

How to Become
**A CARING
TEACHER**

*A Daily Guide for Highly
Affective Teaching*

Edward Roy Krishnan, PhD

Editors:

Ivan Hannel, JrD (Author of Highly Effective Questioning)

Marthonoh Jessen Felix, MS

Tamar Paul, MA

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Author's website: **www.affectiveteaching.com**

To

1. Dr. Prema Gaikwad who inspired me to become a caring teacher
2. Dr. Paul Charles who taught me to dream the impossible!
3. Students at Mission College who motivated me to apply the principles of affective teaching in the classroom

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Foreword

The path to become a Caring Teacher, is a road less traveled, hence no traffic jams. In a quest to improve the quality of education globally, many 'learned' men and women suggest various methods and structures, encouraging the 'learner' to go the 'extra-mile'.

However, we are discovering that systems fail and methods become outdated, but committed teachers remain, weathering the storm of changes in bureaucracies. If there is any change that is envisioned, that will dramatically improve the quality of education in our institutions of learning, it must first begin in the heart of the teacher, who must encapsulate the outcomes before the initiative.

Dr. Krishnan, in "How to Become a Caring Teacher" plainly champions the fundamental change agent in any learning process, the Caring Teacher. Students go the extra-mile if they see its value and need. They will not be duped into performing at their optimal level, no! They have to be inspired to reach their potential. And to inspire, you need a person.

We don't have to look for this kind of a person, very far; they daily interact with your children for most of the day. These 'teachers' need to be transformed into Caring Teachers whose primary motivation is basically, love for the students themselves. Not long

after the students graduate from schools and other institutions, they will forget much of the material they have covered, but a Caring Teacher influences for eternity.

It is only learners who affect the future; the learned soon find themselves with knowledge that is soon outdated. “How to Become a Caring Teacher,” is a passionate plea for teachers never to graduate from the school of learning. It is a call to come down to the level of the student, where there is an exchange, not just of facts but of your very being. After all true Education is more than the pursuit of knowledge. In giving of yourself, you effect change.

In this book, Dr. Krishnan will show you that no one dies from an overdose of appreciation and a genuine interest in our students will yield academic excellence that positively changes the world. After a careful reading and personal application, you *will* join Dr. Krishnan to not just inform but transform students into enthusiastic contributors to our world. This is where the rubber meets the road.

When teachers demonstrate that the subject matter is secondary and the students themselves become our prime focus, we will witness an academic performance ‘par excellence’! The more time invested in the students themselves, the less time will be required for the mastery of concepts and facts and its application. This relationship forged between the heart of the teacher to his/her student is

the catalyst for a dynamic society. Highly Affective Teaching; that is what we need. Yes!

In 'putting pen to paper' Dr. Krishnan allows us a glimpse into his own heart as a Caring Teacher himself.

Paul Charles Ph.D.
Education Director, South Africa

Preface

“There are no poor students; neither are there poor teachers; There are only poor teaching and learning!”

Edward Roy Krishnan

Teaching and learning always take place in a social context. A teacher and a group of students interact in order to grow intellectually. But intellectual growth isn't the only outcome of this interaction. By default, this interaction brings about changes in the social and emotional facets of both teachers and students.

Since the connection between the intellectual and the socio-emotional aspects of the classroom is so strong, teaching and learning are greatly affected by the quality of relationships forged between teachers and students.

Education aims at 'humanizing' people. However, meaningful education only occurs when this task is accomplished collectively, with the help of everyone involved in the process of teaching and learning.

Consider this...

- A teacher is required to be an intellect

- A teacher is required to develop and function within the framework of a sound educational philosophy
- A teacher is required to be well-versed in psychology (human and educational psychology)
- A teacher is required to possess a rich repertoire of teaching strategies
- A teacher is required to be an efficient classroom manager
- A teacher is required to fulfill the specific and general needs of the society, the school, parents, and students
- A teacher is required to maintain and share pertinent data about the educational progress (grades) of students
- A teacher is required to take responsibility for whatever happens to students in the classroom

The above mentioned 'duties' of a teacher are universally accepted as fundamental to the teaching profession. However, one vital role that unifies all these roles is the role of **caring for students**. Being caring toward students is the key to success in all other areas of teaching. 'Care' gives added value and strength to all other requirements that teachers need to fulfill. 'Care' provides meaning to every act that transpires in the classroom.

A classroom that is adorned with 'care' is a place where students love to be and learn, for the sake of

learning. When 'care' is absent, every activity in the classroom becomes a tedious and difficult task. Often teachers learn new teaching strategies and implement them hoping to break the monotony of the learning process. It won't be much longer till they realize that boredom is not necessarily removed by utilizing a variety of teaching strategies.

