



# Achievement

Low Socio-Economic Groups

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Jensen, Eric (2013). "Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind: Practical Strategies for Raising Achievement". Alexandria, VA: ASCD

# Outline

## **UNDERSTANDING THE STUDENT IN CONTEXT**

- The role of the teacher
- Health and Nutrition
- Mindset
- Cognitive capacity
- Relationships within the family
- Stress Level

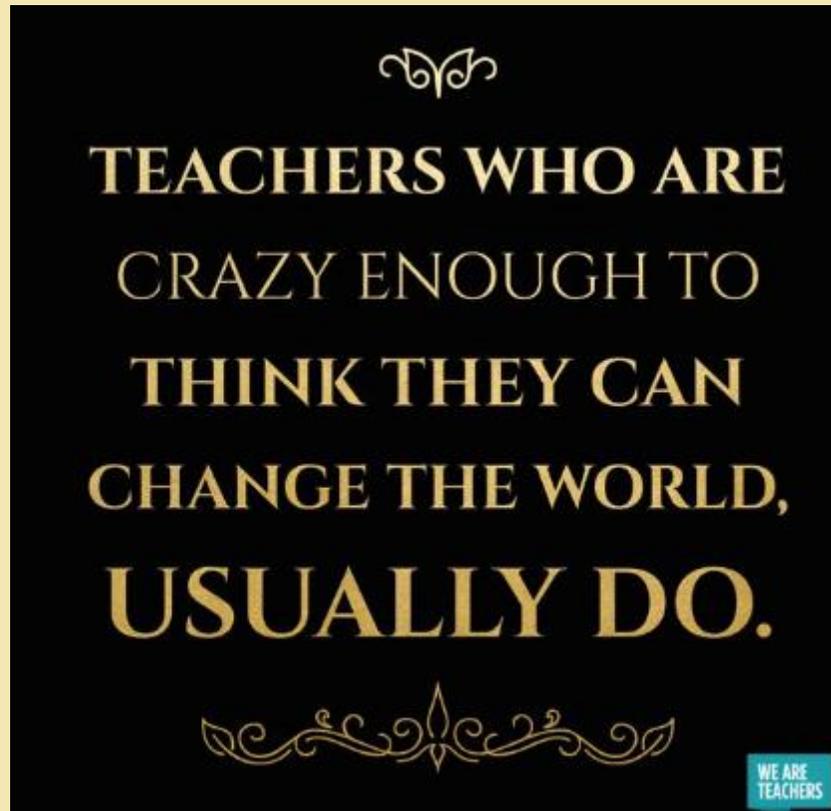
# Teaching makes a difference



“Teaching matters more than any other factor in a student’s school years.” (Hanushek, 2005)

“...quality teaching can completely offset the devastating effects poverty has on students’ academic performance.” (Hanushek, 2005)

# Teaching children in Poverty



“If you are serious about helping kids succeed, stop wishing for a miracle. Five years of strong teaching is the miracle.” [Jensen, 2013: p8].

# Health and Nutrition of children in poverty

- lower birth **weight**,
- **nutrition** problem,
- **health** issues not attended to in a timely manner,
- higher incidence of **asthma**
- untreated **infections**
- poorly maintained **homes**
- '**food insecure**', skipping breakfast which is one of the most important meal of the day.
- Poor nutrition at breakfast affects **gray-matter mass** in kids' brains (Taki, 2010).
- Deficiencies in minerals are linked to **weaker memory**
- **Low** levels of certain nutrients such as **omega-3** fatty acids are linked to **depression**.

# Health and Nutrition



## what poor children eat for breakfast

- Simple carbohydrates such as sugary cereals, pastries, PopTarts, pancakes, or fast food
- Wide fluctuations in blood sugar.
- No Breakfast?

# Consequences

Unstable glucose levels, linked to **weaker cognitive** and **behavioural outcomes**

(Wang, Szabo, & Dykman, 2004). Source: Jensen, p10

“... **poor working memory** and a **weaker ability to link cause and effect**.”

although your students may **know** the behaviour rules, they **won't** necessarily **understand when** and how those rules **apply**. [Jensen, 2013: P9]

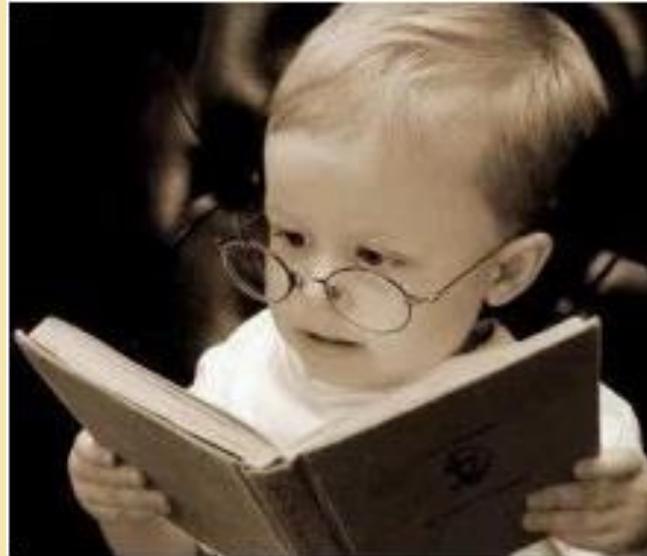
## Successful strategies

The **school** should take an **active role** in informing parents, irrespective of SES.

