

ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS TO REDUCE BULLYING AND INCREASE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract

Educators have used the research-based concepts of Process Communication very effectively to reduce bullying and other student negative behaviors and to improve the motivation and academic achievement of every student. Participants will learn the concepts and how to apply them to establish relationships with all students, thereby enabling them to reach and teach every student, especially the reluctant learner. Several case studies will be discussed, including one in the Watts District of Los Angeles, another in the Ware Youth Center in Louisiana, and a third in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Introduction

As every teacher knows, bullying is a major problem in most schools today. Moreover, the advent of the internet has provided additional means for students to bully others. Frequently cyberspace bullying is meaner and more degrading than the face-to-face bullying occurring in schools. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act and Annual Yearly Progress have put increased pressure on schools to improve the academic achievement of their students – a very difficult task if students do not feel they are in a safe school environment. Recent research shows that if teachers show students that they care about them and establish positive relationships with all of their students, the bullying stops or is greatly reduced and the students are more motivated to learn.

Savage (1991) put it this way: “Students who get their needs met in the classroom seldom cause problems, because doing something that interferes with getting a need met is not in their self interest.” Therefore, if we want to reduce bullying and improve academic achievement, teachers must establish positive relationships with all of their students. Most teachers do establish positive relationships with some students. However, many do not know how to establish those relationships with all of their students, especially with those students who are not motivated the same way that their teachers are. Frequently these students get labeled “reluctant learners”, act out in class, make life difficult for their teachers, and bully other students.

Summary

This paper will discuss the concepts of Process Communication, a communication model developed by Kahler (1982), an internationally acclaimed clinical psychologist. The paper also will briefly describe four of several hundred case studies, where teachers who applied the concepts of the Process Communication Model® were able to reduce bullying and other negative behaviors of their students and improve the students’ academic achievement.

Discussion

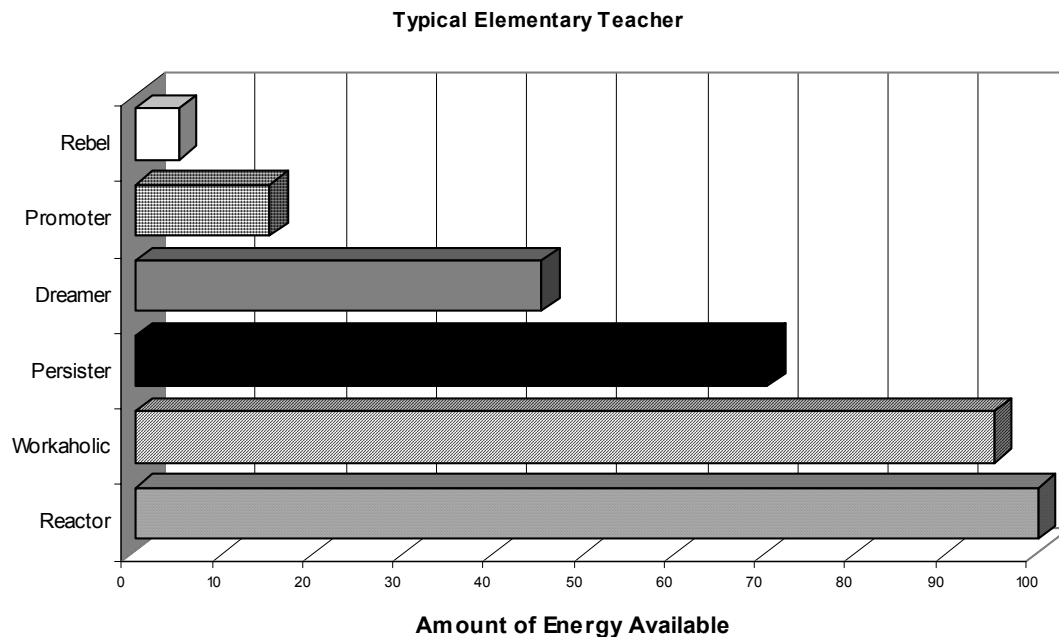
Kahler has shown that the key to forming positive relationships with students in the classroom is to help them get their motivational needs met positively and to speak their language (Kahler, 1991). Kahler's Process Communication Model® describes the characteristics of six distinct personality types. Each of the six types learns differently, communicates differently, is motivated differently, and does different things when in distress. If teachers individualize instruction and include something in every lesson to help each of the six types get their needs met positively, the negative behaviors, including bullying, stop, students are more motivated to learn, and their grades improve.

