

STUDENTS LEARN BEST WHEN THEY FEEL KNOWN, VALUED, AND RESPECTED BY BOTH THE ADULTS IN THE SCHOOL AND THEIR PEERS.

Theory of Action for Teachers

If we focus on knowing our students, demonstrate that we value them as thinkers and learners, and develop positive relationships with them individually and collectively; *then* disruptive behavior will decrease, students will be more engaged, and they will feel more connected to the school community.

Why It Matters

Teacher, parent, mentor, and peer relationships influence student engagement. Feelings of relatedness, in addition to competence and autonomy, are basic psychological needs. When these needs are met, people tend to be more personally motivated, leading to better performance and increased wellbeing. In such relationships, students can thrive, learn, and grow (see Exhibit 1). Research indicates engaging classrooms are both challenging and supportive led by a “warm demander” (see Exhibit 2). The number of strong relationships reported by youth are positively related to academic motivation, socio-emotional skills, and responsibility and inversely related with high-risk behaviors.

As academic challenge increase the greater the need for relational supports. Children are more motivated and willing to take learning risks when they feel supported by and positively related to others. While research suggests positive relationships are important to all students, they appear to matter particularly in adolescence. Middle school students with high levels of teacher support are almost three times more likely to have high levels of engagement. Middle school students who reported better student-teacher relationships were 8 times more likely to stick with a challenging task, enjoy hard work, and accept mistakes when learning

Unfortunately, quality student-teacher relationships are important but rare. The percentage of students reporting that teachers care and push them to be their best decreased from about a third of students in 6th grade to only 16% in 12th grade.

What It Looks & Sounds Like

- ◆ **Physically greet each student as they enter the classroom** by saying, “hello” and their name. This can minimize disruptive behavior and increases engagement
- ◆ **Correctly pronounce every student’s name.** If you’ve got it wrong for a while say: “You know what? I think I’ve been messing up your name all year, and I’m sorry. I want to say it perfectly. Can you teach me?”
- ◆ **Check that your displays and curriculum materials include diverse representation.** Make sure that every student can “see themselves” in your classroom.
- ◆ **Use restorative justice practices to approach transgressions with curiosity.** Ask, “What happened? What went through your mind at the time? How do you view the event now? Who was affected by your behavior? What do you need to do to repair the damage?” Students won’t be able to restore a relationship if they don’t understand how their behavior impacted someone.
- ◆ **Build social capital.** Get to know your students and build relationships early before you have to troubleshoot.
- ◆ **Be intentional about words, body language, and tone.** Show genuine interest, curiosity and care. Avoid sarcasm, it usually backfires.
- ◆ **See and appeal to the best in all students and help them to take responsibility to be better.** Ask, “I’m curious—do you think you’ve been your best self lately?”

Reflecting & Taking Stock

- ◆ Reflect on what gets valued, shared, and celebrated in your classroom:
 - ✓ Does my response to student mistakes indicate that they are a sign of failure or an opportunity for learning?
 - ✓ What is celebrated in the classroom: grades, progress, personal growth, something else?
 - ✓ What does the seating arrangement in the classroom communicate? Does it reflect a community orientation?
 - ✓ Are ALL my students’ backgrounds, cultures, genders, neighborhoods, and sexualities represented in the visuals, literature, and examples in my classroom?”
- ◆ Use Relationship Mapping to create a visual snapshot of students who are well supported and who most need support in your school.

Require all faculty and staff to stop by the meeting room in advance of the meeting in order to carefully consider their relationships with each student. Post the following directions near the chart of student names:

Please place a yellow dot to the left of the name of any student with whom you have a positive, trusting relationship and whom you believe would come to you if they had a personal problem.

Place a red dot to the right of the name of any student you believe may be at risk for academic, personal, or other reasons.

Pay particular attention to students you teach or work with, but look at the full list to identify any student with whom you may have developed relationships.

It is okay to place both red and yellow dots next to the same student’s name.

