

Providing Positive Behavioral Support for All Students

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Children and youth with problematic behavior can bring a variety of challenges to schools and classrooms. These students may struggle with academics and relationships with peers and teachers. They may seem unmotivated and unengaged in school and classroom communities and they may exhibit negative behaviors that can be irritating, disruptive, or verbally and physically aggressive. Teachers often feel unprepared to deal with these behaviors in the classroom, and they see them as a high source of work-related stress (Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008; Westling, 2010).

How educators respond to children and youth with challenging behavior has changed dramatically over the years. In the past, school professionals typically dealt reactively and punitively with “problem students.” There was little attempt to discover or understand the student’s point of view or contributing environmental, instructional, or cultural factors. We now have a much better understanding of the complexity of acting-out behavior and the school and teacher’s role in exacerbating or ameliorating it. Currently, we have an arsenal of effective evidence-based strategies to help educators teach and reinforce positive school-wide and class-wide behavior.

This issue of the *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction* highlights practices that encourage academic and social success for all students. We, as educators, understand the need to go beyond a reactive approach to problematic or atypical behavior to one that views schools and their culture from a systems’ perspective, seeks to prevent the occurrence of negative behavior, understands and meets the needs of students with a wide array of ability, maturity, and skill level, and is accountable for the success of all learners.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

In the lead invited article, “School-wide Systems to Promote Positive Behaviors and Facilitate Instruction,” Lane, Menzies, Ennis, and Bezdek (2013) present an overview of a comprehensive, integrated, three-tiered (CI3T) system that combines the use of academic and behavioral interventions and practices to promote student success in school. The authors describe the CI3T model and three levels of support, including definitions and examples for each: Tier 1, primary level for all students; Tier 2, secondary level targeted for students not responding to Tier 1; and Tier 3, tertiary level for a few students who need intensive and individualized support. Next Lane and colleagues discuss the importance of academic and behavioral screening using “reliable, valid screening tools...and careful monitoring to ensure that all levels of prevention are implemented with treatment integrity...” (p. 12). They acknowledge the

crucial role teachers play in addressing myriad challenges of diverse learners, and they suggest that teachers use a data-driven approach and evidence-based strategies to meet these academic and behavioral needs. They then provide a review of class-wide and individualized research-based practices. They conclude with timely recommendations for teachers.

Subsequent articles in this issue provide real-life application at each level of support. They also substantiate two premises described by Lane et al. as central to this three-tier framework: "...collective and focused energies of teachers, administrators, parents, and other school personnel are more effective than fragmented efforts" and "academic, behavioral, and social support for students should be proactive and supplemental, not reactive and remedial" (p. 6).

In the Research Forum, Campbell, Rodriguez, Anderson, and Barnes (2013) present a single subject design study, "Effects of a Tier 2 Intervention on Classroom Disruptive Behavior and Academic Engagement." Check-in/Check-out (CICO), a research-based collaborative intervention, was used for three typically developing elementary-age boys who needed more support than was provided by their school's ongoing school-wide positive behavior intervention and support (SWPBIS) system. These students were selected to participate based on office discipline reports and teacher interviews. Data were collected for (a) disruptive behavior and (b) academic engagement using 15-second partial interval recording during class times considered to be most problematic for each boy. During the intervention phase, two teachers and the school counselor, serving as the CICO coordinator, implemented the standard protocol CICO. This included two short check-in sessions with the counselor and three short feedback sessions with teachers throughout the day, and daily use of a parent-signed progress report card. Results of the study indicated reduction of disruptive behavior for all three boys and increased academic engagement for two of them. Campbell and colleagues discuss practical implications of using this collaborative data-driven intervention as an effective Tier 2 practice within the SWPBIS framework.

Kilgus (2013) adds to the discussion of Tier 2 supports in his Perspective article, "Use of Direct Behavior Ratings as the Foundation of Tier 2 Service Delivery." He describes a well-researched tool, Direct Behavior Rating (DBR), and suggests practitioners use it to support students during three essential practices: assessment, progress monitoring of behavior; intervention, affecting change in behavior; and communication, enhancing coordination and involvement among school professionals and family stakeholders. He reviews current evidence for each of the three practices and provides individual examples of how each can be implemented. Kilgus emphasizes the importance of treatment integrity in implementing procedures used in assessment, intervention, and communication. He provides a detailed explanation and specific recommendations for teachers to use DBR as an integrated system of support. He acknowledges the potential reticence that some teachers may experience when confronted with the prospect of learning another new practice. Nevertheless, he

concludes with a summary of advantages of DBR and encourages teachers to adopt the use of this one tool for multiple integral aspects of behavioral support for students.

In the Practitioner's Platform, Walkingstick and Bloom (2013) describe the Tier 1 and Tier 3 practices that evolved from the work of a group of third grade teachers in collaboration with a special education teacher in "Creating Community and Support using Native American Values in an Inclusive Third Grade Setting: An Action Research Case Study." The project involved using multiple perspectives to create a grade block system to support all students in learning and meeting school-wide and classroom expectations. While this system was based on principles of SWPBIS, it also integrated practices that reflected a "strong sense of community and an ethos of caring" (p. 60). This system had strong ties to the Native American culture of the community as demonstrated in class meeting protocol and service projects. The authors also describe the progress of Steven, a student with school-identified emotional-behavioral disorders, and the individualized supports implemented by his teachers and peers to reduce his disruptive behavior and reinforce his positive participation in the classroom community.

Reoccurring Themes and Final Thoughts

Several themes that are important to consider in supporting students with behavioral challenges emerge from the articles included in this issue. First and foremost, is the recognition that not every learner requires the same level of intervention. Successful support should be proactive and provided on an as-needed basis for individual students. This approach is in contrast to models that wait for students to experience academic failure or serious behavior problems before intervening.

The importance of multiple perspectives in developing and enhancing systems of support was evident in each of the articles. Children and youth and their challenging behavior cannot be understood separately from classroom instruction and classroom management practices or the influence of families, communities, and culture. All variables need consideration. Classroom practices can be adapted, and families and community members can be engaged by gaining their perspective, sharing data, and garnishing support for behavioral interventions.

A third theme in evidence is the need for commitment, caring, and collaboration of teams of general education and special education teachers and other stakeholders, including school counselors and administrators. It takes a strong caring school community with a commitment to inclusion to promote and reinforce school-wide expectations and to provide more intensive support to some children and youth with more substantial needs.

The final theme that was demonstrated in the articles is the importance of data collection at each level of support to inform decision-making. From school system data models to providing students and families feedback for individual student data,

monitoring for success and making changes based on data are key to accountability and sustainable support.

In conclusion, this issue provides clear examples of the progress that we have made in addressing challenging behavior and meeting the needs of students with troubling behavior in general education classrooms. They provide evidence-based strategies that address the complexities of human behavior and are good alternatives to punitive and exclusionary practices. But, because punitive and exclusionary practices still exist, it is imperative that research continue. For example, further research is needed to determine how to best involve peers, families, and communities who might assist in providing very cost efficient and culturally responsive interventions and supports. Additionally, further research is needed to determine how to best sustain school-wide systems and individual student supports in schools, especially in those where administrator and teacher turnover is high. As the pressure for students to perform well on high stakes assessments increases and school resources dwindle, it becomes imperative that we continue to discover and document the most efficient, culturally respectful, and inclusive approaches to dealing with disruptive behavior.

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