Kahler called the six personality types Reactors, Workaholics, Persisters, Dreamers, Rebels, and Promoters.

- Reactors are compassionate, sensitive and warm and perceive the world through their emotions. They need to be appreciated because they are nice people and not for anything they have done. They also need a comfortable environment. In distress, they tend to make silly, or sometimes tragic, mistakes.
- Workaholics are responsible, logical and organized. They think first and want people to think with them. They learn best in a classroom that is structured, has clear rules and adheres to schedules. Teachers can motivate them by recognizing their hard work, good ideas and their accomplishments. In distress they over-control and may criticize others for not thinking clearly.
- Persisters are conscientious, dedicated and observant. They form opinions very quickly and have an ability to stick at a task they believe in until it is completed. Values are important to them. They need to be respected for their beliefs and their values and have a very hard time learning from teachers who do not respect them or whom they do not respect. They also need to be recognized for their accomplishments and dedication. In distress Persisters may attack others for their lack of commitment.
- Dreamers are reflective, imaginative, and calm. They need their own private time and their own space. They see connections between things that the other types do not see. They have difficulty taking multiple-choice tests because they see so many possible connections that, to them, there is no one right answer. Dreamers feel suffocated when surrounded by many people and cannot think in a noisy environment. In addition, they have a difficult time prioritizing tasks and tend not to be able to do more than one or two things at a time. In distress Dreamers shut down.
- Rebels are creative, spontaneous and playful. They react immediately to their environment and to people with strong likes and dislikes. Humor is their currency and they will work hard for teachers who encourage their creativity and include activities in each lesson that are fun. In distress Rebels blame others for everything that happens and may act out. They frequently are in trouble in school and head the list of students who get expelled. Many also drop out of school.
- Promoters act first without thinking and are motivated by challenges, action, and excitement. They are persuasive, adaptable and charming and may be Mr./Ms Popularity in class. They thrive in leadership positions and in the spotlight and like to make deals that make them look good to their peers. In distress they manipulate, con, ignore the rules and frequently get others in trouble (Kahler, 1991).

Although everyone is one of these six personality types, everyone has parts of all six in them. Kahler describes this as a six-floor condominium in which some floors are more fully developed than others. See Figure 1, next page.

Figure 1. Typical elementary school teacher



Research shows that most adults can access two or three of the parts of their personality fairly easily. Most children can access only one or two of their parts. (Pauley, Bradley, & Pauley, 2002). Because each of the types learns differently and is motivated differently, students who are like their teachers tend to do well in those teachers' classes. Those who are not like their teachers tend to have difficulty. See Figures 2 and 3, next page. Gilbert (2004) showed that many teachers have Reactor, Workaholic, and Persister as their most well developed parts. Consequently Workaholic, Persister and Reactor students tend to do well in school. Bailey (1998) found that teachers listed Rebels and Promoters and sometimes Dreamers as the students they had the most difficulty teaching. Because of the miscommunication between them and their teachers, Rebels and Promoters tend to be the students who frequently are in trouble in school. They also make up the highest percentage of dropouts. (Pauley & Pauley, 2006). It is no one's fault. Everyone is doing the best they can with what they have available to them at the time. The teachers are doing the best they can. The students are doing the best they can. That raises the question, how can everyone do better?

Kahler's model talks about three levels of distress – 1st degree, 2nd degree, and 3rd degree. The levels are of increasing intensity with first degree being the least intense and third degree being depression. They are sequential and observable once people understand the behaviors that are associated with each level. In keeping with the analogy of a condominium, Kahler describes these levels as a doorway (1st degree) that leads to a basement (2nd degree) and a cellar (3rd degree). Bullying behavior occurs when people are in 2nd degree distress, i.e. their basement. They get into their basements when their motivational needs are not met positively. Therefore, the key to getting people out of 2nd degree distress is to help them get their needs met positively. In order to stop bullying, therefore, teachers need to establish a personal relationship with each student by helping them get their needs met positively. If students feel they belong, they will not need to bully others in order to get negative attention.

