

Emotional Health and Self-Renewal in Classrooms

(Originally titled "The 7 Habits of Highly Affective Teachers")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, author/consultant Rick Wormeli imagines some monologues that might be running through students' minds in an average classroom:

This stuff is stupid.

This stuff is awesome.

This stuff is beyond me.

I'm not comfortable with this.

Finally, something I'm good at.

Maybe somebody will notice I can't read.

Let's see her find a mistake in that one – it's perfect!

Does the teacher know I didn't study last night?

Students are by turns "anxious, overconfident, curious, indifferent, angry, amused, lonely, hopeful, embarrassed, empowered, afraid, excited, diminished," says Wormeli. Their emotions are often out of synch with the teacher's and with the school's expectation of conformity and compliance. Wormeli believes that when teachers ignore these emotional disconnects, they're jeopardizing teaching and learning – and their own mental health.

Wormeli suggests seven habits that teachers can use to foster a healthy emotional climate in their classrooms – and maintain their own sanity and humanity:

- ***Find joy in others' success.***

Celebrate students' intellectual milestones, says Wormeli. Give students an encouraging smile when they show improvement.

- ***Cultivate perspective and reframe.***

Don't take certain behaviors personally. Be kind rather than right some of the time. Try to see the big picture. "Teachers who have seen formerly frustrating students come back to visit as successful adults trust in the whole enterprise of schooling and growing up," says Wormeli.

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[Happy New Year](#)

Important Dates

January 4 th , 2016	School Resumes
January 15 th	Teacher Professional Day- No School
January 18 th	Martin Luther King Day- No School

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Due to one of our members at the CO being highly sensitive to any type of fragrance, we ask that staff visiting/meeting at the Administration building refrain from using any scented products. Fragrances from personal care products, air fresheners, laundry and other cleaning products have been associated with adversely affecting a person's health. We ask that we all work together to make the environment a safe and healthy workplace for everyone. Thank you very much for your cooperation!



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"Hall duty between classes isn't such a hardship when we realize it's an opportunity to connect with students outside class."

- **Look beyond stereotypes.**

There's a tendency to pigeonhole students: a class clown, a geek, a mean girl, a drama queen. "When we see people as fully developed thinkers, they become more to us than our quick categorization reveals," says Wormeli. Visiting students' homes or watching them play soccer, paint a landscape, perform in a concert, or celebrate a religious milestone, we see a different side of them. "They are not just one more paper to grade. We think of them specifically as we plan our lessons, and we look forward to watching them progress."

- **Candidly discuss pedagogical issues.**

Research tells us that certain practices are less than effective, says Wormeli: worksheet packets, lectures without opportunities to process content, oral dictation spelling tests as a measure of spelling, counting homework as 50 percent of a report card grade, percentage grades averaged together. Do we have frank discussions with colleagues about changing such practices? Do we work to persuade parents who push for outmoded practices?

- **Embrace humility.**

"If someone critiques our teaching, it feels like they're critiquing us," says Wormeli. "In humility, however, we grow comfortable with the idea that we may be wrong... Let's invite administrators, parents, and students to evaluate us at any time."

- **Value intellect.**

Teaching the same material year after year can be deadening. Wormeli suggests mixing things up curriculum-wise; attending an Edcamp; writing for publication; rethinking one's goals; writing a personal grading philosophy statement to make sure grades truly measure student learning.

- **Maintain passion and playfulness.**

"Having fun with your subject and your students will give students permission to engage, even invest, in their learning," says Wormeli, "and it will elevate your spirits." **Use props in lessons; play the part of different historical or literary characters; be a contestant in a review game; insert funny slides into presentations; make fun of your own errors; use students' names in test questions; get a colleague to**

burst into the classroom with a random piece of information; put a mystery box in the middle of the classroom with yellow police tape around it and a sign saying, Warning: Open one week from today, only in the presence of an adult.

"All these habits together create a feeling of emotional wellness," Wormeli concludes, "but they are habits, not incidents. Like muscles that atrophy in disuse, these habits have to be used frequently to achieve emotional health benefits."

"*The 7 Habits of Highly Affective Teachers*" by Rick Wormeli in *Educational Leadership*, October 2015 (Vol. 73, #2, p. 10-15), <http://bit.ly/1VjnUpp>; Wormeli can be reached at rwormeli@cox.net.

