

Constructing a Space for Boys

*Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember;
involve me and I'll understand.*

—Chinese proverb

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL-BASED MENTORS

As touched on in the previous chapter, formal schooling for males of color can be a horribly oppressive experience. When they are treated in ways that either discount or invalidate who they are as individuals and as a social group, the air in educational settings can be extremely suffocating. Indeed, much of what is taught and practiced in schools is perceived by these males as both counterintuitive and counterproductive. If a school's culture unwittingly perpetuates this grievous experience, then SBM programs, geared toward uplifting males of color, must not only be mindful of this reality but also willing to construct an in-school space that genuinely functions to offset this aspect of student life.

In some cases, a space for boys is purely just that—an all-male mentee and mentor setting. By no means does this insinuate that female mentors are incapable of contributing to male forums. Quite the contrary, women have much to say that can inform males of the conscious and unconscious aspects of masculinity and how it impacts gender relationships. Nevertheless, girls and boys often need separate spaces away from their gender counterparts in order to have free expression and prevent intimidation. Once their personal views are placed on the table, then it is more than conceivable for girl and boy

groups to combine their respective forums and discuss their issues collectively. In the meantime, let us look at ways of building a space strictly for boys.

Constructing a mentoring space for young males of color does not necessarily mean hanging Che Guevara and Malcolm X posters around the room or playing the latest hip hop music. While this can strike a chord with the cultural side of students, we are more concerned with creating an environment that affords young men of color a chance to breathe—the kind of space that runs contrary to the stifling air of the everyday classroom, a space that is relatively free from rigid classroom rules, low teacher expectations, deculturized curriculum, and the overuse of power. A space where boys are free to move around and assemble, where they can express who they are without being labeled, where they can be real without posing for their female counterparts, where they can strive to understand themselves in the context of the world around them, and where they can inhale and then release.

The prime component that adult mentors must address in constructing a space for boys is the need for a safe environment. Safety constitutes physical, mental, and emotional domains and must be established for all participants. Safe spaces must be free from psychological and physical violence, judgment, ridicule, and disrespect, especially if we desire for males to open up and share personal feelings and information. Safe spaces include, as much as possible, care, comfort, free expression, empathy, concern, mutual respect, love, understanding, attentive ears, and open minds. Being that young people thrive in stable environments, there must be a consistency in all of these things.

Part of creating a safe mentoring space, for the sake of having young males open up, is showing them that you, as the adult male, are comfortable in sharing your own experiences. By doing so we send the message that it is safe for boys to be themselves in this space. If we want to see and hear young men express their true selves without posturing, then it is critical that we reveal our true selves, as adult males, without posturing. In order to get boys to feel safe and to reveal emotion,

school-based mentors must also open up and show them that expressing emotions and being a man are not mutually exclusive acts.

At very young ages, males of color are taught that being a “man” means holding back emotions, sucking in the tears, but externalizing aggression. School-based mentors concerned with the inner nature of Latino and African American boys must provide them with an appropriately open space to release and communicate their feelings. By creating cathartic environments for males of color to vent, we help alleviate some of the tension and anxiety that they encounter on a daily basis and also repress on an unconscious level. Thus, in the space that we are sharing with boys, group discussions should function as a productive means for minimizing their stress, whether hidden, restrained, or unrecognized.

An illustration of the open and safe space that we are building for young males of color comes from a personal experience. In a school-based mentoring session with a group of middle-school boys, one of the program units focused on domestic violence. I showed a video on spousal abuse to prepare the boys for a guest speaker who was scheduled to come in the following week. In the video, four women discussed their stories about the victimization they suffered at the hands of their husbands. As the women discussed their exploitation in full detail, some of the boys shook their heads in disgust and disbelief. When the video ended, I opened the floor to dialogue.

I asked the boys about their view on each woman’s tale of abuse. They looked around the room as if waiting for someone to speak first, so I decided to initiate the conversation. I told them my personal account of growing up and witnessing the verbal and emotional abuse that my mother faced from my stepfather. I disclosed to them the rage and powerlessness that I felt seeing this as a child and the extreme violent thoughts that I entertained.

After I finished, a student chimed in sharing a similarly dramatic story about the physical abuse that his mother endures from her boyfriend, and how the experience fuels his sadness and anger. After him,

another young man revealed the fear that he faces each morning on his way to school when local gangs try to recruit him through threat and intimidation. One by one, each boy stood up and spoke matter-of-factly about the various forms of violence in their lives and the stress that they feel as a result.

