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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Removing Labels, Grades K-12*, by Dominique Smith, Douglas Fisher, and Nancy Frey. This excerpt covers how to address when younger and older students start using labels.

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TECHNIQUE 26

When Young Children Label Others—The Crumple Doll

What: Relational bullying, name-calling, and taunts begin at an early age and negatively impact the classroom climate. These incidents should be addressed immediately with the children involved, as well as with the families involved. But such incidents may also need to be discussed with the class. The Crumple Doll technique is a way for primary teachers to respond at the class level when an incident has occurred.

Why: Name-calling is the most common kind of verbal aggression in schools. Children and adults often accept this practice as part of the expected exchange of young children, without fully appreciating the lasting effects it can have on people. A study of student aggression found that girls were more likely to use name-calling as a tool for rejection from social circles (Schuster, 1996). This relational aggression is not confined to girls, of course. But it begins quite early and can have lasting consequences. A troubling report on peer relational victimization and relational aggression in preschoolers found a strong

link between these experiences and depression in children ages 18 months to 6 years. In other words, children who were victimized, as well as those who were the perpetrators, were more likely to be identified as clinically depressed (Krygsman & Vaillancourt, 2019). The same researchers found that physical victimization and physical aggression, while problematic, were not associated specifically with depression.

How: Young children need to learn empathy to prevent name-calling and relational aggression. An instructional activity to promote empathetic understanding is the Crumple Doll (Katz et al., 2003). Cut a paper doll out of a brown shopping bag (it will look a bit like a gingerbread man). Tell students that the paper doll represents a child their age at another school. Explain that this child is called names by their classmates, like “stupid” and “ugly.” With each name, crumple a part of the doll until it is in a small ball. Invite students to brainstorm what kinds of words the paper doll would need to hear in order to return to their former shape. Students will invariably conclude that kind words will restore the paper doll. As they give examples of kind words, begin to smooth it out. When the paper doll has been unfolded, show the students that the wrinkles still remain. Remind them that cruel words remain inside a person for a long time. At the conclusion of the lesson, hang the crumple doll in a prominent place as a reminder of the effects of name-calling. If you overhear an incident of name-calling in the classroom, walk over to the paper doll and crumple a part of it. This serves as a dramatic cue about the power of words.

Observe your students on the playground, in the cafeteria, and in the hallways for incidents of name-calling and relational aggression. Identify the frequency and types of taunting that occur most frequently and tailor your Crumple Doll story to make it meaningful for your students. Use this lesson as an introduction of books about empathy, kindness, and helping others when they are victimized.

TECHNIQUE 27

When Older Students Label Others— Insults and Epithets

What: Verbal aggression with older students can take the form of insults about appearance, personality traits, and performance in school. Insults and epithets include homophobic statements, racial and ethnic slurs, gender-based invectives, and other verbal defamations. These may occur on social media or in school environments. These behaviors tear at the social fabric of the classroom and leave students feeling marginalized and threatened.

Why: Over the past two decades, educators have become increasingly aware of the damaging effects of verbal transgressions committed by one young person against another. These fall under the larger umbrella of bullying, which can take a variety of forms, including physical, social, electronic, and verbal. Of these types, verbal bullying is the most common, accounting for 54% of incidents between adolescents (Wang et al., 2009). Overall, 21% of elementary students self-report verbal bullying,

and 5% self-report physical bullying (Beran & Tutty, 2002). But when asked about their peers, the percentage of students who are bullied increases to more than 50% (Li, 2006). We have also learned that these transgressions take a toll on victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Victims can suffer from higher rates of anxiety, depression, and a loss of self-esteem (Chang et al., 2013). Perpetrators are at increased risk for short- and long-term substance abuse problems (Moore et al., 2014). And bystanders—those who witness bullying of peers but are not themselves victims—are at a higher risk for mental health and substance abuse problems at rates that approach those seen in victims and perpetrators (Rivers et al., 2009).

Of special note within the context of this book is the verbal bullying propelled by a student's identity. Bullying in this form is targeted at a student's perceived or real identities. These slurs are used to attack a peer's race, ethnicity, religion, gender expression, or disability. Some of these verbal bullying incidents occur outside of the range of the teacher. But teacher–student relationships have an influence on whether bystanders will become upstanders, rallying to the defense of the victim. Middle school students who reported a warm relationship with their teacher were more likely to possess an autonomous motivation to defend a victim (Jungert et al., 2016). In other words, they felt a stronger sense of agency to take action. Those who reported conflictual teacher–student relationships, marked by a classroom climate that was perceived as having a pattern of “harshness, criticism, and destructive conflicts,” were far more likely to take the side of the bully rather than the victim (p. 79). When the classroom climate is supportive of students' identities and the teacher is viewed as a moral role model, bullying is reduced and students feel empowered to take action.

How: Every school district has a policy on bullying, including discriminatory speech. But do you know yours? And do your students know it? Refamiliarize yourself with your school's antibullying policies and practices and examine how you can integrate them into your classroom. These efforts need to go beyond the annual review of the student handbook and become a part of daily practice.

Proactive Steps

Examine the Norms and Classroom Agreements. Determine whether they reflect an antibullying and nondiscriminatory speech stance. If they don't, bring this issue to a class meeting (see Technique 12) to discuss the need for a statement, co-constructing new language with the class.

Take Inventory of Your Classroom Materials. The texts you select speak volumes about your stance on discrimination and inequities in general and communicate your worldview about the students you teach. Take inventory of the books in your classroom library, with a critical eye on texts that reflect your students, their experiences, and those of others. Keep in mind that a handful of historical figures does not represent a community, and it is up to you to locate contemporary voices that deepen understanding about your content area.

