School Practitioner Community of Practice
(A network for sharing & exchange)

July 12, 2017

Topic: *Beyond Behavioral Initiatives*

Request from a Colleague:

> *About promoting positive behavior schoolwide*

- **Center's Perspective**
- **Recommendations from What Works Clearinghouse**

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Featured Set of Center Resources on

> *School improvement & reducing behavior problems*

From the Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA

Note: In keeping with the *National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports*, this is being sent to and forwarded by over 100,000 school and community stakeholders concerned about (1) daily matters confronting schools, (2) promoting whole child development and positive school climate, and (3) the transformation of student and learning supports.

Request: About promoting positive behavior in the classroom and schoolwide

Center's Perspective: This is one of the most basic concerns for schools and one of the most frequent matters about which we are asked.

Some schools apparently are finding that the initial success of positive behavior initiatives tends to plateau after a couple of years. This is not surprising given the lack of attention to the different underlying causes of and motivations for behavior problems and the failure to comprehensively address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

These matters are a central focus of our Center's work. See the section below featuring a sample of what we have developed over the years based on our research and that of others.

To briefly highlight our perspective, here's a brief excerpt from the resource entitled:

>*Behavioral Initiatives in Broad Perspective*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/behavioral/behini.pdf

It is easy to fall into the trap of ignoring the underlying causes of a student's misbehavior in designing ways for schools and communities to carry out behavioral initiatives. In particular, it is tempting to apply strategies to all students that in actuality are only necessary and appropriate for those who manifest the most severe and pervasive behavior problems.

The objective of any behavioral initiative must be first and foremost to enhance in all students feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness. The key to this is transforming schools and classrooms into environments that are caring environments that truly enable learning.

Students misbehave. It's a daily fact of life in classrooms. What's a teacher to do? More to the point: What should a teacher do? That is a question for all of us. To answer the question, we need to broaden the context from concerns about consequences, social control, removing "triggers," and social skills training.

The context must be the goals of schooling. And the goals must include not only academic learning, but the promotion of healthy social and emotional development. In some form or another, every school has goals that emphasize a desire to enhance students' personal and social functioning. Such goals reflect an understanding that social and emotional growth plays an important role in enhancing the daily smooth functioning of schools and the emergence of a safe, caring, and supportive school climate facilitating students' holistic development enabling student motivation and capability for academic learning optimizing life beyond schooling.

With all this in mind, efforts to address misbehavior provide natural, albeit challenging, opportunities to promote social and emotional development and minimize transactions that interfere with positive growth in these areas. Support staff need to grab hold of these opportunities as an avenue for working with teachers in a new way. Whenever a student misbehaves, personal and social growth should become a major priority in deciding how to react.

Here are some recommendations:
>Promote a caring, supportive, and nurturing climate in the classroom and schoolwide
>Personalize classroom instruction (e.g., to accommodate a wide range of motivational and developmental differences by ensuring a good match with students' intrinsic motivation and capabilities)
>Provide status opportunities for nonpopular students (e.g., special roles as assistants and tutors)
>Identify and remedy skill deficiencies early. Offer appropriate and attractive alternative ways the student can pursue a sense of competence, control, and relatedness
>Equip students with acceptable steps to take instead of misbehaving (e.g., options to withdraw from a situation)

>Enhance student motivation and skills for overcoming behavior problems (including altering negative attitudes toward school)
>Provide extra support and direction so that students who are prone to misbehave can cope with difficult situations (including steps that can be taken instead of misbehaving)
>Develop consequences for misbehavior that are perceived by students as logical (i.e., that are perceived as reasonable fair, and nondenigrating reactions which do not threaten students' sense of competence, self-determination, and relatedness)"

Whatever the initial cause of someone's learning and behavior problems, the longer the individual has lived with such problems, the more likely s/he will have negative feelings and thoughts about instruction, teachers, and schools. The feelings include anxiety, fear, frustration, and anger. The thoughts may include expectations of failure and vulnerability and low valuing of many learning "opportunities." Such thoughts and feelings can result in avoidance motivation or low motivation for learning and performing in many areas of schooling. Low motivation leads to half-hearted effort. Avoidance motivation leads to avoidance behaviors. Individuals with avoidance and low motivation often also are attracted to socially disapproved activity.

It remains tempting to focus directly on student misbehavior. And, in doing so, it is heartening to see the shift from negative to positive strategies in addressing unwanted behavior. However, as long as factors that lead to disengagement are left unaffected, we risk perpetuating the phenomenon that William Ryan identified as *Blaming the Victim*. From an intervention perspective, the point for emphasis is that engaging and re-engaging students in classroom learning involves matching motivation. Matching motivation requires factoring in students' perceptions in determining the right mix of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. It also requires understanding the key role played by expectations related to outcome. Without a good match, social control strategies can suppress negative attitudes and behaviors, but reengagement in classroom learning is unlikely.