I have personally tried to improve teaching and learning by utilizing a variety of methods. They did work, for some time! When the novelty of a method is lost, students become aloof once again. I become frustrated every time this happens. I wish there is a solution to making teaching and learning **continuously** fun, active and productive. With time, I did find the solution!

The key, as I have discovered and experienced, is not equipping myself with more tricks, strategies, theories, and interventions. **The key to successful teaching is to become a caring teacher!** Once 'care' colors every activity in the classroom, even the simplest of activities can turn the teaching-learning process into a fun-filled, interesting, and valuable experience. These are the kind of experiences that both teachers and students long to have in their classrooms.

I have discovered that every teachable moment can be filled with enjoyment and excitement when a teacher exhibits a caring attitude toward students. A caring teacher opens the minds of students and

invites them to grow every day. A caring teacher desires to grow along with students. A caring teacher wishes to bring the best out of every student. A caring teacher constantly tells students that he believes in them and their abilities to effect positive changes for themselves and others!

Beautiful! That's how a caring teacher looks at each student in the classroom. When students come broken and lost, a caring teacher sees them through compassionate eyes. **A caring teacher's focus is not on who they are, but on what they can become.**

A caring teacher doesn't give up on students when they're not at their best (academically, behaviorally, and socio-emotionally). A caring teacher doesn't quit on students when they struggle to answer questions or understand lessons. A caring teacher is one who identifies with every infirmity of a student. He remembers how he once struggled and went through the same painstaking process of learning. He understands that acquiring knowledge and skills has its own challenges and that it takes a lot of effort and time to learn. He accepts that there is no simple formula to become an excellent learner.

A caring teacher doesn't behave like a 'superman' in the classroom – someone indispensable, authoritative, superior, and in ownership of knowledge and skills. A caring teacher is willing to help students pass through the difficult processes of learning by being there for them, and guiding them

each step of the way. In essence, a caring teacher constantly tells the students, “I understand what you’re going through. The process of learning is tough indeed, but we are in this together!”

Above all, **a caring teacher knows that students change!** Those who struggle today, those who misbehave today, those who cause trouble today, and those who seem incompetent today - will all change for the better. What students need is **time** and **opportunities** to change! A caring teacher provides students with time and opportunities to become ever better!

As you read this book, please remember that the most important skill you need as a teacher is the skill to ‘care’ for students. You might be an expert in all other aspects of teaching. But if you do not ‘care’ for students, you have not fully understood the teaching profession!

Edward Roy Krishnan, Ph.D.
Lecturer, Psychology/Education

A Reminder to the Readers

The pages that follow are intended for daily reading. It is hoped that readers will spend approximately five minutes (or more) a day reading, contemplating, and reflecting on translating the principles suggested into concrete and practical actions.

Readers are encouraged to think of actual classroom practices in relation to the principles of affective teaching and implement them on a daily basis. This will result in a more 'humanized' teaching-learning experience.

Flip through the pages. Start on any day. Each day deals with an exclusive topic on becoming a caring teacher. Try to memorize and internalize statements in **bold print**. Collectively, they will serve as an inner guide in times of professional emergencies.

You might be tempted to think that this is yet another book filled with empty promises and feeble principles. You might wonder if you will ever become a caring teacher by merely reading the contents of this book. If the principles and practices suggested here were not effective and achievable, I wouldn't have put them in writing.

I am a living testimony to the power of affective teaching; not because I am a caring teacher by

nature. Far from it! I have learned that affective teachers are not born, but made. Caring teachers are educated and trained in the principles and practices of affective teaching.

Improvement rarely takes place unexpectedly. However, a deliberate attempt to bring about beneficial changes holds great reward. **In the classroom, intentional efforts breed success and productivity! Apathy and trial-and-error on the other hand, breed failure.**

If you want to benefit from this book, remember that you need to make deliberate attempts to internalize and practice each principle in your own teaching.

If I am doing it, so can you!

Day 1

Teachers - You are never Out of Job!

Before the 21st century dawned on us, many were convinced that the new century will automate classroom instructions. Parents and teachers were envisioning a time in which computers would take over the roles of educating students. However, the computer revolution of our age infused mixed feelings among educators. Some felt threatened, fearing the loss of their teaching careers. Some, on the other hand, felt that computers were the only solution to the ever growing demands of the globalized, knowledge-society of the new millennium.

But here we are, at the start of a new century and surprisingly, nothing much has changed! In fact, more and more schools are employing more teachers instead of computers. What happened to the apprehension and prediction of the last century? Can't computers educate students? Can't computers efficiently impart knowledge and skills required for the survival and functioning of people in a multifaceted world?

Obviously, we cannot deny the vital roles that computers play in the education of students. However, can they completely replace human

teachers? The answer to this question is a simple NO...!