Next, look at the curriculum materials you have been using. Do these reflect multiple perspectives and viewpoints? Keep in mind that you are responsible for teaching the standards and are not limited to a single commercial curriculum. Look for gaps and fill them with lessons and materials that honor a broad spectrum of people and experiences (see Technique 11 on creating a classroom community and building a culturally sustaining pedagogy).

Review the Sociogram Information About Your Class. The sociogram discussed in Technique 13 provides a social map of the network of relationships in your classroom. Look again at students who seem to be on the outer edges of the social life of the classroom. Is it possible that any of these students are being victimized by others? Are any of the students who are marginalized engaged in bullying behavior themselves? As you monitor these students, attend to interactions they have with others, and seek to build strong relationships with them. Take a look at the student's cumulative file and ask questions of the school counselor and previous teachers. Whether the student is a victim in a given situation or is targeting another student through exclusion or intimidation, that student needs the support and intervention that comes from a caring school community.

Listen to Your Language in the Classroom. Teachers who are seen as moral role models are better able to energize students into taking action. Model speech that is inclusive, respectful, and free from stereotypes. Importantly, don't put individual students in the unfair position of speaking for an entire race, culture, or group. While you should solicit the perspectives of all students, don't always turn to the student who is openly gay, for instance, to speak on behalf of the LGBTQ community. What's much better is to ask about their perspective in light of the topic. When you do stumble and are challenged, listen carefully to students and model the kind of critical listening you want your students to be able to do. If you've blown it, apologize, take responsibility, and take action to improve. Isn't that what we ask of our students every day?

Provide Accurate Information About Historically Marginalized Groups. Here's a place where Accountable Talk reenters the conversation (see Technique 23). Every member of the classroom community, especially you, is accountable for providing information that is accurate, sourced, corroborated, and publicly available. Utilize vetted sources (not random websites and social media) to discuss the experiences and perspectives of groups who have been targeted with discriminatory speech. This is vital, especially if you are not a member of that group yourself. Consult with community leaders to deepen your knowledge and verify reliable sources. Invite community leaders into the classroom to augment discussion about controversial topics.

Model What It Means to Be an Upstander. Discriminatory speech and hate speech occur at a dizzying rate in the cybersphere. These incidents sometimes creep into the classroom and need to be addressed. Students look to you as a model to help them figure out how to make sense of these events. Help them untangle emotions, information, and misinformation, and show them how you respond. Being an upstander isn't just for children—it is vital that we show them how caring adults take on this role, too.

Responding to Verbal Aggressions

Proactive measures must be balanced with responses to incidents that require your direct intervention. In the same way that we advocate for a decision-making model for proactively addressing disruptions (see Technique 24), it is necessary to know how you will respond when you have directly witnessed or been informed about a bullying incident in your classroom or another school environment. The first step is to reacquaint yourself with school and district procedures for doing so. This is likely to include other school personnel and family members who need to be informed about what has occurred. As an example, in Australia, the Victoria Department of Education and Training (2020) has committed to eliminating racist bullying as part of its larger Bully Stoppers initiative. We have summarized the department's advice, but more information, including interactive learning modules for teachers, can be found at <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/teachers.aspx>.

- *Check your emotions.* It is a big challenge to stay calm when you have witnessed or learned about an incident. Although you may be seething inside, maintain a calm response and avoid immediately pouncing on the student who is the perpetrator in the situation, as it may escalate the problem, or cause them to assume a defensive posture that prevents them from reflecting on the incident.
- *Address the behavior explicitly.* Staying silent makes you complicit in the event. Make it clear that the language being used in the verbal aggression is not acceptable.
- *Confront the behavior directly.* Talk to the student who is the perpetrator in the situation about what has occurred and the plan to follow up with others. Seek out support immediately, whether it is through administrators, counselors, or social workers. Our school has a restorative practices team, for instance, that steers these

discussions. Because you have reviewed your school's procedures, you will know who to turn to and won't be left trying to figure out what needs to happen next.

- *Turn your attention to the student who is the victim in the situation.* Check in with them and assure them that their feelings are justified and that they are not alone. Don't minimize the incident or try to explain it away (e.g., "I'm sure they were just joking."). Let them know what steps are being taken by the school. The procedures utilized by your school should include how the victim is supported. In our school, while one member of the restorative practices team meets with the perpetrator, another team member meets separately with the victim.
- *Notify the families of the students who were perpetrators and victims in this situation so they can collaborate with you.* Don't hesitate to consult with the families to solve the problem. They are often the source of the best ideas for working effectively with their children.
- *Address the incident with your class.* Plan for how you will discuss this with your class, which is likely to be full of bystanders and witnesses. All of these parties need to be a part of the resolution of the situation. Such incidents are often a complex interaction that can be fueled by an audience: those who stand by silently, as well as those who encourage the bullying but do not directly participate in the event. In the immediate aftermath, inform the class briefly that school personnel are involved in addressing the incident. Don't demonize the student who was the perpetrator in this situation to their classmates, but do reassure the class that there is no room for verbal aggressions. Hold a class meeting later to further address what has occurred and how it was resolved. Be sure to involve the students who were the perpetrators and victims in this situation, as they need your support and guidance in restoring the climate of the classroom.

The eyes of your students are on you. View this as an opportunity to teach, not just a problem to be solved. In this way, you become a moral role model for being an upstander and an educator committed to all of them.