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## Develop a Relationship With Each Student

*If your students like you, there is nothing  
they will not do for you.*

*If your students don't like you, there is nothing  
they will not do to you!*

Marcia L. Tate



### WHAT: CREATING A CARING CULTURE

Have you ever walked down the hall in a high school and seen a teenager with his pants hanging low and a cap on his head? Have you witnessed one teacher ask the student to pull up his pants and take off the cap, and he walks by as if he has not heard the teacher's request? Keep watching! The student continues to walk, and another teacher makes the same request. "Pull up your pants and take off your cap!" This time the student complies.

What made the difference? It was the relationship that the student had with the second teacher that he did not have with the first. Relationships are everything to classroom management.

Teachers have told me that their students don't really have to like them. It is only important that students respect them. Guess what! According to brain research, students must both like you and respect you! Think back to a teacher in your educational career that you did not like. No doubt, you will never forget the experience of being in his or her room. However, you will not remember much of the content he or she

taught. As you were sitting in the room, your brain may have been in survival mode. This means that the higher-level thought processes of the brain may have given way to the fight-or-flight response that occurs when one is threatened.

If you have a relationship with students and they misbehave, they are truly sorry because they have disappointed you. If you have no relationship, they don't really care whether they disappoint you or not. I have seen blended families where the stepparent does not bother to develop a relationship with the stepchildren but begins to make demands on them. I have actually heard teenage stepchildren make this comment: "You can't tell me what to do. You are not my mother!" When time is spent developing that all-important relationship, then the teenager is more likely to comply when the stepparent asks them to be home from a date by midnight.

According to William Glasser (1999), one of the five crucial needs that must be satisfied if students are to be effectively motivated is the need for belonging and love. The other needs are survival, power, freedom, and fun. The need for belonging and love used to be satisfied for most students by belonging to a stable family unit. Many children today have no strong family units to which they can belong. What we also know is that, when



"I channeled John Dewey. He says if you want to be a good teacher, don't teach reading and writing. Teach students."

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students cannot satisfy this need by belonging to something positive, like a family at home or an honor society in school, they will belong to something negative, like a gang. Gangs are very smart! They tell you that the gang is a *family*. Then they send you out to do something heinous, such as hurt or kill someone. That is your initiation into the *family*! The feeling one gets when belonging to a gang is no less powerful than any other organization to which one belongs. If you don't want your students in a gang, be sure that they belong to something positive, like the family of learners in your classroom.

### WHY: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the main reasons that people engage in activities that they care little about is the value placed on that activity by a person with whom they have a relationship (Jabari, 2013).

*"Remember you are the alpha (leader) in the classroom. Be friendly without being a child with the children (or teenager with teens)"* (Cooper & Garner, 2012, p. 43).

When teachers disclose information about their personal lives and school experiences, they cultivate emotional proximity (H. A. Davis, Gableman, & Wingfield, 2011).

*"Students tend to listen more with their hearts than with their heads"* (Cooper & Garner, 2012, p. 3).

Many students have to establish a relationship with their teachers before they can learn from them (Haycock, 2001; Payne, 2001).

As relationships matter when attempting to teach human beings, a person may not be able to perform as well when he or she does not feel safe with a teacher or a boss (Medina, 2008).

The brain begins to develop blueprints for adult relationships during adolescence (Feinstein, 2009).

A complicated web of social relationships that students experience with their family members, peers, and teachers have a greater effect on student behavior than was once expected (Harris, 2006).

Several studies indicate that teachers make decisions about which students to form relationships with based on student assets and obstacles. Those assets include attractiveness, social skills, and whether the student desires a relationship with the teacher (Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999).

Because conflict is a natural consequence of learning while interacting with others, classrooms should be places where teachers model for students how to repair those relationships when they become damaged (H. A. Davis, Summers, & Miller, 2012).





## HOW: CLASSROOM APPLICATION

- Relationships can begin at the door. It is at the door of the classroom where you can ask students how their weekend was, ask whether they won their game, or compliment them on a new hair style. I am at the door each time I teach my classes for adults. It is amazing how many times my participants have commented that they have been teaching for between 10 and 25 years, and this is the first time the presenter has ever been at the door. What a difference they say it makes to them! I have already begun to develop my relationship before the class even starts.

- Harry Wong and I were presenting at a conference in Canada. In a keynote speech, I heard Wong say that not only should the teacher be at the door, but one student should be standing there with the teacher to greet the class. One student greets the class for one week and then another student for the next week until every student has had an opportunity to greet the class. He related that, in schools that are doing this, bullying is decreasing significantly. It is very difficult to bully someone who has greeted you for an entire week!

- Call your students by name. A person's name is very important to his or her personal identity. I realize that this becomes much more difficult at the middle and high school level because teachers are learning the names of multiple classes of students; however, it is certainly worth a try. If you are at the door to greet daily, ask each student his or her name and then repeat it back until you learn it.

- On the first day of school, as a part of your rituals, tell the class how excited you are to have them in your community of learners for the year. For example, when addressing the class on the first day, one teacher looked at a piece of white paper, looked out at her students, looked back at the paper and at her students. She then remarked, *"This is going to be a great year! They gave me every single student I asked for!"* There was absolutely nothing on the white piece of paper. Wouldn't it be wonderful to know that your teacher actually asked for you! What a feeling of belonging!

- Allow your students to know something about you personally. This could include in which cities you have lived, schools you have attended, whether you have a spouse or children, your likes and dislikes, and so on. When I teach my math class, I turn facts about my personal life into a math word problem that teachers are only too happy to solve. By the way, developing a relationship with a student does not mean becoming his or her buddy or friend. You are the professional in the classroom and should always remain such.

- Set the ground rules for the operation of the class from day one of school. Relate that they will never hear you demean or put a student down in class and you have the same expectation for them toward one another.

- Get to know something specific about each individual student. This includes students' likes, dislikes, strengths, challenges, and interests as well as where they live, who their parents or guardians are, and what they do for a living. Knowing something about the home life of students can shed a great deal of light on the behaviors of students seen in class. Begin with those students whom you think may give you some challenges in terms of management and expand to all others. Remember that the students to whom you are least likely to give personal attention are often the ones who need that attention the most.

- Let students know that you are available to them before or after school should they need to talk with you. As students get to know and trust you, they may avail themselves of this opportunity, and you never know when a moment spent with you could possibly change a life. For example, a science teacher related to me that he noticed a change in a student's demeanor and asked her to see him after class. She related to him her detailed plans for attempting suicide. He was able to intervene and get help for her. Without a relationship, the student would never have revealed her plans to that teacher.

- Open and close class with a positive statement so that the first and last things that students hear from you leave their brains in a positive state. One high school English teacher related to me that she ends each class with the following two statements: *Have a great evening. I love you!* She said that, on the days she becomes busy and forgets to say those two sentences, her students will stand there until she remembers, or they will remind her by saying, *"You forgot to tell us you loved us!"* Remember, I said high school, not kindergarten! According to mental health professionals, a person needs 12 positive interactions per day to thrive. At least these teenagers get one of the 12 in Mrs. William's English class.

- When possible, write a positive note on the paper of a student. The note may indicate that you have noticed an improved grade over the last test, or it may relate to something personal about the student. The note is another of the 12 positive interactions that your students need to thrive.

