

## 2.4 Create safe conditions for rigorous learning: Support and challenge students to achieve high standards



### Essence >

The teacher has high expectations and guides each student to achieve his/her personal best.

### Key actions: Teachers

- Share my excitement and my own learning examples with my students
- Create a learning environment where every student feels driven by challenge rather than threat
- Listen to each student and identify and value his/her learning strengths and passions in developing personal learning goals
- Encourage students' resilience in using their strengths to tackle new learning, solve problems and 'raise the bar' with their expectations
- Set tasks with multiple entry and exit points to maximise each student's learning time and progress
- Establish and monitor classroom procedures to maximise learning time
- Continually nudge students—ask them 'What else could you do?'
- Ensure my teaching and learning program is referenced against criteria for high standards
- Engineer learning conversations that extend students' thinking
- Scaffold each student's progress with guidance, modelling, demonstrations and targeted feedback
- Challenge students with tasks that demand transference of skills/understandings
- Structure milestones for students to share their learning and get guidance along the way to enrich their final performance or demonstration of understanding
- Teach students how to seek feedback and offer timely feedback to move their learning forward
- Celebrate students' successes throughout the learning process as they challenge themselves to achieve their personal best

### Key actions: Students

- Believe in myself, use my learning strengths and have a go—I can do it
- Aim high and challenge myself with goals that will take a lot of persistence
- Reflect on my learning, and explain how I got past being 'stuck'
- Show initiative—talk with people, read lots of books and explore new ways of using technologies
- Challenge myself: 'Is this my best? What risks will I take to prove to myself that I can do even better?'
- Look forward to getting feedback from others to help me take the next step



*Do not worry about your difficulties in Mathematics. I can assure you that mine are still greater.*

Albert Einstein

### Interrupting the failure cycle— Never give up

Rebecca was a Year 3 student who just wasn't making progress. She'd had one-on-one support for several hours a day since she started school, but her learning was still laboured. For Rebecca, writing her own name was an ongoing challenge. I kept thinking of the famous quote by Albert Einstein: 'Insanity is continuing to do the same thing over and over and expecting different results'. I had to do something different.

At the time, I was involved in further study on digital literacies, so I decided to try a new way of working with Rebecca. I negotiated with her and her family to send daily e-mails between school and home. Initially, Rebecca's mother would type the outgoing e-mails and read incoming e-mails to Rebecca.

Gradually, with encouragement, Rebecca took the reins. Her growing confidence was tangible. In time, she was writing and reading all her own e-mails. She was developing a taste for it—e-mailing classmates and then even teaching other students how to do things on the computer.

Rebecca was turning a corner. Things started to change at school. She was transferring her learning to other situations. For the first time, she was experiencing success.

Primary school teacher

### Using transfer to challenge learners

Many students claim, 'I can't do maths!', but Sean was the classic. When he entered my maths lessons, his entire body language drooped into failure. One recess time I caught sight of him in the quadrangle practising his soccer skills. He was a different person! The confidence, persistence and precision shone through.

I had an idea. The next time I saw him I praised the skills and dedication he showed in learning his soccer techniques, and then I posed the challenge: 'If you bring one tenth of that doggedness to the next ten maths lessons, I'll work with you to get a passing grade.' He looked at me for a full five seconds and then replied, 'OK, just watch me!'

He was up for the challenge.

*Adapted from Professor Guy Claxton's presentation at the Building Learning Power conference, Port Pirie, 19 March 2009*

*When we expect that we have an impact on student achievement, we are right. When we expect that we are impotent, we are also right.*

Douglas Reeves

### Justice alert

Is every student challenged to reach her/his personal best or just those who 'do school' well?

### Ways to support and challenge students to achieve high standards

#### Supporting students to reach their potential:

- Most importantly, tell yourself 'This student **can** learn and **I** can help them do it'.
- Keep looking for new approaches.
- Look at both sides of the situation. Identify the challenges that the student, and you, must embrace to achieve success.
- Provide time for students to see a learning task through to completion. If at first they don't achieve the required standard, provide specific feedback and give them the opportunity to try again. If they are finding it hard to complete a task, help them tackle their difficulties, set new time-lines and support them to meet deadlines.
- Remember that your expectations matter.

**Learning wall:** Arrange wall space where students can share their learning processes, their individual strategies for risk taking, and celebrate their persistence. They can post photographs, stories, artworks, tokens, diagrams and questions.