**Informing parents** should be part of the school communication strategy.

# Vocabulary

- “A child’s **vocabulary** is part of his or her **brain’s toolkit** for learning, memory, and cognition.
- **Words** help children **represent, manipulate, and reframe** information.” [Jensen, p11].



- Hart and Risley (2003):

Children of **professional parents** have **twice as much word** vocabulary compared to those from low socio economic status (SES)

- (Bracey, (2006):

Even **toddlers** from middle and higher income groups use many **more words** when communication to their parents compared to those from lower classes

# Efforts and Energy

## Low SES

- **viewed as:** lacking motivation, lazy
- **parents** have **similar** attitudes.
- **deficient**, and have themselves to blame

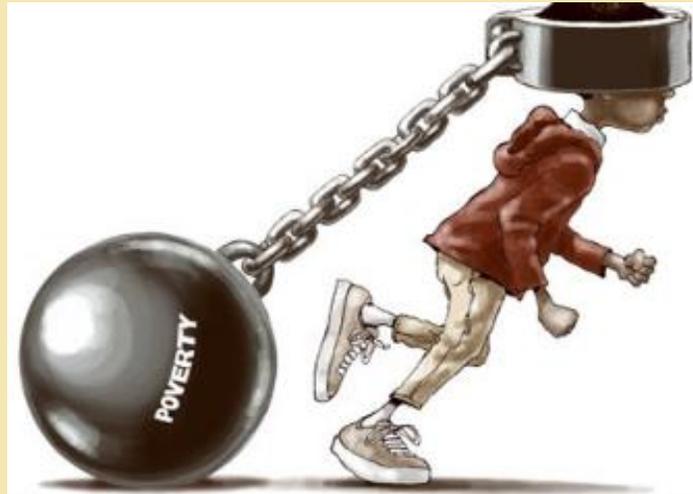
## Middle & Higher SES

- **not reaching their potential.**
- **they have potential**
- come from homes where **they can get support.**
- the **circumstances that should be mended** so as to help the child.

# Efforts and Energy: what Research says?

Many people living in poverty **do value education**, but **situational constraints** prevent them from taking full **advantage** of institutions such as schools.

(Bernstein, Mishel, & Boushey, 2002).



- Students often **do not value teachers** who are seen as **disconnected from their world** and their culture.
- Similarly **students who fail** are those who experience a **disconnect** between the **school world** and their **home life**

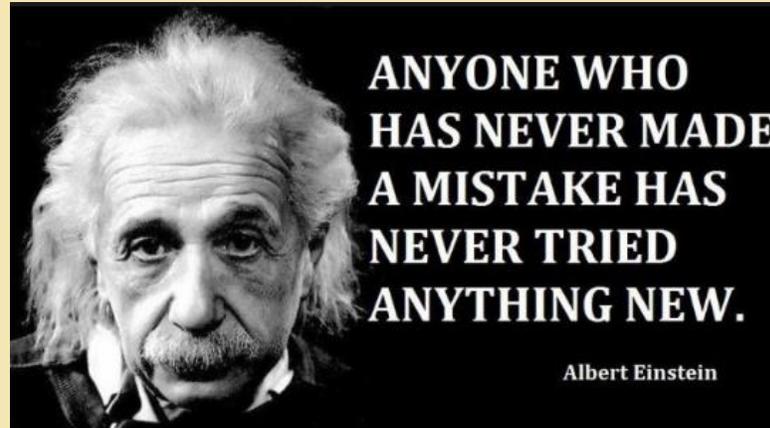
(Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt, 2010)

**Culture of Poverty v/s Situational Constraints**

# Mind-Set

## Fixed mindset.

- **intelligence** as a **fixed** attribute, either you have it or not.
- People are **smart** only when they **do not make any mistake**.
- **Children** who do not have the right answer **refuse to speak**



