

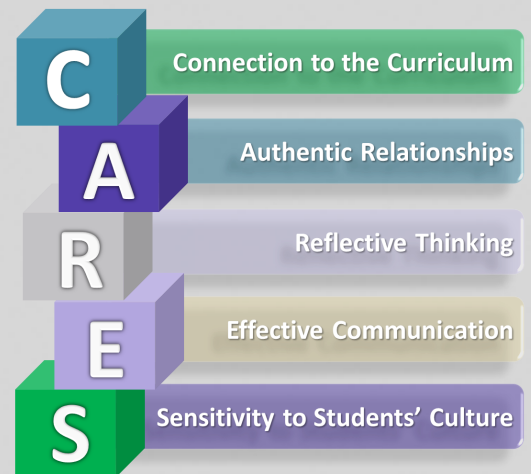


DOUBLE CHECKER ON CARES

What is CARES and What do the Letters Stand For?

CARES is an acronym used as a reminder of the five elements that research demonstrates are successful in engaging students of culturally diverse backgrounds at school. Each letter refers to a significant element of interaction within the classroom. Applying all five elements of CARES works because it promotes a better understanding of students and ourselves by using strategies that deepen those relationships every day.

There is no single element that works independently of the others. All five elements need to be applied in the classroom to be successful.



How Does CARES Work in the Classroom?

Research has shown that each of the five CARES elements has a significant impact on students and their behavior when used regularly and over time. Students who feel they are known and understood by their teachers as individuals in the classroom report deeper connections academically and to their school. When teachers understand their own cultural heritage, they better understand the differences between themselves and their students and report higher levels of mutual respect with students. **This also helps teachers to recognize the similarities they share with their students.** In classrooms where students actively learn, teachers welcome exploration, invite cultural differences, make connections to the curriculum, listen attentively to understand how each student is approaching the concept, and use humor and other communication tools to engage students. The 21st century classroom is one where knowledge is shared and students co-plan and co-teach with the teacher.

Where Should I Begin as a Teacher?

As teachers, we need to be willing to open up ourselves and our classrooms to new learning, recognizing that each of us has our own culture and biases that we bring with us. It is important to recognize that you create a classroom culture through the way you set up the classroom (i.e., layout), visual cues, and curriculum design. These elements reflect our own “methods” of teaching. You must ask yourself:

- What cultural elements do I communicate with my teaching methods?
- How mindful am I about my own cultural biases, so that I can be sensitive when they interfere with student learning?
- How can I get to know something about each and every one of my students, particularly those whose behavior may be more “challenging”?
- What do my students’ behaviors communicate to me about learning in my classroom?
- What risks am I willing to take to promote co-planning and co-teaching in order to put my teaching and subjects into context for ALL cultures?

Case Study

Ms. Conrad has been a successful teacher for a number of years, though started experiencing more challenges recently. She has noticed that the students are less prepared at the start of the year, they show less interest in learning, and families seem less visible in the classroom. After working with a Double Check coach at her school, Ms. Conrad became aware of how she valued education, realizing how her own upbringing in a professional family affected her values and culture. Ms. Conrad's education and family roots influenced how she taught, what she expected of her students and their families, and how she communicated those expectations. With that understanding, she was able to reflect and be mindful of these influences and was able to center her feelings when they interfered with her making sound decisions about student behavior. She decided she wanted to learn more about each of her students, so she identified a student each day to get to know better. Ms. Conrad did this by having lunch with individual students, visiting student homes when possible, learning about their families, and knowing their dreams, interests, music, and pastimes. She kept notes privately. After 6 weeks, she had learned something about each of her students. From these notes, Ms. Conrad recognized those students that she thought could help her engage other students who appeared most disinterested in school. Often, those same students were the most disruptive in her classroom. One student in particular, Kyle, really challenged her; he was moody, had a negative tone of voice, and was disrespectful towards her and the school. She used Function-Based Thinking to better understand his behavior, worked with several peers who were a "bridge" between her and this student, and found common interests. Kyle was willing to be a leader in one subject only, math; so she worked with him to co-plan his work, and he became a co-teacher with a small group of students struggling in math. She found that she could identify with his interest in music, so they talked about music when there was time during the day. Kyle's communication improved as she helped him see what "codes" to use in which setting, knowing that music is a code as well, but not always one that translates in all school settings. Ms. Conrad was so proud when Kyle earned his first C and she encouraged him to keep striving for good grades in science where his math skills could be applied. He advanced to the next grade, and comes back to see Ms. Conrad, who is the strongest connection he has at the school. Knowing this, Ms. Conrad has reached out to Kyle's new teacher to offer assistance in *double checking* his own classroom.

What Resources do I Have as a Teacher to Develop this Understanding?

As a teacher, you can find research, practice, and skill-building resources. The foundational research article below is tied to the *Double Check CARES* project. In addition, your school's Double Check Coach can be used as a valuable resource for you and your classroom.

Hershfeldt, P.A., Sechrest, R., Pell, K.L., Rosenberg, M.S., Bradshaw, C.P., & Leaf, P.J. (2009). Double-Check: A framework of cultural responsiveness applied to classroom behavior. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 6 (2), Article 5, Retrieved December 12, 2009 from <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol6/iss2/art5>.

Contact Us

JHUDoublecheck@gmail.com