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Creating and Sustaining a Positive Learning Environment for Students At Risk

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Creating and Sustaining a Positive Learning Environment for Students at Risk

National Youth at Risk Conference 2018

Savannah, Georgia

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- Deeply consider the content
- Reflect on how it impacts your choices as a professional
- Share your thought processes and insights with your peers here

What does being “At-Risk” Mean?

Resource Deficits

- Financial
- Emotional
- Mental
- Spiritual
- Physical
- Support Systems
- Relationships w/Mentors, Role Models
- Knowledge of Unspoken Rules

What is Known about How Schools Effectively Educate Students Placed At Risk?

Macro-Structures are created to compensate for the resource deficits experienced by students placed at risk.

- Resources
- Policies & Procedures

What does this look like on the classroom level?

What classroom structures create or inhibit a positive learning environment that supports learners who are at risk?

Our Beliefs

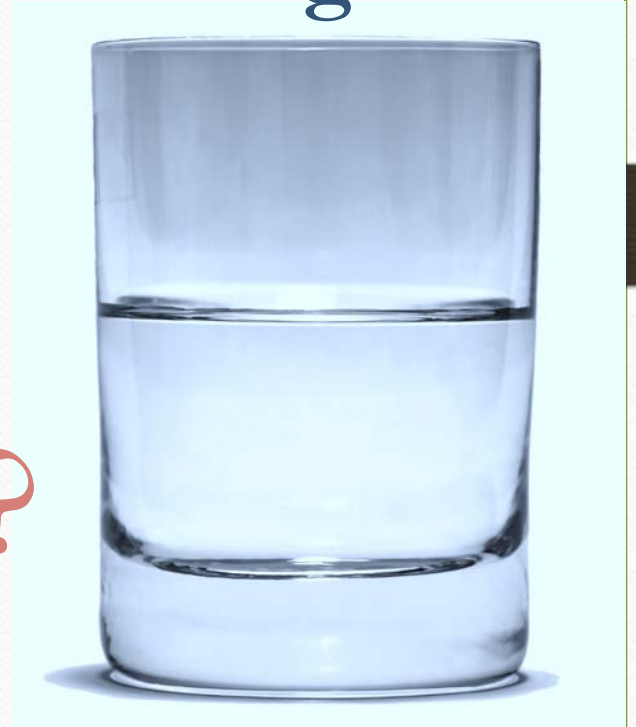
Our Relationships

**Our Procedures &
Policies**

What do we believe or perceive about the fullness of the glass?

What is factually true about the fullness of the glass?

Why do the answers to these two questions matter?



One person with a belief is equal to a force of ninety-nine who have only interests. ~John Stuart Mill

Is it Sympathy or Empathy?

Why Does it Matter?

Sympathy

- To suffer with
- Commiseration
- Feelings of sorrow for another's situation
- Pity—the acknowledgement of someone else's misfortune
- Paralyzing

- To suffer within—to vicariously experience it
- Seeing a situation from someone else's perspective
- Ability to recognize and share the feelings of another
- Ability to stand in someone else's shoes
- Compassion
- Mobilizing



Pity:
I acknowledge
your suffering.

Sympathy:
I care about
your suffering.

Empathy:
I feel your
suffering.

Compassion:
I want to relieve
your suffering.

Engagement

How do our beliefs impact our work with youth at risk?

- A. Put in long term foster care at age 4 due to severe abuse and neglect
- B. Being raised by an alcoholic caregiver who never attended a parent-teacher conference
- C. Going a year and a half without glasses and can't see the board in the classroom from farther away than a foot.
- D. Became an emancipated minor at age 16 while working 3 jobs and attempting to complete high school

Turn and Talk
What are the probable outcomes for a youth with one or more of these risk factors?

