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CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT IS ABOUT CREATING A CARING ENVIRONMENT

No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship.

—James Comer, Professor of Child Psychiatry

In my world there are no bad kids, just impressionable, conflicted young people wrestling with emotions and impulses, trying to communicate their feelings and needs the only way they know how.

—Janet Lansbury, Parent Advisor, Writer, Teacher

Every child deserves a champion: an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists they become the best they can possibly be.

—Rita Pierson, Educator

Students don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

—John C. Maxwell, Author

In addition to effective instruction, classroom management is also about creating a caring learning environment. Caring learning environments are spaces where all students feel fully seen, heard, respected, and cared for. To build caring learning environments, educators must develop a classroom culture that is both nurturing and rigorous. This classroom culture must meet students where they are and be responsive to their unique learning needs. Overall, we recommend that teachers enact practices in four interrelated areas as a means to develop a caring classroom environment. These areas of practice include being student-centered, having high expectations, persistent practices, and partnership with families and communities (see Figure 4.1). Below we detail these interrelated ideas.

The first key practice for a caring classroom environment is being student-centered. Classroom environments with a student-centered approach

are designed around and with students. To accomplish this, teachers meet students where they are culturally, academically, and social-emotionally and position them as influencers and co-creators of their learning experience (Ladson-Billings, 2009). A student-centered approach is personally connected (Milner, 2010), culturally responsive (Gay, 2010), trauma informed (Alvarez, 2017; Dorado, Martinez, McArthur, & Leibovitz, 2016), and developmentally appropriate (Alford, Rollins, Padrón, & Waxman, 2016). Student-centered approaches are designed with students and teachers as co-creators of their expectations, accountability norms, pedagogy, and curriculum.

The second key practice for a caring classroom environment is having belief in, high expectations, and rigor for all students. It is important to establish rigorous, high academic and behavioral expectations in developing a classroom ethos of care. This means ensuring that everyone in the classroom knows that a lot is expected of them, that lessons are challenging, and that the teacher and students believe that they all can learn and achieve at high levels. Having high expectations for all students has been shown to positively affect student's academic success (Rist, 1970), motivation, and engagement (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010) as well as foster deeper, more meaningful and respectful teacher and student relationships (Gay, 2010; Milner, 2010). We are stressing that strong, meaningful relationships between teachers and students are the backbone of a student-centered approach with high expectations.

The third key practice for a caring classroom environment is persistent practices. Creating caring classroom communities also means having persistent practices that anchor relationships between teachers and students such that teachers never give up on their students. Persistent practices are practices that allow students feel seen, valued, and cared for (Noddings, 2012) consistently each day. These practices support students whether they are achieving the expectations or having a rough day. Students they are more likely to continue to strive and thrive in that classroom environment.

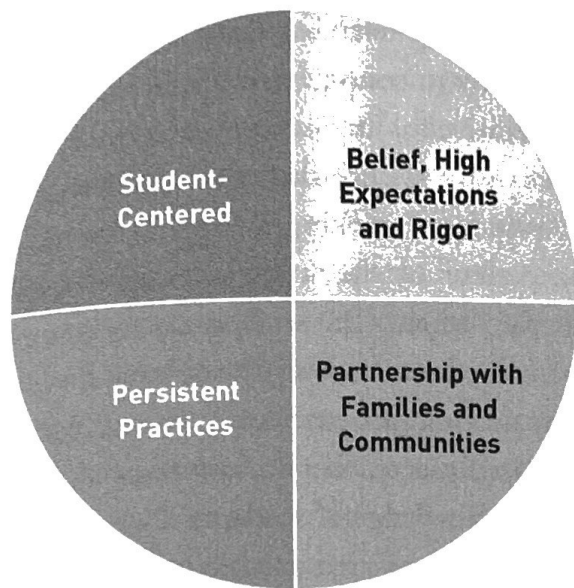
The fourth key practice for a caring classroom environment is teachers' developing partnerships with families and communities. Students are not only individuals; each is also part of a rich fabric of families and communities. When schools, families, and communities connect, all of the experiences in the classroom, from curricular to lesson development that can include family and community members, will become more culturally responsive (Gay, 2010).

In this chapter, we discuss how engaging in a student-centered approach, having high expectations for all, engaging in persistent practices, and developing partnerships with families and communities are essential to establishing and maintaining caring classroom communities. Having a caring classroom environment, we are arguing, is a central feature of effective classroom management.

STUDENT-CENTERED

A student-centered approach in the classroom shifts the focus away from a "banking" concept of education where the teacher is the sole bearer of

FIGURE 4.1 ■ Four Areas of Practice for Building a Caring Classroom Environment



knowledge (Freire, 2000). Freire (2000) explained that the banking approach limits student engagement to “receiving, filing, and storing deposits” (p. 72). A student-centered approach transforms the learning environment into a space where students’ voice, knowledge, experiences, and other assets are centralized and amplified. This shift in our educational experience is liberating as all classroom participants become teachers and students.

A student-centered approach builds on students’ assets and transfers power from the teacher to students, positioning teachers as facilitators and learners as well. Classrooms that are student-centered include students in the planning, implementation, and assessment of learning (McCarthy, 2015). When constructing caring classroom environments that promote effective classroom management, teachers let go of their need for continual and exclusive control. This can be challenging to do, but it provides a highly engaging, collaborative space for all to grow, learn, and thrive.

McCarthy (2015) provides practical perspective on this student-centered approach regarding “*why, what, and how* learning experiences take shape.” McCarthy’s first component is the *why*, or the relevance of the lesson. Students need to understand the “*why*” behind the lesson in order to be motivated to engage in it. In other words, it is essential for teachers to be transparent about their intentions. This transparency includes teachers’ explaining why they do what they do. Some students will resist when faced with “do it because I said so” approaches. It is essential for teachers to share the “*why*” behind the work they are asking students to complete. Doing so provides insight into the value of the lesson for the students in ways that should increase buy-in and engagement and reduce resistance. Teachers can continually connect how the lesson and content are relevant to their students’ lives now and for their future selves. This can be accomplished by referencing basic needs in life, such as how

learning about certain calculations in mathematics will help students manage their own finances and household budgets in ways that can make the difference between saving money for the future or being in debt. Also, teachers can share the actual short-term and long-term implications of those scenarios in life. It is also useful to state the why in connection to students' specific career interests. For instance, it is imperative for anyone interested in the medical field to learn about particular concepts in science that can be discussed in detail depending on what career path a student is seeking.

The second component of the student-centered approach according to McCarthy (2015) is the "what." The student-centered approach includes students' voice and interests when choosing the content for lessons. Many aspects of the state standards driving our curricula can be taught from multiple perspectives. The more deeply a teacher knows their students, the greater the opportunity to tie that knowledge of students' lives and interests into the lessons. The more the curriculum is tied to students' lives, cultures, and interests, the more likely they are to engage in deep learning, grasp the concepts, develop the skills, and attain the goals of the lesson. If the students do not know the references being used, they will not learn the lessons being taught.

An example of this occurred in Mr. Jeffries's second grade physical education class. Mr. Jeffries was teaching his students how to dive over a foam wall and roll into a ball properly so as not to hurt themselves. One of the students, Ori, was having a hard time grasping the concept of forming and maintaining a tight ball with his body, required for this lesson. As he continued to try, his best friend Sally watched from the sideline. The interaction among Mr. Jeffries, Ori, and Sally went as follows:

Mr. Jeffries: I see you're trying, Ori, but you're not quite there yet. You need to pull your body into a tight ball and stay that way as you roll. Imagine you're like a pot roast with a string tied around it to keep it tight in a ball.

Ori: [Blank stare].

Sally: Ori's family is vegetarian.

Mr. Jeffries: Okay, how about during Christmas when . . .

Ori: [Blank stare].

Sally: He's Jewish, he probably won't know that either. Try an armadillo! He loves animals and knows that when an armadillo wants to protect itself it flips into a tight ball and stays that way until it thinks it's safe to come out. He just showed me that on YouTube the other day on our playdate! It was really cool.

Ori: Oh yeah! I get it now!

