## TCM Chapter 14: Changing the Negative Identity Pattern and Succeeding with More Challenging Student Behavior -- by John Shindler

**In this Chapter**

- Changing the Negative Identity Pattern
- Bridging the Gap with Disconnected Students
- Using Reality Therapy and Student Contacts for Chronic Problems
- Supporting Students with ADHD

Often the problems we experience with one or a few of our students can cause us to experience a great deal of distress and even feel that we are failing in general with a whole class. In this chapter, we examine how to take effective action in meeting the more significant behavioral challenges that we face so that we can promote more functional behavior and a healthier climate for all of our students.

**Chapter Reflection 14-a**: Recall classes you have taught, observed, or in which you have been a student. Were there students whose behavior presented a greater challenge to the teacher? How significant was the impact on the class? In what ways did they affect the learning and the climate in the room? The answer to this question should underscore the importance of having a systematic approach to dealing with the difficult students.

### LEVELS OF PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

**Defining Level I, IIa, IIb, and III Types of Problems**

In Chapters 8, 9, and 10, we covered the effective creation of a sound and functional social contract that included logical consequences, and the implementation of action steps for cases in which students chose to violate their agreement to the contract. We could refer to those situations as *Level I problems* -- students fail to comprehend expectations or make bad choices out of carelessness or immaturity. Most contract violations fall in this category. However, we occasionally find ourselves confronted with problems that are more substantial than simple contract violations. We can refer to these problems as Level II problems (See Table 14.1). These result from: a) student's deliberate choice to reject their social contract responsibilities; or b) a fundamental pattern of student behavior that will not likely change on their own and left unchanged may do a great deal of harm to the welfare of the class as a whole. These *Level IIb problems* are typically rooted in more substantial deep-seated conditions (Robinson & Ricord Griesemer, 2006). The strategies we need to use to succeed with dysfunctional behavior that stems from these conditions will go beyond (but likely include) delivering clear and logical consequences (Walker, et al, 1996). Organic conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) require a separate distinction. We can refer to these neurologically based conditions as *Level III problems.* We will address these later in the chapter.

**Table 14.1: Levels of Classroom Behavioral Problems and Examples of Each**

| | Description | Out of School Example | Classroom Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Level I** | Student actions that violate classroom rules and/or social contract. Typically rooted in forgetfulness, lack of understanding, or carelessness. | Person carelessly exceeds the speed limit or runs a stop sign because they were not paying attention. | Student carelessly leaves a mess at a work station or student talks to a neighbor when the expectation is to be listening. |
| **Level IIa** | Students knowingly reject their commitment to the social contract in words or actions. Typically rooted in defiance, a desire for power, or a cry for help. | Person knowingly drives too fast and in a risky manner because they are late. | Student refuses to clean up their area or deliberately continues to talk when the expectation is to be attentive to the speaker. |
| **Level IIb** | Student exhibits dysfunctional behavior on a regular basis. Typically rooted in a deeply conditioned pattern of thinking and ego defense. | Person drives recklessly, using their vehicle as a means to work out their aggression and for self-satisfaction without concern for the safety of others. | Student tends to disrupt the work of other group members any time they feel the task is too challenging in an attempt to meet their needs for competence and power or student exhibits a compulsive need for attention. |
| **Level III** | Student experiences a struggle with their behavior and has a biological/organic basis to their lack of self control which may involve a legitimate case of ADHD. | Person is incapable of stopping and attending for long. They seem to need to continuously make some sort of noise. | Student struggles to attend for long periods of time and feels a compulsive need to move and talk -- even though they wish they could and feel guilty that they cannot. |

### Level IIb Problems

Level IIb types of behavioral problems (Table 14.1) commonly include the following situations:

1. Students who have developed a pattern of negative identity.
2. Students who have developed chronic, compulsive or habitual inappropriate behavior.
3. Cases in which there is a pronounced disconnect or "gap" between the expectations, values and desires of one of more students and those of the teacher.

Very often these more substantive types of challenges include students' exhibiting an external locus of control and consequent faulty sense of cause-and-effect, a failure psychology, and/or the student attempting to meet their basic needs with means that are both unhealthy and will not work within what is good for the class (Walker et al., 1996).

