

This Spotlight looks at how we can give students the confidence to reach for the top. An important part of this is student self-esteem and self-perception (learner identity). The language teachers use is vital in building the intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy of all our students

Giving Students the Confidence to Reach for the Top

- When we ask our students to engage with the most difficult concepts, we often encounter "challenge-resistant responses." ~ this is usually rooted in a lack of confidence or a limited academic self-concept, rather than an aversion to challenge itself.
- Carl Rogers described self-concept as the set of beliefs we hold about ourselves, including self-image, self-esteem, and the ideal self. These elements of self-concept shape how students see themselves as learners and affect their willingness to engage with complex material.
- Researchers have shown that self-concept and achievement create a feedback loop ~ a higher academic self-concept encourages greater achievement, which in turn strengthens self-concept.

By understanding and addressing these internalised beliefs, we can help students reshape their self-concept to view themselves as capable of tackling challenging material. This means creating learning experiences that not only demand high-level thinking but also provide the support needed to make students believe they are up to the task.

Self-Esteem and Self-Perception: The Importance of Learner Identity

- Learner identity, how students perceive themselves as learners, is crucial.
- Students learn best from teachers who believe in them and show it consistently.
- In Teaching to the top, our role is to help reshape students' self-perception, particularly those who see themselves as "not capable" of engaging with high-level work. This requires ongoing, intentional reinforcement of their potential and achievements.

Language and Praise: Building Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Efficacy

- The language we use can boost student self-efficacy
- Positive language enhances intrinsic motivation, as students feel valued and supported
- According to Self-Determination Theory intrinsic motivation thrives when students feel competent, autonomous, and connected
- Positive teacher language and praise enhance a student's sense of competence
- Positive language also enhances long-term resilience in the face of challenges

Trusted Techniques

1. "Not yet" is a trusted technique because it signals high expectations and encourages a growth mindset, helping students see challenges as steps in their learning journey rather than barriers to success.
2. The "We" Language: Foster a sense of collective learning by using inclusive language, e.g., "We are exploring this complex idea together."
3. Success Reflection: Regularly ask students to reflect on a time they overcame a challenge in your subject to reinforce their growing competence.