One of the major functions of education in this era is to develop the emotional intelligence of students. Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and appreciate one's self and others. As the world gets more complex, the demands to prepare students to face its complexities rise. Knowledge alone cannot equip a student to face the future. Knowledge is only useful when individuals are able to appropriately adjust and apply it to various real-life situations that are 'emotionally packed'. This implies that education is a highly emotional activity and it entails the training of the affect (feelings).

Computers are neutral instructors. They are more objective than human teachers. In this sense, computer instructions significantly reduce the short-term socio-emotional conflicts that usually exist between people involved in the process of teaching and learning.

However, it is the human teacher alone who can readily identify and address personal needs, hopes, dreams, aspirations, ambitions, emotional fluctuations, despair, sadness, and fears of a student. This is coupled with the fact that students inherently long for and require personal human attention.

Computers may eradicate many of the interpersonal conflicts between a teacher and his/her students.

Computers may help create a learning environment that is conducive for acquisition of knowledge and skills. Although this sounds good, the positive outcome of this practice is only temporal and superficial.

What about meeting the socio-emotional needs of students? These needs are known to have a long-lasting impact on any student as a learner. Unfulfilled psychological needs give rise to immorality, crime, and related problems. A sense of fulfillment in these areas assures meaningful living and useful participation as a functional member of the society.

Can computers accomplish the above-mentioned task? Aren't higher order psychosocial needs like the need to belong and identify with other humans, the need for self-esteem, and the need for companionship, equally important for the development of human beings?

It is the teacher who plays a leading role in the classroom. A teacher's personal approach to everything and everyone in the classroom determines the atmosphere created in that room. Consequently, the atmosphere determines classroom experiences.

Every teacher is an active agent of choice in the classroom. Teachers are constantly deciding between wanting to bring gladness or sadness to a

classroom experience. Teachers are frequently being challenged to choose between wanting to see students smile or cry; helped or hurt. Teachers are often struggling between wanting to intensify or weaken (and eventually alleviate) crises at school. In short, **humanity is either upheld or crushed by everything a teacher does in the presence of his/her students in the classroom.**

I have seen many students go through the school system in utter despair. Although they possess an intense desire to be accepted, appreciated, and treated more humanely, these needs are often 'out-of-reach' and unavailable.

As I write this section, I recall my own elementary and high school experiences. Although I am satisfied with what I have turned out to be in life, I am deeply convinced that I could have become a far greater person if my teachers were more sensitive and caring. Sadly, the school has been commonly viewed as a 'factory' that produces workers who fulfill the requirements of the job market. Teachers are mere line-assemblers in these 'factories'.

- Their aim: Assure that the supply meets the demand
- The quality of the supply: Not assessed

This bleak picture cannot prevail. It has to come to a standstill. I am taking this small, but historic step to move in the direction of change for students, both

present and future! I cannot change the whole world. But whoever I can touch and convince to join me in becoming a **caring teacher** will consequently change many others. A ripple-effect? Yes! So let us inspire affective teaching in all our teachers!

“Caring teachers make use of their emotion and passion to inspire students! Caring teachers make good teachers and good teachers make good students!”

Edward Roy Krishnan

Day 2

Are You the One?

Societies have always had problems. Previously, problems all around us were unseen and unheard. We lived and took control of small territories. The scenario has changed. Today, we live in a global world. Some say that we live in a 'global-village'. It's as if the world has suddenly shrunk. Everyone knows everyone else's problems, conflicts, and challenges. Problem resolution no longer takes place at small-scale organizational or national levels. We talk about resolution of conflicts in a broader (global) context. We talk about life issues from the perspective of 'world issues'.

With the latest development in science, technology, and information dispersal, news spreads like wildfire. We hear of social evils more recurrently today than ever before. This does not mean that immorality and crime have become rampant unexpectedly in our time. It has always been there. The difference is that now, we are made aware of them. Thanks to hi-tech media!

The problems that our societies face today are not new. The solutions to these problems aren't new either. They have been in use since civilizations began. **Sadly, solutions to societal problems were**

not executed by the right people. That is why we remain where we started!

In the end, we have the same old problems; unresolved simply because solutions were not executed by the ones who could really make significant changes. The trend continues. We need to stop this. We have to stop it. If we don't, who will?

Caring teachers attempt to disentangle societal problems that are directly caused by failures in teaching. They look at the classroom and examine how interaction processes in the classroom give rise to a variety of social problems. Caring teachers are aware of and utilize principles that would help sort societal problems from a more solution-oriented-implementation-based perspective.

Since teachers are strategically positioned, they can solve societal problems effectively by playing their roles more purposefully. It is the teacher who can address crucial issues that relate to the personal, social, psychological, philosophical, and existential aspects of living. Many problems in the society persist because important questions that pertain to the meaning of existence are not answered. Education is the most powerful change agency. **A Caring teacher uses the medium of education to effect positive changes around them.**

Caring teachers use appropriate and constructive interpersonal skills to enhance relationships in the

classroom. This is done to address personal and social difficulties of students, right from the beginning of their journey in life, resulting in the creation of well-adjusted and healthy social beings fit to live more harmoniously with one another (sociological responsibilities of teachers).