At the heart of these Level IIb behavioral challenges is a student who has experienced a great deal of dysfunctional conditioning beforehand. This conditioning is likely being reinforced outside the class as well. What stands between the student and functional behavior is our ability to help them recognize and become conscious of the dysfunctional conditioning within themselves and to assist them as they alter it or at least work with it in a productive manner. While Level I problems do not require much recognition of deep-seated patterns and unconscious conditioning, solving Level II problems without this conditioning will be inherently impossible. You may say, "I am not a psychologist, I am just a teacher." We do not need to be expert psychologists to succeed with these Level IIb behavioral

challenges, but it is important to recognize the difference between a student's conscious choice and something strongly influencing their behavior of which they are unconscious and do not seem to be entirely choosing (Robinson & Ricord Griesemer, 2006).

**Chapter Reflection 14-b:** Recall a student you would classify as a chronic behavior problem student. Would you say that the student was happy or at peace with him/herself? It may seem an obvious answer, but it helps us shift our focus to what is going on with the student rather than why what they are doing is a problem.

**To succeed with Level IIb types of problems, we need to take on an intentional, proactive and positive mindset. Therefore we need to begin by doing the following:**

1. Stop owning the student's behavior and/or taking it personally. Stay in the present moment and avoid dwelling on past events. It may help to focus on the success we are having with the rest of the students.
2. Avoid self-limiting labels such as "bad students" or "behavioral problem." When we label the student even mentally we reinforce the idea that problem is a fixed condition. We take on what Dweck (2000) refers to as a "helpless pattern" approach to dealing with it. We make a challenge into a plight and go from being a teacher to a victim.
3. Acknowledge we *do* have the ability to change the pattern or at least get things moving in the right direction if we are systematic and consistent. So, we need to let go of our resentment, and fatalistic thinking that is so easy to do in these situations. Instead, we must take positive action. Action is the antidote to despair.
4. Let go of assumptions that negativity, punishment, passive aggressiveness, or projecting disappointment are doing anything but making things worse. We need to look the student in the eye and send these messages: a) we like them and believe they can do better; b) what they are doing is going to change; and c) it needs to change ASAP.
5. Avoid relying on external authorities to solve the problem. Sending the student to the principal or calling home may be occasionally necessary, but this sends the message that we lack the authority, desire, and/or ideas to make the situation better. Work with the student to solve the problem in-house instead of out-sourcing the problem to others.

**Chapter Reflection 14-c:** When you recall the response by school personnel to troubled and behaviorally challenging students in your years in schools: 1) How many of the interventions that were used would you say met the criteria above? 2) How many of those students ultimately improved their behavior? Do you see a relationship between the two?

## THE NEGATIVE IDENTITY PATTERN

### Examining the Nature of the Negative-Identity Pattern

**Negative-Identity Pattern Case Example:**
*We have developed a solid social contract in our class(s) by the fourth week of the year. Most students are very clear about expectations. However, one student always seems to be testing us. He/she constantly seems to find some reason to be off task and annoy other students. Whatever the expectation is, s/he seems to take joy in doing the opposite and/or something to hinder the other students' efforts. We have implemented the (Level I) consequences that have worked well for the other students, and have made it clear that what he/she is doing is unacceptable. But things have not changed, as s/he seems to enjoy being a clown and a fool for the other students. We notice Mondays are usually his/her worst days.*

**Chapter Reflection 14-d**: Do you know a student like this? Keep them in mind as we explore the idea of negative-identity.

If we approach this student from a crime-and-punishment paradigm or just hope that someday the behavior will improve, we will likely be engaged in a battle for the rest of the year. Moreover, no matter how much we explain to this student how "bad" he/she is acting and need to "straighten up and fly right," the behavior is unlikely to change. We cannot just let them do what they are doing either, as it is not fair to the rest of the class, good for our mental health, nor good for the student himself/herself. Let's instead look inside the student's pattern and undertake a process to change it.

The problem behavior depicted in the case above could best be characterized as a *negative-identity pattern*. The negative identity student can take many roles including the class clown, the antagonist, the failure/quitter, the victim, the perpetually angry, the sadist, or the tough/bad kid. We may not have done anything to bring on the problem but to avoid a perpetual struggle we want to take purposeful and well-conceived action (Vitaro, Brendgen, & Trembley, 2001). As the saying goes, "Nothing changes until something changes," and we will have to initiate the change process if we want to see improvement.