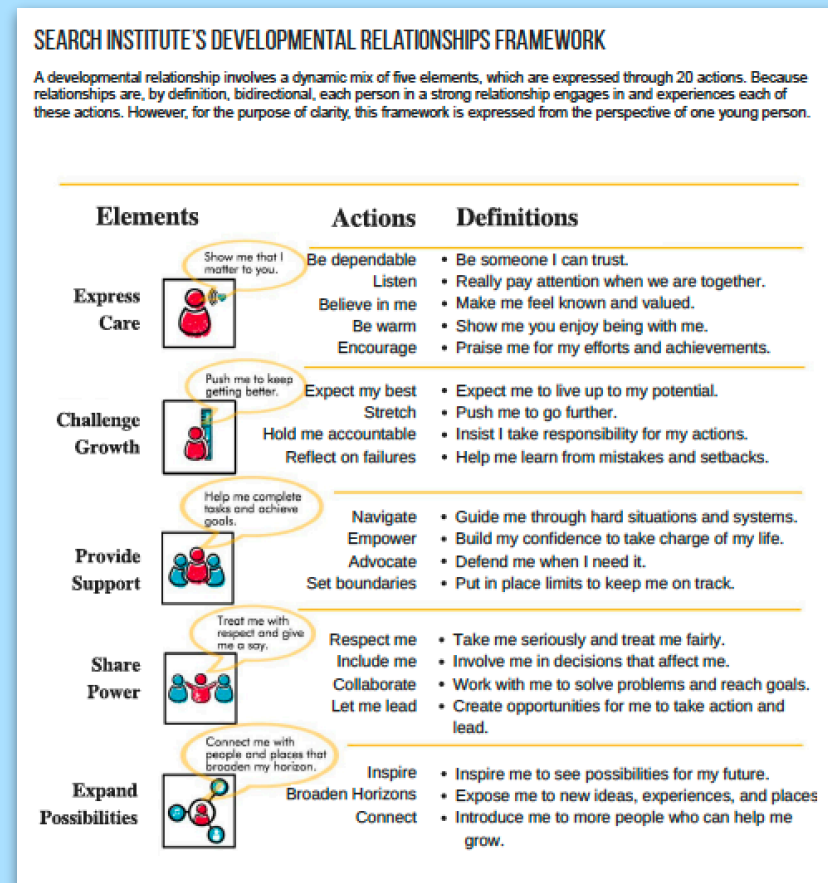
Here is an example of how to set up A Relationship Map. List all students. Have adults place stickers next to students with whom they have a positive relationship and who they believe may be “at risk” academically, personally, or socially.

Positive Relationship?	Student Name	At risk?
●●●●●	Michelle B.	
●	Mike S.	●●
	Jake Z.	●●●●●

- ✓ What interesting or surprising details do you notice?
- ✓ What questions or reflections does the map evoke?
- ✓ What possible factors contribute to some students having more yellow dots than others? More red dots?
- ✓ What kinds of school-wide changes can be made to increase the number of yellow dots for students? Decrease the number of red dots?

