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Effective Communication: The Key to Student Management

William Overman

Four communication models that can be used by the teacher to manage classroom behavior are described on the following pages. Each model has individual differences, but more important, the author notes, are the communication skills common to all four.

MANAGING STUDENT behavior continues to be a high priority in our nation's schools. National surveys have identified discipline as the most significant school problem for nine out of the last 10 years. Legislative action and court decisions have resulted in recognition of student rights and guidelines, as well as constraints for disciplining students who conduct themselves irresponsibly. In spite of the increased concerns and restrictions, however, many teachers effectively manage student behavior and experience relatively few student management problems.

Communication Models

From observations of successful teachers have come communication models which emphasize good teaching skills. Additional communication skills have been identified by persons in the field of counseling and psychology. These skills also have been translated into communication models for use in the classrooms.

These models stress communication skills that enhance the self-concept of students. Research has repeatedly shown many student failures to be the result of

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poor self-concept. Research has also shown that the self-concept of students develops from their individual interaction and communication with "significant others" in their lives.

What is effective communication? Effective communication is based on relationships. It promotes growth and is stress reducing. Effective communication is democratic rather than autocratic. Communication models such as Transactional Analysis, Teacher Effectiveness Training, Reality Therapy, and Logical Consequences are designed to be effective and to enhance the self-concept of students and teachers.

At first glance, each of these models appears to approach the establishment of effective communication channels in a different way. A closer view, however, reveals that each model seems to be built on the same principles. Before identifying these key skills, a brief identification of the components of these four models will assist in the identification of their common characteristics.

Transactional Analysis

S. Otho Hesterly, in his book *How to Use Transactional Analysis in the Public School*, describes the psychotherapy model developed by Eric Berne as it applies to a communication model for use by teachers in their classrooms to manage student behavior. TA's conceptual scheme of communication legitimizes teacher and student feelings. TA, as used by teachers, has four components. They are Transactions, Passivity, Problem Solving, and Contracting.

The Transactions component is based on a person's state of mind when communicating with other persons. TA theory says each person can communicate from one of three ego states: Adult, Parent, or Child. Communication between two persons both in their Adult ego state is effective and productive. Any other combination of ego states produces ineffective communication, particularly when a teacher is managing student behavior. This important concept of TA emphasizes the need for the teacher to remain in the Adult ego state while communicating with students. The teacher should also communicate in such a manner as to encourage students to assume that state as well.

The Passivity component is one which stresses the need of students to think and to care for their own needs. The concept of Passivity refers to behavior that discounts a situation, the significance of the situation, or a solution to a situation. Passivity results in unproductive relationships. Therefore, the importance of this concept to teachers is to avoid or minimize passive behavior in the classroom. A key word to listen for in determining passive behavior is "can't."

TA stresses the use of Problem Solving as a means of reducing Passivity in the classroom. There is nothing unique about TA's form of Prob-

lem Solving. The key to Problem Solving is the belief that something can be done to improve things without controlling others. It focuses on the need of the teacher to gain the cooperation of the misbehaving student.

The solution arrived at through Problem Solving in TA is translated into action by using the Contracting concept. Contracts are made from the Adult ego state. Ideally, contracts state explicitly what behavior will occur. Contracts strengthen relationships, promote responsible behavior, and enhance one's feelings of self.

The popularity of Transactional Analysis is indicated by the response of the public to such books as *I'm OK, You're OK* and *Born to Win*. TA's strength is that it enhances communication among individuals, thus promoting the positive development of the individual's self-concept.

Teacher Effectiveness Training

Teacher Effectiveness Training (TET) was conceived by William Gordon. Teacher Effectiveness Training asserts that it is the manner in which teachers talk with students that determines their relationships with students. TET concentrates on how teachers can avoid using statements that order, nag, or preach to the student. Such destructive communication can be simply avoided by the use of "I" messages instead of "you" messages. "I" messages also allow a teacher to legitimately express feelings.

TET combines the use of "I" messages with Problem Solving. The TET Problem Solving steps are the same as those used in Transactional Analysis. They are: defining the problem, generating possible solutions, evaluating the solutions, making a decision, determining how to implement the decision, and assessing the success of the solution.

TET stresses the need for a written commitment as an effective means of concluding the Problem Solving phase. The widespread use of William Gordon's books, *Teacher Effectiveness Training*, *Parent Effectiveness Training*, and *Leadership Effectiveness Training*, speaks to the success one can achieve in managing student behavior by practicing the message found in his books.

Reality Therapy

Reality Therapy, was designed by William Glasser, author of *Schools Without Failure* and other well-read books. Reality Therapy is perhaps the easiest model to use in the classroom because Glasser has gone to great lengths to simplify and organize his model. Glasser calls the process "Ten Steps to Discipline." These 10 steps emphasize Glasser's belief that students solve their own problems with the help of their teachers.

The first three steps of Glasser's model occur prior to a teacher assisting a student in solving a problem. The first step is taking the time to think about what now is happening with a student. The second step is assessing the success of what is being done and, if necessary, making a commitment to change it. Next, the teacher establishes a positive relationship with the student.

