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## **Impact of Mentoring on At-Risk Youth**

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### **Abstract**

This research is a Qualitative case study which highlights the important role of an educational leader using mentoring and socio emotional techniques to save her student from extremist activities in the name of religion. Educational leaders should be committed not only toward their students' academic enrichment but also focus on developing their student's socio emotional wellbeing and build in them the confidence when they need it the most. Whenever at-risk youth is mentioned, it is assumed that they hide destructive layers under their body and mind. They need someone who knows how to read these signs and the educational leader should play a key role in this regard. This study will help educational leaders and managers to understand the aspects, importance and applicability of social emotional learning (Cognitive Affective) on students' behavior. Furthermore the study will also show how using some techniques of care, the teacher not only saves her students' life but also the lives' of many other students. This research accentuates the importance of creating a strong bonding with students. For curriculum developers, it is of key importance to inculcate religious content that emphasizes more on aspects related to care through animal rights in Islam and humanity on whole. Furthermore this research provides imperative guidelines to inculcate social emotional learning in 'Islamiat' curriculum and shares the result on student's behavior towards people generally. Finally, it emphasizes the leaders' role of managing students on the basis of Socio Emotional Learning.

**Key words:** *Leader, Mentoring, At-risk youth, Socio Emotional learning, Care Curriculum, Extremism*

### **Introduction**

While on their way home people would cross the tracks and get trapped between sudden movements of the cargo train. Six residents died and lost their limbs. My maid's son was the seventh and last victim of this tragedy. I visited my maid's home for condolence where I was warmly welcomed by other women of the community. I was urged to start a non-formal school or

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a play group in that area. Initially a bit reluctant, I did start a non-formal one roomed <sup>2</sup>Community Based School (CBO) in a marginalized area of Karachi in the year 2002.

In a few years the non-formal school became a formal one. My students who entered at pre-primary level reached secondary section and I witnessed a great shift in their behaviors and attitudes. I had seen them grow in front of my eyes. Some of them became reserved and some would stay out late with friends. What I especially noticed was that neighborhood mothers were not aware what their sons were doing. When mothers were called to caution them to keep an eye on what their sons were doing, they would explain that since they are boys they couldn't control them. This type of attitude encouraged boys to act carelessly because they knew no one was supervising them.

As far as the role of teachers is concerned, they focused more on the cognitive side and ignored the pupils' socio-emotional needs. I noticed that the curriculum incorporated nothing that made them caring human beings who make positive contributions to the world.

This research is about one student who was negatively influenced by an irrational character whom he idolized. When the student reached grade VIII, I experienced a great shift in his behavior as he started avoiding my classes. He started raising questions and doubting the importance of worldly teachings and began influencing other pupils in classroom as well. He became very aggressive both inside and outside of class.

Teachers in the school could not identify the reason behind this shift in his behavior. Some suggested very strongly that I expel him out of school in order to protect other students from his negative influence. For me, as a CEO, it was difficult to rusticate a student who had spent eight years with me but I couldn't ignore this issue any more. We started reflecting on possible reasons and factors behind his behavior. Things started getting worse when he openly declared his association with a terrorist organization supporting their views openly.

### **Statement of Problem**

It is very important for a child to get caring and nurturing environment in school where students look upon their teachers for guidance. Reality is different from what should happen in a learning institution because usually, there's no one to guide them. Teachers are like machines who come

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<sup>2</sup> pseudonym for the case study

and go and show least concern for what is happening in their student's life nor do they ponder why the student is completely ignoring their Socio-Emotional needs. This research will fill the gap and guide teachers how to handle at-risk youth.

### **Research Questions**

- Can a students get inspired by extreme thoughts?
- Can mentoring help at-risk students change their negative perspective to positive?
- Does a family play a positive role in mentoring at-risk children?