The literature about bullying says that some people are always bullies, some are always victims and some people sometimes are bullies and sometimes are victims. How does this happen? In his research, Kahler found that two-thirds of the people in North America change their motivation at least once during their lifetimes as a result of sustained, severe distress caused by not getting their motivational needs met for a prolonged period of time. Kahler called this a phase change. When people experience a phase change they move to the next floor in their personality condominium and live there anywhere from two years to a lifetime. This is a complete life change, i.e. their motivation changes and their distress behaviors change. The concept of phase may explain why some people are victims some of the time and bullies at other times.

For example, Persisters and Workaholics attack people when in their basement of distress. If they are in distress they tend to be bullies. Rebels and Promoters blame and manipulate others when in their basement. They also tend to bully others. In his Drama Triangle, Karpman (1968) identified two roles for people in 2nd degree distress – Persecutors and Victims. Therefore, Persisters, Workaholics, Promoters, and Rebels are Persecutors and bully. Reactors and Dreamers are Victims. Kahler also found that in normal distress people show the distress sequence of their phase personality type and in severe distress, show the distress sequence of their base personality type. This explains how people sometimes may be bullies and sometimes victims. For example, a Reactor in a Workaholic phase may bully when in normal distress and may be a victim when in severe distress.

Research shows that students of all six types can do well in school when they are motivated according to their needs (Bradley, Pauley, & Pauley, 2006). A working knowledge of the concepts of Process Communication enables teachers to understand how to motivate each of their students so that they can build activities into their lesson plans that address the motivational needs of each type. To do so, teachers can ask themselves the following questions as they prepare their lesson plans and units.

1. Reactors need to know that people like them just because they are nice people. Therefore, teachers can ask themselves, “How can I provide personal recognition for the Reactor?”
2. Workaholics need to be recognized for their hard work and their accomplishments. They also need to know when things are due. Therefore, teachers can ask, “How can I give recognition for work and provide time structure for the Workaholic?”
3. Persisters need to be respected and have their opinions sought. They also need to know that what they are doing is meaningful. Therefore, teachers can ask, “How can I ensure that the task is meaningful for the Persister?”
4. Dreamers need their own private space and time to reflect. Therefore, teachers can ask, “How can I provide reflection time, space and structure for the Dreamer?”
5. Rebels need to be able to move around and have fun. Therefore, teachers can ask, “How can I make this fun for the Rebel?”
6. Promoters also need to be able to move around and they need action and excitement. Therefore, teachers can ask, “How can I incorporate action and a challenge for the Promoter?”

If teachers will do this, student motivation and academic achievement will improve and they will stop or, at least greatly reduce, their negative behaviors. As described in the examples below, this includes bullying. Knaupp, a professor at Arizona State University, said “We can give students what they deserve or what they need. If we give them what they need, they will deserve more” (Knaupp, 1990). Helping students get their motivational needs met positively in every class is the key to establishing relationships with them and reducing bullying and other disruptive behaviors. Indeed, it is the key to the success of every student.