From this example, we can see that honest and safe mentoring spaces help boys articulate emotions that are often left muted or pent up. In order for mentors to create and build upon this kind of space, they must be prepared to contribute to group discussions in sincere and heartfelt ways. As boys come to feel comfortable and safe with you and the environment, they open up in ways that the regular classroom does not allow and cannot generate. In this newer, more secure space, boys can share their feelings, form their own understandings around personal issues, and see that they are not alone in their private situations.

It is through authentic dialogue that we truly come to know who our young people are, placing mentors in positions to provide them with wisdom, knowledge, and a clearer understanding of the world that they are living in. Presenting them with the time and the opportunity to speak vastly differs from the regular classroom where “time on task” is the major focus and where what is taught is usually expressed through the singular lens of a text or the imperious voice of a teacher. School-based mentors must strive to create a more relaxed air—one that includes multiple voices and perspectives.

Learning communities that allow males of color to positively express themselves give these young people an opportunity to breathe. As opposed to governing their minds through prescribed curriculum and regulating their bodies through harsh discipline codes, we must offer them a chance to interject their own thoughts and viewpoints into the schooling experience—their schooling experience. It is their expression that informs us of their individual needs, temperament, personality, and identity. From this, we can learn how to genuinely connect with them and support whatever aspirations they hold.

Constructing a space for males of color demands that their ideas be at the center of program curriculum and practices. If we ignore or

silence them—and we have observed that outcome time and time again—they disengage or rebel. Even though our space must have rules to ensure protection for all participants, it is not about control. Rather, it is about providing them with a time and a place to be understood as children and teenagers; to be free, critical thinkers; to express their inner thoughts; and to be embraced as males of color.

THE ROLE OF SBM CURRICULUM

The notion of encouraging students to inquire and analytically think about their world, as well as proffering alternative avenues in their decision-making processes, differs immensely from the unilateral, direct-instructional way of teaching that is typical in our educational institutions. As opposed to filling student minds with a disjointed reality devoid of any real significance, mentors and mentees must discuss and discover their individual perceptions and identities, as well as ways of personally evolving and transforming their lives for the present and future.

The school-based mentoring curriculum ought to be socially and culturally relevant for males of color. It must inform them of what is happening in the world around them, draw connections from those events to their life, and enlighten them as to the various choices that they can make and the consequences of those decisions. The idea of such a curriculum is also about helping males alter or avoid stressful conflicts as they encounter them on a personal and everyday basis.

We are well aware of those young men who deal with their stress in destructive ways given that constructive avenues to express themselves have been closed off or made otherwise inaccessible. These young men commit deviant acts in small spaces (e.g., the classroom, the neighborhood block) to make their personal power seem bigger. Their rebellious acts are outward expressions of their need to have power over something and be recognized and understood. Hence, SBM curriculum for males of color must touch and ignite the creative side within them—the side that seeks to build and not to destroy, to release and not to suppress, to give and not to withhold. The following are a few possibilities

to include in the design and implementation of SBM and/or classroom curricula.

Arts-Based Activities

One way that mentors can tap into the affective side of boys, bringing their emotions to the surface and into a discussion, is through the use of arts-based activities. Youth of all ages are drawn to the arts. They empower and encourage young people to come up with ideas that resonate within their own worlds, putting them in control of their own understanding and motivating them to learn, discover, imagine, and achieve. Once students are empowered to think and act on their own, they can take control over their own learning and life. Ideally, this promotes personal agency, self-discipline, self-respect, and self-defined expectations.

Arts-based activities also provide self-activation, where students can speak their own language and not worry about adult perfection. Mediums of expression like poetry, spoken word, hip hop, and sketch artistry serve as vehicles for youth to convey their complex identities and emotions. Through such artistic forms, boys are able to communicate their issues, name their social anxieties, and shape their experiences in ways that are inhibited by conventional speech.

One arts-based project that a group of students and I initiated was called *Real Voices*. This SBM endeavor was a showcase of creative youth expressions where boys were able to openly verbalize about and reflect on the day-to-day highs and lows of school and home life. Using mainly poetry and hip hop, they discussed how they learned to deal with those issues that impacted their life: teenage fatherhood, hostile neighborhoods, gun violence, gang warfare, domestic violence, substance abuse, and peer pressure.