Teachers Being Clear About Task, Purpose, and Criteria for Success

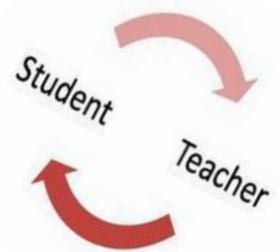
In this article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dan Berrett says that some college students [and K-12 students] run into trouble because academic expectations are not clear. It's as if there are unwritten rules that these students aren't privy to.

"As an increasingly broad and diverse cross-section of students enters higher education, knowing those rules matters more than ever," says Berrett. "Without them, students stumble. They might miss the point of a paper, drift during discussions, or feel overwhelmed or aimless."

Transparency with assignments is one key to these students gaining confidence, thriving academically, and feeling they belong. Researchers have zeroed in on three components that the most-effective instructors orchestrate and communicate to students: **The task** – What exactly are students being asked to do?

The purpose – Why should they do it? What important learning will flow from it?

The criteria – How will students' work be evaluated? "As minor and perhaps self-evident as the underlying questions may seem," says Berrett, "it's surprising how often they go unexamined... Spelling them out for students does not mean wholesale changes, like



flipping courses. It requires no fancy technology.” **Clarity of task**, purpose, and criteria help students meet higher expectations of rigor and ensure equity of educational quality. Attending to these factors also pushes instructors to think through their material at a deeper level and give assignments that benefit all students.

Why don't some instructors use these simple steps?

Because they “often take for granted the logic and the rhythm of their courses,” says Berrett. “Some have forgotten how much they know and care about the material relative to their students... An assignment can become an old standard, reliable but creaky.” When an instructor is on autopilot, what the assignment is all about, and what it takes to be successful, may seem *obvious* – but to some students, it’s anything but. Some instructors also believe that being this explicit about assignments is hand-holding; students should be able to figure out assignments by themselves. And some instructors think that showing students they care about them at a personal level is more important than being explicit about task, purpose, and criteria.

“**Understanding the rules of the game** is one of the most difficult parts for historically underrepresented students,” says Tara Yosso of the University of Michigan/Ann Arbor. This “navigational capital” needs to be developed, and explicitness, along with good teaching and caring, is how it’s done. When instructors explain material clearly, use good examples to explore difficult points, are well prepared, and have a solid command of their subject, students notice and appreciate it – and are more successful academically.

“**The Unwritten Rules of College**” by Dan Berrett in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 25, 2015 (Vol. LXII, #4, p. A26-A29), e-link for subscribers only

SMART Goals in Action

In this article in *ASCA School Counselor*, Carol Kaffenberger (Johns Hopkins University) and Mark Kuranz (ASCA professional development director) suggest ways to work with **SMART goals** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound). The article is written from a counseling perspective, but their tips apply to any goal-writing process.

- **Review school data.** Look for issues with

achievement, attendance, or behavior by demographic categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, SES, or grade level. What issues are creating barriers for students? Do any patterns emerge on bullying, behavior referrals, student self-harm, attendance, achievement, or safety?

- **Connect program goals to the school’s data.** Here’s an example of how a school goal ripples down to action for students:

School improvement plan goal: By June 2016, at least 50 percent of seventh-graders on the Math Watch List will score Proficient or above on the state math test.

Teacher’s goal: By June 2016, seventh-graders on the Voyager team with math grades of D or F will improve by one letter grade.

Counselor’s goal: By June 2016, 75 percent of seventh-graders on the Math Watch List will pass the state math test.

Counseling strategies: Individual and small-group counseling involving goal-setting, motivation strategies, and academic support; parent/teacher conferences; consultation with teachers; mentor programs; and incentives.

- **Identify who will receive interventions.** For example, seventh-graders with more than one D/F grade at the end of the first marking period, or K-3 students with six or more absences in the first month of school, or ninth graders with three or more discipline reports in the first quarter.

- **Set goals for each of the SMART goal**

acronym categories: **Specific:** Focused on one domain and data point, for example, achievement, attendance, or behavior, and one specific group; **Measurable:** For example, grades, days absent or tardy, PBIS data, report card marks; **Attainable:** Set a target that is a stretch but still possible, for example, third graders who missed 10 days of school in the first marking period will increase attendance by five days during the last two marking periods; **Results-oriented:** the goal is written in terms of actual outcomes or measurable changes in perceptions; **Time-bound:** typically, SMART goals are written to be achieved in one school year.

- **Use the SMART goal statement format.**

For example, By June 2016, 90 percent of ninth graders with three or more discipline referrals during the first month of school will decrease referrals to



none in the last marking period.

