The Process Communication Model
An Effective Tool to Motivate All Students

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Disruptive, dangerous, and out-of-control students dominate the list of student, teacher, parent, and community concerns. Educators continue to investigate a myriad of interventions and alternative environments for at-risk students. However, the challenges presented by these students remain overwhelming.

Frequently a major disconnect occurs between our at-risk students and their teachers because their needs and motivations are so different. Students who experience the most difficulty staying interested and on task in school are often not motivated in the same way as their teachers. For example, teachers who are well prepared with lessons they believe will motivate their students to work hard are confounded by students who seem to use their capabilities and efforts to avoid assignments.

The Process Communication Model (PCM) offers a powerful tool for motivating at-risk students to achieve and behave appropriately in school. This model identifies six personality types based on unique perceptions, behavior patterns, needs, and motivators that affect how people of various types will interact, respond, and learn. Teachers and youth workers who have acquired skills through the use of PCM report significant gains in their ability to motivate at-risk students to increase achievement and reduce inappropriate behavior (Gilbert, 1992; Hopewell, 1997).

What is the Process Communication Model?

According to the research of psychologist, Taibi Kahler (1988), each of us possesses a personality structure made up of six distinct personality types. The relative strength of each type differs from person to person. No type is smarter or better than any other type. The six personality types, their traits and their needs as identified by Kahler's research can be seen in Table 1. Alternative type names in parentheses were developed to more specifically characterize students found in today's classrooms.

Table 1. Personality Types—Characteristics and Needs

Personality Type	Characteristics	Needs
Reactor (Feeler)	Compassionate, Sensitive, Warm	Recognition of person; Sensory
Workaholic (Thinker)	Responsible, Logical, Organized	Recognition for work; Time structure
Persister (Believer)	Dedicated, Observant Conscientious	Recognition for work; Conviction
Dreamer (Dreamer)	Reflective, Imaginative, Calm	Solitude

Rebel (Funster)	Spontaneous, Creative, Playful	Playful physical contact
Promoter (Do-er)	Persuasive, Adaptable, Charming	Incidence (action)

In every classroom you will find students of every personality type. Although every person has parts of all six types, each person is able to energize two or three of their personality parts fairly easily. Students whose most well-developed characteristics match the most well-developed parts in their teachers tend to do well in school. However, other students are "at risk" because of the personality differences between themselves and their teachers.

Who are These Students?

Some students' personality types closely match those of their teachers. **Feelers** take in and respond to information from the world predominantly through emotions and are very aware of their environments. They need to know that they are appreciated for who they are and they receive positive energy from interacting with others. **Thinkers** perceive the world through thoughts and prefer a structured environment with clear rules and an orderly and predictable sequence of events. They think before acting and need recognition for work and accomplishments. **Believers** view the world through their beliefs and opinions. They need to be recognized for their work and need their convictions supported. Many elementary school teachers are Feelers and a typical high school teacher demonstrates high energy in the Thinker and Believer categories.

Dreamers need to contemplate before they act. They need clear, concise directions and the opportunity to be alone and to reflect. They may appear to be "out of it" and inattentive. **Funsters** process and respond to the world through strong reactions (likes and dislikes). Fun, attention, and creative challenges are needed for them to succeed. **Do-ers** act before thinking. They prefer action-oriented events and thrive in exciting, stimulating environments with immediate rewards.

When confronted with teachers who are low in Funster and Do-er energy, students of these types often do not get their needs met positively in a typical school day. Consequently, they find other ways to get them met by engaging in predictable behaviors. These students are frequently identified by teachers as overactive and lacking in self-control (Bailey, 1998). Funsters are the students who fall out of their chairs, crack jokes at inappropriate times and bait their teachers when they find that the classroom is not an entertaining enough place for them. Do-ers also have to have something exciting happening and will create incidences if things get "boring." Dreamers, on the other hand, will "check out."

What Can Educators Do?

Teachers, parents, and administrators, and other youth service providers across the nation have been trained in and are using the Process Communication Model with students in both general and special education at all grade levels. In addition to providing a research-based theory, PCM provides concrete strategies that have helped educators connect with and motivate every type of student to promote productive, successful learning and behavior.

Successful teachers may already incorporate strategies in their teaching which helps students of various personality types get their needs met. For example, one special education resource teacher in suburban

Maryland makes a practice of connecting with every student within the first five minutes of class by greeting each one by name and with a smile. Personal comments like, "I'm so glad you're here today, Sara. We missed you yesterday," or "Hey, Joey, that jacket is really cool!" bring smiles to the faces of Feelers and Funsters alike. The teacher then distributes the schedule with illustrations of clothing on a clothesline. "Will you point to the craziest piece of clothing (for Funsters), or the one you like best (for Feelers) on the clothesline and color it with your favorite markers?" The activity itself is motivating for Do-ers and Funsters, and Dreamers benefit from the clear directions. Thinkers and Believers appreciate having their own copies of the schedule. "Will you put your finger on the eyeglasses?" the teacher asks before reading the tasks. Some assignments can be re-worded to maintain the interest of Do-ers and Funsters who will be more motivated to "Play the Silent-e Game" than to "Write words with silent e," even though both statements address the same learning objective.

Teachers who have been trained in the PCM have developed expertise in meeting the needs of students with histories of previous school difficulties. In fact, most PCM-trained educators have found that one of the most appealing aspects of the model is its elegance as a tool in problem-solving and decision-making. By directing attention to student personality type, strengths, and needs, teacher selection of strategies to improve behavior and academic performance has become more effective and efficient. For example, a fourth grade teacher in Washington, D.C. recently discovered an amazingly simple way to deal with a student's frequent absences from school. By looking first at the student's strengths and determining his type (Feeler) she realized he was not getting his need for recognition of person met. She began greeting him at the door with a smile and a positive comment in a nurturing tone of voice about something of interest to him. Within a week, the absences stopped and learning increased significantly.

