

# BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The quest to nurture kind, caring and  
authentic teacher – student relationships



# HOW IMPORTANT IS...

- Engaging your students in the curriculum, differentiating the curriculum and providing constructive feedback to your students?

# HOW IMPORTANT IS...

- Engaging your students in the curriculum, differentiating the curriculum and providing constructive feedback to your students?
  - Building positive relationships with your students and ensuring they feel safe and secure and a sense of belonging in your classroom?
-

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT?

**As a teacher, do I put more time into my curriculum planning or more time into my relationship planning?**

**time**

---

# VISIBLE LEARNING

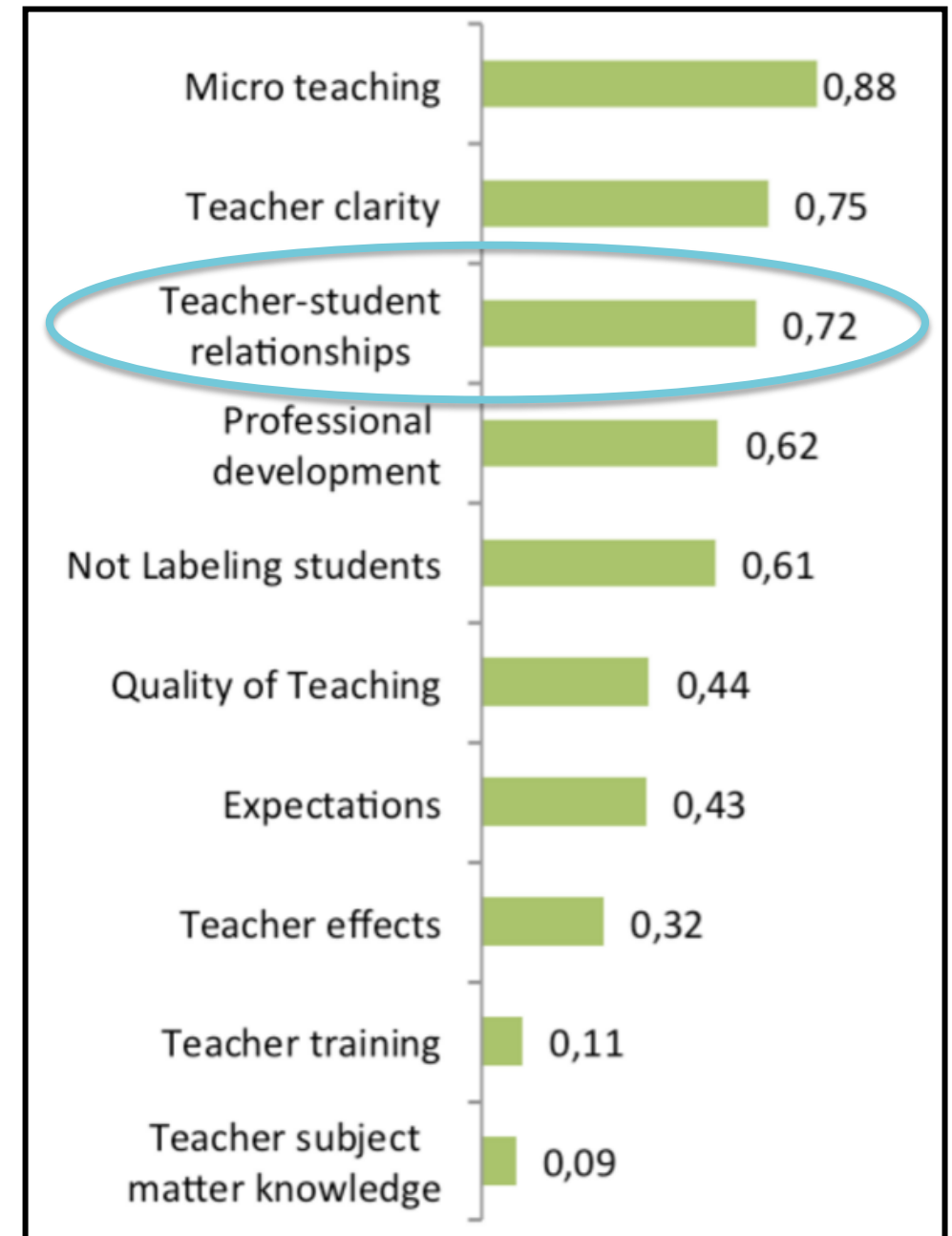
## Predictors of student achievement:

Student, Home, School, Curricula, Teacher, Teaching and Learning approaches

- **Highest**  
The individual students
- **Second highest**  
The teacher and the student's relationship with his or her teacher

## TEACHER EFFECTS

Influences and effect sizes related to student achievement





# The teacher who saved the day on Flight JQ527



Is there a teacher on board this flight? Is there a special-needs teacher on board?

**SOPHIE MURPHY**

**I**t is now just over a week since *The Age* shared the story of my experience on Flight JQ527. To briefly recount the tale, I was flying home from Sydney but the plane was unable to land in Melbourne because a 14-year-old boy with Down syndrome was feeling unwell and lying in the aisle.

As we circled the city at night, the plane running out of fuel, a cabin announcement called for help from a teacher, specifically a special-needs teacher. I was proud to be asked to help.

I found the boy, Shamran, on the floor at the back of the plane. He was genuinely ill, scared and unable to move.

I knew it was important to develop a relationship with him, by using the right tone and language.

It was late and the energy in the plane was strange. It had started as one of hostility and anger between

passengers – nasty remarks and negative body language – and needed to be diffused. How wonderful that the Jetstar crew thought outside the box, taking a chance on the idea that positive remarks and warm body language might ease the situation.

Relationships and the power of voice have always been passions of mine. I have been a teacher for more than two decades, with experience co-ordinating special-needs programs.

I moved to the University of Melbourne in 2015 to complete a PhD with a focus on the use of language, the power of our questioning as teachers, and what effective language looks like in the classroom.

I have had help. My supervisor is Professor John Hattie, chairman of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, director of the Melbourne Educational Research Institute and

deputy director of the Science of Learning Research Centre (both at the University of Melbourne).

He is an inspiration to teachers all over the globe.

Teachers know the relationships they develop with their students are the most important foundation for learning. Connecting, knowing their name, showing you care, being mindful and smiling are not just good behaviours to display – they are integral.

On the plane, I got down on the floor in the aisle with Shamran. If he was going to move, I needed to introduce myself, find out his name, connect, let him speak, listen to him, see what the problem was, and not panic him or be punitive. I knew I needed to lock onto his eyes and show empathy. I learnt his favourite books, not as an ice breaker or an introduction, but to construct a real relationship, however brief.

The story that followed in *The Age* touched the hearts of many more than I could have anticipated. I have received messages of tearful happiness from all over the world. It connected most with teachers, with those who know a teacher, with those with special needs, and those who have children with

special needs. I am told the story has been shared more than 25,000 times on Facebook, and that it has been read by hundreds of thousands of people. I have experienced a whirlwind week, being interviewed by Raf Epstein, Neil Mitchell, Hughsey and Kate, as well as Richard Glover in Sydney and National Public Radio in Washington, DC.

**Teaching is not just a job, it is so much more. You live it, breathe it, and become it.**

I can only speculate as to why so many wanted to hear the story again, but I imagine it was because of the interaction with Shamran that took place in extraordinary circumstances – high in the sky in a packed plane running low on fuel.

What stands out to me, though, is how unspectacular the moment was: helping a child find comfort in the world is something teachers do every day.

Teachers wear many hats. They are responsible for the learning of others but also – and equally im-

portantly – ensuring the students in their care feel emotionally and socially supported. Teaching is not just a job, it is so much more. You live it, breathe it, and become it.

The wonderful teaching stories I could share are countless. Ask a teacher some day to tell you one of their favourite moments in school and you will hear some extraordinarily beautiful things.

