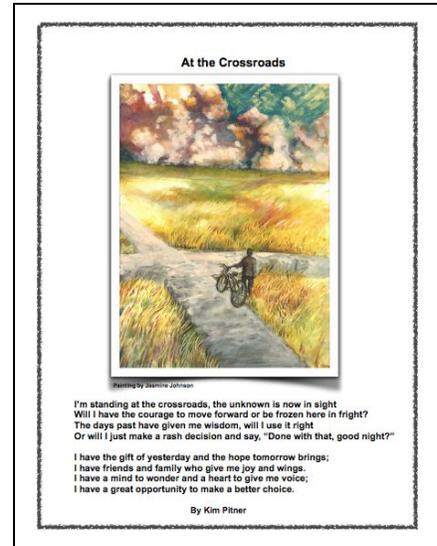


Testimonial to C.R.O.S.S.ROADS CHOICE Effectiveness

***By Pamela Deering,
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and Great Expectations Coach***

This C.R.O.S.S.ROADS CHOICE process was birthed from incredible frustration at having to handle one disciplinary situation after another as a result of negative choices by the students at the middle school where I was principal. I asked the question, “Can making better choices be taught?” and discovered that, “YES, IT CAN!”



During my first year an unfortunate incident with one of the students led me to seek help from our county health department psychologist. Just in conversation I asked him the question, “Can making better choices be taught?”. Towards that end he worked with me to put together a 4 step process directed solely at conflict resolution: P.O.P.S. - P - Problem; O - Options; P - Pick one; S- Start over. I received permission from my superintendent to pilot it for the next school year and all the staff were trained in its use before the beginning of school.

To introduce the process to the students during the first weeks of school that year, my partner, the psychologist, and I went into every class and role-played the 4 steps using a conflict situation: an incident between two students going through the lunch line and finding only one piece of cake left which both wanted.

Problem: One piece of cake and two students.

Options we role played:

- 1) Fight over it and get in trouble with neither getting the cake.***
- 2) One of them gets the cake and the other gets none.***
- 3) They cut it in two and both get a smaller piece.***

Pick one: They decided they would share the piece of cake.

Start over: If that didn't end to their satisfaction they could figure out something different in case it happened again, such as one gets the cake this time and the other would get it the next time.

From that point P.O.P.S. was the process used in all conflict situations throughout the school environment. If teachers observed a conflict beginning they would immediately have the involved parties go through the P.O.P.S. steps. Writing it down on the P.O.P.S. form was used only when it was felt that having written documentation would help or as a means of giving those involved time to settle down.

If the situation ended up at the office, the same process was used and when necessary done on the P.O.P.S. form for documentation. It was found that the extra time writing down the facts helped those involved to calm down so they could work through what had happened. A side benefit was that it also gave documentation of the event in their own handwriting.

It quickly became evident that when taken through the steps, the students would make the right choices. They were also involved in determining appropriate consequences and it was found they tended to be much harder on themselves than the offense would warrant. A wiser course was often asking them if they would like to hear the consequences others had considered in similar circumstances. Note: It was difficult for any outside dissent or to argue fairness when told that the consequence was decided upon by the student.

*Initially this process did take a little more effort because the staff had to stop and run through the steps with the students. However, we found it saved us that much time and more in dealing with future situations. **More importantly all of a sudden it was the students resolving the potential conflicts and not the staff. The role of the staff had switched from that of disciplinarians to facilitators of self-discipline by the students.** (Talk about a stress reliever!)*

Results: There was a 56% drop in disciplinary referrals over two years.

At this point I left the middle school position to become principal at a K-6 elementary. Over a period of two years 100 % of our staff was trained in the Great Expectations summer methodology workshops. Two years after that our school was one of the first three model schools in the state.

Together with a school creed, the Eight Expectations, and Life Principles formed the guidelines for making positive choices. Every student knew that when confronted with their wrong choice, they would be asked which expectation, life principle, or part of the creed had been violated. Eventually it resulted in them just quoting the appropriate

phrase immediately before even being asked. We had a phrase in our creed, “I do not have the right to interfere with the learning and well-being of others.” and that, along with Expectation One - “We will value one another as unique and special individuals.” were the most commonly referenced.