### Changing the Negative-Identity Behavior Pattern of a Student

Most students are trying to achieve success (e.g., performing successfully, learning, fostering friendships, achieve goals, etc.), using positive behavior such as making an effort, being productive, or doing the "right thing." Most of us can relate to the idea of trying to develop a positive identity. The more we have tried to reach our goals, succeed socially, acquire skills, and attain some level of positive recognition from others, the more we attach those positive attributes to ourselves, thus forming some degree of positive identity. While we all have unconscious patterns keeping us from acting with full awareness of why we do what we do, and sometimes making choices that we are not happy with, we typically seek to be generally functional and productive. However, we will occasionally teach students who have developed a pattern of dysfunctional behavior. If the problem is not *organic* (i.e., Level III problems such as ADHD, FAS, or a mental or emotional disability) it is usually related the student's having been conditioned into a negative-identity pattern. All of us carry some form of this conditioning as a result of each of our ego's need to avoid feeling guilty, inadequate, unworthy or unloved. For some students this becomes a primary mode of operation. These students spend a great deal of time in a defensive or reactive mode that has come to feel normal, but is largely unconscious and self-destructive.

In many cases this negative identity manifests in a student who would prefer to be the "best worst" rather than a "nobody" or a failure. While on the surface this may not make sense, it makes a great deal of sense when we reflect that on a fundamental psychological level, *the opposite of love is not hate but indifference*. Who wants to be a zero? Who is capable of surviving without getting the basic needs of love and belonging met? Moreover, as we dig deeper into most negative-identity patterns, we will recognize that at the heart of the problem is a psychological co-mingling of pain and love. In the face of a deep-seated sense of worthlessness, inadequacy, vulnerability and/or guilt it makes sense that the ego finds a way to compensate for the unbearable condition.

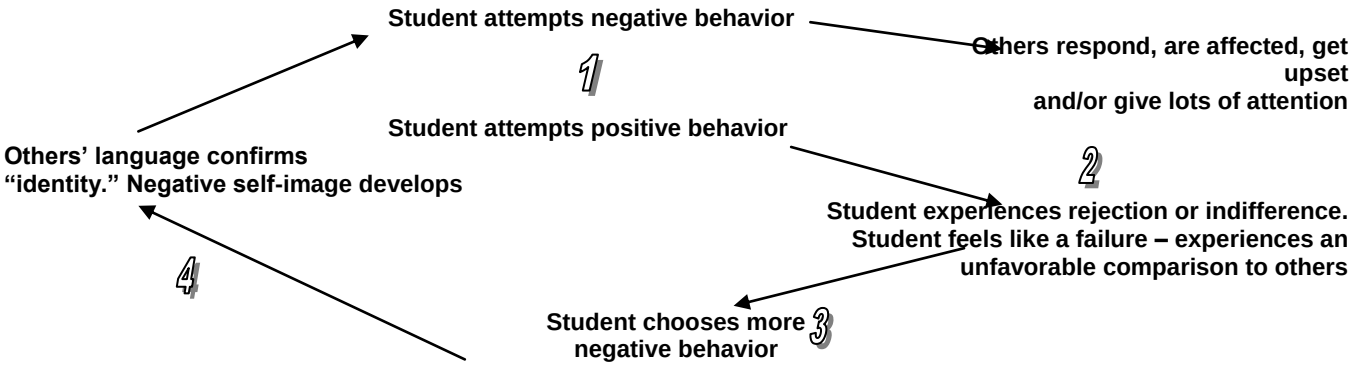
As we operationalize and examine the negative identity pattern, keep in mind that some students exhibit it perpetually and others are triggered by environmental factors, only in certain situations. Students whose unconsciousness and negative identity projection is displayed almost continuously may go to great lengths to initiate conflict and drama to confirm their negative identity. Others' negative identity pattern arises in certain situations when certain buttons are pushed to trigger a reaction that activates their source of inner pain.

**Chapter Reflection 14-e:** These may not be comfortable memories, but it is helpful when understanding the negative-identity student to reflect on times in our lives when we have done destructive, ugly, selfish, embarrassing, or hurtful things in an effort to gain love, recognition of others or acceptance of the group. Did a part of your self know that what you were doing was not very good? Your ability to ignore that voice should give you some compassion and understanding for the negative-identity student.