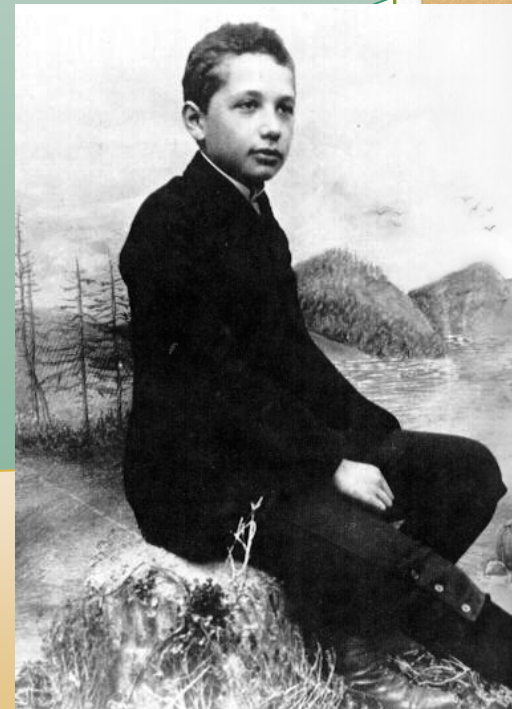


How do beliefs impact classroom environments?



- Stop looking at the probabilities and feeling sorry for your students; start seeing them as people with potential.
- Believe in students' ability to transcend their at-risk circumstances in the long run
- Believe that the key to changing their circumstances is to build on strengths and talents they have **right now**.

Replace beliefs that limit your students' possibilities with beliefs that expand them.



What classroom structures create or inhibit a positive learning environment that supports learners who are at risk?

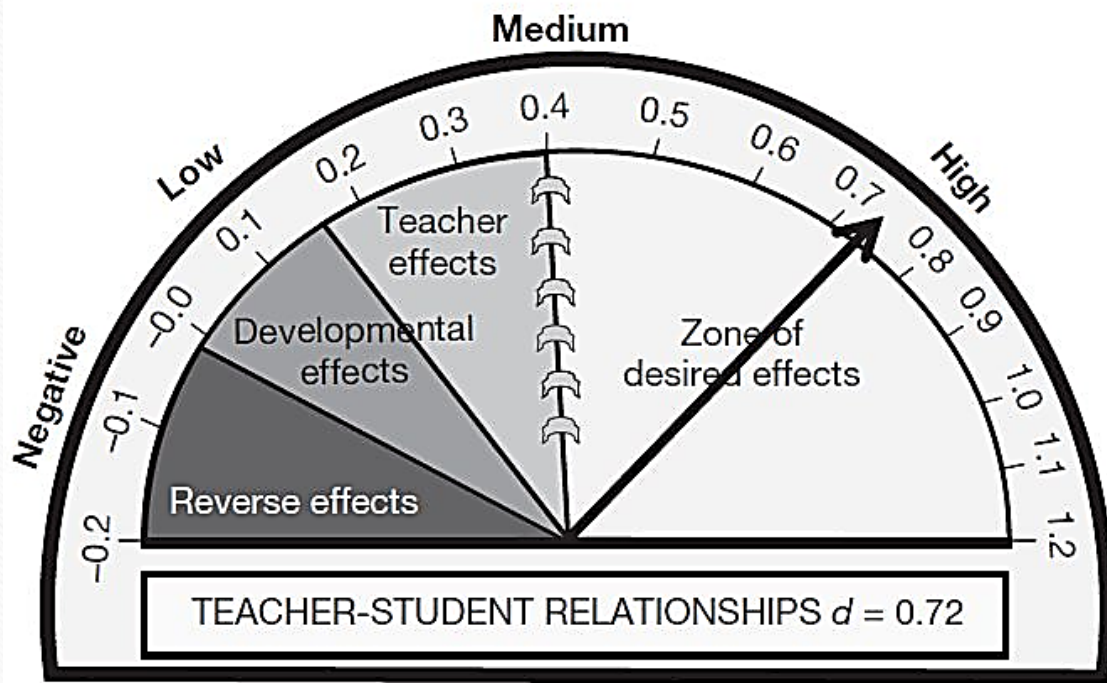
Our Beliefs

- Perception is Reality
- Self-Fulfilling Prophecy
- Our attitudes and actions derive directly from our beliefs about what is right, appropriate, and possible