*Along with G.E. we instituted the same P.O.P.S. conflict resolution program. Evidence of how much it had become part of our school climate came one afternoon I’ll never forget when on the playground, I observed a student yelling, “POPS IT, POPS IT!” to two other students who were about to get into a physical altercation. **The change in the dynamics of the potential conflict situation was dramatic from the traditional teacher intervention to students empowered to solve the problem themselves.***

This particular incident led to another idea of having a group of trained student on patrol at recess that students could go to with their potential conflict situations. The patrol students would do nothing more than take the students through the P.O.P.S. process. Students didn’t have to be tagged as ‘tattling to the teacher’ and yet had a way of addressing what they considered to be a problem before it escalated.

*Thus was born the C.A.T. Patrol,(Caught Acting Terrific). One of the staff voluntarily took on the position of selecting and training those who would serve. We put together an application form, a parental consent form, standards for participation such as minimum grade performance in classes, behavior, etc. and a basic mediation training curriculum. The selected students attended training sessions after school before beginning recess patrols. Students always worked in pairs and had clipboards with **C.A.T. Patrol forms** to document any assistance given. These were turned in each day after recess in case there was a situation that required follow-up.*



*The Great Expectations climate coupled with the problem-solving process became very evident one day when I was out on the playground at noon recess. A student come up to me close to tears because another student was calling him names. I asked him to tell the other student to come back with him for a visit. A few minutes later the two arrived and I asked what the problem was. It turned out there was more to the story (surprise, surprise). I verbally stepped them through the process with questions giving them the opportunity to resolve the situation. See the **example dialogue** of our conversation for a full account of what happened. Afterwards I thought about how different this situation had resolved itself from the traditional teacher handing out the punishment scenario.*

- 1) *The student felt safe enough to bring the problem to an adult knowing they would be allowed to work it out between themselves.*
- 2) *The students evaluated their own behavior/choices.*
- 3) *The students determined what consequences would be fair. (with a few hints from me)*
- 4) *Instead of “This is what you’re going to do!” from a teacher or administrator, it was “This is what I’m going to do!” from the student/s.*

Who were the winners here? Who learned to take responsibility for their own actions? Who worked out other ways the problem could be solved? Who is not angry because of consequences handed down by ‘that teacher’ (or other person in authority)? Who has a better chance of making different choices in the future?

Results: After 6 years as a Great Expectations school and with almost 300 students PK-6, my last year there were only 39 disciplinary referrals that made it to the office. Definitely this was education heaven!*

**This number did not include incident referrals from buses that carried PK-12th grade students.*

Translating the process to other situations at school, it was discovered to work just as well when trying to make other decisions. As a staff we had identified Practice Two (speaking in complete sentences) as a goal to more fully implement and followed the steps in planning what that should look like throughout our school environment. Collectively we developed procedures for all of us to follow in our classrooms and everywhere else. Within six weeks the transformation was nothing short of miraculous.

From P.O.P.S. to C.R.O.S.S.ROADS - Why the change?

Over the years as an administrator working through a myriad of decision-making experiences with staff, students, and parents, it was evident that this P.O.P.S. process could be revised for use in all decision-making situations - general decision-making, goal setting, problem-solving, and its component, conflict resolution. The missing pieces were 1) looking at the REALITY (facts) of the situation before figuring out the realistic options to choose from, 2) adding in the planning of how the selected choice would be carried out, and 3) expanding the ‘Start over’ to include evaluating and revising as needed. It’s fairly simple to make a decision, but to carry it out is a totally

different challenge. Putting together all of these pieces led to the creation of the C.R.O.S.S.ROADS process.

The five steps:

C - Choice - What is the choice being made?

R - Reality - What is happening now? (facts)

O - Options - What are some choice options?

S - Select option/s and create a plan.

S - Start over. (Evaluate and revise.)

Decisions are crossroads in our lives. How many can say that our lives would have taken a different turn, "if we'd only....."? With C.R.O.S.S.ROADS in our toolbox, the "if I'd only....."s in our lives can be turned into "I'm so glad I did!"s.

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