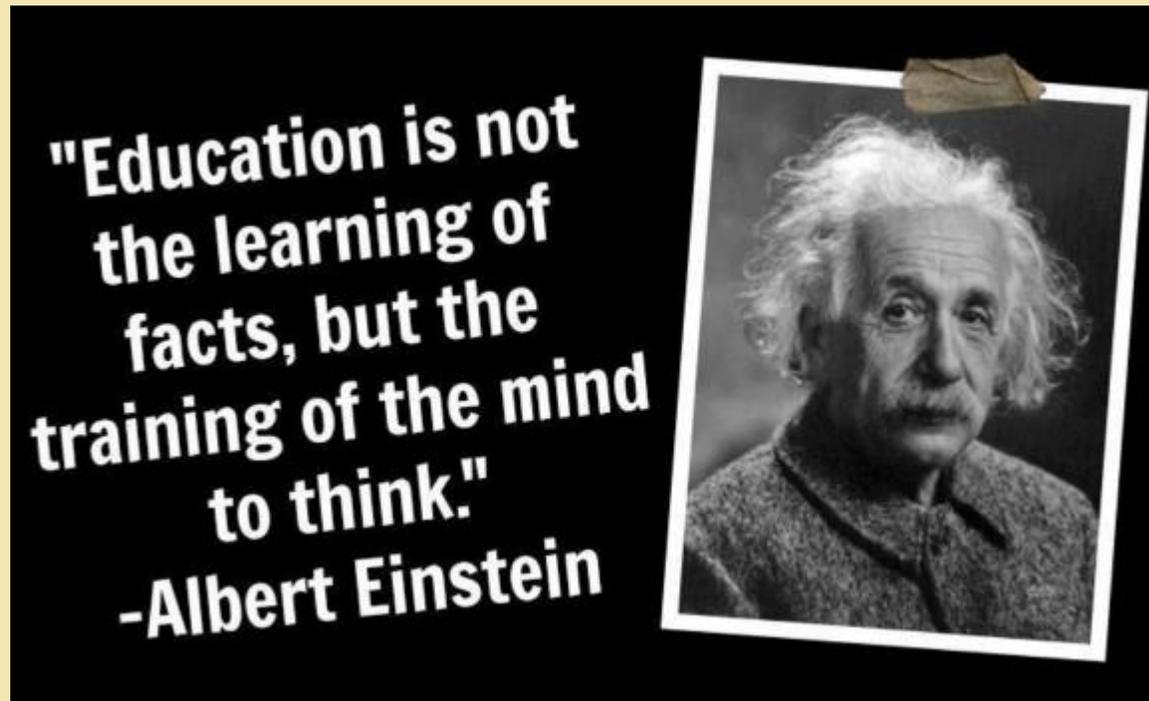
## Growth mindset

- **Mistake** is an **opportunity** to understand one's own shortcomings, grow from them
- **Extra effort** is needed to be able to do something they could not do before.

- Dweck: “there is no test score that “can measure you forever...We have a tendency to give a “test the power to define them” (our intelligence).

Dweck, Carol  
(2013).

“Mindset:  
Changing the  
way you think”

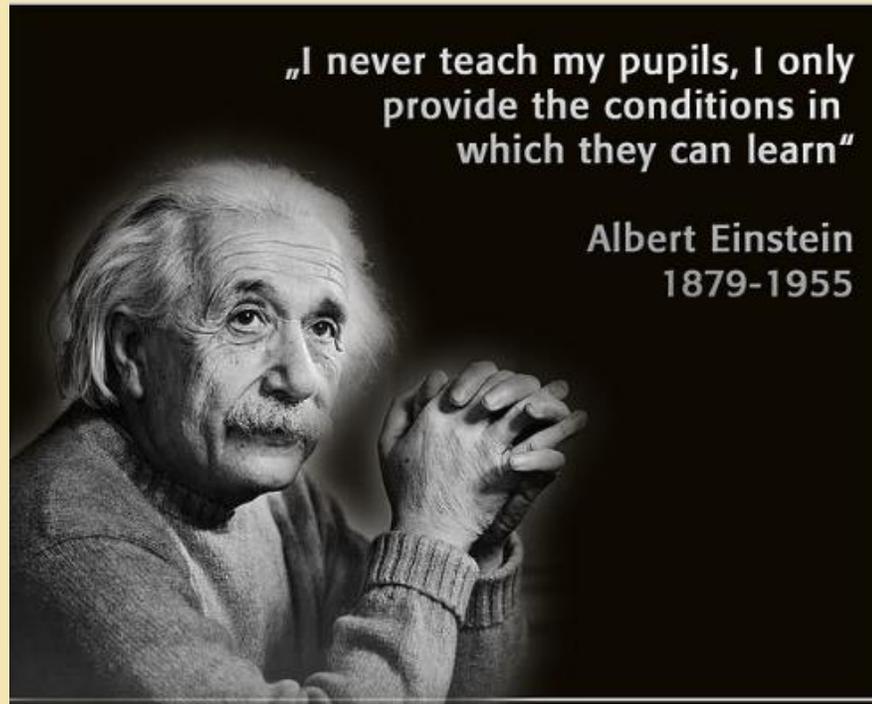


# Mindset

## Fixed mindset

- students with fixed mindset had **higher levels of depression**- they viewed their **setback** as being **incompetent** or unworthy.

(Dweck, 2103).



"I never teach my pupils, I only provide the conditions in which they can learn"

## Growth mindset

- They believe that certain **qualities can be developed**.
- **Failures hurt, but does not define them.**
- They believe that if **ability can be expanded**, there are many paths to success.

