

ARE WE FOCUSING ON THE WRONG BEHAVIORS?
CHANGING APPROACHES TO BETTER SUPPORT YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



A Connected School:

Creating a Safe, Caring, and Achieving Environment

Presented by
E. Perry Good
Senior Faculty Member
International Association for Applied Control Theory



A Connected School is primarily focused on creating a positive school climate. When school climate is based on strong relationships, students and faculty are safer, more caring, and able to achieve at a high level.

Historically, schools have tried to control students from the outside by focusing on rewards for good behavior and punishment for bad behavior. Increasing failure, suspension, and dropout rates; school and community violence; and our increasing prison population soundly prove that this approach does not work. But focusing on these failures only postpones creating solutions.

While most people, certainly school teachers, acknowledge that they cannot control the behavior of other people, like most of us they continue to spend much of their time and energy trying to do just that. Researchers have indicated that what differentiates truly successful schools from less successful ones is the nature of the relationships between the students and the teachers in the school. If relationships in school environments are a key success factor, it stands to reason that staff development efforts should be directed towards teaching people how to control their own behavior and model

it for others, rather than trying to teach people how to control the behavior of others. That is precisely the goal of *A Connected School*.

A Connected School: Creating a Safe, Caring, and Achieving Environment is a promising program that gives educators and human services agencies the tools to effect real change in their schools and communities by understanding and applying strategies based on Perceptual Control Theory, a relatively recent theory of behavior that has been subjected to rigorous scientific scrutiny over the past 35 years and is proving to be accurate.

Perceptual Control Theory, or PCT for short, was introduced by William T. Powers in 1973 in his seminal book entitled *Behavior: The Control of Perception*. The theory articulates principles which are specific to living things as distinguished from non-living things. PCT is gaining credibility among social scientists, psychologists, and educators worldwide. Many academicians and practitioners in the fields of psychology and education have embraced the theory and are developing specific practices based on its principles. Evidence is accumulating which shows that providing helping professionals with a foundation in PCT enables them

not only to improve their personal lives, but to significantly improve their skills as professionals.

PCT is a comprehensive, universal theory of behavior. It applies to all people. While the physical sciences have been advancing theories for the behavior of physical things for centuries, building models and testing those models in the real world has become possible only since the advent of computers, which have allowed scientists to design models in which random variables can be incorporated. Individuals can experience how behavior is, in fact, a feedback process that involves perceiving, comparing, and acting. Behavior is a circular process rather than a linear one.

Once this theory of behavior is understood and internalized, there is no turning back. PCT is a paradigm shift in how we view and understand behavior. It has important implications for how we interact with students and peers in schools. It changes everything in a fundamental way. Basically it changes how we view change.

At Cedar Hall Elementary School in Evansville, Indiana, where quite a few teachers have been trained in *A Connected School* since 2008, principal Jackie Kuhn reported: "During my first year as principal of a high poverty school, I spent an extraordinary amount of time dealing with discipline problems, averaging about 150 referrals each month. In the summer of 2008, my staff and I participated in *A Connected School* training, and this year have implemented strategies based on the principles of Perceptual Control Theory. I am amazed at the difference. This year discipline referrals have decreased 90 percent, and we have averaged fewer than 12 discipline referrals each month. Students, teachers, and staff now feel connected, safe, and respected. Cedar Hall Elementary has become a great place to work and to learn!"

Doug Gerringer is principal of Atkins High School of Pre-engineering in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a school which has received funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Many of its Freshman Academy teachers have attended *A Connected School* training. As a result, the 2008 North Carolina Teacher

Working Conditions Survey showed that Atkins High scored higher than the district and state averages in every category. "This is a tremendous achievement for our school," said Gerringer.

For the past 10 years, Fayetteville, North Carolina-based Cumberland County Schools (CCS) has offered training in *A Connected School* to over 40 principals and 500 teachers. Educators have used the new approaches to connect with students and to create environments that promote a positive approach to discipline. Among other improvements, central office personnel evaluating the training found that "minority students and economically disadvantaged students in the schools receiving the training scored higher on standardized tests than those at other schools in the district and in the state."

Some 15,000 school administrators, teachers, counselors, and substance abuse prevention specialists have received training in *A Connected School* in the United States, Canada, and Australia. It has proven to be effective in both rural and urban settings in all grades (K-12) as well as across ethnic, racial, and gender lines. In addition to on-going efforts in Fayetteville and Winston-Salem, North Carolina, current or new Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiatives are underway in Randolph County Schools, North Carolina; Flint community Schools, Michigan; Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, Indiana; and South Sioux City Community Schools, Nebraska. Evaluation designs are being implemented by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation; Dan Diehl and associates at Diehl Evaluation and Consulting Services; and Dr. Jessica Barnes at Michigan State University's Community Evaluation and Research Center.

E. Perry Good, an author and speaker, is President of New View Publications & Seminars. Contact her via toll-free telephone at 800-441-3604 or via e-mail at nview@aol.com. For more information, visit aconnectedschool.com or newviewpublications.com.