

The 6R's of Successful Classrooms

A Model for Developing a Quality Classroom

by Larry Taylor and Bette Blance



We all want our classes to function effectively. We put time and effort into planning how we will teach the content, but how much thought and effort do we put into ensuring that the group functions effectively? How much is left to chance? By working through these six stages, we are planning for successful group development and we are more likely to get the results we seek.

Introduction

When a group of students and a teacher are brought together in the same room at the beginning of a new school year, both become engaged in establishing a new classroom context. This classroom context will change from year to year due to factors such as the age of the students, the diversity and personality of the group and the health and energy levels of the teacher. Each participant in this class forming process brings to this setting diverse prior knowledge about how classrooms work and about how people interact and behave. Each also brings an expectation of what they want their classroom experience to be like. This knowledge and expectation is accompanied by a range of well learned and established patterns of behaviour designed to shape the world so that it more closely resembles the way each wants it to be. Individually and together, the students and teacher learn which of these behaviours will be most effective in getting each what they want to meet their needs in this new setting.

Although it is possible to adopt a wait and see approach, whilst various members of the group try out behaviours to see which work and which don't, we are suggesting a less haphazard process. Numbers of teachers and university students in teacher education have been using the process we are proposing in the 6R's model (*Figure on page 10*) as a way to identify and organise those behaviours conducive to establishing and maintaining a quality classroom.

Deciding which behaviours will be effective in the new setting involves reorganising existing behaviours. For individuals this can be guess and check, a largely unplanned process of sorting, sieving, selecting and testing behaviours. For a group, this process can be more effectively carried out if the students and teacher jointly determine which behaviours will be accepted and will work within the classroom and which behaviours will not. It involves a process of identifying, viewing, labelling, categorising, trialling, verifying, accepting and rejecting behaviours. This is important in making sure that everyone has the same clear, shared understanding of which behaviours will be accepted and work in the classroom and which will not. It also ensures that everyone involved knows what those behaviours are, what they are called and what they look like. It is also important to replace each unwanted or unacceptable behaviour with one that is wanted, is acceptable and is able to be practised. If we identify, view, label and reject *nagging*, *begging* and *whinging* as unacceptable and unwanted, for example, then we need to identify, view, label, accept and practise a replacement behaviour which is wanted such as, *ask politely and wait for a response*. At the beginning of a year, it is also useful and necessary for teachers to share with their students information about ...

"themselves and what they stand for;

what they will ask students to do and what they will not ask them to do; what they will do for them and what they will not do for them; and"¹ which behaviours work with them and which behaviours do not.

In the process, students begin learning how best to communicate with their teacher. Being able to communicate with others in the group is a key element in forming relationships.

Relationship

As introductions begin, with each student meeting the new teacher, the teacher meeting each new student and the students meeting each other, there begins the forming of many new relationships which are to be maintained at least over the twelve months, or longer in the case of some multi-age classes, that the group will be together. This is a crucial time, because the forming of viable and sustainable, positive **relationships** that are based on trust, is vital to the success of the group. Where there is trust between two or more people, there is also the opportunity to **influence**. Students come to school already having formed a perception of themselves. This perception is either confirmed or influenced by the experiences each student has in the classroom. Students who perceive themselves as competent and confident will have their perception confirmed, if others in the classroom, including the teacher, accept them and value their contributions. On the other hand, students who come to school with the perception that they are unlovable and incapable will have their perception confirmed, if they lack a strong connection with the other members of the class, including the teacher, or they perceive their contributions aren't valued. These same kinds of experiences may also influence students to change their perceptions of themselves in either a positive or negative way. Only by developing a relationship based on trust will the teacher really become aware of how each student views himself. Developing and engendering personal trust relies on the presence of key elements in a relationship.



They are ...