*In all human affairs there are efforts, and there are results, and the strength of the effort is the measure of the result.*

*James Allen*

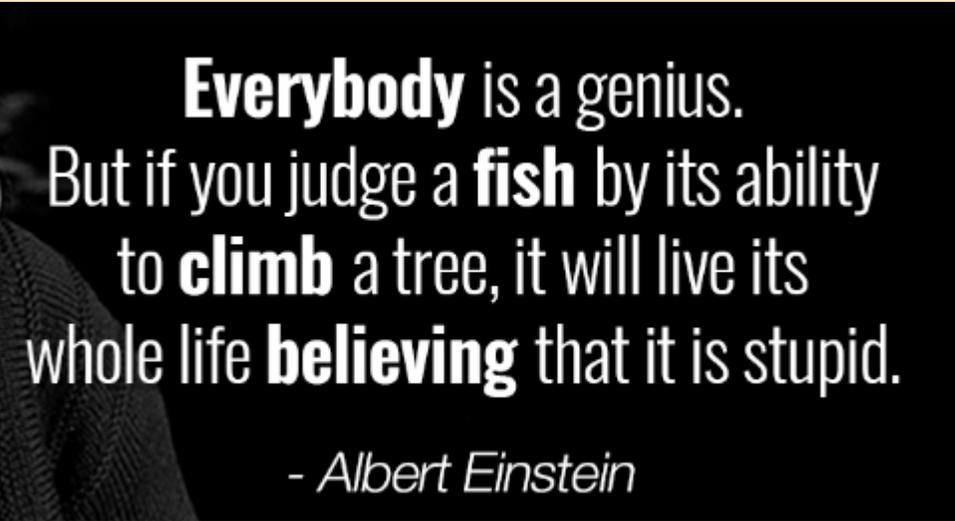


In all human affairs there are efforts and there are results, and the strength of the effort is the measure of the result.

No matter what one's ability, **it is effort that turns ability into accomplishment** (Dweck, 2103).

# Mindset: asset or liability?

- “.... When both teachers and students believe that students have a **fixed amount of “smarts”** that cannot be increased, **students** are far more likely to **disengage**.
- 
- Conversely, when students have **positive attitudes** about their own learning capacity, and when teachers **focus on growth** and change...student **engagement increases.**”  
[Dweck, p.13]



**Everybody** is a genius.  
But if you judge a **fish** by its ability  
to **climb** a tree, it will live its  
whole life **believing** that it is stupid.

- *Albert Einstein*

# Cognitive Capacity- Poverty & Brain

- **Cognitive capacity:** The **ability** of children **to assimilate** and internalize the learning materials
- **Poverty affects the physical brain.** The **learning memory is smaller** and this affects intelligence

Children have **poor working memory** and struggle with verbal ability, have **short attention span**, highly **distracted, unable to find solutions** to problems [Jensen, 2013].

# Relationships within the family

- **lack positive caregiving: fail to learn** about appropriate **positive emotional response**.
- lead to **inappropriate school behaviours**.
- **difficult** for students to develop ability **to work well in cooperative groups**



No one is born happy, but every one is born with the ability to create happiness.

# Successful Strategies

- **Reframe your thinking: expect** that students may act “**disrespectful**” **until you teach them otherwise.**
- Expect kids to **test** their **boundaries** until they learn stronger social and emotional skills.
- They will exhibit **coarse behaviour** **until** the **relationships** you build and the **school’s social conditions** make **it attractive** for them **not to behave inappropriately.** [Jensen, 2013:16]



DON'T  
THINK ABOUT  
WHAT MIGHT  
GO WRONG  
THINK ABOUT  
WHAT  
COULD GO  
RIGHT

# Stress Level

- Stress can be defined as the **body's response to** the perception of **loss of control** resulting from an adverse situation or person. (Jensen, 2013: 16).
- The **stress** problem resides more among low income families
- **parents** tend to be more **authoritarian** with their children
- more likely to **inflict physical punishment** (Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001).

IT'S NOT STRESS  
THAT KILLS US,  
IT IS OUR  
REACTION TO IT.

# Stress level

- Influence children's **physical, psychological, emotional,** and **cognitive functioning,** and **brain development.**
- **impact on academic success and social competence** (Evans, Kim, Ting, Teshler, & Shannis, 2007).
- At school **disruptive behaviour** may be a **result of** such **stressful home environment** (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002)
- **Inability** of children **to defer gratification** (Evans, 2003).

IT'S NOT THE  
LOAD THAT  
Breaks You  
DOWN, IT'S  
THE WAY  
YOU CARRY IT.

LOU HOLTZ

[WWW.VERYBESTQUOTES.COM](http://WWW.VERYBESTQUOTES.COM)

# Consequences

- Students resort to **aggression**, “**in your face**” behaviour - a means to feel in control and to take charge of a situation. They adopt a survival strategy of: “**fight first, ask questions later**”. [Jensen, 2013:17]
- An increased **detachment and hopelessness** over time (Bolland, Lian, & Formichella, 2005).
- Tend to **give up**, become **passive** and show **disinterest** in the school and classroom activities (Johnson, 1981).
- **Passive** school behaviour such as a **failure to respond** to questions or requests, **slumped posture**, and **disconnection** from peers or the class activities

**DON'T JUDGE  
MY CHOICES  
WITHOUT  
UNDERSTANDING  
MY REASONS.**

# Consequences

- **'learned helplessness'** - a tendency to **give up** and **adopt a passive attitude** in the face of adversity.
- develop a **fatalistic attitude**, the attitude that nothing much can be done about them and their future.
- Such children **do not have any role model to aspire to.**

# Successful Strategies

- **Schools** and **teachers** should make a deliberate effort to **teach appropriate coping skills** and **stress relieving techniques** that would decrease hostility.
- **Give students responsibilities** that help them **feel a sense of control** over their daily lives at school.