The *Real Voices* project proved to be an empowering experience for its participants. While they were engaged in a sixteen-week process of writing, editing, expressing their voices, and recording, a shift in their attitude toward school was revealed—attendance increased, behavioral problems declined, and their grades improved. Indeed, the boys

became more committed to learning as they transformed project initiatives into their own creation. Moreover, doing so afforded them the chance to speak their own dialect without worrying about “official” arrangements of language.

The frankness of their cultural tongue on this project, as well as in our mentoring sessions, further created a space dissimilar from the regular classroom. While it is the job of teachers to help students master Standard English, often that is done at the cost of abandoning one’s way of speaking altogether. This “cultural tongue,” as it were, symbolizes the most powerful force of human identity. It represents both culture and language. Urging young men of color to give it up in many ways forces them to sacrifice an enormous aspect of who they are. The reality is that students possess their own languages, both informal and official. Not to embrace the former, in some degree, can promote student silencing, as well as resistance.

When we invite Latino and African American males to bring their culture and language into the SBM settings, we reduce the conflict that exists between these students and the larger school culture by validating their identity. Unlike the everyday classroom, students are not asked to solely use Standard English. In SBM settings, they can freely intersperse words such as “dope” (meaning something superb) or “whacked” (meaning something stupid or boring) with the “King’s English.” It is critical that boys be allowed to use their vernacular and not feel restricted by doing so.

For the most part, young people know the difference between their informal tongue and the official one. What they need assistance in understanding is that they do not have to relinquish one for the sake of the other. They can learn to master Standard English for the benefit of excelling in academics and in the job world, while retaining their individual tongue for the purpose of being able to communicate with members of their immediate culture and avoiding the “sellout” label. Without a doubt, we must teach youth of color when and where it is appropriate to switch their language. This leads to a brief, but critical, point on this subject.

On the Real Voices project, I felt that it was inappropriate for boys to use curse words (e.g., “shit” or “damn”) to accentuate their feelings or thoughts on a particular issue. While the everyday rap songs they listen to liberally use such language, the CD that we were creating was to be distributed and played among teachers, parents, peers, and younger children. In this case, the boys fully understood that using profanity would be unsuitable. They also came to understand that creating a safe and respectful mentoring environment for everyone meant staying away from homosexual and racially offensive slurs such as “bitch,” “faggot,” and even “nigger.” In later sections of this chapter, I discuss ways of having a critical dialogue with boys surrounding gender stereotypes and the derogatory language attached to it.

Besides arts-based activities, how else can school-based mentors build open and constructive environments? What other forms of curriculum can be used to assist boys in disclosing their emotions, their problems, and even their views on the larger society? In line with arts-based activities, boys ought to be engaged in something that is culturally meaningful and socially relevant, something that is arousing and informative, and something that takes them out of the passive spectator role and places them in a position where they can freely interpret and respond to curriculum as it fits within the context of their own life, and in the lives of significant others.

Reflective Writing

While arts-based activities assist in exploring boys’ creative dimensions, they can occasionally fall short in getting at the root of who they are beyond male posturing. Here, I am specifically referring to the artistic expression of hip hop. Although rap lyrics cleverly narrate lived reality, males sometimes take on another persona through hip hop, usually replicating and glorifying the false images of male bravado that they see in biased media and popular music. Mentors must be aware of these skewed representations and how they help to shape young male perceptions and identities and must urge boys to be more than just passive consumers of them. Accordingly, SBM curriculum must incorporate a

critical perspective—one that delves deeper into the individual and shared perspectives of males of color.

An example of such curriculum comes out of one of my mentoring sessions with a group of high-school boys. I brought in a recent newspaper article about a twelve-year-old boy, Orlando Patterson, who had been shot and killed playing outside his home in the West Englewood community of Chicago. For me, stories about youth violence can be startling and distressing. Yet, I wondered how these young males responded to daily violence in their own lives, whether on television, in newspapers, in music, in school, and possibly in their homes. I was curious to know not only what they felt and thought about it but also how they came to terms with it.

I familiarized the students with the newspaper story and passed out copies of it. I also brought in an audio tape of two songs related to some of the adversities that urban youth face. The first song was R. Kelly’s “Gotham City” and the second was Mistra’s “Blackberry Molasas.” As the music played, I asked the boys to think about the article and write down their responses to it. As they wrote, R. Kelly soulfully crooned in the background about ghetto life—of no money and no friends, of no food and no clothing—and the need for a change.