Process Communication-trained teachers have found the model to be of great value in planning lessons. Consider the following lesson introduction.

> Today we are going to review for our test. I am going to give you a list of review questions. If you can write the answers to all these questions, you should do well on the test. I will be available if you have any questions.

This type of assignment tends to appeal to Thinkers who prefer structured work and like to think about things. If the Believers see a purpose in the assignment, they are likely to buy into it. Even Dreamers, if the directions are precise enough, may react well to such an assignment. The Feelers will probably be disappointed that there is no interaction, but may do the assignment to please the teacher. However, Funsters and Do-ers are not inclined to respond positively to such an assignment because it does not provide enough opportunity for excitement. Although making up only 25% of our student population, these two types of students tend to cause the most problems in classrooms.

Contrast the first assignment with the one that follows for its appeal to a wider variety of student personality types.

> Today we are going to review for our test by playing Jeopardy. I have questions under several categories. The questions range in difficulty from a $50 question to a $500 question in each category. When it is your turn, you can think about it by yourself or talk it over with your team before you answer. You'll get point tickets for correct answers that ill be worth valuable prizes (free time) at the end! If you can answer these questions, you'll do a terrific job on the test! Let's go!

This assignment is more likely to "hook in" all the types. Playing game appeals to the Funsters. The Thinkers and Believers can show off their knowledge by selecting the hard questions. The rules of the game

and keeping score will also appeal to them. Dreamers and Feelers know they have opportunities to either process by themselves or with a group. Do-ers respond to the action-oriented features of earning money and points. Free time at the end gives everyone a chance to take care of their needs (be alone, talk with friends, play a game, use the computer). This activity accomplishes the same objective as the first assignment (reviewing for the test), but gives a "battery charge" to each type of student.

There are six simple questions that teachers can ask themselves when planning a lesson:

1. How can I build recognition for work and time structure into this lessons (for the Thinker)
2. How can I ensure the task is meaningful? (for the Believer)
3. How can I make this fun? (for the Funster)
4. How can I incorporate action? (for the Do-er)
5. How can I provide reflection time? (for the Dreamer)
6. How can I provide personal recognition and opportunities to interact with others? (for the Feeler)

Most students want contact and positive feedback from their teachers. Verbal recognition, grades, comments on papers, greetings or high fives as students enter the room, smiles, or jokes can meet these needs. Funsters and Do-ers respond well to multi-sensory, dynamic activities. When these activities have a purpose, are productive and are well organized they will appeal to Thinkers and Believers. Some time to reflect and work alone can be built in for the Dreamers. Feelers need a chance to work with others.

PCM-trained middle school teachers and counselors in a rural Maryland district have been using the PCM for dealing with behavior problems of at-risk youngsters. One case became particularly disconcerting in February, when a sixth grade Funster student returned to his earlier disruptive behaviors after having made significant improvements prior to the holidays. As the team discussed the situation, they realized that most of the teachers had, themselves, fallen back into old familiar practices with the student and had not been using PCM with him since January. The more the team brainstormed, the more they were able to identify positive traits of this student. For instance, one teacher noted how the student was quite good at making up songs. The rest of the teachers seized on this strength and designed techniques to incorporate his musical skill into all areas of the curriculum. By focusing on personality type, strengths, and needs (in this case, the Funsters need for playful contact), the teachers were able to find a simple yet effective way to help this student.

Another Funster student in the same school was frequently tardy. Once the teachers became aware of the fact that Funsters need to play first before they can concentrate on work and learning, a small basketball net was set up in their classrooms and the student was allowed three shots at the net before class started each time he arrived at class on time. The student was rarely late to class after that.

Teachers can create their own PCM Toolboxs with objects and activities to motivate each type of learner. In the early grades, puppets have natural appeal to Feelers (who like to hold them) and Funsters (who can use silly voices and make up creative roles). Spinners, dice, and playing cards can be used with Do-ers to let them have choices in assignments for class or homework. Stuffed toys are great for younger Feelers, while special projects and certificates of accomplishment appeal to Thinkers and Believers at any age. Portable study carrels and headphones can make a Dreamer's life easier by helping meet his/her need for solitude. Likewise, materials for art work or for designing subject-related games appeal to Funsters.

It should be noted that every student's needs do not have to be addressed at every moment of the day. It is also important for teachers to realize that when students behave contrary to the typical teacher profile (high in Thinker/Believer/Feeler energy) and appear to day-dream, want to have fun, complain about being bored, or don't follow directions, they are not necessarily attempting to agitate their teachers. These behaviors are more likely a function of their dominant personality type rather than willful misbehavior. If their needs can be met in a positive way, they are more inclined to participate appropriately.

Why Use the Process Communication Model?

Multiple intelligence theory, brain research, and learning style systems all support the use of a variety of teaching techniques to reach all students. It follows that when teachers plan and execute lessons that include specific ways to meet the needs of students of varying personality types, they reach more students and achievement and behavior improve. "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. 39).

It is essential that educators utilize effective techniques to reach and teach all students. Knowledge of the PCM makes it possible for educators to learn to energize their own personality parts that are not especially well developed. Educators can expand their teaching repertoires to meet the needs of the six types of students, especially those whose personality structures are dissimilar to their own. The application of the PCM can help teachers relate to all students and plan curricula and lessons that facilitate the success of every type of student found in today's classrooms.

References

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