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| <i>believability</i> | - Does what you say hold true? |
| <i>reliability</i> | - Do you do what you say you will do? |
| <i>confidentiality</i> | - Do you reveal what others tell you without their permission? |
| <i>responsibility</i> | - Do you take ownership of what you do?
- Are you accountable for what you do? |
| <i>flexibility</i> | - Are you prepared to negotiate and/or change? |
| <i>safety</i> | - Is what you do free from harm? |

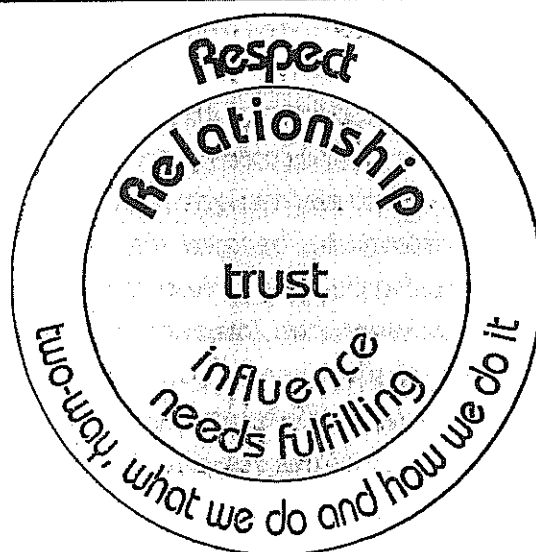
These elements apply equally to the teacher and the students. Discussion and modelling of each of these key elements by the whole group is crucial in setting up a learning environment where quality relationships are being developed. It is not enough that these elements are demonstrated in specific lessons, they need to be a part of a group's whole mode of operating on a daily basis. Doing this

immerses students in a classroom context that teaches, encourages and supports effective behaviours in developing and maintaining relationships.

At the beginning of the year, significant time needs to be spent on getting-to-know-you and relationship building activities. This is sometimes more important for the teacher than the students, particularly if the students already know each other well. These kinds of activities involve the giving of information about self and the gathering of information about others and require a level of **cooperation** and **trust**. Examples of getting-to-know-you activities include ways to get to know names. Knowing and being able to say a person's name sends that person a message that they are a valued and important member of the group. We are constantly amazed by class groups in which, even two thirds of the way through the year, there are still students who do not know each other by name. It is important to reach an agreement that whenever one member of the group is referring to some other group member, that it is important to always refer to that person by name. Circle activities where students can make eye contact with the speaker and use repetitive patterns and alliteration, like "Angelic Angela", "Beaut Bob", or "I'm Jason and I like jelly." are fun and help give them a reason to use and a way to remember each other's names. The information given and gathered, seen and heard in this way is vital in assisting individuals to form perceptions of each person in the group, including the teacher. We form these perceptions of others based on the information we have about them. These kinds of activities need to be graded from relatively safe sharing of non-threatening personal information, such as eye and hair colour and gradually building to the sharing of more personal, potentially-threatening information about self, such as experiences, opinions, ideas, dreams and hopes. Each person needs to know that their ideas will be accepted, that they will not be laughed at or put down. This kind of sharing needs to begin initially with one other person, progressing to groups of four and very gradually and selectively to larger groups with each person's right to choose what to share and what not to share being **respected**. Having others listen to us is needs-fulfilling, because we see not just what we say, but ourselves, as valued and important. When we are listened to by the group we see ourselves as a part of the group, we feel included. It is important that the teacher is a participant in this process rather than only an observer. By sharing and self-disclosing, the teacher models appropriate behaviour for the students, assists them to form a positive perception of the teacher and gains the students's trust. Whilst this is especially important at the beginning of the year, the process of relationship building is ongoing and cannot be neglected or taken for granted as the year progresses.