Ori then proceeded to jump, make his body into a tight ball like an armadillo, and hurl himself over the foam wall. Once he knew the reference, he understood and learned the lesson. Our point here is that teachers must know their students' interests well and understand their cultural references (Ladson-Billings, 2009) when attempting to teach new or more complex information. This example also showed how much more effective the learning was for Ori when his friend, Sally, who knows him well, was able to participate in the learning process as a source of knowledge. The more students see themselves in the lessons and are actively engaged as agents in the classroom, the more effective the learning experience will be for everyone. This also connects to McCarthy's (2015) third step, the "how." Students should be agents in all aspects of their learning, including how learning is demonstrated.

The student-centered classroom is more culturally relevant and effective than the often-found cultural mismatch of a teacher-focused classroom based only on the teacher's own cultural lens and preferences (Delpit, 1995; Stephens & Townsend, 2015). The prior story about the physical education class is a good example of cultural mismatch. The teacher just assumed that the student would understand an aspect of the lesson by referencing an example from the Christmas holiday, but this cannot be assumed when the student is not Christian. It is also important to keep in mind that no identity group is monolithic. For instance, not all Christian-identifying people celebrate Christmas, and if they do, it is not in the same way. This is why teachers' knowing their individual students well is so valuable. In addition to lesson content, there are many other ways that cultural mismatch can be expressed. For example, ways of behaving and communicating are expressed differently in different cultures and can be wrongly interpreted across culture. One example of this is how eye contact is used and what it is intended to communicate. For instance, in Japanese culture, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect, while in some Western cultures, avoiding eye contact can be interpreted as a sign of disrespect (Akechi et al., 2013). This is one of the many reasons why building relationships among everyone in the classroom is so valuable. Doing so can help everyone in the learning community understand one another better in ways that lead to more effective instruction and more accurate interpretation of behaviors.

Student-centered approaches shift the power from being solely that of the teacher to that of the students, creating a more relevant, engaging environment that clearly reflects the needs, cultures, interests, perspectives, and brilliance of its students. Doing so also positions the students to be more accountable for their learning in ways that support high academic achievement, productive behavior, collaborative learning, and leadership development.

Co-Create Accountable Classroom Culture

Another part of being student-centered is co-constructing classroom norms and expectations. It is advantageous for teachers and students to begin each school year and/or semester by developing their norms together so that all

voices are heard in creating a caring classroom environment. Students tend to be more engaged and take greater ownership over their learning and behavior when provided with the opportunity to contribute to the creation of their classroom norms (Cushman, 2003). This process also ensures that students feel heard, respected, and valued. It gives them a needed degree of power for engagement and positions them as responsible partners in the effort to have a nurturing, responsive learning environment for all to achieve at high levels. Co-construction of norms and expectations in the classroom also gives teachers an opportunity to learn more about their students, hear their needs, and be responsive. There are various approaches to co-creating norms in the classroom. The approach to this collaborative process can be cogenerated as well. Teachers and students can and should be as creative as they want in this process. One way of co-creating classroom norms is as follows:

1. The teacher provides the opportunity to co-create norms during the very first week of class, even the first day if possible.
2. The teacher sets the tone that this is everyone's classroom, and we are going to co-create this community learning environment in ways that work for everyone to achieve at high levels. Every voice is valued.
3. Students then conduct a classroom-wide brainstorming session listing the norms they think are important for everyone to be held accountable to for everyone's success.
4. Frame norm language in proactive, positive language, such as "actively listen" and "respect each other" as opposed to what not to do, such as "don't talk when others are talking" and "no bullying".
5. Student(s) write the list of ideas on the board.
6. Everyone then explores the various ideas and groups them into themes.
7. Everyone helps craft the language for the final draft.
8. Everyone votes on adopting them as the classroom norms and expectations for everyone.
9. Students then write the agreed-upon norms on poster board or something that can be permanently seen in the classroom (make sure to number them).
10. Students place the board in a location visible to all students.

In addition, to ensure that everyone is on the same page, it is helpful to:

1. Have students sign a document listing the classroom norms and agreeing to honor them.
2. Share the classroom norms with students' "parents" (whoever parents them: mom, dad, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, foster family,

group home staff, etc.) as well as the co-creation process they enacted to develop them.

Once this process is completed, teachers and students alike can refer to classroom norms by number and detail as needed when someone is not honoring them. The interaction around non-norm behavior then becomes about the norms they co-created and agreed to, therefore keeping the conversation about the behavior and the norms, as opposed to becoming a personal power struggle between the teacher and student. (This is important for maintaining relationships as well as the efficacy of the goals in creating them.) Teachers can then ask their students, “Which one of our classroom norms are you not honoring by talking at this time?” or just say, “Number 4, please, Sarah,” pointing at the norms on the wall. When the students really take ownership over their classroom learning environment, they will also support one another in maintaining normed behavior so that everyone can effectively learn and achieve at high levels together.

Co-creating norms can be implemented in any classroom and is particularly effective in middle and high schools when students are seeking opportunities for greater agency in their lives.

VIGNETTE A: BEING STUDENT-CENTERED NURTURES AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY

All of the eighth graders wanted to be in Mr. Summer English language class. From day one, he got to know his students: their cultures, life stories, and interests. Mr. Summer used these elements of their lives, cultures, and interests to shape his pedagogy and lesson content daily. He even made preparing for the statewide tests relevant and fun. One week, he took the video game dynamics many of his students talked about playing after school and tied them into how to make decisions and critically think about some of the test-taking approaches needed for the statewide tests. His students thought that was really cool. He regularly asked his students for feedback and ideas about how to improve their learning experience to support their success. Sometimes Mr. Summer would even stop in the middle of a lesson if he noticed the students weren't into it to ask what they needed to reengage. He would ask what was working and not working, along with eliciting their ideas for improvement in the moment. He was really in tune with his students that way and learned a lot about them by explicitly asking them to be active participants in shaping their learning experience. He saw himself as a facilitator of their learning community and a learner right along with his students. He found that although challenging at times, co-creating the space, being inclusive of everyone's needs and interests, was very rewarding, and his students were increasingly successful the more he embraced this

approach. His students loved the sense of agency they had in their classroom, where from the outset, they knew their voices mattered. From the beginning, they got to know one another and co-create their classroom norms, grounded in rigor and high expectations for all. Their room was filled with their positively framed co-created norms, images they chose that inspired them, including images of themselves, and quotations and other expressions of themselves that inspired them to learn, strive, and thrive every day. Ja'Quaya, an artist, drew a beautiful border framing their classroom norms. Franko, who loved to take pictures, took photos of the students actively engaged in learning and put them up on the walls. All the students chose or wrote quotations that inspired them, which were then posted throughout the room and outside the door. In this classroom, students felt valued and honored one another's contribution, with the teacher learning and growing along with the students every day.

Lingering Questions

1. Mr. Summer continually wondered, "How can I better tie my student's lives and interests into this lesson?"
2. Mr. Summer regularly scanned the room, watching body language and listening to students talk about their experiences, and asked himself, "Who's checked out? What can I tweak in what I'm doing right now to better engage everyone?"
3. Mr. Summer had a consistent practice of inquiring, "What can I ask my students that would provide the information I need to best support their success?"

A student-centered classroom environment honors the voices of everyone within it. It positions the teacher as a facilitator of the learning space and centers, not marginalizes, students' cultures, knowledge, lived experiences, interests, wants, and needs in ways that are deeply engaging and provide agency for students to take ownership over their own learning.

BELIEF, EXPECTATIONS, AND RIGOR

A caring classroom environment includes a critically self-aware teacher who holds deep belief in all students' ability to achieve at high levels, has high expectations for all students, and provides the academic rigor needed to grow all students to high levels.