As we move into a week dominated by NAPLAN tests, remember that teachers will not only be administering national testing.

They will also be teaching the essentials of the curriculum, along with values, creativity, innovation, inclusiveness, diversity, the complexity of the world, the future and how to be kind.

They will believe in their students, whether it is the student who needs assistance academically, or the student who pastorally needs extra care. Teachers see the spark in all students. So please continue to embrace our teachers, advocate for them, and understand that what they do is far more than sums and sentences, dates and places, classrooms and homework.

Sophie Murphy is a special-needs teacher based in Melbourne.





Thank you!



Dear Mr Bott/Botty/DJ Bott/Avicii,  
I am not very good with goodbyes but I will try my best, by firstly saying thank you so much for being my tutor this year. But not only that, thank you for being a positive and inspiring role model to me throughout the year, you supported me in so many different ways and always knew when I needed to talk to. I wish

our, let's call them 'rough patches', that we have had. I have come to respect you so much as a person. You is so admirable and to the well being of all of us, by taking such for showing me how to lead with dignity, by taking for the good of others, disregarding the difficulties you yourself. You exemplify with so much beauty and selflessness and strength. EM is such a wonderful house being acceptance and the ability to feel something and talk about it. You are to thank for all of that. I wish you would do what you do every day. That that must be so hard for every single girl in this house respects with incredible you are now, they will be teaching them so much about being vulnerable. I thank you for being human - how can I thank you for only being human. You are so

Frau Sherwin!  
I'm not going to write this in German because you'll probably get out your red pen and correct it! THANK YOU SO MUCH for being the best language teacher in the history of the world! I will be entertained and I will be second. Your dedication is unbelievable and I thank you endlessly for every second of your time. I was being silly or serious you were me and I don't think I was with as much dedication. I wish you all

Haughty,  
Thank you for such a wonderful training & interesting 2 years in geography. I have truly enjoyed your class.  
Thank you for being such a caring & helpful teacher.  
Thank you for starting support

Dear Mrs Wong,  
I would like to say a MASSIVE thank you for everything! I have come half way through my GCSEs. Your enthusiasm

Dear Mrs Lewis,  
Thank you so much for being such a great head of house. I really appreciate everything you have ever done for me. I wish you all

Dear Miss Meek,  
Thank you for everything you have done for the cast. I have enjoyed the play and the year! Thank you for this

A rare insight into what our students really value in their teachers

I was... and the... er looked... ter he had basically heard one...  
I'm starting to realize just how useful our course will be. I'm writing to thank you for being, truly, one of the best teachers I had in my thirteen years of school. I think I have to put you down to passion; you always seemed to love being with us and enjoy getting what you know in to our time. I think I have to put you down to passion; you always seemed to love being with us and enjoy getting what you know in to our time. I think I have to put you down to passion; you always seemed to love being with us and enjoy getting what you know in to our time.

Thank you so much for all you do for the school. Your inspirational words expressed through your insightful speeches have always been something that I have looked forward to hearing in assemblies. In particular, that time you closed the first SS assembly in the SPACE with a video of Voldemort singing 'UpTown Funk' - simple things like that have always made me inspired by your energy, creativity and especially your ability to speak and share your views and values with such a pure and strong passion. I would also like to thank you for coming to so many of

Thank you for teaching me...  
Thank you for...  
Thank you for...

To Mr. Bouvier,  
Thank you so much of your support and the past three years, you not only set an example of work ethic, but have also inspired a sense of compassion and care for others that transcends all its confines. We are learning, growing in

Deano! Where do I even begin? Already I am ridiculously small writing! Firstly thank you for being a... I did turn to dad for a lot of Maths help you were always in English! You were born to teach and your enthusiasm to find an occupation which fills me with the same joy