Exhibit 1

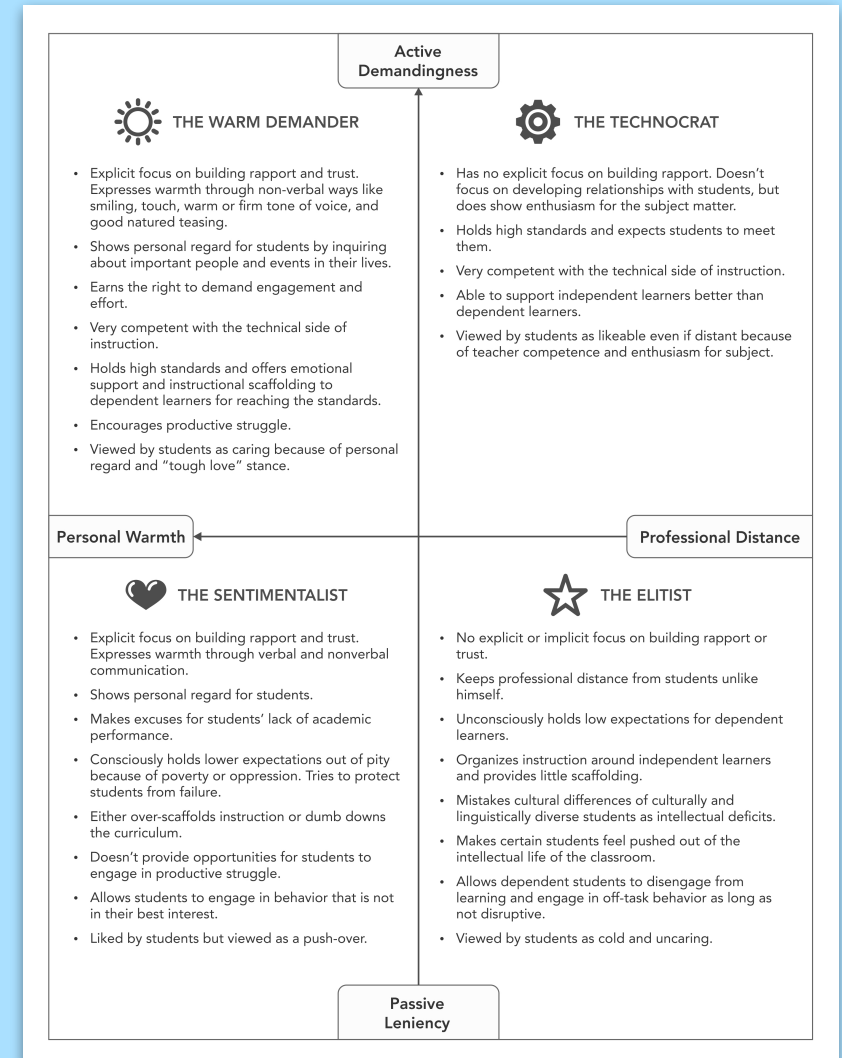
The Search Institute's "Developmental Relationships Framework" grew out of focus groups with youth, parents, educators, youth workers, and others; a wide-ranging review of existing research; extensive analysis of existing data; and input from both scholars and practitioners. It also builds on The Search Institute's landmark research with more than 5 million youth to identify the critical supports and strengths youth need to thrive. Developmental relationships are defined as relationships that cause individuals to thrive, learn, and grow. The framework below identifies five key dimensions of such relationships; each expressed from the viewpoint of a student.



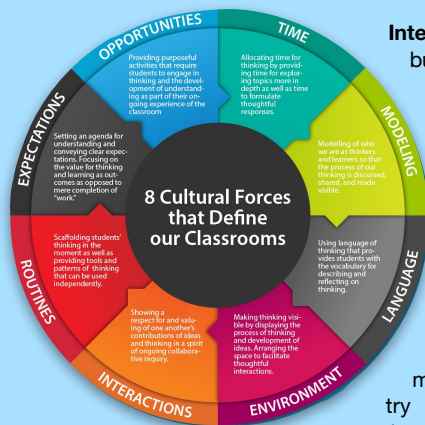
The Search Institute, 2017

Exhibit 2

It is important for teachers to be both warm, approachable, and welcoming as well as having high standards for students and providing supports for producing quality work. When students feel included, supported and challenged, they do their best learning. These qualities come together under the characterization of a "Warm Demander."



Connection to the Cultural Forces



Interactions and the relationships that get built through those interactions are the prime cultural force implicated by principle #4. Our interactions must show a respect for and an interest in our students' thinking, their ideas, and what they contribute to the class community as a whole. It is important that our interactions be sincere, honest, and genuine. This often takes the form of being curious about our students and who they are. It also means approaching misbehavior from a frame of curiosity to try to understand the situation, what motivated it, and how it can be repaired rather than from a punitive stance. Take students seriously as important people who have something to contribute to the world.

Time. Teachers invest time in building quality relationships early in the year. Think of this as social capital that will pay off when the going gets rough or there is a need to troubleshoot or intervene.

Modeling. Through our interactions with students we model how to treat one another and thus build community in our classroom.

Language. When students misbehave, be wary of using words like "should" that carry judgment, and avoid language that assigns blame. Don't say you're "shocked" or "appalled," for example. Similarly, sarcasm, name-calling, and threats are unproductive and only serve to humiliate students. Watch your body language and tone to project both openness and caring. Use "we" to include yourself and create community wherever you can.

Environment. Make sure the physical environment has representations of ALL students' backgrounds, cultures, genders, neighborhoods, and sexualities in the visuals, literature, and examples in my classroom. Organize seating to facilitate community and communication. Can students see one another when talking?