### **Research Objectives**

- To find out how students get inspired by extreme thoughts
- To gauge how mentoring changes students perspective positively
- To determine the role of families who lack close bonding with at-risk children

### **Literature Review**

#### **Mentoring**

Extensive research has been conducted regarding mentoring the youth and considerably for those that are at-risk. Slack, et al. (2013) mentions that students who are unsuccessful in their academic endeavors are at a substantial risk of dropping from school or require a mentor. Hoover (2005) states that a mentor is a person that encourages and cares for a student and is actively involved in the educational undertakings of the pupil.

Rhodes (as cited in DuBois et al. 2011) states that mentoring has three categories including: cognitive, identity and social-emotional. Social emotional aspect can be inculcated when the mentor models caring behavior and provides support to the mentee. This is especially helpful when the youth experience non satisfactory relationship with people around them especially parents.

Mentoring also facilitates the cognitive ability in students. When a student is involved in a mentoring program that is consistent, long-term and following a proper framework, there are tangible results that can be drawn from it (Tierney & Grossman, 2000). Hence mentoring can be a tool that can be used by a teacher to deal with at-risk students.

## **Cognitive Affective Curriculum**

Cognitive/Affective Curriculum helps prepare student body to face challenges of the world, and it also inculcates critical thinking habits among youth. The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five major interrelated sets that include behavioral, affective and cognitive competencies. The five sets are “self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making (CASEL)”. Cognitive and Affective curriculum is the process through which students are able to apply knowledge, attitudes and skills to achieve positive results and make informed decisions.

Effective SEL programming needs a curriculum based approach that is properly structured and can be applied consistently over the years (as cited in Kress et al., 2004). Ragozzino et al., (2003) explains their experience of promoting and integrating SEL in school students and also preparing the teachers and staff to develop these skills. Brandt (2003) states that learning is not solely cognitive because when it is inculcated in classes, SEL answers challenging issues of emotions and cognition that are intertwined together (as cited in Kress et al., 2004).

## **Care Curriculum**

According to Noddings (1995), care theory emphasizes more on expressing empathy. Socio cultural preparation, which is supported by the mechanism of Lave and Vygotsky advocates that learning is inevitably social in nature and therefore schools do well to recognize such a certainty (as cited in Heid, 2008).

As suggested by Noddings (1995), learning happens greatest within an atmosphere of care, enabling students to learn to care forms close social relationships to be shaped. She further elaborates that care then develops the substance that chains socio-cultural relationships, that nurtures aesthetic skills (as cited in Heid, 2008).

Noddings (1995) emphasizes the importance of adding religious knowledge in the curriculum. She emphasizes that students should devoted their lives to religion and they should also master elementary vocabulary about a belief in God.

## **Extremism**

Fierce extremism and radicalization rank at the top among challenges of our times. Youth are vulnerable to the messages of terrorist organizations and violent extremists. They require

specific learning opportunities while they face challenges to develop attitudes and skills that may help them gain strength. With the help of confident, respected and well prepared teachers these competencies can be developed.

There are three main factors that lead to violent extremism amongst youth, socio-economic, psychological and institutional (UNESCO 2016). Davies (2008) explores how education can counter different forms of extremism which present societies globally. Young people become vulnerable to being attracted by extremist narratives. What provides a breeding ground for violent extremism is when economic opportunity fails and youth doesn't get any mentoring or guidance from their families and surroundings.

Extremist beliefs are also reliant on the cultural perspective, norms and values that are intricately bound up in the definition of 'extremism.' Pakistan faces utmost challenge from domestic and internal security issues that emerge in the name of religious extremism. Unfortunately these overwhelming threats always affect Pakistani youth. In the name of religion what these so called leaders do is pitch in their identity, and say you will be important, you will know important people, especially the promise of belonging to a momentous group. They make them significant. Second, grievance against society especially those who experience negative emotions are usually young people from marginalized areas who feel that they have nothing to lose (UNESCO, 2016).