When the student misbehaves, the next three steps are implemented. The first step is to ask the student, "What are you doing?" When the student answers correctly, the teacher asks if the conduct is in violation of any rule. The last step is the problem-solving phase, where a solution to the misbehavior is sought and a commitment is obtained from the student to implement the solution.

The last four steps stress the need of repeating steps four through six over and over until the conduct of the student becomes responsible. Glasser stresses that this must be done in a non-punishing manner.

Logical Consequences

The last model to be described is Logical Consequences. This model was designed by Rudolf Dreikurs and Loren Grey. Logical Consequences emphasizes that students learn from the reality of society by requiring students to be responsible for their own behavior. This model assists teachers in managing student behavior by stressing the need to avoid reinforcing or provoking misbehavior, developing relations based upon mutual respect, looking for the good in students, and being flexible in their attitude toward students.

There are four steps to follow when applying the Logical Consequences model to managing student behavior. The first step is to determine the meaning and purpose of the student's misbehavior. The teacher accomplishes this by focusing on the beliefs the student is expressing, the feelings being expressed, and the non-verbal message being sent by the student. The teacher responds by acknowledging the student's feelings.

Step two requires the teacher to identify the real issue, usually one of four: attention seeking, desiring power, revenge, or displaying inadequacy. Problem solving with the student is the third step. Step four is obtaining a commitment for good behavior.

Again, Logical Consequences stresses the need of the teacher to avoid punishing the student.

Communication: Key to Success

The approach each of these models assumes is that the manner in which the teacher communicates with the students is the key to success.

The process to be followed when using each model varies, but the goal is the same. The enhancement of a student's self-concept can be achieved through the use of effective communication.

Before identifying the skills for effective communications, a quick glance at the chart summarizing the steps of the four models will be helpful.

Summary of the Four Communication Models

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Transactional Analysis</i></p> <p>Identify ego state. Avoid passivity. Problem solving. Contracting.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Teacher Effectiveness Training</i></p> <p>Problem identification. ("I" message.) Problem solving. Obtaining a commitment.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Reality Therapy</i></p> <p>Deal with present behavior. (Ask question, "What are you doing?") Get student to make a value judgment. Develop a plan to improve behavior. Obtain commitment</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Logical Consequences</i></p> <p>Understand meaning of misbehavior. Identify real issue. Involve student in considering alternative behavior. Obtain a commitment to a specific course of action.</p>

Within these four widely used communication models are four common communication skills: confronting, being nonjudgmental, participatory problem solving, and obtaining commitments. Each is necessary if teachers are to effectively manage student behavior.

The first and second skills are closely related. *Confronting* is the need for teachers to respond to student misbehavior. Ignoring misbehavior is not an effective way of solving problems. The manner in which a teacher confronts a misbehaving student is critical. The confrontation must be *nonjudgmental*. This is the second communication skill essential to effective student management. Each model has an effective way for a teacher to be nonjudgmental.

TA calls for the teacher to stay in the Adult ego state. This state of mind prevents the teacher from speaking in ways that are critical, punitive, or sarcastic. Teacher Effectiveness Training emphasizes the use of "I" messages instead of "you" messages to ensure that the teacher does not speak judgmentally. Reality Therapy requires the teacher to ask the student, "What are you doing?" when confronting misbehavior. This question prevents the teacher from passing judgment upon the irresponsible act or the student committing the act. Logical Con-

sequences requires the teacher to assess the meaning and purpose of the misbehavior. This requires the use of active listening. Active listening, too, is a nonjudgmental form of communication.

Participatory problem solving is the third communication skill teachers need to utilize to effectively manage student behavior. Problem solving must be two-way, meaning the student who has misbehaved must be actively involved in solving the problem. This participation of the student in determining how and what to do to improve behavior allows the teacher to be seen as a person who is accepting, but firm.

The *obtaining of a commitment*, preferably written, is the fourth skill common to these models. This skill is an effective means of bringing the problem-solving phase to a conclusion. More importantly, it affords the teacher a means of praising the student for improved behavior because the willingness to make a commitment to improve is positive behavior.

An additional common aspect of each of these four communication models is the concept that a teacher should never punish. This common theme controls the framework of the four communication skills. Confronting, being nonjudgmental, participatory problem solving, and obtaining commitment are legitimate and positive forms of communication and if faithfully practiced will prevent any teacher from being viewed as punitive.

These four skills can be learned and become a part of any teacher's behavior when managing students. The key to any teacher effectively doing so lies in the motivation to learn these important communication skills. The implementation of these effective communication skills is the key to student management.

October Is International Energy Conservation Month

In October the U.S., along with 19 other nations, will focus attention on the need for worldwide energy conservation. Sponsored by the International Energy Agency, the event will highlight and promote national efforts to use energy efficiently.

The Department of Energy staff coordinator urges school administrators to choose October as the month to highlight energy efficiency in classrooms and school districts. DOE will also encourage investigations into energy efficiency in school buildings and school transportation systems.

□ If your school is planning any special energy events the Department of Energy would like to hear about them. Contact Donald Duggan, Chief of the Academic Programs Branch, DOE, Education Programs Division, Washington, D.C. 20545.