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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the results from 20 interviews over 10 years with therapeutic support staff members (TSSs) who revealed practices that they successfully implemented while working in inclusionary classrooms with students who had severe behavior challenges. All of the interviewees had Bachelor's degrees in behavior modification. They all worked one-on-one with identified students to facilitate the students' social and academic development in inclusionary classrooms. The suggested practices are designed to diminish teachers' anxieties by providing behavioral intervention when working with identified students. Awareness of the practices can benefit teachers, even if a one-on-one approach is not possible. The most effective practices the TSSs found are: preparing a focus to meet the students' educational needs; establishing certainty in rewards and reinforcement; maintaining consistency in the environment and expectations; providing a variety of materials to improve academic performance; and developing a shared language for communicating with the student. An example of a student incentive chart is attached. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/SM)

Promising Behavioral Intervention Practices in the Inclusionary Classroom

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ABSTRACT - This paper discusses the results from twenty interviews with therapeutic support staff (TSSs) members who revealed practices that have been implemented with success while working in inclusionary classrooms. While their work facilitates an identified student's academic and social development with the one-on-one approach, awareness of these effective practices can benefit all teachers. Advocated by these professionals are: (1) preparing a focus, (2) establishing certainty in rewards, (3) maintaining consistency, (4) providing variety in materials, and (5) developing a shared language. Strategies and suggestions, to obtain quality results when working with behaviorally challenged children, are explained so all teachers can establish classrooms that function efficiently and effectively. (Contains a computer-generated incentive chart).

Promising Behavioral Intervention Practices in the Inclusionary Classroom

Viola Supon and Kimberly Rowe

Teachers are concerned that the behaviorally challenged, learning disabled, physically handicapped, or developmentally retarded students may not be successful in the inclusionary classroom. Often, these children are disruptive, disrespectful, inattentive, and can't follow directions (Hedeen, et al., 1996). Teachers are also concerned about the parental expectations that knowledge and skillful learning will take place for these identified children. This can be a slow and arduous process.

Teacher anxieties can be diminished by implementing promising behavioral intervention practices when working with identified children. Twenty interviews over the last two years with therapeutic support staff members (TSSs), who have obtained bachelor degrees in behavior modification, have revealed practices that have been tried and repeated with success while working with low and high-functioning children in inclusionary classrooms. These TSSs work one-on-one with an identified student that has been diagnosed by a clinical psychologist as having severe behavioral challenges. Their work, facilitating the identified student's social and academic development, has occurred in inclusionary classrooms with classes ranging from twenty to thirty students. Awareness of these practices can benefit all teachers, even if a one-on-one approach may not be

all teachers, even if a one-on-one approach may not be possible. The most effective practices the TSSs emphasize are (1) preparing a focus, (2) establishing certainty in rewards, (3) maintaining consistency, (4) providing variety in materials, and (5) developing a shared language.

PREPARING A FOCUS

To meet the educational needs of the learner, the teacher should be informed about the student's specific priorities and general educational goals (Giangreco, 1996; Evans, et al., 1996). This information is available from the clinical support members who diagnose the student's situation. Becoming familiar with the Individualized Education Plan, medications, mobility factors, and the social/emotional needs of each student helps the teacher prepare a focus. Often this information is formatted for the teacher by the clinicians. If not, the teacher can then create a realistic set of behavioral and instructional expectations based on specific skills to be accomplished. While these skills may change daily because of the child's temperament, knowing what the targeted objectives are establishes parameters of acceptable behaviors for each child with the over-arching goal of meaningful learning.

Teachers working with behaviorally challenged children need to develop a well-planned curriculum that focuses on learning. Too many times teachers can become distracted with maintaining control, and the main purpose, learning, is

often overlooked. The perceptive teacher recognizes that lessons designed from the specific curriculum need to focus on ways to achieve success. The curriculum becomes the "what" students need to know, and the plan for curriculum implementation will address, overcome, and circumvent barriers while promoting learning. The curriculum needs to include a variety of reteaching (while reviewing previous attempts), flexible timing, and a plethora of techniques while retaining the focus. It is through the focus, with emphasis on skill development of learners, that teachers examine and prepare the curriculum focus. Once that is in place, with an array of opportunities, learning and achievement can be accomplished (Morgan and Reinhart, 1991).