Respect

By participating in this process, students develop **respect** for themselves and others, including their teacher and a respect for their own ideas and the ideas of others. If respect is present, class members will be more likely to treat each other with courtesy and consideration and to display care and concern for one another. Being respected helps us to feel important and worthwhile. When students give and get respect, they will also be more likely to show respect for their own property and the property of others. The development of mutual respect in this way is important, because when respect is present in the relationship, then both students and teacher are more readily able to recognise that each has certain **rights** within the context



of the classroom. It also means that everyone will be more ready to forgive someone who makes a mistake. As none of us is perfect, we need to allow people to make mistakes and to tell them that it is okay to make a mistake, but that it's not okay to keep making the same mistake. When someone makes a mistake it needs to be seen as an opportunity for the individual and the group to learn from the mistake and to teach about tolerance and forgiveness. To facilitate this, everyone in the group needs to know how to apologise, how to accept an apology and to be able to work out ways to correct errors or solve any problems that may arise.

How to apologise ... (How to say you're sorry.)

- look the person in the eye
- say "I'm sorry ..."
- say the person's name
- say what you're sorry for e.g. I'm sorry for breaking your pencil, John.

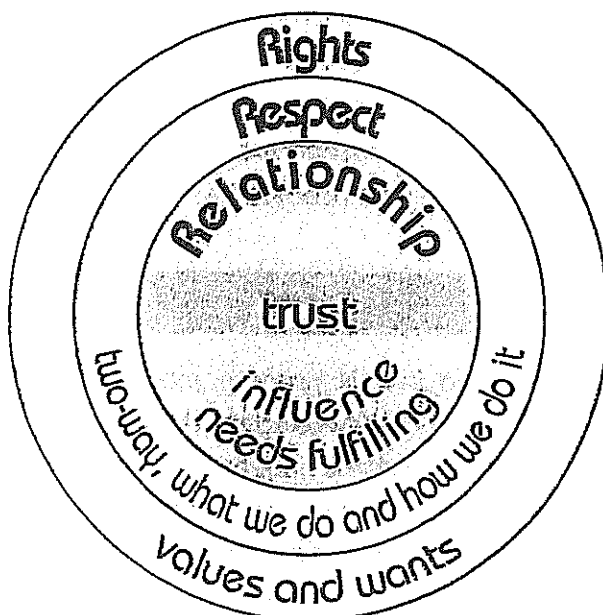
How to accept an apology ...

- say "I accept your apology ..."
- say the person's name e.g. I accept your apology, Michael.

When a class member, including the teacher, makes a mistake they separate or alienate themselves from the rest of the group. Apologising is one part of the process of solving the problem and is necessary to repair the relationship. It needs to be done in a way that shows respect for the person or persons injured by the mistake. It also allows the person who made the mistake an opportunity to take responsibility and to be reaccepted as a member of the group.

