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# Introduction

## WHAT IS FIERCE TEACHING?

*Fierce teaching* describes a way of working with students that is smart and highly effective; it allows you to teach without burnout. It's laser-like in its methodology. Fierce teaching is about doing the right things and doing them right. It asks you to focus on the fewest moving parts to get the greatest effect possible. This book is not about the myths, the popular topics, and the latest trend. It's about learning the factors that make successful teaching possible, every time. In fact, if anything, this book may astound you in the simplicity of the factors that matter most.

What about better strategies? Strategies make things happen in a classroom. However, some teachers use what seem like good strategies, but fail. And other teachers take a marginal strategy and find a way to make it a success. What causes the difference? One of the reasons that a strategy fails is how a teacher uses it. But I believe, as do a number of other researchers cited in this book, that the reason for the variance lies elsewhere.

Look to a larger context when framing the success of strategies. You will see an environment filled with nuances that emerge from a teacher over time. The student experiences a teacher's mission; purpose; and (more explicitly) his or her beliefs, values, principles, and strategies. Typically, more experienced educators understand these domains better, since they have developed some congruency within them. Over time, integration and congruency of these strategies contribute to their effectiveness because they avoid working at odds with each other. Here is the typical hierarchy that experienced educators work with, starting at the top:

- **Mission** is your lifelong job or path. (e.g., "Make a positive, significant, and lasting difference in how we learn").
- **Purpose** is the reason you work. We all need to earn a living, but this is greater than the paycheck. This is the satisfaction, the "hook" in the job you have (e.g., "To discover and share my gifts").

- **Beliefs** are your decision-making foundations. Each of us may have hundreds and thousands of content- and context-dependent beliefs, which influence our decision making. It's easy to see how these can make or break a teacher (e.g., "I believe all students can improve").
- **Values** are your motivational switches. These are the simple mechanisms that influence you to avoid or embrace an idea or action. These values often make the difference between whether we take action on something (e.g., "I value the love of learning, so I'll make the process enjoyable").
- **Principles** are the guiding laws. Such larger categories hold strategies. For example, if the principle is awareness of the environment, the strategy is to influence the environment as much as possible (e.g., "The brain is highly aware on both conscious and nonconscious levels").
- **Strategies** are the daily work tools. Each principle can generate 5 to 500 strategies. Strategies are often population, content, and context specific (e.g., "Student feedback every 30 minutes or less").

## Seven Fierce and Highly Practical Strategies

By necessity, most teachers are highly practical; strategies often have a greater appeal than theories, generalized understandings, or ideas. We can all understand that need. But there is a downside. All strategies have an unlimited number of nuances that can make them succeed or fail. It is often assumed strategies are used the same by all, but this is not true. At issue here is that a really good teacher can make a marginal strategy work, and a marginal teacher can ruin a really good strategy. That's why this book focuses not only on strategies, but also on the deeper, more potent principles that underlie them. If you make a change in a strategy on your own, that's fine as long as you understand the general principle.

### *How the Seven Principles and Strategies Were Chosen*

Collectively, it is hard for educators to vote on the "most important" principles. So how is this book different from others? It's different in that it isn't a guide on how to get the highest possible achievement scores in your state. Rather, here are the questions that form the foundation of this book: What are the fundamental principles of learning that will stand the test of time? Which principles, when used on a daily basis, will consistently create positive, significant, and lasting results? And, just as important, are they supportable by the latest research? In short, the methods behind writing this book are as follows:

- establish criteria for research
- locate all research-supportable achievement factors
- gather source materials
- group items by similarities