



## **Professional Development Institute**

### **Flex Course Syllabus**

# **Building Empathy and Community in Middle and High School (Grades 6-12)**

**PDI Course Number: 142T02**

**ACE Course Number: LE5392**

**UCSD Course Number: EDUC42445**

If you would like information about receiving credit for completing this course, [please click here](#).

### **Course Timeline**

Participants have one year to complete the course. Participants must spend a minimum of three weeks in this course.

### **Course Description**

Are you looking for practical strategies to build and foster empathy and community within your middle or high school classroom and/or school? As a teacher, you likely already know that the two values of empathy and community feed into each other and often promote even stronger, more connected school systems. Yet, at the same time, you also know the challenges that many students, teachers, and administrators face when trying to implement these best practices. This online course is designed to provide teachers in grades 6-12 with the necessary tools to build and maintain an environment in which all students feel respected, celebrated, and valued. Here, teachers will learn how to create a safe, empathetic space to meet the holistic needs of their diverse learners using best social-emotional learning practices, including such things as check-ins and restorative circles. Teachers will also learn how to help their students identify and regulate their emotions so that student choice, agency, and curiosity are cultivated and nourished in a safe classroom environment. Teachers will also learn how to institute common goals using a solid mission/vision statement so that empathetic connections can be promoted within and among school teams as well as the larger community. By the end of this course, teachers will feel more confident and successful in their quest to transform their classrooms and schools into an empathetic community filled with grace and compassion.

## Educational Outcomes

1. Teachers will learn what empathy is, what its benefits are, and why it is important to cultivate it in schools.
2. Teachers will learn how the creation of community is a direct result of empathy.
3. Teachers will understand how trauma-informed best teaching practices build community and empathy within not only the classroom, but within schools, colleagues, and school districts as well.
4. Teachers will understand the connection between empathy and community, and how both can be used to broaden the human experience.
5. Teachers will learn how to channel community and empathy to offset the negative effects of shame.
6. Teachers will learn how to create empathy in their classrooms by meeting students' basic safety and social-emotional needs and by viewing students through their own lens to better understand their personal perspectives.
7. Teachers will understand how important diversity and inclusion are to empathy.
8. Teachers will learn how to create a safe space in their classrooms by fostering empathy and community, while working to reduce shame and guilt. The strategies that they learn include such things as using micro-affirmations, establishing ground rules for interactions, and meeting challenging behavior head-on, so that they can be turned into teachable moments.
9. Teachers will learn the impact that diversity has on academics, which ultimately leads to greater empathy and community in the classroom environment.
10. Teachers will learn how to examine their own internal biases and restrictive patterns of old behaviors and beliefs so that their minds are more open, leading to a school environment which cherishes and supports empathy and classroom community.
11. Teachers will learn how to revise and re-shape their discipline policies so that they are more empathetic and inclusive.
12. Teachers will learn the importance of regulating their own emotions so that they are better positioned to model and support a variety of emotional regulation skills for students.
13. Teachers will take a deep dive into Maslow's hierarchy of needs and they will learn various strategies to meet those needs in the 6-12 classroom.
14. Teachers will learn about trauma-informed teaching, and they will explore several strategies for incorporating same into their own teaching practices.
15. Teachers will learn how to set norms and address bullying behavior so that a safe and supportive classroom environment can be established and nurtured so that a diverse set of students can feel accepted and celebrated as part of the classroom community.
16. Teachers will explore a variety of strategies to cultivate a culturally responsive classroom so that students' curiosity is cultivated and celebrated in a safe and compassionate environment.
17. Teachers will learn several strategies to cultivate students' curiosity, including setting norms, establishing a growth mindset, practicing asking questions with the QFT method, and employing surveys, among others.

18. Teachers will learn about the barriers that students face when they try to cultivate empathy, including such things as living in an individualistic culture and the effects of mental health challenges, among others.
19. Teachers will explore several classroom activities to cultivate empathy in students, including such things as perspective-taking, active listening, and collaboration, among others.
20. Teachers will explore several SEL activities, all of which are designed to build connections and stimulate empathy and community.
21. Teachers will explore a variety of barriers to cultivating empathy among colleagues including systemic challenges such as increased workloads, staffing issues, finances, high-stakes testing and accountability, as well as the challenges faced due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.
22. Teachers will explore a variety of strategies to promote adult mental health and well-being, including ways to decrease the workload and how to promote respect and professionalism within the school environment.
23. Teachers will explore a variety of activities to promote empathy and create colleague connections within school teams.
24. Teachers will explore several strategies to build classroom community and set norms so that students can have more voice and choice.
25. Teachers will learn several ways to build community throughout the whole school, including such things as instituting joy block, advisories, and promoting student leadership.
26. Teachers will learn about the importance of staff retention, and they will explore a variety of strategies for accomplishing the same.