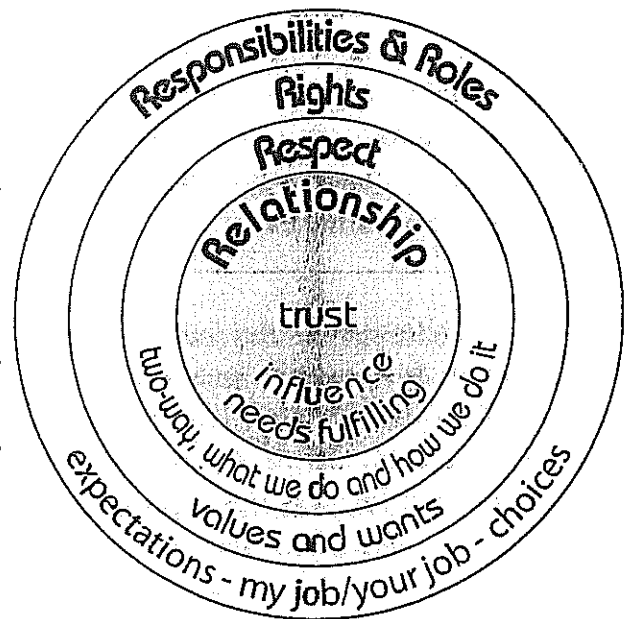
Rights

Before **rights** can be recognised, it requires some discussion take place first. The students and their teacher need to talk about what their rights are within the classroom. Historically, rights have been fragile. Rights have been granted and rights have been taken away and this occurs with great frequency and often arbitrarily within classrooms, so it is important to establish what these rights are and what they mean. Acknowledging that such rights exist is an important step towards establishing an environment that is just and fair. If these rights are clearly articulated, then they will provide a foundation and a **reason** for the structures that follow. For students, their rights may include the right to feel safe, have acceptable fun, be listened to, be cared for and learn. For teachers, their rights may include the right to feel safe, have acceptable fun, be listened to, be cared for, learn and teach. These rights can also be easily linked to Glasser's basic needs of "**survival, power, fun, freedom and belonging**"². Discussing each of these rights and what they mean, including example scenarios is needed to develop a shared understanding of how they affect our behaviour towards one another. Everyone needs to understand that when we choose to ignore the rights of others, we lose their **respect**, their **trust** in us fades and we damage the **relationship**.



Responsibilities

Once we recognise that each of us has **rights**, our own rights and the rights of others, we need then to understand that each of these rights carries with it an accompanying **responsibility**. Each accompanying responsibility can be, and needs to be, clearly spelled out. An additional important aspect of responsibility is the understanding that each person is responsible for their own behaviour. This includes being accountable for that behaviour. When someone is considered as being responsible for their behaviour, it also suggests that they are able to control that behaviour. When we make clear what each person's responsibilities are within the classroom, we also make clear what aspects of their behaviour each person is able to control. The following outlines some suggested rights and responsibilities.



Right	Responsibility
<i>to feel safe</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • act safely • let others know when something is unsafe
<i>to have acceptable fun</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have fun responsibly without harming others
<i>to learn</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put effort into learning • ask and answer questions • listen, think and form an understanding • be prepared for learning
<i>be listened to</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen to others • speak in a way that others want to hear
<i>be cared for</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • care for others • care for yourself • ask for help

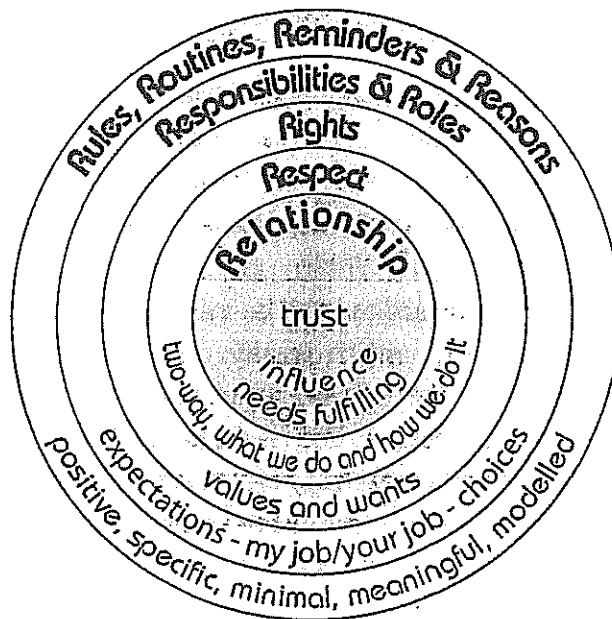
Roles

Within the classroom context, each of these **rights** and accompanying **responsibilities** can be explained more easily by identifying, defining and establishing the **role** or part each person, teacher or student, has in maintaining it.

