

CREATING A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT

The foundation for and the development of the system

The communication protocol upon which all programs are anchored and the development of the Focusing Students on Achievement Program

The communication method taught and used throughout the CREATING A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT, leadership and professional development System is Goal-Focused Communication (GFC). The GFC protocol is anchored to the therapeutic protocol known as Solution Focused Therapy.

Steve De Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg developed Solution Focused Therapy based, in part, on the work of Milton Erickson, MD of the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California. While developing and testing Solution Focused Therapy DeShazer, Berg, and team worked at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Solution Focused Therapy (SFT) is a time-sensitive, future-focused intervention. It moves the client focus off of what is wrong and onto what is right. The technique only gives attention to the present and future desires of the client, rather than focusing on past, often negative, experiences.

The therapist encourages the client to imagine their future as they want it to be and then the therapist and client collaborate on a series of steps to achieve that goal. This form of therapy involves reviewing and dissecting the client's vision, and determining what skills, resources, and abilities the client will develop and use to attain the desired outcome.

It stresses the resources and skills a client has. It helps the client to take on the role of expert. It causes the client to take responsibility for setting his or her own goals and reaching them. It is not about what is missing and causes worry, but what is present and can lead to happiness.

In 2005, Dr. Thomas Brock and a small group of therapists and educators at the request of Michael Robinson employed an embryonic protocol to develop teacher skills in causing students to clarify their career, school, and classroom goals employing many of the tenets of Solution Focused Therapy. Brock had been a private practice and agency therapist as well as principal of California's highest performing academic



high school. Brock used SFT concepts blended with other modalities at Gretchen Whitney High School in Cerritos, California while developing a school climate focused on achievement.

Evaluating the challenge experienced by a team of teachers in a dropout prevention academy in South Carolina, Brock determined that teachers were used to *informing* and *directing* students and not *engaging* them.

Further, teachers had the natural inclination to analyze a student's past to come up with what seemed to be a logical solution to the student's problem. They had been taught to approach problem solving in this manner. In this scenario, the locus of responsibility was on the teacher. Students had little or no vested interest in the solution. Further, Brock and the team observed that teachers would often get caught in what might be termed blame-based communication. When teachers communicated with parents about the students' pasts, they confronted scenarios where parents felt that this dredging up of the past was a means of blaming the parents for the actions of their children. Such interactions did little to advance the futures of the students and in most cases communications became a "stand-off".

Brock determined that a protocol that moved the locus of responsibility onto the student, be forward-focused, and time efficient would form the basis for a solution to the problem posed by Robinson and the dropout prevention staff. Since he had employed Solution Focused Therapy with severely troubled youth and their parents with much success, the team began to develop a more universal communication protocol substantively based on the premises of SFT. What they felt was that school communications should be focused on goals and in most cases goals were tied to achievement.

What emerged became known as Goal-Focused Communications (GFC).

GFC is a precise method of engaging communication that causes students (and other "clients") to clarify their own goals, to identify their resources, and to monitor their progress. The GFC protocol is based on three questions

1. **What** is your goal?
2. **Where** are you now? (relative to that goal)
3. **How** are you going to reach your goal?

In all cases the locus of responsibility is transferred to the student. All communication/conversations begin now and go forward. All communication in the form of conversations is time sensitive and brief.

Given the needs of teachers, universally, and the decreasing amount of time provided for teacher professional development, a protocol that was seen to work well in the dropout academy and over twenty other academy and school-based applications pointed out the value of an efficient means of developing these skills in teachers.

The Goal-Focused Communications (GFC) protocol is based on a set of principles. Such principles are fundamental truths, psychological truths, and are observable realities.

Following are GFC Principles.

GFC

- All students have goals
- The human brain attempts to hold attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in harmony (reduce cognitive dissonance)
- Repeated goal-statements evoke new behavior (self-fulfilling prophesy)
- Questioning students causes them to think and become engaged in their own answers
- Precise goal definition yields easier/higher probability of attainment
- Success comes easier in small increments rather than large
- One must know location in order to determine direction
- Students have strengths and resources available to them (internal as well as external)
- Internal locus of control causes greater success than external locus of control

From 2008 through 2011, Brock and Robinson worked on developing an efficient, performance-based learning system that included two formal (knowledge and skill) class sessions of three-hour duration each and two (skill application) guided practice sessions. In the guided practice sessions, conducted in the teachers' classrooms, teachers see GFC conversations modeled and then they conduct such conversations with their own students while being videotaped and reviewed, using a commonly understood rubric, by a teaching fellow and a student.

The resulting program has come to be known as "FOCUSING STUDENTS ON ACHIEVEMENT". An organization headed by Brock and Robinson (Founding Fellows) uses experienced educators and psychologists (Teaching Fellows) to deliver FOCUSING STUDENTS ON ACHIEVEMENT (FSA). That organization is known as Metis Leadership Group. (www.metisleadershipgroup.com)

Work continues to be done on alternate forms of delivery of FSA. Time for teacher professional development is continuing to be reduced and forms of technology-delivered alternatives are being tested for the program's classroom portion.

