Chapter 2
It All Begins With Relationships: The Glasser Quality School Model

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ABSTRACT
Understanding choice theory provides a foundation for developing relationships and is the central component of the Glasser quality school model. Choice theory is William Glasser’s explanation of human behavior and motivation. It is based on the premise that we all have five basic needs: love and belonging, power and achievement, the freedom to be independent and make choices, the joy in having fun, and basic needs of survival and safety. In a quality school, the goal of administrators, teachers, counselors, staff, and support personnel is to create an environment in which everyone in the system, especially the students, gets his or her needs met in responsible, respectful ways. In this chapter, the Glasser quality school criteria is explained in addition to the behavioral habits that help build relationships and the behavioral habits that break down relationships. Stories that highlight the experiences of administrators, teachers, and counselors who put Glasser’s concepts into action are included to illuminate the essence of the Glasser quality school model.

IT ALL BEGINS WITH RELATIONSHIPS: THE GLASSER QUALITY SCHOOL MODEL

In the authors’ experience, educators enter the field of teaching with a desire to make a difference in the lives of the students they teach and ultimately to influence the community for good. We recall our own early years as students, our excitement when beginning each new year and our fondness for the teachers who engaged us and helped us grow. We also recall times when our classrooms seemed to be unfriendly places, in which the teacher’s focus seemed to be more on outcome than process and maintaining discipline and order overrode creativity and inspiration.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5748-7.ch002
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The role of social interaction in the development of cognition was considered by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky to be a fundamental part of the learning process and critical to making meaning from content (Vygostky, 1978). The ideal learning environment is considered to be a “shared problem space, inviting the students to participate in a process of negotiation and co-construction of knowledge” (Haenen, Schrijnemakers, & Stufkens 2003, p. 246, as cited in Cramp & Lamond, 2016, p. 2). Cramp and Lamond made a case for the importance of engagement and kindness in the delivery of content, citing Bell’s (2011) contention that learning is an emotional practice that includes emotional work, which requires attention to how students feel as they are allowed to be fully authentic, active participants, and truly connected in the learning process.

In his book *The Quality School* (1990), Dr. William Glasser argued that the traditional system of managing students and delivering information was the source of problems in schools. He wrote about the importance of creating systemic change rather than having a focus on changing students. This change would occur by eliminating coercion and, instead, by creating a learning environment that would be need-satisfying to students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community. In fact, Glasser wrote extensively about the importance of eliminating coercion in all relationships, noting that it is our attempts to control others that is at the source of virtually all relationship problems (1998). Glasser explained that the use of what he called *Deadly Habits* (i.e. criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, and bribing or rewarding to control) are toxic to relationships, and yet these behaviors are indicative of the ways we interact with others in the hope that somehow things will improve. Glasser proposed that utilizing *Caring Habits* instead (i.e. supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating differences) is necessary for eliminating coercion and improving relationships in school and in life in general.

This chapter will provide an introduction to the work of William Glasser, especially as it relates to how his ideas influenced systemic change in schools and the development of the Glasser Quality School (GQS) Model. Personal and professional reports from school teachers who have adopted Glasser’s ideas will be shared and readers will learn how to access more information about these ideas that will be useful in applying these concepts in their own lives and classrooms.

**WILLIAM GLASSER**

Historically, Glasser’s focus on the importance of relationships began as a result of his early experience as a psychiatrist in a veteran’s hospital and in his work with adolescent delinquent girls. Glasser wrote about these experiences in his books *Mental Health or Mental Illness* (1960) and *Reality Therapy* (1965). Glasser, who was psychoanalytically trained, discovered that a psychoanalytic approach to therapy was not effective for the populations he served. Glasser argued for the importance of building a personally connected and collaborative relationship with his patients instead of being in a hierarchical relationship in which therapy was oriented to an exploration of the past, with a focus on the unconscious and achieving insight. Glasser’s focus was on mental health instead of mental illness, noting that the problems we face in our lives are basically due to the difficulty we experience in our interpersonal relationships. His therapeutic approach was based primarily on establishing a good working relationship with his patients, and then helping them accept personal responsibility for the areas in which they had some control. Glasser helped his patients identify ways to make changes that led to meaningful relationships with self and with others.