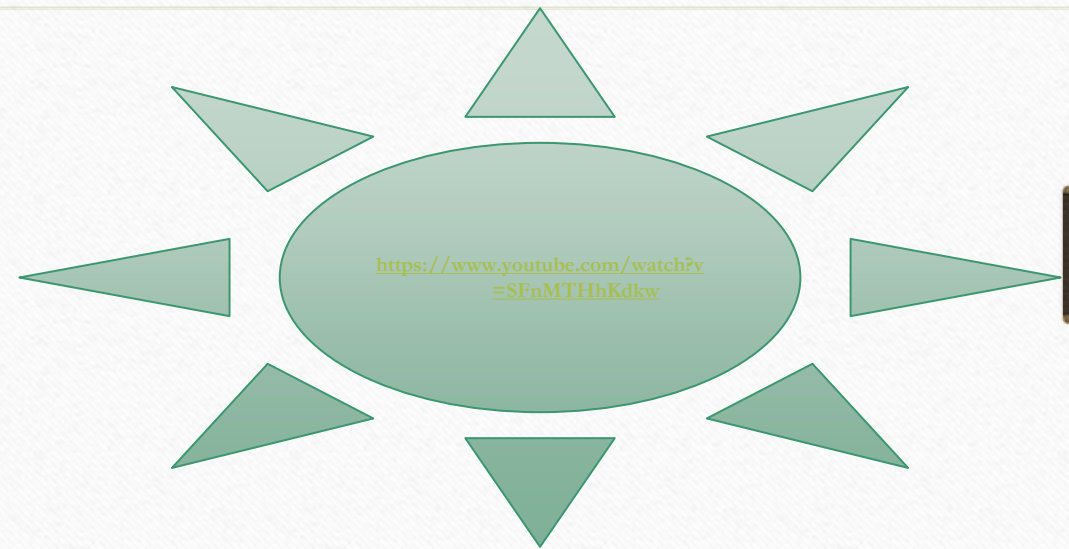
Our Relationships

Our Procedures & Policies

What school relationships best support students with multiple risk factors?



Hattie, 2009



The strength of our student relationships makes the difference in **translating our passion for teaching** into their passion for learning.