As the second song faded, students still continued to write. When all pens were down, I asked if there was anyone who wanted to read his response aloud. In the little time that was left in our session, several of the boys shared their thoughts and personal experiences related to violence. They spoke about the loss of friends and family members to gang violence; they expressed the anger and uncertainty surrounding their own lives; they questioned the reasons for Orlando Patterson’s murder; and they wondered why it had to happen. One student was even driven to tears while reading his response.

Seeing and hearing all their different reactions, I found the meeting to be overtly cathartic. Many of the hostile environments and circumstances that evidently pervaded these boys’ lives needed to be vented. The boys had a lot to say about physical violence and the fatal end that it can sometimes lead to. Although our arts-based activities were fun

and productive, they did not evoke the same kind of emotion and personal exchange as this writing activity. Putting their immediate thoughts on paper without rhyme or verse, proved to be a positive outlet for expression. It was the kind of action that provided a space and time for these boys to process thought and emotion—an act that some males of color avoid or ignore, which unfortunately leaves them less in touch with themselves and less informed about ways of bettering their situation. In our next group session, we revisited their writings and discussed various hostile elements of life and constructive ways for handling them.

Conflict Resolution

Another viable option for encouraging males of color to reflect on and talk about their lives is through the use of conflict resolution skits. As a peer group activity, conflict resolution supports and enables students to play an intricate role in their self-development by having them collectively problematize, articulate, understand, and possibly transform their shared world in both in and out of school locations. Conflict resolution is a vital curriculum component in school-based mentoring as it puts students in real-life situations and asks them to develop rational choices to conflict. The purpose is to acquaint students with choices that they can reasonably consider in addition to the ones that they are already used to.

Boys tend to resolve conflict based on how their immediate surrounding environment functions and what it dictates. Some boys are taught that if someone pushes you, then you have to push back. While this is common, these decisions can sometimes lead to a fatal end. Of course, it depends on who is doing the pushing and who is pushed. The purpose of conflict resolution is to urge boys to think beyond the moment and to see that responding to situations with violence (verbal, physical, or psychological) is not always the answer. By offering them multiple options to everyday conflict, boys become better equipped in knowing how to handle hostile situations without jeopardizing their own well-being and future.

As mentors, it is important that the choices and solutions we offer be practical and realistic to the lives of mentees. When using peer groups, mentors should talk with boys about their options but not suppress any one particular way of thinking or rule of thumb in the way that they should manage their lives. It is not about telling boys what to do or how to be. Rather, it is opening up a dialogue with them, discussing choices to solving a dilemma, alerting them to the consequences of those choices, asking them what they think about those decisions, and trusting them to pick the least destructive and harmful outcome.

In one of our mentoring sessions, another colleague and I placed thirty middle-school boys into six groups of five. We informed them that in handling conflicting situations they have three basic alternatives to choose from: accepting it, altering it, or avoiding it. We gave each group a hypothetical situation and asked them to develop skits based on these three alternatives. Afterward, they would perform their skits in front of their classmates.

The first group performed a sketch in which a teacher was reprimanding a student for talking in class. In their presentation, the boys portrayed the teacher as infuriated and unwilling to listen to the student. Each boy alternated between playing the teacher while the other acted out one of the three choices that they could make in the confrontation. In their first example, they showed a student accepting the situation by not talking back to the teacher and suffering under his angry words. The conclusion was that the student was suspended.

In the second skit, a student avoided the conflict altogether by not talking in the classroom. The third option showed the student altering the situation by first listening to what the teacher had to say and then respectfully explaining his reason for talking in class. Although the boys felt that the teacher would be unwilling to listen, they believed that by showing respect they might elude suspension, as well as further admonishment. The boys then added a fourth skit which showed the student not talking back to the teacher, but then later telling a mentor about the situation. One of the boys portrayed a mentor calmly talking to the teacher about the student, helping the boy get out of trouble.

Despite their range in age (10–14), we found that this activity was engaging for boys, as they were able to express themselves through the physical activity of acting, cooperation with peers, and the conveyance of personal issues and concerns. The conflict resolution activity also helped to teach the skill of thinking beyond the moment, of seeing other ways of being. It encouraged our boys to question their everyday ways of thinking and reacting by considering alternative ways of handling life situations.