This may seem like a heavy task. But when you decide to become a caring teacher, you will accept this responsibility with enthusiasm because...**you are the one!**

“Everyone who remembers his own educational experiences remembers teachers, not methods and techniques.”

Sidney Hook

Day 3

The Teaching Experience

Have you ever been discouraged and disillusioned by an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice in teaching? Well, take courage! You are not the only one who has done so.

Teachers attend and complete teachers' training programs in the hope that they will be better prepared to meet the challenges and needs of students at school. During the two or three years of preparation, teachers are taught a variety of educational and psychological theories that pertain to learning, human development, teaching methods, disciplining techniques, school administration and management, assessment and evaluation, etc.

Upon graduation, 'fresh' teachers enter into the school system enlightened, excited, and ready to bring a lot of innovative ideas into their work. Each day, they enter into classrooms longing to make a difference! They yearn to contribute significantly to the school system and expect it to recognize and appreciate their efforts.

Unfortunately, teaching, just like a marriage, is not a 'bed of roses' experience. Upon entering the profession of teaching, a fresh, energetic, and

innovative teacher quickly comes to a frantic realization that all the theoretical knowledge accumulated has little to do with what they are to live through in the actual classroom. Students they once wanted to care for become their 'enemies'. Teaching is gradually despised. The first few months of teaching reveal that students cannot be changed instantly. Nor can the school system be changed! All the efforts and intentions to bring reformation to the process of education are refuted.

If this is the scenario of teaching, how does one become motivated to care for students? How do you become a caring teacher, after having been through all these bitter experiences at school? A variety of responses can be expected.

Some teachers quit caring for students and do their work on a superficial level. They simply teach the subject and do not worry about the socio-emotional well-being and development of students.

Others take it too personal and start a crusade against 'disobedient' students. These teachers end up quarreling and entering into nasty battles with students in the classroom.

There are also a few teachers who do not possess the strength to fight and so, they accept and live with whatever rumpus the teaching profession brings them - each day passes by with empty teaching (I call them the 'zombie' teachers!). Some even come to

the conclusion that teaching is for the tough and it does not treat those who truly care for students, kindly.

What we need to acknowledge from the very start of our journeys as teachers is that: **Students do not learn from a teacher they do not like!**

As long as teachers are contending with their students to establish control and order, the classroom is merely a battle zone. The moment it becomes a place of trust, love, acceptance, respect, and care, learning takes place without any need for compulsion or force.

The academic performance of students can be positively affected when teachers create a climate of congeniality in the classroom. Teaching is all about the relationship established between teachers and students. Education is affected by the quality of this relationship. Careful examination and study will reveal that many problems at school can be traced back to the defects in relational factors. For example:

1. Kelly refuses to cooperate because she was previously insulted by her cooperative group members
2. Tommy skips math lessons because he heard his teacher say, "You're a math phobic."

3. Kyle copies answers for a science assignment because the teacher only accepts and appreciates 'right' answers
4. Mona yells at her classmates because she saw her teacher doing so to 'misbehaving' students
5. Lenny does not help his classmates because his teacher requires everyone to be busy with their 'own work'

Thus, if we expect improvement at school and in the classroom, it has to start with a transformation in the type of relationships teachers forge with their students. **When students 'feel' good, they perform well, academically.**

Personally, I believe that **teachers are the only hope to creating a more humane world.** But this is only accomplished when teachers become willing to create more humane classrooms at school.

**"A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell
where his influence stops."**

Henry Brooks Adams

Day 4

A Teacher's Responsibility

Have you ever been to a prison? If you have, what went through your mind when you looked at the prisoners? How did you feel as you took a glimpse at those present there? Did the experience reveal something about your profession as a teacher? If it didn't, let me bring something to your attention.

Every criminal in a prison was once a student. He was taught by a teacher. His life revolved around the living examples and teachings of teachers. He was once placed under the responsibility of a teacher who could have made a world of difference. These lawbreakers spent years in school. Although schools hire teachers to instill moral values in students, little do we know if these teachings are reinforced by appropriate modeling.

Teaching is not just telling. It is more importantly, doing what is told. A hypocritical teacher can reiterate many noble principles as part of a lesson, and yet, live a life that is totally contradictory to what was taught. So, can we say that every prison is a stark exhibition of the failures of teachers and the school system as a whole?

Teachers need to take a closer look at the seriousness of their responsibilities. Traditionally, teachers were solely in-charge of imparting knowledge and skills. However, the challenges and demands of the new century have given birth to another equally, if not more, important task for teachers; emotional and 'relational' obligation of teaching-learning processes.