~Beth Morrow

The Four Quadrants of a Teacher-Student Relationship

Dominance

Influence

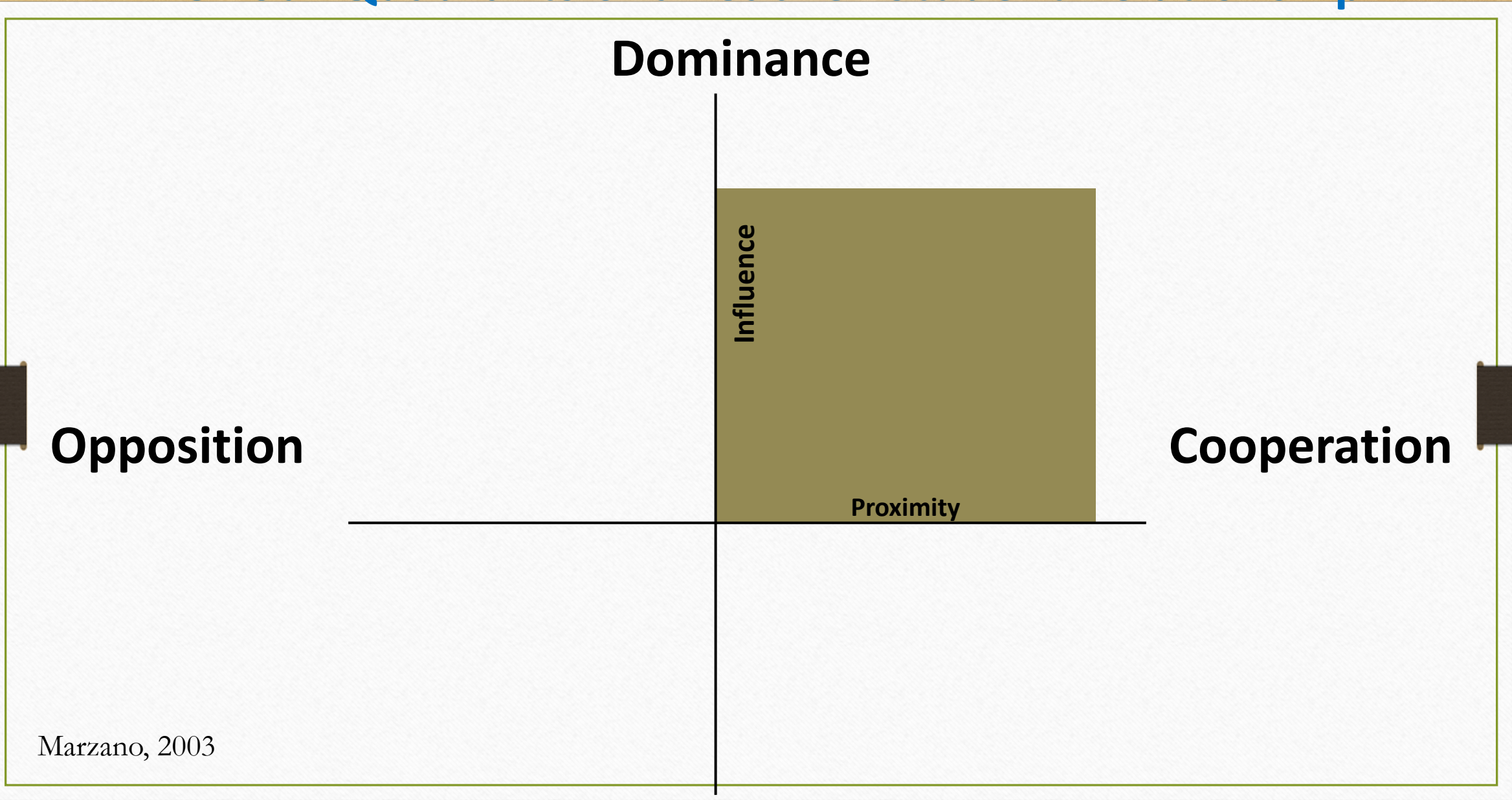
Opposition

Cooperation

Proximity

Submission

Marzano, 2003



4 Corners EQ:

What important steps can teachers take to build effective relationships with youth at risk?

1. Johnson

3. Payne

2. Safir

4. Beegle

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Our Relationships

- No significant learning happens in the absence of relationship (Comer)
- Maximize background experiences as assets
- Who is worthy of our time, effort and attention and how do we communicate this?

Our Procedures & Policies

How do Procedures & Policies create or inhibit safe and equitable classrooms?

School failure in students at-risk is attributable to:

- Low levels of trust and collaboration
- Lack of positive relationships between school and home/community
- Lack of understanding of the effects of poverty, trauma, etc. on academic achievement
- Inattention to student attendance and mobility
- Inappropriate behavioral interventions
- **Failure to establish a needs-based approach**



Whose needs
do the policies and
procedures serve?

A Needs-Based Approach to Policies & Procedures:

Acknowledges that circumstances and resource deficits pull student and family focus away from educational achievement



Develops innovative ways to compensate for the resource deficits and circumstances that threaten students at risk against staying in school or achieving while there

How do our policies and procedures impact our work with youth at risk?

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How can classroom policies & procedures be administered through a Needs-Based Approach?

Classroom Procedures/Policies

- Materials (pencils, paper, books)
- Homework
- Attendance/Tardiness
- Deadlines
- Other?

Possible Procedure/Policy Adaptations



End

What is a Needs-Based Approach to Classroom Policies & Procedures?

Jensen, 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build internal capacity (self-confidence, hope, persistence, etc.) through the language of Growth Mindset• Use multiple opportunities and varied methods for demonstrating mastery• Retool the Operating System by teaching kids how to learn, not just what to learn (attentional, organizational, memory, information processing, and sequencing skills)
Payne, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make the classroom a culture of collaboration; peer support while learning increases engagement and academic risk-taking• Translate the concrete into the abstract using relevant models• Teach students to speak in formal register• Teach the “hidden rules” of school
Safir, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make it safe to fail > communicate that failure and struggle are a NORMAL part of learning and celebrate it• Flex routines > sometimes plans need to be set aside in order to individualize instruction; consider pulling students into or out of activities; consider unconventional uses of time

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Our Procedures & Policies

- Flexibility vs. Consistency
- Communication of Our Mindset (Growth or Fixed)
- Ways of doing things either expand opportunities or limit them

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