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HOW TO BE A CARING TEACHER IN CHINESE ESL CLASSROOM

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HOW TO BE A CARING TEACHER IN CHINESE ESL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

HOW TO BE A CARING TEACHER IN CHINESE ESL CLASSROOM

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Though expectations are known to influence perceptions and motivation, which, in turn, influence the effectiveness of any situation, students' expectations for caring teachers have received little attention. A caring classroom environment in which teachers and students promote positive learning behaviors appears to play a critical role in promoting students' language learning efficiency and pursuit of other positive social goals. How a teacher can be watchful of the students expectations and cope with one's own inner resistances to keep on caring or to shift the mode of caring is the question that requires study.

This paper reviews literature related to students' view on caring teachers and what benefit teachers' care will do on ESL learning. It also reviews literature about effective strategies on how to be a caring teacher in Chinese ESL classroom. The paper categorizes and combines the reviewed literature with the writer's own teaching experience. Through qualitative research, the paper intends to call awareness on the significance of teachers' care in Chinese ESL classroom, and introduce several practical skills of being caring for Chinese ESL teachers.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Because students spend a majority of their time in school, it is important to have a teacher who genuinely cares about them. Having a teacher who genuinely cares about his/her students will help the students to develop a positive self-concept as well as help them to be intrinsically motivated to do well in school. Students need to feel that they can confide in their teacher, especially those who come from less than ideal home situations.

Williams (2001) held the idea that when tests become high-stakes, teachers naturally focus their attention on the knowledge and skills the tests measure, leaving less time to engage students in conversation about personal issues or make them feel valued and supported. To achieve effective education, teachers must realize the truth that their genuine care make students feel valued, supported and motivated to learn. To be Specific, in Chinese ESL classroom setting, teachers' proper and timely care about students' psychological situation as well as their academic progress will motivate students to learn and help with students' language learning.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed is, How to be a caring teacher in Chinese ESL classroom?

### *Definition of Terms*

**Quality Teachers:** Teachers of a high standard, and they are responsible, creative, efficient and love their students.

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**Students' Expectation:** What students expect to acquire on the course.

**Students' Motivation:** Eagerness and willingness to learn without needing to be told or forced.

**ESL.** Abbreviation for the term English as a second Language (Retrieved on January 30 from <http://www.answers.com/topic/esl>).

### Delimitations of the Research

The research will be conducted in and through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over eighty-eight (88) days. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics included “students’ expectation ”,”students’ motivation” , “qualified teacher”, “caring teacher”, and “ESL”.

### Method

A review of literature relating factors, including students’ view on caring teachers, influence teachers’ care on students’ learning, and effective strategies will be conducted. The findings will be summarized and recommendations made.

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## Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

### Students' Expectation on Teachers' "Caring"

Though expectations are known to influence perceptions and motivation, which, in turn, influence the effectiveness of any situation, students' expectations for caring teachers have received little attention.

An article, "What Students Want From Teachers," appears in the November 2008 Educational Leadership (vol. 66, issue 3, 48-51.) The authors asked students (coming from different schools and different backgrounds, ranging from Kindergarten to grade 12) to describe a time when they felt in charge of their learning in school—when they were working not just for a grade but because they were excited and interested. Students' responses are as follows:

Take me seriously.

Challenge Me to Think.

Nurture My Self-Respect.

Show Me I Can Make a Difference.

Let Me Do It My Way.

Point Me Toward My Goals.

Make Me feel Important.

Build on My Interests.

Tap My Creativity.

Bring Out My Best Self.

Let Me Move at My Own Pace.

Tell Me I Can Do it.

Show Me How.

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These students' expectations have possibly covered most students' viewpoint on caring teachers. These are also the compass a caring teacher should always keep in mind.

### **Influence of Teachers' Care on Students' Learning**

Young children share their feeling and information about themselves with teachers who are nurturing and affectionate. These close relationships with teachers lead to higher levels of student engagement and achievement (Pianta, 1999). Stipek (2006) stated in her article, when students are asked how they know their teachers care about them, they refer to teachers being attentive ("She say hi to me when I come in the room"); addressing their nonacademic needs ("She saves a snack for me if I miss Snack time"); and being fair ("She makes sure I get a turn").

Another student complained about a particularly uncaring teacher:

He's just writing things on the board....He doesn't look at the class like, "Do you understand?" He's just teaching it to us. He sees that a couple of students understand it and he moves on. He doesn't make a space for us to ask. (Cushman, 2002)

Tice (1995) stated that in ordinary language, to care is to act upon one's wish appropriately to respond to a person's need. The person could be another or oneself. It is, we might say, a kind of love but not equivalent to any other kind of love.

It seems to me that it is this latter phenomenon, how it can arise and express itself, and how a teacher can be watchful of and cope with one's own inner resistances to keep on caring or to shift the mode of caring that most requires study. The importance of doing so is indicated by the great emphasis placed by students on wanting a caring teacher—and by teachers on wanting a caring principal. This is one

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of the major circulation systems in the body we call schooling. (Tice, 1995)

Stipek (2006) also held the viewpoint that being a caring and supportive teacher does not mean coddling; rather, it means holding students accountable while providing the support they need to succeed.