Figure 2. Typical secondary school teacher

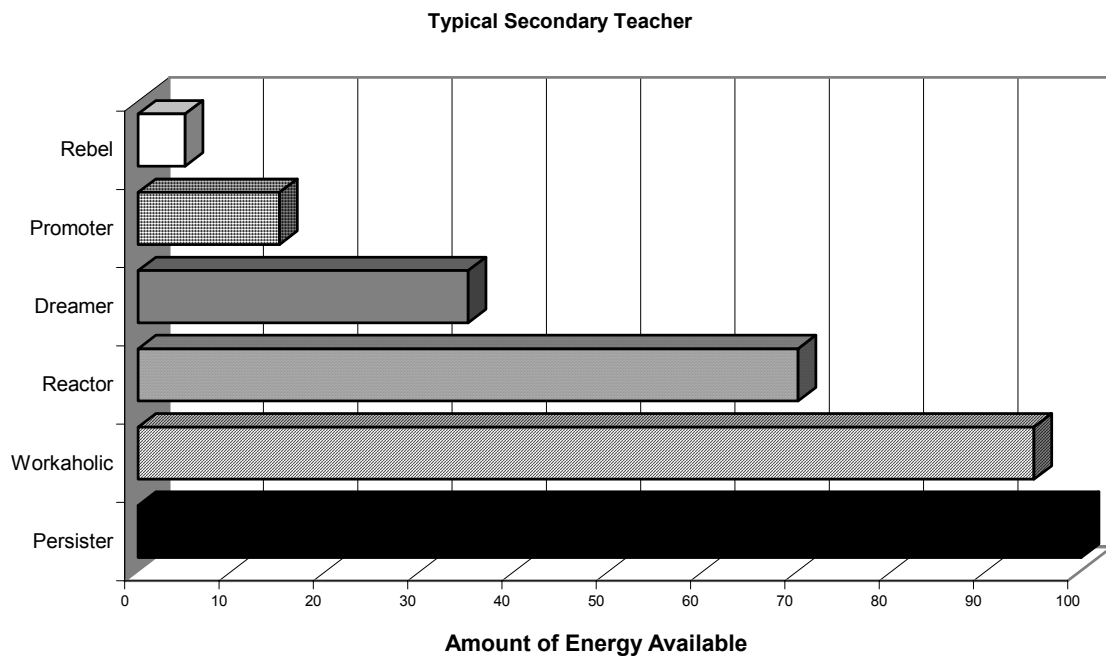
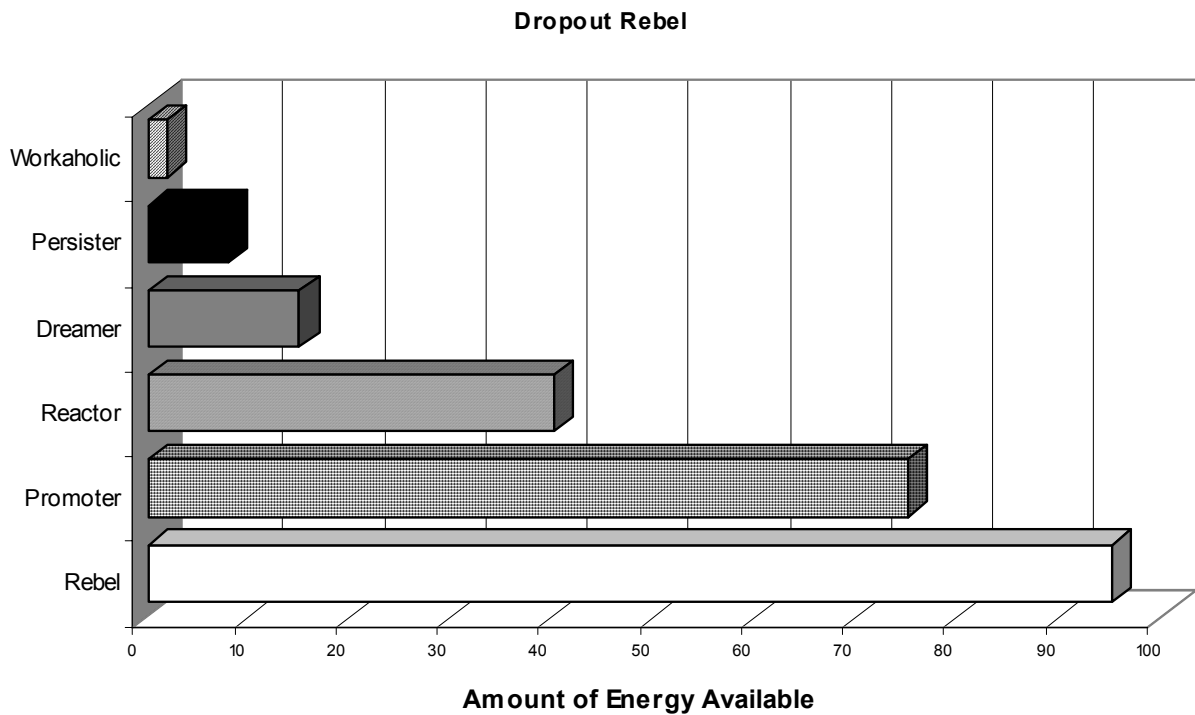


