

Care & Growth[®] in the Classroom

Shahpur Jamall

Low student achievement and confrontational student teacher relationships are two serious problems facing most middle and high schools today. In exploring the reasons why this is, technology, specifically functional MRI scanners, have given us a depth of understanding of brain function never available before. A specific area of study has been the developmental phases of the teenage brain.

Psychologists today can understand teenage defiance and the adolescent obsession with socializing, as a function of the development and increased activity of certain parts of the brain. These studies show that the tendency to defy authority is hardwired into the teenage brain, and is part of the child's journey from dependence to independence and adulthood.

The overwhelming compulsion to socialize, at the expense of most other activities including their school work, has also been linked to the increased activity in a certain part of the brain. Given that human beings are primarily social creatures, teenagers have a need to find their place in the social hierarchy. Defining their role in their peer group thus becomes one of the most important things humans do between the ages of 12 and 20.

However, understanding the behavior does not change the implications for schools. In a school setting adults are required to "make" these young people study, something in which they have no interest at this stage of their lives. The result is conflict, confrontation, and low academic achievement.

But, there is hope! We know that some teachers are able to crack the code. They appear to have a magic formula that causes students to work for them willingly without threat of censure or punishment. Students appear to respect these teachers and accept their authority, which is quite contrary to their normal behavior patterns. Well, the magic is no longer a secret. What those teachers do instinctively can now be taught and practiced by all teachers.

We believe that the Care and Growth Model®, as developed by Etsko Schuitema of Schuitema Associates, an international business consultancy firm, is the essential intervention for schools. We have no doubt that the implementation of the Care and Growth model in schools will allow our teenagers to develop their full potential in a positive learning environment.

The Care and Growth Model has four essential elements; Care, Means, Ability and Accountability. The model is designed to create a willingness to work in any institutional environment based on superior subordinate relationships.

Given below is the rationale for each component as it applies in a school setting, followed by its relevant Criteria.

Care

The first issue is that when a teenager experiences the use of authority/power by a teacher in the classroom, his instinct is to confront or rebel, either overtly or covertly.

The only way a student willingly submits to authority is if he feels the authority is legitimate. The use of power by a teacher can only be experienced by the student as legitimate if the exercise of power is experienced as being used in the interest or Care and Growth, of the student.

It is only if the student genuinely believes that the teacher cares for him that he accepts the authority of the teacher. The Care criteria listed below, if applied genuinely, allow a teacher to establish that relationship with his/her students.

Care Criteria in the Classroom

The Teacher:

- Knows his / her students well and is interested in them as people not just as students.
- Is there for his / her students and not the other way around. The flow of service is down and not up the line.
- Spends sufficient time with students in group settings, and in one-on-one sessions when necessary. Also interacts with students outside the formal classroom setting.
- Listens to and respects the views and opinions of his / her students.
- Practices what he/she preaches.
- Relationships with his / her students are characterized by mutual trust and respect..
- Students feel comfortable approaching the teacher about personal issues.

Means

(Time and Authority)

Means includes both time and authority. To demonstrate Care a teacher needs to have time to spend with students to give their issues due attention. Also a teacher needs to have the authority to act in the student's interest while demonstrating both Care and Growth.

It is only when the teacher has the authority to develop classroom rules and expectations, as well as appropriate consequences with the authority to implement them, is he/she in a position to Care and Grow students. The teacher must also be the one to make decisions regarding both instruction and evaluation.

In terms of the students' Growth the teacher must incrementally shift authority, and with it responsibility, to the student. If the student is only following directions and having the entire educational experience controlled by his teacher(s) he has no responsibility for the process. The responsibility lies with the teacher who is in control of the entire process.

To encourage students to grow and mature they must be given the opportunity to make decisions and then accept responsibility for the consequences of those choices. Obviously this process must be done in incremental steps and must be commiserate to a student's maturity level.

For example up to Class IV the teacher checks every student's Home Work Diary and then signs it, thus taking responsibility that each student has copied his/her home work. At home parents sign the Home Work Diary acknowledging that the Homework is done. Therefore, the responsibility for the student doing the homework is shared by the teacher and parent - not the student.

In Class V teachers stop signing the Diaries and the student is expected to take responsibility for copying the homework. However, parents still sign the Diary acknowledging that the homework was done.

By Class VII, not only does the teacher not sign the Homework diary but the parents do not either. Now the responsibility for doing the homework lies with the student.

Means Criteria in the Classroom

The Teacher:

- Ensures students know the importance and relevance of what they are doing in her / his class.
- Ensures students know what is expected of them in terms of academics, behavior and responsibility.
- Ensures that students find the work challenging but not overwhelming.
- Ensures that students have enough time to do the work expected of them.
- Ensures that students get effective and timely feedback on their performance.
- Ensures that students are evaluated fairly based on what they have been taught.
- Ensures students have the books and resources to succeed.
- Ensures that she spends time with and attending to the needs of all students.
- Ensures that as students mature they have the opportunity to make decisions and then take responsibility for their choices.

Ability

(How and Why)

Ability includes the how and the why of the task. To create a willingness to learn, the degree of effectiveness of the “How”, (the teaching), is based around the teachers intent. If the student feels the teacher is only interested in the results, high test scores, he feels used. In that case it is the test scores that are important and not the student. The natural reaction to being used is resentment.

On the other hand, a teacher who genuinely Cares for the student is not concerned with the results. That teacher is using the result only as a means to grow the student, to give him targets and to measure his Growth. Their students are not a means to an end, the end being good test results. The results, the subjects, the curriculum, are only the means to Grow their students, which is the real goal/end.

The second and equally important part of Ability is the “why” of a task. Again students will do any assignment in a mediocre fashion if they are forced to. However, to create willingness in the pursuit of excellence they must understand “Why” that task is important. How does what they are doing contribute to the students Growth or the benefit of the school or community?

Ability Criteria in the Classroom

The Teacher:

- Ensures formal instruction and development are effective in ensuring that students have the skills to perform the assigned task/activity.
- Develops students understanding of the educational process and its importance.
- Effectively coaches students in terms of how to improve their performance.
- Facilitates student growth through regular review and deliberate changes in responsibility level.
- Addresses weaknesses with specific recommendations.
- Helps students develop a plan for improving their performance.
- Motivates students to do their best regardless of their results.

Accountability

Growth is not possible without accountability whether that be in terms of academics, behavior or personal excellence.

Students should be held accountable for the effort they put in to their work and not for the results their work produces. In any given classroom there is a broad spectrum of students with varying levels of intelligence and ability. To hold all students accountable to the same standard in terms of academic results would not be fair.

All students must be held accountable for appropriate behavior and following school rules. Also all students can be expected to do their best in the pursuit of excellence.

Accountability Criteria in the Classroom

- Students are held accountable for their effort and not for results.
- Regular checking of work and feedback at an individual level is conducted.
- Only when students have the means and ability to complete a task are they held accountable.
- The teacher is fair and consistent with all students.
- Students not doing the class work/homework are consistently held responsible.
- Students who finish their work consistently and to the best of their ability receive appropriate praise.
- Students whose work is exceptional are rewarded accordingly.
- Those who contribute to a positive learning environment are acknowledged / praised.
- Those who consistently go the extra mile in creating a positive learning environment are rewarded for doing so.
- Students are disciplined for deliberate misconduct and censured for carelessness.