FSA learning is based on very specific performance objectives and formative and summative measures have been developed and tested to assure that all participants in an FSA program know and can perform that which is prescribed by the program's objectives/outcomes upon program completion. The preparation of the Teaching Associates follows a detailed Job Task Analysis for that role and all persons prepared demonstrate that they can perform and have performed all requisite tasks.

Following are FSA Principles.

Please note that all the previously stated GFC protocol principles are included in the FSA Program Principles.

FSA Principles

- All previously cited GFC Principles
- Education requires a relationship between student and teacher
- Students achieve better when they focus on their own goals
- Students achieve better in class when class is relevant to their own goals
- Students achieve better when they respect their teachers and believe their teachers respect and care about them

The design and development of a program that helps teachers Manage Classroom Behavior

In 2008 Brock and Robinson worked with the Macon County School District in Tuskegee, Alabama in support of a dropout prevention academy employing one of the initial forms of Focusing Students on Achievement. The Alabama Industrial Development & Training agency (AIDT) and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), an agency within the U.S. Department of Commerce, supported the project.

During conversations with assistant superintendent Dr. Leila Frank, it was pointed out that a large body of students had little or no

- Respect for learning
- Respect for other people
- Respect for the property of other people

She and other district administrators attributed this negative behavior to parents who did not provide a disciplined environment for their children. Subsequent to interviewing and observation it was determined that the home life of many of these students was, in itself, undisciplined.

When queried, local administrators addressed this concern by saying that they felt that if the classrooms could be well managed by teachers, it could be expected that teachers could teach again rather than be constantly dealing with behavior problems.

When students were questioned, it was revealed that they saw little relevance to what they were being taught. This was a dilemma since much of what they were being taught was State mandated.

Brock and Robinson had begun to see how Goal-Focused Conversations between teacher and students that were focused on career, school, and classroom goals were causing students to focus more on their individual achievement. Students began to see relevance in previously ignored content and skill. That was a beginning step toward resolving the district's concerns.

However, it was determined that teachers prepared by a variety of colleges came from an era when subject matter acquisition was of prime importance. The classes previously termed "methods courses" had been pared down or eliminated in collegiate teacher education programs. Few, if any, teachers established learnable classroom procedures - only rules and sanctions. And those were not working.

It was evident that the old notion of rewards and punishments (carrot and stick extrinsic motivation) was not a functional paradigm. Teachers needed a way to cause students to behave in ways that would demonstrate their respect for learning, respect for people, and respect for property. Clearly a well-managed classroom environment was needed where learning takes place, students feel comfortable, and where teachers do not burn out.

A second issue was observed. Principals had become office-bound managers and were no longer the instructional leaders of their schools. They were neither the coach nor mentor of

teachers. They evaluated teachers and levied sanctions. This was nearly the same situation that existed between teachers and students.

Brock and Robinson deemed that a program was needed to prepare teachers to develop classroom procedures that reduced, and ultimately ameliorated chaos in the classroom and, consequently, cause students to respect learning, people, and property. The second element of this program would be to provide the principal and other school leaders with similar skills so that the locus of responsibility for assisting teachers with the preparation of classroom procedures would be vested in the principal and these leaders. In effect, this caused the principal to regain his or her status as the instructional leader of the school.

So much of the research and literature has been devoted to the importance of the local educational leader, usually the school principal. This person's leadership is deemed to be vital to the health of the institution.

The prototype program, MANAGING CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR, was first instituted with the staff of a middle school academy program in Paterson, NJ in 2009. It was there that the importance of including the principal in the professional development sessions became clear and it also pointed out the need to prepare the principal and other school leaders to teach and mentor new staff especially where there is, historically, a high turnover rate.

Note that, as the MANAGING CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR Program was field-tested, modified, and became a stabilized process, the reported rate of teacher turnover was reduced in those schools or academies employing the program. It was observed that teachers began to gain control of their classrooms and, therefore, became more effective and comfortable in the teaching role.

Versions of MANAGING CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR were tested and refined over the 2009 through 2010 time frame. This resulted in the identification of a stabilized body of knowledge and skill. Various delivery formats were tested. The critical process for re-engaging the school principal was developed and tested at West-Oak High School in Oconee County, South Carolina during the summer of 2011 and the 2011/2012 school year in a model program implementation underwritten by two offices of the South Carolina Department of Education. Those were the Palmetto Priority Schools directed by David Rawlinson and the Office of Career Tech Education directed by Dr. Bob Couch. Both of these state officials were instrumental in defining needs for the MANAGING CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR program.

During the summer of 2011 the professional development class scripts were critically evaluated and finalized based on the Oconee experience. Formative and summative evaluations were re-anchored to performance objectives and the process for re-engaging the principal as instructional leader of the school was documented so as to be replicable. A Job/Task Analysis for the role of teaching fellows will exist for use in their preparation.