Figure 3. Typical dropout rebel



Program Summary and Findings

In their book, “Effective Classroom Management: Six Keys to Success,” the authors have included 68 true stories from teachers all over the country demonstrating the impact of this approach. Shioji (2004) conducted a study in which she measured the impact of teaching style on student motivation in a population of low-achieving students in the Watts community of Los Angeles, an area with a high dropout population. She was a second year high school biology teacher. She had Reactor, Workaholic, and Persister well developed in her personality structure, but did not have much Rebel and Promoter energy. She was having an especially difficult time with one class and was discouraged because they were not motivated to learn and were out of control. Eleven of the students were Rebels, three were Promoters, three were Workaholics, two were Reactors, seven were Dreamers and 12 were Persisters. Shioji was working on her master’s degree at UCLA and, after learning about the concepts of Process Communication, decided to take that class as the experimental group and her other physiology class as the control group. She designed her daily lesson plans to ensure there were elements that appealed to each personality type and incorporated a variety of activities into each class to appeal to each of the personality types. For example, she gave the class a variety of tasks, used group work and independent work, had the students use technology, gave each of the students individual “battery charges” for their needs several times in each class period, and brought a guest speaker in to speak to the class about the topics they were studying, thereby demonstrating the relevance of the material (Shioji 2004, p. 46). She also met each of the students in the experimental class one-on-one throughout the study. During these sessions, the students told her that they were more motivated to study and learn because she showed them she cared about them and because the guest speaker showed them they could use the information she was teaching them in their own lives. She increased the rigor of the content by using a college text for the course. Ironically, the students thought the material was easy because of their increased motivation (Shioji, 2004, p. 43).

Through pre- and post- testing, Shioji found that all six personality types in the experimental class showed an increase in motivation, every type’s grade improved and all the bullying and other negative behaviors stopped. She taught her other physiology class the way she always taught. In that class there was no increase in motivation. No student’s grade improved and by the end of the term, that class was out of control and many of the students were bullying others (Shioji, 2004). The following summer, Shioji attended a course taught by the authors at California State University at San Marcos to get more proficient in applying the concepts. The following year she applied the concepts in all of her classes with positive results. Because she was the only teacher reaching the students, she was promoted and made the Least Restrictive Environment Coordinator for the school. Her advisor at UCLA told the authors that she hoped Shioji would continue to teach in the inner city because “she has a knack for teaching inner city students”(Swanson, personal communication, 2006). According to Shioji, “the knack” was her ability to use the concepts of Process Communication (Shioji, personal communication, 2006).

This is true even in cases with students who have run afoul of the law and been placed in juvenile detention centers. The staff of the Ware Youth Center in Coushatta, Louisiana began using the concepts of Process Communication with their students in 2002. In the first eight months after they began applying the concepts, there was a 44 percent reduction in student incidents compared with the previous six months. In addition, only two students were expelled in that time compared with 14 in the previous six months. Also, every student’s grades improved (Loftin, 2001). Since then, six members of the staff have been trained to administer the program and teach the concepts to the staff, the students, and to a lesser extent to the parents of the juveniles. The parents are required to come to the facility every week for meetings and training. The goal is for everyone to be reading off the same page in helping the juveniles adjust to society on their release – usually after six months. As a result of the program they have referred only one juvenile to a psychiatric hospital in the past two years. In addition, the recidivism rate is only 25 percent, the lowest in Louisiana. Because of the success they are enjoying, the Ware Youth Center has just been given responsibility for all the juvenile

detention programs in northern Louisiana, including the Swanson maximum-security facility. They have also been given responsibility for all female juveniles who have been adjudicated to the penal system and have just received a grant to construct a new building to house them (Ware, personal communication, 2007).

In Montgomery County, Maryland, a 15 year old who had been in trouble with the Office of Juvenile Justice since he was 12, was court ordered back to school as a condition of his release from detention. He did not want to return to school. He was disruptive in class and was abusive to his teachers and fellow students. He was placed in a school for students who were labeled severely emotionally disturbed. His bullying continued in every class. He refused to sit or do any work and he was failing every subject. His teacher heard about the concepts of Process Communication and, in desperation, began including activities in every class to help him get his needs met positively. To her surprise and delight, all the bullying stopped. He began doing his homework. His grades improved; and he became a model student and positive student leader. In short, he turned his life around because he was getting his needs met positively. Because his needs were being met positively, he had no need to do things to get them met negatively.