Teachers press students to learn by encouraging them, paying attention to their work and giving constructive feedback, refusing to accept halfhearted efforts, providing assistance when students need it, and refusing to give up on students. Holding students accountable without this support and encouragement is likely to discourage and alienate them rather than motivate them. (Stipek, 2006)

### **Effective Strategies**

#### 1. Let Known Teacher's Care

Williams (2001) agreed with Pianta (1999) that young children share their feelings and information about themselves with teachers who are affectionate and nurturing. These close relationships with teachers lead to higher levels of student engagement and achievement. "The personal relationships that these behaviors engender are particularly valuable for children who come to school with poor social skills (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2002)."

Adolescents report that they work harder for teachers who treat them as individuals and express interest in their personal lives outside school. Caring teachers, they say, are also honest, fair and trusting (Davidson & Phelan, 1999).

Williams (2001) suggested that teachers grant students some autonomy and opportunities for decision making—for example, by giving them choices in assignments, engaging them in developing classroom rules, and encouraging them to express their opinions in classroom

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discussions.

Conversations with students in both urban and suburban schools have convinced me that as long as teachers are providing the support students need, the students interpret teachers' efforts to hold them accountable as evidence that they care (Williams, 2001).

## 2. Understand Students' strengths and struggles

Antonio (2008) advised teachers to understand students' strengths and struggles. He stated that to know our students, we must know their communities and acknowledge their challenges.

A student's ability to stay engaged in school can be affected by that students home responsibilities, lack of family resources ,and peer-group, tensions related to social class hierarchies. Low-income students in particular benefit from having a meaningful relationship with at least one school staff member who knows their interests, skills, and struggles (Antonio, 2008).

As educators, we have a daily opportunity to build relationships that can foster educational and performance. As what Antonio (2008) has cited from a 2005 report for the Annie E. Casey Foundation asserts,

Some young people do well and stay in school despite tough circumstances.

Researchers studying their resilience have found that children need personal anchors—stable, positive, emotional relationships with at least one parent or key person... or they may play a role by offering emotional support during hard times, acting as the students advocate when conflict arises in school or at home, or by providing an opportunity to pursue a special talent or interest.

Many researchers claim early intervention for struggling learners:

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Students fail in school for a variety of reasons. In some cases, their academic difficulties can be directly attributed to deficiencies in the teaching and learning environment. For example, students with limited English may fail because they do not have access to effective bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) instruction. (Ortiz, 2001)

Ortiz (2001) also cited in his research paper:

Most learning problems can be prevented if students are in positive school and classroom context that accommodate individual differences. However, even in the most positive environments, some students still experience difficulties. For these students, early intervention strategies must be implemented as soon as learning problems are noted. Early intervention means that “supplementary instructional services are provided early in students’ schooling, and that they are intense enough to bring at-risk students quickly to a level at which they can profit from high-quality classroom instruction” (Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1991)

### 3. Give Timely Praise and Feedback

Brophy (1981) reported that praise has been widely recommended as an important reinforcement method for teachers because it can build self-esteem, provide encouragement, and build a close relationship between student and teacher. He pointed out that praise in the classroom appears to be dependent on teacher style , personality and their perceptions of students’ need for praise.

Students who received their teachers’ frequently provided negative feedback in the

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classroom reported a more negative relationship with their teachers (Burnett, 2002). American research cited by Merrett & Wheldall (1987) suggested that overall the general level of positive and negative teacher feedback is low, although teachers provide more negative feedback compared to positive feedback (Strain et al., 1983). In contrast, Merrett & Wheldall (1987) observed 128 teachers in England and found that 56% of the feedback given to students was positive, while 44% was negative. Furthermore, boys were more likely to receive negative responses from female teachers for social behaviors whereas male teachers provided male students with significantly more positive responses for academic behavior (Merrett & Wheldall, 1992).

#### 4. Create Classroom Community

As well as academic knowledge, teachers must make students aware of respect and responsibility. “To succeed in teaching respect and responsibility, teachers must make the development of a classroom moral community a central educational objective” (Lickona, 1992). “Education fails our children when it neglects the school as being a form of community life. This affects everything in a child throughout their school careers, which includes behavior and academics” (Dewey 1916).

“Children learn morality by living it. They need to be a community – to interact, form relationships, work out problems, grow as a group, and learn directly, from their first-hand social experience, lessons about fair play, cooperation, forgiveness, and respect for the worth and dignity of every individual.” (Lickona, 1992)

Teachers need to help students cultivate friendship, sharing, respectfulness, truthfulness, and caring. According to the Early Childhood Today Editorial Staff (2000):

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Everyone needs to play a part in passing ideas and traditions to the young, giving them feelings of cohesiveness and community. You, as educators, bear a special responsibility because of the many hours children spend in your program. By this point in the year, you've probably spent a good deal of time working to create a classroom environment that promotes values that help children work together as a group. Of course, this is an ongoing effort, with a reasonable number of expected pitfalls along the way.