By having the group engage in a process such as *My Job – Your Job*, it is possible to shed some revealing light on what students perceive as their role and what they perceive as their teacher's role in the context of the classroom. This process involves first asking students to outline what they see their teacher's role is in the classroom. The next step is to ask students to outline what they see as their role in the classroom. The real insight comes in having the group compare the similarities and contrast the differences in the two lists. There are frequently so many similarities between the two lists, that it is usually possible to

Rules

Just as we erect fences to clearly define the boundaries of a property, *rules* help to define the boundary between what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the classroom. Rules also help to set the standard against which behaviour is measured. Although this is extremely useful, rules have the more important task of assisting us to protect our *rights*. Rules are necessary to safeguard everyone's rights at school. However, it's important to realise that these same rules can curtail rights that some class members may have outside of school. This aspect needs to be addressed, so that students understand, although they may have additional privileges elsewhere, why different conditions apply at school. Without written rules to guide decision making about behaviour, we have no immediate or visible protection or guarantee against any infringement of our rights that occurs. When infringements do occur, it is the rules to which we will turn, when we seek to have students take responsibility for their behaviour, to self-evaluate and ultimately, to solve the problem. Solving the problem rather than punishing the person causing the problem is the main objective. We need to keep in mind however, that rules are only effective in assisting people to take responsibility for their behaviour, where there is mutual respect and an understanding of individual rights. This means giving all of those involved in a problem the opportunity to speak, and being prepared to listen and ask questions. There are a number of ways in which rules can be devised and presented. Because our brain recognises patterns and makes sense by organising and categorising information in ways that are meaningful, it is useful to present classroom rules in a way that will make them more likely to be remembered. We can further support this through the use of illustrations and colour to assist the text. Rules need to be clear, specific and kept to the minimum necessary to ensure rights are protected. As well, everyone needs to know the reason for having each rule. The rules also need to be modelled so that everyone can see what they look like and how they will operate in practice. Importantly, rules need to be suggested, negotiated, discussed and agreed upon by all members of the group, otherwise we run the risk that some will not respect the rules and have no reason to, because they see them as arbitrary and an attempt to control behaviour. If they are not part of formulating the rules, some students may not see the rules as really applying to them. Rules also become more meaningful if they arise from within the context of a specific set of expectations. These expectations have the benefit of providing specific guidelines for all behaviour, including any which may not be precisely covered by the rules.



A Set of Specific Expectations: *(The use of an acronym assists memory.)*

Think before doing
Respect self and others
Use common sense
Speak the truth
Take responsibility

Each of these expectations and its reason for being needs to be explained in detail. For example using common sense means using your senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling) to notice when something needs to be corrected like, my hands are dirty, I need to wash them. As well, these expectations remind

blend them into one list, which has the heading *"Collectively our job is to ..."*. When students suggest an idea such as, *"the teacher's job is to make us learn"*, it presents an ideal opportunity to teach students that no one can make them do anything they don't want to do and that what really happens is, that they as learners make the choice to learn or not to learn. The ensuing discussion enables everyone to define where the responsibility to learn lies. Students may also say that *"the teacher's job is to teach"*. Here again is an opportunity for the teacher to propose that everyone in the classroom is a teacher and everyone is a learner. It is important to wait until both lists are complete, before engaging in these kinds of discussions, which will likely challenge students' perceptions, so that students' ideas aren't stifled by doubts about the validity of their answers.

Whilst an exercise such as that outlined above helps to define in general terms a group member's role in the classroom, it is possible to create more specific roles more closely related to our rights within the classroom. For example, if we have the right to be safe then our classroom needs to be a safe place. If the classroom is to be a safe place, we need to clarify the teacher's role and the students's role in making it and keeping it safe. Although everyone who resides in the room has a general responsibility for maintaining its safety, one way to highlight its importance is to make it the specific responsibility of selected students by giving them the role and responsibility of health and safety officers. The parameters and responsibilities of the role need to be clearly spelled out, so that students can carry out their role effectively and knowledgeably within defined limits. Giving students this responsibility does not in any way negate the teacher's role or responsibility for safety in the classroom, rather it enhances that role.

