

# The human dimension of productive learning environment

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THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF PRODUCTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT Teachers are essential to creating productive learning environments; they set emotional tone in the classroom, creating either an inviting or a threatening environment. They design learning experiences that can engage, ignore, or even distance students. They interact with students during instruction in ways that motivate, interest, or possibly bore them. Think about some the teachers you've had. What comes to mind? If you're typical, the first thing you remember is that you believed that they cared about you as a person, were committed to your learning, and were enthusiastic about the topics they taught. Let us examine the human dimension of creating productive learning environments as we discuss the following teacher characteristics: 1. CARING — as an essential element in teaching it refers to a teacher's investment in the protection and development of the young people in his/her classes. And a caring teacher is at the heart of a productive learning environment. Students are more motivated to learn and achieve higher in classrooms where they believe their teachers like, understand, and empathize with them. Students who feel they are welcome and who receive personal support from their teachers also demonstrate more interest in their class work and describe it as more important than students whose teachers are distant. A supportive classroom environment, where each student is valued regardless of academic ability or performance, is essential for both learning and motivation for all students. Teacher caring is essential at all levels, and its importance does not diminish as students grow older.

\*\*\*\*\*COMMUNICATING CARING\*\*\*\*\* How do teachers communicate that they care about their students? Some ways include: \* Learning students' names

quickly and calling on students by their first name. \* Greeting them daily and getting to know them as individuals. \* Using effective nonverbal communication such as making eye contact and smiling. \* Using " we" and " our" in reference to class activities and assignments. \* Spending time with students. \* Demonstrating respect for students as individuals. The last two items on the list deserve special emphasis. We all have 24hours in our days- no more, no less-and the way we choose to allocate our time is the truest measure of our priorities. Choosing to allocate time to an individual student communicates caring better than any other single factor. Helping students who have problems with an assignment or calling a parent after school hours communicates that teachers care about students and whether or not they are learning. Spending a moment to ask a question about a baby brother or compliment a new hairstyle communicates caring about a student as a human being. Showing respect is also essential. Teachers show respect in subtle ways, such as the way they look at students and how long they wait for students to answer questions. Interestingly, maintaining high standards is one of the most powerful ways to show respect. One of the best ways to show respect for students is to hold them to high standards-by not accepting sloppy, thoughtless, or incomplete work, by pressing them to clarify vague comments by encouraging them not to give up, and by not praising work that does not reflect genuine effort. Ironically, reactions that are often intended to protect students' self esteem-such as accepting low quality work-convey a lack of interest, patience, or caring. Respect, of course, is a two way street. Teachers should model respect for students and in return they have the right to expect students to respect them and one another. "

Treat everyone with respect" is a rule that should be universally posted and enforced. An occasional minor incident of rudeness can be overlooked. But teachers should clearly communicate that chronic disrespect for themselves or the students in their classes will not be tolerated.

2. PERSONAL TEACHING EFFICACY In addition to caring, teachers who create productive learning environments believe in their ability to help learn, grow and promote learning in all students regardless of their prior knowledge or experiences. When students aren't learning, high efficacy teachers don't blame it on lack of intelligence, poor home environments, uncooperative administrators, or some other external cause. Instead, they redouble their efforts. They emphasize praise rather than criticism, persevere with low achievers, and maximize the time available for instruction. Low-efficacy teachers, in contrast, are less student centered, spend less time on learning activities.

3. POSITIVE TEACHER EXPECTATIONS Teachers who create productive learning environments have faith not only in their own capabilities but also in the capabilities of their students. Positive teacher expectations are teachers' beliefs in students' capabilities to learn. Teacher expectations about students' learning can have profound implications for what students actually learn. Expectations affect the content and pace of the curriculum, the organization of instruction, evaluation, instructional interactions with individual students, and many subtle and not-so-subtle behaviors that affect students' own expectations for learning and their behavior. Research indicates that teachers treat students for whom they have high expectations differently than those for whom they have low expectations. High-expectation students receive differential treatment in the following areas. \*

Emotional support: teachers interact more with perceived high achievers; their interactions are more positive; they make more eye contact, stand closer, and orient their bodies more directly towards the students; and they seat these students closer to the front of the class. \* Teacher effort and demands: teachers give perceived high achievers more thorough explanations, their instruction is more enthusiastic, they ask more follow-up questions, and they require more complete and accurate student answers. \* Questioning: teachers call on perceived high achievers more often, they allow the students more time to answer, and they provide more encouragement and prompt perceived high achievers more often. \* Feedback and evaluation: teachers praise perceived high achievers more and criticize them less. They offer perceived high achievers more complete and lengthier feedback and more conceptual evaluations. Students are sensitive to these differences, and even early elementary children are aware of differential treatment. In one study, researchers concluded, “ after ten seconds of seeing and or hearing a teacher, even very young students could detect whether the teacher talked about, or to, an excellent or a weak student and could determine the extent to which that student was loved by the teacher". This is both amazing and disquieting; it challenges teachers to communicate caring and high expectations to all students. Expectations can be self-fulfilling; when we treat students as if they are low achievers, they don't try as hard. Reduced effort results in less learning, and a downward spiral begins. Unfortunately, teachers often aren't aware of their lowered expectations. When introduced to this research and encouraged to analyze their own classrooms with this framework, teachers can learn to treat all

students as potential learners, and as a result, the learning environment becomes more productive. 4. MODELING AND ENTHUSIASM “ Actions speak louder than words” is a cliché, but it is often true, and it is particularly important in productive learning environments. Think about times that you have become excited about a class or topic you were studying. Often, your excitement was the result of teacher modeling, the tendency of people to observe and imitate others’ behaviors and attitudes. Your teacher demonstrated his/her own genuine interest in the topic, and as a result of your interest also increased. Like all people, students tend to imitate behaviors and attitudes, and teachers who are enthusiastic about the topics they teach increase the likelihood that students will feel the same way. The impact of modeling has important implications for teachers because students constantly observe their actions. For example, imagine how would you feel if one of your instructors said, “ I know this stuff is boring, but we have to learn it’ compared to “ now this topic is exciting; it will help us understand how our students think. ” Obviously, you’re more likely to be interested in the second topic. The impact of modeling goes farther. If you want your students to be courteous and respectful to you and each other, for instance, you must treat them with courtesy and respect. If you want them to be responsible and conscientious you must model these same characteristics in ways such as returning their papers promptly, having your instructional materials organized and ready to use, and using your instructional time effectively. As we said in the beginning, creating productive environments, begins with the teacher and caring, high personal teaching efficacy, positive expectations, and teacher modeling are essential elements of effective classrooms.