ESTABLISHING CERTAINTY IN REWARDS

Teachers are aware that rewards are sometimes given to signify desirable actions, while a lack of rewards signifies undesirable actions. When teachers call attention to undesirable actions, a student's self-concept can be diminished and the student's emotional problems increased (Prochaska, et al. 1994). Sensitivity is a key to the successful classroom.

It is in the best interest of the student for the teacher to use both tangible rewards and verbal reinforcement (Fachin, 1996). Effective tangible awards, according to the TSSs interviewed, are incentive charts,

stickers, and/or other tokens. The visual representation of an incentive chart clarifies the goal to be achieved for the student and showcases the effort put forth in that endeavor. Various forms of incentive charts are available; they can be computer generated (Appendix A)or created by students. Therapeutic support staff members strongly suggest that each identified child design and implement an incentive chart. This develops a sense of ownership and goal-setting, while providing a focus towards success. If, because of age or other factors, the identified child cannot create an incentive chart, it can be completed with help from the teacher. This provides an opportunity for cooperation and enhances social development.

Encouragement by verbal reinforcement is also important for this targeted population of students. According to Edwards (1993, p. 91) this should emphasize "effort rather than achievement. . .[to give] positive feedback to children who are trying hard but may be somewhat unsuccessful." Such encouragement promotes the individual's successes, and the teacher becomes the supporter for demonstrated effort. The student's completion of the task, is the significant factor.

Finally, it is important for the teacher to believe that the behaviorally challenged student can succeed. This certainty does not mean that regression will occur, but that preventative measures are in place to prevent most lapses

and relapses. If lapses do occur, teachers should be flexible, using various methods to redirect the learner in order to accomplish the set goals. Teachers should also recognize the certainty of reward is critical for continuation of progress.

MAINTAINING CONSISTENCY

A quiet setting works well while working with behaviorally challenged children. This allows the teacher and the student to concentrate while accomplishing the assigned task. Depending on the classroom arrangement, however, a quiet setting may not be feasible. Whatever the existing environment, consistency is required. Edwards (1993, p.239) points out that consistency "is one of the least talked about yet most important educational considerations."

Recognizing the importance of consistency is equally balanced by pointing out to these students the teacher's classroom guidelines. According to Morgan and Reinhart (1991, p. 54), students have the right to know the established guidelines. In other words, "they need to know the classroom routines and what to expect; they need to know what is expected of them." For example, students need to know what to do with their belongings when entering the classroom. If the teacher wants the students to place their book bags, lunch, and clothing in a designated area, the student needs to know that. A three-step task may be

overwhelming for a behaviorally challenged child. By graphically indicating the three step process and taping it to the child's desk, a framework is provided. The child then knows what to do with the book-bag, lunch, and apparel. This may take several attempts, yet the student has a point of reference. Edwards (1993, p.239) reminds us how consistency results in less student confusion, increased learning, "better educational practice," and "teacher commitment." The results reflect and perpetuate a sound educational program where students have an optimum opportunity to succeed. When teachers demonstrate consistency in the classroom, students become involved in the learning process.

PROVIDING A VARIETY IN MATERIALS

It is important to remember that "a hyperactive child is an active child" (Armstrong, 1996, p. 36). With excessive levels of energy in many of these children, teachers need to plan activities that encompass a variety in the materials used. One therapeutic support staff member suggests the "magic tub." A large plastic container becomes a portable resource for instructional purposes. The container is filled with flash cards, battery-operated educational toys, a play dough machine, a laptop chalkboard, markers, books, and computer discs. Paper materials are cut into large geometric shapes and utilize soft pastels or neon colors. The attempt is to teach the child skill development

while not getting bogged down in a worksheet mode. The magic tub allows for a variety of tasks which motivate the learner. It is important to change the items in the magic tub from time-to-time. Armstrong (1996, p. 6) further recommends:

> "by providing these kids with high-stimulation learning environments grounded in what they enjoy and can succeed in, we're essentially providing them with a kind of educational psychostimulant which is internally empowering them rather than externally controlling."

