

THE HEART AND ART OF TEACHING AND LEARNING



When people choose teaching as a profession, they make a commitment to making a difference for students. Bringing their own strengths, interests and passions into their teaching inspires their students. Recognizing students' positive attributes and purposely seeking out their individual strengths creates a positive mindset in a classroom community where everyone feels included, valued and more willing to take risks in learning.

The information and lessons that follow are excerpted from Chapter 3 – “Building Inclusion: Practical Ideas for the First Hours/Days/Weeks of School.”

The resource is available at shopetfo.ca and online at heartandart.ca. The website/blog allows teachers to interact with other educators who are living the heart and art of teaching and learning with students.

BIG IDEAS FOR THE FIRST HOURS/DAYS/WEEKS OF SCHOOL

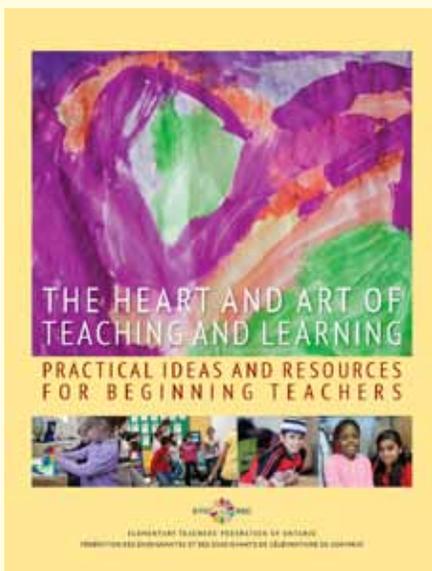
Inclusion is a sense of belonging. It is the feeling that the classroom is a safe place, where the contributions of all students are valued. Opportunities for students to learn about each other and about you as their teacher help foster this sense of inclusion and build a classroom community.

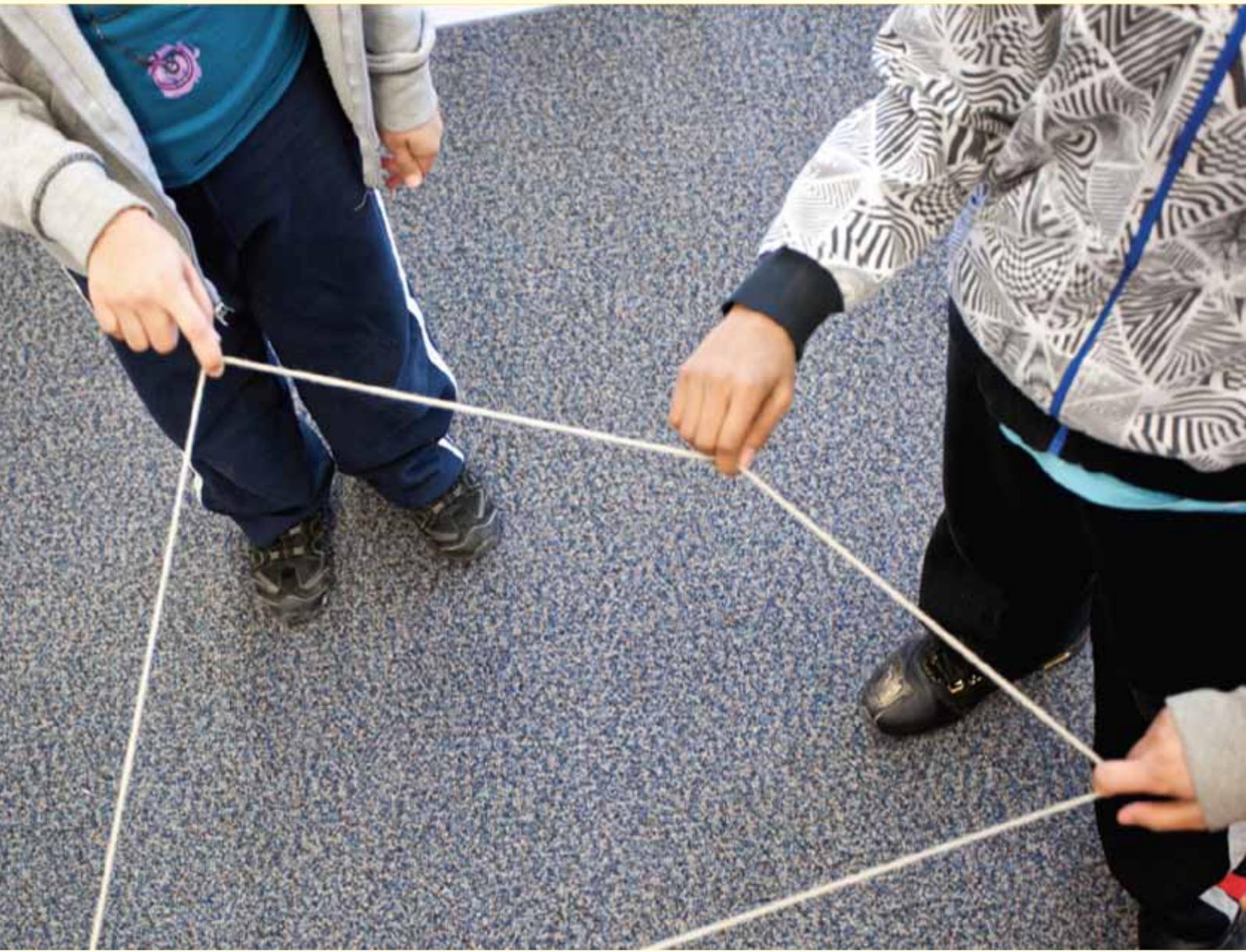
This chapter shares practical activities to use in the first weeks of school. These ideas help to create a community of learners. As with so many aspects of teaching, there is no one “right way,” but our hope is to provide some useful ideas that you can adapt and modify based on your teaching context and the needs of your students.