Teacher Beliefs, Bias, and Critical Self-Awareness

We all, including teachers, have biases based on being socialized in our society (Grinage, 2011; Milner, 2010; Sue, 2015). As human beings, we often act

and react from our implicit biases. By *implicit bias*, we mean the “automatic and unconscious stereotypes that drive people to behave and make decisions in certain ways” (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016, p. 3). If left unexamined, we are rendered unable to deeply understand or consciously determine our reactions. However, teachers can address implicit bias in their teaching by examining their thoughts and associations about people. This gives them more control over how they think, feel, and act toward people, including their students (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012). Some examples of bias include the following: boys are more likely to excel at STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects than girls are, English language learners are less intelligent than native English speakers are, Black students are more likely to “cause trouble,” students living below the poverty line do not value education, and Asian students will get better grades than other students. Although these biases may seem positive or negative, they are all harmful because they lead teachers to stereotype their students rather than seeing them as individuals.

Examining biases is something that takes a great deal of honesty and practice over time, but it is worth the effort in the development of a caring classroom culture. One useful online resource that provides insight into implicit biases is called Project Implicit at Harvard University (<https://implicit.harvard.edu>). Teachers should also be conscious of the adjectives they think of, and other societal labels, when considering various aspects of their students’ identities. Being conscious of these thoughts provides insights into the biases they may hold. These insights can provide teachers with greater agency in shaping their classroom environment.

CampbellJones, CampbellJones, and Lindsey (2010) provide a great exercise to reflect on our biases:

Think of a time, not in your role as an educator, when you met a person for the first time from a culture different from yours or attended a cultural event that was an unusual experience for you. Do you remember how you studied the person or event? Can you recall the judgments you made? If you had the opportunity to get to know the person or the event, recall your earlier judgments that you later learned to be true and those that were not even close to being true. (p. 33)

What might someone learn about their biases from such a reflective exercise? How might a similar awareness of biases benefit educators in their school setting? What benefits are there in teachers’ recognizing their biases, including around race, especially with White teachers working with students, families, and communities of color? Teachers can consider how such reflection can positively influence their practice.

Race is a salient aspect of bias in the U.S. context, so it is particularly important to reflect on it extensively. As discussed in previous chapters, Black

and Brown students have disparate experiences and outcomes in schooling. Some of these outcomes are strongly associated with implicit biases around race, including notions that Black and Brown people are not as intelligent as White people are and, furthermore, that they should be feared, especially Black men (Howard, 2013; Morris, 2016). These racist messages are a source of racial inequity and injustice in the education system. Students are aware of their teachers' expectations of them. Studies have shown that Black students may feel that their teachers have lower expectations of them than their White counterparts, leaving them feeling disrespected, unappreciated, and lacking true belonging in the classroom (Pringle et al., 2010; Saphier, 2017; Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013). This is counter to creating a caring classroom environment for all.

It is imperative that teachers examine their implicit biases. It is also important that teachers engage in critical reflective practices (Favela & Torres, 2014; Howard, 2003; Milner, 2010). As discussed previously, teacher critical reflective practice and self-awareness play a significant role in the classroom. If students are not achieving at high levels, for instance, it is an opportunity for critical reflection regarding teachers' expectations of their students and how their levels of expectation may be manifesting in the classroom. It is worthwhile for teachers to engage in the critical reflective autobiography activity discussed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 3, we discussed the importance of teachers' writing critical reflective autobiographies, engaging in critical reflection in unit planning, and pursuing critical reflection in lesson planning. Building on that, it is also important that critical reflection drive a teacher's development of the deeper interpersonal aspects of classroom culture. Asking the following kinds of questions can be helpful in this endeavor:

1. What do I believe about my students' abilities?
2. What are my expectations of them and why?
3. How am I communicating my expectations of my students to them (both verbally and nonverbally)?
4. How do my students react and respond to my communications?
5. Do I regularly communicate my belief in student's ability to achieve at high levels?
6. Have I created a caring classroom environment where students feel valued and care for?
7. How do I inspire hope, confidence, and possibility in my students?
8. Do I ever cause harm to my students, even unintentionally, and if so, how do I address it?
9. Do I remain asset based in my perception of my students?

By regularly examining their responses to these questions, teachers can feel confident that they are working toward building and sustaining a positive, caring classroom culture.

It is vital that teachers be critically reflective and continually seek honest, deep understanding of their biases and beliefs that inform their expectations of their students. This supports them in being fully responsible for the way their biases affect or influence their interactions with students. This contributes to establishing a caring classroom environment.

High Expectations for All

Creating caring classroom environments that are central to effective classroom management also involves having high expectations for all. In other words, “teachers not only must believe in what they are doing, they must believe in their students’ ability to learn” (Jamar & Pitts, 2005, pp. 129–130). Having high expectations for all students has been shown to increase academic success (Milner, 2007; Rist, 1970), motivation, and engagement (Pringle et al., 2010) and to facilitate deeper, more meaningful and respectful teacher-student relationships (Gay, 2010; Milner, 2010). Having high expectations for all students requires that teachers be critically conscious regarding their beliefs of students’ abilities (Howard, 2003; Saphier, 2017), that they enact rigorous lessons (Jamar & Pitts, 2005), and that all of the necessary academic scaffolding and social-emotional supports (Lee, Smith, Perry, & Smylie, 1999) are built into their daily experiences in the classroom in ways that are responsive to student needs.

Students tend to live up to our expectations, especially during those critical identity development years from pre-K to 12th grade, when they are forming their senses of self (Rist, 1970). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found a correlation between teacher expectations and student achievement in their work around self-fulfilling prophecy, also known as the Pygmalion effect. This means that when teachers have strong belief in their students and have high expectations of them, students tend to live up to those expectations and achieve at high levels. Similarly, when teachers do not believe in their students’ ability to achieve at high levels and have low expectations of them, students tend to achieve at lower levels. We are stressing that it is essential for teachers to be mindful of and work to eliminate their biases to be able to communicate their deep belief in all of their students’ ability to achieve. Saphier (2017) provides ways to consider how teachers speak and act with their students that can send messages of low or high expectations. For instance, teachers should be reflective of how often they call on which students, how they communicate with their students verbally and nonverbally, and how those actions can affect their students’ senses of belief in their own abilities and expectations of achievement. Having clear, consistent, unbiased, explicitly communicated high expectations for all, rooted in unwavering belief, can be a catalyst for high academic achievement.

When teachers have low expectations, students may experience that as disrespect and can draw away from the relationship. In addition, students may feel uncared for in ways that affect their experiences in the classroom, particularly as they relate to motivation and achievement (Pringle et al., 2010). Such feelings can lead to unproductive behaviors. Pringle et al. (2010) found that students who perceived that their teachers had low expectations of them had "feelings of dread at attending the class, low morale, and a lack of motivation" (p. 36). Low expectations can manifest in multiple ways. For instance, teachers may not have rigorous lessons and instead regularly depend on low-level worksheets. Or teachers may allow a lot of down time in their classes by not teaching bell to bell. Conversely, when teachers hold high expectations, expressed through rigorous multimodal lessons, taught bell to bell through active student learning and participation, students recognize these high expectations and look forward to attending class, have higher morale, and are more motivated to learn.

In addition to teacher-held expectations, not all students hold a deep belief in themselves and their academic ability. Because of this, a caring classroom culture with high expectations, which includes teachers' consistently reinforcing their belief in their students, may also encourage students to take on this mindset for themselves. A caring classroom culture can serve as an effective motivating factor in keeping students engaged in working toward achieving at higher levels every day. Just as students may have believed negative narratives of themselves previously, they can grow into embracing asset-based, belief-driven, positive narratives of themselves as well. This may lead to a greater likelihood of higher achievement and a productive classroom dynamic.

Academic Rigor

High expectations are expressed through academic rigor. By *academic rigor*, we mean "the extent to which the knowledge work engaged in by students requires cognitive simplicity–complexity" (Paige, Smith, & Sizemore, 2015). It is understandable that when introducing a new topic, for instance, a teacher may wish to do so in the most easily understood, simple form. It is expected in a rigorous classroom, though, that the learning dynamic will become increasingly more complex, challenging the students each day to think and learn in more critical, nuanced ways. Students want to be challenged. They often think that teachers have low expectations and do not care or believe in them when there is only simple, minimal academic rigor in the classroom (Cushman, 2003). Low expectations coupled with low rigor particularly leaves students of color and/or those living below the poverty line feeling that teachers do not believe in their ability, pity them, or let them off easily because of their economic and social circumstances (Rojas & Liou, 2017). Students having this experience may lose respect for their teachers and consequently disengage (Cushman, 2003).

