

Effective teachers use teaching practice to create a classroom environment that works as a learning community. In this learning community caring and support come from the supportive social interactions of teachers and students. Creating those supportive social interactions involves learning through joint activity and everybody participating together. Adaptations may be required to ensure that students are not excluded from learning but they are delivered sensitively, so that students are not excluded from their peers.

(Alton-Lee, 2003; Thorburn, 1997)

AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER: WHAT QUALITIES WOULD YOUR SCHOOL CONSIDER THIS PERSON HAVING?

“Respect comes with love and understanding each kid’s abilities and the desire to teach so therefore teachers must have a desire to teach everyone. They must realise that their dreams are not ours. Ask us what we will need to be an independent person later on in our life. Teach good skills in a respectful way. Conversations with me will tell u if I’m happy” .

(Kliewer & Biklen, 2001, p.11)

Teaching

“If you can’t do that, if you’ve always got to be in control, then you’re just turning them off still ...how are you gonna teach them difficult subjects like maths and language if you haven’t got a rapport with them? You’ve got to be a bit transient and fluid. I can see where I’m in a friendship role with them, but then I notice when the respect’s starting to go, so they need a gentle reminder. So I have to play more of the teacher role. And they look to me to play that role too ...”

(Davis & Watson, 2001, p.679)

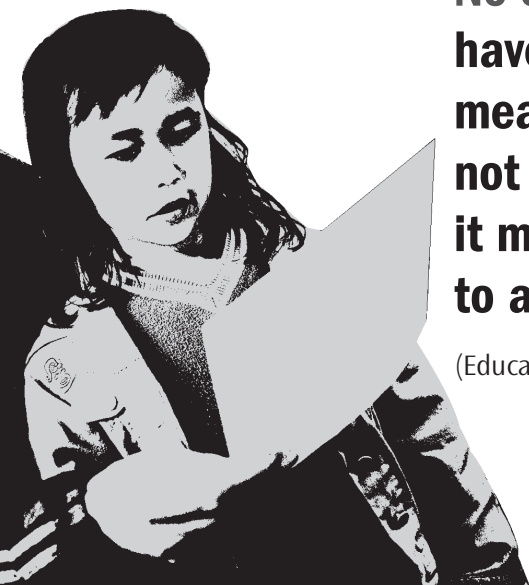


Which of these things are encouraged in your school?

In their interview study of highly successful teachers in low decile urban schools Carpenter, McMurchy-Pilkington & Sutherland (2002) found they:

- are goal driven, plan comprehensively, and are willing to adapt when necessary
- engage in personal and public reflection
- consistently seek professional development
- focus on children as individuals who are observed on an on-going basis
- have high expectations for every child
- demonstrate an unconditional love for their students
- make conscious attempts to understand what it is like to be the other
- are strong in teaching core basics and are interactive in their teaching practice
- extend their classroom into and draw from local communities
- purposefully model successful learning and social learning interactions
- recognise children’s efforts to learn (not just their successes)
- reinforce children’s contributions to their learning





“No one expects us to do well in exams and go on and have a career or even a decent job. Changing this means challenging a mindset that sees the disability not the person and that fails to recognise that while it may take a young person with a disability longer to achieve goals, we can still do it”.

(Educable, 2000, p. 56)

A key finding from the review of research literature is that regardless of the educational setting, teachers must ensure that they do not underestimate what students with disabilities can learn and achieve. Central to students' learning achievement are the **expectations teachers have for their students, and whether they see themselves as responsible for the learning of all students in their classrooms.**

(Hulston, 2000; Udvari-Solner, 1996)



One study found a relationship between teacher beliefs of students they saw as “exceptional” or “at risk”, and their level of interaction with those students. Teachers who thought their students had learning disabilities had low levels of engagement with those students, but teachers who saw themselves as responsible for the achievement of all students, not only interacted more frequently with all of their students, but questioned and made the students think more about their learning (Jordan & Stanovich, 2001). That students do better in some classes as a result of quality interactions during instruction is also a finding in Alton-Lee’s (2003) *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling*.

Assumptions are often made that because students with disabilities cannot read or write they may not be able to think about the material presented either. Access to the curriculum challenges all students to advance their learning skills. The dangers of a watered down curriculum can mean students with disabilities:

- have to focus on isolated skills
- fail to interrelate ideas and facts
- find learning uninteresting

(Giangreco, 1997; Kavermann, 1998)



Teachers can

Onosko and Jorgensen (1998) suggest five curriculum adaptations that will help meet the participation and learning needs of students while still including them in the regular classroom.

1. Support from peers or adults

This can improve relationships between peers, but others should not be relied on completely, and students should not become dependent on each other.

2. Modified materials or assistive technology

Presenting information in different formats, lessens the need to modify the lesson.

3. Individualising performance standards and expectations

Individualising learning objectives and letting students express their learning in different ways.

4. Personalised instruction

This can be done through class discussion, small group work or one to one. The student can be challenged to think more critically or offered extra information.

5. Uniquely designed evaluation and assessment plans

Letting students demonstrate their knowledge using different communication methods.

An example of the above ideas, is the Literacy Environments for Accelerated Progress (LEAP) Programme. Designed by a team of university researchers and teachers, it connected the curriculum to everyday knowledge, modelled language and social practices, constructed visual representations, and featured collaborative group work with students and their teachers. Using this inclusive, participatory and challenging work environment they focused on learning literacy across the curriculum. In comparison to control groups, students participating in this type of learning made significant gains in reading and writing.

(Englert & Dunsmore, 2002)