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INTRODUCTION

The Need for No-Nonsense Nurturers

Necessity is the mother of invention.

—Plato

In my travels as an educational consultant and executive coach, I am constantly reminded of a reality that all too many educators face. While many are well prepared in curriculum, most are not prepared to handle classroom management or support the academic culture necessary for all students to succeed. Teachers spend years studying at universities to learn how to effectively prepare lessons and reach students through content. Yet all that time and expense is potentially meaningless if students don't see your classroom as a culture of high expectations deeply embedded with a relentless belief in what is possible for them.

Because teachers aren't typically well trained in how to develop and maintain a classroom culture that balances strong management with high expectations and relationships, I can only imagine how first-year teachers will feel in their fifth, sixth, seventh, or even twentieth year of teaching. Many teachers will still be struggling with the same issues—disruptive behavior, low engagement, and test scores that don't represent their relentless efforts. *Frustrated* probably doesn't begin to describe their state of mind. This book presents the strategies, concepts, and philosophies of high-performing teachers, each a No-Nonsense Nurturer, and the lessons, mindsets, and strategies we all should have been taught in our teacher preparation programs. Here, in the introduction, I investigate the need and reason for No-Nonsense Nurturers.

The Problem

Since the late 1980s, the education community—educators, reporters, parents, communities, and politicians—have documented the supposed failure of U.S. public schools.

Especially in urban contexts, they place much of the blame directly on teachers and students' families. I believe that this blame is misplaced, and a vital cause stakeholders often overlook or discount is the acute lack of classroom management training the majority of teachers receive (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Chang, 2009; Marzano, 2003). Because teacher preparation programs have not addressed this need effectively, it is one of the major reasons our profession loses so many educators with unending potential. Therefore, effective classroom management is one of the central themes of this book.

Throughout the book, the terms *classroom management* and *classroom culture* are interchangeable because they are related, but it is important to define and think about them to support your understanding as you read. *Classroom management* refers to the strategies and structures teachers use to keep an orderly, high-functioning environment where students can engage in on-task behaviors that lead to rigorous learning objectives. Classroom management is in service of classroom culture. *Classroom culture* involves the established values, beliefs, and rituals of a classroom that enable strong relationships and high expectations among teacher and students so teaching and learning thrive. With a strong classroom culture, adults and youth are all teachers and learners who share the knowledge, roles, and responsibilities in the classroom environment.

Research validates the importance of teachers' need for effective classroom management training. A major study from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2010) finds the key to raising students' academic performance is a teacher's ability to establish a positive, disruption-free classroom culture with effective classroom management that promotes student learning.

Other research validates the conclusions of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2010) study.

- ▶ Eighty-five percent of new teachers are particularly unprepared or underprepared for dealing with behavior problems in their classroom (Aloe et al., 2014; Hudson, 2012; Public Agenda, 2004).
- ▶ In many classrooms, teachers spend half of their class time trying to deal with disruptive behavior (Chang, 2009; Cotton & Wiklund 1990; Dicke et al., 2014; Hudson, 2012; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). This is time they could spend on teaching and working on critical-thinking skills.

A report from the National Council on Teacher Quality on teacher training programs summarizes the reality all too many teachers face: “New teachers deserve better. It is time for teacher prep programs to focus on classroom management so that first-year teachers are prepared on day one to head off potential disruption *before* it starts” (Greenberg, Putman, & Walsh, 2014, p. i).

If research identifies the lack of classroom management training as a problem, why don't teacher preparation programs tackle it in order to better prepare and equip future educators? While I have struggled to find research on this, I would hypothesize that classroom management is more difficult to address than other education domains. Why? Because to manage classrooms well, teacher educators and universities would need to evaluate and confront the middle-class cultural norms that are interwoven into the fabric of U.S. school systems (Nieto, 2002; Rist, 1970).

The structural inequities in schools and throughout the history of U.S. public education created norms about behavior and expectations that prioritize white, middle-class values. These cultural norms, which no longer represent most of the students we serve, are particularly evident in classroom management because the discipline in schools is highly cultural—subject to a person's race, gender, and socioeconomic upbringing (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001). Taking on these historical inequities in public education systems would require a deep analysis of culture and race, something that may be uncomfortable, yet necessary for all educators to evaluate.

The Impact

Research indicates the issues that result from ineffective classroom management training have a profoundly negative impact on both teachers and their students.

- ▶ More than 54 percent of teachers in schools feel discipline problems hinder their ability to teach their students (Aloe et al., 2014; Hudson, 2012; Public Agenda, 2004).
- ▶ More than 40 percent of teachers quit or are fired from schools within five years, the major reason being their inability to deal with student behavior (Aloe et al., 2014; Chang, 2009; Public Agenda, 2004; Siwatu, 2011).
- ▶ Students in urban schools have more new, untrained teachers, resulting in lower academic performance than their higher-socioeconomic peers (Emdin, 2016; Marzano, 2003; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Siwatu, 2011).

4 | EVERY STUDENT, EVERY DAY

- ▶ Students report a sense of alienation from school, believing that no one cares about them (Delpit, 2006; Jensen, 2009; Libbey, 2004; Mouton, Hawkins, McPherson, & Copley, 1996).

