

Teacher Tips

In a lot of ways, our success as teachers is determined by the relationships that we build with our students. Our students will not experience many academic gains in our classrooms, if the trust and the relationships are not at the forefront of our teaching. I am not a teaching "guru", nor am I a "teaching" expert. I am a product of the experience and knowledge that I have gained over the years, and that I am still gaining each and every day. The most important thing that I have learned is that student/teacher rapport is critical to academic success. Here are a few tips that have helped me throughout the years.

- **"Say what you mean, and mean what you say"** - Students will always hold you to your word. Do not make false and empty promises. They will grow to trust you and respect you, if you stand by your word, admit your mistakes, and maintain a healthy level of transparency.
- **"What you tolerate, you encourage"** - When you are setting the classroom rules, allow the students to create the rules with you. They are aware that a certain level of structure is needed for a safe and rigorous learning experience. If you allow them to break the rules that were previously set, you are encouraging them to continue breaking those rules. This is closely aligned with tip #1.
- **"Everyone deserves a chance"** - Most of us have classrooms that feature the same students volunteering to answer questions or responding to the text. However, we often lose most of our students by not holding them accountable with their answers and responses. For each class, keep a jar or a cup, with every student's name, so that each student gets a fair opportunity to respond and show what they know.
- **"Safe, secure, and successful"** - As teachers, we can have the most fabulous lessons, and still not have our students meet their academic goals. Students need to feel safe and secure within the classroom. If they feel safe and secure, they are more likely to participate and engage in classroom activities. Students like structure and organization. They like knowing that there are consequences, when rules are broken (even though they might not admit it). When they feel safe, secure, and respected, they are more likely

to demonstrate academic success. The learning atmosphere is important because that is where the magic happens. We have to treat it as such.

- **“Handle confrontation with care”** – Confrontation and disagreements happen. How you deal with those issues often sets the tone for the rest of the school year. If a student becomes confrontational, that is not the time for you to “assert your authority”, especially with a classroom full of students. Try not to engage in a “back-and-forth” dialogue with the student. Remind them of your expectations, and offer them some time to “cool off” or “decompress”. Keep your cool, and remember that no one is exempt from having a bad day.
- **“Tests are not traps”** – In our quest to discover what our students are learning, it is easy to become a participant in the “test trap”. When we assess our students, we simply want to see if they have met the objectives that we have taught. We should not try to trap them or trick them with our test questions. Of course, the assessments should be rigorous, but not designed to throw them off or trick them.
- **“Consistency is key”** – Be consistent with all of your policies and procedures. Be consistent with your classroom structure and organization. Be consistent with your demeanor. Even with different lessons and activities, maintain a high level of consistency so the students come to know what is expected of them. When they know what to expect, each time an activity is presented to them, they process more and they are able to comprehend more. They are raising their level of awareness as they grow into understanding what is required of them.
- **“Retrieval helps”** – It has been proven that retrieval strategies are the best strategies for students to retain information. Give them frequent opportunities to recall old and new concepts, and give them immediate feedback on their responses. When they are recalling information, they have to demonstrate that they know and understand the concepts. If they can convey their responses, they are demonstrating a level of comprehension on that concept.