# The VIA Classification of 24 Character Strengths

ViaCharacter.org

<b>WISDOM</b>	<b>CREATIVITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Originality</li> <li>• Adaptive</li> <li>• Ingenuity</li> </ul>	<b>CURIOSITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest</li> <li>• Novelty-Seeking</li> <li>• Exploration</li> <li>• Openness</li> </ul>	<b>JUDGMENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Thinking</li> <li>• Thinking Things Through</li> <li>• Open-mindedness</li> </ul>	<b>LOVE OF LEARNING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mastering New Skills &amp; Topics</li> <li>• Systematically Adding to Knowledge</li> </ul>	<b>PERSPECTIVE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wisdom</li> <li>• Providing Wise Counsel</li> <li>• Taking the Big Picture View</li> </ul>
<b>COURAGE</b>	<b>BRAVERY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valor</li> <li>• Not Shrinking from Fear</li> <li>• Speaking Up for What's Right</li> </ul>	<b>PERSEVERANCE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Industry</li> <li>• Finishing What One Starts</li> </ul>	<b>HONESTY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authenticity</li> <li>• Integrity</li> </ul>	<b>ZEST</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vitality</li> <li>• Enthusiasm</li> <li>• Vigor</li> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Feeling Alive</li> </ul>	
<b>HUMANITY</b>	<b>LOVE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both Loving and Being Loved</li> <li>• Valuing Close Relations with Others</li> </ul>	<b>KINDNESS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generosity</li> <li>• Nurturance</li> <li>• Care &amp; Compassion</li> <li>• Altruism</li> <li>• "Niceness"</li> </ul>			<b>SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aware of the Motives/Feelings of Self/Others</li> <li>• Knowing what Makes Other People Tick</li> </ul>
<b>JUSTICE</b>	<b>TEAMWORK</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizenship</li> <li>• Social Responsibility</li> <li>• Loyalty</li> </ul>			<b>FAIRNESS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just</li> <li>• Not Letting Feelings Bias Decisions About Others</li> </ul>	<b>LEADERSHIP</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizing Group Activities</li> <li>• Encouraging a Group to Get Things Done</li> </ul>
<b>TEMPERANCE</b>		<b>FORGIVENESS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mercy</li> <li>• Accepting Others' Shortcomings</li> <li>• Giving People a Second Chance</li> </ul>	<b>HUMILITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modesty</li> <li>• Letting One's Accomplishments Speak for Themselves</li> </ul>	<b>PRUDENCE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careful</li> <li>• Cautious</li> <li>• Not Taking Undue Risks</li> </ul>	<b>SELF-REGULATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Control</li> <li>• Disciplined</li> <li>• Managing Impulses &amp; Emotions</li> </ul>
<b>TRANSCENDENCE</b>	<b>APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY &amp; EXCELLENCE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awe</li> <li>• Wonder</li> <li>• Elevation</li> </ul>	<b>GRATITUDE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thankful for the Good</li> <li>• Expressing Thanks</li> <li>• Feeling Blessed</li> </ul>	<b>HOPE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimism</li> <li>• Future-Mindedness</li> <li>• Future Orientation</li> </ul>	<b>HUMOR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playfulness</li> <li>• Bringing Smiles to Others</li> <li>• Lighthearted</li> </ul>	<b>SPIRITUALITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religiousness</li> <li>• Faith</li> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• Meaning</li> </ul>



# GGs GRATITUDE LETTERS

## Key theme #1

Going above and beyond expectations

### Sample sentences:

- “I cannot thank you enough for all the time, effort and patience you...”
- “You always went beyond expectations by gathering resources and just giving me different ideas. Thank you so much for all your effort....”
- “I am in awe of the amount of time and effort you put into your students, and I count myself so lucky to have been taught by you...”

### Key character strengths to action:

Zest, Love of Learning, Leadership, Creativity, Perseverance, ....



# GGGS GRATITUDE LETTERS

## Key theme #2

Making class fun

### Sample sentences:

- “I will always remember it, even the games we played in class...”
- “You’ve created a banter-ous and fun environment in which to learn”
- “Thank you for all the fun and the stories that stuck in my head when the textbook wouldn’t...”