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

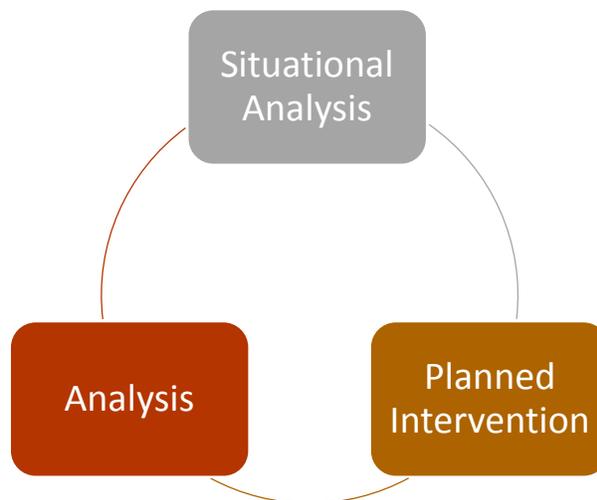
The current study is a case study that discusses the role of mentoring in the life of an at-risk youth. It shows how the teacher first observed his behavior and salvaged him from the clutches of idolizing humans and cruelty to animals, to a complete turn of character where now he nurtures plants and cares for domestic animals at his school. This journey is well captured using qualitative research and single case study method to accomplish the methodology and objectives of the study underpinned by the literature review.

## Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research is useful for obtaining insights into lives of individuals, groups in their natural settings (*Oxford.*, 2016). It deals with the explanations of societal norms and aims to help us in recognizing the social world around us that we inhabit (Hancock, 1998).

## Single Case Study

Case study research allows understanding of difficult issues but is done through past reports. It requires in-depth and holistic inquiry into cases. A researcher of case study understands the behavioral condition through the perspectives of the actor and does not include qualitative and statistical results. The case study method involves an analysis and reconstruction of the case at hand to be under investigation (Tellis, 1997).



**Figure 1:** The Process

## Situational Analysis

Situational Analysis was conducted through observations that indicated change in behavior. Academic results began to decline, authoritative directions were not obeyed, and confusion reflected on the student's face. Discussion session was conducted between teachers, classmates and the head teacher.

### **Planned Intervention**

Teachers, classmates and junior students were asked to observe and report to the head teacher. Vigilant monitoring was enforced. Data was collected and the Islamiat teacher was removed. Bonding was created with the student and the relationship was made more casual than formal. Informed decisions were made, head teacher demonstrated emotional intelligence applicability, Care Curriculum/ SEL.

### **Analysis**

Interventions were evaluated; that indicated that they were a success.

### **Respondents of Study**

The student was of grade VIII and he influenced his classmates' views drastically with strong reasoning using religion. The total sample size includes <sup>3</sup>Shahbaz and his four classmates.

### **Sources of Data**

For the purpose of this study, three teachers, four students and the family of Shahbaz were interviewed. A focus group was conducted of teachers and students that were involved. Open ended questions were asked.

### **Location of the study**

This case study was conducted at a Community Based School situated in a post area of Karachi. Four marginalized areas are adjacent to it.

### **Data Analysis**

### **Introduction to the Issue**

When a teacher has spent years of her life shaping her students, it brings great astonishment to her when she sees the same student changing in front of their eyes. When a radical shift takes place, it is very difficult to deconstruct the behavior and challenge ideas once set.

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<sup>3</sup> pseudonym for the case study

Shahbaz joined the CBO when he was 5 years old. He was a bright and obedient student who regularly participated in all school and community service programs. He was quite friendly in class and preferred spending time with his friends. He was good in studies as well as extracurricular activities. He was an obedient student who had good administration skills since childhood and was always ready to take leadership roles. When Shahbaz was in grade 9, his academic results started declining. Teachers noticed this change especially during class when he would suddenly lose focus. His classmates shared that he was neither talking much nor spending time with them in the evenings. He had a very depressing demeanor. With time he started sharing his thoughts with his close friends regarding reality of life. He would often say, “we are here in this world for some time and there is nothing much to do as we will all die”. His friends shared Shahbaz’s statements with their class teacher who in turn reported it to the school head teacher.

