



HOW CAN RESPONSIVE TEACHING TRANSFORM INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS?

What New Research Says About Teacher Responsiveness

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WHAT RESEARCH FOUND

Teachers regularly respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs, but what does it mean to be a **responsive teacher**? This participatory action research study explored that question by working with **teacher candidates, experienced teachers, and pupils** in a school serving vulnerable learners. Rather than examining teaching techniques alone, the researchers investigated how teacher–student interactions shape learning experiences and identified practical responsive teaching behaviours that foster sustainable and inclusive education.

The study identified **three interconnected categories of responsive practice**. The **socioemotional response** included building trusting relationships, creating safe spaces with clear expectations, believing in students' abilities, and maintaining consistent support even when learners struggled. The **pedagogical response** involved adapting instruction to individual needs and recognising when students' emotional well-being should be addressed before academic learning could continue. The **systemic response** emphasised collaboration among teachers, recognising that professional support networks strengthen both teacher resilience and student outcomes.

Grounded in **Vygotsky's sociocultural theory**, the research shows that responsive teaching develops through meaningful relationships and guided participation rather than through isolated teaching techniques. The authors conclude that responsiveness should become an intentional part of teacher education because it helps educators recognise learners' needs, adjust instruction appropriately, and create classrooms where vulnerable students feel valued, supported, and capable of success.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Students learn more effectively when teachers respond not only to academic performance but also to emotional, social, and personal needs. Responsive teaching strengthens trust, increases participation, and creates classroom environments where learners feel safe enough to engage, ask questions, and overcome challenges.



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Research interpreted for real classroom

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CLASSROOM REALITY

Teachers Aim For	Responsive Teaching Looks Like
Strong teacher–student relationships	Listening before responding
Inclusive participation	Adjusting instruction to learner needs
Positive classroom behaviour	Addressing emotional needs alongside academics
Sustainable teaching	Collaborating with colleagues for support

TRY TOMORROW

During your next lesson:

1. Spend a few moments checking how students are feeling before beginning new learning.
2. When a student struggles, ask questions before offering solutions.
3. Adapt one learning activity for a student who needs additional support or challenge.
4. Reflect with a colleague on one classroom situation and discuss alternative responsive approaches.

CAUTION

Responsive teaching does **not** mean lowering expectations or solving every problem for students. Effective responsiveness combines empathy with high expectations, helping learners develop independence while ensuring they receive appropriate support when needed.

ONE KEY TAKEAWAY

Responsive teachers build inclusive classrooms by recognising students' needs, adapting instruction thoughtfully, and creating relationships that support both learning and well-being.

Keywords: teacher responsiveness, inclusive education, vulnerable learners, teacher–student relationships, pedagogical responsiveness, educational sustainability

Reference:

Lapidot-Lefler, N. (2025). *Teacher Responsiveness in Inclusive Education: A Participatory Study of Pedagogical Practice, Well-Being, and Sustainability*. *Sustainability*, 17(7), 2919.