

Meeting Students' Needs:

The Key to Dropout Prevention

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process communication model can be utilised in so many different areas of life. in motivation, in conflict resolution, in learning how second by second, interaction by interaction an employee, colleague, family member or friend can be motivated to be the very best they can possibly be.
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The U.S. Department of Education reports that 51 percent of school dropouts said they did not like school because they felt as if they did not belong. 35 percent said they could not get along with their teachers—this increased to 51 percent when considering male-only dropouts. The report concludes that administrators and teachers must increase positive relationships with their students and find ways to make their schools and classes more welcoming places (Duckenfield, 2004).

Many teachers agree and would like to establish positive relationships with their students. However, many do not know how to form these relationships, especially with the students who are at-risk for dropping out of school. Research by Dr. Taibi Kahler (1991), an internationally acclaimed psychologist, shows that teachers can form relationships with students if they will help them get their motivational needs met in the classroom. Dr. Kahler has developed a motivation/communication model called the Process Communication Model® (PCM) that describes the needs of each student and helps educators teach each of their students according to the student's motivational needs (Kahler, 1997). Teachers who have applied the concepts of PCM in their classrooms have not only created a welcoming environment by forming positive relationships with their students, but their students have shown improved motivation, higher academic achievement and reduced disruptive behaviors (Shioji, 2004; Gilbert, 1996; Hawking, 1995). Further, the application of these concepts has had a big impact on reducing dropout rates (Gilbert, 1996).

The Process Communication Model®

Dr. Kahler identified six personality types based on how each takes in and processes information (Pauley, Bradley, & Pauley, 2002). According to his research (1988), each teacher and each student has a personality profile made up of all six types that vary in relative strength within the individual. The six personality types are described below.

Reactors filter what is said and done through their emotions. They are compassionate, sensitive and warm and enjoy pleasing people. Their motivational need is to be appreciated for who they are. They also take a great deal of interest in the sensory world around them. When in distress, Reactors put themselves down and make mistakes.

Workaholics filter what comes their way through their thoughts. They display responsibility, use logic and tend to be well organized. They prefer a classroom that has structure, clear rules and schedules. They think before acting and their motivational need is to be appreciated for their hard work and accomplishments. In distress Workaholics tend to over control and become frustrated with others when things don't go their way.

Persisters filter the world through their strong opinions and belief system. They are dedicated, conscientious

and observant. Their motivational need is to be recognized and supported not only for the work they do, but also for their convictions. In distress Persisters can become self-righteous and rigid in their beliefs.

Dreamers need time to contemplate before they answer a question or attack a project. They are calm and imaginative and are motivated by having time alone to reflect. They are unable to think when surrounded by too many people or in a noisy environment. They respond well to structure but not pressure. In distress they withdraw and may appear to be "out of it."

Rebels are creative, spontaneous, and playful and react immediately to events and people with strong likes and dislikes. They love environments that are fun and offer them chances to display their humor and creativity. They are motivated by playful contact and when these needs are not met, they get bored and act out. Therefore, these students frequently are in trouble in school and get expelled. Many eventually drop out of school.

Promoters act first without thinking and are motivated by excitement and action. They are charming, adaptable and persuasive and enjoy being on center stage. They thrive on immediate rewards. Although they need clear, specific directions, in distress they can quickly become argumentative and confrontational. (Bradley, Pauley & Pauley, in press). Their behaviors in distress can result in them doing poorly in school, being removed from the classroom and ultimately lead to them dropping out of school.

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Each person can access some parts of her/his personality more easily than other parts. Those students whose strongest parts match the most strongly developed parts in their teachers tend to do well in school. Research by Gilbert (2004) and others shows that most educators can easily energize their Persister, Workaholic and Reactor personality parts. Therefore, most students of these types do well in school. However, teachers often have difficulty connecting with students whose personality structures are markedly different than theirs. Because teachers possess less energy in their Rebel, Promoter and Dreamer parts, it is these types that present the greatest problems to teachers. Consequently, they have problems motivating them and providing them with positive behavioral interventions. These are the students who are most at-risk for dropping out of school (Gilbert, 1996; Hopewell, 2003; Pauley, Bradley & Pauley, 2002).

