

EDU 653

In order for a student to learn, he/she must be given all the necessary means to realize his/her dreams. *Listening to Urban Kids* by Bruce L. Wilson and H. Dickson Corbett highlights the importance of student perspectives in assessing the effectiveness and shortcomings of education reform. Through these perspectives, it became clear that all these students wanted was a teacher who cared about them.

While the students polled admittedly did not always put themselves in the best position to succeed, they identified certain overarching criteria of what constitutes a good teacher. The most important quality discussed, in my opinion, was a teacher's genuine concern for the success of the student. Recalling my days as a middle school student, it was easy to separate the teachers who cared from the teachers who were "there just for the money" (71). Students want to work for the teachers who have their best interests in mind. They can recognize the teacher who is always willing to help in any way possible. A teacher who commands the respect of the class, changes approaches, further explains content, and offers his/her services before, during, and after school endears himself/herself to the student (66). When I student taught in Bridgeport, I encountered many teachers who simply clocked in, did their time, and clocked out as the kids fell farther and farther below grade level. Extra help was never offered, the teachers were not approachable, and the students were treated more like criminals than kids. Many times, they took refuge in my classroom before and after school for added instruction on what they were not being taught in their own English classes. These students, like every

student, wanted the opportunity to learn. However, the bond between teacher and student must be established in order for this to effectively take place.

In any effective classroom, there is an unspoken trust that exists between teacher and student. I continue to tell my students that respect is commanded through actions, not simply demanded through hallow words. The same motto should go for teachers. Students want a teacher who will listen to them and who will try to relate to them (87). The teacher has to be empathetic to the individual situations of his/her students. This kind of interest emboldens students to put forth their best effort. They know that, even if they have nobody else rooting for them, they at least have their teacher. “Kids want teachers who believe in them” (86). Teachers must continue to believe in students; above all else, they must remain persistent in pushing the students to succeed, regardless of the circumstances. This “no excuse” mentality is what many students need in an urban setting in order to realize even the smallest of successes. “[When they push me] it makes me think I can do the work; I’m glad they’re trying to teach me instead of ignoring me, thinking I can’t do it” (90). More importantly, this nudging that the student speaks of reminds him that his education is important and that his teacher cares about him attaining it.

*Listening to Urban Kids* by Bruce L. Wilson and H. Dickson Corbett shows how observant students really are. When prompted, they are able to articulate important qualities of effective teaching. Amongst these qualities is a teacher’s ability to care, a characteristic that empowers students to work just as hard as the teacher who is working for them.

In Bridgeport, it broke my heart when I assigned my students a free-write that asked them what were their goals, their ambitions, and who did they ultimately want to be. Half the class was able to muster answers such as professional athlete, police officer, fireman, doctor, and lawyer, somewhat similar to the responses offered in the original five Philadelphia area schools (21). However, what differs from the Philadelphia area schools is that, in Bridgeport, the other half of the students could not produce ANY aspirations. When pressed to articulate what their interests were and what they possibly saw themselves becoming, they were equally as unsure. It was as if they had never been asked the question, and they were simply dumbfounded by a teacher that was actually interested in their lives. This is why students in the six schools examined in *Listening to Urban Kids* identified the teacher who cared for their best interests, regardless of behavior, indifference, or lack of understanding, as the teacher whom they learned the most from.