

What is the influence of teacher-student relationships on learning?

The influence of teacher-student relationships on learning is clear: learning is enhanced when teacher-student relationships are strong. Research overwhelmingly suggests that students of varied ages, experiences, and backgrounds who perceive their teachers to be supportive of their needs and interests are more engaged, more motivated, more self-directed, and more socially connected at school than their peers.

How can teachers best foster positive relationships with students? What kinds of learning outcomes can teachers expect as a result? Several key facts emerge from the research:

Being kind matters. Learning is enhanced when teachers demonstrate a variety of behaviours associated with kindness: interpersonal warmth, care, empathy, support, safety, and intellectual encouragement. Research suggests that these behaviours increase a learner's creativity, criticality, autonomy, and satisfaction; and result in better student attendance and grades.

Positive teacher-student relationships are socially contagious. Students who experience positive relationships with teachers are more likely to try to develop similar bonds with others in their school community.

Positive teacher-student relationships benefit vulnerable students most. Students who are racially, socially and economically marginalized, have learning exceptionalities, or who are otherwise deemed at risk are more strongly influenced than others by the quality of relationships they form with teachers.

Teacher responsiveness to student differences is crucial to relationship building. Students tend to be most receptive to teachers who convey an understanding of them as distinct individuals. This proves to be especially true in culturally mixed classrooms.

Teacher-student relationships matter regardless of grade level. While it is often assumed that younger learners are more dependent for their academic adjustment on their teachers than are older ones, research suggests that the importance of teacher-student relationships remain consistent no matter a student's age.

Consensus among educational researchers can be rare, yet here there is little dispute: positive teacher-student relations are integral to young people's learning.

For online resources as well as the research references that inform this issue, please visit:
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