Figure 1

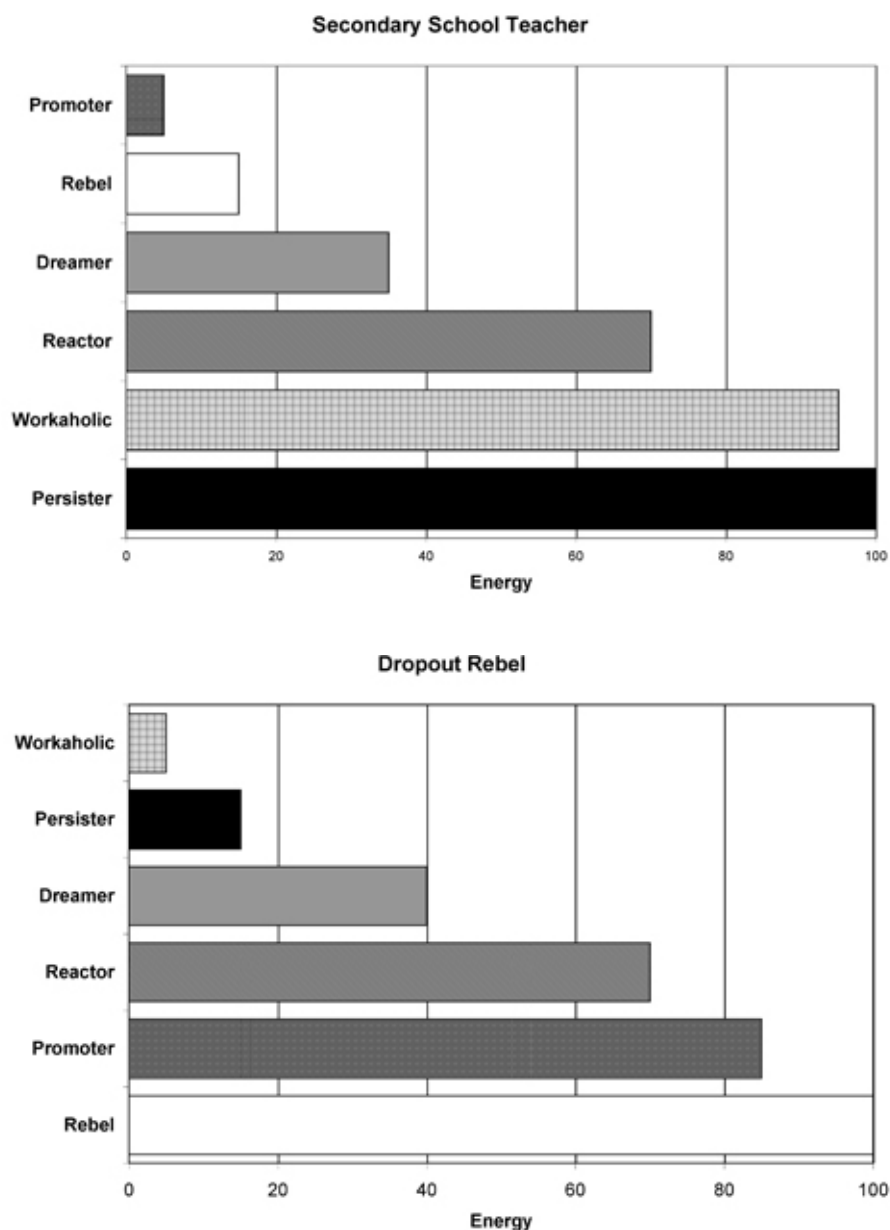


Figure 1 compares the energy in the personality structure of a typical secondary teacher with that of one type of dropout student. The implications are immediately evident. Unless teachers can individualize the motivation for each student, thereby providing fuel to give them energy to study, these students will get into distress, will not like school, and will find ways to get their needs met negatively. For Rebels and Promoters this might take the form of acting out, inappropriately moving around, engaging in conflicts and finding other ways to create their own negative fun and action. Frequently this results in referrals to the principal's office, detentions, suspensions and expulsions. For Dreamers it might mean not attending school. Ultimately many of these students decide that they do not fit into the school structure and drop out.

Students of all six types can do well in school when they are motivated according to their needs (Bradley, Pauley & Pauley, in press). A working knowledge of PCM enables teachers to understand personality types and how each of their students is motivated so that they can build activities into their lesson plans that address the motivational needs of each type. Pauley, Bradley & Pauley (2002) have developed six lesson-planning questions to ensure that teachers include something in every lesson that will appeal to each student. The following questions can help teachers think about each type of student as they develop their lesson plans and units:

1. How can I provide personal recognition for the Reactor?

2. How can I give recognition for work and provide time structure for the Workaholic?
3. How can I ensure that the task has meaning for the Persister?
4. How can I provide reflection time, space and structure for the Dreamer?
5. How can I make this fun for the Rebel?
6. How can I incorporate action for the Promoter?

Success Stories

In their book *Six Keys to Effective Classroom Management* Bradley, Pauley and Pauley (in press) share the following true anecdotes that illustrate ways that teachers have motivated their students to perform better behaviorally and academically in school using the concepts of PCM. They exemplify the fragility of the relationship between Rebels and Promoters and their teachers and demonstrate how using the PCM concepts can help teachers reach at-risk students and make school a place where they thrive and want to be.

A Challenging Promoter

“David” was a Promoter who had served a jail term for assault. He was court ordered back to school as a condition of release, but did not want to be there. He refused to complete assignments, swore at his teachers, assaulted classmates and was late to school almost every day. The teacher had unsuccessfully attempted several surface behavior management strategies such as private talks, proximity, and one-one instruction. After learning about Process Communication, she identified David as a Promoter who needed action and excitement. She concluded that he was acting out because he found his classes dull and lacking excitement. She tried making deals with him, but was only partially successful. After much soul searching, she decided she had to change her pedagogy if she hoped to motivate David to want to learn. She began to include competitive team games in her math classes. David loved the competition and challenge. Some days she allowed David to select the homework problems, thereby enabling him to gain status in the eyes of his classmates. In history, she used role playing for instruction. This met David’s need to be center-stage, out of his chair and up performing in front of his peers.

