

10 Crucial Things My Under-Resourced Students Taught Me

1. I'm quickly assessing you and drawing conclusions about you, before you even say the first word to me. Your level of enthusiasm, passion and excitement for the subject and us, helps me believe that it might be worth paying attention to what you have to say.
2. I don't trust you because you are the authority. People in authority have often abused their power and taken advantage of me and my family...you'll have to prove me wrong to earn my trust. I'm watching to see if you are fair, treat everybody equal and mean what you say. I'm guessing you probably won't.
3. Just because you're the teacher doesn't mean I will automatically respect you...you have to show me why you deserve respect. You've got to give it to get it. If you are in control of the class and can stand up to your students, but also show us that you are human, have a sense of humor and can be approachable, that will make a huge difference.
4. I will do just about anything to avoid being embarrassed or losing face. If you raise your voice at me, talk to me like a parent, talk down to me, try to intimidate me or get in my personal space...I will either shut down and act indifferent or come back at you with the same energy regardless of you being the teacher or not. It's worth getting in trouble in order to save face.
5. If you are kind to me and I don't respond, don't conclude that I didn't notice or it didn't mean anything to me. It could be that I'm shocked, because people usually aren't nice to me or I'm trying to figure out your angle and motive. It's also possible that I'm waiting to see if you are for real and I really hope you are.

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6. If I act apathetic toward learning, don't assume I'm not interested and don't care. Deep down, I really do want to learn but I may be scared of looking stupid. Also, some of my friends don't think it's 'cool' to act smart. Sometimes I'll get hassled if I act really interested, answer questions or participate in class. I need to feel safe in your class to really try.
7. If you respect me and I am convinced that you are honest and real, I might take baby steps toward trying harder and believing that I can be successful in this class. Your encouragement and positive feedback mean more than I have the ability to express. When you get to know me and personally encourage me, I don't want to act out...I look forward to coming to your class. You make me feel good about myself...even if it's for a little while.
8. Even though I may not say much, I'm always watching and listening. How you answer questions, the tone of voice you use, your body language, if you take time to look at someone when they come up to your desk, tells me if you really care or not. If I know you care, I may find the courage to approach you at some point when I need help. If I feel like you don't care...I never will...EVER.
9. If you have to correct or discipline me for something, please do it away from everyone else. My defenses will come down and I will be more willing to listen to you if you care enough to talk with me privately, calmly and respectfully. Give me time to think and respond to your questions...I don't have the vocabulary that a lot of students have and it takes me longer to formulate my thoughts and verbalize them.
10. If you help me have little successes in your class, it will help me believe that I can accomplish more things. Sometimes big tasks overwhelm me and I feel defeated before I even start. But when things are broken down, and I can experience little 'wins' along the way, I feel encouraged and want to try again to have another success. I haven't had much success in school, but it feels good when it happens, even if it's little and I want to believe that I can do the work and have more success.

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