Other than discussions surrounding in-school experiences, conflict resolution can address the following questions: what happens if we choose not to extend our education past high school; if we give in to peer pressure and engage in alcohol and drug use; if we have unprotected sex; if we maintain prejudiced notions of other cultures; if we never see the equality in gender; if we never come to know and discipline ourselves? In these discussions, there is no all-inclusive correct response. Rather, individuals have to decide which decisions are best for them in the context of their own lives and how their decisions can and will affect others.

Young males of color, as all youth, need to be involved in defining and shaping their world, whether it is in the classroom, the neighborhood, or the larger society. As mentors, we must provide them with a genuine sense of proactiveness, as opposed to the helplessness that can easily engulf their lives. Rather than being blindfolded contestants in the Blame Game, they can make wide-awake choices in working together with us to develop safe and realistic strategies for dealing with conflict.

Socially and Culturally Relevant Discussion Topics

In my own SBM program, I design and implement a curriculum that functions to inform and awaken boys to the external world around them. Topics are made socially and culturally relevant by demonstrating how they can potentially impact student life, despite the seemingly physical, social, and cultural distance between them.

For example, a tragic school incident such as the one in Columbine,

Colorado, is not just some distant, White, suburban issue. It represents an underbelly of violence that pervades even urban schools. On the subject of the criminal justice system, we have focused on juvenile jails and the ever-increasing restrictive laws against youth. Although the dreadful construction of youth jails and the unjust revisions of legal statutes are heavily occurring in states like Florida and California, the boys and I talk about how the expansion of these sorts of laws will one day infringe upon their own rights in their own state.

Mentoring sessions have found us examining racist stereotypes in popular culture, discussing how news stories and crime statistics inaccurately represent males of color, how these representations play on our self-concepts, and what we as males of color can do about it. By providing these young men with an understanding of how media images, violence, power, and racism work in their society, they come to see how these dynamics affect their personal decisions and life choices.

In one particular week of program meetings with high schoolers, I introduced a discussion on gender stereotypes. At the outset, I defined gender as a social construction that implied multiple differences between the categories of feminine and masculine. Group members were then given a diagram of three boxes. I explained that the larger center box represented ways in which we are meant to exist and feel as men. The pressure and abuse that we receive to keep us inside this box produce a range of emotions, which were listed in the center: anger, sadness, isolation, acceptance, and curiosity. Ironically, it is also within this box that we develop a sense of control, connection, and love with other males. If we deviate from this, then we are subjected to the verbal and physical abuses noted in the smaller left and right boxes, littered with words like “sissy,” “punk,” “bitch,” and “fag.”

I asked the boys if it was possible to exist outside the center box without suffering physical, verbal, and emotional abuse. Many of them said that it was not. They gave examples of peers who were outside the box and how they were teased or beaten up because of their individuality. I then asked the boys to think about the last time they were called a punk, a sissy, or a bitch because they did not live up to the social

expectation of what it means to be male. Some of the boys revealed that such words were used daily and casually; others commented that they did not care what others said about them; some admitted that name-calling often led to fights; some felt that it was okay to be inside the box; while others professed that it was not.

In this session, it was my hope that these young men would awaken and see the "boxes" of their lives that had already shaped and encapsulated them. I wanted to expose them to alternative ways of thinking, being, and acting as males of color. They needed to be shown choices apart from the ones they made on a daily basis. Although it is the hope that after having such a dialogue students will walk away with a clearer understanding, this is, of course, not always the case. Yet, exposing them to alternative ways of thinking and being presents an opportunity for boys to explore a different, more in-depth, perception, one that they might not be used to seeing.

Discussions revolving around issues of race, class, and gender ought not be designed to adjust the thinking of mentees to the thinking of mentors. Classroom curricula promote enough of this. In contrast, the purpose of such dialogue is to expose young people to concepts and perspectives that are both similar and different to that of their own. Mentors are merely presenting the multiple doors that exist, yet it is mentees who make the choice of crossing the threshold. Through this type of mentoring forum, boys are looking at their lives more critically, with the possibility of transforming themselves by means of a newly informed perspective. With multiple lenses to look through and knowledge of multiple avenues to take, our young males of color can begin to be less destructive and more constructive, less hopeless and more hopeful, less passive and more aggressive in making productive changes in their lives and in their communities. Indeed, knowledge is power.