It is critical that teachers provide the appropriately matched high level of rigor for each student to remain challenged and motivated to learn. Providing the appropriate level of rigor is most effectively accomplished through teachers' deep knowledge of their students. If a teacher's lessons are consistently too simple, students can interpret it as a message of low expectations (Jamar & Pitts, 2005) and get offended, bored, and disengaged. If lessons are consistently too complex, they can get frustrated and give up. The goal is to know students well enough to create rigorous lessons that challenge them to grow in personalized, appropriate ways along the continuum of simple to complex as they master new knowledge and skills. Rigor must also be coupled with tailored scaffolding and support, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter, for an effective caring classroom environment. It is also immensely helpful to be knowledgeable regarding all of the resources for students outside of the classroom connected to the school that provide academic supports, such as tutoring. Knowing and connecting students to supportive resources will help ensure that they have access to all that is available to them to succeed at high levels.

To reiterate, a caring classroom environment has high expectations for all and provides rigorous, scaffolded lessons that are facilitated by a critically reflective teacher with deep belief in all students' ability to learn at high levels. When all of the above are enacted, students can experience significant success.

VIGNETTE B: HIGH EXPECTATIONS, RIGOR, AND BELIEF ARE POWERFUL FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Hilltop High School had an English language arts class for students who had previously failed 11th grade English. Their teacher, Mr. Stevenson, pushed himself to be critically reflective to ensure that he truly had high expectations for all of his students. Because some of the students had internalized some deficit views of themselves, Mr. Stevenson also helped his students redefine the way they saw themselves as the foundation for making high academic achievement possible. This started from the very first minute on the very first day of class. Mr. Stevenson stood in front of his students and explicitly shared his high expectations and belief in them. Mr. Stevenson said, "This is not about who you thought you were as a student before you walked in the door. I'm only concerned about who you want to be now. You have a clean slate, and you now get to write a new chapter in your life story. You can be and become whoever and whatever you choose. I will see you as that and support you in embodying it every day. It does not mean that we ever forget who you've been, as your life experiences and choices have shaped you into the person that you are today and are an important part of your life story. What I understand is that some of your past experiences have not inspired you. Some of your experiences may not have given you the

freedom and options to become whatever you want to in life. You deserve the best. I believe that each and every one of you can earn straight A's in this class." Many of his students pushed back. Tyrone said, "But I can't." "I never got an A in my life," said Frank. "But every teacher I've ever had has expected me to fail," said Shaniqua.

After discussing their concerns, they worked together to create their classroom norms and expectations. "Hey y'all, let's do this!" said Xander, in and watched silently with his arms folded in the corner of the class. Mr. Stevenson noticed Frank's demeanor and talked with him personally after class to check in on his reactions to this experience. He made a mental note to continue to connect with Frank about this throughout the weeks and months ahead. For Mr. Stevenson, this collaborative effort was about transforming how his students saw themselves and what was possible. Every day, he reinforced what they created and reminded them collectively and personally how awesome, smart, and capable they were. He maintained a high level of rigor in his lessons, ensuring that they were constructed on the basis of their interests, and he scaffolded them appropriately each day. He also provided them with the psychological safety they needed to succeed. Students came to see who they truly were, to see their own brilliance and expand their possibilities. They rose to meet the beliefs and high expectations Mr. Stevenson had for them, which many then took on as their new identity.

Lingering Questions

1. As the semester wound down and winter break was upon him, Mr. Stevenson wondered what else he could do to connect with Frank, who still had not bought into the norms of the class.
2. When these students return after winter break, what will Mr. Stevenson need to do to get them back on track?
3. How could Mr. Stevenson help his students understand that they have the potential to succeed in all of their classes, not just his?
4. What other communication moves could Mr. Stevenson make to connect with Frank?

Students are often very aware of a teacher's perceptions, beliefs about, and expectations of them. Students notice when teachers are explicitly clear about their beliefs and expectations of their students, as in the case of Mr. Stevenson, or if their teachers are communicating implicitly through subtle and not-so-subtle interactions with them in the classroom. When teachers hold high expectations of their students

and support them in achieving them, students feel more seen, respected, appreciated, and connected to their teachers and classroom community in ways that enhance student engagement, motivation, learning, and achievement (Milner, 2010).

PERSISTENT PRACTICES

Creating a caring student-centered classroom environment where teachers hold high expectations for all requires persistent practices to cultivate student learning and development. Persistent practices are ways of being and doing that communicate to students that teachers care for them, always believe in them, will never give up on them—and that failure is not an option. Such practices are enacted on a daily basis as the foundation of establishing and maintaining a caring classroom environment. These practices include balancing high expectations with demonstrated care, building relationships, providing a space for hope and healing, and cultivating belonging and success.

Persistent Practice of Being a Warm Demander

One of the more effective persistent practices in nurturing a caring classroom environment is being a “warm demander.” Kleinfeld (1975) introduced the phrase “warm demander” to describe teachers who combined “personal warmth [with] active demandingness” (p. 335). Warm demanders insist that students meet high expectations in the classroom. According to Delpit (2012), “warm demanders expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment” (p. 77). Delpit expands on this notion of being a warm demander when noting that the warm, caring aspects of this approach go beyond academics. Warm demanders “see themselves as advocates for the young people within a system that may not be so caring. . . . They consider the whole child, not just his or her mind” (p. 85). Warm demander teachers never give up on their students. They know that students will have good and bad days, just as we all do. However, when warm demanders are faced with behaviors that are not aligned with the classroom norms, they continue to remain committed to their students’ success. Warm demanders foster a caring space for their students to struggle, push back, get upset, and express the full range of emotions.

Warm demanders give and earn respect, providing a space for their students’ whole humanity in persistent ways every day. Instead of removing students from their classrooms for sharing their frustration and reading it as disrespect, warm demanders instead appreciate students’ struggle and process,

giving them the space and encouragement to remain in the classroom community and work through it. Warm demanders provide each of their students with care, encouragement, and the support they need to continue to strive beyond their previous bounds. Students who are being pushed in this way do not always let teachers know how much they appreciate it in the moment, but often consider their warm demander teachers to be the best they had. There are many ways to approach this work, but they ultimately all communicate to students that their teachers' persistence shows that they care and that "she thinks I'm worth her effort" (Saphier, 2017, p. 64). When caring relationships are persistently nurtured and ground the classroom environment, students are more likely to be fully engaged, grow in new and challenging ways, and achieve academic success.

Persistent Practice of Building Relationships

Numerous scholars point to persistent, caring relationships as one of the foundations for effective teaching and learning (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010; Noddings, 2012). Duncan-Andrade (2009) explained, "At the end of the day, effective teaching depends most heavily on one thing: deep and caring relationships" (p. 191). Students are often more motivated to engage in learning when they feel that their teacher truly cares for them. For instance, a student who is performing quite well in science and social studies may perform poorly in English if she thinks her English teacher does not care about her. Demonstrating care with students on a daily basis is a persistent practice that continually reinforces the relationships as the foundation of their learning community.

How do teachers begin to develop these deep caring relationships? They begin with persistent practices from the first day of school. A great way for teachers to get to know their students personally and establish meaningful relationships with them is to spend intensive time during the beginning of each school year and then regular time woven throughout the school year to focus on getting to know their students personally. This also provides teachers the chance to see the distinction between their perspective and biases and who their students are.