Allow the psychostimulant to be in the *change* of materials used daily and the way that these materials are *presented* to the individual learner. Tactile materials work well (Fachin, 1996; McGuiness, 1985). Examples of tactile materials are essentially those that students can touch. This enhances the senses in regard to texture, size, shape, and temperature. These manipulatives can be decorating index cards for booklets, creating a small picture, modeling clay, and cooperating in board games. Engagement in tactile learning can promote learning. The Chinese proverb "I hear and I forget; I see and I remember, I do and I understand" helps make concepts concrete.

Hands-on methods encourage children to complete certain tasks, and it is practical that tasks be presented in small

steps. Even the simplest of tasks needs to be varied and repeated, and children should be allowed to complete the on-task assignment while taking short breaks. Completion of the task assures success. Some individuals, however, "hyperfocus," i.e., they choose to focus on a certain topic for extended periods of time (Brush, 1996, p. 66). If this is evident, the teacher should allow the child to discover and explore. What may seem redundant and boring to the teacher may be discovery and rediscovery to the child. Using variety in materials and sound instructional practices improves academic performance for these children (DePaepe, et al., 1996).

DEVELOPING A SHARED LANGUAGE

Sharing the same means of communication with behaviorally challenged children begins with a deliberate attempt by teachers to "catch their interest" (Shima & Gsovski, 1996, p. 37). Capitalizing on a specific interest creates opportunities where communication begins and other concepts can be integrated. The time spent exploring and examining these experiences produces a framework for learning. Armstrong (1996, p. 36) encourages educators to "start highlighting [the students'] strengths." These children's strengths lie where their interests originate. If a child is interested in trucks, the teacher should provide visual perception activities that are teacher-

created using trucks to teach mathematical and reading concepts.

In this way, over time, the teacher and students develop a "shared language." Shared language means, e.g., that communication is on a level that the teacher and student can predict success while pointing out obstacles that can be conquered. Avoid comparing the child's performance to a peer's or demanding that the child complete a task for you. Instead, encourage the child to complete the task for individual ownership and success (Morgan and Reinhart, 1991). In this way, as the teacher, you are nurturing all modalities of learning styles and assisting students to understand their own learning styles and preferences.

Words used should avoid evoking sympathy or threatening consequences. Instead of saying, "Sorry, I don't think you will get this done in time to go outside," substitute the collective word "we" for "you." This conveys a team effort and often becomes a motivator for the learner. While the child continues to work alone, emphasize such positives: "It will be fun when you finish your project. Then we can go outside."

Language can be confusing. According to Morgan and Reinhart (1991, p. 169), "words can be misleading, and students will say things they do not mean." Teachers need to differentiate between truth and fiction in regards to

behaviorally challenged students' comments. Closer attention needs to be paid to how students express their feelings. If a child responds with a verbal attack, the teacher should not react and should remain unshaken by the tonality, body language, and negatively expressed words. Teachers should use words of encouragement while recognizing the student may or may not respond in a positive manner. The key is not to deny what was said or demonstrated but to accept it. This provides a comfort zone based on trust.

CONCLUSION:

Working with behaviorally challenged children is very difficult and trying--sometimes a draining-task. Today's teachers will be faced with "challenging situations." Perhaps integrating some of the recommendations made by the therapeutic support staff members will enable teachers to provide choices that are conducive to effective teaching and learning. By preparing a focus, establishing a certainty in rewards, maintaining consistency, providing variety in materials, and developing a shared language, teachers can establish classrooms that function efficiently and effectively.

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Name_____
Date_____
Goal_____

YOU ARE SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS!

The child should place a sticker in each cloud. Once each cloud has a sticker in it, the child has reached his or her goal!
(An alternative to using stickers could be to color in each cloud.)

Created by Kimberly Rowe

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