To make sense of the pattern it is useful to examine its behavioral roots and explore the roles of reinforcement, shaping, and social learning in how it is formed and/or reformed. In a positive identity cycle, efforts by individuals are reinforced to some degree by a desirable outcome and therefore provide an incentive to continue positive behavior. However, in the *negative identity acquisition cycle* (Figure 14.1) attempts at positive behavior (e.g., attempt assigned work, try to be liked, attempt a difficult task) receive little or no positive reinforcement (Figure 14.1, point #1). They may receive grades below their level of satisfaction, feel as though they don't fit in, or fail at a task. As a result, basic needs for love, power and competence are not adequately met and the negative self-image is confirmed (triggering an internal feeling of pain related to a sense of worthlessness, inadequacy, guilt, etc.). However, attempts at negative behavior (being annoying, failing spectacularly, disrupting the class, etc.) they gain attention and experience a feeling of satisfaction and power (Figure 14.1, point #2). When viewed within the lens of basic satisfaction, this reaction is understandable (remember, the opposite of love is not hate but indifference). The result is behavior that has been reinforced and is now more likely to happen in the future (Tremblay et al. 1994).

What feels like success is actually an addictive cycle that is digging the student an ever-deeper hole. Aside from the negative behavior's being dysfunctional for all concerned, what is not understood is that while it may feel satisfying for the moment and even necessary to cope with a sense of inner pain, it will neither satisfy their basic needs nor ease the pain for long. In fact, the stronger the pattern becomes, the more likely the student will be in denial of the problem (Vitaro, Bredgen, & Trembley, 2001).

**Figure 14.1. Events of the Negative-Identity Pattern Acquisition and Maintainance Cycle**




When we examine the negative-identity cycle as depicted in Figure 14.1, the early points of the cycle represent the reinforcement of behavior by others. Given the reinforcement for negative behavior, it is understandable that the student continues to choose it over more socially acceptable behavior (point #3). Moreover, as their behavior becomes more public and regular, they develop an identity and/or reputation that further satisfies their need for love and power (point #4). Over time, this public identity becomes a relatively stable (negative) self-image.

**Helping the Student Change their Pattern**

The key to transforming a negative-identity cycle into a more positive-identity cycle is to alter the system and then reconstruct it differently. In ending the cycle and then replacing the dysfunction with more functional and healthy behaviors, keep in mind that there are two important variables in the process: love and learning. First, the change must involve a new mechanism for meeting the need for love and belonging. Second, the change must involve learning new skills and ways to function -- skills that may be currently foreign to the student. Success will necessarily involve replacing old behaviors with new, and recognizing that those new behaviors achieve something more worthwhile and satisfying. The stages of the cycle take place continuously but we will deal with each phase separately here.

A good starting point is the use of *extinction* at phase 1. Extinction refers to the removal of a reinforcing stimulus (Kauffman, 2005). In this instance, the reinforcement motivating the student's negative behavior is probably somewhat complex, but it could include teachers and students getting annoyed, laughing, being shocked, or giving pity after the student exhibits dysfunctional/inappropriate behavior. *So while we may assume that getting upset, punishing the student or even public scorn will work to discourage the unwanted behavior, actually these reactions act to reinforce the behavior* (Kauffman, 2005). The student is seeking pain and confirmation of their (negative) identity and these responses act to meet these needs. Therefore, we need to eliminate behavior that reinforces the negative-identity-producing reaction.

**Chapter Reflection 14-f:** Reflect on what happens when we remove a long-standing reinforcement from an animal, including a human. If a behavior has been regularly reinforced, when the reinforcement is removed, what happens? Does the behavior stop right away? Recall the classic example of the lab rat placed in a box and given a pellet of food each time it hits a bar. In the example, hitting the bar is the conditioned behavior and the food is the reinforcement. When the researcher takes the food away, what is the rat's response? Like any animal that has been conditioned, it will be to elicit the response (e.g., hit the bar) more vigorously. When the battery runs out on your television remote, what do you do?

Instead of giving in to the negative attention that the student is used to we should attempt to recognize the nature of the pattern, determine the reinforcing stimuli the student is attempting to achieve with the behavior and then go about removing them. In every case, if we want to effect change, it will be essential to for us to stop showing anger, becoming negative and/or implementing a pain-based form of response. However, since you are removing the reinforcing stimulus, be prepared for an "extinction burst," the intensity of which depends on the strength of the previous behavioral reinforcement (Kauffman, 2005). This burst or exaggeration of behavior is an attempt to elicit the desired response that has been removed. It will not last forever, but it may appear dramatic. For example, if the negative behavior was being annoying, the student will become especially annoying. If the negative behavior was to be a clown to get attention, expect the student to increase their efforts to get a reaction if the audience stops laughing. It is important to keep in mind that because the extinction burst can be so unpleasant, very often efforts to change negative-identity patterns are not able to withstand the discomfort the teacher and/or the class feel from the burst of negative behavior. Parents know how difficult it is not to give in to a tantrum. There is an encouraging note: after the burst, expect the behavior to eventually subside.

