

Positive relationships can change student behaviours, says UWS expert

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(PhysOrg.com) -- As students walk into their new classrooms this week, an education expert from the University of Western Sydney says the first week of school is an important time for teachers to set the tone for a positive year ahead.

Dr Sue Roffey from the Centre for Educational Research at UWS, who was a consultant on the Federal Scoping Study on Wellbeing, says the best teachers are those who create a positive, safe and strengths-based environment for their students.

"Research consistently shows us that students respond better to teachers who foster a positive classroom climate," says Dr Roffey.

"If teachers set aside time early on to get to know what their students like, what they are good at, and a bit about their lives outside school, they are in a better position to understand their students' motivations, have sympathy with their difficulties, and respond more effectively to any challenges."

Dr Roffey is the author of the book 'Changing Behaviour in Schools: Promoting Positive Relationships and Wellbeing'.

The aim of the book is to help teachers understand the importance of wellbeing in school, and show them how to change behaviour 'from the inside out' by making students feel valued, accepted and safe.

Dr Roffey says teaching can be a difficult profession, especially when faced with the challenges of troubled children who have not learnt to connect with others or to have self-control.

"Teachers can break the cycle of disadvantage and disaffection by helping all children to see school as a positive place; a refuge from adversity in other areas of their lives," says Dr Roffey.

"When teachers believe their job is just to teach a subject, that relationships don't really matter, and behaviour must be managed by strong discipline, their [students](#) are less likely to be positively engaged, either with the curriculum or in healthy relationships.

"Research evidence shows that when [teachers](#) care for the 'whole child' and take note of the social and emotional dimensions of the learning environment they can make an incredible difference to the lives of children, not only in their [education](#) but also in the development of their resilience, confidence and future success."

Dr Roffey is an educational psychologist, writer and academic specialising in social, emotional and behavioural issues. She is Adjunct Research Fellow at the University of Western Sydney and Honorary Lecturer at University College, London.

Provided by University of Western Sydney

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