

Term 1 ^{and} Beyond!

Teacher–student rapport



Ah, the first day of Term 1, a classroom swimming with new faces. Building a good relationship with the owners of these faces is vital for good classroom management and focused learning. Students who feel comfortable with their teachers are also more likely to volunteer answers in class or ask for help. Most adults can vouch for this.

Think back to your years as a primary-aged student. Which teachers were your favourites or did you respect the most? It was probably the ones with whom you had a good rapport. This sounds great in theory, but is easy to lose sight of in the busy first few weeks of term. Here are some practical tips for developing strong teacher – student rapport in your classroom—not only for that all important Term 1, but for the rest of the year too.

- **First impressions count!** On the first day of Term 1, be as organised and well-rested as possible. This will show in your manner toward the students. You could also try wearing something special—maybe a favourite piece of clothing or jewellery—to make you feel good about yourself.
- **Kids love mystery and intrigue.** Grab the students' interest on the first day by introducing something with an air of mystery about it. For example, seat the students on the floor around an unopened suitcase full of interesting objects and have them guess what is inside and who it might belong to. You could also play some 'guess who?' style drama games or introduce a classroom mystery; for example, you could 'find' some secret letters in the classroom and share them with the students. Who knows what this secret correspondent will write next?
- **Relationship-building games are essential for first term.** Make a special time during each day or week that is just for talking. Make the effort to put the students in a circle, even if it means going to another area to do this. Set clear rules, such as students speaking one at a time and no put-downs or pulling faces. Play games like 'pass the pig'. This game involves a small toy (not necessarily a pig) being passed around the circle. The person holding the toy is the only person who can speak.
- **Find creative ways to introduce yourself to the students.** You might share some objects that are precious or significant to you or create a picture book story about your life, which you can share with the students.
- **Show an interest in the students' lives outside the classroom.** As a starting point, you could try simple questionnaires or ask the students to draw their favourite garden, bedroom, pet. Make charts showing the things that class members (and maybe even you) have in common; e.g. favourite colours, favourite animals.
- **Establish a classroom in which the students have a say.** This includes creating rules and procedures with the help of the students, negotiating rewards and setting goals for both long- and short-term class work.
- **Praise students often**—but only when you mean it. Be spontaneous in the way you praise.
- **Try to greet your students every day with a big smile;** it is contagious and will soon make grumpy faces disappear.
- **Remind the class often of the things they do well;** e.g. sharing, putting bags away neatly.
- **Show disappointment at poor behaviour, not anger.** Encourage students who have behaved poorly at every opportunity following an incident.
- **Create your own special rewards** like 'Star of the Day', 'Worker of the Week' or 'Oscars' not only for academic brilliance, but also for other skills shown by students; e.g. drama skills, kindness to others. Everyone's talents and skills should be recognised regularly. It also shows the students that you understand their interests and what makes them tick. The students in your class will be the envy of the school!
- **Take head shot photographs of each student.** These can be used for 'All About Me' walls, books or 'Who am I?' corners.
- **Have a sense of humour—school should be fun!** Try initiating something like 'Joke of the Day' or do something else light-hearted that fits your personality that the students associate especially with you; e.g. wear zany earrings on a Friday, bring in funny photos of your pet.
- **Remember to be flexible in running your classroom**—what worked for the class you had last year may not work for your new class. Use a variety of teaching strategies that will motivate the students to learn; e.g. using Howard Gardner's 'multiple intelligences' theory.
- **Show respect for your students' ideas and feelings.** Remember to show respect for yourself too—when you say you will do something, then do it!
- **Do things every now and then that make the students feel extra special;** e.g. allowing them to go to recess two minutes early, playing favourite games, having class parties based on the latest classroom theme, letting them play popular music during group work.

Enjoy Term 1—and getting to know your students!