Building Community in the Classroom
by Jan Randolph and Pansy Gee

Why is community so important?
The purpose of this presentation is to encourage and support you in developing positive relationships in your classroom community that will maximize individual and group potential. Classroom relationships include teacher to student, student to teacher, and student to student.

Our goal as early childhood educators is for each child to be a successful learner, but before that will happen each child must feel known, safe, loved and accepted. The child must also feel connected to those in his learning community. These are truths that have been verified by learning theorists from behavioral observations and also by the growing body of brain research.

We will be sharing some understandings and practices that will enhance sense of community in your classroom.

Some of the resources that we will be using today are: More Than Meets the Eye by Donna Skolnick. Others include Teaching With the Brain in Mind by Jensen, Life in a Crowded Place by Ralph Peterson and Choice Words by Peter Johnston.
Teacher, Listen, Listen, Listen
There are many factors that impact the healthy development of community: the teacher must be caring, flexible and have dependable routines. But, one of the key components is listening. It is our responsibility to exhibit listening behaviors and teach the children how to talk and listen to each other.

Listen Song

Quote by Hiam Ginot—“I’ve come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. My personal approach creates the climate. My daily mood makes the weather. As a teacher I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal”

The way I treat each child is how they treat each other.

Quote Let no child pass by unseen, unheard, untouched.

True listening communicates to the child that they are appreciated and accepted and that what they have to say is of interest. It develops trust and concern for each other.

It requires one on one time, sharing stories and smiles
The Storytelling Project is a wonderful example of listening.

Carlson and Bailey in Slowing Down to the Speed of Life say, “True listening allows you to change your mind. It allows you to see something fresh, in a new way. It enables you to say to others or to yourself, I’ve never thought of that before. It’s the kind of listening that creates enjoyment and a sharp learning curve."

Another aspect of developing community is to focus on what is right and be free with praise. My motto this year has been “This is the child that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad for him.”
We model watching for the good and honoring it.
Building That Community Feeling

Getting to Know Each Other
1. Postcards to students before school (can be continued throughout the year).
2. Names and pictures at stations, etc.
3. Kid of the Day
4. Class books with names and pictures of people (and places) in the school community. Individual copies can be made for children to take home.
5. The More We Get Together

Rituals
1. Greetings at the door each morning—cheerful and personal.
2. Hey There, Neighbor
3. Morning Meeting—Come Join the Circle
   Individuals in the Group Share (Fast Arounds, 3 Share/3 Questions)
4. Little Blue Box
5. Pattern claps, chants, songs and rhymes for transitions
6. Partner Talks
7. Story Telling/Dramatizations
8. Writing/Sharing
9. Closing Meeting—share what we learned
10. Good-bye Song and Farewells (hugs, high fives)

Ceremonies/Celebrations
1. Ooh La La
2. Birthdays—Songs, hats, birthday placemats, birthday box
3. Moving Ceremony—pass a special pebble around the circle and have each child make a wish for the departing child. Then she gets to take the pebble with her.
4. Parties for special occasions (including celebrating and sharing good work).
5. End of the Year Ceremony

Affirmations
1. Compliments and praise
2. I am proud
3. Group affirmations
   We can do it.
   We are kind.
   We help each other.
   We are good workers.
We never give up.
We share.
We care about each other.
We are good listeners.
We learn new things every day.

Reflections:
• What is something you heard today that confirms a current practice in your classroom?
• What is something you heard today that you have done but had forgotten about?
• What is something new you learned today that you want to remember to do next week?