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No More Teaching Without Positive Relationships

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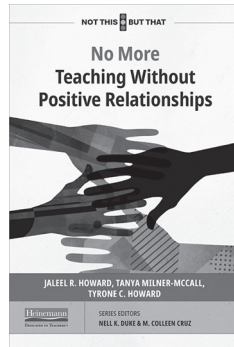
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No More Teaching Without Positive Relationships

by Annie P. Spear

Howard, J., Milner-McCall, T., & Howard, T. (2020). *No more teaching without positive relationships*. N.K. Duke & M.C. Cruz (Series Eds). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Publishers. ISBN 978-0-325- 11813-0



Annie P. Spear

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, relationships and rapport with students are critical. While research and theory in education, instruction, and learning environments constantly evolve and change, relationship-building with students is a cornerstone always deserving of attention. Attending to and nurturing relationships is essential. In fact, research has shown that relationships between students and teachers impact motivation, engagement, and academic success. While some might argue that assessment and routine are the most critical foci in the beginning of the school year, a classroom without a community of learners who share a common understanding, clear and high expectations, and a sense of collaboration, will struggle to succeed and grow. Whether you have always valued relationship-building or perhaps you are seeking to engage in new learning on this topic, the book *No More Teaching Without Positive Relationships* by Jaleel R. Howard, Tanya Milner-McCall, and Tyrone C. Howard, Ph.D. offers a contemporary lens for both seasoned and beginner educators. This book infuses theory, research, and practice as it encourages educators to evaluate their current teaching contexts.

Similar to the structure of all texts in this series, there are three sections. Section 1 discusses what not to do from a practitioner lens. Readers are offered insight into the roots of the problematic practice and the potentially negative impact of the practice. Section 2 is written from a researcher lens. It supports the prior section by

outlining the research against the problematic practice and provides ways to approach the practice more effectively. Section 3 supports Sections 1 and 2 through a practitioner lens. The authors offer actionable solutions to support implementation of their recommendations. As a note, this series has a new design that facilitates the reading and allows readers to easily reference the text through color-coded sections.

The first section is rather short but immerses readers into the importance of attending to relationship-building. This section challenges readers to self-reflect and truly consider how we engage with students. Milner-McCall and J. Howard each provide an example of a student relationship that was particularly challenging, causing them to deeply (and humbly) reflect on their practice. Section 1 concludes with guiding questions the reader can use to self-reflect on their classroom cultures. Literacy educators and literacy coaches, in particular, will appreciate the student-focused activities offered by the authors.

Though most of the sections are co-authored, Dr. Howard is the sole author of Section 2. In this section, Howard addresses the current research on the ways in which community and connection in the classroom positively impact long-term student achievement and overall success beyond school. This section suggests educators should create environments and structures where students and teachers have sufficient and

meaningful time together to foster an environment for positive relationships. However, the relationship-building cannot be limited to just the classroom. Howard challenges educators to provide authentic opportunities to connect with families. Overall, this section is dense but highly informative. Readers are called to engage in deep thinking, reflection, and conversation. Ultimately, the authors conclude that as research continues to emerge, no matter where we live or who we teach, we can and must commit to welcoming all students and to teaching without judgement. This section will undoubtedly challenge all educators to examine how they fully engage with and invest in every student's success.

The final section focuses on educators choosing their words wisely, being metacognitive about their communication, and creating the time and space to connect with every student. As practitioners, the authors recognize that educators have a great deal of content to teach. Therefore, they offer ideas for teaching content with attention to relationship-building. They suggest leveraging a community's cultural capital and attending to students' interests while maintaining open and ongoing communication with students and their families.

Fostering a community of learners is a substantial, but necessary, undertaking. It requires responsiveness and dedication to maintaining relationships within and across the class, while also building relationships with individual students. Whether you are a P-12 teacher, administrator, coach, or other leader within a district or school system, I would recommend reading this book. While the book itself is short, the content within will require readers to be analytical, self-reflective, and curious. Not only does the book offer practical suggestions, the authors use the pages to challenge educators to be vulnerable while maintaining professional boundaries with students. As an educator, this book left me wanting more research exploring this content more broadly across grade levels, populations, and geographical areas of our country (and world) so we can have more information to guide future work for all students and families. While the setting for our upcoming 2020-2021 school year remains unclear, building and maintaining

relationships with and among our students is critical for students' success.

Note: For those readers committed to implementation and learning aligned to Michigan's GELN *Literacy Essentials*, there are connections throughout this book to the suite of *Essential Instructional Practices (pre-Kinderergarten, K to 3, 4-5, 6-12)*, as well as system connections with the *Essential School-Wide & Center-Wide Practices in Literacy*. For those in K-5, this Essential 1, connected to fostering motivation and engagement, and Essential 10 which discusses collaboration with families. More information on the Essentials can be found at <https://literacyessentials.org/>.

Author Biography

Annie Petrozzelli Spear has been in the field of education for over 20 years and holds a Master of Education in Reading and a Master of Arts in Elementary Education. She has taught in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Michigan. She is an Early Literacy Coach at C.O.O.R. Intermediate School District, consultant, and co-author of *Let's Talk: Getting Your Baby Ready to Read*. Annie was a Principal Investigator and Reading Clinic Coordinator for The Literacy Center at Central Michigan University where she remains an adjunct faculty member. Annie aims to facilitate learning around literacy development and to provide actionable ways for educators to meet children's needs through research-supported practices. She has a passion for engaging and collaborating with families in authentic ways linked to literacy research. She lives with her family in Northern Michigan and can be reached at anniespear@gmail.com.