### Key character strengths to action:

Creativity, Zest, Humour, Teamwork, Hope, ....







# GGGS GRATITUDE LETTERS

## Key theme #3

Approachability and emotional guidance

### Sample sentences:

- “Having you as my teacher has been great and I have so appreciated your kind and loving words...”
- “You are also really easy to talk to so that is another thing that I love...”
- “Your honesty, kindness, enthusiasm and approachability makes you very trustworthy and I know I wouldn’t hold anything back from you...”

### Key character strengths to action:

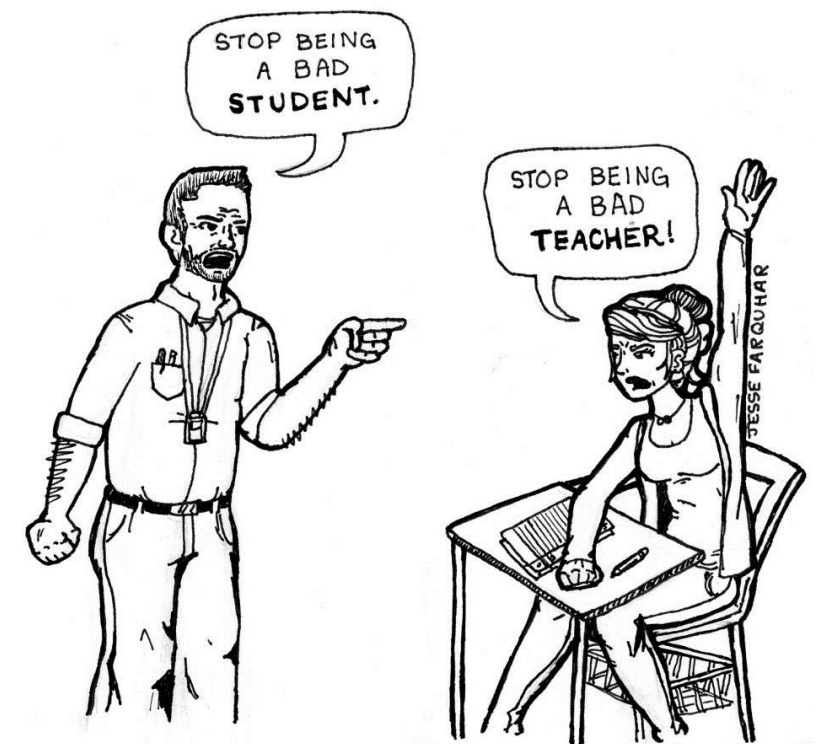
Kindness, Social Intelligence, Love, Perspective, Humility, ....



# ATTACHMENT

## Attachment influences students' wellbeing and school success...

- This is true of students' attachment to their parents, and also to their teachers.
- Secure attachment is associated with higher grades, greater emotional regulation and social competence and greater willingness to take on challenges
- Effects were strongest for high-risk students





# The teacher who saved the day on Flight JQ527



Is there a teacher on board this flight? Is there a special-needs teacher on board?

**SOPHIE MURPHY**

**I**t is now just over a week since *The Age* shared the story of my experience on Flight JQ527. To briefly recount the tale, I was flying home from Sydney but the plane was unable to land in Melbourne because a 14-year-old boy with Down syndrome was feeling unwell and lying in the aisle.

As we circled the city at night, the plane running out of fuel, a cabin announcement called for help from a teacher, specifically a special-needs teacher. I was proud to be asked to help.

I found the boy, Shamran, on the floor at the back of the plane. He was genuinely ill, scared and unable to move.

I knew it was important to develop a relationship with him, by using the right tone and language.

It was late and the energy in the plane was strange. It had started as one of hostility and anger between

passengers – nasty remarks and negative body language – and needed to be diffused. How wonderful that the Jetstar crew thought outside the box, taking a chance on the idea that positive remarks and warm body language might ease the situation.

Relationships and the power of voice have always been passions of mine. I have been a teacher for more than two decades, with experience co-ordinating special-needs programs.