Noting this lack of classroom management training and its impact are important for two reasons. First, teacher preparation programs need to better prepare future teachers' abilities to manage classrooms and build strong cultures. It is imperative for all teachers to receive training to effectively establish environments that serve all students from their first day. It is my hope that this book provides a start to this solution, leading teachers and schools to create classroom cultures conducive to student achievement.

Second, if you are reading this book and struggling with classroom management and culture, it is not your fault! You likely never received the proper training or feedback to support the wide variety of student needs and personalities in your classroom. However, it is your professional responsibility to improve your practice as an educator. Reading this book, working through the activities, and reflecting on your current practice support this professional obligation.

I also suggest administrators consider using this book strategically with the professional learning community (PLC) model and as professional development in an effort to align a coherent vision for classroom culture, establish a common language, and set a schoolwide approach to support staff and students. Immense growth occurs in schools when staff work collectively toward practices that embody empowered mindsets and efficacy (Hattie, 2016).

Mindsets refers to the beliefs that affect educators' attitudes and how they view, interpret, and respond to interactions with students and their families. Teachers' cultural beliefs influence their mindsets and impact their points of view, values, and assumptions. Mindsets influence decision making and can empower or disempower relationships with students. However, when teachers understand and reflect on their own mindsets, they can transform them to help build stronger relationships and increase student achievement (Dweck, 2007).

The reality is, the overwhelming majority of teachers, particularly those teaching in traditionally disenfranchised communities or diverse communities, unknowingly harbor disempowering mindsets about the abilities and cultural experiences of their students (Hudson, 2012; Marzano, 2010; Siwatu, 2011). While this may be unintentional, harm to students is immeasurable, as it reflects the larger deficit narrative that much of the education system harbors. Often, this deficit orientation is magnified when teachers haven't had opportunities to reflect on how their mindsets may

be impacting their actions. Mindsets impact classroom management more than any other part of education. Why? Because as we manage our classrooms and work to establish cultures for academic success, we bring in our own cultural norms that may or may not match those of our students (Aloe et al., 2014; Hammond, 2015).

Approximately 82 percent of teachers in U.S. public education are of European descent, while only 50 percent of students share a similar background (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Students in U.S. classrooms are far more diverse than their teachers, and this can be cause for miscommunications and misinterpretations when it comes to classroom expectations. Understanding the cultural and socioeconomic similarities and differences teachers share with students can significantly improve our abilities to support, build relationships with, and teach our students. The authentic relationships we build with students empower our mindsets because they teach us about what is important to students in their communities and in their homes. It is only when we build authentic, deep relationships and learn about students' cultural experiences that we can provide highly engaging, student-focused classrooms.

Overcoming disempowering mindsets, therefore, is essential to teach all students. The good news is that research and experience highlight the most effective way to dismantle disempowering mindsets—by building relationships with students. Students can teach us about their cultures. They can teach us what we need to know about them. Relationships are going to form in your classroom, one way or another, and they need to benefit both you and your students!

Even when educators do not share the same cultural or socioeconomic background as their students, they can still be very effective. While some teachers we studied shared backgrounds with their students, the majority did not (Klei Borrero & Canter, 2018). In short, regardless of your culture and background, you can become a No-Nonsense Nurturer and support the needs of every student, every day. It requires a deep desire to unlearn some of your assumptions about students with humility and through self-reflection about your own learning and teaching, and passion for building meaningful relationships.

The Need for No-Nonsense Nurturers

As a young administrator, I failed to adequately support teachers in my school with classroom management. This was a harsh but true reality of my early administrative years. However, my failures were not for a lack of trying. I bought every book I could find, watched any video I could get my hands on, and sent teachers to seminars and professional development sessions that promised to help them improve classroom

management. None of these books, videos, or seminars, however, seemed to answer the one question we needed answered: Why can some teachers establish a classroom culture where students are on task, engaged, and achieving at high academic levels, while their peers struggle?

This question is actually quite complex. In pursuit of an answer, I collaborated with a well-esteemed colleague, Lee Canter. Together, we studied educators across the United States. During these studies:

- ▶ We observed and interviewed highly effective teachers about their practices.
- ▶ We interviewed administrators to cross-reference the evidence of these teachers' highly effective classroom practices.
- ▶ We interviewed students' families about what set apart these high-performing teachers from their peers.
- ▶ Perhaps most important, we interviewed the students themselves to identify what made these educators stand apart from their other teachers.

A consistent finding across our research indicates that these educators create caring environments for students through consistency, accountability, and high expectations (Klei Borrero & Canter, 2018). These educators establish effective classroom cultures by creating orderly, predictable environments so all students can meet their full potential.

Theoretical Foundations for the No-Nonsense Nurturer Model

It is important to note that the No-Nonsense Nurturer model is grounded in sound education theory. While I consider myself more of a practitioner than an academic, my coursework and my continued work with youth, families, teachers, and administrators has taught me the importance of grounding educational practice in contemporary learning theory. When it comes to applying classroom management models and systems—which can be reactive and rigid—theory must guide our practice. Educators have learned this from decades of research about the most effective ways to promote meaningful learning and teaching in the classroom.

Key research regarding meaningful learning and teaching in the classroom, which was influential in the work of the No-Nonsense Nurturer model, is Sonia Nieto (2002) and her writings about the application of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978).