Role: Health and Safety Officer

- Give class members limited first aid
- Keep first aid kit well stocked
- Display health and safety posters
- Look out for safe practices
- Inform teachers of unsafe practices
- Remedy some unsafe practices

We have deliberately chosen a role which some may see as potentially controversial. We have done so for two reasons. The first is that unless the role involves meaningful and useful work, which contributes to the welfare of the whole group, there is no point to having it. Students will very soon identify that their role is a role in name only, and that it makes no useful contribution. This defeats the purpose, which is to have students take personal responsibility for what the role involves and to have ownership of it. If they perform the role well they gain the respect of the other members of the group. The second reason is that whatever the role, it needs to be subject to the parameters laid down by the teacher in consultation with the group. Although the teacher may design the role, consultation with the group is important to incorporate any additional parameters that students are able to identify and to discuss potential problems. If the teacher is non-consultative then they run the risk of having the role appear to be a token one only. Students will become well aware, if the subject is discussed with them, that there would be potential problems, if they were to step outside the boundaries of their role. The assigning of roles helps students to see the responsibility as being important.

Once the rights, responsibilities and some roles have been established, there needs to be a way to ensure that everyone remembers their role and their responsibilities and how important both are in contributing to the collective well being of the whole class, including the teacher. The first way to do this is to formulate some classroom rules.

the group of many of the key elements mentioned earlier, that are important in establishing the personal trust necessary to a viable, cohesive relationship.

Routines

Once the rules are in place, we need to make it as easy as possible for everyone to follow the rules. One way to do this is to establish **routines**. Routines are sets of behaviours that are useful in accomplishing a task. Ideally they are simple, repeatable and practised until they are known well. We all have routines that we follow daily, from the moment we wake up till the moment we fall asleep. Routines help us to feel safe and secure. Within our routines we feel comfortable, because we are dealing with known parameters. Routines can be energy efficient and time-saving. A routine is also useful, because it is a set of behaviours, which usually result in a desired outcome. Some of our routines become so well established, that we no longer have to think, we just do. Establishing and practising routines is an ongoing process, as the need arises. There also needs to be a way of keeping everyone aware that the rules exist and what they are. On our roads, we have signs to remind us of the **rules**, that we are to follow when we are on them. In the classroom, we need to provide as many signs as are necessary to ensure everyone knows the rules and the routines and the **reasons** for them. We give reasons to show the justification, motive and purpose for everything that is being put in place and so that what we are doing looks logical and makes sense. The signs serve as continual **reminders** that there are rules and what they are. Reminders can be verbal or non-verbal, question or statement, visual or non-visual or even physically modelled by one or more members of the group e.g. "Who can show me how we put our bags on the rack?". An example of an expectation, a rule, a routine, a reminder and a reason is ..

Expectation: Use common sense.

Rule: Look after all property.

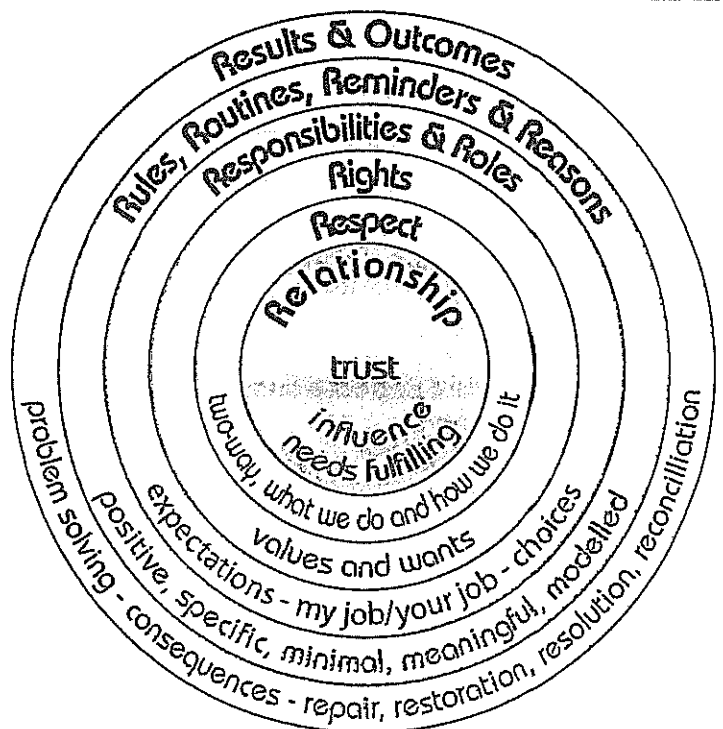
Reminder: A box with a sign "Lost Property" on it.

