

# THE EFFECTIVE TEACHER IS A CARING TEACHER

By Hedley J. Eager

Chuck was a difficult student who took out his frustrations on teachers and students alike. But after three or four years in the positive caring environment of a good school, he learned respect and came to understand what caring and concern for other people was all about.

What led to Chuck's change of attitude? How did he learn to be respon-

sible? Was there something special about Chuck's school that changed him?

He was quick to describe his feelings—"The teachers *care* about the students!" Like Chuck, all children readily discern genuine caring from pretense or insincerity. Caring was the number-one quality within their school that Chuck and his fellow students identified.

"Showing students that the faculty

care about them as people" was also rated as the most important strategy for school effectiveness by 285 administrators and teachers in 49 recognized effective secondary schools in the United States in 1987, in a research program conducted by the author.

Caring must come from within. Teachers must feel an inner love for every student, no matter how unattractive the child's appearance or how unacceptable his behavior. One

faculty member described this as “unconditional acceptance, separating the person from the deed,” while another said, “We practice... unconditional love and acceptance. We let them know that we love them.” But how did teachers do this?

First, as part of the learning process the faculty took time to listen to students and talk *with* them (not *to* them) to help them discuss their feelings and actions. Teachers thus enabled students to confront topics that were difficult for them. These concerns might include social, emotional, educational, or other areas of difficulty. The guidance offered by the teachers helped students learn self-control and appropriate ways of dealing with their feelings.

### **Relationship Building**

Second, the faculty sought every opportunity for informal and formal contact between both staff and students to *practice relationship building*. This included cultivating enthusiasm, making positive informal comments such as, “Hi, Christy! You look so happy today, it makes me feel good” or “Thank you for sharing your seat with Penny at lunchtime. That was very thoughtful of you, and it made Penny feel so much better.” Teachers made an effort to express positive comments throughout the school day. One principal estimated that someone in the school would hear an example of positive sharing every four to twelve seconds! Such positive interaction lets students know that teachers genuinely care about them.

### **Giving Support**

The third way that teachers demonstrated their caring was by *giving support*. This occurred within a planned network of staff interaction. Each student’s learning program was individualized because each teacher at some time was involved with every student. The individualized student programs were computerized and shared with all staff. Each program was updated weekly. Daily specialized staff meetings and a weekly faculty meeting focused on progressive development for each student.

Thus every staff member knew what was expected of each child and continual interaction between staff fine-tuned a support program for each student. These programs addressed the needs of the total child—emotionally, socially, physically, and educationally.

### **Communication and Consistency**

Fourth, genuine support for staff as

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well as students depended on two fundamental practices operating within the school—*communication* and *consistency*. Lines of communication were always open and emphasis was placed on how to help each child improve. Consistency focused on maintaining a uniform approach toward educating, guiding students through corrective discipline procedures, and maintaining enthusiastic relationships throughout the school.

### **Rewarding Compliance**

Fifth, to help develop each student’s self-image, every staff member practiced *rewarding compliance to*

*expected behavior*—recognizing it verbally or nonverbally, using kind words, making eye contact, smiling, or patting a student on the back while giving encouraging support.

Student self-esteem was enhanced by teachers’ taking time to *socialize informally with them*—inviting them home, taking them camping, having lunch with them, or just passing the time of day whenever the opportunity arose.

### **Teaching Values**

Sixth, as they developed self-respect, students gained confidence in themselves and their ability to interact with others in an acceptable way. They learned to give and accept respect. Students needing corrective discipline soon learned that the teachers cared about them as people. Who they were was far more important than the misbehavior. They were worthwhile human beings who had made a mistake or had used poor judgment. They had the right to *try again*. As a result of

the school's *teaching values*, students learned to share, to practice good manners, and to take turns.

### **Giving Affection**

Seventh, the faculties of the schools also gave *physical affection*—using the student's first name, taking time to listen to pupils, giving them a pat on the arm or back, saying nice words about them, giving them a hug, offering sincere praise, walking with them as they sang and talked together, and being role models of how the staff expected them to interact with one another.

Showing students that we as teachers care involves a total commitment of love. It means seeing the potential in every child. Their misbehaviors and learning problems must never distract us from the vision we have for each one of them.

Showing we care about students as people stimulates us to professional

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preparation of our academic work as well as prayerful cooperation with the Holy Spirit in leading each child to accept Jesus and become like Him.

Showing we care helps us to focus on the quality of the total school program as well as the effectiveness of

each learning experience for every child. Caring means addressing the needs of the whole child—spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, physical, aesthetic, and cultural. It means cheerfully committing time to listen, to share ourselves with students, to guide their individual thoughts so that they can make wise choices.

Time thus invested helps students sense that their lives are important to us, both in and out of the classroom. Such a commitment by faculty and administration will help students set worthwhile personal goals, and assist them in achieving their potential—in this life and in the life to come. "Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 18. □

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