

## RELATIONSHIPS

### Teacher-student    Teacher-class



*Sometimes the things you want the most don't happen and what you least expect happens. I don't know - you meet thousands of people and none of them really touch you. And then you meet one person and your life is changed forever.*

— **Jamie Randall** (Jake Gyllenhaal), *Love & Other Drugs*

That person could be a teacher! So, let's talk about teacher-student and teacher-class relationships.

The first, teacher as coach/adviser/counselor. The second, teacher as conductor/director/ringmaster.

Both are grounded (or should be) in “relationships” that are positive, rewarding, and productive. *Students deserve teachers who are encouraging conductors of learning rather than domineering ringmasters focused on maintaining order.*

In the March 13th issue of *Education Week* ([www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org)), Sarah D. Sparks wrote an article titled, “Why Teacher-Student Relationship Matter.” She framed her full-page report around five questions. I have mark the author's quotes with “SS.” All other quotes come from different references.

#### 1. Why are student-teacher relationships important?

*Positive teacher-student relationships are associated with fewer disruptive behaviors and suspensions, and lower school dropout rates.*

*A teacher's relationship with students is the best predictor of how much the teacher experienced joy versus anxiety in class.*

2. How does a teacher's approach affect that relationship?

*Sometimes teachers don't understand the importance that their relationship with each student has on that student's identity and sense of belonging.*

Vicki Nishioka, researcher with Education Northwest (SS)

Emotional control, social and relationship skills are learned behaviors that must be taught and practiced by all students. Enter—the teacher! The ones that know how to counsel and conduct; the ones that *respect, care about and show concern for, the character development of their students. The ones that create a positive learning environment and show that they care are most likely to have their students reciprocate and show respect for them and their fellow classmates.*

3. How can teachers improve their relationships with students?

*In a word: Empathy. (SS)*

We know from the work of Goleman and others that emotional intelligence consists of four attributes: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. *(You know how to develop and maintain good relationships, communicate clearly, inspire and influence others, work well in a team, and manage conflict.)*

Research shows that *teachers who cultivate empathy for and with their students are able to manage students' behavior and academic engagement better.*

4. How can teachers maintain healthy boundaries with students?

*Experts caution that for teachers and students, "relationship" does not equal "friend," particularly on social media. (SS)*

Most school districts have rules guiding teachers about using social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Teachers can create “healthy boundaries,” by using common sense, by being honest with students about who want to share their personal stories, and, of course, there are always the liability issues.

5. How can relationships with students support teacher quality?

*(Use) student feedback to improve teaching practices, and in particular, such feedback can be used to help teachers build deeper relationships with students. (SS)*

*Strong teacher-student relationships have long been considered a foundational aspect of a positive school experience.*

Clayton Cook, Professor, University of Minnesota

I conclude by quoting Neville Billimoria, a friend and Vice President, Mission Federal Credit Union. Neville writes a weekly column called “Soul Food Friday.”

In one recent posting, he addressed teachers directly about developing positive relationships with students.

*Author Andy Stanley once said, “Rules without relationship lead to rebellion.” Far too many principals share rules with their teachers but they don’t have a relationship with them. And far too many teachers don’t have positive relationships with their students. So what happens? Teachers and students disengage from the mission of the school....To develop positive relationships you need to enhance communication, build trust, listen to them, make time for them, recognize them, show them you care through your actions and mentor them. Take the time to give them your best and they will give you their best.*

*Great companies that build an enduring brand have an emotional relationship with customers that has no barrier. And that emotional relationship is on the most important characteristic, which is trust.*

—Howard Schultz, Businessman

Ed DeRoche, Director, Character Education Resource Center, SOLES,  
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