Milner (2011) delineated five clear actions that educators can also adopt as persistent practices to cultivate relationships with their students:

1. Interview Your Students. Teachers sometimes spend infinite amounts of time talking about students to their colleagues or to students' parents but minimal time actually talking to students themselves. This strategy suggests that teachers engage in conversations with students themselves to learn from and about them.
2. Give assignments that allow students to share their experiences and interests. In language arts, assignments might include journal writing

- or essay writing. In social studies, assignments might include family history projects or local community-studies projects. In mathematics or science, assignments might include student-constructed word problems or community-based inquiry projects where students investigate the effects of environmental realities on health, crime, and/or poverty in their community.
3. Encourage classroom discussions that let students be the center of attention. Teachers should not always be at the center of discussions but should allow students to share events and experiences from home and their community. Students should be allowed to share whatever information they feel comfortable discussing. When I taught high school English, I used to facilitate what I came to call “rap sessions” that allowed students to have conversations with each other about what was happening in their lives inside and outside of school. The students developed topics that they wanted to discuss, and we selected a few that allowed them to debate issues or just to share their perspectives on a particular theme.
 4. Attend extracurricular activities featuring your students. It means something to students when teachers take time out of their schedules to visit an activity they are involved in. . . . It is important for teachers to attend students’ activities—such as their plays or sporting events—even when they are not on duty as coaches, chaperones, directors, or sponsors. Teachers from elementary through high school should feel a sense of responsibility to be present at events that help complete students’ educational experiences such as those connected to extracurricular activities.
 5. Visit a site in your students’ community. When teachers immerse themselves in a student’s community, they get a first-hand view of the student’s life outside the learning environment.

The classroom culture and curriculum should build on the knowledge gained from learning about students. Doing so as a daily persistent practice has students feel more fully acknowledged as an integral part of the classroom community. Connected to these practices, teachers can engage in daily, meaningful communication that supports the development and maintenance of caring relationships. Teachers should regularly check in with their students. There are many ways to enact this, including welcoming students at the door, taking note of their nonverbal and verbal communication, asking students how they are and what they need, inquiring about their experience of the classroom climate and culture, and soliciting their reflections on lessons and expectations. If a student seems “off” that day, a teacher can proactively check in with the student personally as soon as possible.

In addition, teachers should model the kinds of sharing they hope to elicit from their students. Teachers can be transparent about their own experience of the classroom and, to some extent, their own lives. For instance, a teacher may share with the class that he is feeling "off," such as when he was up all night caring for a sick child and is therefore tired that day. This way, students can understand why the teacher may be acting differently than usual. This can help students feel more safe and comfortable when teacher behavior is out of the norm. Teachers can also acknowledge when they make mistakes, providing a safe space for students to also make mistakes and feel that they too can offer and receive critical feedback. These persistent practices of open, honest communication nurture dynamics of care and trust in the classroom.

Duncan-Andrade (2007) provides a deep analysis of various relationship dynamics, including the difference between being liked and being loved. According to Duncan-Andrade (2007), the one factor that most differentiates the experience of like from that of love is trust. In his research, he found that the shift from students' liking to loving a teacher occurred "because of the love and support that accompanied raised expectations. Sometimes this was simple encouragement, but many times it meant amplifying the personal support given to students. . . . And when that help is from someone [who] loves you, in spite of your shortcomings, you learn to trust that person" (pp. 634–635). This sense of love is powerful when it is reciprocal between a teacher and the students in terms of how it manifests in what is then possible in the classroom. As Duncan-Andrade states, "The people [who] we love can demand levels of commitment from us that defy even our own notions of what we are capable of. People [who] we like, but do not love, typically are not able to push the limits of our abilities" (p. 634). The teachers in his study who developed these deep trusting relationships also expressed that they were "indignant about student failure. This was due largely to the fact that they saw the failure of a student as their own failure. At the same time, they never excused students from their responsibility" (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 635). The persistent practices of being a warm demander, nurturing caring relationships, and challenging students with love and support help maintain the needed trust required for effective caring classroom environments.

Persistent Practice of Psychological Safety

In order to have high expectations and a rigorous caring classroom culture, teachers must also have a persistent practice of providing a psychologically safe space for learning. By *psychological safety*, we mean "the feeling that taking interpersonal risks will not result in embarrassment, ridicule, or shame, (which) enables people to engage, connect, change, and learn" (Wanless, 2016, p. 6). Teachers providing psychologically safe spaces for learning can reduce barriers to engagement and support students in having greater agency in the classroom (Wanless, 2016).

Hammond (2015) provides a detailed understanding of how important psychologically safe spaces are for students' brain functioning. Hammond describes how fundamental relationships are for learning and how in addition to an emotional component, they also have a physical component rooted in the nervous system. She explains how our autonomic nervous system communicates information about our environment regarding how safe or hostile it is to us, including in a classroom environment. If a space we are in is determined to be unsafe in any way, our body receives a distress signal from our brain. That signal then cues the body to create stress hormones, which render learning virtually impossible. This being the case, it is critical for student learning that teachers build caring, trusting relationships with them "that signal to the brain a sense of physical, psychological, and social safety so that learning is possible" (Hammond, 2015, p. 45).

A significant part of creating a safe space for learning is fostering a sense of identity safety in students. According to Steele and Cohn-Vargas (2013), "students have a sense of identity safety when they believe that their social identity is an asset, rather than a barrier to success in the classroom, and that they are welcomed, supported, and valued whatever their background" (p. 5). Identity safety is particularly critical when working to counter stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is a theory that delves into students' concerns that a negative stereotype, such as being a low-achieving student, made about a group of people whom they identify with will be confirmed inadvertently through their behavior or that they could be treated or judged by others, including teachers, on the basis of that stereotype (Steele, 1997). The experience of stereotype threat in students can manifest in actual lower test scores and achievement. Creating an experience of identity safety for all students is fundamental for a psychologically safe and caring classroom environment where all students have a sense of belonging and are supported to achieve at high levels.

There are many ways that providing psychological safety in the classroom can manifest in positive, productive student behaviors during the learning process. For instance, according to Wanless (2016), when students experience psychological safety, "they are more likely to enact self-regulated strategies such as offering ideas, admitting and learning from mistakes, asking for help, engaging in learning opportunities, providing feedback to others, and speaking up" (pp. 7–8). So how can teachers create psychologically safe environments for their students to learn and thrive? Four ways of creating psychologically safe classroom spaces have already been discussed in this book in other contexts, and these apply here as well. They are building caring, trusting relationships (Wanless, 2016); enacting culturally responsive pedagogy (Cholewa, Goodman, West-Olatunji, & Amatea, 2014); providing challenging, rigorous learning opportunities (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013); and using restorative practices (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2015). It is helpful for teachers to know that these four key ways of being and doing in the classroom have so many intersecting benefits for their students. For this chapter, we will continue

to build on how caring, trusting relationships help create psychologically safe spaces for learning. As mentioned previously, when teachers are attuned to their students and actively notice and inquire into why students may be disengaged, frustrated, and unresponsive, teachers can better address their students' needs. Doing so adds to the students' senses of psychological safety. Although students may seem to be frustrated about not understanding a lesson, they may actually be reacting to deeper problems, such as hunger, sleep deprivation, or other problems outside of the school environment. It is important for students to feel heard in these moments of distress. When teachers do not provide the space for students to be heard and supported, students' behavior may become unproductive or even counterproductive. These student behaviors can affect the whole classroom environment. For instance, students and teachers working together may establish a signal for students to nonverbally communicate that they need teachers' support before acting out in unproductive ways.

Students and teachers should be actively and consistently communicating so that they develop their knowledge and understanding of each other. To continue to nurture a psychologically safe space, it is vital for teachers to be sensitive to and aware of when conversations are appropriate to have classroom-wide and when to have them one on one with individual students. For instance, the whole class could discuss their shared need to have the co-created norms and expectations posted in the classroom as a point of reference to ground their relationships with one another and anchor their learning experiences each day. Individual students, however, may need the opportunity to share one on one that they sometimes get frustrated when they do not understand a concept being taught and they want to discuss how to best deal with that frustration. A psychologically safe space provides the understanding that students will not be judged when they share themselves in vulnerable ways, and that it is safe to do so.

Persistent Practice of Fostering Critical Hope

Teachers who develop and sustain caring classroom environments enact the persistent practice of fostering critical hope. Critical hope is about developing the awareness of societal injustice paired with the hope that change is possible with concerted action (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Sutton, 2015). According to Duncan-Andrade (2009), critical hope is a powerful source of inspiration and possibility for students' learning and lives. It is imperative that teachers are in the struggle for such justice along with their students, whether they are of the social identity group experiencing the unjust oppression or not (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Our schools and classrooms are microcosms of our larger society. Oppression and marginalization occur in those spaces as well. Teachers need to be cognizant of how they either interrupt or perpetuate injustice and oppression in their spaces. Teachers must continually critically reflect on their actions and practice, as mentioned previously, to critically understand their role in such dynamics.