Routines. Don't expect students to know how to interact, collaborate, listen or even talk to one another appropriately and effectively at the beginning of the year. Use routines and protocols that help students learn these behaviors.

Opportunities. Create opportunities for growth and challenge while providing support (i.e., be a Warm Demander). Press for thinking and push for quality. Allow students to take risks, try new things, exert control, and learn from their mistakes. Involve students in decision making and share power.

Expectations. Encourage students to live up to their potential and take responsibility for their actions. Communicate that you believe in students not just in the short term but also in the long-haul.

In Your Own Classroom

Observables: What would I expect to see and others to notice in my classroom if I attend deeply to the principle?

Action-ables: What actions can I take to move this principle forward in my classroom?

Ponder-ables: What questions can I use to guide my reflection on this principle both now and throughout the year?

Quick Data. What "quick data" might I collect to give me a snapshot of where things are at in my classroom with respect to this principle?

RESOURCES

How students of color confront impostor syndrome. TED Talk, Video, 10 minutes

In this 10 min TED talk, Dena Simmons (Teacher and Director of Education, Yale Center for Social Emotional Intelligence) expresses an idea central to this principle: we need loving classrooms that makes students feel proud of who they are.

Q&A: Teachers' Cues Shape Students' Sense of Belonging, Education Wee, Teacher resource, 2 pages

A Q&A with Dena Simmons (see above Ted Talk) A student's environment relates to their confidence about performing in that environment. The author talks about her experience as a black student in a mostly white boarding school.

Breaking the cycle of mistrust: Wise interventions to provide critical feedback across the racial divide. The Journal of Social Psychology, Research Article, 21 pages.

This summarizes 3 double-blind studies that looked at how small changes in how teachers give feedback impacts student performance. Effects were generally largest for African American students who felt more mistrust of school.

Important Questions to Ask Your Students. Edutopia, Teacher resource, 2 pages

This includes a list of questions for teachers and parents students to uncover what helps them learn, feel valued, and be resilient.

Improving Teacher Empathy to Improve Student Behavior. Dr. Robert Brooks Blog, Teacher resource, 3 pages.

Dr. Robert Brooks explains that empathy is a foundational skill for building meaningful relationships and for a fulfilling, resilient life. He encourages developing an "empathetic mindset" rather than a "default punitive mindset" to enhance teacher-student relationships, promote learning, and lessen disruptive behaviors.

Students Care if You Care. Blog, Teacher resource, 2 pages

Master teacher and middle school math teacher explains why she thinks building a relationship with students is the most important tenet of teaching. Relationships improve your understanding of the student, cultivate mutual respect, and increase student engagement.

The Teacher as Warm Demander. ASCD, 6 pages.

Beyond developing skill in lesson planning, to engage students, establish a positive environment by showing children that you care and that you won't give up on them.

Creating a Culture of Respect Through Implicit Curriculum. Middle School Journal. Research Article, 8 Pages.

The affective and overt behaviors of every person in a school setting convey messages about the "hidden" curriculum of the school and influence school culture. This fact is especially true of teachers, who teach "who they are" with every interaction they have with students, parents, and colleagues.

On Listening to What the Children Say. Harvard Educational Review , Article, 11 pages

Master kindergarten teacher Vivian Paley uses her experiences to illustrate the importance of listening. To better understand how teacher interactions influenced students, the teacher tape-recorded class conversations.

60-Second Strategy: Appreciation, Apology, Aha! Edutopia, Video, Teacher resource, 1 min

This short video captures a class using a closing circle activity to build community. Incorporating classroom routines that give students an opportunity to reflect, share, and improve relationships with their peers

The Take Care of Me List. Blog, 3 pages

A middle school teacher explains that she developed the "take care of me list" assignment to communicate clearly that every student matters.

Connecting to "The Who": The Primacy of Supportive Relationships.

Optimal Learning Environments to Promote Student Engagement. Book Chapter. 24 pages.

A review of the literature on student relationships concludes that teacher, parent, mentor, and peer relationships, not just grades, explain why students care about school. This social support is also one of the biggest predictors of student life satisfaction. The impact of relationships appears to increase in adolescence. "Middle school students with high levels of teacher support are almost three times more likely to have high levels of engagement"