Brotherhood

Socially and culturally relevant curricula afford young males an opportunity to communicate personal experiences with peers. As boys share and deconstruct their lived realities, kinships are formed. This

sort of connection is either underdeveloped in classrooms or missing altogether. Having an open and accommodating place to discuss issues gives rise to feelings of camaraderie. Such feelings can offer strength and focus to students who are struggling socially and academically. Where before some have felt disconnected or alienated by their schooling experience, they are now participating in a kind of fellowship that socially connects them with their education. The curriculum that we engage our mentees in is more than just a series of objectives and outcomes. We are developing a human connection through a relevant and engaging curriculum that gives rise to identifying and sharing common personal experiences and goals—in short, a brotherhood.

The feeling of brotherhood in an all-male SBM forum is not a forced sentiment. One cannot expect a program to become a "brotherhood" or a "family" simply because these words are used in a program's title. What makes group mentoring transform into a brotherhood or family is that it provides young males with a safe forum that is based on trust and intimacy—something that is acquired over time. Once boys experience this level of intimacy, they often find ways to maintain closeness with peers, as well as with significant others in their life. For some males, this begins with brotherhood but can carry over into building healthy relationships with women, families, and communities.

One of my SBM experiences serves as an illustration of how SBM programs can create natural spaces where brotherhood is fostered. Mentoring a group of high-school seniors, I brought in a videotape that documented a newly constructed youth jail in California. After setting up the TV and VCR, the boys walked in with a look of utter exhaustion. I asked them what the problem was. Their response was that their teachers were increasing their workload as a way to push them academically. Moving the TV and VCR out of the way, I asked them to talk more about it.

The boys spoke rather candidly about the unachievable academic expectations that were placed upon them by the school staff. Apparently, a few of their teachers were conducting lessons at an extremely fast pace. Before students had time to digest one concept, their teachers

were already onto the next one. They also went on to criticize their school's mission statement. As they were expected to follow it to the letter, they did not appreciate the school staff forcing these ideals upon them.

The boys also felt that the "egalitarian" principles cited in the school's mission statement did not correspond with the way many of them were treated in classrooms and in the school as a whole. When they asked for assistance on a particular activity, teachers ignored them, told them to ask another student, or accused them of disrupting the class. Further, many of their conflicts in the classroom were not handled fairly or diplomatically. According to these students, resolutions were often reached by the teacher through their removal from the classroom, after-school detention, out-of-school suspension, or parent-teacher conferences.

In our sixty minutes together, the boys and I talked about ways of changing this situation. One student brought up the idea of rebelling against the administration with a nonviolent protest. I replied that protest was one way to handle the problem and I would help them with it, but I urged them to think about other alternatives in handling their issues. We came up with other options like helping each other with class work and coming to me if they had any problems with a particular teacher. As for coping with the school's mission statement, the boys decided to follow it, while at the same time ignoring it. They felt that since they only had one year left, they would adhere to the rules until they successfully graduated from the school. At the end of our talk, the boys acknowledged that they felt much better. They were able to release their aggression and hostility by talking with one another. They called the session "group therapy."

Discussions, like the one above, help boys to critically look at their situation and respond to it constructively. By posing options to them, boys are able to pick and choose alternatives that they might not know exist or perceive as viable. Group discussions on this level expand student perceptions of the world and develop new ways of relating and interacting within it. Out of this dialogical practice comes the notion

of brotherhood. Through collective examination of their world and realizing that they have the ability to organize and to make change, boys develop a strong sense of camaraderie and agency.

So what happens to those boys who desire adult guidance but do not want to be involved with group mentoring? Perhaps they do not get along with a specific classmate or their creative interests are not addressed by the program. Mentors can meet the needs of these students by continually offering them an invitation to program meetings, as well as encouragement toward the development of their own projects. In cases where these students choose not to be a part of the program at all, mentors should still offer them advocacy regardless of their disassociation. Also, SBM curriculum can assist alienated students in warming up to their peers by promoting group problem-solving projects or report-back research. Such activities engender peer communication and teamwork relationships that might not otherwise exist in the regular school curriculum. As this occurs, students who were once alienated can begin to see the value of social networking between cliques, as well as the value of their own individual personality and contribution.