



8 CONDITIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE[®]

When students have high aspirations, *they have the ability to dream about 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, students want to be successful. Too often, however, students don't reach their goals and fullest potential because the conditions that inspire and support them are not in place.

The Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) has identified 8 Conditions that need to be in place if students are to strive for, and fulfill, their academic, personal and social promise. Based on more than two decades of research, these Conditions emphasize relationships, engaged learning, and students' sense of purpose.

The 8 Conditions that Make a Difference

Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, an internationally known leader in the study of student aspirations, has identified and defined 8 Conditions that affect the development of student aspirations. In order for students to have and sustain high aspirations, the Conditions that enable them to reach their goals must be in place. These Conditions are known as the 8 Conditions that Make a Difference and are a critical, often overlooked part of education and school improvement initiatives. The 8 Conditions are:

BELONGING

The Condition of Belonging means that a student is a valued member of a community, while still maintaining his or her uniqueness. It is a relationship between two or more persons characterized by a sense of connection and support. Belonging is a necessary Condition for students' well-being, social engagement, and competence. The Condition of Belonging increases intrinsic motivation, for it fosters self-confidence and investment in the community.

HEROES

Heroes are the everyday people—teachers, friends, family—in students' lives who inspire them to excel and to make positive changes in attitudes and lifestyles. Heroes are people students can connect with, those 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 teachers and school leaders as people to learn from and communicate with about many things. Building relationships with students through support, guidance, and encouragement enables them to become more confident in their academic, personal, and social growth.

SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

The Condition of Sense of Accomplishment recognizes effort, perseverance, and citizenship—along with academic achievement—as signs of student success. Educators have traditionally used a narrow view of accomplishment as it refers to innate ability, grades, or who is “best in the class.” The Condition of Sense of Accomplishment, however, views success in terms of personal growth and effort, not just class rank and test scores. Schools can celebrate their students’ accomplishments in visible ways. Taking time to recognize and support students’ efforts will result in students who are motivated to persevere through difficult tasks and to create a healthy learning environment through hard work and dedication.

FUN & EXCITEMENT

The Condition of Fun & Excitement is characterized by students being inspired to learn. They are actively engaged and emotionally involved in their school work. Students who exhibit Fun & Excitement are self-confident, curious, and prepared; they are willing to meet the challenges of the day. To foster this Condition in schools, students need to be offered new opportunities, as well as meaningful challenges, that are connected with their individual interests.

CURIOSITY & CREATIVITY

The Condition of Curiosity & Creativity is characterized by inquisitiveness, eagerness, a strong desire to learn new or interesting things, and a longing to satisfy the mind with new discoveries. Curiosity triggers students to ask “Why?” while creativity gives them the initiative to ask “Why Not?” The intensity of Curiosity & Creativity tends to diminish over time due to the habituating effects of the environment. Therefore, to sustain student motivation, schools must pay careful attention to creating learning environments that promote questioning and creative exploration.

SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

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

LEADERSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY

The Condition of Leadership & Responsibility means students are able to express their ideas and are willing to accept consequences for their actions. It cultivates accountability for the classroom environment and school community. Schools which promote this Condition teach and expect their students to be good decision makers. They provide legitimate decision making opportunities, seek student input, and expect students to be accountable for their actions and words. Students are trusted to make the right decisions and are recognized for doing so.

CONFIDENCE TO TAKE ACTION

Confidence to Take Action is the extent to which students believe in themselves. It encourages them to dream about their future while being motivated to set goals in the present. This Condition is what educators strive for; all other Conditions must be established and supported for students to attain this level of aspiration. Confidence to Take Action is characterized by a positive and healthy outlook on life and by looking inward rather than outward for approval. Schools can help build their students' Confidence to Take Action by providing support, celebrating diversity, and encouraging independent thinking.

Concluding Thoughts

In an era of educational policy that changes almost daily, educators must be grounded in a set of principles that are solidly based on research and that provide a practical, common sense approach to working with students. The 8 Conditions give educators this framework. They are not a new fad in education. They are the same conditions that inspired us when we were students ourselves and they will be the same conditions that inspire generations of students to come. The Condition of Belonging will never be replaced with the 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' feelings of self-worth, active engagement in their learning and in the life of the school, and sense of purpose for themselves and the world around them.

The 8 Conditions can be used by all educators to improve their relationships with students, make teaching and learning more relevant and engaging, and create a renewed sense of purpose in the world of education. 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.