#### Make the most of mistakes:

As a learner, model that it is all right to make mistakes. Share the emotions that you feel, and demonstrate how you learn through these experiences. Students could create cartoon strips to share their own experiences where 'mistakes' were the key to eventual success.

**'Stuck' posters:** Work with students to display useful questions to ask themselves when they are 'stuck'. Encourage them to talk about how they got through being 'stuck'. Help them to draw on memories/feelings of earlier successes to cope with new challenges. (This activity is based on work by Gornal, Chambers & Claxton 2008, p 17.)

**Pastoral care:** Devote time for students to share tips for resolving problems and moving forward with challenging learning. Encourage them to use the strategies they see others use when having difficulties.

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**Mentor links:** Students can offer to share their strengths by acting as mentors for other learners. They can give specific tuition, supportive ideas/feedback or targeted advice on work skills and self-motivation.

**Comfort zones:** Explore the idea that people experience different degrees of comfort at different times when they are learning. In the classroom, identify three areas, each representing a degree, or zone, of comfort: 'Comfort', 'Stretch' and 'Panic'. Suggest different activities and ask students to move into the space that best represents how that activity makes them feel. For example, watching a video might move most students to the comfort zone while stroking a snake might move some of them to panic. Always end the activity with everyone in the comfort zone. Discuss what students felt and what they were able to learn in each of these zones. Good learning happens best in the stretch zone, not in a panic or when too comfortable. When students are stuck, ask for ideas of what could move them into the stretch zone. Code the zones with colours like traffic lights: red for panic, amber for stretch, green for coasting through with no effort and not picking up much learning. (This activity is based on work by Gornal, Chambers & Claxton 2008, p 17.)

**Expert interviews:** Set up interviews with skilful people. Students develop a series of questions to uncover exactly what the expert does (eg What preparation is there?, How do you keep your eye on the ball?, What sort of thinking or beliefs are helpful?). Students create a checklist of key aspects to imitate. (This activity is based on work by Gornal, Chambers & Claxton 2008, p 49.)

**Scheduled learning conversations:** These conversations can be a valuable opportunity for students to share their learning journey with you and other significant adult/s. Support students with a framework for their presentation. They extend an invitation and negotiate a 15 minute meeting time. During the meeting, the student shares growth points, concerns and achievements, shows evidence of his/her successful learning, and leads a three-way conversation where the adults ask questions and acknowledge the student's efforts.



## Language that teachers can use to support and challenge students to achieve high standards

- I'm a teacher and a learner too. You probably know more about this new topic than I do. I aim to be an expert by the end of it! What tips can you give me?
- What's really important to you as a learner? What do you want to get better at?
- What do you hope to achieve this time? How will you do it?
- I'm going to model how to ... for the class. You may move off on your own as soon as you've got the idea.
- You have a real talent for ... How does it feel to ...? Remember to have that same confidence when you ...
- Let's say nothing's 'wrong' but, rather, there are just 'degrees of rightness'. How might this change your thinking?
- It's great to move outside your comfort zone—that's when the real learning happens.
- Do you understand it well enough to teach it to someone else?
- What did you use to work it out last time? Find out three ways others have done it.
- It's when you 'get stuck' that you really start to learn. What's your next step? You can do it!



## This element is not demonstrated if:

- Teachers'/students' words and actions reflect an attitude of 'near enough is good enough'
- The learning intention is unclear
- Learning lacks a clear sequence and evidence of mastery is difficult to find
- Engagement in the learning process wanes before reaching the outcome
- Teachers reference students' achievements only against external norms (eg class norms) without acknowledging individual progress
- All tasks are geared towards final summative tests, without formative assessment to guide student progress

## Practice check

- How do I encourage students to persist when learning gets tough?
- Do I provide opportunities for all students to learn and achieve to a high level?
- How do I make the learning intention/s of each lesson clear to students?
- How do I challenge individuals and acknowledge initiative and progress?
- What procedures are in place to help students move forward when they encounter problems?

*If you do things well, do them better. Be daring, be first, be different, be just.*

Anita Roddick

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Notes:

*I began to challenge myself and I started to mature, because the teacher made me realise I can't go through school waiting for someone to push me all the way. Now that I am heading to high school I am glad I changed into the person I am now, because I reckon I work pretty hard and I follow everything through to the end.*

Year 7 student

believe all students can learn