

# AVID's Four Stages of Building Relational Capacity

AVID's model of the Four Stages of Building Relational Capacity<sup>1</sup> assists educators in developing a caring, supportive community that uplifts all members. The model is not a linear path. There is no set route to successfully creating high relational capacity; rather, the model offers a guide to be used by reflective educators.

## STAGE 1: SAFE SHAPING

Stage 1 is the early stage of any community where individuals with varying experiences, motivations, backgrounds, and skill levels are thrown together. Group members are likely to be both excited and anxious. In this stage, the individuals in the group are searching for common purpose, orienting themselves to the group, and testing boundaries. Stage 1 is where almost all students and classes start.

### There are three priorities during Stage 1:

- Developing a brave environment
- Learning names and making connections
- Initiating student ownership of the classroom

### Questions to consider for Stage 1:

- Do students understand the class expectations, protocols, and procedures?
- Do students feel as though they will be encouraged to be themselves, without pressure to assimilate?
- Do students independently interact with other students and know the names of all their classmates?
- Are students occasionally able to work in cooperative groups independently of the teacher?

## STAGE 2: CONTROLLED CHAOS

Stage 2 is a period of relational-capacity development often characterized by conflict. The honeymoon period of Stage 1 is over, and students will now begin asserting their own leadership. The conflict arising from this is a natural progression and shows that some students have begun to feel ownership for the community. While certain students have begun to take a personal stake in the class, cliques may form that begin to exclude others, potentially polarizing the class. This is a critical stage for the community, and these conflicts must be addressed in order to progress.

### Teachers can help the group continue its positive evolution by overseeing the following:

- Creating a brave space for conflict
- Managing conflict and teaching conflict management
- Maintaining a positive environment

### Questions to consider for Stage 2:

- Have students begun to focus on and support the group vision and mission?
- Do students view conflict as an opportunity to grow as an individual and as a class?
- Do students have the skills to manage conflict successfully?
- Does the general class morale feel high?

<sup>1</sup>The above model is grounded in the work of Bruce Tuckerman's research on group dynamics (Tuckerman, B. W. [1965]. Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63, 384–399).



### STAGE 3: SCOPE AND SOVEREIGNTY

During this stage, activities require students to have a shared vision. By implementing certain techniques learned during the first two stages, students can now problem-solve and work through conflict without teacher intervention. Shared leadership becomes a central focus in the third stage of development. Students will begin taking on the roles and responsibilities to make the group successful, as well as allowing other students to facilitate as they become comfortable in a supporting role.

#### The major focal points of Stage 3 become:

- Autonomous acknowledgment of success
- Adherence to a shared vision
- Creation of novel ideas and solutions

#### Questions to consider for Stage 3:

- Do students independently praise other students without the teacher's prompting?
- Do students create a shared vision for accomplishing tasks?
- Do students self-regulate behaviors during tasks?
- Do students feel comfortable enough to share novel ideas with classmates in order to help solve complex questions?

### STAGE 4: GROUP ACTUALIZATION

The ultimate goal of developing a classroom high in relational capacity is that groups of students become self-directing, self-advocating, and self-monitoring, thereby actualizing their full potential. For students to be successful in Stage 4 activities, they must incorporate all of the skills that they have accumulated. Groups in this stage of development show high amounts of trust, honesty, empathy, and support. The teacher becomes only a resource for feedback while students are working on solving problems. Groups do not traditionally spend long periods of time in Stage 4 due to extraneous variables that affect the group dynamic.

#### The major components in this stage are:

- Understanding the value of multiple perspectives
- Embracing high performance expectations
- Elevating trust and honesty

#### Questions to consider for Stage 4:

- Do students have a default "we" mentality when accomplishing tasks?
- Are students open and honest with each other? Are students comfortable with confrontation if it means addressing the greater good?
- Do students show a high level of respect, trust, and empathy for their classmates?
- Are students able to engage in intellectual discourse about topics and issues in a respectful manner?