Routine: Lost property is placed in the box so the owner can find it.

Reason: It might get damaged or we might trip over it.

Results

Whenever established **rules, routines, reminders, roles, responsibilities, or expectations** aren't adhered to by any group member, the **results** are serious. This is in part, because such actions represent an infringement on the **rights** of the other members of the group. The result is a loss of **respect**, a damaging of the **relationship** between the members of the group and the person and a consequent loss of **trust**. These are just some of the consequences of any such action. Some consequences may be perceived as either natural or designed specifically by the group. If a student were to direct a "put down" statement towards someone else in the group, they would be displaying a lack of respect for others. A natural consequence of that action is that the student



loses the respect of the other group members. A designed consequence might be a mediation process that enables the involved parties to reconcile differences and may occur at a mutually agreed time or at a time convenient to the aggrieved party. These consequences constitute the main basis of the discussions that need to take place to solve the problem. It is these impacts on the group that are more important than the actual breaking of the rule. Students need to realise that by their actions, it is not just the teacher they have let down, but also themselves and the other members of the group and that they need to undo the damage in order to restore the trust and the relationship. The desirable outcome is a process by which this *repairing, restoration, reconciliation or resolution* can take place. If the opportunity to restore the relationship is not provided, then the individual continues to lose **respect**, further damages the **relationship** and will likely continue to ignore the **rules**, overlook the **rights** of others, and neglect their **responsibilities** within the group. This is a no-win situation for all concerned. There always needs to be the opportunity and a process for a student to informally solve a problem. If we have put sufficient time and energy into developing the **relationship**, establishing **trust** and building **respect** within the group at the outset, then it is more likely that students will want to restore it, when it is damaged. If such a relationship exists, then when students are asked whether they want to be a **problem solver** or a **problem maker**, they will almost always opt to be a problem solver. To choose otherwise invites others to make problems for them and damages the relationships they have built with the other members of the group. For our part, we may need to provide additional structure and support so they can more easily do what they say they want to do.

Conclusion

Guiding students through this process produces a shared perception of what each person expects the teacher, their classmates and their room to be like. A clearly understood picture, of how the world that is their classroom works, is vital to ensuring everyone feels safe and secure. Students need to understand which behaviours are accepted and which aren't, what the boundaries are, the **routines** that operate, the **rules** that exist and the **reasons** for them. Everyone needs to know how the problems that will occur will be dealt with and solved. **Solving problems** is