- Complete an action plan for accomplishing each goal.

Begin by identifying the baseline information and the perception data you will need to measure the effectiveness of the intervention. Then identify students, choose interventions, and launch the intervention.

- Collect before and after data.

This usually involves surveys, pre-tests, needs assessments, or program evaluations of beliefs, attitudes, and competencies to create the baseline and guide the intervention, then review of post-data to evaluate changes.

- Analyze the data at the end of the year

(or measurement period). Were the SMART goals achieved? What do the data tell us? What are the implications going forward?

- Share the results with stakeholders.

Charts and graphs can complement the presentation to make the results vivid and understandable and spark thoughtful discussion.

"10 Tips for SMART Goals" by Carol Kaffenberger and Mark Kuranz in *ASCA School Counselor*, September/October 2015 (Vol. 53, #1, p. 28-31), www.schoolcounselor.org; the authors can be reached at ckaffenb@gmail.com and mkuranz@schoolcounselor.org.

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.

~Carl Jung

Handling Confrontations with Particularly Challenging Students

In this *AMLE Magazine* article, consultant Grace Dearborn list some qualities exhibited by teachers who still love their work after 15-20 years in the classroom:

They use effective tools for handling student misbehavior.

They empathize with negative experiences students

may be having outside the classroom that cause disruptive school behaviors.

They aren't discouraged by occasional bad days or bad moments.

They don't see themselves as failures when a student doesn't succeed or change.

"Still," says Dearborn, "managing difficult student behaviors eventually sucks the energy from most teachers, no matter how talented or experienced... So how can we help our most challenging students without completely depleting ourselves?"

Students with serious behavior problems have learned the hard way that adults are not trustworthy – in fact, will eventually abandon or abuse them, physically or psychologically. Deep inside, these kids hope to find an exception – a genuinely trustworthy grown-up – so they act out, putting teachers through multiple tests to see if they might be the one. "We are only human," says Dearborn, "and in the face of such a protracted onslaught of negative behaviors that gets worse over time no matter how safe, structured, and consistent we are, no matter what consequences we use, we eventually give up. Eventually we get exhausted... And now we are just another statistic in their growing body of evidence against adults."

When teachers are on the verge of giving up, Dearborn suggests an unusual strategy: "Imagine that all your students have an invisible subtitle running along in front of them that is communicating to the adults in their lives what they really need. Everything else – the nonsense that comes out of their mouths and bodies during difficult interactions – is just noise, interference meant to get in the way of our reading and responding to their subtitle." For example, what the student says is, "This is stupid! Why we gotta do this?" The subtitle reads, *This is hard for me. Help me to succeed and let me save face, too.* Responding to the subtitle, a teacher might say, "Yes. I know this is hard and sometimes hard things feel unnecessary and we want to avoid them. But I'm here to help. Let's work it out."

Dearborn admits that students' outbursts and resistance often tax our patience. "When that happens," she says, "it's harder for me to stay calm enough to remember to look for the subtitle, especially if I feel personally attacked." At such times, she conjures up several default subtitles:

***Please help me! Don't give up on me!
What can I do right now to behave better?***



“Any one of these helps me stay calm and respond productively to their misbehavior instead of unintentionally escalating the confrontation,” she says. “Remember, my baseline assumption is that student outbursts are tests to pass, not a show of disrespect. Consequently, it’s not personal; it’s a cry for help.”

Dearborn recommends a six-step process when a student irrationally resists a request to do something (or stop doing something):

- **Assume the best.** “I can pass the test by being safe, structured, and consistent,” she says. “The student wants me to pass the test.”
- **Soft eyes, soft voice.** Be calm, Dearborn advises. “I need that calm to be expressed in both my verbal and body language. If I concentrate on keeping the muscles around my eyes soft, or neutral, my voice will naturally follow.”
- **Offer a choice.** Kids need to know that they can comply or continue to resist, and whatever they choose, there will be a consequence.
- **Respect the choice made.** This is not personal, says Dearborn. “I am not being attacked or disrespected. It is just a test.”
- **Give the consequence.** This can be positive or negative, depending on the choice the student makes.
- **Escalate the choice.** If the student chooses not to comply, another more uncomfortable consequence is calmly proffered. This continues until the student complies – or is temporarily removed from the interaction or class.