### **Shahbaz’s behavior**

Shahbaz’s behavior changed and he began negating the orders of his teacher. When he was cautioned even over trivial matters, he would become defensive. He would state that whatever the teachers were teaching was completely forbidden in religion and that female teachers were not supposed to teach male students. He also started convincing students to be part of his cause and began pressurizing them to listen to his ideology even when they were not inclined to do so.

He became abrupt and aggressive especially toward junior students and animals if things did not go according to his way. He used to throw stones at crows. One day he gave a spicy samosa to a lamb. When the animal was agonizing in pain it pleased him. When one student mentioned that being cruel to animals was not right, he retorted that it would make him strong from inside i.e. to see animals in pain would make his heart strong. He further explained to his friend that those creatures were made for us, to serve us therefore we can do anything with them.

### **Family Meeting**

His parents were called to school and told more about his recent activities and also to inform them about his plans. During the meeting, his parents were asked to keep a vigilant eye on him and not to allow him to roam around the neighborhood aimlessly. His mother said as he was a grown up, they couldn’t stop him from the activities he was involved in. The father on the other hand suggested that he should be punished and he would not mind if teachers punished him too. His family did not play any significant role in his correction; in fact his mother encouraged him to

leave school and serve his religion because she was annoyed with teachers whom she thought were working against her son's religious beliefs by stopping him.

### **Observation by teachers and classmates**

The CEO of CBO called a meeting between his classmates and subject teachers. The community is highly connected and since teachers are from the community, they take ownership of school and its students. They took his problem as theirs and avidly participated solving it. Teachers decided to talk to him and try their best to connect with him.

They would call and ask him to share his problems with them but he always opted to remain silent. After several failed attempts Shahbaz told them that he was uninterested in studying and wanted to serve his energies in the path of religion. One of Shahbaz's classmates shared an incident where he saw him writing on a wall with spray paint publicizing a certain organization. This revelation alarmed all his teachers and they started keeping a vigilant eye on him. Two of his classmates were asked to keep an eye on him after school hours. Another follow-up meeting was conducted the next day and one classmate revealed that he had seen Shahbaz carrying a book that contained some pictures pasted. His class teacher checked his bag the next day and noticed that a book in his bag indeed contained the pictures of his hero who was the head of this organization. Some teachers and the Board of CBO suggested immediate expulsion of Shahbaz from school but the CEO instead asked for some time to handle the situation. Another meeting was called between the CEO and the teachers where it was decided that the strategy would be changed. He would not be pushed harder or else he would become rebellious.

### **Intervention Phase**

The school head teacher vigilantly began to research on education and its status in Islam. Authentic hadith were collected that covered the sayings and events specific to education. A lot of data was gathered that in fact negated Shahbaz's claim of education being forbidden in Islam. On the contrary, it was evident that Islam highly supported education and during Gazwa-e Badr, Prisoners (non-Muslims) were asked to teach 10 children how to read and write. This was their ransom after which they would be freed. Specific presentations were developed by the CEO covering animal rights in Islam, sports and environment. Human rights were also covered to inform the students of the values placed by Islam on all these aspects of life.

### **Bonding**

Student teacher relationship have long lasting and positive implications. It is important for students to develop academically and socially. A teacher is the spiritual mother of a student and her teachings remain with him/her like a shadow. Either you follow the shadow when there is darkness or the shadow follows you when there is sunlight. Her teachings are in the soul of his/her students. The CEO emphasized and directed the teachers to strengthen a strong emotional bonding. This was important and was made possible because of the unique model of the school being a CBO. The teachers applied the instructions by giving Shahbaz more importance in his class. Small and simple presents were awarded to him. As Shahbaz was working in the administration department after school hours, teachers would make him his favorite meal for lunch and would ask him to pick it from their residence.