When teachers develop the persistent practice of fostering critical hope in solidarity with their marginalized students they communicate deep love and care for them. Duncan-Andrade (2009) intertwines this idea of critical hope with the fundamental need for healing, which he says is an essential and often unacknowledged aspect of increasing achievement in schools. Part of healing is having the space to share our pain and have that pain acknowledged (Ainslie, 2013). According to Duncan-Andrade (2009),

too many of us try to create classroom spaces that are safe from righteous rage, or, worse, we design plans to weed out children who display it. The question we should be grappling with is not how to manage students with these emotions, but how to help students channel them. (p. 190)

Teachers must always be cognizant of how their actions affect the classroom environment for all of their students. Teachers need to continually critically reflect and ask themselves, “Are my actions providing a space for healing or causing additional harm? Are my actions in solidarity with my students and engendering critical hope or am I perpetuating inequities, oppression and pain?” For example, Jose was getting frustrated with a math problem in Mr. Bennett’s class, and Jose expressed his upset by yelling curse words and banging on his desk repeatedly. Teachers might find this behavior offensive and problematic and react by writing Jose up and sending him out of the room to the principal’s office. Any number of disciplinary actions could be taken against Jose as a result, possibly sending him along the pipeline to prison. In the meantime, being removed from class may have also meant that he no longer felt a sense of belonging, experienced a break in relationship with the teacher, and would also miss valuable learning time, making it that much more difficult for him to learn the math content he was struggling with in the first place, rendering him that much more behind in class. What might it have looked like for Mr. Bennett to instead stand in solidarity with Jose? How could he have heard his pain and struggle, and provide the care needed in that moment? How might he have supported Jose in working through his emotions and academic needs to process forward toward success?

Teachers can foster critical hope with their students by (a) being critically reflective of the self, school, and society; (b) deeply listening to and acknowledging students’ expressions of emotions in all their forms, providing a space for healing; and (c) standing in solidarity against oppression with their marginalized students. Those are three examples of persistent practices for teachers to engender critical hope in a caring classroom environment.

Persistent Practices for Belonging and Success

Pringle et al.’s (2010) research showed that students “perceived a direct association between the negatively charged interpersonal relationships with certain

teachers that had decreased their feelings of belongingness in the classroom setting" (p. 35), which affected their levels of motivation and engagement. A student's sense of belonging is also connected to their experience of the level of psychological safety (Wanless, 2016) in the classroom.

In persistently practicing cultivating a sense of belonging for all students, teachers commit to doing anything necessary to keep students in the classroom. Students' being removed from the classroom can have negative consequences academically as well as social-emotionally. This is the case not just for the student being removed from the classroom community but for all of the students who remain as well. This occurs because knowing that students can be removed from the classroom community can hurt students' senses of psychological safety in their classrooms. In addition to a diminished sense of belonging, students who miss classroom learning time tend to fall behind academically (Gottfried, 2010). When students are sent out of the classroom, it damages their relationships with the teacher and the classroom community. This can also lead to students disengaging upon their return to the classroom. Students should be provided with every opportunity to remain in the learning community. Teachers should seek to understand their students' behavior and meet their needs before considering writing up referrals and sending them out of the classroom to be penalized. Teachers should also do their best to treat every day as a new day. If students demonstrate behaviors that are not in line with the co-created classroom norms, the teacher can wipe the slate clean at the end of the period and communicate with the students that they too can start the next day anew. Doing so proactively maintains students' senses of belonging in the classroom. Teachers should also remember that behavior is taught, just like subject content, and to be patient as students learn and grow in this area too.

When dealing with difficult situations with students, all teachers should have a persistent practice of asking themselves such questions as these:

- Have I listened and heard what this student is communicating verbally?
- Have I missed any nonverbal cues?
- Is the student experiencing distress?
- Have I contributed to this distress in any way? If I have, what can I do to acknowledge it, take responsibility and work to heal it?
- Have I tried everything possible to support this student in being successful both academically and behaviorally?

Asking such questions helps teachers maintain relationships, a sense of belonging, and more learning opportunities leading to student success.

Teachers must be persistent in keeping caring connected relationships with their students at the fore, knowing that a break in belonging with one student can affect all of their students' experiences in the classroom environment.

VIGNETTE C: PERSISTENT CARING RELATIONSHIPS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Ms. Green was a 12th grade English teacher at Overbrook High School. She consistently worked to build relationships with all of her students, welcoming them at the door each day and building the learning experiences around their interests. She also had a sign on her door that read, "Every day is a new day!" letting them know that she would not give up on them, even if yesterday was a bad day. Despite these practices, Ms. Green struggled to connect with Cy, a student in her fifth period English class. Cy was frequently suspended and missed many days of school, making getting to know him more difficult. Although she consistently worked to connect with Cy, she had been unsuccessful with building a relationship with him, but she kept trying. She was finally able to make a connection when she saw his photography as part of a multimedia assignment in their class. Through his photography assignment, Ms. Green learned that Cy's mom, who died when he was 6 years old, was a photographer as well. He used her old camera to take pictures. As Ms. Green continued to talk with him about his photography, Cy shared with her that his father wrestled with addiction and that their family struggled financially. This new knowledge about him helped her understand why he was often upset and disengaged from class. As she continued to get to know him throughout the semester, he shared that he was considering dropping out of school. She made it clear that she completely believed in him and that dropping out of school was not an option and that he deserved better. They had an idea to make him the school photographer, which gave him a greater sense of belonging in the classroom and the school. Other teachers also got to see him in new ways that helped with their relationship building with him too.

Ms. Green was pleased with the way Cy had grown and developed during his senior year as well as the way she and her colleagues were able to see his strengths and assets. Nonetheless, Ms. Green found herself pondering some unresolved questions.

Lingering Questions

1. How else could she support Cy in his continued development?
2. What other students was she "missing" in her daily attempts to get to know them?

A caring classroom environment is one where teachers engage in five persistent practices. First, they are warm demanders who balance personal warmth with high expectations for all students. Second, they engage in relationship building that is both deep and caring. Third, they create a psychologically safe space for learning. Fourth, they foster a sense of critical hope in their classrooms. And fifth, they help students have a sense of belonging in the classroom community. Engaging in these five persistent practices helps teachers hold the student experience at the forefront of classroom management endeavors and provides a caring classroom environment.

PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

So far in this chapter we have discussed the importance of being student-centered, having high expectations for all, and engaging in persistent practices in support of student success. The fourth and final piece that is needed for creating a caring classroom environment is building and sustaining partnerships with families and communities. By *families*, we mean those who care and provide support for students, whether related by blood or not. By *communities*, we mean the people and organizations students are connected to in their neighborhood and local area. By *partnerships*, we mean meaningful and collaborative relationships that benefit everyone involved. Students do not exist in isolation but are deeply rooted in their families and communities. The more teachers understand their students' familial and community context and connect those assets to the classroom learning opportunities, the more responsive the whole classroom experience will be. Making these connections also demonstrates teachers' deep levels of caring and commitment to their students.

Partnering With Families

Families can include mothers, fathers, stepparents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, foster parents, family friends who may act as family members, and group home staff, among others. It is critical to be aware and respectful of all of the many forms that families can take.

Teachers may feel that they do not have enough time to communicate with families. However, doing so may lead to many positive benefits. For instance, some research suggests that partnerships with families can lead to higher academic achievement, graduation rates, and improved attendance (Oxley, 2013). Building partnerships with families can also lead to decreases in student disruptive behaviors (Hohlfeld, Ritzhaupt, & Barron, 2010).

Establishing Relationships With Families

The first step in building partnerships with families is communication. Even before the school year starts, teachers can send e-mails, send letters through

the mail, or call home to introduce themselves. Some schools use Web sites or apps to make connections between teachers and families. Technology can be an easy, effective way to stay in touch with families if they have access to it.

