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Enhancing Students' Socialization: Key Elements. ERIC Digest.

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Coping with students who display problems in personal and social adjustment can be frustrating. Success in teaching problem students often requires extra time, energy, and patience. Recent research reviewed by Jones (1996) indicates that teachers rank individual students who have serious or persistent behavior problems as their chief cause of stress. However, teachers can take direct actions toward minimizing classroom conflicts by socializing students into a classroom environment conducive to learning.

Key elements of successful student socialization include modeling and instruction of prosocial behavior; communicating positive expectations, attributes, and social labels; and reinforcing desired behavior (Dix, 1993; Good & Brophy, 1994, 1995). Successful socialization further depends on a teacher's ability to adopt an authoritative teaching style for classroom management, and to employ effective counseling skills when seeking to develop positive relationships with individual students.

MODELING

Modeling prosocial behavior is the most basic element for enhancing student socialization, because teachers are unlikely to be successful socializers unless they practice what they preach. Modeling, accompanied by verbalization of the self-talk that guides prosocial behavior, can become a very influential method of student socialization because it conveys the thinking and decision making involved in acting for the common good. In situations in which prosocial behavior is difficult for students to learn, modeling may have to be supplemented with instruction (including practice exercises) in desirable social skills and coping strategies. Such instruction should convey not only PROPOSITIONAL KNOWLEDGE (description of the skill and an explanation of why it is desirable), but also PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE (how to implement the skill) and CONDITIONAL KNOWLEDGE (when and why to implement it).

PROJECTING POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS

Consistent projection of positive expectations, attributes, and social labels to students may have a significant impact on fostering self-esteem and increasing motivation toward exhibiting prosocial behaviors. Students who are consistently treated as if they are well-intentioned individuals who respect themselves and others and who desire to act responsibly, morally, and prosocially are more likely to develop these qualities than students who are treated as if they had the opposite inclinations especially if their positive qualities and behaviors are reinforced through expressions of appreciation. When delivered effectively, such reinforcement is likely to increase students' tendencies to attribute their desirable behavior to their own personal traits and to reinforce themselves for possessing and acting on the basis of those traits.

AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING

Teachers, as the authority figure in the classroom, need to be authoritative rather than

either authoritarian or laissez-faire. Teachers have the right and the responsibility to exert leadership and to exercise control, but they increase their chances of success if they are understanding and supportive of students and if they make sure that students understand the reasons behind their demands. Focusing on desired behavior (stressing what to do rather than what not to do) and following up with cues and reminders is also effective. Teachers should be prepared to supply objectively good reasons for their behavior demands.

When situations calling for disciplinary interventions arise, it is important for teachers to handle them effectively. General principles for doing so can be identified: minimize power struggles and face-saving gestures by discussing the incident with the student in private rather than in front of the class; question the student to determine his or her awareness of the behavior and explanation for it; make sure that the student understands why the behavior is inappropriate and cannot be tolerated; seek to get the student to accept responsibility for the behavior and to make a commitment to change; provide any needed modeling or instruction in better ways of coping; work with the student to develop a mutually agreeable plan for solving the problem; concentrate on developing self-regulation capacities through positive socialization and instruction rather than on controlling behavior through the assertion of power. Teachers who employ effective student socialization strategies can develop genuine solutions to students' chronic personal and behavioral problems rather than merely inhibiting the frequency of misconduct by applying sanctions.

COUNSELING SKILLS

Basic socialization and counseling skills may be needed for working with individual students, especially those who display chronic problems in personal development or adjustment. These basic skills include developing personal relationships with problem students and reassuring them of your continued concern about their welfare despite their provocative behavior; monitoring them closely and, if necessary, intervening frequently but briefly and nondisruptively to keep them engaged in academic activities during class; dealing with their problems in more sustained ways outside of class time; handling conflicts calmly without becoming engaged in power struggles; questioning them in ways that are likely to motivate them to talk freely and supply the needed information; using active listening, reflection, interpretation, and related techniques for drawing them out and helping them to develop better insights into themselves and their behavior; insisting that the students accept responsibility for controlling their own behavior while at the same time supportively helping them to do so; and developing productive relationships with their parents.

ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS

Good and Brophy (1995) have identified some general attributes of teachers that contribute to their success in socializing students. These attributes include:
*SOCIAL ATTRACTIVENESS, based on a cheerful disposition, friendliness, emotional

maturity, sincerity, and other qualities that indicate good mental health and personal adjustment;

*EGO STRENGTH, exhibited in self-confidence that allows teachers to be calm in a crisis, listen actively without being defensive, avoid win-lose conflicts, and maintain a problem-solving orientation;

*REALISTIC PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND STUDENTS, without letting perceptions become clouded by romanticism, guilt, hostility, or anxiety;

*ENJOYMENT OF STUDENTS, while maintaining their identity as an adult, a teacher, and an authority figure; being friendly but not overly familiar; and being comfortable with the group without becoming a group member;

*CLARITY ABOUT TEACHER ROLES and comfort in playing them, which enables teachers to explain coherently to students what they expect;

*PATIENCE AND DETERMINATION in working with students who persist in testing limits;

*ACCEPTANCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL, though not necessarily of all of his or her behavior, and making this attitude clear to students; and

*THE ABILITY TO STATE AND ACT ON FIRM BUT FLEXIBLE LIMITS

based on clear expectations, keeping rules to a minimum and liberalizing them as students become more independent and responsible over time.

Developing these personal qualities and using research-based principles for managing the classroom will set the stage for student socialization and will go a long way toward minimizing the need for disciplinary interventions.

CONCLUSION

Teachers are asked to take responsibility for an increasingly diverse population of students in situations where individual differences are to be expected and accepted. An attitude of caring and an orientation to students is crucial to success in socializing students into a classroom culture that fosters learning. Interacting with students for several hours each day in various situations puts teachers in a position to take direct action in helping students cope with their problems.
Research shows that teachers' feelings of self-efficacy or confidence are correlated with their effectiveness ratings. Developing the skills for enhancing student socialization represents an expansion of the teacher's role beyond that of instructor or classroom manager. Teachers who believe that they possess, or at least are developing, good management and student socialization skills will be able to remain patient and focused

on seeking solutions when confronted with difficult problems. In contrast, teachers who view management and socialization skills as talents in which they are lacking may tend to become frustrated and give up easily. Through developing their role as facilitators of students' socialization into the learning environment, teachers can create the potential for having a significant impact on the lives of problem students. ------------------------

This digest was adapted from: Brophy, Jere. (1996). TEACHING PROBLEM STUDENTS. New York: Guilford. Adapted with permission of the author.

See also: Brophy, Jere. (1995). ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

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