Teachers are accountable, more than ever, for the type of 'people' (citizens) produced by the school system. The world does not need an abundance of intelligent crooks. What is the point of having intelligent human beings who are not in touch with their humanity?

The world needs individuals who long for knowledge and use this knowledge to transform lives. This implies that knowledge is gained as a means to improve the quality of human living. Individuals who are strong in character, values, and principles are the greatest need of the world today. This calls forth for affective teaching on the part of all teachers.

What is affective teaching? It is the type of teaching that addresses 'human needs' of students. Teachers who focus on affect (feelings) give importance to the type of psychological climate created in the classroom. These teachers are careful and diligent in upholding the 'humaneness' of the teaching-learning process.

At the crux of affective teaching is the fundamental principle of a caring relationship between a teacher and his/her students. Affective teaching goes beyond the dissemination of knowledge. It accounts for the propagation of human values, timeless principles, and sound philosophies (world views).

If observed more carefully, affective teaching creates a micro-society (within the classroom) in which the members share a common interest. It encourages students to become transparent, honest, cooperative, respectful of one another, temperate, peaceable, reasonable, innovative, creative, caring, tolerable, and loving.

The secret of making all these qualities part of your own classroom texture is to: **Walk the talk!** Students will uphold the good qualities listed above when teachers personally cherish and wholeheartedly latch on to them.

Psychology, particularly the social learning theory submits that children learn by 'imitation'. This is commonly known as observational learning. Children pick up language and speech skills by using this learning strategy. They learn behaviors, mannerisms, thought patterns and values by observing both the physical and social environment around them. They emulate whatever they see in their surrounding. Repeated exposures to these physical and social stimuli help internalize a variety of human activities within the child.

This is undoubtedly, the most powerful tool for learning. It is also important to note that observational learning is natural and one cannot be prevented from learning this way. This has tremendous implications for teaching.

In the classroom, students learn from what they see. A 'two-faced' teacher will find it impossible to achieve obedience and loyalty from his/her students. Superior academic performance is the product of stable and pleasant emotional experiences in the classroom. This is impossible if a teacher says one thing and does another. Discrepancies between 'what is taught' and 'what is done' ruin trust and adversely affect the relationship between a teacher and students. Eventually, academic performance suffers as a function of severed relationships in the classroom.

Let me illustrate. At the age of ten, my older brother developed an unhealthy habit. Whenever he was sent on an errand, he would pick up cigarette butts from the street. When he felt that he had enough of them, he would hide in the bathroom and start smoking. My mother caught him doing this on several occasions. Repeated warning and punishment did not help my brother to quit this habit.

The problem was not with my brother. He was ten. He learned this behavior from someone else. He

learned it from my father. My father used to be a smoker. He was an occasional smoker. He only smoked when he was in the bathroom, fearing his children would adopt this 'unhealthy' habit. Although he hid himself in the bathroom to smoke, his kids knew for a fact that he was smoking.

This didn't bother me. However, it did have an impact on my brother. My mother, being concerned about my brother's future, had to intervene and do something about it. After careful consideration, she realized that my brother would only quit this bad habit if my father (his role model) did too.

Asking my brother to stop smoking while my father still smoked did not make sense, especially when you couldn't expect a ten-year-old to understand the negative implications of cigarette smoking. So they both came up with a solution. It was nothing complicated. They simply decided that my father had to quit smoking. Within days, my dad stopped smoking. My brother, observing this, quitted too! He never smoked again.

Teachers who do not model the virtuous principles they teach are liars. This can create a sense of confusion in students. Consequently, confusion produces damaging results for both teachers and students. Confusion breeds distrustful relationships!

Can we expect students to learn to respect one another when teachers constantly attack and insult

them with destructive comments? How can one teach a lesson on compassion when he mercilessly criticizes and condemns students for their behavior?

A teacher cannot expect students to be kind if he is not caring in the classroom. A teacher cannot expect students to be cooperative if he is not supportive and helpful in the classroom. A teacher cannot expect students to be merciful if he is not compassionate in the classroom. A teacher cannot expect students to be gracious if he is not understanding in the classroom.

“Teachers, I believe, are the most responsible and important members of society because their professional efforts affect the fate of the earth.”

Helen Caldicott, author and peace activist

Day 5

The Challenge of Affective Teaching

Becoming a caring teacher is not an easy task. Nevertheless, it is achievable. Many have succeeded in this pursuit. How can we be so sure? **Every single caring individual you come across in life was once taught by a caring teacher.** Do we see many such individuals? You bet we do. Just take a moment to think of some of them in your own neighborhood, school, workplace, and community.