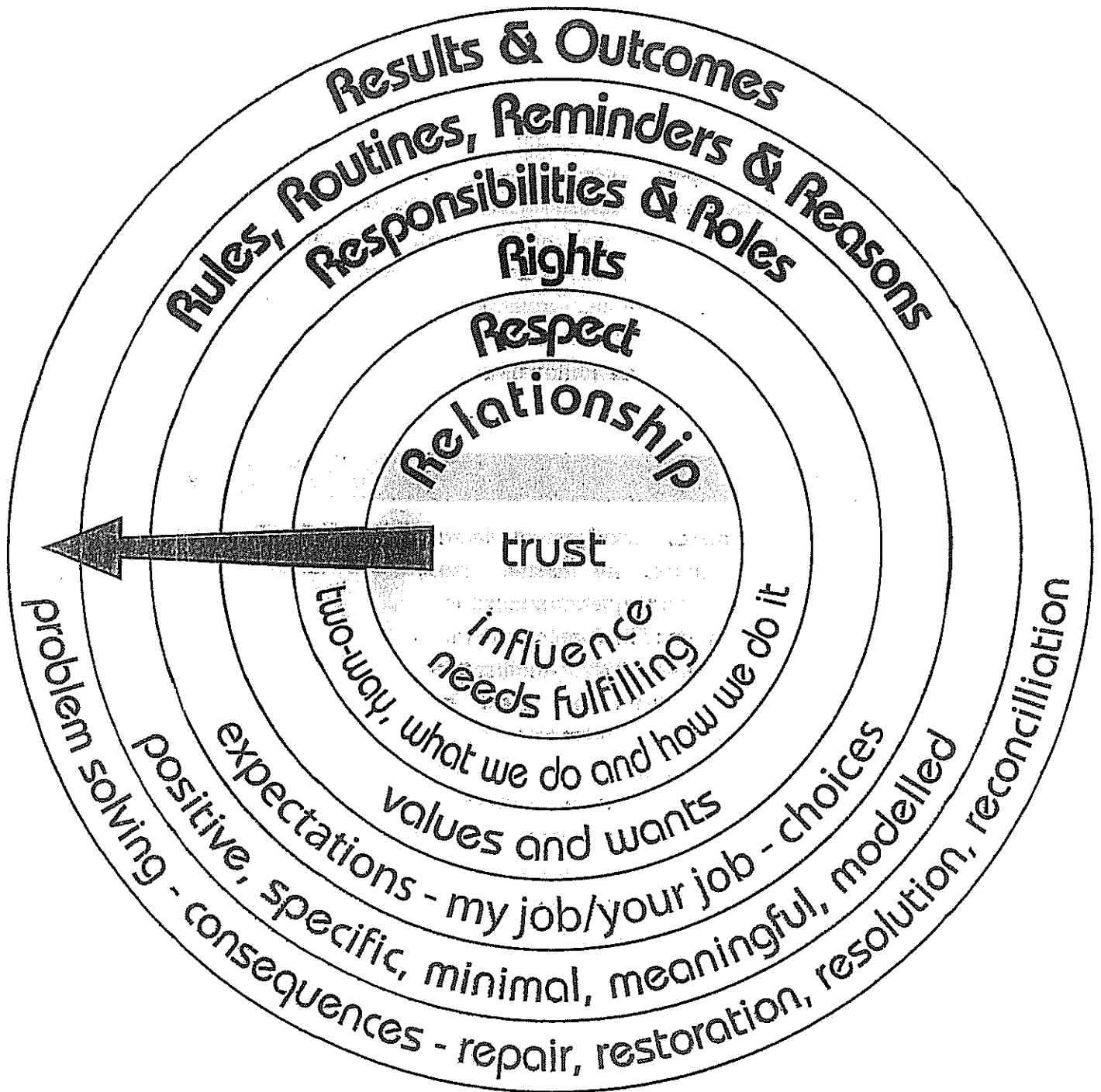
Relationship
Respect
Rights
Roles
Rules
Results
Trust

the objective. Solving problems involves lots of asking questions and listening to responses to get students to think about what they have done, so they are able to recognise the problem and its impact on the others in the group as well as devise a solution. This needs to be done consistently, firmly and fairly, so that everyone concerned sees the outcome as just and has a belief in the process. For this to occur effectively, every member of the group needs to be able to **trust** every other member. Any loss of trust needs to be repaired quickly or it will be replaced by suspicion and accusation and the **relationships** formed will begin to unravel. Where there is no **relationship**, it becomes more difficult to ask anyone to take **responsibility** for their behaviour and to **self-evaluate**. Problems that arise need to be seen as opportunities to learn about how to get on with others more effectively and how to avoid creating further problems. For all concerned, the understanding of how things work in their classroom becomes a shared vision that **influences** all interactions within the classroom and when done effectively, sets a standard against which all interactions at school and elsewhere can be measured.

Reference List

1. Glasser, W. (1993). *The Quality School Teacher*. New York: Harper-Collins.
2. Glasser, W. (1998). *Choice Theory*. New York: Harper-Collins.

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