

Establishing Strong Teacher-Student Relationships

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), human beings have three basic psychological needs of *competence*, *autonomy*, and *relatedness* that are essential to personality and cognitive growth and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Relatedness is characterized by a state of loving and caring for others, With the reciprocal being true, love and care is also experienced by the individual and is important for us to flourish (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In a school environment, teachers can be sympathetic, warm and affectionate with their students when they dedicate psychological resources such as attention, energy and affection to students (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). This way, teachers can nurture in their students' relatedness and self-determined motivation. Relatedness in the classroom maybe conceptualized as interpersonal involvement of teachers by creating opportunities for students to feel related and belonging. As a teacher, one can take the following steps to enhance interpersonal relationships with students (Buskist & Saville, 2001):

- 1) **Learn and use student names:** One of the easiest ways to learn students' names is for students to wear name tags at the beginning of the year.
- 2) **Chat with students:** Learn about students' interests, hobbies and goals.
- 3) **Smile!:** Smiling helps teachers seem more approachable to students. It makes students think you like your job and them.
- 4) **Be respectful of students:** The golden rule is to treat students as you would want to be treated. Avoid yelling at students. Saying "please" and "thank you" go a long way in showing respect.
- 5) **Use humour:** Humour helps students feel more comfortable in class. Use jokes, but avoid sarcasm or ridicule.
- 6) **Be an active listener:** Maintaining eye contact, using non-verbal actions (such as head nodding and facial expressions) and paraphrasing what was said (for e.g. "so you are having a difficult time learning how to dribble the soccer ball") are signs of showing genuine interest in what the students are saying.

Key Definitions:

Psychological needs: People's innate needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. For a high level of intrinsic motivation people must experience satisfaction of these needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Autonomy: "A sense of having a choice in one's actions and experiencing oneself as the locus of initiation of those actions" (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Competence: Experiencing one-self as capable and competent in controlling the activity's environment (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

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