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Seminar & Practicum
Journal Entry #2

I grew up going to sleep-away camp, and then eventually working at that same camp, and later leading international trips for high school students through this same camp. One thing I always enjoyed as a camper, and felt like my group largely benefited from (especially when tensions arose within the bunk) are *Full Value Contracts*. Full Value Contract are a creative way for campers to collaborate on the terms they think they should live by together in a group. When someone breaks one of these terms, the whole group refers back to the contract they created and signed together. The point of these contracts, according to Princeton's Outdoor Education Program, is to create a contract that "fully values" each member of the group.

As a teacher, I have instilled this same idea in my classroom. In just the first week of class, after all of the get-to-know-you-name-game-shenanigans, my students talk about what they want their classroom environment to be, and this is a round-table discussion. After talking about it, usually with some key verbal cues or examples from me, such as "respect" and "honesty," I give them a brightly colored poster, some markers, and say, "Go."

When students are able to discuss their expectations of themselves and of each other in the classroom, it gives them a sense of ownership. Of course I teach high schoolers, so this makes it a bit more tangible when it comes down to referring back to it, but I've done this activity with students as young as eight years old. When students decide that *they* want to hold each other accountable for being "responsible" or "honest," they do. They set a high standard for themselves and for each other, and in my experience teaching for the past four years at Landmark, my students are honest with me, and they are honest with themselves.

This creates a classroom environment where students feel honored and safe, which is especially important in a writing class where they are frequently sharing things that make them vulnerable. Now add being dyslexic in a writing class; they feel even more vulnerable in this class, yet they are open to taking risks because they do so together.

In addition to this Full Value Contract being creative and interdependent, another important aspect of this is the "round-table-discussion" piece. I set up my classroom in a way that students are all sitting around one table, with myself at the same table, rather than at a big "teacher desk." I think it's important for students to be able to discuss their ideas with each other, and for me to be a part of this same group, putting myself on "their level." A big reason I set up my classroom in this way is because when I was in high school, my classes were often set up in rows, which always had the "smart" students in the front and the "lazy" students in the back, and everyone else in between. I never felt comfortable speaking in class because I wasn't in the front row. When I got to college, my small classes were set up in circles, and the fact that everyone could see each other made you

feel like people were actually listening to what you had to say. You weren't just listening to the "front-rowers" discussion, you were actively engaged in the class discussion.

I've never thought this sort of class environment should be saved until college. Why not make students feel important and *fully valued* throughout their school career?



Period 5

SUPPORT

Trust

OPEN MINDS

1

RESPECT

kind

confidence

Ms. Margaret
Sophia
John
Joseph
Anna
MORGAN
DOUGLAS





Period 7

Eliza

MaSha

Melissa

Ms. Mangiarelli