Inclusion is a process, not an event, and while the first days of school provide an opportune time to foster an inclusive classroom atmosphere, any time is a great time for building inclusion!

The *Heart and Art of Teaching and Learning: Practical Ideas and Resources for Beginning Teachers* provides a practical resource for the many “firsts” beginning teachers will encounter, as well as encourages and enhances their personal learning journey.

This ETFO resource provides tips on setting up a classroom, managing a class, building inclusion, working with parents, meeting diverse learning needs, continuing professional learning and growth and preparing to be an occasional teacher. Although beginning teachers will benefit from this resource, teachers going through a change of assignment, grade or division will find it helpful too.





MAP OF THE HUMAN HEART

1. On a blank paper students draw a heart shape to represent their own hearts.
2. Inside the heart they use pictures to represent what is important to them in their lives (e.g., a parent, brother or sister; their school; the country where they were born; a sport or hobby; friends; teachers). Older students can use their knowledge of fractions and mapping to apportion space while younger students may simply want to fill their heart with what they care about. You might begin this activity by drawing and sharing some of the things that are in your heart.
3. Students pair up and then share with their partner two or three things that are in their heart and why they are important in their lives.

4. Display the hearts prominently at the front of your classroom, perhaps in a circle to symbolize connectedness.

5. Perhaps have a sharing circle or informally share by asking students to describe their hearts throughout the following week at opportune moments. This is also a great Valentine's Day activity.

Possible Reflection Questions

Content: How did you choose what to put into your heart?

Collaborative: How did you know your partner was being an attentive listener?

Personal: How does it feel to share what is in your heart with someone else?

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APPRECIATION FANS

1. After the first couple of weeks at school, the following activity is a great way to cement and celebrate the inclusion you are building in your classroom. Before the activity, you could read or tell the students a story involving appreciation and put-downs.
2. Have each student write his or her name on the top of a blank piece of paper. Have students then fold the paper over and back several times (like an accordion or fan).
3. Model for students how to write appreciation statements. Encourage specific statements that are relevant to the student being written about. For example, “You are kind and patient with me when I get stuck in math” or “When you smile it makes my heart feel warm.” These statements are more meaningful than a vague statement like “You’re nice.”
4. Make it clear to the students that they are to write only positive statements; no “put-downs” are permitted.
5. Ask students to exchange fans with their classmates. Each person writes an appreciation statement on the other’s fan. The students may choose to sign or not sign the appreciation statements they write for others.
6. At first, many students will choose only fans that belong to their close friends, but if a positive classroom atmosphere has been created, they will soon reach out to others. Students often set a goal of getting

everyone’s signatures on their fans. It’s a great idea for you, as the teacher, to have a fan as well and participate by writing appreciation statements to students on their fans.

