

Becoming a Warm Demander

Your role as ally in the learning partnership calls for you to know when to offer emotional comfort and care and when to not allow the student to slip into learned helplessness. Your job is to find a way to bring the student into the **zone of proximal development** while in a state of **relaxed alertness** so that he experiences the appropriate cognitive challenge that will stimulate his neurons and help his dendrites to grow.

To do this, the culturally responsive teacher takes a warm demander stance. Educator Judith Kleinfeld (1975) at the University of Alaska originally coined the term *warm demander* to describe the style of those teachers most effective with Eskimo and Native Indian children from small rural villages attending urban schools in Alaska. Other educators over the years have identified a similar teaching stance among effective teachers of African American and Latino students (Ware, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006) in their research of two Latino community-based high schools defined this characteristic as *hard caring*, “the combination of high expectations for academic performance that teachers place on students and supportive, instrumental relationships between students and teachers.” In *Teach Like a Champion* (2010), Doug Lemov calls it “warm/strict.” Even movies have immortalized warm demanders on screen like Jaimie Escalante in *Stand and Deliver* (1988), Marva Collins in *The Marva Collins Story* (1981), and ex-Marine turned teacher, LouAnne Johnson played by actress Michelle Pfeiffer, in *Dangerous Minds* (1995).

Earning the Right to Demand

It is easy to think that just being firm and authoritarian is the key to increasing student achievement for marginalized students. Kleinfeld (1972) and others found the opposite was true. Kleinfeld identified two elements that when put together increased the engagement and effort of students who had disengaged because they were English learners and felt like outsiders in the classroom: *personal warmth* coupled with what she called *active demandingness*. Personal warmth is what Gay (2010) labels *care*. Kleinfeld said this element was important to those students in the study because it was consistent with their collectivist cultural worldview and practices that put a high premium on relationships. Active demandingness isn't defined as just a no-nonsense firmness with regard to behavior but an insistence on excellence and academic effort. This unique combination of personal warmth and active demandingness earns the teacher the right to push for excellence and stretch the student beyond his comfort zone.

She noted that these two characteristics stood in contrast to teachers who exhibited some combination of *professional distance* (no focus on rapport) and *passive leniency* (no focus on effort). The chart in Figure 6.2 lays out the characteristics of each combination of characteristics.

Warmth with passive leniency produced the *sentimentalist*, a teacher who is friendly but holds lower standards and expectations for certain students in a misguided attempt not to hurt their self-esteem. The *Sentimentalist* offers caring without a focus on helping students take on challenging academics. Professional distance coupled with passive leniency creates the *elitist*, a teacher who sees dependent students of color as less intellectual and favors students whom he deems smart and more like him. He makes no effort to help dependent learners grow their intelligence. Then there is the *technocrat*. This teacher focuses on the technical side of teaching and doesn't try to build relationships or help students develop self-confidence as learners. He is successful with independent learners and some dependent learners.

Students interpret the warm demander's mix of care and push as a sign that the teacher "has his back" (Cushman, 2005; Obidah and Teel, 2001; Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Personal warmth and authentic concern exhibited by the teacher earns her the right to demand engagement and effort. Here is where the power of the teacher as ally in the learning partnership is realized. The culturally responsive teacher willingly develops the skills, tools, and techniques to help students rise to the occasion as she invites them to step out of their comfort zone into the zone of proximal development.

Any teacher can become a warm demander, but it is important to know what your inclination is as a teacher (Figure 6.2). For example, are you more inclined to be a technocrat? Then, you will want to work on cultivating authentic personal warmth and rapport with students and express your active demandingness in positive ways. Remember the big idea from Chapter 4: Self-reflection is the key.

