

RESPECT & SCHOOL SUCCESS

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Respect and School Success

“The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Respect is a word that means everything for teaching and learning. Therefore, each teacher must fully understand and embrace its dimensions.

- ❖ Each successful school contains levels of respect that are integrally connected to its unique and dynamic set of relationships.
- ❖ This distinctive set of relationships – always unfolding, changing, and adapting – defines the productivity of each learning community.
- ❖ Such a maturing learning community, as exemplified by this dynamic process, can only be attained through work -- and more work -- as teachers and students together attend to the matters at hand.

Origin of meaning

Respect has a curious origin. From the Latin - *respicere* - meaning ‘to look back’. Respect is an earned condition of worthwhile efforts; only a long road of careful work attains it. When done well, it will lead to a community that is respectful – meaning it has many indicators of respectfulness.

‘Students First’, ‘Attend’, and ‘Consider’

The following three principles of educator practice determine respect development.

I. **TKCF** (The Kids Come First)

An old YMCA acronym, this has been a ‘true north’ indicator for myself for 40 years. The adult world of power, access, ambition, hidden agendas, and plain ill-gained efforts will come into play in schools, as elsewhere in society. When these factors occur I always default to the TKCF maxim, quickly re-orienting myself to what really matters and the needed willpower and courage to see it through. Emerson understood who came first.

II. **Attend**, from the Latin *tendere* meaning ‘to stretch’.

To apply one’s mind by action, reflection, and more action is to truly attend to the matters at hand. It is to stretch beyond one’s comfort zone.

By attending to the learning of others, I must attend to my own learning. This may sound incredibly simple, but in reality it is a very hard stretch. Students have been well-trained in seeing the teacher as expert. Therefore, to really learn, you as teacher must make your learning public – become vulnerable. Students know and highly appreciate this personal dedication to their shared learning path.

When this happens it IS magic! The number one thing – by far – that many, many students communicated to me over the years was how they loved to see me learning something new. Stretch your own mind! Your students will thank you for the shared joy of learning something new.

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III. **Consider**, from the Latin *considerare* – meaning ‘to observe the stars’.

Asking yourself to consider an idea, or a plan, or a problem is opening up the possibilities. To ask another person is even better, for it opens up learning possibilities.

How do we build respect?

Building respect means to attend to each student in a manner that speaks to both small and large behavior. When you ask, “How are you doing?” “What are your thoughts?” “Which plan do you like?” with a manner of sincere questioning, then students are both reasonable and responsive.

The secret that Emerson acknowledges is respect; a principle of effective teaching is to always attend to and consider the other. Respect is something that each student feels for the other when he or she looks back on the experience of those collective and collaborative moments.

Respect is an antidote for despair

Increasing levels of respect in a learning community, derived from both small and large successes, can continually erode apathy and alienation. A genuine place of learning – for any duration – must be conditional on these increasing degrees of respect that are themselves earned through the common work of the group. Work that each member joins, commits oneself to, and cares about.

Respect creates a positive culture

The learning capacity of a group is inextricably tied to the degree of respect contained therein. It is impossible to sustain a culture of success with a group culture of dis-respect. Respect is the ultimate barometer of the Golden Rule.

Increase your respect quotient

The respect quotient is the degree of efficacy in your learning situation. Respect is the wind that propels the sail of success after failure. Remember success – from the Latin *succedere* means ‘to come after’. After what? After the failure, mistakes, and the inevitable up and downs of trying something new. No risk, no peril. Great peril can transform to great promise.

And so...

Respect is the condition that supports learning from mistakes – striving to reach beyond what we already know. Years ago at a youth leadership retreat in Colorado, a student explained to me, “When there is learning taking place, you can actually feel it. You can reach out and touch it.” This triad interrelationship of considering, attending, and caring (TKCF) propels the respect quotient forward.

“The beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you.” – B.B. King