

When students and teachers have high aspirations, they have the *ability to dream and set goals for the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams*. Whether the goal is to learn trigonometry or a trade, get good grades or go to college, develop a new curriculum, expand one's pedagogical repertoire, or achieve an outstanding evaluation, students and teachers want to be successful. Too often, however, students and teachers do not reach their goals and potential because the conditions that inspire and support them are not in place.

The Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations (QISVA) promotes 8 Conditions that educators can use to live out the 3 Guiding Principles—Self-Worth, Engagement, and Purpose—in their classrooms and schools. Based on more than three decades of research by the Quaglia Institute, these Conditions prepare students and teachers to strive for and fulfill their academic, personal, professional, and social promise.

The 8 Conditions are:

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1: SELF-WORTH

BELONGING

The Condition of Belonging means being a valued member of a community while still maintaining your uniqueness. It is manifested in relationships between two or more persons and is characterized by a sense of connection and support. A sense of Belonging is an important Condition for an overall sense of well-being, social engagement, competence, and a strong collegial working environment. The Condition of Belonging can enhance intrinsic motivation, for it fosters self-confidence and an investment in the community.

HEROES

Heroes are the everyday people—teachers, colleagues, students, friends, family—in our lives who inspire us to excel and to make positive changes in attitude and lifestyles. Heroes are the individuals students and teachers connect with, who have a positive influence on them, and who listen to and value their ideas. Heroes build trust in others and belief in oneself. Educators are, by definition, Heroes to their students who look up to them as people to learn from and communicate with about many things. Students are often Heroes to teachers, and everyone can be a Hero to their peers. Building positive relationships through support, guidance, and encouragement enables students and teachers to become more confident in their academic, personal, social, and collegial growth.

SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

The Condition of Sense of Accomplishment recognizes effort, perseverance, collegiality, and citizenship as signs of success. Schools have traditionally used a narrow view of accomplishment as it refers to academic achievement, innate ability, who is “best in the class”, a snapshot performance evaluation, or a checklist for participation in professional development. Sense of Accomplishment, however, is viewed in terms of personal and professional growth and effort, and is not strictly assessed through measurable outcomes and countable successes. Schools can celebrate a wide variety of accomplishments in visible ways. Taking time to recognize and support students' and teachers' efforts can help motivate them to persevere through difficult tasks, creating an appreciation for hard work and dedication.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2: ENGAGEMENT

FUN & EXCITEMENT

The Condition of Fun & Excitement is characterized by being intellectually engaged and emotionally involved in our schoolwork and professional lives. Students and teachers who exhibit Fun & Excitement are usually self-confident, curious, energetic, and prepared; they are willing and able to meet the challenges of the day. To foster Fun & Excitement in schools, students and teachers need to be offered new opportunities and meaningful challenges that are connected with their individual interests and the needs of the school.

CURIOSITY & CREATIVITY

The Condition of Curiosity & Creativity is characterized by inquisitiveness, eagerness, intellectual engagement in learning, and a strong desire to learn new or interesting things. Curiosity invites the question “Why?” while creativity involves taking the initiative to ask “Why not?” The intensity of Curiosity & Creativity tends to diminish over time due to the habituating effects of the environment. To sustain student and teacher engagement, schools can devote extra attention to creating environments that promote questioning, problem solving, innovation, and creative exploration.

SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

The Condition of Spirit of Adventure is characterized by our ability to take on positive, healthy challenges at school and home, with family and friends. Students and teachers experience a Spirit of Adventure when they tackle something new without the fear of failure or success. When schools promote effective decision making and healthy risk taking, students and teachers can become more confident and resilient. Students and teachers with Spirit of Adventure see life as full of opportunities worth exploring for their own sake.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3: PURPOSE

LEADERSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY

The Condition of Leadership & Responsibility means being able to express ideas and a willingness to accept the consequences of our actions. It cultivates accountability for the classroom environment and school community. Fostering leadership empowers students and teachers to make just and appropriate decisions and to take pride in their actions. Schools that promote this Condition expect their students and teachers to have a voice and be good decision makers. They provide legitimate decision-making opportunities, seek student and teacher input, and expect participants to be accountable for their actions and words.

CONFIDENCE TO TAKE ACTION

Confidence to Take Action is characterized by a positive and healthy outlook on life that comes from looking inward rather than outward for approval. It is the extent to which students and teachers believe in themselves and their ability to make a difference in their schools. This Condition is at the heart of what schools ultimately strive for: instilling in students and teachers both confidence and an expectation that they will be successful. Schools can help build Confidence to Take Action by having high expectations, providing support, and encouraging independent thinking. By enhancing the quality of academic, professional and personal growth, schools empower participants to become active and involved members of the learning community.

Concluding Thoughts

In an era of educational policy that changes almost daily, schools must be grounded in a set of principles that are solidly based on research and that provide a practical, common sense approach to professional growth and learning. The 8 Conditions provide schools with this framework. This is not a new fad in education; in fact, these Conditions are the same ones that inspired us when we first became educators, and they will be the same conditions that inspire generations of educators to come. The Condition of Belonging will never be replaced with a Condition of Alienation; the Condition of Fun & Excitement will never be replaced with a program of Intentional Boredom, and the Condition of Leadership & Responsibility will never be replaced with efforts to nurture Apathy.

We must take education back to the basics—the basics that ensure students' and teachers' feelings of self-worth, engagement in the life of the school, and sense of purpose in the world around them. The 8 Conditions can be used by all schools to improve relationships with students and teachers, make teaching and learning more relevant and engaging, and create a renewed sense of purpose in classrooms and schools. If nothing else, the 8 Conditions are a clear reminder of why we entered the field of education in the first place—to make a difference in this world.