**Why Should We Care?**
Trembley and colleagues (1994) found that students who become comfortable with a pattern of disruptive, aggressive, and anti-social behavior tend to maintain that pattern through later grades. Moreover, Robinson and Ricord Griesemer (2006) found that a pattern of disruptive behavior is strongly linked to adolescent and adult criminality. If we do nothing to help change a student's pattern there is a great likelihood that that young person who cannot seem to stay out of trouble will be unable to get out of their rut on their own and as a result cost themselves (and society) in the future.

You might be thinking, "I can't just ignore the student, their behavior is unacceptable and is disrupting the whole class." It is important to make a clear distinction here between discipline and the negative reaction the student seeks. In fact, they are unrelated (Robinson & Ricord Griesemer, 2006). While we need to cease giving the student the pain and negativity that they have been conditioned to expect, we do not need to refrain from giving healthy, logical and non-personal consequences when they violate the social contract. As we will discuss later in this chapter, a personal behavioral contract with individualized consequences may be beneficial as well.

**Connecting Love and Pain: Exploring the Early Years of the Negative-Identity-Pattern Student**. In many cases, a negative identity pattern is the evidence of an adult-child interaction that began at a very young age. When the child was very young, most likely before they could speak and reason, an adult sent them the message that they were bad, worthless, or incapable. Being too young to be able to judge the validity of the message, the young person takes that information as a fact. As a result they 1) learn to believe the negative message and 2) create a psychological connection between pain and love. Those who inflicted pain were also those who gave them love. As a result, they unconsciously connect the two feelings. Over time the experience of pain becomes a familiar reinforcement that in a convoluted way is experienced as a kind of counterfeit love. To the reader who does not connect the two, this may seem odd, but recall that the young child does not have the processes to recognize the irrational nature of the relationship. The unconscious interconnection has been made, and the behavior pattern has been conditioned. Like a child born addicted to a drug, the negative-identity-pattern child has an early addiction to pain and the feelings of worthlessness or inferiority that they experienced as a very small person. As a result they seek it out as a normal condition along with generating situations in

which their negative identity will be confirmed. When you become frustrated with the student's lack of progress toward more functional behavior, keep in mind that the mechanism that is supporting their negative behavior pattern is deep-seated and typically far below their level of awareness. While it may be tempting to attempt to delve into the unconscious to help free the student from their false identity, it will be more helpful to support the emergent new identity and help them recognize that they are good, valuable, capable and accepted.

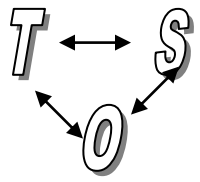
Early in the change process it will be important to promote more positive behavior from the student. That means helping them meet their basic needs, especially competence and love/belonging. Very often a sense of inadequacy is at the heart of the problem. The student may not appear fearful and insecure; they may even exhibit the opposite facade. That does not mean it is not there beneath the surface.

Additionally, keep in mind that the most powerful reinforcement is going to come from peers. It may not be easy, but the teacher needs to create an emotionally safe classroom environment (Cone, 1997). Intolerance of put-downs and the development of healthy "life affirming" language is necessary. Mantras are helpful, such as "in this class, we only encourage each other to act in ways that are positive for ourselves and for the class as a whole." Modeling by the teacher and student role models can be a valuable learning tool as well. Recall the social learning model: consistency is critical throughout the process. Responses that reinforce the negative identity can trigger a relapse and undo a great deal of our hard work.

To support the student in the effort toward more functional behavior, it may be useful to help the student identify a plan that includes behavioral goals toward which to work (Robinson & Ricord Griesemer, 2006). The Reality Therapy process described later in the chapter can be useful in efforts with the negative identity student. This plan should define behaviors that are: a) within the student's control; and b) explicitly stated in behavioral terms (e.g., positive self-talk, persistence when frustrated, raising hand before speaking, being considerate of other, etc.). The student needs to have a concrete understanding of and a commitment to their goals. This is where the practice of *shaping* will be very critical (Landrum & Kauffman, 2006). The teacher needs to reinforce (i.e., recognize, note in assessments, reward, etc.) attempts to achieve the goals of positive behavior even if they are not entirely successful. If the teacher reinforces behavior that is *close* to that desired, the student will be able to build up to full goal achievement. For example, if we observe the student demonstrating behavior that is a good effort toward one of their goals, we should take the opportunity to personally recognize the student for that effort. In many cases, they would not have realized that they had made progress unless we had pointed it out. In addition, public recognition of the student for their positive progress can be powerful, as long as it is sincere and well-timed. Public positive recognitions can support *both* the student's need for love and their process of learning new ways of operating.