## **Instructional Media**

- Online Discussions
- Online Engagement
- Online Collaboration
- Instructor Feedback
- Instructor Interaction
- Online Resources and Websites
- Supplemental Instructional Materials
- Printable Classroom Resources

## **Evaluation**

- Test #1 (5% of final grade)
- Test #2 (5% of final grade)
- Test #3 (5% of final grade)
- Test #4 (5% of final grade)
- Test #5 (5% of final grade)
- Autobiography and Goals for the Course (10% of final grade)

- Article/Video Reflection (15% of final grade)
- Course Collaboration/Share Ideas with the Class (10% of final grade)
- Cumulative Assignment/Project: Design and Reflect on an Empathy Lesson (20% of final grade)
- Culminating Practicum (20% of final grade)

## Topical Outline

### Unit One

- The Importance of Empathy
- The Importance of Community for Educators and Students
- The Connection between Empathy and Community
- **Assignment #1**  
*Write an autobiography including information about yourself, your grade level and what you specifically hope to learn about helping students build empathy and community within an inclusive middle and high school classroom. Your autobiography should be a minimum of three paragraphs.*
- **Test #1**

### Unit Two

- Creating Space for Empathy
- The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion
- Unlearning Old Patterns
- **Assignment #2**  
*As an educator, it is important to be aware of the research, studies, and professional work done in the field. In the course, you will find an article and video that are relevant to the specific course content. Read the article and then write an essay with your thoughts.*
- **Test #2**

### Unit Three

- The Importance of Safety
- Creating a Safe Classroom
- Cultivating Curiosity and Celebrations
- **Assignment #3**  
*Online Discussion Board Participation/Engagement: Please post a tip, strategy, or idea that specifically relates to helping students build empathy and community within an inclusive middle and high school classroom. The tip, strategy, or idea that you share needs to make a difference to other teachers in their own classrooms. Your assignment should be a minimum of three paragraphs and detailed enough for another teacher to follow easily. This is a great opportunity to share and collaborate with other teachers at*

*your grade level around the country. Take time to review and respond to other postings that are relevant to your classroom population in order to gain effective ideas to use immediately in your classroom.*

- **Test #3**

## **Unit Four**

- Challenges to Cultivating Empathy in Students
- Classroom Activities to Cultivate Empathy
- SEL Activities to Cultivate Empathy in Students
- **Test #4**

## **Unit Five**

- Challenges to Cultivating Empathy in Colleagues
- Promoting Adult Mental Health and Well-Being
- Activities to Promote Empathy Within and Among School Teams
- **Test #5**

## **Unit Six**

- Classroom Community-Building Ideas
- Whole School Community-Building Ideas
- It Takes a Village
- **Assignment #4**

***PART I:** Design a lesson to build empathy and community at your particular grade level and which relates to your particular teaching situation. The lesson plan should include an essential question, purpose, background, a materials list, and a minimum of six detailed steps to execute the procedure. Follow the example at the end of the explanation of Part II.*

***PART II:** After you have taught the above lesson, write a one-paragraph reflection about the outcome. Your reflection should consist of at least eight detailed sentences. The sentences should be very metacognitive in nature, meaning they should show a deep understanding of the entire process involved in bringing empathy and community holistically into the classroom and school for the benefit of students and staff alike.*

*If you are currently not teaching or unable to teach this lesson, discuss how you anticipate that this lesson will increase empathy and build community within the classroom and school. This reflection should also be written in at least eight detailed sentences. Again, these sentences should also be very metacognitive in nature, meaning that they show a deep understanding of the entire process involved in bringing empathy and community holistically into the classroom and school for the benefit of students and staff alike.*

- **Assignment #5**

*The culminating practicum is a three-step process. (1) In the first assignment, you were asked what goals you had and what you hoped to learn from the course. Think back to your original goals for this course. Write a minimum two-paragraph reflection specifically describing how what you learned can be used to help you reach those goal(s). (2) Next, write a minimum three-paragraph plan that specifically describes the ways in which you intend to implement a particular strategy you learned in this course into your own teaching situation. (3) Last, write a minimum two-paragraph reflection describing a student you have or have had in the past. Then, discuss how the strategies you learned in this course will specifically benefit that student as you put your plan into action.*

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