In Cecil County, Maryland, a sixth grade student (Promoter in a Rebel phase) was acting out in class and bullying his classmates. He was identified as being at risk and was enrolled in the Choice Middle School Program. The Choice Program got its name because judges give juveniles who run afoul of the law, a choice - go to jail or get in this program. The program was so successful that they decided to start a preventive program for middle school students who were identified as being at risk of getting involved in the juvenile justice system. The sixth grade team was about to expel the student. The Choice Program counselor suggested that the entire team be trained in the concepts of Process Communication. They were trained and began applying the concepts immediately. They began including activities in every class to help the student get his needs met positively. Immediately the bullying stopped, the student began doing his homework, and his grades improved.

In late January 1997, the authors returned to the school and asked the members of the sixth grade team how the student was doing. They replied that he had reverted to his old behaviors and again was bullying everyone. One of the trainers asked if they were doing anything differently. Silence. Then, almost in unison, the team members said that they had gone back to teaching the way they used to teach, proving the adage, "If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got". They immediately began brainstorming to devise ways they could help the student get his needs met positively. The guidance counselor said that the student liked to write songs. Immediately the history teacher said he would have him write a song about what they were studying in history and sing it to the class. The English teacher said that she would have the class act out passages that they were reading and would make sure that the student had a chance to participate so that he would look good in front of his peers. She added that when they began to study poetry, she would show him how songs were really poems set to music. She then would have him write poems and set them to music. The other teachers on the team devised other creative ways to motivate him. The result? The bullying stopped; he began doing his schoolwork again; and his grades improved. At the end of the school year the principal offered to write an endorsement describing what happened.

Conclusions

This is what is possible when teachers (or mentors) establish positive relationships with students and help them get their motivational needs met positively. Bradley, a professor at the University of Maryland, has researched the over-representation of African American males in special education. The teachers and principals she interviewed for her study were aware of cases where students were placed in special education because of behavior problems that could have been avoided if their teachers had individualized instruction by including something in every lesson to help each student get their motivational needs met positively (Bradley, 2007).

Bradley compiled a list of cultural differences between the qualities in the Euro American culture that predominates in our school system and the African American culture. She found that African American students, especially boys, need movement, a strong appreciation for visual and performing arts, emotional expressiveness, a preference for oral communication, spontaneity, practice and experimentation. They also need to see the total context of the information being studied (Bradley, 2007). Ironically, these are the same traits that are common to Rebels and Promoters. If teachers include some of these activities in every lesson, will they be able to establish positive relationships with more students and help reduce bullying in school and close the achievement gap? Research by Bailey, Bradley, Gilbert, Pauley, Shioji and others indicates that this is exactly what is needed to reach every student and is the key to stopping school violence, raising student achievement, and closing the achievement gap.

Implications

If educators want to stop or greatly reduce bullying and increase the academic achievement of their students, then every educator should understand the concepts of Process Communication and be able to include something in every class to motivate and communicate with each student. How can this be done? Courses in the concepts can be taught in every education department and graduate education department in the country. In addition, school systems can include Process Communication as part of their staff development program and rate the teachers on their ability to apply the concepts in their annual evaluation reports. The Apache Junction Unified School District in Arizona has done this for the past 23 years. After the first three years, the number of students in trouble on any given day was reduced from 33 percent to less than 2 percent. The failure rate at the 7th and 8th grade level was reduced from 20 percent to less than 2 percent; student achievement at every grade level improved dramatically; graduation rates increased and students entering into post secondary training increased from less than 19 percent to more than 43 percent; employee turnover was reduced from 43 percent to less than 5 percent; and employee satisfaction and staff morale were at an all time high (Wright, personal communication, 1989). The school district continues to train their new teachers in the concepts of Process Communication every year. One of the teachers who took the training 20 years before said, "I have not had a single discipline problem since I took this course 20 years ago" (Farris, personal communication, 2003).

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