

Showing Empathy by Caring

In our opening meeting we talked about empathy as a key to building relationships with others and in particular with our students. Showing students that you care for them is one way of demonstrating your empathy for them. Showing that you care about them helps them feel as if they belong, “which next to feeling safe is at the very basic level of Maslow’s hierarchy.” Paul Eggen and Don Kauchak in their seventh edition of *Educational Psychology* (2007) cite several important studies that point out specifics related to how teachers can show that they care. Here are a few ways that teachers show they care:

1. *Learn students’ names quickly and call them by their first name.*
2. *Greet them pleasantly, and get to know them as individuals.*
3. *Make eye contact, smile, lean toward them when talking, and demonstrate relaxed body language.*
4. *Use “we” and “our” in reference to class activities and assignments.*
5. *Spend time with students.*
6. *Demonstrate respect for students as individuals.*

In particular, the authors indicate that spending time with students can include the following:

1. *Helping students who have problems with an assignment.*
2. *Calling a parent after school hours.*
3. *Spending personal time to ask a question about a baby brother or compliment a new hairstyle.*

The authors cite Stipek’s (2002) work to point out how to show respect but to maintain standards:

1. *Hold students to high standards—accept no sloppy, thoughtless, or incomplete work.*
2. *Press them to clarify vague comments.*
3. *Encourage them to never give up.*
4. *Offer no praise for work that does not reflect genuine effort.*

Stipek indicates that “accepting low quality work conveys a lack of interest, patience, or caring.” Eggen and Kauchak also emphasize that teachers should “model respect for students and in return should expect that students respect them and one another.” Overlooked might be an “incident of rudeness; however, repeated disrespect should not be tolerated.” (pp. 344-45)

These ideas simply mirror the best practices that master teachers implement routinely. Nonetheless, it is always good to be reminded that what we are doing is what researchers indicate actually works. Show empathy by showing that you care. Have a great year everyone!

—Dan Novey