# Rules of Engagement: Strategies you can use to engage students

# Outline:

## **Working with children in poverty:**

- Upgrading your attitude.
- Building relationships and respect.
- Getting buy-in.
- Embracing clarity.
- Showing your passion.

# Rule #1: Upgrade Your Attitude

Embracing a new, **positive attitude**.

*From*

*“I hope I get a good batch of kids this year?”*

*to*

*“I know the kids I get are going to love the new engagement strategies I’ll be using this year”.*

A BAD ATTITUDE  
IS LIKE A FLAT TIRE.  
IF YOU  
DONT CHANGE IT,  
YOU'LL NEVER GO  
ANYWHERE.

1upattitude.com

# An Ex-Teacher

I met a person at the bus stop, well dressed and looking clearly settled in a good position. He came across me and called me by my name. He happened to be an ex-student. I was surprised to hear that this man in his 30s still remembered the mathematics class he was exposed to when he was 13 years old in the second year of secondary schooling.

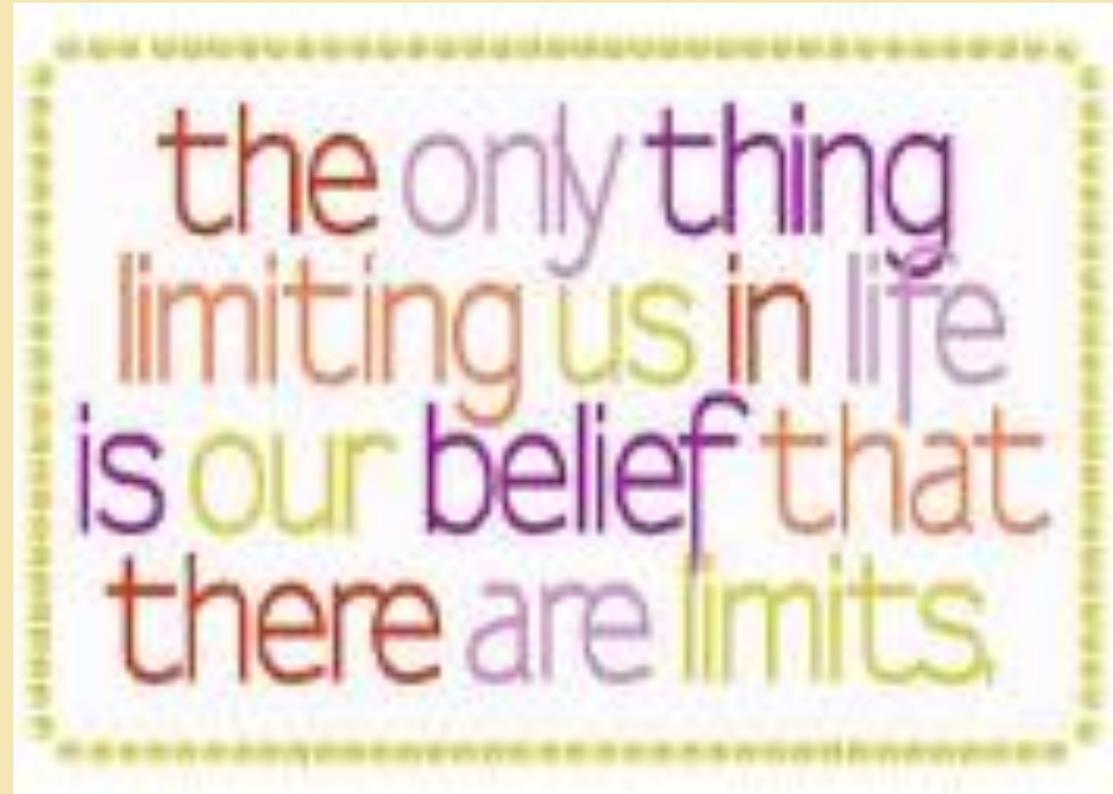
He reminded me of the maths corner that I had created in his class. He still believed that the maths corner was created to help children like him. He told me that today he is an engineer and I might see him in action at the airport giving the green signal for the pilot to take off.

Here was a student who was in a low achieving school, someone who was viewed as a failure and who had almost given up hope to do mathematics, now a qualified professional where maths is probably the most essential subject.

I realized that something that I might have done, very much beyond my knowledge, had made a difference.

# Believe

Low-SES **students** in particular **need you to believe in them** so that they can **believe in themselves**.



# Developing simple skills

- Encourage and **support for showing up on time.**
- **Simple instruction** of being **seated on time**, and later on for **contributing in class** needs to be carefully addressed.
- **No matter how simple** they may appear, these are part of the social skills that **children should be taught** how to acquire.

# Suggestions

- Ask students to **stand and stretch**.
- Ask them to take in a **slow deep breath**, hold it, and then **slowly exhale** all, and while doing so, **feel the stress getting out** and the body feel lighter.
- Students can be asked to **identify something they were just taught** by pointing to the appropriate wall poster.
- Create a **problem situation** and ask them to **try solve them together in a small group**
- They can be taught to **conduct and complete a quiz**, even **mark themselves** and **use** the marking for some sort of **grading at class level**.