A novice teacher enters the world of teaching fully equipped with knowledge and skills required of him/her by the school system. However, little does he/she know about the actual factors that would make him/her a successful teacher. In all his /her attempts to gain approval and recognition from colleagues and superiors, he/she loses focus. His/her priorities are muddled. In all probability, teachers start out as caring individuals, but gradually digress because they are disillusioned by external rewards promised by school authorities as a price of being an 'excellent' teacher (the priority of an excellent teacher is to ensure perfect or close-to-perfect academic achievement of his/her students).

It's admirable to desire to become an excellent teacher. The problem lies in the fact that more and

more teachers view excellence solely as an index of outstanding academic performance. They strive to achieve perfection in academics at the cost of neglecting and seriously injuring students' socio-emotional health. They hold misguided conceptions that academic achievement can be secured in the absence of emotional well-being of students. After all, they do not have time for both in the classroom.

What teachers don't know is that academic performance is strongly and positively related to socio-emotional health of students. They are ignorant of the fact that many students perform poorly because of a severe neglect of their affect (feelings), and not because they possess inferior intelligence or academic abilities. Many behavioral and emotional problems at school are directly related to the ignorance of teachers in this matter.

Thus, educators who know that affective teaching leads to improved academic performance should strive to translate this knowledge into practice. Instead of craving for a promotion and raise in salary through outstanding academic achievement, caring teachers focus on students and their well-being. Once students feel safe, and cared for, they will automatically play their part to become excellent achievers in school subjects.

But how do we become caring teachers? How do we apply the principles of affective teaching in the classroom and achieve positive changes in all areas

of teaching and learning? How do we bridge the gap between knowing what affective teaching is and actually doing it?

Swimming for example, can be taught effectively in the classroom, with the help of a variety of strategies and visual aids. However, to really ensure that one has indeed mastered the skills in swimming, it is imperative that the learner is taken to the pool and asked to demonstrate mastery by applying the principles of swimming in the pool itself. Otherwise, we risk losing the life of the learner.

The same goes for teachers. We learn principles, creed, and dogma about effective and positive classroom practices. Many of these principles require us to be caring toward our students. However, we do not get any specialized training to anticipate, prepare for, and face specific situations that would call for the application of the principles of affective teaching. We are left to figure this out on our own. Often times, we fail miserably and this failure leads to the formation of destructive beliefs or thoughts about the teaching profession.

When we are faced with crises in the classroom, no amount of knowledge from our training will help us. All the literature in education will seem insignificant. The courses that we took will make no sense. All the lectures recalled will find no connection with the actual emergency encountered.

What really matters (in crises) is the realization that **only well-assimilated affective teaching skills and our attitude toward these skills can save us!**

It's one thing to have knowledge on how to become a caring teacher. It's another thing to transform the knowledge into operational skills. Yet, teachers cannot stop at analyzing themselves at the level of knowledge and skills alone. They have to go beyond this level. They have to also examine their attitudes toward affective teaching. **When knowledge and skills accompany the right type of attitude, the goals of affective teaching can be realized without much hassle.**

Attitudes dictate behavior. Thus, successful affective teachers invariably possess positive attitude toward the act of 'caring' for students in the classroom.

Examine your own attitude toward affective teaching. What is it like? Is obedience to your authority as a teacher more important than having students relate to you as a person? If your answer to this question is a 'yes', I would suggest that you revisit and restructure your belief system about teaching.

What is your view about academic performance? Does it reflect a genuine care for students? Do you want students to be academically successful because you care for them and truly want to bring the best out of them? Or does it reflect the need to fulfill your

own goals for obtaining some reward through the demonstration of how well they perform?

Why are you a teacher? Is it because you have no other choice and need to teach to bring in an income? Or is it because you truly care for students and want to make a difference in their individual lives? Do you have a deep interest for the subjects that you teach? Do you teach with passion? Does your enthusiasm for teaching communicate care for students?

If you are a caring teacher, or if you long to become one, you would answer all the questions presented above without difficulty. If they are hard to answer, you might want to re-consider your motives for becoming a teacher in the first place. A good teacher is one whose primary motive in teaching is to care for students. Any other motivation is subservient to this intention!

If a romantic relationship is driven by love, then **teaching is driven by care for students!**

“The dream begins, most of the time, with a teacher who believes in you, who tugs and pushes and leads you on to the next plateau, sometimes poking you with a sharp stick called truth.”

Dan Rather

Day 6

The Trustworthy Teacher

If you have been in the school system long enough, you should be familiar with how it functions. Many times, people wonder why shortcomings in the school system persist despite the awareness of ill-practices.

The answer is evident in the relational dynamics among people that make-up the system. Distrust is a common psychological trait that drives the thoughts and behavior of those in the school. Teachers distrust students. Principals distrust teachers. Educational superintendents distrust principals. And the school boards distrust educational superintendents.

