Chapter 4
The Homeostatic Classroom: A New Framework for Creating an Optimal Learning Environment

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ABSTRACT
This chapter will propose a new theoretical and practical framework that can be utilized in any type of classroom, including multicultural classrooms, and that creates an optimal learning environment while also being highly protective against potentially traumatic experiences for both students and teachers. The chapter will also introduce the “choose love” tool, which can be used in any classroom to connect the students and the teacher to the “homeostatic drive” – a global force or drive within each of us that is biologically and evolutionarily designed to keep us in states of homeostasis, or equilibrium, at all levels, and that is, the chapter will argue, the force of all love and self-love, including all “love” of learning.

INTRODUCTION
The classroom is both an opportunity for deep, enriching, connecting experiences, and also an environment filled with risks for potentially traumatic, disconnecting experiences that can be highly detrimental to students, teachers, and to the classroom environment as a whole. In multicultural classrooms, where differences in social and cultural norms will inevitably strain effective and healthy communication among students and between students and teachers, students belonging to the racial, cultural, or ethnic minority are likely to be particularly prone to damaging experiences such as feeling consistently insulted, slighted, or excluded. Chronic triggering of these painful emotions is likely to be a significant risk factor for developing destructive thought and behavior patterns that can have highly detrimental effects on learning and on a student’s overall school experience and well-being (Hermans et al., 2011).

This chapter will propose a new theoretical and practical framework that can be utilized in any type of classroom, including multicultural classrooms, and that actively promotes connection and well-being in students while also being highly protective against potentially traumatic experiences for both students and teachers. The basis for this framework is the proposal that there are two opposing forces, or overall “drives,” that...
operate within all people living in modern cultures (Montgomery & Ritchey, 2008). The first is a
global “homeostatic drive” that is biologically
designed – in humans as in all animals – to keep
each person in a state of physical and psychologi-
cal “homeostasis,” or equilibrium, whenever pos-
sible, and to bring people back into equilibrium
or homeostasis whenever they become stressed
or out of balance.

The second force or drive in modern life, includ-
ing in nearly all classrooms, is the maladaptive,
dysfunctional “non-homeostatic” or “addictive”
drive, which has been suggested to arise under
circumstances of “evolutionary mismatch”
(Montgomery & Ritchey, 2010) – that is, within
environments, such as modern cities, that human
beings are not well-equipped for biologically and
evolutionarily, and that are therefore considered
to be “mismatched” environments (Lieberman,
2013). The modern classroom, and particularly
any multicultural classroom, presents a number of
evolutionary mismatches that, if not specifically
attended to, can be a source of significant traumas
and difficulties for both students and teachers.
The addictive drive that frequently arises as a
consequence of evolutionary mismatch effects
has been proposed to throw people inappropri-
ately and dysfunctionally out of equilibrium or
homeostasis, into unnecessary states of pain or
emotional distress (Montgomery, 2012). Studies
have suggested that stress hormones, such as corti-
sol and β-endorphin, that are released by states of
non-homeostasis, have many of the same effects
in the brain as addictive drugs such as cocaine
or methamphetamine (Lekners & Tracey, 2008;
Montgomery & Ritchey, 2008). Montgomery and
Ritchey (2008) have proposed that the addictive
drive develops because thought and behavior
patterns that generate painful, distressing states
of non-homeostasis can become reinforced in
the brain due to the unconsciously rewarding or
reinforcing effects of various neurochemicals, such
as dopamine and β-endorphin, that are released
or triggered by a stress response.

This chapter will argue that for any education
and learning to be in any way effective or last-
ing, it must directly align with and nurture the
homeostatic drive within each person or student.
It will further argue that the homeostatic drive is
the force of all love, critically including self-love,
a phenomenon of profound importance to any
healthy classroom. Full awareness of and con-
tinual alignment with the homeostatic drive, and
particularly self-love, the chapter will suggest, is
critical for the establishment of the most nurturing
and effective classrooms. A powerful new practical
tool, called “choose love,” that is based on this
theoretical framework and that can be used as the
guiding principle for any classroom, will also be
introduced. The “choose love” tool can be utilized
to keep students and teachers aligned with the
healthy homeostatic drive – the force of all love
and particularly self-love – while also keeping
students and teachers from being triggered into
the destructive addictive drive, which is highly
detrimental to the creation of a healthy, functional
classroom environment. It will be proposed that
this framework, including the overriding ethos of
“choosing love,” and particularly self-love, at all
times, can generate a potentially transformational
classroom that is deeply connecting and that is an
ideal environment for learning, for the expansion
of self-knowledge, and for promoting the overall
well-being and personal growth of both teachers
and students.

EVOLUTIONARY MISMATCH
AND PHYSICAL AND
PHYSIOLOGICAL HEALTH

Prior to ten thousand years ago, when agricultural
and animal husbandry methods began to develop
and spread across the world, all human beings lived
as nomadic or semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers and
had done so for hundreds of thousands of years.
Although there have been genetic changes in the
past ten thousand years – such as the spread of