The Managing Classroom Behavior program is composed of two formal (knowledge and skill) class sessions of three-hour duration apiece, a one and a half hour session with the principal and school leaders, a two-hour review of procedures completed by teachers, and a student input session for the principal and school leaders. The sessions are capped by an in-class guided practice of teacher implementation of classroom procedures. In between sessions there is period of two to five weeks for teachers to implement classroom procedures and test them.

Critical to this process is this time during which the principal and school leaders mentor teachers and the principal begins to regain the role of instructional leader.

Following are MCB program principles.

MCB Principles

- Students learn better in a well-managed classroom where students show respect for people, property, and learning
- New behaviors can be learned (procedures can be taught)
- Increased time on task increases student achievement
- Self-regulated students achieve better than compliant students
- Children learn best with age-appropriate structure and limits
- Intrinsic motivators are stronger and more enduring than extrinsic motivators
- Behavioral consequences inform subsequent behavior
- The principal is the instructional leader of the school

The design and development of a program to create a Healthy School Climate

A program at the whole school or academy level has been in development since 2009 by Brock and Robinson. Its final field-testing will be conducted during the 2011/12 school-year at West-Oak High School in Westminster, SC. Certain perspectives have become evident to the developers over years as practitioners in schools of various types, observers of programs across the country and developers and deliverers of culture of achievement leadership and professional development services and programs. Those perspectives follow.

Student achievement requires an atmosphere where students are safe, emotionally and physically. Students must be free from fear, from bullying, from drugs, from violence. Draconian protective measures, including armed police officers, metal detectors, and zero-tolerance policies don't provide the safety that a positive and affirming school culture provides.

Unbalanced focus on content standards and test scores adversely affects learning and destroys the motivation of both teacher and student. Student achievement requires an atmosphere that is secure, focused on productive behaviors, and pleasant.

For students to achieve, school must be a pleasant, welcoming environment where students feel they belong. The school culture must accept and utilize other responsible influences on students, such as parents and other community resources.

Student achievement requires a school climate that is safe, happy, and productive. Principals need a set of skills and strategies to involve parents, staff, and students to create such a school culture. The school leader can't be isolated and powerless; the principal must be in a position of extreme positive influence over all three constituent groups.

The BUILDING A HEALTHY SCHOOL CLIMATE program teaches principals how to use leadership groups of students, teachers, and parents to select school-wide goals and develop a collaborative action plan to create a safe, happy, and productive environment.

The program provides a template for communicating about common causes. The student, teacher, and parent groups and the combined team don't have to invent beginning causes. They evaluate the school and create an action plan using a set of 12 quality indicators identified for each of the three essential elements (Safe, Happy, and Productive).

The Healthy School Climate program is composed of four principal's sessions. The principal conducts the first session. Three separate constituent groups (students, teachers, and parents) are involved in the first part of this session. It is followed by a principal led joint session including all three leadership groups. The goal of the first session is to select goals for school improvement in three categories: safe, happy, and productive that are agreed upon by all groups.

The second principal's session is organized, as was the first. The goal of this multi-meeting session is to plan action steps to satisfy the goals set in session one.

Session three is with the whole group (students, teachers and parents) to review the implementation of the action steps.

Session four is organized, as was the first session. This, multi-meeting, session is designed for the groups to review the year's progress and to adjust the action plan, for the next year.

This design positions the principal as the school leader who uses the resources of three constituent groups (students, teachers, and parents). Further the groups become ongoing supporters of the school's drive to have a healthy climate and resources for the principal in other matters.

Following are Healthy School Climate principles.

HSC Principles

- Students learn better when they are physically and emotionally safe
- Students have a greater commitment to school when they are happy there
- Students learn better in an environment that is focused on achievement
- Collaboration among students, parents, and teachers supports greater student achievement

Some conclusions

The three programs composing the Culture of Achievement system are purposely aimed at

- Individual (one to one) communication (Focusing Students on Achievement)
- Group interaction (Managing Classroom Behavior)
- Whole school interaction (Healthy School Climate)

This continuum has seen to be a logical and necessary progression of communication in order for the school to have a healthy school climate. Each of the Program Principles (stated above in boxes) has a research base and program precepts and objectives are anchored to them.

While each of the programs has been conducted in progressive stages of development, principles have existed coming from a research base while implementation activities have developed over time. It is expected that implementation will advance over time and will,

ultimately, be responsive to advances in technology. With that being stated, Metis Leadership Group feels that the person placed in today's teaching role is ill prepared to assist students in clarifying their personal goals relative to school offerings. The Group feels that teachers in classroom or lab settings have not been prepared to manage those settings adequately. And, the Group feels that the principals of schools, as institutions, need to use the resources of students, teachers, and parents in assuring a healthy school climate where there is a culture of achievement.