Everyone in positions of authority communicates suspicion to their subordinates. In fact, most of the rules and regulations established and implemented are meant to create an operative confinement for the other. In other words, we create prisons and we expect certain people at school to function from within those confinements, simply because they are not worthy of our trust. This attitude implies that people below us are incapable, careless, and untruthful. Sadly, this is the attitude that eventually produces intellectual convicts.

One of the major characteristics of a caring teacher is that he/she trusts his/her students. This trust is not based on merit, prior experience, or a proven track record of students to demonstrate trustworthiness. It is a principle consciously upheld by a teacher regardless of who the student was/is and what he/she is capable of. This is a characteristic trait of a caring teacher!

Teachers who trust their students look at them beyond their grades, classroom attendance, physical characteristics, willingness to obey, and inclination to please. **A caring teacher looks at a student as a person with immense potential for limitless success.** When this happens, students will move away from engaging in superficially approval-achieving or punishment-avoiding behaviors to intentional, purposeful, and inspirationally-driven actions.

Educators conveniently define 'education' as 'drawing out from students what they already possess'. In other words, education is the process by which the true potential of students is brought into light and made achievable.

Although 'education' is aptly defined, teachers exert minimum or zero effort to attain its rightful outcome. Instead of drawing out students' potential, teachers expect students to draw out information from textbooks. Instead of exploring their own strengths and weaknesses, students are required to

draw out ideas from teachers and 'parrot' these thoughts during exams.

When was the last time you felt that a teacher sincerely wanted to bring something good out of you? Or did you always feel that a teacher's main goal was to suppress your potential by imposing his/her own ideas and thoughts?

Time after time, teachers make students feel insignificant in the process of learning. This is evident in the cry of educators everywhere to encourage students to 'take responsibility for their own learning'. Does this mean that students were not held responsible for their own learning up until now? How did they learn then?

Personally, I was never required to learn (at least not at the elementary and high school levels). I was required to memorize and re-produce facts and figures. This kind of 'learning' makes every student shrink into thinking 'small' about him/herself. This kind of 'learning' makes a student feel incapable.

One reason for this phenomenon is a lack of trust in the ability of students and their potential to learn and become productive individuals. Teachers have traditionally viewed students as inferior people. A student has always been viewed as someone who needs a teacher to become valuable in life. While this is true to a certain extent, it is not supposed to dominate the thinking of teachers.

A caring teacher understands that students need him/her to **accompany** them in their quest for more knowledge and constructive experiences. A caring teacher adopts an attitude of a 'fellow traveler'. He/she does not reduce the role of a student as an active learner. He/she does not take a student's efforts (in the learning process) for granted.

In essence, **students need to feel 'needed' to become great achievers** and benefit from learning. This cannot be attained when the basic trusting relationship between a teacher and students is unsuccessfully wrought.

Students learn better when they realize that their teachers know what thrills them in the classroom. Students learn better when they sense teachers' willingness to constantly engage in introspective understanding of students and classroom situations. Students learn better when they sense a spirit of continual longing for improvement in their teachers. In short, learning is maximized when positive and healthy trusting relationships are forged between teachers and students.

An effective way of building a trusting relationship in the classroom is to expect and permit students to affect teachers (this is contrary to the common idea that teachers affect students). When teachers allow students to influence them positively, they are in essence, telling the students that they trust them and are willing to be taught by them.

Expecting students to be affected by a teacher and not vice versa is a crime. It reflects a unidirectional interaction. It damages 'trust' in relationships.

Students admire and appreciate teachers who would respect their comments and suggestions for change. These comments may be directed at improving classroom structure or practices. Sometimes, the comments may also be directed at improving a teacher and his ways of relating to students. A caring teacher would be sensitive and pay attention to such comments because they would help build and strengthen positive relationships in the classroom.

A teacher who trusts his/her students (and in return achieves students' trust) is one who is willing to share his/her deepest joy, fears, and dreams with them. Disclosure conveys trust, respect, and appreciation. By doing this, students are encouraged to (confidently) share their own emotional experiences with a teacher.

Are you willing to trust your students? How far are you ready to go to achieve this goal today?

“Teachers teach because they care. Teaching young people is what they do best. It requires long hours, patience, and care.”

Horace Mann

Day 7

Redefining Learning

A good teacher knows what learning is. However, a caring teacher recognizes that **learning is always in the present tense and always personal**. Learning does not exist in an emotional vacuum. All learning takes place in emotionally charged environments. The classroom, in effect, is a place of heightened emotions. Fortunately or unfortunately, it is the teacher who creates the type of emotions that characterize a variety of learning opportunities.