I moved to the University of Melbourne in 2015 to complete a PhD with a focus on the use of language, the power of our questioning as teachers, and what effective language looks like in the classroom.

I have had help. My supervisor is Professor John Hattie, chairman of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, director of the Melbourne Educational Research Institute and

deputy director of the Science of Learning Research Centre (both at the University of Melbourne).

He is an inspiration to teachers all over the globe.

Teachers know the relationships they develop with their students are the most important foundation for learning. Connecting, knowing their name, showing you care, being mindful and smiling are not just good behaviours to display – they are integral.

On the plane, I got down on the floor in the aisle with Shamran. If he was going to move, I needed to introduce myself, find out his name, connect, let him speak, listen to him, see what the problem was, and not panic him or be punitive. I knew I needed to lock onto his eyes and show empathy. I learnt his favourite books, not as an ice breaker or an introduction, but to construct a real relationship, however brief.

The story that followed in *The Age* touched the hearts of many more than I could have anticipated. I have received messages of tearful happiness from all over the world. It connected most with teachers, with those who know a teacher, with those with special needs, and those who have children with

special needs. I am told the story has been shared more than 25,000 times on Facebook, and that it has been read by hundreds of thousands of people. I have experienced a whirlwind week, being interviewed by Raf Epstein, Neil Mitchell, Hughsey and Kate, as well as Richard Glover in Sydney and National Public Radio in Washington, DC.

---

**Teaching is not just a job, it is so much more. You live it, breathe it, and become it.**

---

I can only speculate as to why so many wanted to hear the story again, but I imagine it was because of the interaction with Shamran that took place in extraordinary circumstances – high in the sky in a packed plane running low on fuel.

What stands out to me, though, is how unspectacular the moment was: helping a child find comfort in the world is something teachers do every day.

Teachers wear many hats. They are responsible for the learning of others but also – and equally im-

portantly – ensuring the students in their care feel emotionally and socially supported. Teaching is not just a job, it is so much more. You live it, breathe it, and become it.

The wonderful teaching stories I could share are countless. Ask a teacher some day to tell you one of their favourite moments in school and you will hear some extraordinarily beautiful things.

As we move into a week dominated by NAPLAN tests, remember that teachers will not only be administering national testing.

They will also be teaching the essentials of the curriculum, along with values, creativity, innovation, inclusiveness, diversity, the complexity of the world, the future and how to be kind.

They will believe in their students, whether it is the student who needs assistance academically, or the student who pastorally needs extra care. Teachers see the spark in all students. So please continue to embrace our teachers, advocate for them, and understand that what they do is far more than sums and sentences, dates and places, classrooms and homework.

Sophie Murphy is a special-needs teacher based in Melbourne.



---

KNOWING  
& BEING  
KNOWN

---

# LEARNING STUDENT NAMES

**“Everyone has a good memory for things that interest them.”**

## **TIPS for learning student names:**

- Use photos with name tags
- Use tent cards
- Use rhymes or alliterations to aid auditory and visual memory
- Greet and farewell students as they enter and leave the room
- Good old fashioned repetition and rote learning
- ...
- What about students learning other students' names...



# KNOWING YOUR STUDENTS

## In the classroom

**Write down several of your students' names...**

- Character Strength – ACTION
- Character Strength – NURTURE
- Study Skill – ACTION
- Study Skill – NURTURE

**Could you do this for each student in your class?**

# KNOWING YOUR STUDENTS

## Beyond the classroom

**Write down a few different students' names...**

- Unique piece of information (fun fact)
- What sport or musical instrument do they play?
- Do they learn a language?
- What year did they start at your school?
- ...



# BEING KNOWN BY YOUR STUDENTS

In the classroom and beyond the classroom

## What do you think?

- Is it appropriate for your students to 'know you'?
- How do you let your students' know you?
- Are you known for a quirky characteristic?
- Do you let your students know what stresses you?



