



NASSET's Practical Teacher Series

Positive Student-Teacher Relationships: An In-Depth Look into a Behavior Program and its Implications for Teachers of Students with EBD

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This issue of **NASSET's Practical Teacher** series was written by Nancy Reigel from the University of South Carolina. Students with Emotional and Behavioral problems struggle in the classroom for a variety of reasons. Research shows that teachers can react negatively or positively in situations. A Positive Teacher relationship has been shown to be highly effective in increasing academic gains of students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) but the research is fairly inconsistent. A look into a behavior program primarily designed for students who display severe forms of verbal and physical aggression. A deep look into the program and how teachers form strong lasting relationships with students. Research shows that teacher relationships, teacher intervention strategies along with strong social skills components are crucial to developing lasting skills with students with EBD. The findings of this program will reveal a deep commitment and understanding by the teachers and students in the program with regard to teacher-student relationships and impact on the students' academic development.

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inconsistent. A look into a behavior program primarily designed for students who display severe forms of verbal and physical aggression. A deep look into the program and how teachers form strong lasting relationships with students. Research shows that teacher relationships, teacher intervention strategies along with strong social skills components are crucial to developing lasting skills with students with EBD. The findings of this program will reveal a deep commitment and understanding by the teachers and students in the program with regard to teacher-student relationships and impact on the students' academic development.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY RELATED TO EFFECTIVE CLASSROOMS OF STUDENTS WITH EBD?

Effective classrooms are full of relationships, engagement, dedication and abundance of social skills. Students with EBD struggle in typical classrooms due to exhibiting both academic and behavioral deficits which in turn causes a strain on the relationships formed within that classroom (Kauffman, 2001; Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995). Students with EBD normally display deficits in the area of social skills related directly to peer relationships, aggression and defiance. The behaviors that are generally displayed can be quite disruptive and cause off-task behaviors that has been shown to affect the behavior of others in the classroom along with the teacher (Sutherland, Wehby, & Yoder, 2002). Over the year's teachers have used more negative reinforcement and interactions with students who display aggressive behaviors. Currently research is trying to correct that and provide teachers with alternatives that are more positive in nature. A decrease has been shown when students are given choices of how to escape the task at hand and one-to-one peer support (Trussell, Chen, Lewis, & Luna, (2018). With the implementation of IDEA students with EBD needed plans in place to help define the antecedent, function and consequence that related to the problem behavior called a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) which could lead to a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) for certain students. These documents are shown to increase on task behaviors as well as decrease disruptive behaviors (Trussell, Chen, Lewis & Luna, (2018). A new researched idea is that teachers need to further their knowledge and understanding of their students related to their traumatic experiences, where the student resides along with their cultural differences (Delale- O'Conner, Alvarez, Murray & Milner, 2017). Research states that we as Educators might need to move away from negative responses towards the disruptive behaviors and rely on the positive responses and watch for improvements related to those students with EBD.

BEST PRACTICES AT WORK; TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

There is a program in the state of SC that embodies all of the research related to students with behavioral concerns. The students first try a general education classroom and many times display the common behaviors of students with EBD from off task, out of seat, talking out, or more severe behaviors like aggression either verbally or physically. Once the “home” school feels they have tried everything from general education classrooms to special education services they are then moved to a separate program/facility where they are served with other students from different areas all working on the same thing decreasing disruptive behaviors.

The program has numerous staff members from the 3 main teachers to 4 assistants (1 assistant is a floater due to the high numbers in 2 classrooms) 1 clinical counselor, 1 licensed baccalaureate social worker, 1 transition specialist and 1 behavior interventionist. These staff members work with the students on a daily basis at various times throughout the day. The teachers including other support staff all believe with the article by Prather-Jones that everyone in the program needs a strong commitment to the field of EBD along with the feeling of wanting to make a difference. (Prather-Jones, 2011). Many of the teachers within the program fit the embodiment of special education teachers according to the Council for Exceptional Children because they are “creative,” “flexible,” and “prepared to meet challenges.” (Prather-Jones, 2011). Each of the staff members have more than 4 years’ experience teaching students with special needs.

One of the main ways that this program has been successful at correcting inappropriate and disruptive behaviors is through strong teacher-student relationships. Many of the student’s past relationships in the classroom were surrounded by negative nature of the classroom. Also, it has been seen that teachers are providing less instruction to those students identified as high aggressors (Sutherland & Oswald, 2005). Each of the teachers spend a great deal of time investing into each of their students and being aware of the cultural differences as well as their lives outside of the classroom. Each teacher sets the tone of their classroom by including academic and social expectations, a classroom that encourages and develops positive relationships, cooperation and conflict resolution strategies (Humphries, M. L., Williams, B. V., & May, T. 2018). Even as students are moved to the program at various times of the year teachers take the time showing them how the program works and investing into each student which in turn decreases some of the disruptive behaviors. Students display signs of feeling safe

and comfortable and are more likely to share with teachers and support staff their thoughts and feelings.