Recommendations from the What Works Clearinghouse

It is interesting to contrast the above approach with the narrower perspective reflected in the recommendations made by the What Works Clearinghouse in its practice guide entitled:

>*Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom*
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/4

"Recommendations:

1. Identify the specifics of the problem behavior and the conditions that prompt and reinforce it. Every teacher experiences difficulty at one time or another in trying to remedy an individual student's behavior problem that is not responsive to preventative efforts. Because research suggests that the success of a behavioral intervention hinges on identifying the specific conditions that prompt and reinforce the problem behavior (i.e., the behavior's "antecedents" and "consequences"), we recommend that teachers carefully observe the conditions in which the problem behavior is likely to occur and not occur. Teachers then can use that information to tailor effective and efficient intervention strategies that respond to the needs of the individual student within the classroom context.

2. Modify the classroom learning environment to decrease problem behavior. Many effective classroom focused interventions to decrease students' problematic behavior alter or remove factors that trigger them. These triggers can result from a mismatch between the classroom setting or academic demands and a student's strengths, preferences, or skills. Teachers can reduce the occurrence of inappropriate behavior by revisiting and reinforcing classroom behavioral expectations; rearranging the classroom environment, schedule, or learning activities to meet students' needs; and/or individually adapting instruction to promote high rates of student engagement and on-task behavior

3. Teach and reinforce new skills to increase appropriate behavior and preserve a positive classroom climate. We recommend that teachers actively teach students socially- and behaviorally appropriate skills to replace problem behaviors using strategies focused on both individual students and the whole classroom. In doing so, teachers help students with behavior problems learn how, when, and

where to use these new skills; increase the opportunities that the students have to exhibit appropriate behaviors; preserve a positive classroom climate; and manage consequences to reinforce students' display of positive "replacement" behaviors and adaptive skills.

4. Draw on relationships with professional colleagues and students' families for continued guidance and support. Social relationships and collaborative opportunities can play a critical role in supporting teachers in managing disruptive behavior in their classrooms. We recommend that teachers draw on these relationships in finding ways to address the behavior problems of individual students and consider parents, school personnel, and behavioral experts as allies who can provide new insights, strategies, and support.

5. Assess whether schoolwide behavior problems warrant adopting schoolwide strategies or programs and, if so, implement ones shown to reduce negative and foster positive interactions. Classroom teachers, in coordination with other school personnel (administrators, grade-level teams, and special educators), can benefit from adopting a schoolwide approach to preventing problem behaviors and increasing positive social interactions among students and with school staff. This type of systemic approach requires a shared responsibility on the part of all school personnel, particularly the administrators who establish and support consistent schoolwide practices and the teachers who implement these practices both in their individual classrooms and beyond."

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Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Given the widespread interest in promoting positive behavior and responding to misbehavior, please share with this community of practice whatever you can about these concerns.

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured Set of Center Resources on

>School improvement & reducing behavior problems

Besides
>*Behavioral Initiatives in Broad Perspective*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/behavioral/behini.pdf

here are a few other brief documents:

>*Rethinking How Schools Address Student Misbehavior & Disengagement –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/spring08.pdf

>*Common Behavior Problems at School: A Natural Opportunity for Social and Emotional Learning –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/behaviorsocialemot.pdf

>*School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf

>*Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf

>*Rethinking discipline to improve school climate –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/disciplineclimate.pdf

For a book-length discussion, see the Center's new (free) book

>***Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide***
(access from the Center's homepage – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/)

Note: Because we receive so many requests about *discipline practices* and *codes of conduct,* we have developed the following Quick Finds:

>*Discipline practices* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/discpractices.htm

>*Discipline codes and policies* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/Discip.htm

>*Behavior problems* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3022_01.htm

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If you missed the quarterly ejournal for summer, 2017 or the monthly ENEWS, you can access them on the Center's website http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/

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THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!
For new sign-ups – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.
We post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange*
on our website at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm
and on *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/)

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*Information is online about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

And see the new book:

>*Transforming Student and Learning Supports:*
Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System
https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html
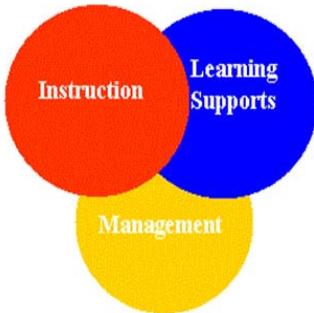
If you didn't make so many rules,
there wouldn't be so many for me to break!