7. Students may want to take their fans out at recess time to get friends from other classes to write an appreciation statement and sign their fans. They also enjoy taking their fans home to share with their family. Younger students could keep their fans as part of a scrapbook and read them when they need a boost. This is a great activity to revisit throughout the year.

Possible Reflection Questions

Content: What is one statement on your fan that you would like to share in community circle?

Collaborative: Why are Appreciations/No Put-Downs so important for this activity?

Personal: How did you feel when you read the appreciations that people had written on your fan? How did it feel to write appreciations on other people’s fans?



CLASS DATABASE

1. To create a class database, think of five or six categories/fields of information that you would like students to share with you and each other. You might determine these categories by brainstorming ideas with the students or choose the categories in advance. On a large (several metres long) piece of butcher’s paper, create the database template and record the titles of the chosen categories. Choosing categories the students will be comfortable with will encourage everyone to respond. Possibilities include: Hair Colour/ Favourite Food/ Peaceful Place/ Favourite Subject/ Favourite Animal/ Favourite Book or Movie or TV Show. It’s a good idea to avoid categories like Best Friend or people’s physical characteristics, which may build exclusion not inclusion.
2. Upon completion your database could look something like this:

Name	Mr. S.	Sri	Ahmed	Dana	Ana
Food	Lasagna	Pizza	Burger	Fries	Pizza
Place	My kayak	Beach	My room	Mall	School
Animal	Cat	Dolphin	Cat	Whale	Panda
Hair	Brown	Black	Black	Red	Blonde
Subject	Writing	Computers	Art	Music	Math



3. Generate questions that students will be able to answer by using the database (e.g., How many people like pizza? What are the favourite subjects of students at the beginning of Grade 3?) With older students, you can ask more sophisticated, co-relational questions (e.g., Are students who like music likely to be cat lovers?)
4. As an ICT (information communications technologies) extension students could input the data using spreadsheet or database software and use the Find command to answer their questions. It’s best to start with an actual database (on paper) to ensure greater understanding.

Possible Reflection Questions

Content: What do you have in common with other members of our class?

Collaborative: Why is mutual respect important in this activity?

Personal: What are some other things about me that I’d like to share with my classmates?



MY LIFE IN SIX WORDS: BUILDING INCLUSION IN SHERNETT'S GRADE 7/8 CLASSROOM

I used this lesson last year with Grade 7 and 8 students. It was an instant hit! Students were intrigued about writing an autobiography in six words. In the age of Twitter and texting, students are becoming more experienced at communicating using as little text as possible. This activity is a great way to build inclusion by introducing students to each other and allowing them to write honestly about who they are.

You can also have students create a video or use a photo story to create six slides with their six words and attach a picture, if they wish. Students can present their words to the class and the completed activity can be used to decorate the classroom.

Who are you? What are you most proud of? How would you describe your life to a stranger?

Background

Everyone has a story to tell. Six words are all they need.

That's what editor Larry Smith discovered when he posted a six-word memoir challenge on his website *smithmag.net* in November 2006, asking readers to write their life story in precisely six words. Within the first two months, the site received 15,000 replies. The best have been reproduced in a book that has become a bestseller, aptly titled *Not Quite What I Was Planning*.

Read some of the examples that I have printed from the site with your table group.

What do the six words tell you about the person? Consider the following:

- Male or female?
- What age?
- Any challenges?
- Would you want to know this person? Why or why not?
- Is this person's life in six words inspirational?

Once you have discussed the examples with your group, it's time to do some thinking and reflecting.

Think About:

- What are you most proud of?
- What has brought you great joy in your life thus far?
- What role do your family, friends, pets, mentors play in your happiness or lack thereof?
- What goals do you have for the future?

Task:

Using the paper provided, draft your autobiography in six words (no more, no less). Your work will be scattered around on the tables for your classmates to view. Use creativity and colour to add some flair to your lettering. Have fun!

To present or NOT to present . . . that is the question! If you are comfortable sharing your work by presenting it in front of the class, please let me know.