**Chapter Reflection 14–h**: As we begin to better understand the negative-identity student, it will be helpful to keep in mind that there is a part of them that wants to return to the familiar (albeit dysfunctional) negative behavior. At stage three they are like an addict who is currently "on the wagon." They are letting themselves trust us and sticking out their neck. What would you predict the problems would be for a person making a life change from an old mindset and set of behaviors to new and unfamiliar thinking and actions? What do they need you to offer at this stage of the process and what should you avoid doing?

Watch out for the student's attempts to sabotage their own success. Help the student adopt the language of an internal locus of control. Don't allow them to use negative self-talk or victim language, dwell on comparisons, or co-mingle their assessment of their academic performance with their self worth. Focusing on process and effort are good antidotes to the resurgence of a "failure psychology." If the student experiences failure and/or a lack of support toward his/her goals at any time, they will be inclined to revert to the comfort of their negative identity behavior. And it should be emphasized that throughout the process the teacher needs to maintain a high degree of trust with the student (Birch, & Ladd, 1997). Keep in mind that the addiction still exists and may indefinitely. Even if it is not readily apparent it can be triggered by acute failure, rejection, humiliation, shame or any profound emotion that triggers the pain reaction familiar to that student.




As the student increasingly internalizes new goals and identity, it is essential that we guide the class in support of their efforts. We need to be absolutely intolerant of any labeling by peers or the student him/herself that promotes a negative-identity. We should use the power of labels to the student's advantage. Refer to them with labels that support their process of transformation and the development of a success psychology. For example, we might use such confirming terms as "team player," "winner," "brilliant," "persistent," "selfless," "scholar," "industrious," etc. You may get a look telling you that you are being corny but their private internal reaction will be powerful.

We need to send the message both implicitly and with explicit mantras such as, "In this class, there are no 'bad kids,' 'fools,' 'dumb kids,' 'losers,' 'failures,' or 'helpless victims.'" To support the student's positive identity, it will be useful to put them in situations in which they are able to experience a sense of contributing to the welfare of others, and when possible, a leadership role. We will want to encourage the ethic in the class that "when we support each other, we all win." This ethic was displayed powerfully in the film *Educating Peter* (Wurzburg and Goodwin, 1992), in which a class of fifth graders supported the growth and learning of one mentally and emotionally disabled student.

Table 14.2 outlines some of the various forms of negative identity patterns. It is possible that we recognize ourselves in at least one pattern and this is actually useful. The more effectively we deal with negative patterns within ourselves, the better teachers we will be. Chapter 16 discussion will help in this process. Our own growth and self-awareness will be of value as we assist our students in their growth. The table identifies the external trigger or reinforcer for each type of pattern. Students with patterns that are not as overpowering may need a substantial external event to trigger the inner ego response that perpetuates the negative identity. Other students' reactive patterns are activated almost continuously. These students are primed for something to trigger their negative reaction. For each type of pattern a set of teacher supports is offered.