Many experienced educators have offered in the website plenty of effective ways (or classroom activities) in their teaching practices.

#### 5. Develop Classroom Discipline and Principles

Lickona (1992) also held the idea that giving the students a voice in their environment gave them a stronger sense of involvement and ownership. Under the theory of Nelson and Lott (1993), teachers began holding classroom meetings to discuss, learn and role play situations that occur in the classroom and develop life mediation and communication skills.

Some other theorists like Albert (2003); Curwin & Mendler (1988) considered building an environment where all students belong as an essential part of discipline.

Through the teacher's development of discipline, students can begin to realize they do have control over their own destiny. Students begin to realize that they cannot control anyone's behavior but their own (Coloroso, 2002)

When Merwin (2005) explored his values, relations and circumstances with students, the following principles emerged to him, falling into three major categories:

Principle One: Find the mark on the continuum of doormat to dictator, and

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maintain it consistently.

Principle Two: Do not sacrifice the many for the one.

Principle Three: In order to get my students to work harder, sometimes I have to work harder.

Principle Four: Teach to the many as if they were interested as the one.

Principle Five: Admit that I cannot always “read” students.

Principle Six: Do not take student behavior personally.

Principle Seven: Make no assumption.

Principle Eight: Foster the love of learning in my students.

Principle Nine: Teach students like they are all prestigious and important people, because they are.

Principle Ten: Recognize the honor I have been given to change people’s lives.

Principle Eleven: Do your best to bring out the best.

Principle Twelve: Never stop trying to be a better teacher and never stop asking questions.

## 6. Individual Care for Problem Students

The final step of Walker et al (1996)’s hierarchy of education system is the individual students. “The individual student system provides established policies and procedure for responding to students who present the most severe forms of problem behavior” (Walker, 1996).

Three studies (Dunlap & Kern, 1996; Dunlap, Foster-Johnson, Clarke, Kern & Chilads, 1995; and Kern, Dunlap, Clark & Childs, 1994) report the use of information gathered from interviews with students with behavioral disorders to

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determine how instruction could be modified to encourage academic engagement.

Dunlap, et al (1996) outlines this process. First, teachers gather information that includes when appropriate behavior does and does not occur (e.g., during music, academic times, etc.). Next, teachers test hypotheses for possible solutions (e.g., assignments given in smaller increments). Finally, the intervention started and is evaluated for success. In this particular study, a severely emotionally disturbed student's curriculum was successfully modified when several large assignments were divided into smaller tasks and blended together.

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### **Chapter Three: Implication**

Combining what has been learnt from literature with personal experience of ESL teaching in China, the writer recognizes the strategies explained above are practical and effective.

The writer realizes that, among other things, the initiations for a caring teacher is to have correspondingly qualified knowledge and skillful output of the language of English, and to set classroom discipline and principles. ESL teacher should be a first-hand resource for ESL learners, able to implement a wide scope of vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, vocabulary, and note-taking strategies to conduct instruction.

Besides, the writer tends to pay special attention on the awareness of who the individual student really is, what background he/she comes from, thus to understand the strengths and struggles they are going through.

The writer's students come from different regions of China, or even from different culture. That means, firstly, they take different dialects which may well affect their efficiency on listening and speaking; secondly, they have different customs which may very possibly influence their blending in the ESL classroom environment and the way of internalizing things. Or, even students from the same region and same culture may have different levels on ESL learning. In the inclusive classroom, this may be the most challenging part for ESL teachers.

When dealing with writing course, timely feedback and encouraging evaluation can very effectively stimulate the students' interests and their eagerness to get improved.

As far as pronunciation and speaking is concerned, the writer pays specific attention on individual student's progress according to his/her background. Extra assist plan and hours are provided to those with special needs.

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## Chapter Four: Conclusion

A caring classroom environment in which teachers and students promote positive learning behaviors appears to play a critical role in promoting students' language learning efficiency and pursuit of other positive social goals.

In Chinese ESL classroom setting, mere introduction of the language and skills does not do the job of helping students attain effective language learning achievement. Qualified ESL teachers are teachers of a high standard in both English language and teaching methodology, and they are responsible, creative, and efficient and love their students. They focus on the students' achievements and their own improvement as well. To combine the strategies explained above on being a caring teacher (or many more other strategies) with teachers' own ESL teaching experience is of great practical significance. Both the students and the teachers themselves will benefit a lot from it.

In this paper, the writer tried to figure out the students' view on caring teachers and what benefit teachers' care will do on ESL learning, thus, to call awareness on the significance of teachers' care in Chinese ESL classroom. The writer put the emphasis on several effective strategies on how to be a caring teacher in Chinese ESL classroom then categorized them and combined them with personal experience.

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