asian History Month; and today we had a mom do a whole session on the Faroe Islands because that is where she grew-up.

**These ideas comes from a third grade teacher:** At the beginning of the year I tell the kids one or two things I am really good at doing. I tell them to ask me for help if they ever need help in those one or two areas, because I am a pro at them. Then I get the kids to tell me one or two things they are really good at doing and we make sure that we keep a list until we memorize it. Then those kids are the pros and should be asked for help in those areas. Every kid knows there is something they can offer to another person in need. We recognize strengths, and I learn where the students are confident. I apologize when I am wrong, and thank kids for accepting my weaknesses. Rudeness or cruelty in any form is not tolerated at any time in my classroom. We discuss our worries/triumphs every morning during Morning Meeting, mine included. I shared my horrid experiences trying to polish my toenails yesterday. The

students realize we all need comforting, we all have bad days, and laughter is good medicine. I try to ask kids personal questions one-on-one that show I remember what they tell me. I will even say, “You know last night right before I went to sleep, I remembered that I forgot to ask how your dog was doing. You told me he was sick and I have been a little worried. Is everything okay?” They know I think about them often, not just at school.

**This idea comes from a school psychologist who works in several different classrooms:** Last year one of the teachers at Amelia Earhart Intermediate School had each of her students cut a “link” from construction paper. They all wrote something positive about the student beside them and she hung them around the room. I thought this was pretty cool. I also know that a couple of teachers do “carpet talks” with their classes at times. During carpet talks the kids are free to express concerns openly without fear of retaliation or punishment. They are also encouraged to recognize good things that are happening.

My third grade colleague creates a democratic student government to help make decisions regarding their classroom. The students not only gain an understanding of how a democratic government works, but they also gain some ownership of and responsibility for their problems as well as the organization/management of their classroom.

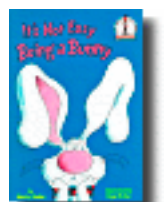


### Getting to Know My Students via Children’s Picture Books

By Joyce S. Loyd  
2004 DoDEA  
Teacher of the Year

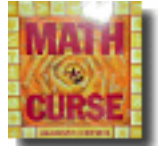
Regardless of what grade level I teach, I have found kids love to be read to, especially when I get dramatic with my reading and change voices for each character. A valuable tool I have used over the years to help me get to know my kids, and in return, let them get to know me, is picture books. I will share with you a couple of the books I read to my students and how I use these books to help build strong teacher-student relationships.

*It’s Not Easy Being a Bunny* by Marilyn Sadler is one of my favorite books. I let approximately six to nine weeks go by at the beginning of the year before I read this book. P.J. Funny Bunny decides he is tired of eating carrots and tired of all of his siblings, so he ventures out into the world in search



of the perfect animal to be. By the end of the story he realizes it is not easy being any species of animal, so he goes back home to be a bunny. After I read the book to my kids, I tell them it is not always easy being a teacher. I talk honestly to them about the things that aren't particularly easy for me as a teacher. I then ask them if they think it is easy for their parents to be a parent and we discuss that in depth. I finally ask them, "Is it easy being a fifth grader?" We talk about some of the things they are having problems with at this point in the school year. I conclude this lesson by passing out a brightly colored 3x5 index card to each student. I ask them to write 3-5 sentences telling me what they find personally difficult in their experience as a fifth grader. Not only do I get a chance to gain insight into each child at this point in the school year, but I also get a quick look at their unedited writing skills.

*Math Curse* by Jon Scieszka is an interactive book I use in math. Each page generates discussions for solving the problems presented. It's a fun book which I generally use at the beginning of the school year in my three math classes. At the conclusion of the book, we discuss how math is such an integral part of our lives. We also talk about how time controls our lives. At the conclusion of the discussion, I again, pass out a brightly colored 3x5 index card to each student. I ask them to write 3-5 sentences telling me how time controls their lives and/or what they would do if they had more leisure time on their hands. Some years I have asked them to explain what causes them frustrations in math. Again, I get to know more about each student in relationship to math, and I get a quick look at their unedited writing skills.



**2004 DoDEA Teachers of the Year** at the recognition banquet held in Arlington, Virginia, during the 2004 Teacher Forum. Front center is Joyce Loyd, 2004 DoDEA Teacher of the Year. Standing in the first row are James Hashman, Japan District, Ada Debien, Antilles Consolidated School System, Jacqueline Mayo, Isles District, Lorri Blanchard, Georgia/Alabama School District, Karen Twitty, South Carolina/Ft. Stewart District, Kirsten Downey, Guam District, Sharon Adinolfi, New York/Virginia District, and Karin Mordt, Okinawa District. In the Second row are Heide Hurd, Heidelberg District, Denise Webster, Kaiserslautern District, Edward Gravlin, Korea District, David Becher, Bavaria District, Lisa Eckhoff, Mediterranean District, and Maryann Williams, North Carolina School District.

## 2005 Teacher Forum Announced

The DoDEA Teacher Forum will convene at DoDEA Headquarters, Arlington, Virginia, November 30 – December 3, 2004. The 2005 DoDEA District Teachers of the Year will be invited to attend. This annual event provides a forum for DoDEA teachers to voice their opinions on current educational issues. The four-day event will also include trips to the Pentagon and to the Smithsonian Institution.