



## Relationships First Connection Barometer



As human beings, we are hardwired to emotionally connect with others, this is a scientifically proven fact.

*“The mechanisms by which we become and stay attached to others are biologically primed and increasingly discernible in the basic structure of the brain...self-organization of the developing brain occurs in the context of a relationship with another self, another brain...this relational context can be growth-facilitating or growth-inhibiting, and so it imprints into the developing right brain either a resilience against or a vulnerability to later forming psychiatric disorders”* (‘Hardwired To Connect’, a research report co-sponsored by YMCA of the USA, Dartmouth Medical School, and the Institute for American Values for the Commission on Children at Risk.)

When we are with others in situations where the safe expression or emotion is encouraged, we begin to ‘loop’ with one another as Daniel Goleman tells us, and eventually find ourselves *in rapport*. Our brains are built to resonate (mirror) emotions *or affects* we see in others, when others laugh, we may laugh. When others cry, we experience distress, as the distress of another is uncomfortably contagious.

This *neural looping* can occur when we deliberately create situations where people can join together in situations where a range of emotions are safely and freely expressed. Nathanson (Affect theory) tells us that encouraging this safe free flow of emotion between people, where people are taught to name the emotions that course through them, creates a sense of community where people feel connected to one another. As educators, we implicitly know that learning is optimized in settings where students feel emotionally safe with others. Taking this a step further, when students feel connected (like they belong), they feel safe. When they feel safe, they are more likely to take healthy risks, when students feel safe enough to push themselves beyond what feels completely safe (take a risk) , they learn!

Over our two days together, we will share a range of activities and methodologies designed to create a sense of connectedness between participants. We would like you to **privately** track your feelings of connectedness to the group by plotting them on this ‘connection barometer’ at specified times that we will inform you of . Of course, this will not be an *exact science*, but we hope that recording your feelings in regards to your connection with others at a set of times over the next two days will highlight some occurrences worth discussing as the sense of community evolves within our group.

It is our hope you take away with you a heightened sense of the crucial importance of helping students to create and maintain relationships with one another, and feel that you have some tools in your kit to engage students in community building pedagogies like Circle Time, Restorative Practices and the Circle of Courage.

Travis, Kym and Bill