



Module Twenty-Two: Creating an Environment Conducive to Learning

In order to become a Glasser Quality School the following criterion must be met

Relationships are based upon trust and respect, and all discipline problems, not incidents, have been eliminated.

Total Learning Competency is stressed and an evaluation that is below competence or what is now a "B" has been eliminated. All schooling as defined by Dr. William Glasser has been replaced by useful education.

All students do some Quality Work each year that is significantly beyond competence. All such work receives an "A" grade or higher, such as an "A+".

Students and staff are taught to use Choice Theory in their lives and in their work in school. Parents are encouraged to participate in study groups to become familiar with the ideas of Dr. William Glasser.

Students do better on state proficiency tests and college entrance examinations. The importance of these tests is emphasized in the school.

Staff, students, parents and administrators view the school as a joyful place.

Each competency will be expanded upon in future lessons but the two that will be examined in this one are Numbers 1 and 6. In order to create relationships based on trust and respect, eliminate discipline problems and create a joyful school, we must focus on establishing a need-satisfying environment that is conducive to learning.

This is similar to the discussion we had in Lesson 11 about creating an environment conducive to change but it is applied a little differently to a school, which is a system as opposed to an individual helping relationship.

Basic Premises:

All behavior is purposeful.

People are choosing the best behavior they have available to them to get whatever it is they want at any particular time.

If people truly knew and trusted a better way, they would choose it.

Whenever there is a discipline problem in school, it is because students are not able to get their needs met in a responsible way.

A school is a system. Instead of looking at individuals within the system, we will examine the system itself for flaws and make the correction at that level.

We are not attacking or blaming school teachers or administrators for any systemic problem. The educational system is bigger than any individual. The problem is systemic, not individual.

Last week we talked about how important the relationship is between a student and teacher if you want to have a positive influence with that student. It is also true that the relationship between your school administrator(s) and you needs to be based on mutual trust and respect in order for the administrator to have positive influence on you.

Teachers and administrators who threaten and intimidate those they manage might get what they want in the short term but it won't be internally motivated. It will be done grudgingly. No one likes to be coerced and controlled. It usually only results in compliance when the controller is present.

The keys to establishing an environment that is conducive to learning are developing relationships that are first, absent of external control, and second, need-satisfying.

Using only Caring Relationship Habits is a great start. Then teaching them to students and encouraging them to use them with each other is an excellent second step. Building positive relationships absent external control may be the single most important thing you can do, no matter what your relationship is to the person with whom you are interacting.

When teachers are working on creating an environment conducive to learning, they must focus totally on what they are doing to bring themselves closer to their students and avoid doing those things that move them further apart. In essence, teachers want to become a picture in the students' Quality Worlds.

Teachers are providing a place and space for students to get the needs of survival, love & belonging, power, freedom and fun met in the classroom. Let's look at each need individually.

Survival:

Naturally, you first want to attend to your students' physical needs. Are they hungry? Are they sufficiently rested? Is the environment oxygen-rich?

You want your students to feel safe and secure with you. This involves establishing trust. One of the best ways I know to establish safety is to prove yourself to be a trustworthy individual. The basics of trust begin with the physical environment you make available in your classroom. Is it comfortable? Is it well-lit? Is it interesting?

Next we want to look to the social environment. Is it safe? Is it free from bullying? Do students have a non-violent way to resolve conflict? Are they taught responsible ways to communicate what they want? Do they have skills to manage anger--their own and the anger of others?

Do the students feel safe with you? Do they know you wouldn't embarrass them in front of their classmates? Do they know you have their best interests at heart and would never knowingly hurt them, physically or emotionally? It's not enough to tell them this. You need to demonstrate it repeatedly through your actions.

Being non-judgmental helps your students feel safe with you. When you are non-judgmental, instead of punishing students, you are seeking to understand the causes and reasons for the "misbehavior" and work to correct the underlying causes. It is you and the student partnered together against the problem rather than you and the student against each other.

Knowing that things do not shock you and that you can handle whatever is going on in your classroom goes a long in helping students feel safe with you.

Demonstrating integrity in the teaching process is important. When you say you are going to do something, make sure you do. When you tell someone about the type of person you are, stay consistent with what you describe. Talk the talk and walk the walk. This will also help establish trust and a sense of safety.

Another way of creating safety is to have consistency established guidelines for behavior. Students need to know what the expectations are and what acceptable behavior is. Knowing this increases one's sense of safety and security.

Love & Belonging:

You want to be connected with your students. You want them to know you care about them and the things that are important to them. In *The Quality School*, Dr. Glasser states, "The better students know the teacher, and the more they like what they know, the harder they will work for him or her" (p. 48).