“Struggling teachers sometimes hold the belief that respect is something that should automatically be afforded them because they are the adult authority figure in the room,” says Dearborn, “rather than something they must earn through a series of interactions over time. Or, from the student’s perspective, a series of tests being passed over time... [J]ust because students don’t change on the outside (behavior), that doesn’t mean they aren’t changing on the inside (belief). Some kids are battling a lifetime of not being able to trust adults. Some kids need to experience more than one year of consistent, loving accountability in order to internalize trust.”

“**Compassionate Discipline: Dealing with Difficult Students**” by Grace Dearborn in *AMLE Magazine*, September 2015 (Vol. 3, #2, p. 8-11), www.amle.org; Dearborn can be reached at grace@consciousteaching.com.



Addressing Various Parent Concerns

In this article in *Principal Leadership*, New Jersey social worker/family therapist Brett Novick lists some troublesome parent behaviors and suggests ways to deal with each one:

- **My child is never at fault** – “Stick to the facts,” advises Novick. “Document your conversations... Documentation can help clarify facts, reduce emotional exaggeration, and avoid legal disputes.” To prevent teachers, administrators, and other adults being played off against each other, he suggests including the student in meetings.
- **The teacher or administrator must be wrong about what my child did** – Let the parent have his or her say first, says Novick. “Encouraging parents to share their worries first enables you to remind them in a firm-yet-understanding tone that the rules of the school apply even if they don’t necessarily agree with all of them.” It’s helpful to have another educator present at the meeting.
- **He’s your problem now** – “Some parents are drowning in a world of financial despair and/or emotional, physical, or family issues,” says Novick. “First, see if these survival concerns are being met.” If the parent isn’t in a position to help with a child’s issues, work with the school counselor to find rewards, motivations, and consequences within the school.
- **Second-guessing teachers and administrators** – Don’t always assume the worst and avoid getting defensive, says Novick. The parent may be using questions about the curriculum and other matters to

-understand what's going on and feel part of a child's education. "The more information that these parents have on the front-end, the less apt they are to question how things were handled on the back-end," he says.

- **Harassing, intimidating, or bullying behaviors** – When parents are in this mode, Novick advises against using e-mail (it can come across as confrontational) or picking up the phone while angry. Timeliness is also important – getting to the parent with the school's side of the story before the child has a chance to stoke anger at home.

- **My child will attend school when he or she chooses to** – Look for patterns in children's absence, advises Novick, as well as signs of abuse or neglect, and provide missed work for chronically absent children.

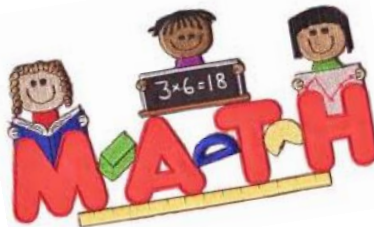
- **Passive-aggressive behavior** – Becoming too friendly with parents – accepting a daily cup of coffee or a bagel, chatting on social media or the soccer field, accepting a compliment that includes an invidious comparison with another educator – can come back to haunt you, says Novick. Maintain appropriate boundaries at all times.

- **My child is being victimized by teachers (or other students)** – Steer the conversation away from blaming or victimizing, says Novick. "Remind them that it is the behavior that you are addressing. You are not condemning their child's character or, consequently, their parenting skills." In addition, it's important for the school to work toward consistent discipline policies from classroom to classroom.

- **Helicoptering** – Be proactive in contacting these parents and affirming their deep and passionate concern for their children's well-being. "These parents are concerned that their child will not be able to handle the proverbial 'real world' without their intervention," says Novick. "When you report successes to the parents, it helps them to realize that they do not have to do everything for their child."

- **Distrustful of public schools, administrators, and teachers** – "Don't focus on being right or wrong," says Novick. "Focus on what is right for the student." And look for face-saving "win-win" solutions.

"The 10 Most Challenging Types of Parents – and How to Work With Them" by Brett Novick in *Principal Leadership*, September 2015 (Vol. 15, #1, p. 44-48), no e-link available



Getting Students Talking to Each Other About Math

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Megan Franke, Angela Turrou, Noreen Webb, Jacqueline Wong, Nami Shin, and Cecilia Fernandez (University of California/Los Angeles) and Marsha Ing

(University of California/Riverside) examine ways to get students to engage with each others' mathematical ideas. "Researchers increasingly recognize," say the authors, "that promoting mathematical learning requires teachers to engage students in 'productive struggle,' where students expend effort to make sense of mathematics and figure out something that is not immediately apparent. One way students can productively struggle with the mathematics is through their communication with others – both through explaining one's own thought processes (e.g., reasoning about mathematical concepts and how to solve problems) and discussing other students' reasoning process."