All the teachers demonstrated a very empathetic behavior toward him especially during school hours. His grade IX Science teacher developed a special bond with him through food i.e. by cooking and eating together with him. The teacher would also give him a sympathetic ear when he would talk about his academic problems and began giving him individual free extra classes. These classes helped her develop a one to one relationship with him.

CBO is different and is comparatively more successful as compared to NGOs because communities perceive NGOs as aliens. As CBOs are run by communities themselves, the Management and students share happiness and sorrows together. Teachers develop natural bonding with the students.

### **Picnics**

The importance of going for trips means more than just going out for fun. Students experience new environment which gives them a chance to build closer relationship with their teachers and classmates. The bond between Shahbaz, teachers, classmates and the CEO greatly strengthened when picnics were arranged between the senior sections. The purpose was to take him to a new environment, enjoy time with classmates, play and have food together. Such arrangements reduce social awkwardness.

The power lies with the teacher, she can make the most of the situation by building connections and strengthening the bond as a result. Shahbaz was made the group leader and given the

responsibility to arrange for transportation and food. They ordered their favorite food and shared it with each other. These strategies inculcated team spirit and leadership qualities and also taught them to be cooperative and caring toward each other.

### **Special Lunch Program**

Working collectively as team for a specific task makes everyone more responsible and accepting of the outcomes and fosters teamwork. The lunch strategy was quite successful so a special lunch program was organized in school called the soup kitchen. When teachers eat lunch with students it frames them in a different light embedding the teacher in a different territory that speeds up the process of building effective rapport. It also enables a smooth interaction and students are drawn into their realm of influence. It's an effortless way to build rapport. Meals foster feelings of belonging and warmth and also improve social skills. Lunch created strong bonding between students and teachers of CBO. Shahbaz contributed by helping to set it up and in this sense eating together created good social gathering and good environment.

### **Employment**

Shahbaz's father is a stone mason and his mother is a housewife. They have a family of six children to support. Keeping this in mind, Shahbaz was given an administration job from 7:30am to 5:30pm. He had to stay back in school to fulfill his duties thus not being left with much extra time. Teachers also gave him important duties to conduct in school to work as teacher assistant. He was assigned the duty of opening the school gate early in the morning and monitor students while they enter school. By giving him a job to fulfill his financial duties, the school tried to make him economically strong so that he doesn't get attracted towards joining the terrorist organization for money or financial satisfaction.

### **Islamiat Curriculum**

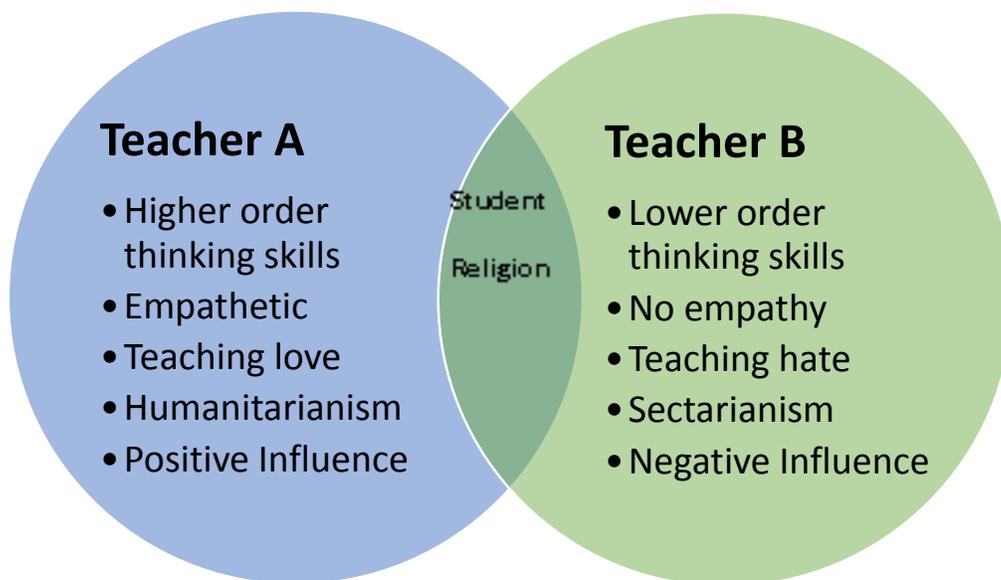
Students that established a strong bond with their teachers perform better. The Islamiat teacher was replaced as her teaching style only catered to the lower order thinking skills thus working on rote learning instead of character building. The new teacher tried to infuse higher order thinking skills among students by bringing a social side into the Islamiat curriculum.