# GGGS GRATITUDE LETTERS

## Key theme #4

Pushing students for best results

### Sample sentences:

- “You taught me never to give up and to always try my hardest...”
- “Though you pushed me very hard, doing so made me achieve more than I thought I was capable of...”
- “Thankyou for believing in me and pushing me to be my best...”

### Key character strengths to action:

Honesty, Perseverance, Love of Learning, Bravery, Prudence, ....



# HARNESSING YOUR STRENGTHS

To build positive teacher – student relationships

## **VIA Character Strengths classification**

- Have you taken the free VIA Survey
- Do you play to your signature strengths?
- Are there specific strengths you could develop?
- Are you aware of the shadowside of your strengths?

## **Have you ever asked your class**

- What character strengths do you spot in me?
  - What character strength would you like me to action more?
-

# BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

## Consider...

- Celebrating and analyzing the gratitude letters written by your students in your school...
- Encouraging colleagues to intentionally spend time 'preparing' to build positive relationships...
- Sharing best practices with your colleagues...
- How best to build your existing student relationships...



[illegible]

M.C M.C M.C M.C

♥ Thank you, Mrs Clancy ♥

Dear Mrs Clancy,  
"Thank YOU So So Much"  
you have been a amazing  
teacher. I have learn't more  
than you could amagine.  
I loved how much effort  
you have put in to it and  
all of our excursions, all the  
camps and all of every  
thing else you have done for  
us. You have been the best teacher  
you could ever in the  
whole world imagine. Thank  
You for all of the trust you

M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C

M.C M.C M.C M.C

M.C M.C M.C

can give in us and to you. I  
will really miss you nearly more  
then anything. Thank you for  
helping me throw hard  
places throw year 3. I think  
you have HOPE, LOVE OF  
LEARNING, CREATIVITY, and  
I don't think this is one but  
the best TEACHER AWARD  
THANK YOU  
from -

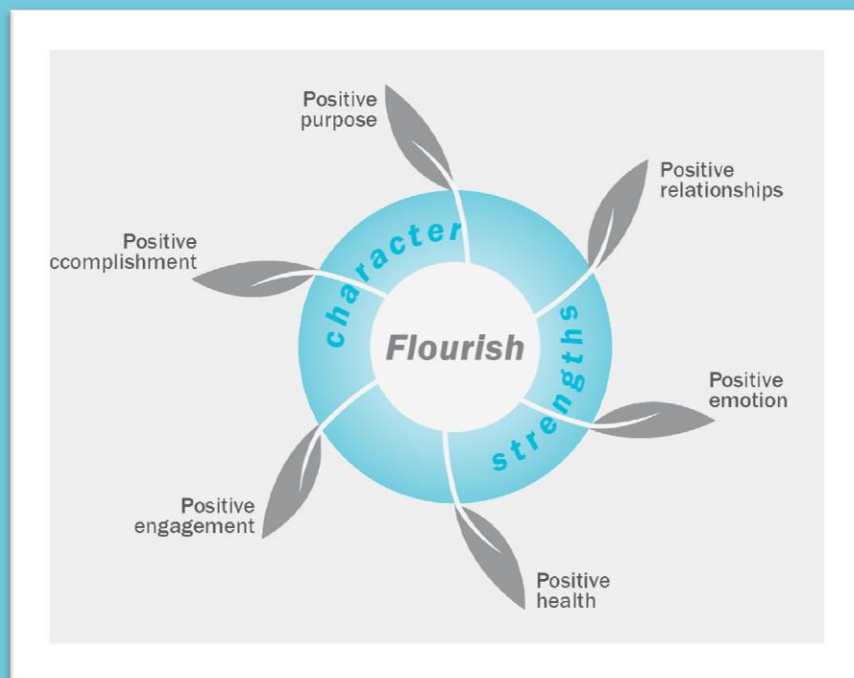
M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C M.C

M.C M.C M.C M.C



# YOUR PERSONAL ACTION CARD

What will be your next action for Building Positive Relationships with your students?



A large white rectangular box intended for writing a personal action plan.