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Teacher Caring as a Classroom Management Strategy

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Abstract: McCroskey (1992) noted that when teachers motivated students by caring for them, students interpreted it as an act of inspiring them in positive ways of displaying empathy, understanding, and responsiveness. Teachers earn greater respect from students. In fact, teachers can manage a positive classroom environment by helping students to be self-disciplined in class. Students learn how to be self-disciplined, supportive, and encouraging to one another by teachers modeling desired caring behaviors (Noddings, 2005). When a positive classroom environment is established, students agree to cooperate with teachers and peers creating a community of learners (Brown, 2004). In turn, students will demonstrate their ability to perform to the high expectations of their teachers. In this paper, exercising teacher caring as a proactive measure to diminish student misbehavior is initiated as a strategy to prepare students to become self-disciplined to achieve positive classroom management, which directly impacts the classroom learning environment. Noddings (2005) contented that until our students believe they are cared for and learn to care for others, they will not achieve academic success.

Teacher caring behaviors

Garza (2009) stated that a construct that may create a more positive school climate for students is the “ethic of care”. Teacher caring behaviors are purposeful actions exhibited by teachers who are passionate enough about the well-being of their students to invest ample time and effort to ensure student success. As characterized by Gay (2000), teacher caring behaviors refer to “patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment” (p. 49). Other attributes are trust, respect, and

relationships (Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 2005; Pizarro, 2005). Teven and McCroskey (1996) claimed that teacher caring behaviors comprised of facial expressions, gaze, posture, and other body movements that conveyed teachers' attitude, feelings, and emotional state toward their students. Teachers' caring practices consisted of parent-teacher conferences, student portfolios, goal setting with students, and creating a classroom environment that promoted mental and physical security (Schlosser, 1992).

Given that students spend a significant time within the school environment, the teacher-student relationship is key for academic and behavioral adjustment (Ang, 2005). Brown (2004) suggested that teachers listening to students may be one of the most powerful means of establishing meaningful relationships. When teachers foster positive caring relationships with their students, both student effort and engagement in learning are promoted (Stipek, 2006). Noddings (2005) believed that teachers' acts of caring had to be acknowledged by students to be beneficial to pursue an ongoing relationship. Pang (2005) claimed that teachers formed interpersonal relationships with their students and taught them to develop reciprocal relationships. Garza (2009) and Noddings (2005) agreed that caring for students should be relevant to each student's individual needs. If teachers desire student cooperation, Brown (2004) suggested that they express mutual respect for students' ethnic and cultural needs including differences in communication styles.

Perspectives of classroom management

Classroom management is more than dealing with student misbehaviors in classrooms. It involves the creation of a positive learning environment to engage students in learning (McEwan, 2000). Wong (2011) labeled the characteristics of a well-managed classroom as

1. Students are deeply involved with their work, especially with academic, teacher-led instruction.
2. Students know what is expected of them and are generally successful.
3. There is relatively little wasted time, confusion, or disruption.
4. The climate of the classroom is work-oriented but relaxed and pleasant.

(p.1)

Wong's point of view was narrated from another perspective by

Li (2008) who listed the four major components of managing positive classroom learning environment as (1) management of the physical environment, (2) management of learning, (3) classroom procedures and rules, and (4) managing discipline. These four components all work together to generate a pleasant and enjoyable environment that leads to successful student learning. The positive learning environment was described by Charles and Senter (2002) as the classroom ambience which translated to the totality of intangible impressions that pervaded the physical classroom. Punishment as an intervention of disruptive behaviors in classrooms, though at times necessary, tends to diminish the warm and harmonious learning atmosphere most students enjoy. Teachers in Brown's study (2004) maintained a cooperative learning environment based on their strong teacher-student relationships built on trust rather than punishment. Teachers should view student self-discipline as the ultimate goal in classroom management (Li, 2008). Teacher caring behavior as a proactive measure to student misbehavior can become a unique strategy to prepare students become self-disciplined to achieve a positive learning environment.

Caring teacher behaviors and positive classroom environment

Caring teacher behaviors focus on teacher-student interactions (Osterman & Freese, 2000; Wentzel, 1997). Students interviewed in Alder's study (2002) highly valued teachers taking initiative to interact with them and allow them to have a voice. As felt by students, teacher caring behaviors that promote the valued commodity of teacher-student interaction help make the connection between teaching and learning (Garrett, Barr, & Rothman, 2009). Alder (2002) eloquently expressed that "Truly transformative education begins with the shared meaning we establish with one another through our interactions." (p. 264).

