



# Healthy Student-Educator Relationships: Supporting Students Without Burning Out Educators

## Members

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## CORE QUESTION

How can educators build supportive relationships with students while maintaining healthy professional boundaries and personal wellbeing?

## ACTIVITIES

- ★ 7 learning community meetings (Members took turns to facilitate themed discussions)
- ★ 1 conference presentation at Higher Education Conference in Singapore (HECS) 2025
- ★ 1 brown bag sharing at Centre for English Language and Communication (CELC) 2026
- ★ 1 research study initiated, DERC approval obtained

Title: "What does a healthy, positive and realistic teacher-student relationship (TSR) in higher education (HE) look like? - Uncovering the dynamics of teacher-student relationships that motivate learning and support teachers' wellbeing in our classroom today."



## WHY THIS MATTERS

### Gen Z Students

- ✓ Digital-first communication habits
- ✓ Expect quick responses
- ✓ Shorter attention spans
- ✓ Transitioning to greater autonomy in university

## EDUCATOR CHALLENGE

- ✓ Relationship-building improves engagement and learning
- ✓ Emotional labour can increase stress and burnout
- ✓ Student evaluations contribute to pressure on educators

## KEY INSIGHTS from our discussions

### Care is part of professional practice

Developing positive student relationships is part of educators' professional and moral responsibility.

However, caring relationships also involve emotional labour and must be supported by healthy boundaries.

#### Key Insight:

*Care must be intentional and structured, not limitless.*

### How we demonstrate care

- Providing responsive communication
- Checking in on student progress
- Offering personalised and constructive feedback
- Encouraging participation and collaboration
- Creating safe and respectful learning environments

#### Key Insight:

*Care ≠ being "nice."  
Care = supporting growth with structure.*

### Building rapport in the classroom

Rapport grows through small, consistent actions:

- Learning students' names and interests
- Engaging in individual conversations with students
- Clarifying expectations early
- Using collaborative tools and activities
- Encouraging peer interaction

#### Key Insight:

*Rapport grows when students feel safe, seen and heard, not when teachers are overly "nice."*

### Maintaining healthy boundaries

- Mid-semester feedback surveys
- Transparent communication about expectations
- Structured feedback opportunities
- Reflective end-of-semester discussions

#### Key Insight:

*Healthy boundaries help educators sustain care without burnout.*

## REFLECTIONS

### AMELYN

I have truly appreciated the open sharing among colleagues, which helped me to examine my own teaching practices and learn about new strategies and approaches. It was affirming to realise our shared challenges and successes. It encouraged me to keep prioritising care and support in building healthy student-educator relationships. It has been an enjoyable learning process!

### CAO FENG

This learning community provides us a good space to reflect and share our thoughts on developing student-teacher relationship. As an ELT practitioner, I used to focus more on the content aspects of the language and communication. However, by taking part in this LC, and by listening to other colleagues sharing and discussion, it dawned on me that student care and support is in fact a big part of our everyday practice and should be given more attention. The content of learning may not occur without a good engagement in the first place!



### SUSAN

Listening to colleagues' perspectives, experiences, and responses to challenges in engaging students has made me evaluate my own attitude and practice. The candid exchanges on positive and failed encounters in our attempts to reach out to students, engage with feedback, maintain boundaries and encourage a growth mindset, have reminded me that we teach in an increasingly complex and highly contextual classroom. So privileged to share and learn in this space. Enjoyed the professional camaraderie in the LC!



### CORRINE

It was humbling and encouraging at the same time to know that there are like-minded educator colleagues who espouse a genuine interest in students' well-being and take the issue of "care" seriously and professionally. The LC exposed me to the world of relational pedagogy which was not a topic I had intentionally reflected upon. This experience was truly enlightening and showed me room for much more growth and learning alongside fellow educators!



### ANITA

What I appreciated most was the opportunity to hear from others about their challenges, success stories, and insights. Also, taking turns to find readings to anchor our discussions was a helpful way to "get through" relevant literature. Thanks, Susan, for roping me into this amazing circle of colleagues. And thanks, everyone, for your easy sharing and awesome facilitation! Thanks to CTLT for making all this possible.



### DOREEN

I've always been attentive to this topic and it was a joy listening to stories and experiences of colleagues, with similar yet different encounters. It was affirming that a few of us share the same sentiment on building positive relationships with our students despite the challenges and changes. I feel supported and humbled through this learning process and truly enjoyed it.



### JONATHAN

I really enjoyed the sharing sessions that enabled me to learn from each other's experiences, opinions, success stories and even failures. Being someone (a Zillennial) whose values and beliefs align closely with the current batch of students, I was able to put myself in their shoes, and I felt empowered to share my thoughts with the LC too. It is this metaphorical bridge that has made me more insightful through our in-depth discussions, and to also reflect and further improve my own teaching practices!