David responded very well. He stopped his negative behaviors, his grades improved, he became a positive role model and student leader, and he really began to enjoy school. All of his teachers were amazed at his transformation. Unfortunately the change did not carry over to the next year. David was not in this teacher’s classes the following year and his new teachers did not know about Process Communication. Moreover they did not accept the teacher’s suggestions of how they could reach him. Consequently, David reverted to his old behaviors and dropped out of school.

A Rebel-Promoter—Almost Lost

Bernie, a Rebel with Promoter second in his personality structure, was an unhappy sixth grade student in a rural school in Maryland. He was disruptive and abusive in class, led the class in detention referrals and was on the verge of being expelled. At this point, his team of teachers was trained in the concepts of PCM and began to change the way they taught. To their surprise, Bernie’s negative behaviors stopped. He began doing his work and his grades improved. After the winter holidays, the teachers noted that Bernie was once again displaying his disruptive behaviors.

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At a team meeting at the end of January, they admitted that they had gone back to teaching the way they taught prior to learning about PCM. Once they realized this, they decided to develop new strategies for teaching Bernie. The social studies teacher knew that Bernie liked to write songs so he asked Bernie to write a song about what they were studying in class. The English teacher knew that Bernie liked to act so she began having the class act out stories they were studying. When they began a unit on poetry, she showed him that poems were just like songs. Soon he began to write poems of his own. She encouraged him to set them to music and perform them for the class. Bernie once again became an enthusiastic learner and he stopped his disruptive behaviors. Savage (1991) explained this phenomenon in the following way, “Learners who feel that their needs are being met in the classroom seldom cause discipline problems because interfering with something that is meeting a need is contrary to their self-interest” (Savage, 1991, p. 32)

A Potential Kindergarten Drop-out

Research by Franklin Schargel, the president of the Education Division of the American Society for Quality, (2004) shows that many students make the decision to drop out of school by the third grade and merely bide their time until they turn 16 to make it official. One Rebel student made the decision to drop out of school while in kindergarten because of miscommunication between her and her teacher. She acted out in class and was in trouble every day. Because of her attitude, none of her classmates would play with her. She developed ulcers and announced that she was never going to school again.

At the beginning of first grade she was at the bottom of her class in every subject and she continued her negative behaviors. Two months into the school year her first grade

teacher learned about PCM and began implementing the strategies in her classroom. The teacher learned and understood the important concept that Rebels need to play, have fun and be onstage during their school day. One day for math class the teacher told her students they were going to go out into the hall and do their math work lying on the floor. This student, who had been failing math, was the first one to finish and all of the examples were done correctly. The teacher was surprised. As the student re-entered the classroom, she thanked the teacher for letting her out of her "little box." Thereafter, the teacher continued to include something in every lesson for all six personality types, especially her Rebel students. By the time this young lady was in the second grade she was in the advanced math class. Math is her favorite subject and her career goal is to become a teacher.

Teaching Style and School Success

In 2004, Shioji 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 having a particularly difficult time with one class, all but three of whom were Rebels and Promoters. She designed her daily lesson plans to ensure there were elements that appealed to each personality type. She incorporated a variety of activities into each class starting with greeting each student at the door as they entered the classroom and including warm-ups, peer and group work, student demonstrations for the class, reflection questions, practical applications, academic games, acting, hands-on activities, lab sheets, testing theoretic information on each other and guest speakers. This instructional unit held the interest of all the students because of the variety and appeal of the different activities. Through pre- and post-testing, she found that all personality types showed an increase in motivation. Further, she found that the grades of the students in this class increased while the negative behaviors decreased. She concluded that using the specific motivators designed for each personality type throughout her plans resulted in higher motivation to achieve and behave positively in school.

Conclusions

Marked differences in personality profiles between potential dropouts (who are often Rebels and Promoters and sometimes Dreamers) and their teachers (who tend to be Workaholics, Persisters and Reactors) often result in student-teacher conflict in today's classrooms (Bailey, 1998). Therefore, it is essential that educators use effective techniques to reach and teach students who are at-risk for dropping out of school. Teachers, who have applied the PCM strategies for motivating each of the six types of students, have noted a decrease in discipline problems and an increase in student achievement of all personality types (Shioji, 2004; Gilbert, 1996). They have acquired new ways to interpret behavior problems and intervene

effectively with students exhibiting negative actions so that their classrooms are more productive and are welcoming places to learn. The application of the Process Communication Model® is a tool that can help teachers relate to all students, plan curricula and lessons that will facilitate the success of every type of student found in today's classrooms and help prevent students from dropping out of school.

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