

The Teacher Exudes Positive Energy

The teacher describes her demeanor as **low energy/high affect**. She indicates that she matches her energy to support the needs of the students. The students are autistic and the high intensity of very animated movements can become counterproductive and/or make them anxious. What they do need though is clear, concise expression with high affect to illustrate meaning. It is more of a calm, controlled energy, but it is definitive. This is quite different than a passive, unemotional demeanor that is not conducive to an educational setting.

COMMENTS from the GROUP?

The Classroom Staff is a Team

The teacher is emotional when she speaks about the respect she has for the paraprofessionals that work with her in the classroom. They all have a mutual respect for the students and a shared passion for treating those students with the respect they deserve. You can see in the video the staff working side by side. Many teachers say they have no time to spend instructing the staff on what to do so they never really get the help they need. The difference here is that this teacher, from the onset, assumes that the instruction will require all hands on deck, and her approach is that they do it together. So the paraprofessionals learn what to do as she models for them side by side. She respects that she needs them, and they respect her by doing their best to follow her lead.

COMMENTS from the GROUP?

The Teacher does not “Speak Down” to her Students

One of the most situations that is often evidenced in special education classrooms is the low level of expectations that are placed on students. Assumptions are often made about cognitive skills related to students' physical and behavioral characteristics. We often observe educators talking about students in front of them, staff talking amongst themselves during instruction, and frequent interruptions by related service providers bringing students in and out of the classroom during a lesson. We also see sometimes a monotone or robotic way of speaking when conversing with students with autism, or sometimes a disrespectful method of speaking that is way below the students' chronological age

as if because they have a disability, they deserve only to be treated like a very young child.

No judgment can or should be made regarding the receptive abilities of non-verbal, limited verbal, or otherwise disabled students. All students should be treated and spoke to in an age-appropriate manner. They deserve to be exposed to natural language patterns (not to be confused with reducing lengthy utterances for more efficient expressions). It is best practice to assume that the person inside is deserving of your respect and should be treated as you would treat another student that does not present with the same challenges.

COMMENTS from the GROUP?

Connections to the Frameworks for Teaching (FFT)

The following connections to the FFT should be easily recognized while watching the video.

Component 1 Planning and Prep

- Demonstrates knowledge of students
- Sets Instructional outcomes

Component 2 The Classroom Environment

- Creates an environment of respect/ rapport
- Manages classroom procedures

Component 3 Instruction

- Communication with students
- Engaging students in learning
- Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness

In preparation for the next meeting, please incorporate one or more of these concepts into your teaching practice. Be prepared to explain, or show a short video clip to your colleagues.

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Pocket PD No. 2

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF RESPECT AND RAPPORT

For this Professional Development, you will explore a 7-minute video featuring Jessica Englehart from 721R and her 6:1:1 class. The focus of her teaching is vocational as the students are nearing a transition period from the school setting to a possible work setting. Jessica explains and models teaching practices she describes as **“low energy / high affect.”** Her methods are calming but exaggerated, and therefore easy for the students to target and respond to without becoming over stimulated. Her collaboration with her team of paraprofessionals creates an environment of respect. Her routines are clearly defined. Her classroom environment reduces anxiety and creates a place for practice, enabling students to reach higher levels of independence.



Listed here are **Target Points** to watch for during the video. Please take a moment to read through the list first, and then mark the items and take notes as you see them occur in the video.

Write notes on a separate sheet.
The Target Points in blue text will be explored in detail.

TARGET POINTS to watch for...

- Organized environment
- Alternate ways to interact with materials to increase student participation
- Teacher demonstrates high expectations for all students
- Teacher exudes positive energy
- There are multiple ways for students to respond
- The environment is "respectful"
- The students' emotional / behavioral responses are respected and considered
- The teacher models the use of multiple means of expression
- The classroom staff is a team
- The teacher speaks and repeats information clearly
- The teacher is flexible. Voice output devices can be used by all (not just by nonverbal students) for varying reasons.
- The teacher does not "speak down" to her students

NOW LET'S WATCH the VIMEO!



**Jessica's 3 Rs:
RELATE, RESPECT, ROUTINE**

<http://vimeo.com/42424588>

**Target Points →
TEACHING POINTS!**

Organized Environment

This classroom environment is neat and organized. The information posted in the room is relevant and current. Any information posted in the line of sight of students should be related to the instruction. Too much information is a distraction. Take notice of how things are displayed (color, size, background, how much is displayed, and why it is displayed - is it useful?). There are many visual references that may come and go in your teaching environment; they should be displayed only when they are going to be used.

It is commonly thought that a "lively" environment, one that is heavy on displaying student work and is "decorated" with borders and details, is a great platform for learning. This is quite the contrary.

There is significant data that supports this:

A classroom environment that is organized and free of distractions not only provides a better learning environment for the students but enables the teacher to better execute lessons and routines.

For students with any form of learning challenge, this aspect is paramount to success and needs to be carefully considered. If this is proven to be a better environment for cognitively capable students, then it is undeniably necessary for students with challenged learning styles. Reducing distractions is essential for these students.

Please reference the following handouts:

The Classroom Environment Checklist (Technology Solutions, District 75)

This checklist will allow teachers to self-evaluate their classroom environments. Each teacher should complete this checklist following this PD and share back with the group any changes they were able to do to improve the learning environment in their classrooms.

Rethinking the Colorful Kindergarten Classroom (Jan Hoffman, June 9, 2014)

This article presents a study where 2 similar classrooms of kindergarten students were educated in the same way with the only difference being their environments. One group was educated in a quiet, unadorned or un-decorated environment. The results indicated that the students in the unadorned classroom scored better following each lesson than the students in the decorated classroom.