A more positive classroom environment can be managed by improved relationship between teachers and students since more students are self-disciplined in the classrooms of caring teachers. Students may feel that teachers display their respect by holding high behavioral expectations because they believe their students are capable of behaving in a proper manner that maintains a classroom environment conducive to learning (Alder, 2002). Caring teachers, because of their love and sincerity toward their students, earn the respect of students in their classes. Perhaps students perceived teachers as caring because they realized it

was necessary for academic growth and class benefits as a whole (Alder, 2002). Consequentially, even the frequent disruptive students are more self-disciplined in front of caring teachers (Perez, 2000).

Teachers who created a sense of community, built respectful relationships, and validated students' self-worth were likely to affect students' disposition in the classroom and their motivation to engage in the educational process (Garza, 2009). Caring teachers have the potential to motivate students to succeed in academic quests (Rich, 2006). Perez (2000) noted that a caring demeanor was critical to encourage students' commitment to school and their engagement in learning by stating "The care, understanding, and sensitivity teachers show toward their students may in the final analysis, be the most important influence on student academic performance." (p.105) Teven and McCroskey (1996) also provided evidence that teachers who engaged in behaviors that communicated a positive intent toward their students were more likely to influence the students to put forth more effort in a positive learning environment. (See Diagram 1 - A Model of Teacher Caring and Classroom Management)

Becoming an effective caring teacher for classroom management

Caring teachers can become effective managers of positive classroom environments. In addition to having a personal feeling for the love of students, teachers can exercise their caring behaviors by actually acting with care. They need to display their care for students in ways that can be felt by students. Although Noddings (2005) believes that caring relationships are interactive, she feels that those relationships are subject to interpretations of those involved.

No Child Left Behind Without Care

Garza (2009) highlighted five dominant themes of teacher caring as perceived by students: (a) provide necessary scaffolding during teaching; (b) exhibit a kind disposition, including having a good sense of humor; (c) being available outside of class to help students succeed; (d) show a personal interest in the students' well-being inside as well as outside of the classroom; and (e) do whatever is necessary to provide them with the academic support in the classroom to ensure that they pass. Similarly, Teven (2001) suggested that students perceived caring teachers to show a friendly disposition and interpersonal skills. The urban

high school students in Alder's research expressed that teachers who had good classroom management and helped them succeed with classroom assignments were perceived as caring teachers.

An Extra Mile Pays Off

Students may not see the same teacher caring behaviors as teachers see (King & Chan, 2011). However, they identified the following teachers as good teachers: teachers who noticed if a student was in trouble; teachers who discussed topics of interest to students such as gangs, drug addiction, and values; also, teachers who told students that they could come back after class if they needed to talk more (Schlosser, 1992). Ferreira and Bosworth (2001) believed that "How students perceive their teachers as caring or non-caring has a direct impact on how students perceive the culture of the school" (p. 25).

Individual Attention Is The Key

Students feel a sense of belonging and thrive within a school environment when teachers strive to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships (Ang, 2005). Noddings (2005) claimed that "caring teachers listen and respond differentially to their students" (p. 19). She emphasized the necessity of gaining the trust of students by persistently pursuing an ongoing individual relationship. Students have to feel that the good teachers know about their individual needs and interests without passing the wrong judgment on them. Teacher giving individual attention to students is a key component to a caring relationship (Garrett, Barr, & Rothman, 2009; Teven & McCroskey, 1996). Students describe caring teachers as those who talk with them individually and listen to them when they are having personal problems at home or school (Alder, 2002).

Caring Teachers Seek Parental Support

A caring teacher promotes teacher-parent relationship. Parents care about the behaviors and academic achievement of their children and like to work with teachers to manage positive classroom environments for learning (Epstein & Sanders, 1998). Students also interpret teachers calling home to urge parents to encourage their children to change disruptive behaviors or get their work done as caring (Alder, 2002). Teachers in collaboration with parents can implement their caring behaviors more effectively since parental attitudes strongly influence their children (Hue, 2008).

Teacher Caring As Professional Learning

Serving as an effective caring teacher in classroom management takes time and experience. Teachers take time to understand the background of the students they work with. Professional learning communities at school can provide plenty of opportunities for teachers to learn from one another about the teacher caring strategies that can be applied to manage positive classroom environments (Rogers, 1995).

Concluding thoughts

Creating a positive environment has become a teacher's significant responsibility in his/her classroom management plan. Teacher caring attitudes and behaviors are powerful strategies in classroom management by touching the heart of every student for self-respect and self-discipline. Several elements of effectively conveying teacher caring attitudes and behaviors are crucial:

First, teachers need to role-model themselves as professionals by self-respect. Caring for students assigned to them is in close observation of high level of professionalism.

Second, teachers need to know what it means by caring attitudes and behaviors and how to practice them in their classrooms. Li's four classroom management components provide an outline of areas teachers can work on by demonstrating their care for students.