Human rights, animal rights, sports, environment and other fun aspects were incorporated in the curriculum as practiced by our Prophet peace be upon him. Ayats and Hadith were narrated in class with their references to establish their authenticity. More pets were brought in school to teach

them with example. These were deliberately done to inculcate the importance of animal rights and care in Islam. When a religion has rights for animals how can it justify killing human beings in the name of religion. Such interventions stimulated their thinking to higher order thinking skills.

### Comparison of the two teachers

This is the Venn diagram that elaborate a comparative analysis of the two teachers. The common aspect between the two is the student and the religion. Teacher A is the head teacher of the school who rescued the student through interventions whereas Teacher B is the person having negative influence who tried to take the student away.



**Figure 2:** Comparison of the two teachers

### Findings

Care and bonding makes deep connections with students. After developing a strong bond and trusting her instinct, the teacher told Shahbaz that she didn't want him to keep his association with the other organization. He was kept busy during school days from morning till evening but he had time at night and over the weekends. Finally, the CEO decided to ask Shahbaz to make one choice between the two organizations. He was pressed so that he can focus on giving his exams. He stood up and left the class because he decided to pick the other organization.

The teacher of CBO was confident that Shahbaz would come back on basis of her strong bonding through care which was provided to him. She made sure that his friends did not abandon him while he was in deciding mode. He used to ask his classmates if any of them missed him or asked about him. His classmates would say that everyone was very busy indicating that no one misses him. In reality he was missing the extra care and importance which he was getting in school, within a week he shared with his friend that he wanted to go back to school and apologize.

### **Outcome**

Once a connection is developed with the student, nothing can break the bond as students find direction through the light the teacher shows her students. When Shahbaz was given a choice because he could not swim in two boats, he decided to go for the other organization. To everyone's surprise, he stood up and left the room. His class teacher asked the CEO to stop him else he would throw himself completely in the hands of the organization that pollutes young minds to conduct actions that are not supported by religion. The CEO was sure and confident due to her connection with him that he will return back to the CBO. She also allowed his friends to continue their friendship with him so that they can keep a watchful eye on him. His best friend <sup>4</sup>Hunain played a significant role in this whole scenario. He didn't say anything to Shahbaz about CBO. After two days Shahbaz's curiosity knew no bounds. He wanted to know if teachers and other students missed him. Hunain replied in the negative and said everyone was busy in their own endeavors. As Shahbaz was quite used to attention, he felt strange that no one missed him.

Hunain, on the other hand, narrated the whole scenario back in school the next day which assured the teachers that he was missing school. Now Hunain was especially directed to share the fun news of school with Shahbaz, which he did amicably well. Shahbaz told Hunain that his party member wanted to talk about Shahbaz to the CEO. Upon hearing this, the CEO stated that if the party leader came, he would be shown the door indicating that there was no influence that the party leader have have on the CEO. Teachers also sent a message to Shahbaz saying that he should be ashamed of himself by sending Party heads to threaten the CEO of CBO.