# Will it work?

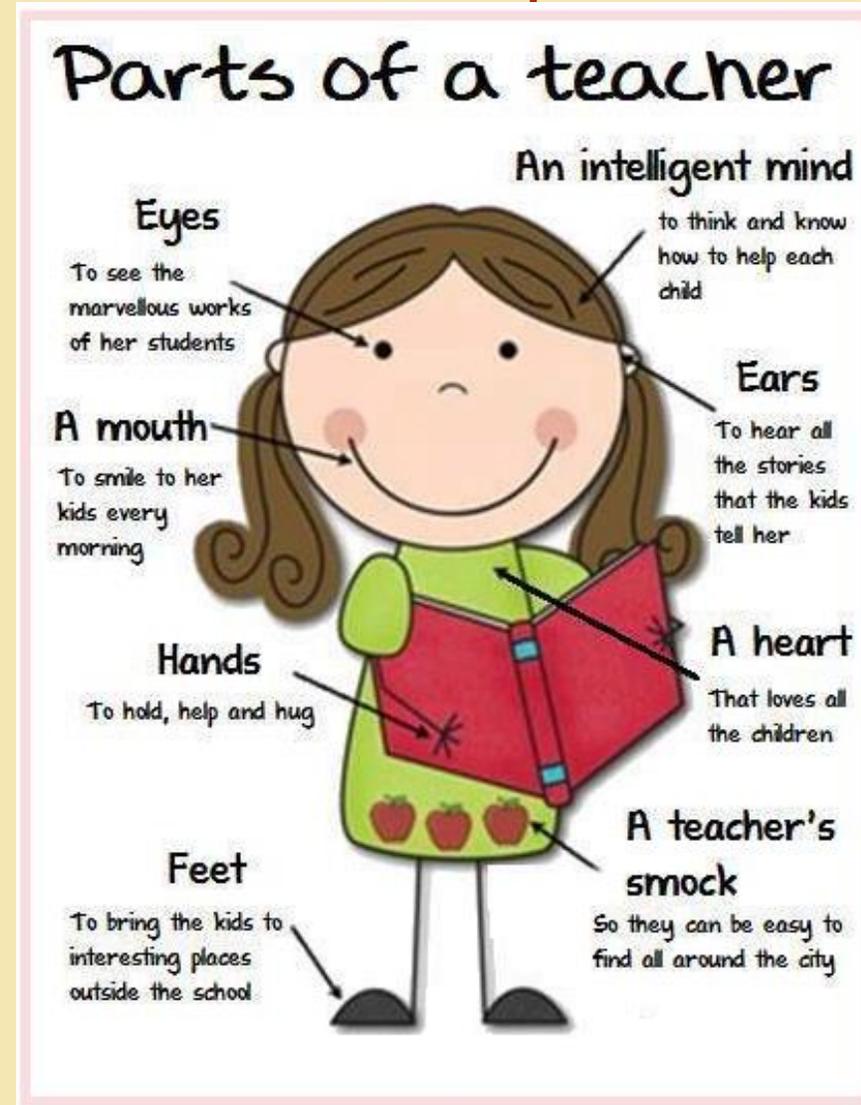
- **You may fail** or attain your objectives to some extent.
- You should be **allowed to fail.**
- It was **not what you tried**, but **how you prepared for it** that matters.

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

Winston Churchill

# Rule #2: Build Relationships and Respect

- “...students don't care how much you know until they know **how much you care**. Students who have **positive relationships** with their teachers experience **less stress, behave more appropriately**, and feel more excited about learning. Students almost always **work harder for teachers they like**” (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010).



# Student background

- Many different life experiences.
- **Never received any praise** for something they have achieved.
- Sent to school to 'buy time'
- They feel that **teachers do not care** for them, but have a job to do so as to earn their salary.



# Help to build a success story

- Put in an idea of a **dream they can build** for themselves “...one day I will be proud of what I have achieved. **Can you think of yourself what you will be in 10 years’ time?**”
- **Create a space** where they can **write their thoughts** about themselves in the future.

## Future time sheet”

- Call it a **Future time sheet** and let them **write** a statement about themselves on it **anytime they feel like.**

*No matter  
where you're from,  
your dreams are valid.*

LUPITA NYONG'O

# Future Time Sheet

- Lay down the **rule for using** it: *write your comment on it and just stick it. No need to write your name.*
- **Review** it every day and make a **positive comment** about every statement.
- **Create posters** about their dreams, hobbies, family, neighborhood, problems, and passions.

Make a **motivation class**.

- **Build a language, Maths or Science class** around it.

# Respect your students

- “To earn your students’ respect, you must **respect them**. You don’t need to like your students’ world, but **never disparage or criticise** a student’s background, heritage, or culture. You must **integrate students’ cultural and social capital** into any goals or criteria for success you set for them” (Putnam, 2000).

I'm only **responsible**  
for what  
**I Say** not for  
What you  
**Understand...**

# Integrate student's cultural and social capital into the classroom

- Create an **opportunity** for children **to speak** about themselves.
- Single out something they did and would like to **share to the class.**
- Find a way to **bring out the value of her/his story** and **thank her/him** for presenting it.
- Find ways to **strengthen** that experience by **providing what else s/he could do** in future.

## Every Child Matters



“We have to do more both to protect children and ensure each child fulfils their potential. Security and opportunity must go hand in hand.”