Third, teachers need to check if students believe in the same teacher caring attitudes and behaviors as teachers. Unmatched beliefs do not help contribute to positive classroom management. Chan and King's (2011) quantitative study compared the perspectives of teachers and students and results revealed a significant difference in the perceptions of caring between teachers and students. Noddings (2005) expressed that caring must be received to actually exist. She elaborated by adding that "No matter how hard teachers try to care, if the caring is not received by students, the claim 'they don't care' has some validity" (p. 15).

Fourth, school administrators can help teachers, especially novice teachers, set up their classroom management plans with the implementation of caring attitudes and behaviors. Brown's findings (2004) revealed that although most of the experienced teachers who were interviewed felt confident that they had successfully created effective learning environments by developing respectful relationships with their students, the majority of novice teachers did not establish a clear, productive classroom management plan.

Caring teachers establish warm, personal relationship with students and influence students' behavior and achievement by winning their respect and support. Positively managed classrooms provide supportive environment for learning. Students can be challenged to the best of their potential under caring teachers and well managed classrooms.

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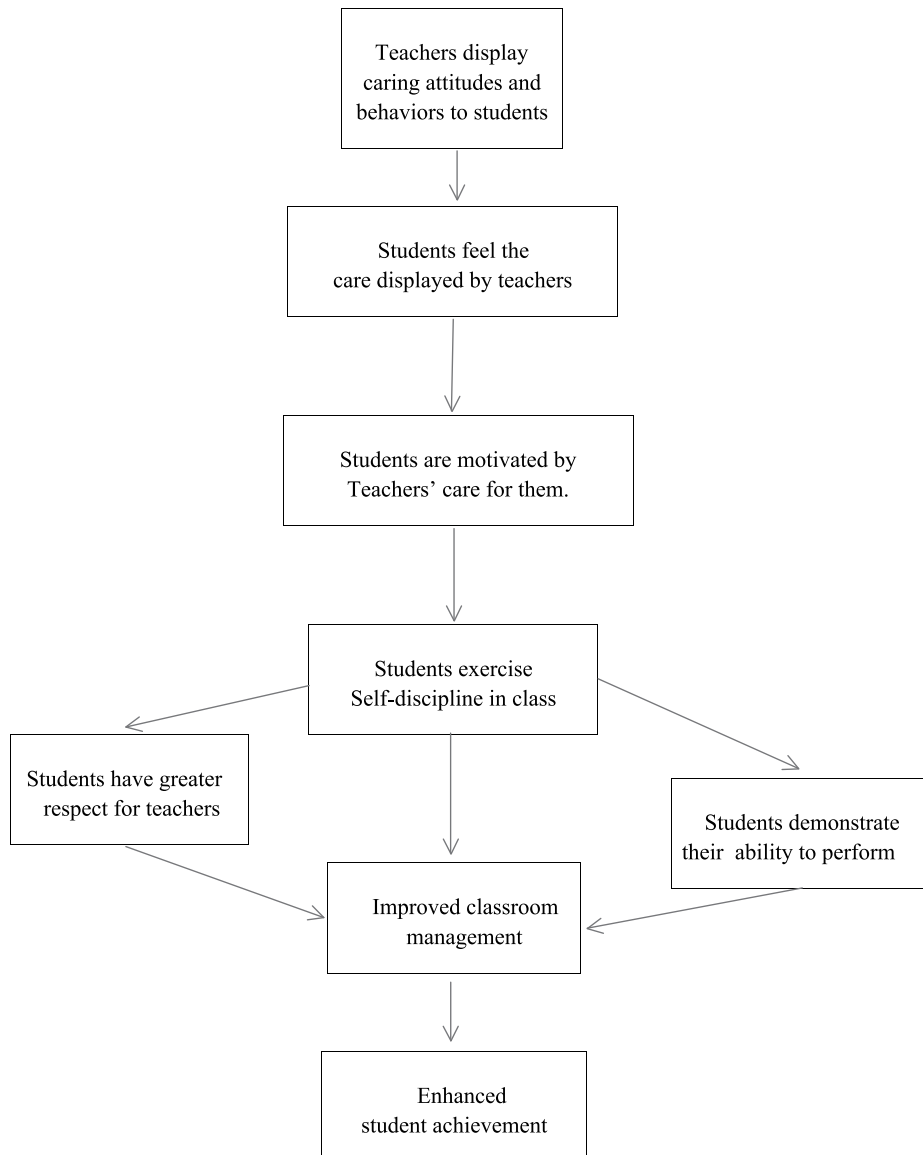
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Diagram 1
A Model of Teacher Caring and Classroom Management



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