

# Applying Care and Growth at School

Shahpur Jamall

## Cultivating Willingness

Can you think of a service sector where respecting the client is not part of the job requirement? Where no effort is made to make the “medicine” taste good? Where the customer must attend every day no matter how much he may detest the experience?

Well if this doesn't sound familiar it's probably because you have been out of school too long. The unfortunate aspect is that school doesn't really have to be unpleasant, and learning really can be a positive experience. It is possible to create a situation where children want to come to school, and will work willingly once there. Before we can seek to change things we must first examine the current situation.

In most places today children experience school as something being unpleasant; they only attend because they have to. Most would rather be anywhere else than in school. This “I don't want to be here” attitude creates an environment in which teachers feel they must behave in an authoritarian manner in order to enforce control and discipline. Not surprisingly then, learning, the one function which the human brain is designed to do naturally, has become a battle ground; a test of wills.

Until the age of twelve or so children submit to this situation. But as they reach the teen years and start High School, they begin to challenge their teachers' authority. It is then that control, fear and intimidation determine how “smoothly” a school is run. Working in an environment based on suppression, fear and control ultimately eliminates the drive to excel. It reduces schooling to an exercise in mediocrity. Most students study only because they *have* to, not because they **want** to.

## Means and Ends

One of the main reasons for this state of affairs is that teachers are held accountable for the wrong thing. Teachers are held accountable for the results students achieve on tests and exams, and not for the contribution teachers make to children's lives. Therefore, the curriculum has become more important than the student. The books, lessons, structure and discipline rather than being a means by which to grow and enable students, have become an end in themselves. The student has been reduced to being a means, a tool, to achieving a result. One consequence of this inversion of means and ends is that the child, who should be at the center of the educational process, has been moved to the periphery.

## Intent

Children don't feel that schools exist to serve their needs. This is crucial to how children experience school. If a student is only a means to high academic achievement, his experience of school is one that of being used for some one else's purpose. On the other hand if the intention of the teacher is to use the curriculum, the books, the rules to enable the child, the child's experience of the interaction will be different. The student will then be the beneficiary of the interaction. Therefore it is the teacher's intention, either to get something from the student or to give something, which is at the core of the teacher-student relationship. It is the crucial factor in cultivating a willingness to work for the teacher.

## Legitimate Authority

At its fundamental level the teacher-student relationship is one in which the big one in the relationship is growing the little one. By definition the teacher is in a position of authority and power. After all, you cannot have a relationship of equals between teacher and student because they are not equal.

We all deal with the power wielded by authority figures in our lives. That could be the parent at home, the boss at work, or the policeman on the street. However, sometimes we acquiesce to their demands willingly and sometimes only under compulsion. In a school situation then, where the teacher-student interaction is the fundamental activity that takes place, the key question has to be what makes the authority of a teacher acceptable? And how can we create an environment where students willingly listen to and work for their teachers?

Research done by Schuitema Associates, a leading international business consultancy firm, addresses this question directly. Etsko Schuitema developed the Care & Growth™ model for organizational transformation 15 years ago. One core axiom of the model is that when the intent of the super-ordinate is the Care and Growth of the subordinate, authority is perceived as legitimate. Over the last fifteen years the Care & Growth™ model has effectively transformed many organizations all over the world by changing the paradigm of "I work because I *have to*" to "I work because I *want to*".

If we explore the first relationship of power that a human being experiences, it is that of parent and child. The fundamental element that makes the relationship legitimate is that it is the parent's intent to care for and grow the child. It is the instinctive acknowledgement on the child's part that he is cared for, that allows the willing submission to the parent's authority. It is the realization that authority is being wielded by the parent in the child's interest that gives legitimacy to the relationship. Later in life when adults describe the boss they would willingly work for, all the elements of this ideal authority figure fall into two categories; Care and Growth.

The essence of the student-teacher dynamic, especially in the teen years, is one of authority, compulsion and rebellion. Therefore, cultivating the willingness to work has to be a key element of successful schooling.

According to the Care & Growth™ model we must invert the current means-ends paradigm in schools. We must acknowledge that the curriculum, examinations, and results are only a means to encourage the growth of the individual child. The teacher's intent then cannot be to get results out of the child, but to contribute to his growth.

Keeping this in mind, tests and exams should be viewed as no more than indicators of progress, not as goals in themselves. It is therefore vital that teachers understand this issue of Intent. It is ultimately the intent of the teacher, as much as his actions, which determines his relationship with the child. Students who perceive their teachers' intent as being his Care and Growth, will willingly do what a teacher asks of him, and more.

### **Making a Contribution**

To bring out this transformation in schools, to move from mediocrity to excellence, we must also cultivate willingness on the part of teachers to make a contribution to children. They must feel a higher purpose than logging hours for a paycheck. For this to happen Care & Growth™ must be built into the very fabric of the school.

Exactly the same principles which govern the teacher-student relationship must guide the interaction between school administrators and teachers. These include: Means and Ends, Intent, and authority and power. According to the model, the function of the administrative structure in schools is the Care & Growth of the teachers. To cultivate the willingness to make a contribution, administrators can't use teachers to achieve their purpose but must Care for and Grow them to achieve their highest potential. Again it is the teacher's perception of the administrator's intent that determines his willingness to work. Is it the administrator's role to get something out of the teacher or contribute something to him? Therefore the line of service must down the line and not up. The administrators serve the teachers who serve the students.

The first part of the model is Care, which means teachers must feel respected, trusted and cared for. The second part is Growth which includes Ability, Means and Accountability.

Ability includes both the how and why of a teacher's job. The how is teacher training, including lesson planning, lesson delivery, classroom management. The why includes an understanding of the importance of the contribution teachers make to students and to society. To truly engage a persons will they have to believe in the demands being made of them.

Teachers must be then be given the Means which includes the tools, authority and time to fulfill this role. And finally for growth to take place, teachers must be held accountable for their contribution to students and not for the results their students produce.

For more information on Care & Growth in the Classroom, and for what specific criteria as they apply to the school setting please visit the link [Schuitema.co.za](http://Schuitema.co.za) and click on articles.