This sounds good in theory, but implementing it in classrooms is not a simple matter. It's relatively straightforward to get students talking about math problems, say Franke and her colleagues, but getting classrooms to the level of "productive struggle" is quite challenging. Here is a continuum of students' degree of engagement with other students' ideas, from low to high:

Saying "I agree" or "I disagree" with an idea that was shared.

Pointing to the strategy that most closely resembles their own strategy.

Repeating the details of what a student shared.

Explaining another student's strategy after it was written on the board.

Adding further detail to another student's strategy.

Providing a correction to an problematic portion of a student's solution.

Proposing an alternative solution and explaining how it differs from the idea already posed.

Co-constructing a solution with another student.

The researchers observed a number of teacher "invitations" designed to elicit higher-level mathematical discourse:

Asking a student to explain someone else's solution – "Joey, can you explain what Natalia did?"

Discussing differences between solutions – “Let’s look again at what Dylan said. Dylan said it is a whole number. Stella, do you want to respond to that, given what you said to start with?”

Making a suggestion to another student about his or her idea – “What is he going to have to do with that set of numbers, with 387? What does he have to do, Grayson?”

Connecting students’ ideas to other’ ideas – “Joaquin, can you see what Enrique is doing or what Natalia is doing and see if it looks like yours? Or if it’s different?”

Getting a student to create a solution with another student – “Griffin, why don’t you sit down and work on the problem together with Easton?”

Using a solution that was shared by another student – “See how Paige counted? Could you take this problem and count like her?”

As they observed classrooms in a California elementary school, Franke and her colleagues noticed three challenges that teachers faced as they tried to orchestrate good mathematical discussions:

Students sometimes seemed unable to engage with each others’ ideas.

Students sometimes provided little or no detail about others’ thinking;

At times, students provided details but didn’t address the mathematical ideas underlying other students’ strategies.

In other words, say the researchers, “just inviting students to engage with others will not guarantee that students will, in fact, engage with each other, nor necessarily engage in ways that are supportive of mathematical learning.”

When discussions fizzled, there were big differences in how teachers reacted. Some provided their own solution. Some moved on to another topic. But some teachers had a broader repertoire of in-the-moment strategies: probes (pressing students to engage further); scaffolding (providing some information or clarification); and positioning (interacting with students in ways that acknowledge the students’ connection with the math idea being discussed – for example, “What Aaron’s saying is that four-fourths is a whole, or one. That’s what he says. What do you say to that?”). These teacher moves, say the authors, “require not only pedagogical skill and knowledge, but also pedagogical content knowledge and mathematical content knowledge, and well as

identities as teachers who see each of their students as capable. We need to better understand how teachers draw on their knowledge and identities as they make their in-the-moment decisions.”

“We never saw a teacher use the same series of support moves more than once,” say the researchers, “even in response to the same kinds of challenges. This implies that the teacher support moves were not a set of fully planned actions that could be applied repeatedly in the same way, but rather served as a repertoire of pedagogical moves that teachers drew upon in the moment. Our findings resonate with those of previous researchers and suggest that understanding the teacher moves that support student thinking requires looking beyond the first move a teacher makes and toward how teachers extend their interactions with students to support opportunities for productive struggle.” This involves a sophisticated knowledge that takes into account the student, the math, and the context – something teachers develop with years of experience, interaction with colleagues, and high-quality professional development.

The researchers close with a description of what happens when classroom mathematics discussions are at their best: “Teachers learn about content, about the development of student thinking, about their students as mathematics learners

and people, and about how to support their students. The students, while learning mathematical content, learn how to listen to one another, how to ask a question that moves the mathematics forward, and how to position their ideas in relation to others’ ideas. The interaction among the teacher and students supports students to learn to persevere as they communicate with each other and productively struggle to understand and articulate each others’ ideas.”

“Student Engagement with Others’ Mathematical Ideas: The Role of Teacher Invitation and Support Moves” by Megan Franke, Angela Turrou, Noreen Webb, Marsha Ing, Jacqueline Wong, Nami Shin, and Cecilia Fernandez in *The Elementary School Journal*, September 2015 (Vol. 116, #1, p. 126-148), available for purchase at <http://bit.ly/1NezQjd>