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<sup>4</sup> pseudonym for the case study

Hunain communicated the message along with the threat and consequences. Shahbaz absorbed all this and didn't reply. He started inquiring about the after lunch activities in CBO. On the 6<sup>th</sup> day, he told Hunain that he wanted to return to the school but he was very embarrassed to show up. Shahbaz also asked for different ideas to ask for forgiveness. Hunain advised him to go and convey salaam (peace salutations for greeting people). The next day, which was a Saturday, Hunain informed the CEO that Shahbaz would come back. He sat in her car to surprise her. When the teacher entered her car, he said salaam and the teacher didn't say anything else i.e. she didn't condemn him about abandoning school etc. because she was confident in her bonding with Shahbaz and realized that he had made the final choice of returning back to his school, the CBO.

### **Summary of Findings**

It is very important that there should be a specific program designed in school which confirms positive results (Powell, 1997). CBO didn't possess any such program but they rescued the student from the evil political/religious clutches through their natural instincts and care for the student. CBO included care policy in their educational model as Socio Emotional learning is integral especially for students representing the marginalized areas of the city. Powell (1997) states that a student at high risk can be positively influenced with effective mentoring and this impact is also lifelong. CBO in this regard has played a very important role in tackling students' behavioral issues using effective mentoring strategies. It is important to create bonding with the students and then the student will start listening to the teacher. Then the cycle of mentoring starts. Activities that build bonding include lunch, arranging picnics, giving a listening ear, highly motivating the student so that they are able to achieve their best.

Social side of Islam is usually ignored, the curriculum sways heavily toward rituals. The personality of an Islamiyat teacher is key. It is important that the teacher sets good examples that are also realistic. Islamiyat teacher at CBO had behavioral issues i.e. she was very rude and often criticized students. She had zero bonding and would scare students about hell and punishment of Allah, this caused the students to become fearful of religion hence the care part of Islam was neglected. The care policy applied to counter the effect of the above mentioned issues resulted in rescuing the student from the evil clutches of terrorist organization. One life saved from such an ordeal means saving many more unimaginable lives that could have been destroyed due to terrorism.

Those parents who do not develop strong bonding with their students become easy prey to terrorist organizations. Noddings (1995) says that when we provide our students an atmosphere of care their learning skills increases drastically. CBO is trying very hard in this regard to provide its students atmosphere of care in classroom and develop their learning skills through it. It is important that curriculum for care should be developed where both teacher as mentors and children explore and practice morality (Kazemek, 1989). CBO is developing a curriculum based on care which will develop students who are caring.

School leadership does not play important role in developing strong bonding with parents, teachers and students. When the student reaches teenage, class teacher can play a major role, finding out or developing a strong bonding, with his/her student. Schools play a very important role in helping students understand the negative effects of drug use, bullying and violence. This can only happen when schools focus on developing social emotional skills in their students. CBO in this regard helped its students by giving them guidance and support that has continued till today and no other case has been witnessed again.

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Implications**

#### **Conclusion**

Teachers play a very important role in building students' lives. In CBO the role of teacher is defined differently. It's not merely taking care of students' academic side but also their socio emotional skills. Usually teachers feel that their role as caring teacher is when they focus more on developing their academic side but students on the other hand have different concept of care. They feel cared when they help them to face their personal life's challenges and guide them as mentors. We as teachers should know that students don't just come alone they also bring with them their personal problems, behaviors, their family issues, frustrations and depression.

#### **Recommendations**

- It is very important for principals and school leaders to develop cognitive affective curriculum.
- In order to help at-risk students, it is very important to develop long-term mentoring programs which should not be less than one year.

- In order to help students who have extreme behavior issues or views in the name of religion, it is very important for Islamiyat teacher to include care related syllabus in its curriculum. Topics like care, peace and love of animals and their rights in Islam, environment, and humanity as a whole.
- Teacher can play a very important role in life of at-risk students by developing a strong bonding through care.
- Teachers in school should act as mentors rather than inviting mentors from outside who are not aware of the school environment and student's background or nature for a long time.
- Extremism in the name of religion can only be curbed through religion. Content should be according to the context.
- It is very important for these students to read the life history of their Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).
- Beside studies, schools should focus on extracurricular activities that includes fun trips.
- Schools should have proper vocational training classes for students according to their interests.

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