# Grade- shift from core to periphery

- **When children cannot achieve good grades, they do not make grade a high priority.**
- Would you care to collect a paper where you have failed?
- Will parent come over to hear about their kids are failures.
- They will be asked to support the child, a skill that they believe they do not possess.

Help Parents Understand a few simple things:

"At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents."

Jane D. Hull

Parents

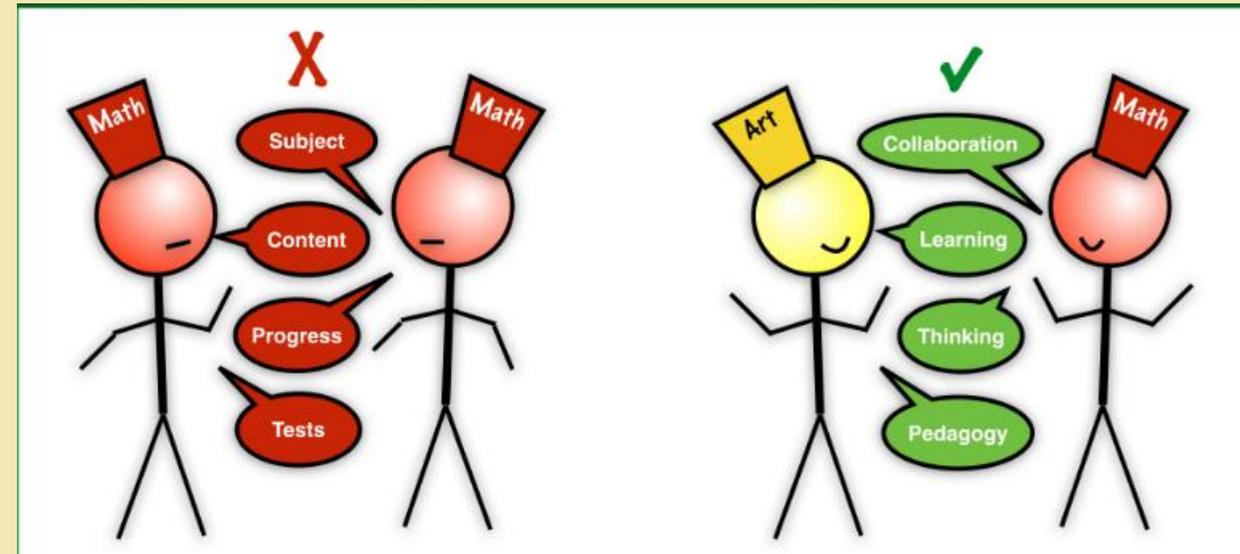
**"CHILDREN  
LEARN MORE  
FROM WHAT  
YOU ARE THAN  
WHAT YOU  
TEACH."**

-Jane D. Hull

# Engage

- Engage students in **exercise** that **the child prefers**
- **Set targets for improvement.**
- **Do not set targets** that they **cannot achieve** for the moment.
- Teachers can **set different academic goals using the skills** that **the child possess** as a basis to proceed

Teachers collaborate to achieve their goals.



From

Subject  
Content  
Progress  
test

To

Collaboration  
Learning  
Thinking  
Pedagogy

# Class project

- Students can participate in a **class project** which they **slowly build** at their **own pace** around a theme.
- Every now and then ask them to **speak about it**.
- Help them to make a **comment**, and **write** it if possible.
- Use the corner to **assign a mark to the class** and **individual marks** to each child who demonstrates her/his contribution



# Planning- questions

- Am I creating an activity that would run the **risk of making students uncomfortable?**
- Will the task **embarrass** them if they fail at it?
- How do I **define success** so as **not to make students feel** that they are a **failure?**

Therefore you should

- Set the **criteria for success** on the basis of what they **can achieve.**
- Make this criteria **clear at the start.**

# Language

- Be **conscious of** your interactive **language**.
- Make **eye contact** and do not miss to draw to the good in them.
- When they are off track, **refocus** your question **without** necessarily **dismissing** what they said.
- Help them to **understand that something else is required** as an answer.

# Model appropriate behaviour

- Students need to be exposed to a **model** of appropriate behaviour.
- Use the same **language** with them that you would want them to learn how to use when addressing you.
- Use of **respectful words** and phrases like “please”, “thank you”, “we can do it at your convenience”, or “when you have a moment”.