**Table 14.2 Types of Negative Identities, Descriptions, Triggers, and Related Teacher Support**

| Negative Identity Pattern | External Reinforcement/ Trigger of the pattern | Teacher Support |
|---|---|---|
| **Victim/Poor Me /Guilt Complex**<br>This student's ego tells them that life is unfair and out to get them. The ego says that if they accept responsibility of their actions they will feel guilty and bad. Underneath is a sense of being unloved and unwanted. It shows up as an endless string of excuses and reasons things cannot go right and a desire to have others absolve them and confirm that "it is not their fault." | Pity from others.<br><br>Confirmation that they have an excuse and are not responsible or to blame. | First, the student needs us to clearly communicate that we accept and believe in them. Second, we need to help them recognize that they are asking for absolution from blame and responsibility. Third, we need to help them accept responsibility for their actions and experience how it feels better in the end than avoiding blame. |
| **Dangerous/Intimidating**<br>This student's ego tells them that if they act scary enough they will be able to keep people away. They can attribute being alone to that, so they do not have to accept feeling unloved. Underneath it all is a desperate need to be loved and feel connected and a fear of rejection. It shows up as a student who dresses, acts and affiliates themselves in ways that make other want to steer clear. Their manner is "don't mess with me." | The intimidation of others.<br><br>People seeming uncomfortable and uneasy around them. | First, the student needs to know that we are a caring adult and we see them as a good kid, but still a kid. Second, we define our relationship not by anything related to their external identifiers or reputation, but the positive goals, behaviors and accomplishments that they make in our class. Third, when they become unconscious and try to put on an intimidating mien, we will simply want to ignore this and refocus them on the practical work of the class. |
| **Failure/Helpless/Self-Sabotage**<br>This student's ego says that it is easier to quit than have to deal with the pain of losing or performing below their high own expectations. What might look like inferiority is actually more likely an inner sense of superiority. Because the student has a need to feel better than others, they fear comparison and so find ways to sabotage their efforts. If they can tell themselves they did not try, it saves them from having to face failure. It shows up as an unpredictable and frustrating mix of excellent performance, self-sabotage, and quitting. | Comparison to others.<br><br>Allowing them to externalize their LOC.<br><br>Confirmation of their distorted view of reality. | First, we will want to minimize situations in which we publically compare students. There is no education benefit to it. Second, we want to help the student recognize their pattern and take responsibility for finding more effective and conscious solutions to problems. This will include not buying into their helpless pattern language. We need to send them the message that we believe in them but will not accept their excuses or self-pity. |
| **Unloved/Look at Me/Clown**<br>This student's ego tells them that unless they are getting a reaction from others there is no evidence that they are lovable. So they act out an endless part in which they try to win the love that they feel they did not get earlier (probably from parents). The student becomes entirely dependent on external criteria for their sense of self. This is a losing battle, but works well to hone attention-getting skills. It shows up as a constant need for attention, reaction, and affirmation from others. | Giving attention when they act out.<br><br>A sense of failure in another area. | First, we need to let the student know that they will get a reasonable amount of attention, but that their attention seeking behavior will not have the effect of obtaining more attention from us. Second, we need to help the student build an internal locus of control and a self-identified sense of value. Third, we may want to find ways that the student can experience healthy attention from peers by giving them a format, letting them work in groups, allowing venues such as presentations, and giving them a sense of responsibility in class. If we help this student feel that they are making a positive contribution, they will feel less of a need to use inappropriate means to gain attention. |
| **Best/Best Worst/Inferiority Complex**<br>This student's ego says that they need to win or they are unworthy. They interpret all events through the lens of competition. If the game does not work to their advantage, they will find a game that does. This same mechanism will create both the student who needs to get the highest score and the student who needs to create the most visible doodling or get the lowest score ever recorded. What it looks like is a student who acts and thinks only in comparisons and becomes overly joyful when they win and overly miserable when they lose. | Competitive contexts.<br><br>Public Comparison. | First, reduce the unnecessary competition and competitive elements in the class. Ask yourself if they are valuable in the long-term (see Ch.19). Second, help this student recognize the tendency to want to see things in terms of comparison, and that it is not necessarily a true representation of reality. Encourage them to look at their learning as a process of growth rather than a measure of their ability of self-worth (Dweck, 2000). Introduce them to the idea that success is more likely if they shed their inferiority complex. It may seem useful but it is not based in sound motivation. If it were they would feel satisfied more often, and it is a |