What do students learn in the classroom? Concepts! But teaching of concepts alone does not fulfill the prerequisites for providing holistic and valuable education. Teachers are obligated to do more than just teach concepts. The challenges posed by students, every second and minute, require that teachers uphold and respond to the principles of democracy, love, respect, acceptance, individual differences, and personal needs, inside and outside of instructional periods. Though these principles sound splendid, they are too intangible and estranged from the reality of learning.

If you want to buy a loaf of bread, or some cheese, you need coins (loose change). You cannot expect to

buy these small everyday supplies by using a hundred-dollar bill.

Similarly, it is vital for a teacher to equip him/herself with specific skills for dealing effectively and humanely with the minute-to-minute happenings in the classroom – the small irritations, the daily conflicts, and the sudden crises – all of which contribute significantly to the overall quality of learning!

So, the next time you are tempted to smile when your class performs well in a particular subject, indicated by a good overall grade-achievement, think again. You might have been successful in teaching concepts. But the more important question you need to contemplate upon is whether or not you played your role as a positive socio-emotional regulator for your students' feelings, while learning was taking place. If learning and mastery of concepts is done devoid of emotional experiences, then that learning is quickly forgotten.

A simple illustration will help us understand this. Do you remember anything from last week? What can you recall about the week? How much can you remember? Not much I suppose. You might be able to recall vague experiences and events. However, if you had experienced an intense and emotionally charged incident, in all probability, you will be able to recall it with relative ease. Why? Simply because

the emotional center in the brain aid in boosting the retrieval of this particular memory.

Learning that is fully charged with positive emotions is more potent than learning that transpires in emotional hollowness. The kind of emotions that accompany every learning experience in the classroom is decided by the kind of teacher-responses directed at students. Intelligence, motivation, interest, and aptitude do contribute to performance in learning. But let us never forget that it is the emotional life of teachers and students in the classroom that make teaching and learning possible or impossible!

Many students testify to the fact that they have rejected learning on emotional rather than on cognitive ground. If only teachers realize how important it is to use their emotions and passion along with the intellectual aspect of teaching, the outcome of education would be more promising.

Have you ever wondered why students 'walk' to school and 'run' back home? Students hate school because teachers teach in a highly structured environment. Structure isn't altogether bad. It is required. But consider a child in his/her early years of development. How does he/she learn? Does he/she learn in a structured or highly unstructured environment?

Students get discouraged when learning in the classroom becomes rigid. Rigidity in the learning environment runs contrary to their curious and exploring minds. This creates tension and further frustrates them. A frustrated student does not want to learn. A frustrated student responds to instruction in the classroom by totally closing the doors of his/her mind.

I recall a class on Research Designs that I taught not long ago. Students were initially apprehensive about the course. The course sounded very technical to them. It had the element of statistics in it. These students had a tough time in their statistics class the previous semester. They were afraid of having to go through similar difficulties once again.

I understood this from our first meeting. Knowing their fear about the subject, I assured them that this was going to be a lot more fun than they had expected. Initially, students thought that I was joking about the 'fun' element. Later, they realized that Research Designs can indeed be a 'fun' subject. How did we do it? I can give you two reasons for this:

1. We made sure that our learning always took place in the context of positive emotions
2. We worked in an unstructured classroom environment, where freedom to explore, query, investigate, discuss, and exchange thoughts were encouraged and permitted

To my surprise, students' perception about their own fear toward the subject was dissolved in no time. Their liking for research grew and each student in the class prepared a complete proposal for a topic of their choice. This was all possible by making the teaching-learning process emotionally packed and more unstructured.

Here is a specific example of a teaching-learning experience that took place in that particular class. It was a lesson on the construction of data collection tools for research (instrumentation). Instead of using conventional methods of imparting knowledge, I invited the whole class to participate and construct a self-esteem inventory, with the help of a handout on the principles of effective instrumentation.

The class was noisy. Everyone participated. They were excited about constructing an instrument to measure a psychological construct all by themselves! Each student's suggestion was considered, evaluated, and accepted (or rejected). Once the tool was ready, students administered it to others in the college. They brought back the completed forms. We analyzed the data together. Conclusions were made with the help of every single individual in the classroom. And the tool was checked and re-evaluated cooperatively to establish its relevance and strength to measure self-esteem.

I could have easily taught the chapter on 'instrumentation' in one period, using the lecture method. I could have maintained a high level of discipline by requiring students to learn this particular portion in a rigid and structured environment. But I also know that learning is minimal, if not completely absent, when teaching is highly structured.

Structure gives rise to fear. Fear expels trust. Lack of trust creates discomfort. Discomfort ruins learning!

If I asked you to dance in front of a group of strangers, you would hesitate. However, if I asked you to dance in front of your friends, or someone very close to you, wouldn't you do it? The same goes for learning in the classroom. When structure gives rise to fear, distrust, and emotional vacuum, students close their minds to learning. However, a highly unstructured environment maximizes learning two or threefold, even in the classroom.