When a teacher is calling a family member, right after introducing themselves, the teacher should ask the family member if they have a few minutes to talk. A teacher can ask, "Is now an okay time?" This respectful act lets the family member know that the teacher realizes that the family member is busy and that the teacher may be interrupting something. It also makes the family member focus more intently on the conversation. If the family member says that it is not a good time, the teacher should ask when might be a better time and follow up then.

When initially reaching out to families for the first time, teachers can begin with an introduction about themselves. A personal introduction will humanize the teacher. Until then, the teacher is often just seen as part of the educational institution. Family members may already have lots of thoughts and feelings about teachers from their own experiences or in the past with their students, which are not always positive. In addition, a teacher can also assure families of the following:

- The teacher cares about the student and will do whatever they can for the student to be successful in the class.
- The teacher wants to learn from them anything that can help them teach with the student most effectively.
- The teacher values their input, knowledge, and experience and sees them as partners in supporting the student to achieve.
- The family can contact the teacher and should feel invited to do so at any time.

The teacher should also add a form for family members to fill out regarding what they want and need in terms of communication. This can help establish a strong, positive relationship from the beginning. Be sure to ask the following:

- the name(s) of the family member(s) who should be contacted as well as their relationship(s) to the student,
- the preferred form(s) of communication,
- contact information, and
- best times and days to connect.

In reaching out to families in this way, families may begin to know that they can regard teachers as partners. As a result of this, families' responses may be more warm and welcoming to future teacher contacts.

This initial communication can also include a survey, such as a "Getting to Know My Student" form for families to complete, providing lots of rich, useful information that can assist teachers in getting to know their students from the families' perspectives. It is important that teachers use their professional judgment in posing questions to families in order to avoid probes that may come across as disrespectful. For instance, it is important when teachers communicate with families to remember the wide array of family dynamics they may encounter. For instance, teachers should not inquire about a family member's marital status or income level in a beginning-of-the-year contact, as this may come across as insensitive.

Another simple action that can have a positive impact on teachers' relationships with families is for teachers to frequently connect with families to share only positive news. Taking a couple of minutes to send a message or make a call to share something positive about the student can be tremendously helpful. This can be especially important in the case of a student who is demonstrating growth and progress. Ideally, positive contact should occur more often than negative contact, so that families know that teachers see their students' many assets. An additional benefit to this is evident when a teacher needs to contact a family member to discuss an issue or problem. In this case, because there have already been a number of positive contacts with family members, they already know that the teacher genuinely cares about and sees the whole student. As a result, the family members are often more open to listening and less defensive than when these kinds of interactions are the first and/or only time the teacher and family ever connect.

When communicating with a family member about an issue or a problem, a teacher should consider sharing the student's positive qualities first and last. This can be remembered using the initials "PNP." These letters remind the teacher to share a **p**ositive point, then communicate the **n**egative issue, and then close with another **p**ositive point. Teachers should be careful to offer positive points only if they are true. This communication will be counterproductive if the teacher does not communicate in a genuine manner. Teachers should remember that even the most challenging students have assets. For instance, even if a student will not complete written work, that student may still be an excellent critical thinker and significantly contribute to class discussions.

When communicating with family members, it is recommended to make a list of all of the points about the students that teachers want to discuss. Teachers should use easily referenced bullet points as much as possible. Reading from notes at any great length makes it difficult to engage in effective dialogue and listen to family members. Teachers should be

prepared with a list of possible solutions to any issues or problems as well. This may include available resources and any school policies that relate to the issue at hand.

In addition to having notes, teachers must also reflect on their own attitudes before calling family members. They may even need to shift their attitudes and reconsider their word choices to have a positive interaction with a family member. This may be needed because families sometimes sense negative teacher attitudes about their students and become defensive during phone conversations. It also helps for teachers to take a few deep breaths to calm and ground themselves before and during interactions with families when needed. Teachers are encouraged to use objective language when describing student actions. An example of objective language would be "Johnny missed the last five homework assignments." This type of language is more effective than subjective language. An example of subjective language would be "Johnny is lazy because he does not do his homework." Objective language is more effective because it simply states the facts and tends to produce more positive reactions from families. Families may react more strongly to subjective language, which may convey a judgment about the student attached to it. It is helpful for teachers to remember that family members are human beings too and share the same range of thoughts and feelings that teachers do. Families should never be made to feel that their children's teachers are the enemy. Teachers should consistently work to position themselves as partners with families in addressing any problems or issues related to student success. Working together is more effective.

How teachers listen to families is just as important as how teachers speak to families. Most family members deeply love and care for their students. This is the source of most of their reactions in communicating with teachers. It is important for teachers to hear and honor the families as advocates for their children. This perspective provides a compassionate place to listen from, especially if reactions escalate. In most cases, families are just doing their best to love and support their students. Considering the importance of such communication efforts with families can assist teachers in this valuable endeavor.

Negotiating Conflict With Families

When communicating with family members about difficult conversations it is not uncommon for family members to become angry. Teachers should provide families with a safe, caring space to have all of their feelings heard. Teachers do not need to agree with what the family member is sharing, but active listening helps teachers a great deal with relationship building (Whitbourne, 2012). This is an opportune time for teachers to contemplate what the source of the family member's upset might be. For instance,

- Is the family member feeling that her child is being treated unjustly? If yes, how so?
- Does she feel offended by something the teacher just said? If so, what was it?
- Has the family member been contacted multiple times about the same issue and feels that the student is not being supported sufficiently by the school? If so, what does the family member think should happen?
- Is the family member only just being told about a problem that has been going on for a while? Is he now upset that he was not informed earlier? Does the family member feel that the teacher does not understand the student because the two are of different races? How does this difference play a role?
- Does the family member feel that the teacher does not understand the student because the two are of different genders? How does this difference play a role?
- Does the family member feel that the teacher does not understand the student because the two are of different socioeconomic statuses? How does this difference play a role?

Furthermore, teachers should consider the following techniques when interacting with upset family members. Teachers can listen closely to the family member's tone of voice and what it is communicating. If a family member does get loud or upset, the teacher can take a deep breath and soften their tone of voice. This is a time for active listening. These actions can help deescalate the situation. By using strategies such as these, teachers can deepen their understanding of students' families, move beyond conflict, and build true partnerships that support student success.

Meeting Families in Person

When meeting families in person, teachers should be aware of their body language. Teachers should use open body language, such as avoiding crossing their arms. Open body language shows that a teacher is open and accessible. When sitting down with family members, teachers should be thoughtful about seating arrangements to balance the power dynamics. For instance, teachers should sit at the same table with families or use the same classroom chairs as their family member guests. Always let the family know beforehand who will be attending the meeting so that they are not surprised and do not feel intimidated when they enter the meeting room. Moves such as these make families feel as comfortable as possible.

In addition, when meeting with families, consider issues of access. Are all of the family-teacher meetings scheduled to occur in the school, or are they also situated in the communities? Do meeting times take into consideration the family members' work schedules? Have teachers considered doing home visits if families are interested (Ginsburg, 2011)? Such questions speak to the issue of equity in access and opportunity and are fundamental in building partnerships with families.

Connecting Family Members as Classroom Assets

The notion of bringing students' assets into the classroom can also be expanded upon with their families. In addition to families being knowledgeable about their children, they are also rich sources of knowledge for developing a caring classroom environment. This builds on the concept of funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge represent "a positive (and, we argue, realistic) view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great potential utility for classroom instruction" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 134). As teachers get to know families and their multitude of assets, teachers can invite families into the classroom to teach and facilitate in culturally responsive ways from their knowledge, skills, and experiences.