BREAKING IT DOWN

The program itself is data driven and consistent. Teachers keep a daily point sheet where each student starts the day with 100 points. The daily point sheet is broken down into sections or blocks of instructional time. Students lose points throughout the day for talking out, out of seat, not following directions, and keeping hands to self. Students also can lose an automatic 10 points when they are displaying more serious offenses from cursing, teasing, threatening, disrespect, lying, cheating, stealing, and lastly physical or verbal aggression. The more severe behaviors are called fines and can be given throughout the day and for however many times students display those behaviors. The points translate into a level system with a letter given from “Excellent, Good, OK and Poor” and then marked on a level card which is color coded. Each color card relates to different rewards and reinforcements like a Positive Behavior Intervention System or Token Economy. This system follows other major research stating that classroom wide interventions along with Individual Behavior Interventions show decrease trends in escape-motivated students (Trussell, Chen, Lewis & Luna, 2018). Students also have a specific behavior they are working on from keeping hands out of their mouth, speaking appropriately with adults, or even arguing with staff these displays are documented but not taken away from their daily score. Each student has a specific target behavior they are working on and if they meet their daily goal they get a ticket. Those tickets are then spent during Lottery days which are fun activities decided upon by the staff and happen each quarter. Students with more tickets are able to buy and purchase more fun activities which helps form the intrinsic motivation to change the target behavior.

Each classroom and style are different, but all of the teachers use specific research-based strategies to have effective classroom management. Each classroom has clear expectations about behavior (point sheet), rules and routines are explicitly taught, teacher praise on appropriate behavior (level system), quickly responding to behaviors (after 3 points in a given area students are given consequence like Quiet Area, or removal from class), and the consequences are consistently used. (Oliver & Reschly, 2010) Teachers are quick to redirect behaviors if possible and intervene before points have to be taken but if points are taken there is a system in place to give each child a chance to correct the behavior before consequences follow. Students are given

3 chances to change a behavior like being off task and not following directions. If the behavior continues, they are then placed in a quiet area which is an area within the classroom covered by a curtain so that other students are not focused on the student misbehaving. After the time is finished for the Quiet Area the student returns to the class and joins back in with instruction. If the behavior continues or if it escalates, they are removed and given the chance to talk to a counselor or behavior interventionist as an Alternative. If that does not work, they have to stay in an Independent Work Area where they are only allowed to come back to class if they earn their points for the time removed. Each student is allowed to earn points based off sitting in seat, having quiet mouth and working. The behavior interventionist is in charge of monitoring the points and helping them as necessary. After they have completed their time and worked, they are allowed to return to class and join back in with the class. Teachers send work with the student along with a write up as to why they had to be removed from the classroom. This also helps with keeping documentation as to the behavior of each student, frequency and duration which is in turn used to help write FBA's and BIP's.

CAN'T ARGUE WITH DATA

Each of the point sheets are gathered and the data is entered into an excel spreadsheet giving the staff a visual of each student and whether the behavior is increasing or decreasing. The data sheet looks at the number of fines, how many times was the student removed from the classroom, also looks at the increase or decrease in certain fines, other things noticed is on task behavior (tallied weekly by random support staff) and their compliance. These data sheets are kept and used to show improvements when looking to transition a student out of the program. Also used if changes need to be made to the students IEP to help them be successful academically and socially. When teachers talk with parents, or school administrators we have the numbers to back up the comments we are making. The data is kept for at least 3 years along with record of communication between parents through daily home note. This is great to show longevity and the improvements the program makes on majority of the students that come to the program.

ADMINISTRATION AND OUTSIDE FACTORS

One of the main concerns and parts addressed with each student is the social and emotional development. Research shows us that students who are able to regulate their emotions are more likely able to adjust to school and have better outcomes related to academics. (Humphries,

Williams, & May 2018). A major part of the program is the social and emotional development and the program is lucky to be a part of Rehabilitative Behavioral Health Services (RBHS) through this program students receive extra therapy working on the psychosocial and psychotherapy skills needed to help them cope and work through their behaviors. Through this program students are given group therapy services from either the clinical counselor or LPSW twice a week working through social and emotional skills. Students also receive group therapy as a whole class working on psychosocial skills. If students are not receiving outside counseling services, they can have the opportunity to get individual therapy with our licensed counselor on a weekly basis. Helping students to interpret and organize their emotional and social skills is needed to help them engage in learning and make responsible decisions (Humphries, Williams, & May, 2018). Administration over this program does a great job of making teachers and other support staff feel valued and appreciated. They have funded programs like “Energy Bus” & Positive Behavior Intervention System, there is weekly acknowledgement reports given by administration and other staff that is shared weekly, along with constant sharing of information or tweaking things that will best support the students in the program. The administration team truly displays many of the characteristics founded through Cancio...etc research by showing teachers Emotional Support, Informational support, Guidance and lastly Appreciation (Cancio, Albrecht, Johns, 2013).

REFLECTION

So, I know so much about this program because I am one of the special teachers that gets to experience and be a part of something so different and unique. Just this week we had teachers from area schools come and tour and later this month we have teachers and district administrators coming from counties and cities 4-5 hours away. The program is special because it takes all of the research-based ideas and puts them into practice the best we can. Many of the teachers that have worked in this program in the past and present have been teaching for numerous years and many have given 4+ years to the program which reflects great teacher retention data. This is my 3rd year in this particular program but it is my 7th year within the school. The program is special in general because we only care for students with special needs, so we are close knit family full of love and encouragement for each other. Other staff in the building take time out of their day to encourage and show love towards my students on a daily basis. It means so much for the students in my class to feel loved, safe and cared for not just from me but from others in the school. After reading all of the research related to EBD students

and factors that influence their learning and understanding as well as the teacher-student relationship it is great knowing I am working in a program meeting the research expectations and seeing growth and longevity with our students.

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