Know your students' names. Even get to know the names of students who are not in your classes. Learn, remember, and ask about things that are important to each student. Use humor appropriately and be able to laugh at yourself.

Create opportunities for teambuilding within your classroom. This not only allows students to feel connected to you but also to their fellow classmates. Create multiple opportunities for cooperative learning. Conduct regularly scheduled class meetings, which we will discuss in depth in module 24.

Power:

be given credit for work that is not at least B-level. Students can repeat the test or assignment and take as long as it takes to achieve competence, but you, the teacher, will not allow them to move on until they have full understanding of the current material. The time factor will be removed from the learning process.

Another way to help student gain power is by listening to their suggestions and allowing them a say in what happens in the classroom. Involve students in the curriculum development for certain subjects. Encourage them to help develop the class guidelines.

Notice each student's strengths, even if not necessarily academic, and encourage them to use and develop those strengths. One of the first things is to listen, really listen, to what they have to say. Often, this is the very first time someone is actually listening and that, in itself, is extremely powerful.

Create an atmosphere of respect by letting your students know they are important. Help all students value difference by recognizing everyone's unique gifts. Help your students understand the impact they can and do have on the world.

Listen to them. Sometimes, simply being listened to is all a person needs to feel respected. Do not demand respect from your students without first extending respect to them. Model the way.

Ask students to help out. They can help you, other students, the school or community. Find ways for them to make a meaningful contribution.

Another way to help your students feel more powerful is to teach them Choice Theory, helping them focus on the things they can change--their own behavior and thoughts. Help them see where they have control and show them how to focus their energies there.

How do you help students feel powerful at school? One way is through competency-based learning which will be the subject of next week's lesson. Basically, it is letting students know, they will not

Freedom:

Providing freedom within the educational environment is important. Whenever a person is not getting their freedom need met, they act out in ways to get more freedom. A wise teacher will provide responsible ways for students to meet their freedom need in class so students do not feel compelled to choose disruptive ways of meeting their freedom need instead.

Creating few, but important, rules creates freedom. Whenever you have 101 rules in your class, you are actually providing your students with 101 ways of getting their freedom need met by breaking your rules. Having only a few overarching guidelines, I recommend three, will provide the structure you need while creating a sense of freedom for your students.

Teaching for success by allowing students the opportunity to redo their work until they achieve competency, provides freedom from failure. Allowing students to sit where they want is a freedom. Encouraging them to help develop curriculum is a freedom.

Providing choices within assignments creates freedom. It is similar to the lead manager who tells her workers what she wants, allowing them to come up with the how. Teachers can do the same with students by telling them what the assignment is and allowing the students to choose the how. For example, you may want a writing assignment but allow the students to choose what they write about. Similarly, you may provide the class reading time but allow students to choose what it is they read.

Allowing students the independence they can handle can also be a freedom issue. You want student to be as free as they have responsible behaviors to manage that freedom. Not all students will be allowed the same level of independence. However, if a student wants increased independence, then you will use the questioning process of reality therapy to help him or her learn the responsible behaviors he or she needs to warrant the increased independence and freedom.

Opening up possibilities for your students can be freeing, as well. Many students limit what they believe is possible based on restrictions they, or others, have placed on them. Whenever a person tells me, "I couldn't do that," I often say, "Well, you could, but maybe you don't want to." I want students to see they always have a choice, even when it doesn't feel like much of a choice.

Another way to provide freedom is to allow students to determine the assessment tool they want to use to demonstrate their competency with certain material. Perhaps they can write a play, song or poem; present to class; write a paper; take an oral exam; or opt for the regular paper and pencil testing format. Opening these options can satisfy freedom and power, as well.

Finally, when a person feels safe enough and supported enough to engage their creativity, it is incredibly freeing. Encourage students to tap into their creativity every day.

Teach your students that responsibility and freedom go hand in hand. They have the right to choose whatever they want, as long as they are willing to pay the cost of those choices, whether positive, negative or neutral

Fun:

This need can be met in so many ways in school. You are only limited by the limits of your own creativity. And when that fails you, tap into the creativity of your co-workers or read a book about how to make learning fun for kids.

Jon Erwin, a senior instructor for The William Glasser Institute, has a book I highly recommend. It's called *The Classroom of Choice: Giving Students What They Need and Getting What You Want*. It will be an invaluable resource if you are interested in creating a classroom that is need-satisfying for both you and your students.

Conclusion:

When you have been successful in establishing an environment conducive to learning, don't stop there. There will always be ways to improve it. And you will know you are having an impact because the 6th competency, Staff, students, parents and administrators view the school as a joyful place, will be evident.

Your assignment this week is to complete the Needs-Satisfying Worksheet and record all the ways you currently use to assist students in meeting their five basic needs, and then, record additional things you plan to implement as a result of reading this module.