

THE CASE OF THE DISRUPTIVE STUDENT

Shortly after I was trained in TOC in 1993, I began to adapt one of the thinking methods (the "negative branch") to get students to write down for themselves the consequences of their actions. The application was so effective with my 7th grade disruptive students that soon all the teachers on my team began to send their disruptive students to me rather than the office because the process I was using is so effective!

The amazing thing is that the students actually fix their own problems. All I do is get them to use the process. The first step is to have them write down the behavior that led to the problem with the teacher. After that, I just guide them with: "what happened next?" I think the students can write this so easily because they have experienced the chain of events. In this way, they are also developing a skill--cause and effect-- which is sometimes otherwise difficult to teach. Using this method, they can develop the skill by building--"scaffolding"-- on prior knowledge rather than having to learn it as an independent skill.

In this example, the student had been making noises in another teacher's class. When we started writing the negative branch, I just asked "why were you sent here?" At first, the student said, typically : "I didn't do anything." I gave him some thinking time and then in a few minutes he said, "Well, I made some noises in class and then the teacher got mad."

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"And then what happened?" I continued, and he gave me a few more effects, which I was writing down for him just in little circles and connecting them with arrows to indicate that one circle was leading to the next circle. Meanwhile, my 7th grade English class had been working on an assignment and I had to stop and give them some instructions. I put the pen down to wait until I had dealt with the needs of my classroom. When I returned, I found that he had picked up the pen and finished the negative branch all by himself! You can see on the copy of this work where the handwriting changes and he takes over.

We discussed what could he do to prevent the final outcome and he wrote down some suggestions that were not new ideas. What was new in this case was that this time they were his ideas. This negative branch was written in October and this student had already been referred to the office 40 times by the other teacher! He never got in trouble again with this teacher for the rest of the school year. (which ended the following June).

Editor's note: Belinda Small is the first known teacher to have used the 'negative branch' with children. Teachers all over the world are now using her simple, yet powerful, application.