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|---|---|---|
| | | sure bet that they do not. |
| **Drama King or Queen**<br>This student's ego tells them that if they keep the external dramas going they will not have to deal with what is inside. What is inside is not nearly as scary as they believe, but they see it as an unbearable monster. They allow their ego to run their lives and find whatever external stimuli, conflict, drama, offense, problem, disaster to attach to and engage in. The result is the development of coping skills that appear dynamic and occasionally effective. However, the failure to take personal responsibility for their actions and to listen to what is going on inside create a series of ticking time bombs that explode eventually. It shows up as a student who always has a good reason for being prevented from achievement, why they are in conflict with others, and why the rules need to be different for them. | High pressure deadlines and outcomes.<br><br>The thought that they will be exposed.<br><br>Others buying into the drama and the external variables.<br><br>Enabling the excuses or the drama stories. | First, do not buy into the drama. Second, help the student examine events within a practical lens. Help them step back from the drama and recognize that there are many interpretations to events and the dramatic interpretation is just one subjective way of looking at it. Also, help them learn to look at the practical choices that led to the crisis. Could they have gotten started on the project earlier? Could they have planned for more time or cut out another activity to make sure that they achieved the outcome that they desired? Third, help the student recognize that drama, conflict, and crisis are largely manufactured conditions. They do not occur without being created. Help the student evaluate how the latest drama or crisis that they experienced originated. |
| **Pleaser/Tell I am good/Teacher's Pet**<br>This student's ego says that if they do not have an external parent figure telling them that they are special they are insignificant. As a result they feel the need to be the "most loved," the "uniquely blessed" member of the class. While this may not seem negative on the surface, it is not healthy. At best when we enable this pattern we promote the student's lack of internal sense of adequacy and worth. At worst, if the student feels their need is unrequited, they may become a powerfully disruptive force in the class. | Giving praise each time it is requested.<br><br>Treating students differently depending on how reverent they are.<br><br>Playing into the student's game.<br><br>Leading them on. | First, project to the student that you like and accept them the way they are. Do give them concrete and specific feedback and positively recognize their effort. Do **not** give them personal praise, tell them that they are good because they have done good work, and/or buy into their requests for praise. Affirm their effort, give them unconditional acceptance, but choose your words carefully so that the student does not hear personal praise. Second, help the student to learn to validate their own work. When they ask you what you think about something they made, as them what they think. Third, maintain healthy boundaries with the student. Stay professional and avoid too much time alone with the student. |
| **Pain Addict/Chemical Addict/Destructive**<br>This student's ego has become aligned with the student's pain-based internal physical reaction. The result is a student who is on the lookout for something they can take as a personal offense, a challenge to their worth or honor, or anything that they can use to trigger the pain reaction inside that looks for pain to feed upon. This shows up as a student who likes to challenge others, sees everything through the lens of being personally attacked and victimized, and is ready to fight back. In severe cases this student is capable of unpredictable, risky and destructive behavior. | Anger or pain-based punishments.<br><br>Making choices personal and attacking the student's dignity.<br><br>Getting hooked into their efforts to personalize and create power struggles. | First, resist the temptation to engage this student in a power struggle. It will never end well. Also resist the temptation to get in the pattern of sending the student out after they have reacted badly to your ultimatum or threat. Second, follow the steps above related to how to alter the negative identity pattern faithfully. We need to build a great deal of trust with this student and help them feel valuable and capable. Third, help them find their talents, gifts and strengths and reinforce their efforts toward cultivating them. Help them find healthy addictions such as exercise or creating or building things. Fourth, to the degree possible allow the student to share what is inside, and let them know that you are there to listen and on their side. |

As you examine the various negative identity patterns in Table 14.2, you may notice some common ingredients. First, they all have a trigger, and promoting awareness of that trigger is critical to the success of the effort. Second, each pattern is masking something that the student fears. This is usually some sort of pain, and as the pattern gets more established, the student will fear the loss of the negative identity; it will feel like a loss of the self. The power of the addictive process makes it seem painfully true. Third, for each pattern the solution requires promoting a success psychology within the student. The power of having basic needs satisfied in a positive and meaningful way will supersede the power of the addiction to negative attention. Conversely, the teaching practices that promote a failure psychology will reinforce and strengthen the negative identity pattern. If we do nothing else, we will want to take the practical action steps outlined in Chapter 7 for promoting a success psychology and avoid those that promote a failure psychology.

If nothing is addressed in this student's pattern it may never change, and we will feel perpetually frustrated and resentful that they are in our class. Making the investment to change this pattern is worth the effort. I have seen many students change their mindset from attempting to be the "best worst" to attempting to be an altruistic leader. The shift is not as impossible as it might appear. If the root of the problem is simply the student's finding a way to use their talents to meet their needs then the change can occur relatively quickly and dramatically. Once the student realizes that they are capable of getting love, attention and a sense of competence with positive behavior, they may take off in that direction. History is full of examples of those who have. Many students in my classes share that they were once the negative identity student and are now committed to much more positive goals -- including becoming teachers. Before we give up on our students and pass on the responsibility, keep in mind that it often just takes one understanding soul to change a life.

There are instances of turnaround everywhere, including former offenders. When asked what made the difference between a life of crime and a productive life in society, those who have turned around credit the support and faith of just one person. Often, that one person was a teacher (Pianta, 2006).

**Chapter Reflection 14-i:** Recall examples that you know or have heard, of someone who has gone from a negative identity pattern (e.g., being the "best worst") to working toward making a positive contribution in the world.