# Hope for the future

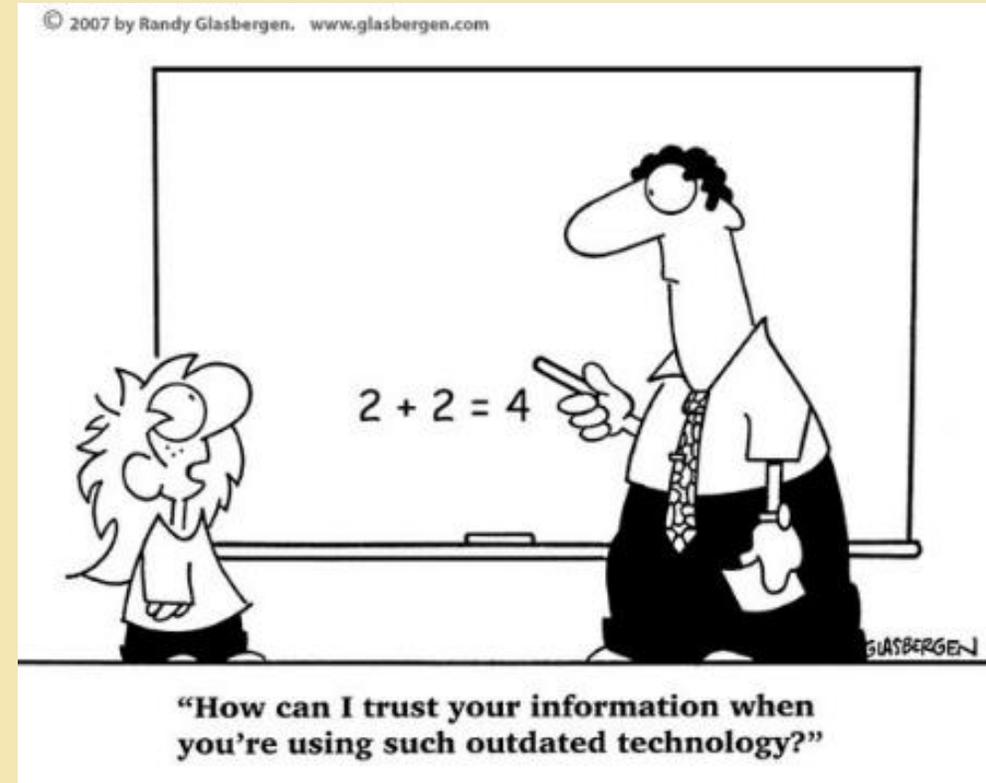
- Always think about the **future** that the **child will imagine for her/himself** through the way you address them.
- **Does your treatment** of the child **offer a hope** for him/her with a future that might change her/his life?

**EXAMPLE IS NOT  
THE MAIN THING  
IN INFLUENCING  
OTHERS. IT IS THE  
ONLY THING.**

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

# Rule # 3: Get Buy-In

- The teacher's job is to "sell" the learning to the children.
- Tell the students why they should learn something and how relevant it is for them
- Take time to make a weekly assessment of learning gain and how you would wish to proceed



# Why children go to school

- Because their friends are there
- School is often seen as an obligation even by the parent
- The rule obliges children to be at school.



# “At least try the next step”

- The child is **allowed to make mistake,**
- **Only good answer** will **deter students from trying.**
- If the task is challenging, it appeals to the self-esteem of the child to prove his/her worth, it will provide its own motivation.
- There should be **no issue of good or bad answer,** but a recognition that the child is **ready to try.**

No matter how many **mistakes** you make or how slow you progress, you are still way ahead of everyone who isn't trying.

Tony Robbins

# Strategies that work

- “If you finish on time, I will **add additional marks** on your behaviour chart that will count in the final assessment on the non-core areas”.
- Occasionally bring in **some** elements of **competition**,
- Reward: Use **continuous assessment and incentive scheme**: some additional marks on the final examination.
- “Work in small teams and see which one gets the solution first”: **success builds self-esteem and status**.
- Use **‘Homework Pass’** to skip a homework once a month.
- Provide incentive to **attend extra PE classes** in lieu of classwork for those who have earned credits through consistent work
- Use **goals** that are more **meaningful** to students.
- **Good grades** should be a **by-product**, not the central concern.



# Respect

- Do not put them into **embarrassing situations** by dismissing their contribution in front of their peers.
- Do **not dismiss** their answer, but say that you want more answers
- Find out if you can **bring out** a few **positive** elements what they answer,

*Respect* people's  
*feelings*. **Even**  
**if it doesn't mean**  
*anything* to you,  
**it could mean**  
*everything* to  
**them**

*iliketoquote.com*

## Rule #4: Embrace Clarity

- Plan with purpose, and think through the lesson from the student's point of view
- Use **fewer words**. ...pause instead of adding more words.
- Say what you do want from students, not what you don't want
- Focus on positive, desired behaviour
- Give clear, simple directions



# Rule #5: Show Your Passion

- Passionate teachers get their message across not only with words but also with **body language**
- As teachers, you can positively affect students' states of mind simply by being in a **positive state**.
- Passion tells students that you **care about what you do** and that you're connecting with them.
- And passion cannot be faked. If you're not passionate in your teaching, your **students will see right through you**.



people with great passion  
**can make**  
the impossible happen

@youngantop

# Solutions you can use

- Stay active. **Move around** your classroom; do not get stuck up front. Refer to posters on the wall, use props, and gesticulate dramatically.
- **Vary your voice** purposefully
- **Vary your tone** and add pauses
- Keep your **eyes focused on students**. Avoid looking at your computer, notes, desk, or any other nonstudent destination
- Be positive. **Focus on what you want to happen** rather than the negatives.

## **What about yourself?**

- **Use music** that gets you excited.
- Wear **comfortable** shoes, practice healthy habits,
- Use **positive self-talk** to stay relaxed and focused.



**Yesterday is not ours to  
recover, but tomorrow is  
ours to win or lose.**

Lyndon B. Johnson