There are countless ways to create a bridge between families and the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995) discusses the importance of connecting families and schools, such as bringing in family members as artists or craftspeople in residence. This provides a meaningful opportunity to connect cultural knowledge to the classroom. An example of this occurred in Mr. Davis's sixth grade English language class. Mr. Davis invited his student Shaneeka's grandmother, Ms. Shamilah, to be an artist in residence during a unit in which students read a historical novel. Ms. Shamilah was known in the community for creating story quilts. Together they all decided on a scene from the novel they wanted to capture on a quilt for their class project. Ms. Shamilah taught the students how to create the quilt. Students also collaborated with the math teacher, Ms. Donaldson, who, along with Ms. Shamilah, helped students understand the measurements needed to create their quilt. Ms. Shamilah came to class a number of times throughout the month to carry out various aspects of the unit. This lesson was highly engaging. Students were so delighted by Ms. Shamilah's lessons that they remained focused and attentive the entire time.

Family members can be invaluable partners for classroom teachers. By taking the time to establish good relationships with families, teachers know that they have built strong bridges with their students' most fervent advocates. By being thoughtful about their communication with families, teachers can understand that conflict may happen and can be resolved successfully. By being mindful of how body language and space dynamics affect communication, teachers can successfully meet face to face with families in ways that nurture relationships. And by connecting family members' assets to the

classroom, teachers are taking many positive steps toward building true partnerships with families.

Partnering With Communities

Just as teachers can build partnerships with families, teachers can also build partnerships with community members and organizations. Indeed, community involvement in schools has positive effects on student achievement, delinquency rates, and student behavior (Hohlfeld et al., 2010). Building on the cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) of the community is also a very powerful way to extend the caring classroom environment and bring culturally responsive resources into the school. Again, students do not exist in isolation but are immersed in and shaped by families and communities. The more we understand, embrace, and connect to our students' community contexts, the more effective we will be in building relationships, developing culturally responsive curricula, and expanding our caring classroom environment.

One way community organizations can support students in schools is by offering social services needed by students and their families. Basic human needs must be met for significant learning to occur. Maslow (1943) detailed the five fundamental areas of human needs as physiological needs, safety, love and belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. Many of these were previously discussed in this chapter. A caring classroom environment must address these basic human needs. Addressing these needs is one way community organizations can become classroom partners. Although teachers should not be expected to meet all students' needs, they are well positioned to link their students to the many assets in their school and communities. With teachers as the first line of contact with students, knowing what assets and resources exist for students to access can be extraordinarily helpful and a powerful extension of the caring classroom environment. According to Favela and Torres (2014), "teachers can work with their school counselors and community organizations to connect students and their families to resources, solutions, and hope" (p. 51). Many communities have programs that address basic human needs, such as food banks, mental health supports, health clinics, and tutoring and mentoring programs for students. By teachers connecting students to such community assets, students feel cared for and are more likely to achieve.

For teachers to be effective with their students, it is imperative that they know their students' community contexts. One way for teachers to get know their students' community contexts is to spend quality time in the communities they serve and learn about all of their assets. Teachers can learn more about their students' communities by conducting a community resource analysis (Favela & Torres, 2014). This is a process by which teachers can explore and gain greater understanding about community assets, including schools, nonprofit organizations, houses of worship, businesses, health centers, entertainment, and libraries. Spending quality time in communities,

going to activities there, talking with community members, using businesses and such can be extremely beneficial in providing context and contacts for the classroom. Inviting community experts into the school and classroom have multiple benefits. Some of these benefits include the creation of school-community networks, the identification of role models, and promoting diverse perspectives (Favela & Torres, 2014). Bringing in community organizations connects communities and schools in meaningful culturally responsive ways, providing rich cultural contexts for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Communities are rich with assets and resources that can enhance classroom learning by increasing the relevance of the curriculum while communicating the message to students that their communities and their cultures matter, thus deepening the sense of care in the classroom.

VIGNETTE D: CONNECTING COMMUNITY ASSETS AND CLASSROOM LEARNING

Ms. Sanchez, a second grade teacher in an urban elementary school, was well known for her outreach with parents and communities. Community members were regularly brought into the classroom to read their favorite books, and elders shared firsthand accounts about the histories of their communities. Ms. Washington, a neighborhood electrician, came in to teach about the profession. Students knew Ms. Washington well, because in addition to being an electrician, she was also a pastor in a church down the street from the school. The students really enjoyed getting to see what she did and learning all of the math and science involved in her work. Ms. Washington loved coming back, because she had attended that elementary school as a child, and she enjoyed sharing what she knew about electricity. She also offered to come back to the school for parents' night and share information about electricity access programs for financially struggling families. Ms. Sanchez's classroom caring permeated the walls and reached into her students' homes and communities in meaningful ways that nurtured deep relationships and everyone's sense of belonging.

Lingering Questions

1. After Ms. Washington's visit, Ms. Sanchez wondered how she could reach out into the community and connect with other community members as well.
2. Ms. Sanchez also wondered how the community members could continue to support her reaching her curricular goals.
3. Ms. Sanchez also pondered ways her students' family members' assets could be connected to their classroom as well.

A caring classroom environment is one where teachers develop partnerships with students' families and communities. A number of strategies for building partnerships with families include being proactive about building relationship with families before any problems arise. Teachers can be mindful of how they negotiate any conflicts with families that may occur. Teachers can be thoughtful about how they interact with families when meeting face to face. Teachers can regard families as classroom assets to enrich student experiences. Similarly, community members can be regarded as classroom partners as well. By inviting community members into classroom spaces, teachers can make students' experiences between community and school more seamless and address students' needs as well.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the interconnectedness and importance of classrooms being student-centered, having high expectations and rigor for all, built on persistent practices, with partnerships with families and communities as a foundation for caring classroom environments. By being student-centered, we mean co-creating a classroom with students that is culturally responsive and addresses their learning needs in engaging ways. By having high expectations and rigor for all, we mean that the teachers believe in every student's ability to achieve at high levels, plan challenging lessons accordingly, and provide the needed supports for success. By having persistent practices, we mean that teachers are consistently being and doing in ways that nurture a caring classroom environment, including critical self-reflection, relationship building with students, maintaining a psychologically safe space for learning, and fostering critical hope and a sense of belonging in their classrooms. By partnerships with families and communities, we mean that teachers consistently build relationships with the people who are extensions of their students' lives in meaningful ways and connect their funds of knowledge to the classroom.

In other words, teachers should consistently show care and communicate meaningfully with students and their families, co-create classroom expectations around academics and behavior with their students, maintain high expectations for all, and show to students a belief that all can attain them, providing the necessary individualized academic and social emotional supports to reach them. Doing all this provides a nurturing, engaging classroom climate and culture where all students can thrive and succeed in ways that manage the classroom space effectively. These ways of being and doing also play an important role in disrupting the cradle-to-prison pipeline.

Student-Centered	Belief, High Expectations, and Rigor	Persistent Practices	Partner With Families and Communities
Students' culture, voice, needs, wants, and interests are centralized and amplified. Students have greater agency in the classroom.	Teachers' beliefs, biases, and critical self-awareness must be reflected on and fundamentally understood as the drivers of expectation (Devine et al., 2012).	Persistent practices are ways of being and doing consistently each day that create a caring classroom environment.	Meaningful collaboration with families and communities extends the caring classroom environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
Student-centered approaches are designed with students and teachers as co-creators of their expectations, accountability norms, pedagogy, and curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2009).	High expectations for all students are imperative for engagement and achievement (Pringle et al., 2010).	The warm demander approach requires deep caring for students and continually challenging them (Kleinfeld, 1975).	When partnering with families, focus on establishing relationships and working through conflict in ways that bond.
Use a why, what, and how approach to a student-centered classroom (McCarthy, 2015).	Rigor—simplicity through complexity—must be used, with an emphasis on scaffolding to meet the students where they are and continually challenging them (Paige et al., 2015).	Building trusting, caring relationships is the foundation for learning with one another (Milner, 2010).	Connect family and community assets and funds of knowledge to the classroom (Moll et al., 1992).
	Academic and social-emotional supports are required to ensure that all students have all they need to succeed.	Maintaining a psychologically safe space is a fundamental requirement for learning (Wanless, 2016).	Partnering with families and communities makes learning more culturally responsive (Gay, 2010).
		Foster critical hope toward what is possible with a critical eye, standing in solidarity with students (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).	Partnering with families and communities fulfills needs that nurture learning.
		Providing students with a strong sense of belonging in the classroom nurtures learning.	